

Social trust in education in European countries, 2002–2010

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Social trust in education is at least partly rooted in the legitimacy of the principal institutions which organise the social order, such as the political system, democracy and economy. Easton formulated the theoretical justification for this hypothesis in the 1960s, while empirical confirmation was delayed until the first decade of this century, when the data was collected in the European Social Survey. The results of ESS confirmed the hypothesis that trust in education is influenced by the legitimacy of the more fundamental state institutions but the mechanisms of this effect vary across Europe. In countries where schools are autonomous and control over them is located at community level, trust in education becomes independent from social support for the state. However, in countries where education is considered to be a government agency, strongly shaped by political goals, people tend to evaluate education together with other state institutions. The ESS data also provide insight into factors determining trust in education at the level of the individual. Surprisingly, the lowest degree of trust was shown by the upper classes, including the educated, whom the education system had benefited most. This is not conducive to the involvement of such people in countries that are building their educational resources.

KEYWORDS: education, social trust, legitimacy, European Social Survey.

The success of the strategies that stimulate the development of welfare countries depend on trust placed in the institutions of the state (Coleman, 1990). This is a statement which takes on particular relevance in the case of education. The creation of

a knowledge society is one of the major objectives in many countries, while the European Union has adopted it as a priority. Therefore, significant funds are allocated to research to determine the way in which education translates into the beneficial development of individuals and societies. The conclusions from such studies are followed by educational reforms, the success of which depends on the trust in education. Trust in this area not only implies passive acquiescence to educational policy, but also – and maybe primarily – the support of its goals by individuals and communities. Lack of trust leads to a situation in which society perceives education as a platform for government to pursue its own interests, not necessarily converging with those of the individual. In these circumstances, it

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would be hard to expect people to actively support educational policy.

Trust in education is, at least to an extent, a derivative of the general trust in the institutions of the state, called political legitimacy (Weatherford, 1992). It relates to the extent to which people trust the institutions that organise the social order, including: parliament, the government, political parties and politicians. Sometimes, trust and support for the very principles that organise the functioning of societies is also recognised – democracy and economy are good examples. When examining the issues, it was observed that countries differ significantly in terms of social support for such institutions. In Europe, the highest support has been consistently shown in Nordic countries for many years. A slightly lower level of support is characteristic for other West European countries, where it is clearly lower in Mediterranean countries and decidedly the lowest in the countries of Central-Eastern Europe (Domański and Słomczyński, 2010; Roosma, Gelissen and van Oorschot, 2012).

If there are any connections between perception of education and legitimacy of democratic institutions, then the former phenomenon should not be considered in isolation from the latter. Therefore, a theory connecting both phenomena, as well as data to compare of various countries in both dimensions are both needed. This would provide the only means to discover whether high trust in education is a manifestation of its outstanding place among the values and objectives of society or stems from society having trust in more fundamental state institutions.

Firstly, let us consider the problem of the relationship between trust in education and support for state institutions at a country level, which is justified by the fact that European countries differ in terms of degree of political legitimacy, which is, among other things, connected to social development and well-being. Only against this background can

the issue of country specific trust in education be considered. The data was taken from the European Social Survey (ESS, 2012) to enable determination of the trust education enjoys in European countries and identifying changes which took place in the years 2002–2010. This was a period which partly includes years of worldwide crisis. The final part of the article concentrates on identifying the individual characteristics playing a crucial role in determining attitudes towards education. The ESS data lead to a rather unexpected finding that education is less highly regarded by those who have benefited from it most. An attempt to explain this mechanism is explored but further research in this area is patently needed.

Theory

A good starting point for analysis of the mechanisms that shape trust in education is offered by the classic concept proposed for research into political relations by Easton (1965). He distinguished two types of individual support for the political system: specific support and diffuse support. Individuals give specific support to those institutions and their actions which might be evaluated in terms of proper or improper consequences for individuals and communities. The specific support always concerns an area reinforced by individual perceptions and experiences. Otherwise, diffuse support is rooted deeper – in social norms and values. It is the expression of general trust in the political system, which manifests itself in the internal conviction of individuals that the authorities act properly, even when difficulties abound. In this sense, someone might think that postponing the retirement age was the right thing to do, clarifying to oneself that it was necessary and the government had no other option. Such a person will find it easier to accept the fact that pension reform deferred the prospect of their own retirement by a few

years. It would be quite different in the case of someone who contests the authorities and thinks that every government decision brings about more damage than benefits. However, the dependence between diffuse support and specific support goes both ways. When society sees an excessive number of areas where actions of the authorities do not bring about the expected results, diffuse support dwindles gradually (Kumlin, 2007).

This article is based on the assumption that education is one of the areas to which specific support applies. Then, one may expect that it will be favourably rated in countries with high general support for the principal institutions of the state. And conversely – in countries, in which the state institutions are characterised by a low level of legitimacy, education would therefore be evaluated negatively. It is a consequence of the fact that

diffuse support plays the dominant role with respect to the support called specific – narrowed to particular areas of social policy. It can be formulated as a hypothesis, which plays a central role in the following analysis – society's trust in education depends primarily on the degree of system legitimacy.

It needs to be emphasised that system legitimacy, which is to play the causative role in the adopted model, is, to a great extent, a derivative of the level of development of a country in political, economic and social terms. The essence of the dependence, confirmed in many studies (Svallfors, 2007; Newton and Montero, 2007; Domański and Słomczyński, 2010), is rather self-evident, since well-being of citizens and integration around common goals contribute to system legitimacy (Putnam, 2000). Therefore, Western democracies, especially Nordic countries, enjoy the

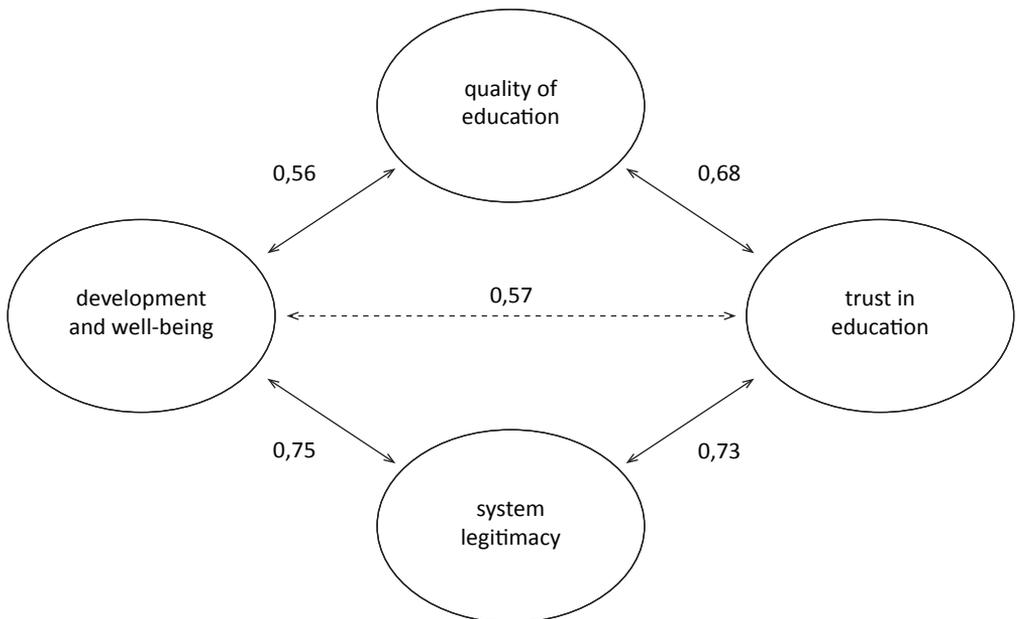


Figure 1. Correlations between country-level variables in Europe.

Note: Only countries that participated in the European Social Survey (ESS, 2012) were taken into account. This survey is the source of data on system legitimacy and trust in education (both indicators are described later in the article). GDP per capita (World Bank, 2012) was adopted as an indicator of the level of development, while the results of the 2009 PISA Survey (reading scale) served as the education quality indicator (OECD, 2010).

highest indicators of legitimacy, while it is much less internalised in countries that are still building social coherence.

Social and economic development affects the quality of education due to the fact that the richest countries spend more on it. It leads to a system of interdependencies presented in Figure 1. Development and affluence of society (expressed by means of GDP) determine not only system legitimacy, but also education quality, identified in this case by the results of the PISA survey. However, both factors affecting the trust in education cannot be examined in isolation from each other, for the reason that they have a common cause, that is, level of development. Taking both factors into account would lead to mixing their influences, creating a knot impossible to disentangle. As a result, it would lead to the trivial conclusion that trust in education depends basically on level of development of a country (the dependence shown with the dashed line in Figure 1). Therefore, the article focuses on the degree to which trust in education depends on system legitimacy, and the quality of education plays a secondary role. This role is to enrich the formulated explanations, especially when discrepancies between the degree of system legitimacy and trust in education occur.

Data

The analyses make use of the data from the European Social Survey (ESS). The five rounds of the survey were carried out in the years 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010 (ESS, 2012). The number of European countries that participated in the subsequent rounds varied from 21 to 28, but most of them took part in all rounds. In each round an identically worded question was asked concerning education in each country: “Now, using this card, please say what you think overall about the state of education in [country] nowadays?” The respondents chose one of 11 response options, from 0 to 10, where 0 meant

“extremely bad”, while 10 “extremely good”. The formulation of the question allows for the conclusion that the responses express not only the evaluation but also the degree of trust in education. It is not just a question about reform and other specific adjustments to the country’s education system, assuming that respondents were well acquainted with it, but a request for a general opinion. Thus, a positive opinion can be interpreted as an expression of trust (“I do not know the details, but I am convinced that education works well”), compared with a negative opinion reflecting lack of trust (“it is bad, regardless of specific actions undertaken by the authorities in the area of education”).

The ESS data also evaluated other institutions, enabling construction of a legitimacy index. For that purpose three questions were chosen which were asked in all rounds. They concerned the economy, the government and democracy (c.f. Domański and Słomczyński, 2010). The questions were worded as follows: “On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [country]?”;

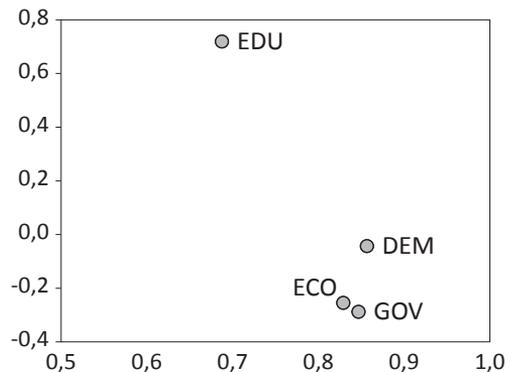


Figure 2. Factor loadings in the first two dimensions of factor analysis for opinions on education, economy, government and democracy. The European Social Survey 2010.

Note: The analysis was carried out on individual data after combining all the countries surveyed in 2010. The total sample was 50,872. The first dimension explains 64.4% and the second 16.7% of total variance.

“Now thinking about the [country] government, how satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job?”; “And on the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]?” In answer to all questions, respondents used the same scale from 0 to 10 points.

Opinions on education and the three institutions are positively correlated. For the 2010 data, the correlations ranged from 0.393 to 0.695. It is adequate for the expectations, as, in compliance with the theory presented, evaluations in each dimension should reflect

Table 1

Values of the legitimacy index, average trust in education and differences between trust in education and the legitimacy index (the “net” trust in education) in 25 European countries. The European Social Survey 2010

Country	Legitimacy index	Country	Trust in education	Country	“Net” trust
Norway	6.56	Finland	7.87	Slovenia	2.79
Switzerland	6.53	Denmark	7.18	Ireland	2.37
Sweden	6.44	Switzerland	6.68	Croatia	2.27
Finland	5.91	Norway	6.66	Czech Republic	2.05
Netherlands	5.73	Belgium	6.66	Belgium	2.01
Denmark	5.66	Estonia	6.05	Finland	1.95
Cyprus	4.95	Ireland	6.03	Portugal	1.82
Germany	4.84	Czech Republic	6.00	Spain	1.65
Belgium	4.64	Netherlands	5.98	Estonia	1.52
Estonia	4.51	Poland	5.96	Denmark	1.52
Poland	4.46	Sweden	5.77	United Kingdom	1.51
United Kingdom	4.25	United Kingdom	5.77	Poland	1.46
Russia	4.01	Slovenia	5.73	Ukraine	1.31
Hungary	3.97	Cyprus	5.67	Slovakia	1.21
Czech Republic	3.94	Spain	5.25	Greece	1.05
Slovakia	3.81	Croatia	5.20	France	1.01
France	3.72	Slovakia	5.07	Bulgaria	1.01
Ireland	3.65	Hungary	4.97	Hungary	0.95
Spain	3.60	Germany	4.73	Cyprus	0.75
Bulgaria	3.01	France	4.73	Russia	0.30
Slovenia	2.92	Portugal	4.61	Netherlands	0.24
Croatia	2.91	Russia	4.31	Switzerland	0.15
Portugal	2.75	Bulgaria	4.08	Norway	0.10
Ukraine	2.55	Ukraine	3.90	Germany	-0.11
Greece	2.04	Greece	3.08	Sweden	-0.68
Average	4.20	Average	5.38	Average	1.15

The values expressed in terms of response scales from 0 to 10, on which 10 represents the highest trust and 0 the lowest. Individual data aggregated at national level.

the diffuse support for the system. Therefore, it needs to be determined whether the evaluation of education is specific enough to constitute a separate topic for consideration. Arguments supporting that conclusion are offered by factor analysis (Figure 2). Opinions on economy, the government and democracy are most strongly correlated, so points representing them in the figure form a cluster. This justifies the combination of the three evaluations into a joint indicator, reflecting diffuse support for the most fundamental state institutions. This indicator has been called the legitimacy index and is defined as the mean evaluation of the economy, the government and democracy. Factor analysis proves that evaluations of education manifested specific

variability (the point representing them in the figure is separated from the others), thus may be treated as a separate topic. It enabled definition of a “net” measure of trust in education in the form of a difference between the opinion about education provided by respondents and their average support for three institutions. The average values of the indicators for the countries participating in the 2010 survey are presented in Table 1.

System legitimacy and trust in education

In accordance with the hypothesis, trust in education should, in the first place, depend on diffuse system support, that is – in this case – the resultant of the assessments of

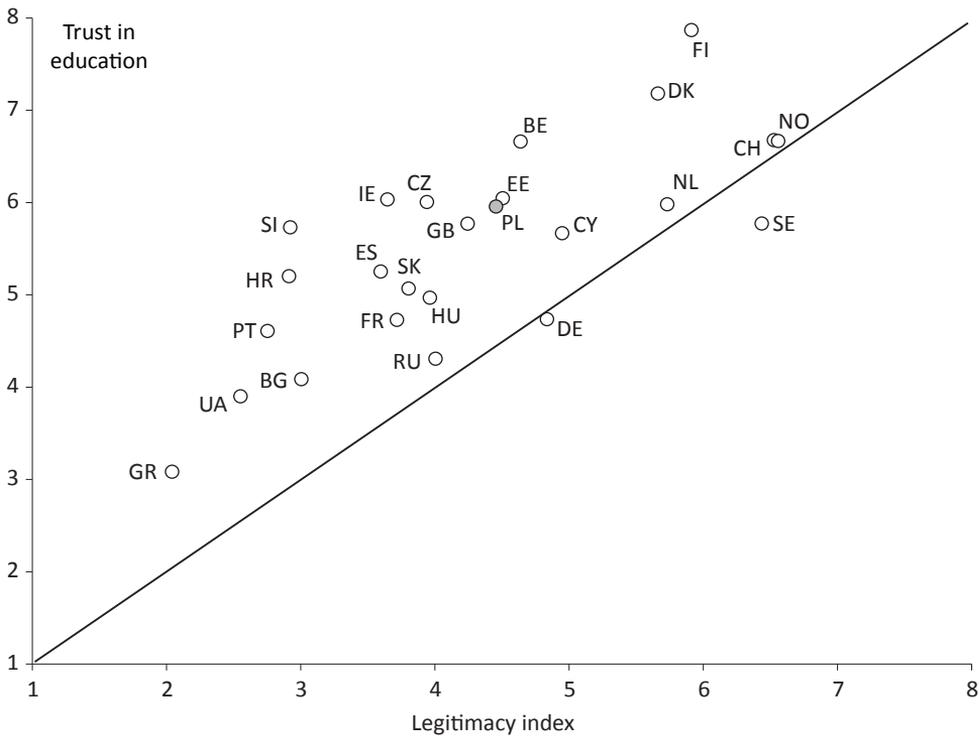


Figure 3. Legitimacy index and trust in education in 25 countries. The European Social Survey 2010.

Country codes: BE – Belgium, BG – Bulgaria, CH – Switzerland, CY – Cyprus, CZ – the Czech Republic, DE – Germany, DK – Denmark, EE – Estonia, ES – Spain, FI – Finland, FR – France, GB – the United Kingdom, GR – Greece, HR – Croatia, HU – Hungary, IE – Ireland, NL – the Netherlands, NO – Norway, PL – Poland, PT – Portugal, RU – Russia, SE – Sweden, SI – Slovenia, SK – Slovakia, UA – Ukraine.

democracy, the economy and the government. The results presented in Table 1 lead to the conclusion that such dependency occurs – yet it is not of an absolute nature (see also Figure 3). A high position in both dimensions is characteristic for Nordic countries and Switzerland. A contrasting and consistently low position is occupied by two Mediterranean countries – Greece and Portugal – and two countries of the Central and Eastern Europe: the Ukraine and Bulgaria.

Beside the similarities, there are also discrepancies between the two dimensions. Their analysis is facilitated by the counter-diagonal in Figure 3, which represents identical assessments of education and the other institutions considered: democracy, the economy and the government. Most of the countries are located above the diagonal, which means that trust in education is higher in these countries than the average evaluation of the three institutions. Only one of the 25 countries was placed clearly below the diagonal, namely Sweden. It means that there, education is evaluated lower than other institutions of the democratic state. Five other countries were located close to the diagonal: Norway, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany and Russia. In those countries, education is evaluated similarly to other institutions.

Against the institutions key for the system, “net” trust in education is highest in Slovenia, as well as in Ireland, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Belgium and Finland (see the last column of Table 1). Even the very juxtaposition of those countries leads to the presumption that the excess of trust in education may have various causes. Ireland is a country which suffered the crisis to a higher degree than others, so the relatively high net trust in education may result from otherwise low support for the system. On the other hand, in Finland, the high net trust in education may reflect its traditional high position among social goals and values. The results of the ESS do not provide an insight into the causes

specific to particular countries, it is not a survey aimed at issues related to perception of education, but, in exchange, allow analysis of changes in the relation between trust in education and support for the system in the years 2002–2010. Such an analysis provides a better explains why education compared with system legitimacy, is rated higher in some countries.

Dynamics of trust in the state and education in the years 2002–2010

Changes in evaluation of education should be a derivative of changes in the support for the state according to the hypothesis. If a society provides increasing support to state institutions, it should trust education accordingly. And conversely, if there is a crisis of trust in the economic and political institutions, education should also be trusted less. However, one should not expect the two processes to be fully synchronised. If, in accordance with Easton’s theory, evaluation of education is a derivative of diffuse support for the political system, it should manifest some degree of inertia. When a sudden downturn in system support occurs, decline in trust in education should follow a delay.

The ESS data cover the period from 2002 to 2010. It partially coincides with the years of the world-wide economic crisis which affected the European countries. To determine the extent to which it affected changes in system support and consequently changes in the trust in education, we will use three measures. The first is an unstandardized regression coefficient which permits determination of the pace and direction of changes (marked b_{ed} for education and b_{sys} for system legitimacy). However, as the changes could be fluctuations (e.g. support for the system first increased, then decreased, and then returned), the regression coefficient should be supplemented with a measure that determines the stability of

changes. Average deviation from the mean will be used for that purpose:

$$d = \frac{1}{k} \sum_{i=1}^k |a_i - A| \quad (1)$$

where k is the number of ESS rounds in which a country participated, a_i are the assessments in subsequent rounds and A signifies the mean for all rounds. The more evaluations differ between rounds (are unstable), the higher the measure. In addition, to determine the concurrence of changes in trust in education and support for the system, a correlation coefficient will be employed. The values of all measures are presented in Table 2. In addition, Figure 4 presents the results graphically. In both presentations countries are divided into four geopolitical groups, to aid clarity when discussing the results.

First, stability of evaluations over time is considered. As a rule, the trust in education is characterised by higher stability than the trust in system institutions in all countries¹. In the Nordic and West European countries, the fluctuations in the legitimacy index are about three times higher than the fluctuations of trust in education. In Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean countries, the difference is approximately double (Table 2). The conclusion enriches Easton's conception, which predicts that support for the system, of a more general nature and more rooted in fundamental values, should be less prone to

fluctuating than trust in education, which is specific in nature and more dependent on the actual state of affairs. If the empirical data indicate the reverse, the only explanations are that the actual state of education does not change or that actual changes are not perceived by the society. Such conclusions would be consistent with the assumption that education is of secondary importance compared to the key institutions. Its evaluation is more a result of stereotyping and individual notions rather than a reliable diagnosis based on facts.

It is worth tracing the changes in the more distinguished groups of countries. Nordic countries are characterised by a very high similarity between the pace and direction of changes in the support for the system institutions and trust in education. The correlations between the two dimensions are positive and mostly high (Table 2). The concurrence is well described by the example of Denmark (Figure 4). In the years 2002–2006, Danish trust in the system institutions was growing, as was the trust in education. In the next round, the trend reversed; trust in the system institutions started to decrease and a simultaneous fall in trust in education was visible, although its pace was much slower. It illustrates the inertia of trust in education in comparison to the trust in institutions considered more basic to society.

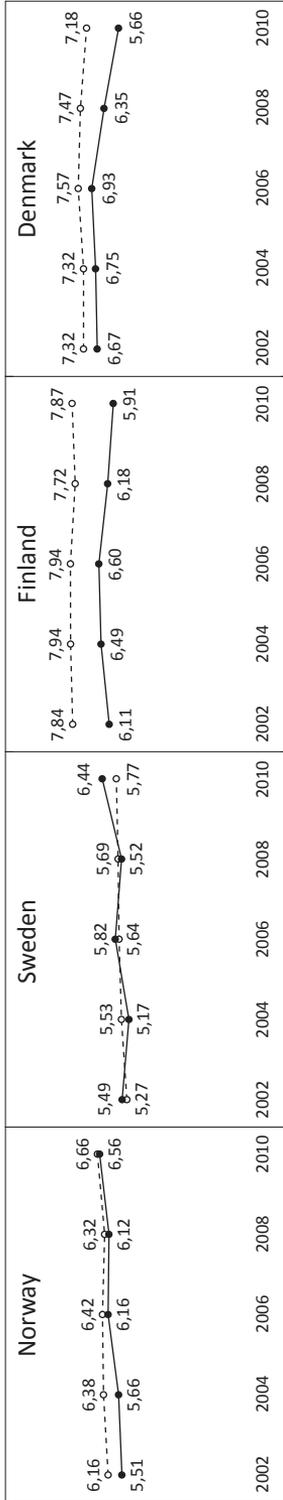
There were also other countries where a decrease in trust in education occurred as a result of a crisis of trust in system institutions. In Ireland, after 2006, when support for the most fundamental state institutions plummeted, trust in education also fell. Due to inertia, the fall was slower, though. Identical patterns were observed in Greece, which was characterised by the decidedly lowest rating of system legitimacy of all countries studied in 2010. It is clear that trust in state institutions fell faster than the trust in education. An identical pattern can be seen in Cyprus.

¹ Only two countries do not follow this pattern: Russia and the Czech Republic (Table 2). They are both characterised by a clearly higher stability of evaluations of system institutions than other countries. This is probably the reason why variability of trust in education is close to the variability of the support for the system in Russia, while the variability of the former factor clearly exceeds the variability of the latter in the Czech Republic. The data for both countries are not complete, however, as not all five rounds of the ESS were implemented there. Thus, the conclusion about the relatively stable support for the system in Russia and the Czech Republic should be treated with a degree of caution.

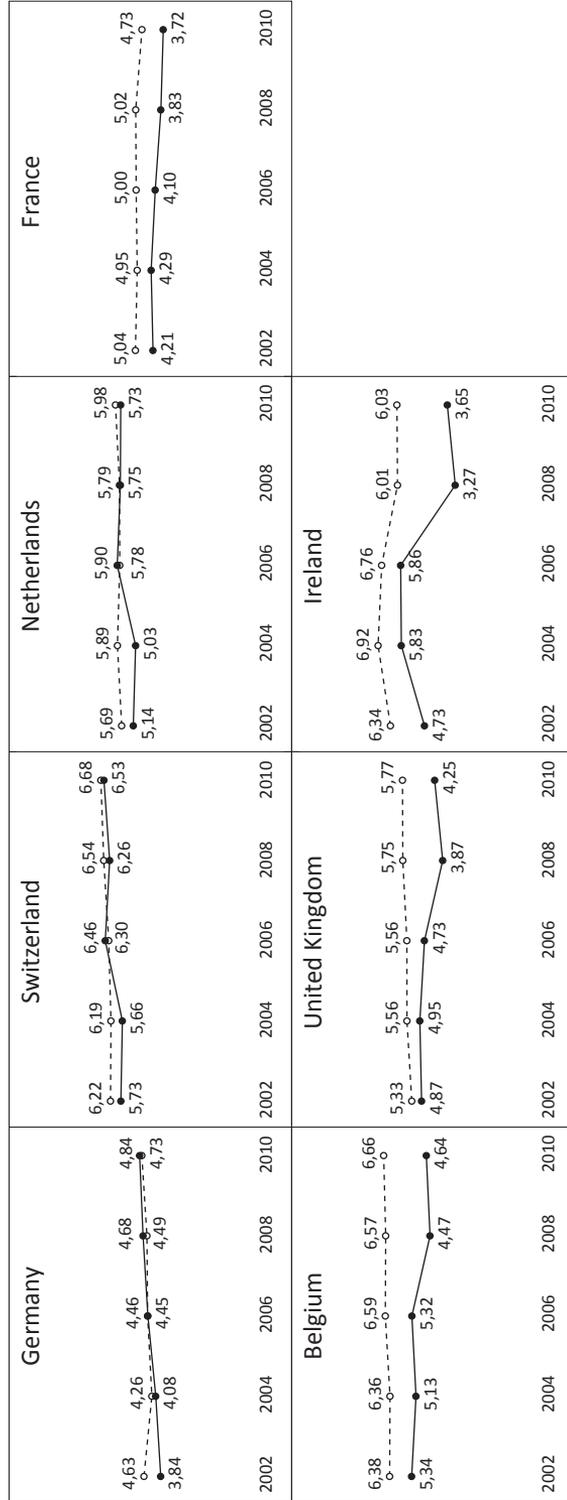
Table 2
Coefficients of changes in legitimacy and trust in education in 24 countries.
The European Social Survey 2002–2010

A. Nordic countries					
Country	d_{ed}	d_{sys}	b_{ed}	b_{sys}	$r_{ed.sys}$
Norway	0.12	0.33	0.10	0.26	0.88
Sweden	0.14	0.35	0.12	0.22	0.60
Finland	0.07	0.23	-0.02	-0.07	0.57
Denmark	0.12	0.37	-0.01	-0.24	0.70
Average	0.11	0.32	0.05	0.04	0.69
B. West European countries					
Country	d_{ed}	d_{sys}	b_{ed}	b_{sys}	$r_{ed.sys}$
Germany	0.13	0.33	0.04	0.26	0.34
Switzerland	0.18	0.35	0.13	0.22	0.77
Netherlands	0.09	0.34	0.05	0.19	0.16
France	0.09	0.20	-0.06	-0.14	0.60
Belgium	0.11	0.34	0.08	-0.21	-0.57
United Kingdom	0.13	0.38	0.11	-0.23	-0.80
Ireland	0.34	0.97	-0.15	-0.47	0.98
Average	0.15	0.42	0.03	-0.05	0.21
C. Central and Eastern Europe countries					
Country	d_{ed}	d_{sys}	b_{ed}	b_{sys}	$r_{ed.sys}$
Poland	0.33	0.46	0.25	0.34	0.92
Bulgaria	0.18	0.23	0.26	0.16	0.37
Slovakia	0.20	0.63	-0.05	0.14	0.83
Russia	0.11	0.10	0.02	0.06	0.94
Czech Republic	0.24	0.10	0.05	-0.02	-0.27
Estonia	0.24	0.33	0.19	-0.08	-0.57
Hungary	0.30	0.67	-0.04	-0.26	0.77
Slovenia	0.19	0.50	0.11	-0.26	-0.67
Ukraine	0.09	0.56	-0.08	-0.45	0.79
Average	0.21	0.40	0.08	-0.04	0.35
D. Mediterranean countries					
Country	d_{ed}	d_{sys}	b_{ed}	b_{sys}	$r_{ed.sys}$
Portugal	0.26	0.37	0.18	-0.14	-0.50
Spain	0.11	0.59	0.07	-0.37	-0.11
Cyprus	0.28	0.46	-0.34	-0.62	0.84
Greece	0.72	1.00	-0.43	-0.64	0.97
Average	0.34	0.60	-0.13	-0.44	0.30

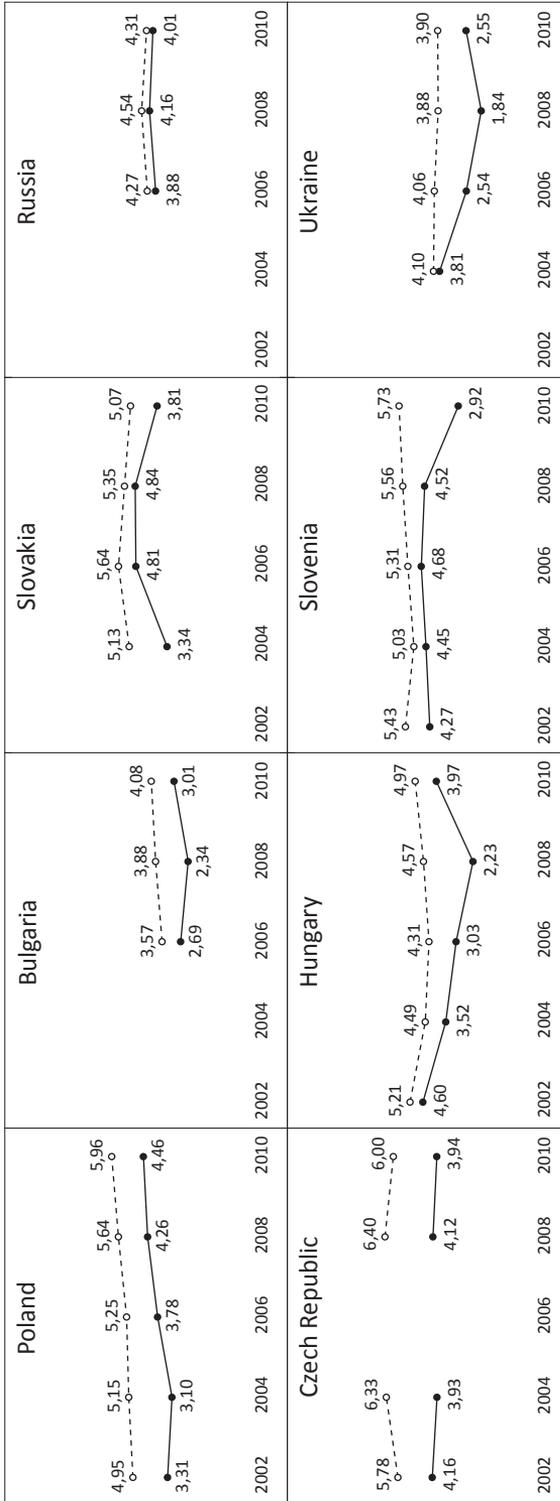
A. Nordic countries



B. West European countries



C. Central and Eastern Europe countries



D. Mediterranean countries

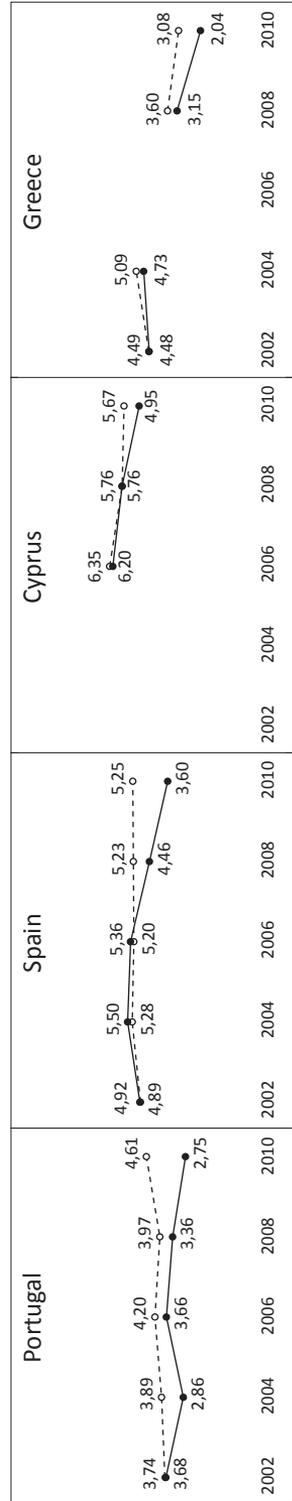


Figure 4. Legitimacy index (solid line) and trust in education (dashed line) in the years 2002–2010 in 23 countries. The European Social Survey 2002–2010.

Among countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Poland stands out in terms of the fastest growth of social trust in state institutions. The value of the regression coefficient b_{sys} , which is 0.34, is generally the highest among all countries studied (Table 2). This explains why the pace of growth of trust in education in Poland is at the highest level in Europe. The growth of trust in education is slower than the pace of increase in legitimacy, which may testify to inertia in the evaluation of education.

The same direction for change in support for the system and trust in education is not, however, a universal principle. Several exceptions to this rule can be identified. Examples are offered by Belgium and the United Kingdom, where the trust in education was basically growing over the whole period, despite a clear crisis of trust in state institutions after 2006. Slovenia is a special case, as the pace of the downwards trend in trust in state institutions is comparable to Ireland and Greece, while trust in education clearly grew over that time. As a result, Slovenia had the highest excess of social trust in education as compared to the trust in state institutions in Europe in 2010 (Table 1). At the same time, it explains why excess is not a valid indicator of trust in education as such, since its value depends not only on how high the trust in education is, but also – and maybe most importantly – on how poor perception of key system institutions is. In terms of the absolute trust in education, Slovenia does not stand out particularly, occupying a middle ranking position of all countries (Table 1). It is similar to Ireland or Croatia, where education is not assessed very favourably either, while state institutions are evaluated as definitely poor. This leads to a relative excess of social trust in education.

The ESS results also show that some societies permanently have greater trust in education than in state institutions. In Finland, the excess of trust in education remained at the

same level for the whole period 2002–2010 (Figure 4). The specificity of Finland is perceptible especially when juxtaposed to the Netherlands, a country with the closest level of trust in state institutions to Finland. In the Netherlands, trust in education and the degree of legitimacy were similar over the whole period covered by the survey. In Figure 4, both lines are close together. In Finland, they are permanently divided by a distance of almost two points of the scale. A similar phenomenon was observed in Poland.

The excess of trust in education may also be an effect of reform or other measures of educational policy, as long as they are noticed and approved of by society. Between 2008 and 2010, the fastest increase of trust in education among all countries took place in Portugal (from 3.97 to 4.61 points). This happened despite the fact that trust of the Portuguese in state institutions fell. Over the same period, the Portuguese government implemented a programme that equipped 1.5 million students and teachers with laptops and ensured them with Internet access. The spectacular nature of the project probably positively influenced Portuguese society's perception of education despite growing dissatisfaction with the general condition of the state.

Social position and trust in education

Let us move on to identification of the mechanisms that shape trust in education at an individual level. It is known from prior research that system legitimacy is influenced by social status. People who are worse off in life are more likely to rate the system institutions as unsatisfactory, while the institutional order is supported mainly by those who have high status and material and cultural advantages (Schoon et al., 2010; Domański and Słomczyński, 2010). This finding is consistent with expectations that the privileged have more to lose in the event of system changes. In the light of the previous

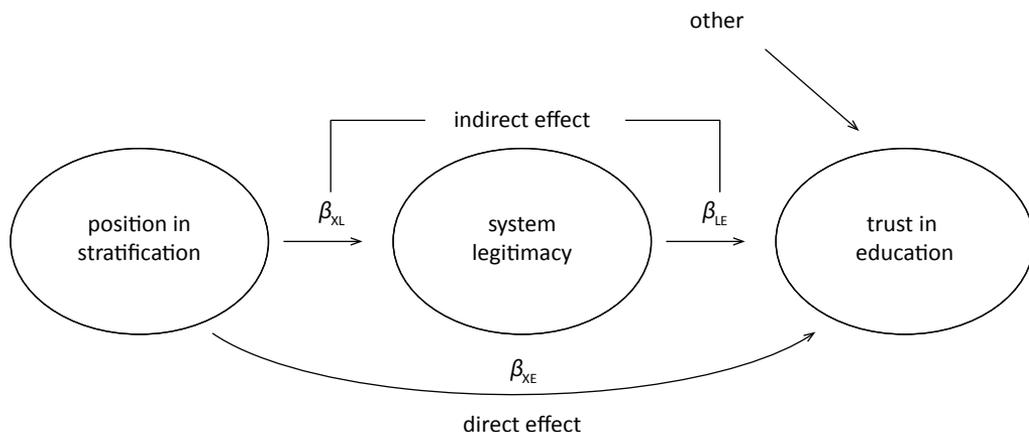


Figure 5. Relationships between the determinants of trust in education at the level of individuals. Variables: X – position in the stratification system; L – system legitimacy; E – trust in education.

research, this mechanism, although its direction raises no doubts, seems to be rather weak. The value of the correlation between the social class and system legitimacy is estimated by Domański and Słomczyński (2010) at the level of 0.13–0.14².

Thus, the social status of the respondents determines – at least to some extent – affirmation of the system and this, in turn, in accordance with the adopted theory, should shape trust in education. The pattern of those relationships is presented in Figure 5. This resembles a copy of the country-level relationships, where the degree of economic and social development of a country determines the system legitimacy, which, in turn, translates into a higher or lower trust in education (see Figure 1).

We will start the analysis at the individual level from the latter of the elements of the diagram in Figure 5, that is how strongly trust in education is determined by legitimacy. Correlations vary considerably between countries (Table 3), which leads to the conclusion that mechanisms that translate legitimacy into trust in education may have

different natures in different countries. In the first place, let us consider two countries – Belgium and the Netherlands, where we can observe the weakest correlation between system support and trust in education. According to the well-known report *Education at a glance*, both countries are distinguished in Europe by a high degree of autonomy of schools (OECD, 2012). One may conclude that their residents evaluate education through the prism of functioning of schools at the local level. The Netherlands were the first to enact a school voucher program in Europe, as early as 1917, allowing parents to decide where to send their children (James, 1984). The evaluation of education from the local perspective does not have to go hand in hand with evaluation of state institutions located at the national level – this may be the cause of a relative greater independence of trust in education from the trust in institutions of the state.

On the other hand, the strongest correlations are characteristic for those countries where a significant polarisation of both evaluations of state institutions and education occurs. This phenomenon is illustrated by the values of the coefficient of variation V (Allison, 1978) provided in the right-hand

² The multiple regression coefficients provided by the authors.

Table 3
Correlations (r) and coefficients of variation (V) for legitimacy (L) and trust in education (E) in 25 countries. The European Social Survey 2010

Countries	$r_{LE}^{(a)}$	Countries	$V_L^{(b)}$	$V_E^{(c)}$
Belgium	0.241	Netherlands	0.238	0.275
Netherlands	0.270	Norway	0.238	0.268
Hungary	0.304	Switzerland	0.240	0.298
Slovenia	0.308	Sweden	0.262	0.329
Sweden	0.326	Finland	0.277	0.180
Switzerland	0.351	Denmark	0.303	0.260
Ireland	0.356	Belgium	0.363	0.278
Finland	0.367	Cyprus	0.390	0.367
Norway	0.371	Germany	0.391	0.492
Cyprus	0.374	Poland	0.424	0.364
Czech Republic	0.379	United Kingdom	0.439	0.360
United Kingdom	0.384	Estonia	0.454	0.354
France	0.387	Spain	0.473	0.393
Slovakia	0.393	Ireland	0.487	0.362
Denmark	0.394	Hungary	0.492	0.456
Spain	0.413	Slovakia	0.493	0.451
Portugal	0.414	Czech Republic	0.509	0.365
Germany	0.430	France	0.526	0.453
Croatia	0.437	Russia	0.539	0.583
Poland	0.438	Portugal	0.581	0.440
Bulgaria	0.443	Croatia	0.618	0.416
Estonia	0.464	Bulgaria	0.634	0.592
Ukraine	0.480	Slovenia	0.635	0.382
Russia	0.577	Ukraine	0.665	0.559
Greece	0.578	Greece	0.829	0.733
Average	0.395	Average	0.460	0.400

The calculations were performed on individual data. All values significant at $p = 0.001$.

^(a) Pearsonian correlations between the legitimacy and trust in education.

^(b) Coefficient of variation V for the legitimacy index.

^(c) Coefficient of variation V for trust in education.

side of Table 3. The high coefficient means that in those countries, beside those who approve of the state institutions, there must be an equally strong group of determined state

opponents. One may think that both groups focus more on the institutions key to the state, rather than education, since variation of opinions on state institutions is greater

Table 4
Measures of dependence between the educational attainment of the respondents, the system legitimacy and the trust in education. The European Social Survey 2010

Country	Correlation between educational attainment and trust in education	Impact of educational attainment on legitimacy	Impact of legitimacy on trust in education	Impact of educational attainment on trust in education	
				Indirect	Direct
	r_{XE}	β_{XL}	β_{LE}	$\beta_{XL} \cdot \beta_{LE}$	β_{XE}
Poland	-0.108	0.159	0.480	0.076	-0.185
Bulgaria	-0.139	0.091	0.452	0.041	-0.180
Germany	-0.076	0.133	0.447	0.059	-0.135
Switzerland	-0.095	0.092	0.368	0.034	-0.129
Slovakia	-0.061	0.155	0.412	0.064	-0.125
Sweden	-0.056	0.180	0.335	0.060	-0.117
Slovenia	-0.062	0.146	0.338	0.049	-0.112
Norway	-0.056	0.135	0.398	0.054	-0.110
Portugal	-0.047	0.116	0.447	0.052	-0.098
Estonia	-0.026	0.132	0.492	0.065	-0.091
Netherlands	-0.042	0.163	0.267	0.044	-0.086
United Kingdom	-0.028	0.108	0.382	0.041	-0.069
Belgium	-0.038	0.124	0.250	0.031	-0.068
Czech Republic	-0.031	0.084	0.383	0.032	-0.063

Beside the values distinguished with italics, all other statistically significant at $p = 0.01$.

Variables: X – educational attainment of the respondents according to the EISCED classification common for all countries (variable *eisced*); L – legitimacy index; E – trust in education.

The countries are arranged according to the value of direct impact of educational attainment on trust in education (column β_{XE}). The table does not cover countries, for which at least one of the direct impacts (β_{XL} , β_{LE} , β_{XE}) was not statistically significant at the level of $p = 0.01$.

(except Russia – c.f. the last two columns of Table 3). A strong polarisation of views entails high correlation between opinions on the state institutions and opinions on education. It also means that education is not perceived independently, but as a branch of central administration. Trust in education is, therefore, a derivative of the trust in more basic state institutions.

One may expect that, after combining the two elements of dependence from Figure 5, people with a high social status should have higher trust in education than those who

occupy lower positions in the social hierarchy. To verify that hypothesis we limit further considerations to a single indicator of the social status of respondents, selecting educational attainment for that purpose. It is surely not such a valid indicator of social standing as measures based on occupation (Domański, Sawiński and Słomczyński, 2009), but, in exchange, it creates better interpretative opportunities for analyses of trust in education. In the first column of Table 4, there are correlations between educational attainment of respondents and their trust in education.

Contrary to expectations, the correlations are low (statistically significant for just six countries), and, in addition – which may be a little surprising – they are negative! To clarify this unexpected result, we shall use a technique known as path analysis (Kerlinger and Pedhazur, 1973). It enables separating the direct impacts from indirect impacts, which are achieved through intermediate variables.

Returning to Figure 5, the position in the stratification system affects the trust in education along two paths. The first path is an indirect one, on which the intermediate link is formed by beliefs concerning system legitimacy. We have focused on that path so far, assuming that social status affects the evaluation of the most fundamental state institutions, and that, in turn, trust in education. However, this does not preclude the existence of another path, a direct one. A person with high social status may have trust in all state institutions, including education. At the same time, he or she may think that education functions worse than other state institutions. We interpret this deficit of trust, which is an effect of the comparison of education with other institutions, as direct impact. Whereas the remaining part of trust in education, which results from the beliefs concerning system legitimacy, as indirect impact.

Table 4 presents both links in the indirect path: the impact of respondents' educational attainment on the beliefs concerning system legitimacy β_{XL} and the impact of the system legitimacy on trust in education β_{LE} . In the path model, the product of both coefficients is interpreted as indirect impact. Its value is provided in the column marked as $\beta_{XL} \cdot \beta_{LE}$. In all the countries³ considered,

the indirect impact was positive. This justifies the reasoning that high social status leads to legitimacy of the system, while that is conducive to trust in all institutions, including education.

Beside the indirect impact, the path analysis enables separation of the parallel mechanism which directly mediates influence of social status on trust in education (Table 4, values β_{XE}). In the countries covered by the analysis, the mechanism operates opposite to the direction described above. People with high educational attainment are prone to lower evaluation of education compared to their evaluations of the key institutions, while people with low educational attainment give education relatively higher assessments. This phenomenon is illustrated in Figure 6 for three countries: Poland, Switzerland and Sweden. The values provided concern net trust in education, that is the difference between the absolute trust in education and the system legitimacy index.

Let us recall that Poland belongs to a group of countries where education is rated much higher than the other institutions (Figure 4). The results presented in Figure 6 make it possible to deepen this conclusion. The excess of trust in education persists in Poland in all categories of educational attainment, yet the higher the attainment, the lower the excess. In Switzerland, at the scale of whole society, education is evaluated similarly to the other institutions. The well-educated Swiss however, evaluate it lower than other institutions, while the Swiss with low educational attainment rate it much higher. Sweden is the only country in Europe, where education is evaluated significantly below than other institutions. This deficit of trust in education is, however, minor among Swedes with low educational attainment, while more pronounced among Swedes with the highest educational attainment.

³ The results are presented only for 14 countries, in which the values of the coefficients β for all estimated paths were statistically significant ($p = 0.01$). In omitted countries that criterion was not met by the coefficient determining the impact of educational attainment on trust in education, which prevented reliable comparison of the direct and indirect impacts.

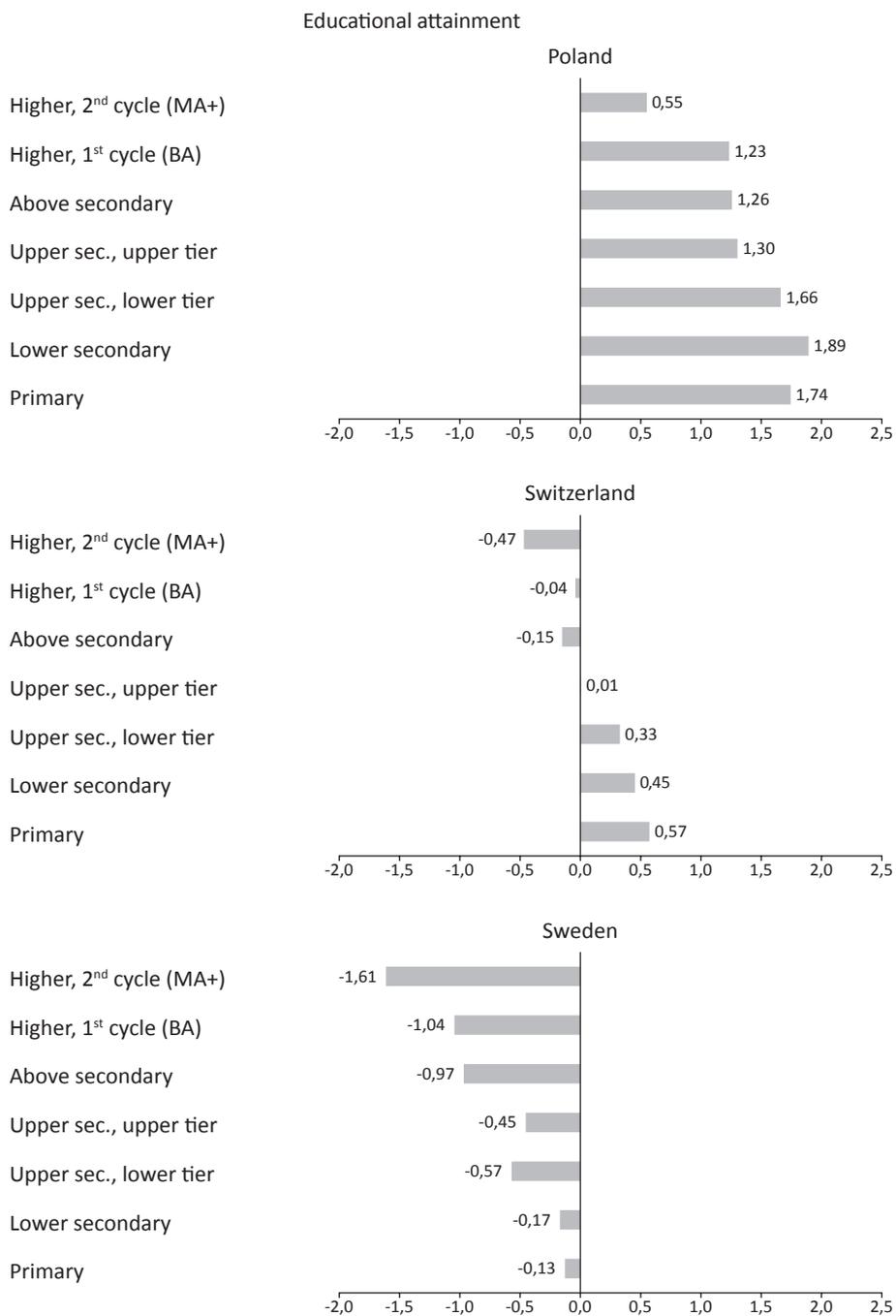


Figure 6. Differences between trust in education and system legitimacy for levels of educational attainment in Poland, Switzerland and Sweden. The European Social Survey 2010.

Educational attainment coded according to the classification common for all countries (the *eisced* variable).

The pattern that was detected makes it possible to explain the unexpected result, namely that a correlation between social status and trust in education is not detectable in most countries (not statistically significant), and when found, it tends to be negative. In the path analysis, correlation is the sum of direct and indirect effects (note that the sum of the values in columns $\beta_{XL} \cdot \beta_{LE}$ and β_{XE} in Table 4 gives the correlation from column r_{XE}). However, since the direct impact is opposite in direction to the indirect, both impacts neutralise each other, owing to which the observed correlation between the respondents' educational attainment and trust in education tends to be small or negative. Low observed correlations do not prove, therefore, that social status does not affect trust in education. It does have an influence, but through two different channels, operating in opposing directions.

Discussion and conclusions

The aim of the analysis was to determine whether education is perceived and evaluated in the European countries as a separate dimension in the area of state institutions. Does education have its own legitimacy, which makes it possible to place trust in it during a crisis of faith in institutions that are more fundamental in society? Or it is regarded in the same way as central bureaucracy, which implements its own objectives. The adopted theoretical perspective did not predict which options would be confirmed from the data. It only showed that education cannot be examined in isolation from the most basic institutions of society.

The analysis at country level confirmed that the system legitimacy is a derivative of economic development and social well-being. The values of the legitimacy index, on the basis of social evaluation of democracy, the economy and government, was shown to be the highest in Nordic countries, above

those in the West European countries, markedly lower in Mediterranean countries, but definitely the lowest in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The analyses also revealed that in terms of social trust in education, the hierarchy of countries roughly overlapped with the hierarchy in terms of trust in the basic institutions of the state. One may tentatively conclude that the unique features of educational systems, their historical roots, reforms, or even their efficiency in building knowledge capital have minor impact on society's rating of education. Even intense effort by education policy would not guarantee that society would appreciate this effort and evaluate education any better than other institutions of state.

The social evaluation of education does not always closely follow the barometer of legitimacy of more fundamental institutions. The analysis of changes in the years 2002–2010 proved that trust in education is characterised by a certain degree of inertia. The crisis which unevenly affected the European countries found clear reflection in the social evaluation of the most basic institutions, while it was not shown in evaluations of education, and when it was, it was delayed. That inertia may have resulted from the fact that education is not the first priority to address when social welfare is threatened.

A similar mechanism is responsible for the excess of trust in education, relative to other state institutions. It transpires that excess results, in most of European countries from falling trust in basic system institutions, rather than growing trust in education. The excess of trust in education is a permanent feature in only two European countries, Finland and Poland. In Finland, this can be explained by the high position of knowledge in social values and the respect which is given to schools and teachers (Simola, 2005). The PISA survey confirms that the Finnish education system, with social support, successfully implements its goals (Mejdung and Roe, 2006).

In Poland, other explanations for the excess of trust revealed in education are needed. One cause may be found in the educational aspirations of society, already high during the era of communism, when educational attainment opened the path to promotion for some, while it helped others to maintain their position (Wiśniewski, 1984; Sawiński, 1987). Aspirations grew even more during the post-communist transformation, when earlier barriers to education were removed (Bogaj, 2005; Wciórka, 2009). However, to be certain about whether high aspirations are the true explanation of approval for education in Poland, more thorough analysis is required. Caution is needed since this reasoning is not replicated in some of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe. In the Soviet Union, educational attainment was also one of few ways to open career paths for citizens – remaining, in strong synergy with promotion along party lines (Collins, 1979). Moreover, after the fall of communism in Russia, the educational boom was at an unprecedented scale, which was the result of opening of the educational system – especially at the higher level – to the aspirations of those previously denied the chance (Gerber and Schaefer, 2004). Despite these similarities, in Russia – unlike in Poland – no visible excess of trust in education can be observed (Figure 4).

Another important conclusion concerns the finding that the pattern of trust in education in Europe is stretched between two extremes. The first one occurs when educational engagement of society is at a local level, with schools aware of and acting on the needs and expectations of the parents. Evolution of such a model is a long term investment. The Netherlands needed almost 100 years for local communities perceive school as their own good, rather than a department of central administration. At the opposite extreme education is perceived as just one manifestation of state authority. It remains unfamiliar to people, as they can have no direct influence

on it. Society is dominated by the belief that education institutions have the same goals as other state institutions, and are thus evaluated accordingly. This model can be found in most of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and some Mediterranean countries.

Last but not least is the rather startling finding, most visible in Poland, that educational attainment translates into negative attitudes towards education. Better-educated people are not sentimental about the institutions which helped them achieve success. In economic terms, one may say that providing them with education yielded “a negative return on investment”. These attitudes look like a symptom of frustration from the fact their qualifications did not yield the anticipated benefits. That “over-education” of society – as defined by Freeman in 1976 – was the necessary cost of overcoming the barriers to education in countries of the former Eastern Bloc. At present, the Ukraine, Russia, Slovakia and Poland belong to the leaders in Europe in terms of people with higher education (Sawiński, 2013). One must, however, allow for the fact that education may find few supporters among the multitude of educated people.

The final conclusion is more general. There is a strong belief among economists that education plays a crucial role in the development and growth of countries, because investment in education is among the most cost-effective (c.f. Hanushek and Woessmann, 2011). However, it can be seen that society is guided by logic which is contrary to their opinion. Education is not a primary concern for people. Trust in education hinges on whether the more fundamental system institutions, such as democracy, the economy and government function well or not. Thus success seems unlikely for politicians who would like to start social reform from education. Before gaining social support and approval for creating knowledge and skills, more essential expectations and needs should be met.

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