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# The Social Model and the Construction of the European Identity

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## **The Social Model and the Construction of the European Identity**

*Giovanni Bertin\**

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*Abstract:* The process of constructing a European identity has not made much progress in the last few years, and its citizens are tending to recognize themselves only within the nation states. The European Commission believes the European Social Model to be a fundamental factor in developing the identification of its citizens around the idea of a United Europe. The model is based on the necessity of activating a solidarity network and on the recognition of certain social protection rights. This element is fundamental as it brings citizens to recognize themselves as being part of the same community. The emphasis on the solidarity aspect, however, contrasts with differentiated welfare systems and with the differing levels of concrete enforceability of formally recognized rights. Implementing policies which reduce inequalities in the level of social protection between European citizens becomes a fundamental factor in the construction of a new European identity.

*Keywords:* European identity, territorial inequalities, welfare systems

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## **Introduction**

In 2004 the Euro-barometer surveys (European Commission, 2004) indicated that the process of identification in Europe was already struggling to emerge. In answering the question regarding nationality or supranationality (“in the near future you see yourself as ...”), only 3% of Europeans interviewed replied that they saw themselves purely as a European citizen; 10% considered themselves a European citizen, but also as a citizen of their nation. 45% viewed their nation as the main reference point but felt they were also European, whereas 40% did not at all perceive the supranational element as a part of their (local) identity, and recognize only their nation (European Commission, 2004). Since 2004 not much has changed for the skepticism of Europe and its recognition as a supranational element, and its community has in fact identified this as one of the fundamental themes to work on in order to continue its path of European unity. Given the lack of significant progress over the past few years in constructing a European identity I believe it is worth investigating the factors that are obstructing the unification process of Europeans. Obviously the factors are numerous and are closely tied to the histories and cultures of the various populations, but a central role in the construction of identity can be attributed to the presence or lack of a homogenous set of social rights guaranteed by welfare policies. A country’s welfare model formalizes the pact between citizens, state and community, making it clear which social risks are the responsibility of the citizens, and which are to be assumed by the community. Sharing a certain level of social protection is one of the fundamental factors which triggers a sense of belonging and identity. From this point of view, citizens who feel discriminated against struggle to recognize themselves as being part of the same social system.

The hypotheses resulting from this observation are the following:

- hypothesis 1: Europe is characterized by a model of development in which social rights, solidarity and social cohesion have a central role;
- hypothesis 2: social cohesion and solidarity are fundamental elements in constructing an identity in the idea of Europe;
- hypothesis 3: the homogeneity factors in the European model are more normative than real; the welfare systems are diverging further and this makes constructing a supranational European identity problematic.

In the first section - *The European social model and the construction of a national (and supranational) identity* - I will attempt to support these

hypotheses through illustrating the debate around the capacity for the “European social model” to constitute the glue for development processes in national systems, and to contribute to the construction of a supranational European identity. In the second part - *Formal rights, differences and inequalities in welfare systems* - I will attempt to demonstrate that there is a wide gap between the formal affirmations concerning the European model and the rights that citizens can concretely exercise. This distance between the normative value of the model and the various welfare policies forms an obstacle for the identification around the idea of Europe as a “common home”.

### **The European social model and the construction of a national (and supranational) identity**

One of the distinguishing features of the European experience is undoubtedly the debate on the specificity of its model of development. The history of last century in fact shows us an increase in the level of social protection and the consolidation of the idea that social risks produced by modernity cannot be considered a problem of single individuals, nor can the responsibility for such risks be reduced solely to the ability of individuals to face the critical events that characterize their existence. The State and the community are deemed to be co-responsible for building life conditions wherein individuals can find support in dealing with the emergence of conditions which undermine their quality of life. Additionally, the values that direct the development of solidarity networks, and the concrete practices developed as a result, contribute to the construction of culture and people’s identification of the idea of nation. If these two considerations are true, it follows that social policies and their homogeneity at the European level can significantly contribute to constructing the identity of citizens in the (abstract) concept of Europe. However, these two statements are substantial, and, before undergoing empirical verification, require some clarification of the concepts they rest on.

#### *Features, strength and weakness in the European Social Model*

The European Community has often reiterated (European Council, 2000) the centrality of the European model in its regulation. “The European

Social Model, characterised in particular by systems that offer a high level of social protection, by the importance of the social dialogue and by services of general interest covering activities vital for social cohesion, is today based, beyond the diversity of the Member States' social systems, on a common core of values" (European Council, 2000).

Since its formulation the model has undergone numerous interpretations.

Alber (2010a), for example, highlights that such a model is characterized by four fundamental elements:

- a high level of social protection carried out with general public interest services;
- particular attention to the development of social cohesion policies;
- a set of shared values;
- a process of social protection management defined by policy makers through the involvement of social forces and the launching of a negotiation process.

These aspects have permeated the dynamics among decision-makers of the system's three fundamental institutions: economy, society and state. In order to best represent the nature of the European model, Albert (2010b) proposes the United States as a point of comparison. This comparison proves interesting because it highlights the differences with a large Western democracy characterized by its federalist system. Considering the three institutions (the economy is seen to be an institution in this sense, see: Barbera & Negri, 2008) it can be stated once again that the European model, with respect to that of the US, shows the following peculiarities:

- at the level of the economy it focuses greater attention on societal dialogue and ecologically sustainable development, whereas the US focuses greater attention on the economic dynamics of commerce;
- at the level of society the founding dimension of the European model is established on social cohesion, on protection and on social security. The US, on the other hand, concentrate on the development of individual opportunities;
- at the level of State, Europe places great importance on the redistributive function, pursued through the development of state welfare systems, compared with the centrality of democratic freedom that leads the American model.

These elements represent Europe's situation as a set of states that are motivated by values and discretely coherent and homogenous policies,

indicating a different path of development to the more liberal path of the US. Against this configuration, however, we also find authors who point out several intrinsic problematic issues in this feature of Europe. Shall (2012, p. 126), for example, claims that the “European Social Model (ESM) is a vague concept that provides goals as to the outcomes of social policies, but little guidance as to the way these goals are to be met”. Accordingly, the strength of the ESM is seen to be in its ability to trace out a path to follow. In this sense it has normative value, but the single states follow completely different courses along this path. The rights that citizens are guaranteed and the forms of service distribution have taken on differing characteristics in the single territorial realities.

These observations are in fact well supported by table 1 (Annex 1), which highlights how during the period of welfare system consolidation there is an evident increase in the incidence of social spending on gross domestic product in southern European countries, in continental Europe and in Scandinavia. In all of these countries the growth rate was greater than that in the United States. However, the differences that were present in the 1980s remain until halfway through the first decade of the new century. Furthermore, the situation is clearer in the new member states which have started with a system of diverse social policies characterized by a real socialist mindset. In this case the average of the states does not represent the phenomenon in as much as internal variability is high, and the situations are extremely different.

Hemerijck (2002) also questions the validity of speaking about a European model (ESM). In summary, for Hemerijck, all European states can be characterized by three fundamental factors:

- solidaristic intent (aims: full employment; distribution of healthcare and education; adequate public welfare for illness, old-age, unemployment, disability and social work directed at reducing poverty and marginalization;
- policies which hold social justice to be an important factor that contributes to development and progress, and which manifest the belief that there is no contradiction between economic competitiveness and social cohesion;
- an elevated presence of lobby organizations and negotiation processes based on the participation and involvement of social actors.

The author addresses the norms and values that direct the practices, but in moving from this level of orientation to the practices in themselves, it

can be seen that the European countries have pursued paths which are markedly different in terms of concretizing this theoretical paradigm.

Moreover, the multi-level nature of European policies, which in the case of welfare policies is structured over three fundamental levels (local, national and supranational), and the weakness in European action, highlight the necessity to go beyond the regulatory dimension of the ESM, analyzing whether its theoretical paradigm has brought about national and sub-national policies that are coherent with this model, and show similarities with each another. It is only this type of analysis that can allow us to verify whether a context that can support the development of a supranational identity has effectively been reinforced. Before discussing the relationship between formal and enforceable rights, or analyzing the ability of current welfare systems to form the base of European unity, it is worth reflecting on the role of social policies in the processes of identity construction.

#### *Social rights and supranational identification in Europe*

The European situation is marked by the attempt at passing from a national identity to a supranational identity. This process is evidently complex as it requires the individuation of a lowest common denominator at the level of culture and of citizen rights. The concept which should serve as a starting point in any analysis of the relationship between social rights and European identity is probably that of citizenship. From this point of view, an important reference is the work of Marshall (1992), which attributes citizenship to full and equal participation in society. This participation can be broken down to three dimensions: civil, political and societal. Somers (2008), drawing on Marshall, also defines the concept of citizenship along three dimensions:

- liberal, in relation to the possibilities of individuals to realize their individual liberty;
- republican, with reference to the construction of conditions which allow, and indeed favor, the right to participate in political life in its various manifestations;
- communitarian, with reference to the solidarity dynamics which characterize the relationships between individuals, but also the dynamics of community membership.

The communitarian dimension is central for our investigation, but underlying it are several aspects of complexity. It can, in fact, be

understood from two different perspectives, relating to the complexity of the concept of solidarity. This concept is one of the constants of sociological enquiry concerning social processes. Durkheim employs it in order to bring attention to the centrality of social norms in the dynamics that govern the functioning of a society (pre-modern and modern, characterized by mechanic or organic solidarity). The features of social norms as a whole depend on the type of society and define diverse kinds of solidarity. The micro and macro nature of solidarity furthermore is one of the factors upon which the social capital debates was developed (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 2005; Putnam, 2000), and allows a clarification of the relationship between identity construction, citizenship and social rights. Restating the importance of the concept of solidarity (communitarian dimension) in constructing the idea of citizenship brings to light the problem of specifying the mechanisms which accompany the construction of solidarity bonds in any one population. This dimension in fact has implications concerning:

- the perspective of individual rights. In this case solidarity is understood as the recognition of a citizen's right to social protection against critical events (Dewilde, 2003; Pearlin et al, 2005) which threaten their life course;
- the perspective of relational dynamics (Donati & Colozzi, 2006; Donati, 2013). In this case we are dealing with the relationships of help between the actors (at a micro and meso level) who act within the community, and with the necessity of reducing vulnerability and supporting people's resilience (Bertin, 2012). That is, their ability to utilize necessary resources (public and private, collective and individual) in order to face the manifestation of social risks. This micro dimension, which concerns the forms of interpersonal solidarity, also reverberates in the dynamics of sharing social norms;
- the macro perspective, of generalized social capital and of the processes of building the conditions that allow society to function. Attention is placed in particular on the dynamics of secondary socialization and the reinforcement of social norms.

For that matter, the definition of solidarity given by Paskov Dewilde can also be understood in its relational dimension, and in that which directs the development of the policies. The authors in fact define solidarity as being a "willingness to promote the welfare of other people" (2012). The indefiniteness of the subject (who promotes the wellbeing of other people?)

allows attention to be focused on both individual responsibility and the collective responsibility of the community. Again, in both cases, solidaristic processes play a central role in identity construction.

The sharing of this idea of solidarity, of underlying social rights and of the policies that emerge as a result therefore forms the basis for developing the communitarian dimension of citizenship. In other words, it develops a feeling of belonging and identification as it defines an aspect of citizenship that can be recognized by everyone. The common recognition of this dimension ends up becoming an element for the specification, recognition and identification of the idea of Europe (in our case). The work of Smith (2003) also heads in this direction. The author claims that there are “rules that express certain conceptions of political membership and thereby help to constitute the identities of persons in accordance with these conceptions”.

Other studies support this paradigm also, in particular:

- Shall (2012: 131) maintains that “the actual provision and administration of social rights that is most firmly entrenched at the national level is significant, because the direct provision of rights is the process which is most likely to shape citizens’ identities”;
- Soss (2002), in analyzing the effects of Social Security Disability Insurance in participant processes, and Mettler (2005), in studying different forms of generous and individualistic welfare systems, demonstrate that social policies can produce significant effects on national identity.

Somers (2008) elaborates on this paradigm, highlighting another aspect of complexity that can be interpreted from two different angles. Similar to above, the author claims that the element of homogeneity in the policies of the single states on the solidarity dimension lies in recognizing “the right to have rights”. The right to have rights makes up “the dimension of awareness, that is, of sharing, of feeling part of a community”. This paradigm also states that the availability of solidaristic practices and the aspect of equality in having the same rights to social protection contribute to the development of a sense of community membership, and as a consequence, to the triggering of identification processes.

Another contribution to the specification of these social dynamics comes from Olson (2006). This author extends Marshall’s line of reasoning regarding the concept of citizenship and connects it to his idea of reflexive democracy. Reflexiveness has been proposed as a fundamental process in

people's actions by Luhmann (a summary of which can be found in Luhmann 2007). Olson states it in terms of reflexive citizenship. Reflexive re-elaboration of experience provides a sense of the concept of citizenship, it historicizes citizen rights and it makes people become a part of the cultural system. This process allows social rights to form the base element of the concept of citizenship. Incorporating these aspects, Hermann and Brewer (2004) propose considering social policies and their implementation as being a part of the secondary socialization process. Moreover, the logic of reflexivity allows us to make another important observation. In tying citizenship, and therefore identity, to the re-elaboration of experience we implicitly presume that the basis is not in the normative dimension of rights but in its concrete application, or better yet, in the practices that are triggered with solidaristic actions (Bourdieu 1995; Sennet, 2012), and more generally, with the process of consumption (but also distribution) of public goods which counter social risks. Pierson (2001) also connects the processes of identity construction to rights, paying particular attention to practices and to their reflexive re-elaboration.

Summarizing, we can state that the societal aspect of the European model is put into effect through the definition of a right to social protection, and that this aspect can form a base element for the idea of Europe. However, this idea triggers concrete identification through the reflexive re-elaboration of experiences that come about with the process of production and consumption of public goods with solidaristic objectives.

Moving the focus away from normative rights to practices raises issues concerning homogeneity of the forms employed by solidaristic behaviors which characterize the various welfare systems. In this case also, the literature uncovers several problematic issues. Shall (2012: 126) claims that "The EU has made some attempts at coordinating the social policies of member states (see e.g., Kyist & Saari, 2007), but there remain vast differences between the welfare states present in each of the states". The observations raised in this paragraph allow us to confirm the centrality of social rights in the construction of a European identity, but also to bring to the centre of investigation the rights which are concretely enforceable and the practices which allow the single national systems to concretely carry out the construction of a solidaristic culture that can be shared among the actors of the social system.

### **Formal rights, differences and inequalities in welfare systems**

The relationship between social solidarity networks, social rights and the processes of supranational identity construction meet with and come up against various issues related to i) the differing nature of welfare systems in the single European countries; ii) the limited ability to reduce social exclusion processes; iii) the differentiation within single states linked to decentralization processes.

i) The establishment of differentiated welfare systems in the various European countries

All research on the classification of welfare systems has pointed out the diversity of welfare systems and of their cultural matrix (Vrooman 2013; Rice 2013). Although controversial (Arts & Gelissen, 2002; Powell & Barrientos, 2004; Wood & Gough, 2006; Ferragina & Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011; Bertin & Robertson, 2013), the analysis of Esping Andersen (1999) remains a seminal work and classifies welfare regimes starting with the concept of solidarity. The author states types of solidarity in relation to the subdivision of individual and collective responsibilities in facing conditions of social disadvantage. His proposal is to consider three styles of solidarity which he defines as:

- Liberal or residual. This type of regime occurs when the action of the state limits itself to intervening among population groups in conditions of extreme need and who are unable to manage without the help of the public sector;
- Conservative or corporatist. In this case the social protection of the individual is closely linked to their employment status. It grows on the basis of the social role and socio-economic condition of the individuals involved;
- Social democratic or universalistic. This type of regime concerns the entire population and is linked to citizenship rights. Everybody, regardless of social risks and employment status, is entitled to the same degree of social protection.

This three way classification makes it clear that the point of view taken by Esping Andersen is that of the macro perspective, with its fulcrum lying in the actions of public institutions. Starting from this configuration, Esping Andersen classifies welfare regimes along four (originally three) types, which he calls: social-democratic, liberal, conservative and Mediterranean

(Esping Andersen, 1999), respectively. These diverse systems manifest differing features in terms of social protection (which risks to respond to), of the extension of the protection within the population (who can benefit from these services), and in terms of the actors that carry out the services, and of the system's governing processes. A further element of differentiation of the systems is provided by the entrance of ex-Soviet block countries in the community. The first comparative studies added a welfare regime to Esping Andersen's model, into which the new states were inserted. However, in the following years it became evident that these states have followed different paths and the label - welfare of ex-Soviet Union countries - simply represents a set which was originally (relatively) homogeneous, but which is currently differentiated. Finally, the first analyses of the effects of the crisis on the social protection of European citizens show an increase in the differences between systems and, at the same time, a reduction in the capacity for countering social exclusion, precisely due to weaker systems (Lockwood, 1999; Colozzi, 2008; Bertin, 2014).

The current national welfare system situation is therefore strongly differentiated. From this point of view, the concretization of the communitarian dimension of citizenship takes on differentiated forms in the single countries of the union.

Other scholars of European policies point out this kind of problem. They in fact claim that where the European states have shared the definition of common objectives regarding social policy and the struggle against social exclusion has become an element that directs the choices of the community, the single state members show resistance and seem reluctant to adopt more homogeneous intervention strategies. It is useful to note that compared with attempts to unify Europe in terms of its economic system profile, much less has been done in terms of its social protection profile, and in relation to the processes that activate social solidarity. The idea of Europe develops on a parallel with the reinforcement of national welfare systems, and for almost all states, the proposals for development of a European social policy meet with and come up against rights/identities acquired. In this case, the absence of a European policy and the consolidation of models and differing practices ends up consolidating different identities (perhaps even opposing Universalism north Europe vs. liberism or familism of the north west and south Europe). This situation is also perceived by the community's citizens. Despite dedicated resources

and the normative centrality assigned to counter-policies for social exclusion, in 2014 only 17% of those interviewed (European Community, 2014) considered the effects produced by welfare policies implemented by the European community to be relevant.

*Criticality and inefficiency in welfare systems*

In comparing the various systems, Esping Andersen (1999) also employs a criterion relating to the capability of systems for reducing social inequalities, and concludes that the only welfare system capable of producing significant results regarding de-stratification (ability to reduce inequalities) is that which adopts a universalistic solidarity. This conclusion indicates that the studies carried out at the turn of the century (which were shaped by analyses carried out during what would be later known as the end of the period of expansion of welfare policies) highlighted the strong diversity of the systems present in the single countries and their differing ability to hinder the processes of social exclusion.

The debate that developed during the phase of welfare system review compromises this type of analysis. In particular, several problematic elements relating to the theoretical paradigm employed, and to the empirical evidence.

The theoretical issues concern:

- the use of the term public, which tends to only take into account the solidarity implemented through state actions. In this way, the solidarity dynamics which emerge and develop in the real world, and which characterize the actions of voluntary organizations and families are not taken into consideration;
- the decision to classify welfare regimes based on an assumption that the policies aimed at responding to the various social risks have the same characteristics in the single countries. The inclusion of welfare, employment, pension and health policies in the concept of welfare clearly shows that these policies have assumed different styles of solidarity within the single countries. If we consider, for example, countries such as Great Britain or Italy (Robertson 2014; Bertin, Robertson 2013) we can see that health policies are inspired by a universalistic form of solidarity, while pension or employment policies are based on residual (Great Britain) or corporatist approaches (Italy);

- the difficulties involved in the decision to consider styles of solidarity based on an analysis of welfare state systems which increase in response to the increasingly hybrid nature of the welfare systems and growing importance of actors other than the state. Since the end of the last century, various states have responded to the lack of resources available for welfare states by enacting processes of change, which have consequently heightened internal differences (geographic and relative to the single policies), and lengthened the distance from the types of regime proposed by Esping Andersen.

On an empirical level, there are also a number of changes revealing the need to rethink the links between styles of solidarity and de-stratification. In their paper presented at the APSA (American Political Science Association) annual meeting Scruggs and Pontusson (2008) claimed that a comparison of the analyses carried out by Esping Andersen in 1980 with more recent data – though still relative to the initial phase of the major changes in welfare regimes that occurred from 2002 – reveals interesting changes in the relationship between welfare regimes and de-stratification processes. The countries moving towards greater egalitarianism are Japan (residual solidarity); Finland, Norway and Denmark (universalistic solidarity). Moving in the opposite direction we find countries that have increased stratification. This group includes New Zealand and Great Britain (classified within the residual welfare paradigm), the Netherlands (corporatist welfare) and Sweden (universalistic welfare). These factors suggest that the link between de-stratification and welfare policies is not as linear as we might think. The authors of this research paper conclude their findings as follows: “First, there is an emerging empirical basis suggesting that we revise somewhat our operating assumptions about how welfare state programs cluster, and how we should classify them” (p. 19).

These critical areas are also confirmed by the analysis of inequalities in economic conditions within the single countries. Table 2 (Annex 2) represents the situation of the single European countries in the light of income inequalities in 2011, and of the changes taking place in the previous period (2006-11). The first observation can be linked to the distribution of countries along the horizontal axis (2011 Gini coefficient). This situation confirms the lack of results produced overall by welfare systems in the current phase of renewal. The failure to reduce inequalities can be seen in all countries, regardless of the type of welfare system adopted. The only

exceptions are Bulgaria, which is characterized by a marked presence of inequalities that have increased further in the last period, and Norway, which is at the opposite extreme. Norway is the only country to have relatively low levels of social inequality in the period considered, and which shows signs of a further reduction in these levels. These brief observations suggest that the different forms of solidarity underlying the classification of welfare regimes do not represent the main variable explaining social inequalities.

The study by Whelan and Maître (2012) also points out the need to further develop the theoretical considerations used to explain relations between welfare regimes and social inequalities. Their examination of the characteristics of social deprivation (defined according to six different dimensions: basic, consumption, household facilities, health of HRP, neighborhood, access to public facilities) shows that there is no clear causal relation between welfare regimes, degree and form of social deprivation and reduction of social inequalities (Hurrelman et al 2011; Grosse Frie et al, 2010).

Additionally, various studies of the differences between welfare systems in Italy on a regional level presented in Bertin (2012) reveal that the main variables explaining these differences are wealth generated and social cohesion. The combination of these two variables in fact directly contributes to reducing social inequalities, and not by simply promoting the growth of welfare systems. In order to analyze the change processes taking place we must reconsider the elements both uniting and differentiating the countries classified within single welfare regimes, as well as the complexity of the dynamics (internal or external to welfare policies) giving rise to processes of social stratification or de-stratification. An additional element to consider concerns the outcomes of policies or, in other words, how we expect welfare systems to reduce inequalities. In order to do so, we need to return to our definition of equality, and to the consequent emphasis on conditions of life in which different opportunities appear, and which are targeted by welfare policies. These inequalities concern the tangible and intangible conditions of life, health, housing, education, employment and social capital. These indicators can be used as dimensions of social wellbeing, but are not independent from each other and may also be considered as resources for making it possible to reduce social risks; health, for example, is a fundamental element in the analysis of social wellbeing as well as a resource that makes it possible to combat risks ensuing from the

reduction of material resources. The complexity of the links and dynamics which influence the relationship between welfare systems and social stratification (and de-stratification) means that the problem must be tackled by questioning the expected link between the types of solidarity of the different welfare regimes and the reduction of social inequalities. The construction of an interpretative theory of links between welfare and social stratification which takes into account the changes taking place must consider the specific nature of the policies, and must assume that links may appear to be different in relation to the dimensions of social wellbeing that we intend to analyze, or to the different distribution of resources used to develop it.

*Differentiation within single countries: between formal and enforceable rights*

Welfare policies are a product of multi-level governance involving numerous actors. The type of solidarity which emerges is in fact the result of both the actions of public and non-profit private subjects (not taking into consideration those which are profit-private), and the actions of various local institutions which range from the European community itself, to the state, to local institutions (in their different forms). From this point of view the Italian case proves interesting. A recent study (Bertin, 2012) carried out a classification of the Italian regional welfare system into 7 main categories. This classification employed around 50 indicators relating to the supply of social protection services. Most of these indicators revealed significant differences between the regions.

Table 3 (Annex 3) displays the differences, but additionally signals how the situations which manifest more consistent social risks are also those which have weaker social protection systems. This observation leads us to reflect on how we can direct future research in this area. Firstly, a significant gap between sanctioned equality rights across the entire national territory and the factual reality (formally sanctioned and concretely enforceable rights) can be detected. A second element leads to the hypothesis that these differences cannot be traced back to a different request for social protection (who is worse off needs more protection), but instead to the differing abilities of local socio-economic and political systems to develop solidarity networks (both macro and micro).

Finally, this imbalance between generosity/extension of regional welfare systems and social risks reveals once again that these welfare

systems, despite undergoing a process of consolidation last century, manifest severe imbalances, and strong difficulties in reducing (if only partly) social exclusion.

## **Conclusion**

In response to the question concerning values pursued by the European Community (European Community, 2014), which indirectly represent the perception of the true ESM, citizens in 2014 place peace in first place (37%), human rights in second (32%), democracy in third (30%), and in 7th place solidarity (16%). It can once again be seen how the communitarian dimension of citizenship in European countries, and the solidarity dimension typical of the European social model, are not perceived to be the values underlying the European community's actions. The local dimension forms the main reference point for citizens with respect to social protection policies. This perception is in fact confirmed by the numerous studies that highlight the strong territorial differentiation in welfare policies (Kaztepov, 2009; Bertin, 2013; Bertin & Cipolla, 2013).

The relationship between the European community and the actions of the local authorities is weak and cannot be resolved through new laws, which are furthermore difficult to both approve and impose upon the member states. The extreme territorial differentiation also encumbers any attempt at defining a set of social rights that can be considered the minimum levels of social protection. Such difficulties can be attributed to the different composition (consequence and spread) of social risks that characterize the territorial contexts, and to the resistance to change that the national states and local authorities can trigger. The various situations of resistance are linked to: the effects of the current economic crisis that have impacted differently on the single states, and their ability to maintain and/or develop welfare policies; the reduction of discretionary power of the political decision-makers who would see their autonomy reduced in the processes of prioritizing local and national policies (a problem which is particularly relevant in moments of limited resources). Europe's commitment also needs to be in supporting the processes of welfare system review through initiating the exchange of good practices produced in the single states, and the development of a parallel process which strengthens the dimension of participation and social solidarity. The path to take is one which promotes

social rights and the solidarity practices which have highlighted their ability to strengthen identity and to expand social cohesion. Accordingly, it is necessary to endorse practices which contribute to:

- reinforcing relational networks;
- developing a participative governance network;
- achieving social equity in services;
- incentivizing empowerment in citizens;
- incentivizing and supporting forms of subsidiarity and the involvement of voluntary work;
- improving community resources;
- reducing imbalances in welfare systems;
- promoting sustainable policies.

In all European countries a review of welfare systems is taking place, triggered by social and economic changes characteristic of the present times, and by the problematic issues that have emerged in the reduced ability of welfare systems to provide an effective response to such processes. This condition of criticality and instability in welfare systems demands the community to take on a coordinating role which does not substitute the actions of local authorities, but which accompanies them through a mindset of governance, stimulation and direction on a political cultural level, and through the promotion and circulation of the good practices existing in the territories of the various countries.

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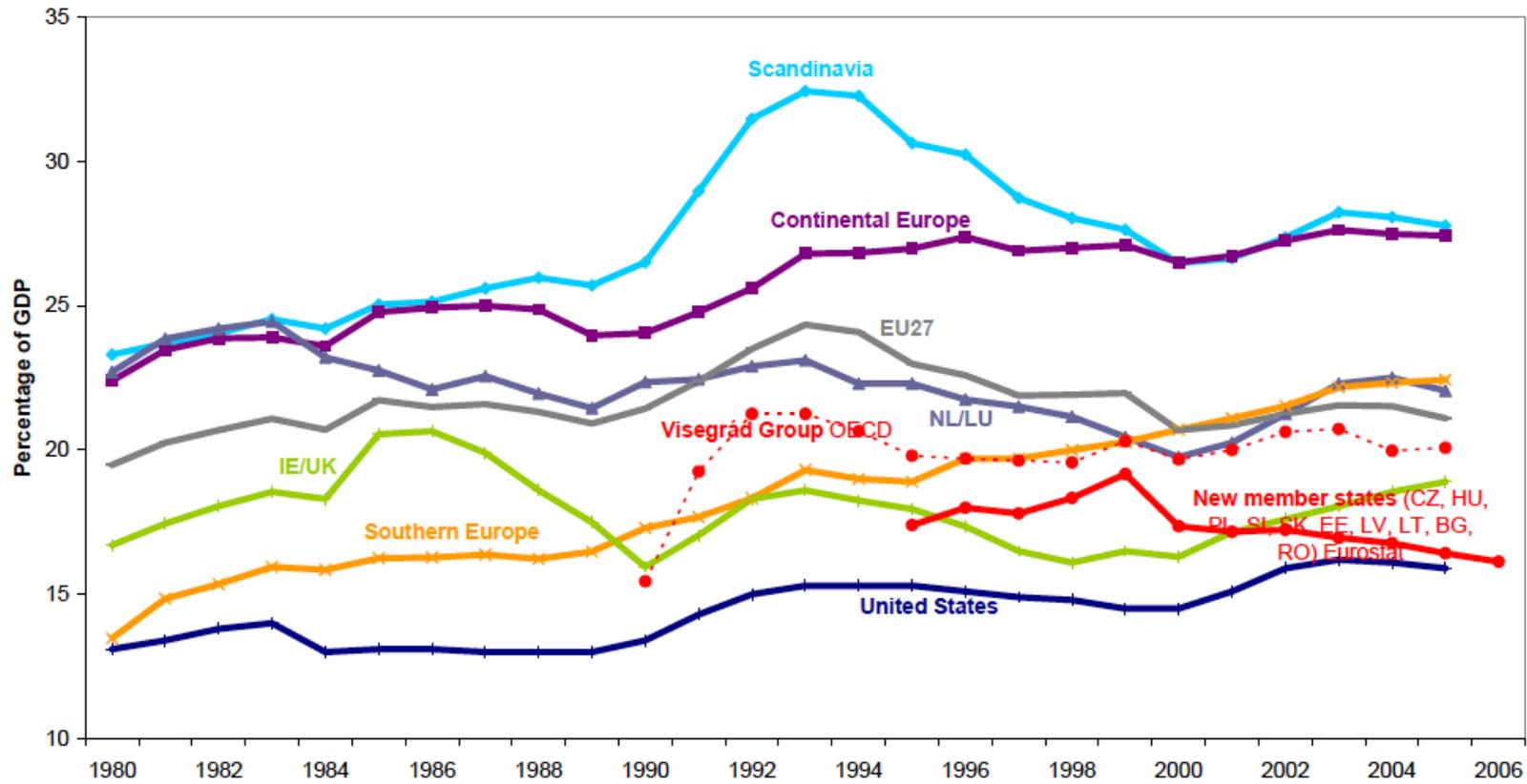
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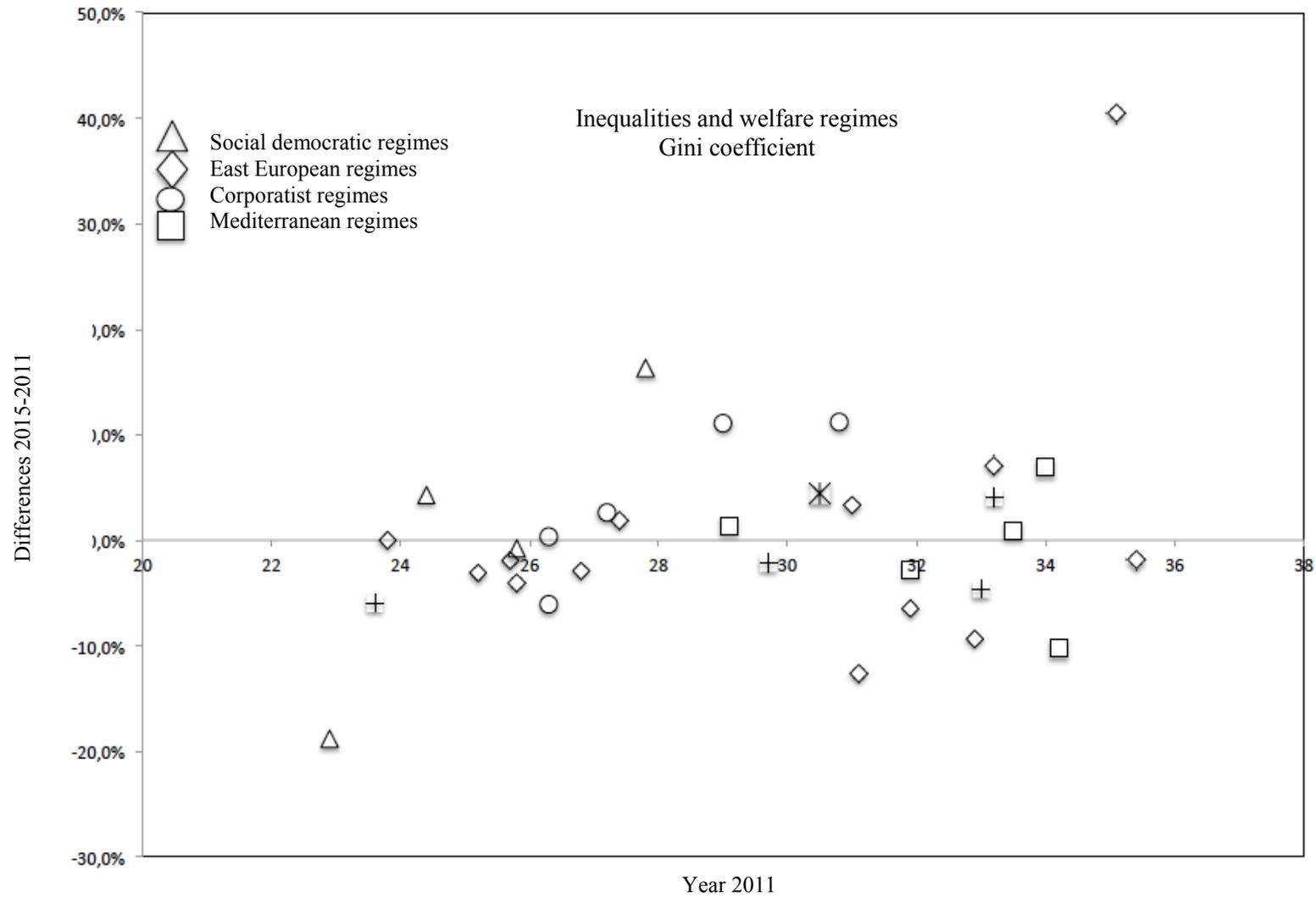
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Annex 1 - Table 1. Trend of social spending in European countries (in relation to GDP)



Source: OECD: Social Expenditure database, New member states: Eurostat

Annex 2 - Table 2. The reduction of social inequalities in welfare regimes



Annex 3 - Table 3. Extension of welfare systems in Italian regions

