Public support for redistribution: What factors explain the international differences? *

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1. Introduction

The widespread consensus view of individual incomes in industrialized countries is that inequality has increased since the 1980s. Notwithstanding the intense debate on ‘welfare retrenchment’, the welfare state has so far had a cushioning effect – naturally not to an equal extent in all countries – on the market’s distribution of income (Kenworthy/Pontusson 2005). The degree to which social policy based on income redistribution is possible ought *also* to depend on the voters and on what they perceive as justified. As politicians strive for re-election, their campaigns represent a channel for public opinion to assert itself. Nevertheless, if a country’s redistribution burden – namely, taxes and social contributions required to finance the transfer programs – is deemed too high, and with a resulting negative impact on economic growth and labor markets, then the scope of socio-political action inevitably narrows (Brooks/Manza 2006). Of course, it would be too hasty to treat public support as the only determinant of income redistribution, since the degree of redistribution may be a direct outcome of individuals’ increasing eligibility to claim benefits during times of economic crisis (Kenworthy/Pontusson 2005). State redistribution by taking from individuals in an economically stronger position in order to give back to those in an economically weaker situation *is controversial*, because it calls for a sacrifice from 'the winners in the great lottery of the market, to reduce the distance between them and the losers' (Streeck 2000: 136; 2001). Thus, the present contribution investigates which social structures and convictions facilitate such a correction of market inequality.

Comparative research highlights the range of different attitudes in various countries towards income inequality and redistribution through the welfare state. A lively debate ensued in recent comparative literature about whether these differences in individuals’ preferences are more aptly explained by economic theories or by institutionalist explanations. The former approach assumes that preferences react directly to facts, while the latter explanation emphasizes how, in view of empirical patterns, it is hardly feasible to refer to redistribution demands being influenced by objective inequality. Above all, the *median voter hypothesis* proposed by Meltzer and Richard was criticized. This hypothesis postulates that actors who maximize their gain when faced with objective inequality also develop specific interests in redistribution. Yet on the contrary, requirements for state redistribution are channeled through institutional influences; these institutions are considered differently in the various research traditions.

This paper contributes to the debate on the reasons for international variations in public support for income redistribution. Here, the argument is put forward that national differences in citizens' acceptance of redistribution are not solely related to the influence of the welfare regime. Indeed, this argument overlooks other factors connected to the country variable. Additionally, it is argued that the macroeconomic context, on which explanations of *political economy* mainly refer, equally offer no fully suitable explanation. Instead, the results of my analysis support an *integrative approach*: Research that is critical of the assumption of a direct link between the level of income inequality and public support for redistribution can only be partially confirmed. Nevertheless, the relevance of an alternative macroeconomic factor, as discussed in political economy, demonstrates that it would be unwise entirely to rule out the idea of preferences reacting to objective context-based conditions. Equally, the impact of the *regime* cannot be denied. The following analysis therefore concentrates on the macro-level with regard to factors in support of redistribution, while at the same time controlling for relevant influences at the individual level.

A multilevel analysis is adopted here, since support for redistribution is explained by factors relating both to individual and country characteristics. The data base referred to is the 1999 'International Social Survey Program' with the central topic of 'Social Inequality' and additional macroeconomic variables included from sources that are within the public domain. A brief survey is initially provided of previous research into the acceptance of state redistribution (chapter 2). Here, we focus on the debate about whether international differences in redistribution preferences are a direct outcome of inequality (2.1), or whether any mitigating institutional factors may also prove influential. This assumption is made for regime theory (2.2), and also in the asset-theory of social policy preferences. The role of individual factors is shortly discussed (chapter 2.3). Chapter 3 presents the method, data base, indicators and variables used in the empirical analysis. The results (chapter 4) show that the argument with respect to regime influences, and that of the rational 'median voter' cannot be diametrically opposed. Support for redistribution is influenced by regimes *and* by rational reactions. These results are subsequently discussed in the conclusions (chapter 5).

2. Support for redistribution – explanations of the variation between countries

2.1 Inequality and demand for redistribution

In general, *political economy* interprets the attitudes towards redistribution as a kind of *reaction* to national conditions without discussing *cultural or institutional filters* that shape the perceptions of structural features predominating in the institutionalist approach (Lübker

2007). This model of a 'reaction' to given facts in many studies is not explicitly derived from a rational actor concept that rests on the assumption of actors being able to calculate a demand for redistribution that maximizes individual advantages. The common denominator of these studies based on arguments from political economy is that objective conditions influence social policy preferences. The degree of inequality in income distribution, the economic outlook, unemployment or the volume of social expenditure are relevant factors in different countries that are invoked from the standpoint of *political economy* as influencing demand for redistribution and offering an explanation for why levels of income redistribution differ from country to country.

Research discourse most frequently focuses on inequality in the distribution of (pre- or post-tax) earnings (of individuals or households). It seems plausible that in those countries where income inequality is comparatively low, public demands for more equality correspondingly diminish. In countries where income redistribution is already practised to a greater degree, a 'satiation' of the 'need' for redistribution is achieved. To opt for more income redistribution is less desirable because a low level of income inequality is hardly a motivating factor for additional redistribution practices. The marginal utility of more redistribution decreases in *'mature'* welfare states. The progressively higher burden on taxpayers and contributors has a negative impact on the demand for redistribution. Empirical results for countries with relatively little income inequality show less support for redistribution (Roller 1995, Lippl 2003), and thus underline this '*satiation hypothesis*'.

The *median voter hypothesis* developed by Meltzer and Richard (1981) also assumes a negative link between the level of income inequality and the degree of public support for redistribution in a country. As the authors argue, individuals with a median income have a keen self-interest in redistributive benefits, since this group can impose their political demands by majority decisions in elections. The greater the (pre-tax) income inequality the higher the increase in the gap between median voters' income and the mean income. Also, median voters expect to gain from progressive taxation used to finance income redistribution. Conversely, the closer the median income is to average income, the less desirable redistribution is likely to be. As income distribution gradually equalizes, there is a growing risk that median voters will have to finance the redistribution themselves. Therefore, after a certain point, self-interest in income redistribution dwindles.[1] If the assumptions are followed about the effect of inequality on the public's assent to income redistribution in any given country, then the resulting hypothesis must be:

H 1: The less the prevailing income inequality in a country, the less the support for redistribution. Conversely, the greater the prevailing inequality, the greater the support for income redistribution.

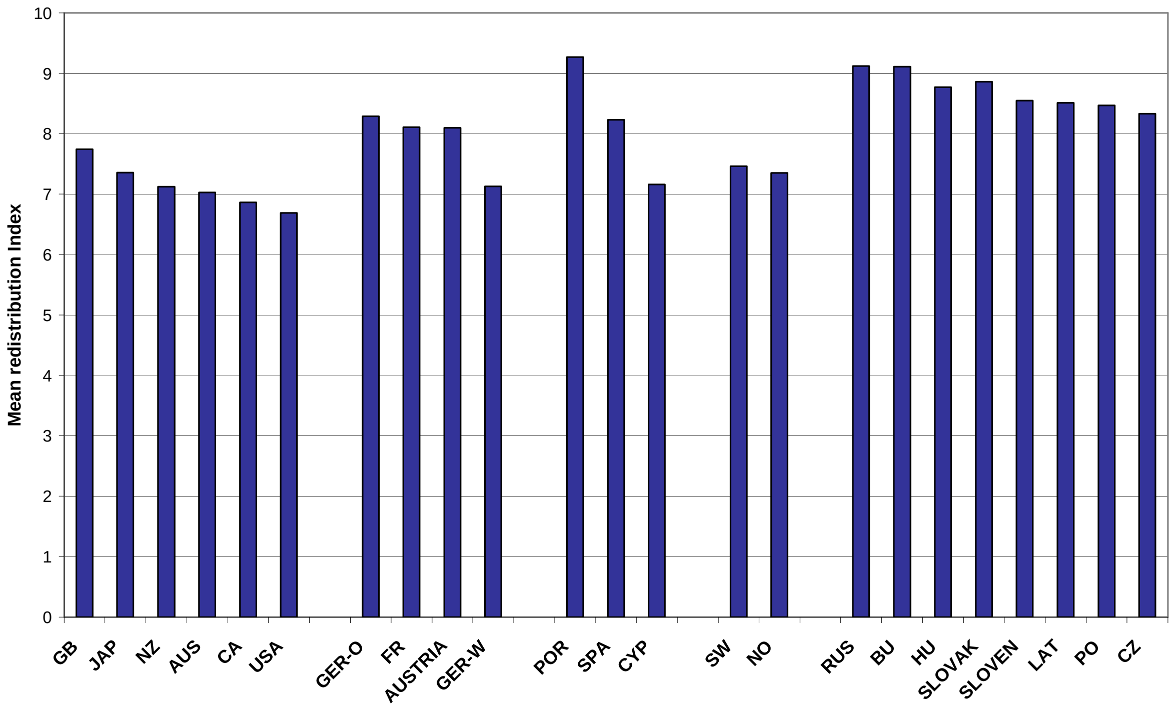
However, this direct link between inequality and a certain 'demand' for redistribution was often questioned, above all, with reference to the United States and other liberal countries, where high income inequality notably does not at all result in high support for redistribution (Kangas 2002; Kenworthy/Pontusson 2005; Soskice 2005; see also figure 1).

In this case, the argument was adopted that objective inequality must first be *mediated* by 'redistributive ethics' (Bowles/Gintis 2000) or else be evaluated by the varying social justice concepts. Hence, identical income inequality nevertheless yields to different request for redistribution (Lübker 2007, 2004). Lübker showed that the Gini Index alone has no significant influence on how citizens evaluate inequality and state income redistribution. The level of inequality only has a significant effect when additional country groups with different socio-political cultures (regimes) are taken into account. However, apart from the regimes, Lübker did not consider any other country factors that may lead to international variations in redistribution preferences. He therefore arrives at a bold conclusion that redistribution desires are influenced by institutionalized value ideals.

In some respects, it is too convenient to assume a direct link between inequality and distribution preferences. Results should also be acknowledged that confirm some influence of actual inequality on individuals' judgments. In a study based on European countries, the influence of actual income inequality was partly confirmed (Finseraas 2006). The case study by Kenworthy and McCall (2007) about the relation between a change in actual inequality and perceptions of inequality over time, as measured with reference to public opinion, obtained some ambivalent results. Thus, whereas in some countries changes of opinions clearly followed trends in the actual level of income inequality, in other countries the perceived level of inequality was not found to mirror the given inequality structures.[2]

Figure 1: National levels of preferences for redistribution grouped by social political regimes (mean values).

[1] For a more detailed discussion of the median voter hypothesis see Kenworthy/MacCall (2007).
[2] A comparative study on the link between the growing inequality of households' pre-tax gross market incomes and transfers, and actual redistribution of welfare states also found that the median voter hypothesis is not completely false: The greater the increase in market income inequality, the more welfare state redistribution increased (Kenworthy/Pontusson 2005). Kenworthy and Pontusson further found that the extent of redistribution largely depends on the voter turnout in different countries. These results underline how objective inequality is not decoupled from voter demand; hence any mediating political processes must be taken into account.



Source: ISSP 1999, own calculation based on an redistribution index. Calculation see chapter 3 and table A1.

In view of the difficulty of explaining the variations in inequality preferences as a reaction to inequality, the research approach was to prioritize institutional influencing factors. In *political economy*, institutions are considered as restrictions upon actors who basically seek individual advantages. However, in the approach adopted by Esping and Andersen, which was more closely aligned to regime factors, institutions are rather considered to refer to socio-political ideologies.

2.2 The regime approach

Regimes are packages comprised of institutional programs, dominant societal powers and coalitions in politics as well as certain socio-political ideals that developed historically in western industrial societies (Esping-Andersen 1990: 138, Taylor-Gooby 2001). They have varying ways of shaping social security, influencing income inequality or defining the role of the family in welfare production. Thus, liberal regimes stress individual responsibility in securing income and intervene only minimally in the market processes of distribution. Conservative regimes tend to be shaped by Catholic social doctrine or by Christian Democracy as the dominant political force. Such regimes are also likely to assume greater responsibility for the social security of the individual and practise income redistribution more than in liberal regimes. Under social-democratic regimes, redistribution can be far-reaching, not only due to strong labor parties, but also because of the accessibility of social rights to all classes. Thus, redistribution receives broad public support. The original regime typology was broadened to include Mediterranean and post-socialist regimes. Citizens of the latter type are assumed to have high expectations of the state that is supposed to aim at more equality among its citizens (Kluegel/Myano 1995, Delhey 1998). In contrast, the influence of the Mediterranean regime on preferences for redistribution is anticipated to be similar to that of the conservative regime type.

Regime approaches in public opinion research assume varying degrees of international acceptance of redistribution either as a result of differing socio-political *ideals* about income inequality and the ‘proper’ degree of state intervention in income distribution or as a result of the interests of social groups (‘cleavages’). Regimes are supposed to symbolize social policy ideologies which in the long term have a *formative effect* on citizens’ preferences (Svallfors 1997, Gelissen 2001, Mau 2004). The different regimes 'promote different ways of valuing market distribution and the redistributive responsibilities of government.' (Svallfors 1997: 286). They influence citizens’ notions about solidarity because they embody specific *ideas* about how much the welfare state should foster equality (Arts/Gelissen 2001, Gelissen 2002). This is how welfare states in Scandinavia virtually create their broad-based support from within, as the institutions that comprise their social states represent collective responsibility for their citizens’ welfare. Institutions of the welfare state limit political action, institutionalize social relationships of exchange, trust and solidarity between citizens. This norm- and preference-setting function is called a ‘moral logic’ (Rothstein 1998) or a ‘moral economy’ (Mau 2003).

Following the regime approach, the hypothesis is:

> *H 2: The level of support for redistribution in the countries belonging to the same regime type should be similar. Moreover, the following ranking is to be anticipated: Citizens of countries with liberal regimes support redistribution the least. Under post-socialist regimes the requirement is the highest, on account of the enduring influence of socialistic ideology. This is closely followed by level in countries with social-democratic governments, whereas opinions of those living in conservative and Mediterranean regimes exhibit average redistribution preferences.*

However, empirical results offer only partial confirmation of the regime approach. Evidence could hardly be found for the existence of 'cleavages' with specific interests as regards welfare state redistribution. Instead, ‘cleavages’ according to gender, class and dependency structure support for state redistribution and this applies in equal measure for all countries (Svallfors

1997: 295, Taylor-Gooby 2001).[3] Although a study restricted to Germany, Norway and the US confirmed the anticipated regime-specific tolerance for redistribution (Andreß/Heien 2001), the low number of cases in that study does not permit any generalizations. Other studies have shown that citizens in social-democratic regimes do not have the strongest tendency to support redistribution, but rather express relatively little support for (more) redistributive measures. By contrast, citizens in Mediterranean states such as Spain or Portugal demonstrate a high level of support for redistribution (Svallfors 1997; Gelissen 2002). This result appears plausible, given the potential for additional income redistribution in these comparatively 'immature' welfare states. According to my own data, support for income redistribution does not always clearly follow regime types (see figure 1). Thus, German, Swedish and Norwegian citizens have an acceptance level that is as low as in other liberal countries. Moreover, there are differences within the regimes that emerge when considering a greater number of countries for a specific regime type. Variations between countries instead suggest that preferences for redistribution react to the equalization of income structures that have already been achieved. According to the results previously discussed, it must be conceded that the assumption of a moral economy as an influential factor on redistribution preferences only holds true to a limited extent, although it is not necessary entirely to dispense with this assumption (Blekesaune 2007).

Additional concessions must be made insofar as the international differences in preferences in relation to inequality and redistribution can hardly be ascribed to regimes without first incorporating an element of control for the impact of other country characteristics. Country and regime factors are often equated. *Meier Jaeger* (2006a) tried to avoid this by applying indicators for social policies such as the extent of public expenditure on social welfare, the weight given to social services in relation to cash transfers, and the wage-replacement rate of unemployment benefit. However, no correlation was found between social policies and attitudes towards redistribution. High social expenditures for material assistance and a high wage-replacement level, each of them characteristic of social-democratic regimes, had a *negative* influence on support for redistribution. Furthermore, generous benefit payments to families did not positively correlate with the support for redistribution, rather there was an inverse relationship between the two.[4] These results underline that support for further reduction of inequalities dwindles when social inequalities are low. Additionally, we should distinguish be-

[3] Other recent studies have attempted, by a more refined methodical procedure, to identify 'cleavages' (Linos/West 2003, Meier Jaeger 2006b).
[4] Only the relation between social welfare expenditures and citizens support for redistribution was positive, as expected.

tween immature and mature welfare states. In the latter, there is less scope for redistribution, since appropriate measures have been implemented. Variations between countries in terms of the level of support for redistribution in no way entirely follow *historical legacies* of the respective regimes.

The *asset theory* is another institutional approach to the problem of why redistribution preferences are not just the outcome of actual earnings inequality. This theory was developed in the framework of the ‘varieties of capitalism’ (Iversen/Soskice 2001). International variations in public preferences for welfare state expenditure (not redistribution!) follow from different *product market regimes*. In liberal market economies (LMEs), where production of basic products and services dominates, most employees do not invest much in education. They acquire *general* qualifications that are easily transferable to other jobs. Because unemployment poses only slight risks, the demand for generous welfare state security is low. In coordinated market economies (CMEs), the production of technologically advanced products is predominant with employees being highly qualified according to the specific requirements of firms and industries (Hall/Soskice 2001: 51). If this workforce becomes unemployed, the employees risk loosing the high investment they made in their specific skills and therefore demand higher wage replacement. These individual preferences result in generous social security and high social expenditure. The *asset theory* can therefore account for preferences for social security in liberal countries with flexible labor markets in contrast to European countries. However, this focus on two types of capitalism simultaneously represents a limitation of the analysis, as it does not clearly explain the differences in social policy preferences between coordinated market economies. This assumption is borne out by my own data (see figure A2). A regression using dummy variables also gives a highly significant, negative coefficient for LMEs, although no significant coefficient is given for the case of the CME, since preferences in these countries are evidently too heterogeneous (the results are not provided here). Moreover, it is difficult to decide whether the significant effect for LMEs is to be traced back to the *product market regime* or to their social-political regime. On the basis of these uncertainties, we refrain from suggesting a hypothesis for asset theory.

An additional kind of ‘institutional’ explanation for public opinions on income redistribution draws on the distinction between the targeted and universalist welfare state. When benefits are targeted to the most needy, the social basis of welfare state support is low, while benefits aiming at the middle social strata also create broad public support (Rothstein 1998; Korpi/Palme 2001; Moene/Wallerstein 2001). The targeting welfare state mostly is the residual liberal type, while the latter is either the social insurance state or the generous Scandinavian welfare state.[5] Thus, an impact of either targeting or universal welfare institutions is already captured by the regimes.

The impact of economic conditions

The quest to find explanations for international variations in distribution preferences must also account for the influence of the economic situation on citizens' demands for redistribution. This approach may lead in two directions. On the one hand, economic crises can reduce the support of the general public for redistribution programs: "Altruism declines in times of hardship" (Sihvo/Uusitalo 1995: 252). The legitimacy of the welfare state is questioned when people experience a worsening of a country's economic fortunes, often accompanied by a decline in real wages. Additionally, the part of their income that individuals have to give up to the welfare state increases in times of economic crises (Shivo/Uusitalo 1995; Andreß et al. 2001: 50f.). Conversely, in times of economic prosperity, tolerance for redistribution grows, as wage increments mean the hardships of giving up income to fund social welfare payments are felt to a lesser extent. By the same token, one can imagine an inverse relationship between *economic prosperity* and demand for redistribution. In the case of high *economic wealth*, the support for income redistribution should fall, because now people need government protection less (Blekesaune 2007; Haller/Höllinger/Raubal 1990: 35-37). Economic prosperity reduces unemployment and in general makes the income level rise. Public redistribution by the welfare state now seems less desirable, because labor market participation promises to solve problems.[6]

Equally, in times of an overall economic crisis, the support for redistribution grows, as then the *need* is perceived for intervention by the social state due to rising unemployment and poverty. Labor market problems culminate in economic insecurity and, in turn, this again creates preferences for redistribution. This negative link between the overall economic situation and demands for redistribution is described as the '*needs hypothesis*'.[7]

> H 3: The better the economic situation of a country, the lower the level of assent is to redistribution.

[5] Social security programs inspire more vigorous public support because they both appeal "to the self-interested desires on part of a broad range of citizens" and as well to the broadly accepted ideal of reciprocity (Fong 2001).
[6] The deliberations on the effect of the economic situation are based on the condition that all social strata profit from a favorable overall economic development. However, the extent to which this is the case depends on the distribution structures in the individual countries.
[7] Blekesaune refers to "governmental protection hypothesis" (2007).

The economic situation, the labor market and the perceived requirements for income redistribution are closely interrelated (Korpi 2003; Kenworthy 2004). Potentially, the employment situation influences demands for redistribution more directly than the economic situation. It is assumed that claims for state redistribution become more frequent, when employment falls (Blekesaune/Quadagno 1998; Blekesaune 2007). However, in my own analysis, the variable of unemployment is not used in the regression, as there is a high correlation between unemployment and GDP (see table A2). But regressions that replace GDP with the unemployment rate do not provide models with results that deviate from those using GDP. Hence, the influence of the overall economic situation ought to be traced back to unemployment to a greater extent.

Variation among individuals: Self-interests and norms of justice

Most studies consider both self-interest and social values when trying to explain the demand for equality and redistribution at the individual level (Taylor-Gooby 1985, Meier Jaeger 2006). For studies in political economy, individual self-interest tends to influence the extent of support for redistribution by the welfare state. First and foremost, those people with an interest in redistribution are individuals who are directly dependent on state welfare benefits and, secondly, those individuals who expect to gain from redistribution because of their low income or high risk of unemployment. Empirical evidence confirms the view that it is usually workers and the less well-qualified individuals and those with a low income or recipients of benefits who advocate redistribution and hope to profit from it (Wilensky 1973, Svallfors 1997, Corneo/Gruner 2002). Rehm (2005) examined the hypothesis of Iversen/Soskice (2001) that preferences for state redistribution depend on occupationally specific labor market risks. In fact, he found a positive correlation between an occupation-related unemployment risk and the advocacy of redistribution. In this paper, it is assumed that an above average unemployment risk can be tested by education, because less well-qualified individuals face high labor market risks. Previous studies supported the view of higher dependency on welfare transfers in the case of unemployment, poor qualifications, low income and being female. These variables are considered later in the discussion on the multilevel regression.

Research on social policy attitudes has also assessed the role of c*ultural* ideas (Roller 1995, Andreß/Heien 2001, van Oorschot 2001). It is argued that redistribution attitudes are no *reaction* to the objective situation (unemployment, low income), but rather are *transmitted* by value conceptualizations or political ideologies. Objective facts are assessed against the backdrop of ideas, values or belief systems (Blekesaune/Quadagno 2003; Linos/West 2003). Also, the neo-institutionalist perspective emphasizes values because, in its view, formal welfare state institutions are related to informal institutions like cultural ideas. Judgments about the welfare state are thus made against the background of norms of fairness, solidarity and suitability (Offe 1987, Rothstein 1998, Mau 2002 and 2004). Corneo and Gruner (2002) consider values as 'social incentives' creating the wish to act in accord with publicly recognized norms. Empirical results confirm that beliefs about *egalitarianism* (Blekesaune/Quadagno 2003), social advancement (Linos/West 2001), the causes of poverty (Fong 2001) or political ideologies (Meier Jaeger 2006a) are influential. Here, however, no such values-based attitude is incorporated in the analysis.

3 Operationalization and data

As a measure for the approval of income redistribution, the *dependent* v*ariable* is a sum index of two items from the 1999 International Social Survey when interviewees designated their approval or rejection of the following statements: “Differences in income in [this country] are too large.” “It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high income and those with low income.” A five-step scale was used. The first item whether inequality is perceived at all and if its evaluation is negative. In relation to the second item, interviewees were asked whether they wished the state to reduce income inequality. The dependent variable gives a summary of each of these aspects insofar as judging income inequality to be too high *and* demanding the state to reduce it *almost* aims at one dimension. However, the second item points beyond the first to the extent that it measures whether the state is largely also assigned the responsibility to reduce inequality and its negative consequences, and the solution is not rather to be found in labor market participation. Assigning responsibility to the state or labor market only emerges empirically in liberal states as a dimension in its own right. This is because, in general, there is a high correlation between both items (Pearsons r=0.52) – the value of Cronbach’s alpha (0.701) is highly reliable, and factor analysis showed one factor for each country. Only in liberal countries is the close link partly dissolved between inequality and the state acting as the responsible entity to moderate these income differences. Hence, the correlation proves slightly weaker (see table A1).[8]

Our aim is to analyze the impact of country features that are treated as influential variables for the level of the demand for more equality in a country at the same time as discussing individual characteristics that shape people’s interests and dependencies on redistribution. Therefore a *multilevel regression* is used. Multilevel procedures are best suited to the hierarchical data structure. The data of individuals in the survey are 'nested' in single countries. In an OLS regression, however, this would give rise to a standard error that is much too small, because the sample for context variables is smaller then the number of individual cases. A multilevel regression facilitates a separate estimation of the contribution of the different levels as an explanation for the varying demand for equality (Rabe-Hesketh/Skrondal 2005; Hans 2006). A Random Intercept and Random Slope Model are used whereby the regression constants of different countries together with the slopes of the selected predictors may vary randomly. In the RI model, it is assumed that the country levels of support for redistribution vary around a mean. Within the RS model it is assumed that the strength of the influence of household income on the dependent variable – demand for redistribution – varies between countries. Furthermore, *cross-level effects* were introduced, thus modeling the influence of the context variable on the slopes of individual level variables. It was assumed that the influence (=slope) of family income depends on the GDP: High GDP strengthens the negative effect of the income variable.

Those countries from the 1999 ISSP survey were included, to which the regime approach can be usefully applied. The institutional influence of a regime is identified with a corresponding grouping of the various countries. Sweden and Norway belong to the social-democratic regime type; France, Austria, and Germany to the conservative. Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan are grouped as liberal regimes, whereas Spain and Italy count as Mediterranean types. The post-socialist regime type includes Poland, Lithuania, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic. In all, the sample consists of 23 countries.

In addition to analysis by regime type, an alternative grouping is introduced. On the one hand, countries are grouped into ‘mature’ welfare states (Sweden, Norway, Germany, France, and Austria) where income is already equalized by the social state and there is little scope for *further* redistribution. On the other hand, ‘immature’ social states are considered to be in southern and eastern Europe. The liberal welfare states are retained, as their socio-political culture constitutes a special status.

In the relevant literature, the discussion already showed that the social state regime does not influence public support to the extent that is assumed by the adopted institutional approaches. For that reason, the influence of the context factors of Gini and GDP are taken into account.

[8] The results that we gain from in multivariate analysis using the sum index are only slightly different from those using the single dependent variable: “It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes.”

Comparable, high quality data on the Gini-coefficient calculated by the same method are available from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) and EUROSTAT.[9] In this contribution, a Gini which is based on weighted *after* tax net household income and transfers is preferred to a Gini based on market incomes, since net household income is the indicator that is more relevant to people. To test the impact of the economic situation of a given country, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in 1999 (in dollars, Purchasing Power Parity) is used (data from HDR 2004). The country variables were not centered, as all have a relevant zero point.

Independent variables at the *individual* level were indicators of self-interest for redistribution because of the personal income position or risk of income loss. They were measured by household income (deciles from 1 to 10), and years of education. A dummy variable for those in retirement (contrast: those in employment) was used. A gender dummy (with females as the reference group) was added. Further a dummy variable on the perceived fairness of own income was introduced assuming, that the feeling to get "less than I deserve" rises the request for a reduction of income inequalities. Income is also inserted into the random part of the multilevel model. Variables at the individual level are the Grand mean centered (Enders/Tofighi 2007). This permits controlling for the coefficients of the country variables for individual factors.

4 Results

People's judgments about income inequality and support for redistribution clearly vary among the individual countries, as figure 1 already showed.[10] Moreover, as anticipated, the mean redistribution preferences rank the highest in post-socialist and Mediterranean countries, whereas they rank the lowest in liberal countries. But social-democratic and conservative countries rank somewhere in the middle or even close to liberal countries. The preferences for redistribution in social-democratic countries are lower than suggested by the regime typology. The range order is rather ambiguous, not as postulated in the first hypothesis. Furthermore, a high degree of similarity in one regime type's assent to redistribution was expected. Hence, only the post-socialist countries can be grouped in a similar level of support for redistribution, while other regimes are less homogeneous. Western Germans' preference for redistribution is much lower than that of the French and Austrians and is more in alignment with that of liberal countries. In *liberal* regimes, homogeneity is limited, for example, in the case of the UK. Also

[9] Table A2 gives an overview of the data on country characters and on the data sources.
[10] It has a minimum value of 6.69 for US citizens and a maximum value of 9.27 for the Portuguese.

the level of redistribution demands diverges in Mediterranean countries. Thus, regimes are only partly homogeneous ‘worlds of social policy preferences’.

Before discussing the results of the regression, the bivariate connections are interpreted in a graph along with both country variables. In this instance, the individual countries are still considered separately to illustrate more clearly the different influence of macroeconomic determinants of GDP and Gini within the individual country groups. This aspect in the subsequent multivariate analysis becomes less visible. However, these divergent influences are the specific problem of an analysis of international variation in redistribution preferences.

Figure 2: Agreement with redistribution and economic prosperity (about here)

Figure 2 plots the level of public support for redistribution against GDP and illustrates the regime type by using different symbols. On the whole, it can be seen that as prosperity increases in a given country, citizens demand less income redistribution. Indeed, a certain satiation seems to set in. A clear polarization between transformation countries and the other, ‘richer’ countries in northern and continental Europe becomes evident. Thus, the high level of approval for redistribution in eastern Europe is linked to the economic development and/or the immature welfare states and not merely to regime influences. Differences of redistribution support exist in the 'wealthy' countries. Thus, *different* reactions are possible to similar economic wealth. Hence, some vague regime clusters appear.

Figure 3: Agreement with redistribution – inequality

In addition, figure 3 gives an initial impression of the link between the degree of income inequality and the acceptance of redistribution. With a low Gini, the average support for redistribution in a country should fall. This correlation is found for the countries in the lower left quarter (Western Germany, Norway, Sweden, Japan, and Canada). A positive correlation of high inequality and strong redistribution preferences only holds true for Russia and Portugal. Both effects confirm the median voter hypothesis. However, the other countries place in question a direct influence between the degree of inequality and the request for redistribution. Citizens of liberal regimes in the lower right area of figure 2 do not show the expected preferences, despite living in countries with a high level of income inequality. Conversely, the countries on the upper left side in figure 2, that is, the post-socialist and two conservative regimes of France and Austria, exhibit a low level of inequality, albeit a high level of redistribution support. Neither US citizens, nor post-socialist citizens react like *median voters*. In each case, the results support explanations that lead beyond the scope of political economy. However, the countries in the lower left quarter provisionally confirm the view of political economy: Namely, with a low Gini, people's redistribution preferences – plausibly – diminish. As has been shown, the context variable of 'inequality' has no consistent influence that is the same across all country groups. Rather, two contrary effects can be observed: In the country group where inequality is already low, the consensus for more redistribution is also lower, as anticipated by the first median voter hypothesis on the orientation of redistribution desires. In contradistinction, redistribution desires in (most) liberal and post-socialist countries do not conform to the expectations of the median voter hypothesis. These disparate effects are difficult to detect in the following multivariate analysis.

The influence of the macroeconomic variables and the regime type are now simultaneously estimated using multivariate regressions based on all 23 countries, and controlling for individual variables. Table 1 shows the results of several models. The RIO model (Random Intercept Only) still contains no explanatory variables. The average value of the sum index for acceptance of redistribution is 7.98; the variation of country-specific constants is significant. The 'intra-class coefficient' (IKK) computed on the base of the RIO-Model indicates that 17% of the total variance can be explained by the country-level variables.

First of all, the variables are introduced that are important to approaches in political economy. The Gini Index does not become significant, as this was to be expected on the basis of previously reviewed research results and the bivariate analyses. Considering all countries, actual income inequality does not influence redistribution demands, even when controlling for GDP. The aforementioned effect in respect of mature welfare states – that is, low income inequality and low approval for *further* redistribution – does not become visible because of other tendencies: A high Gini coefficient as well as high GDP can also be found in conjunction with low demands for redistribution (liberal countries) or a relatively low Gini in combination with high redistribution desires in transformation countries. Even when controlling for the regimes in model 3, in contrast to Lübker's findings (2007), the coefficient for Gini remains insignificant. Moreover, countries grouped within a regime type are heterogeneous in relation to the effects resulting from inequality.

However, according to the highly significant and negative coefficients for GDP, support for redistribution decreases as economic development advances, even after controlling for inequality (Gini). This confirms the third hypothesis that postulates the demand for redistribution to be 'satiated' with the growth of prosperity. As previously discussed (see chapter 2), requests for redistribution tend to level off in times of economic prosperity, as citizens are then likely to associate the labor market with the solution for welfare problems, while conversely in times of economic crisis, the social state is seen as responsible. This is also confirmed by a sample regression conducted using the unemployment rate instead of GDP that resulted in a highly significant coefficient for unemployment and a similar goodness of fit.

The effect of grouping the countries into different regimes is the next aspect to be tested (model 2, reference: conservative regime). Dummy variables for the regime serve as proxies for different institutionalized welfare values and ideologies that are assumed to play an important role in political sociology. Liberal countries, as expected, exhibit a lower assent to redistributive social policies, as borne out by an almost significant effect for the dummy. The dummy for social-democratic regimes is insignificant, as shown by the similarity of both regimes. The results for post-socialist and Mediterranean regimes are clearly significant. In both instances, support for redistribution is higher than in conservative regimes.[11] However, these effects can be traced back to the fact that post-socialist and Mediterranean countries are also economically less powerful countries with a low GDP and mostly immature welfare states.

Model 3 therefore controls for regimes with *macroeconomic* indicators. In this instance, post-socialist and Mediterranean regimes are grouped as immature welfare states, as they have similar regression results and also their position on the charts justifies this treatment as a joint group. In model 3, the new dummy variable for immature welfare states is not significant, as evidently economic differences that were previously not controlled for represent the cause of regime-specific effects.[12] The high redistribution expectations of the state that are made in transformation countries are rather the result of weak economic power as opposed to post-socialist ideology. This supports the "governmental protection hypothesis" of Blekesaune (2007). Conversely, controlling for economic factors by different ‘worlds of welfare capitalism’ in model 3 gives no substantial change for the effects of GDP and Gini.[13] Even after adjusting for potential ideological effects that were previously concealed in GDP and possibly emerged in the case of some economically powerful liberal states, the economic situation still has an independent influence from redistribution preferences. The higher the GDP of the different countries, the lower the redistribution expectations – even without the liberal social state tradition. The disparate effects of Gini on redistribution desires cannot be captured by the interaction effects for the specific combinations in country groups.[14]

[11] The choice of an alternative reference group only marginally influences the results, as there are slight variations in the coefficients, although the structure of the results remains stable.
[12] In the structure, the same results are also achieved using dummies that are further separated for the individual regime.
[13] The coefficient and standard errors of Gini even become worse.
[14] Incidentally, another result deserves a mention, given that the number of explanatory variables is not to be further increased. Additionally controlling for the share of *social expenditures* in GDP in the countries – in an

In model 4 *individual level variables* are added to the context variables. All individual variables are Grand Mean centered; as such, the regression coefficients of country-level variables are controlled for with individual level variables. Moreover, model 4 contains a Cross-Level-Interaction-effect assuming that the impact of family income on redistribution attitudes differs between countries. The coefficients of most individual determinants are negative and (apart from retired people) are highly significant. A higher household income, more years in education, and being a man all lead to a decline in the acceptance of redistribution. The impression getting less wage than deserved increases support for redistribution. The small impact of the explained individual level variation underlines that other relevant individual variables still are missing in the model. However, the individual variables were in any case only intended as control functions.

The coefficients of the context variables show slight, though not principal changes in model 4. The clear effect of GDP and significantly lower redistribution preferences in liberal countries remain. The RS model with the assumption of varying income slopes in the different countries and a cross-level effect between household income and GDP merely increases the significance of the results of the liberal regime. The higher the GDP, the more negative is the influence of income on redistribution demand. The Gini coefficient remains insignificant. The first hypothesis – the assumption that people facing high inequality (median voter hypothesis) expect gains from redistribution and support it – is not confirmed.

The part of the variance in the redistribution preferences that is explained by different models can help with estimating the role of the context variables. Model 1 with economic factors only explains a bit less variance as model 2 that only includes regime dummies. In both cases, two thirds of the international variations are explained. The combination of the two new types of mature and immature welfare states and the country factors relevant in political economy (model 3) increases that share to 70%, an only small improvement. Hence, one must consider the regression coefficients and their changes in detail, as shown above. Then it becomes visible, that after controlling regimes for the other attributes of countries (and the related theories) above all the strong influence of the economic situation contributes to the explained variance.

The last model with context and individual variables, cross-level effect and random slope for household income shows a notable descrease in the explained variance on the country level

endeavour to grasp the hypothesis that GDP could actually mean high social spending – a positive significant effect is attained for social expenditures (the remaining results are stable). A large share of GDP devoted to welfare expenditure even increases the willingness to support redistribution. This confirms the institutionalist approach, according to which the way welfare states target benefits is decisive: Social policy benefiting the middle strata fosters broad support (Rothstein 1998; Moene/Wallerstein 2001).

resulting from the introduction of the variable for perceived justice of own wage. This emphasizes the significance of individual level variables, both indicating dependencies on state transfers and perceived justice.

Table 1: Multilevel regression support for redistribution (regression coefficient)

	RIO	Model 1 RI	Model 2 RI	Model 3 RI	Model 3a RI	Model 4 RS
Constant	7.98***	9.870***	7.600***	8.923***	8.473	9.623***
	(.164)	(.708)	(.208)	(.792)	(.986)	(.787)
Fixed Parameters						
Gini		- 1.136		1.300	.662	-1.014
		(1.990)		(2.119)	(2.297)	(2.060)
GDP (per capita, PPP)[1]		- .084***		- .086***	- .044*	- .090***
		(.013)		(.015)	(.022)	(.016)
Regime, ref. conservative						
- Liberal			- .452*		- .459	
			(.262)		(.267)	
- Social democrat			- .194		- .116	
			(.377)		(.347)	
- Mediterranian			.773*		.441	
			(.303)		(.320)	
- Post-socialist			1.049***		.471	
			(.255)		(.356)	
Welfare states, ref. liberal						
- Mature welfare states (S, N, Ger-W, F, A)				.581*		.570*
				(.274)		(.267)
- Immature welfare states (postsoc.+ med.)				.301		-.025
				(.232)		(.234)
Individual Level						
- Household income (1-10) (gmc)						-.109***
						(.015)
- Education in years (gmc)						-.059***
						(.004)
- retired (Ref. in lab. force)						-.033
						(.031)
- sex (Ref. female)						-.235***
						(.023)
- Wage less than I deserve (dummy)						.502***
						(.026)
- Household income*GDP						-.006**
						(.002)
Variance components						
Level 1 Residual variance	2.869 (.025)	2.869 (.025)	2.869 (.025)	2.869 (.025)	2.869 (.025)	2.618 (.026)
Level 2 var Constant	.588 (.174)	.214 (.064)	.196 (.058)	.176 (.053)	.160 (..048)	.208 (.063)
var income						.005 (.001)
cov income, Const.						.020 (.010)
LL Log-Likelihood	-50691.8	-50680.3	-50679.3	-50678.1	-50677.0	-37255.4
Wald Test		50.06***	49.82***	53.19***	60.52***	927.36***
Explained Variance[2]						
R^2 (BR) – Level 2 const	IKK 17 %	63,7 %	66,7 %	70,1%	72,8%	64,2 %
R^2 (BR) – var income						19,4%
R^2 (BR) - Level 1						8 %
N	26017	26017	26017	26017	26017	21441

*Source: ISSP 1999; own calculation; *p < 0,05; **p< 0.01; ***p < 0.001; Standard error in brackets.*
1) The reader may remark, that GDP is in 1000 $. With GDP in dollar the coefficient is -.0000835 (.000013)
2) R^2 of RI-Models and the RS-Model is calculated according to Bryk/Raudenbush (see Hans 2006). In the RI-models the reference point for the calculation of improvements in explained variance is the RIO-Model. The R^2 in the Random slope model with context-, individual level variables and interaction terms is calculated with reference to a RS model without context variables.

6 Discussion and conclusions

Clearly, the extent of income inequality is not directly linked to certain reactions or demands for public support of redistribution. Due to this deviation from what may be expected in terms of a rational actor model, over recent years, various (in the widest sense) institutional explanations were developed for the international variations in support of income redistribution. This article discussed the asset-approach based on the varieties of capitalism and the regime approach to the failure to explain redistribution preferences based on rational actor assumptions. Yet the regime approach was largely a failure – and by association also its thesis of the level of redistribution demands (or tolerance) determined by ideological and socio-political traditions. Confirmation was found only for one regime-effect: Liberal countries actually do have significantly lower redistribution desires, even controlling for the economic situation and actual inequality. What initially appeared like a regime-specific effect in post-socialist countries disappeared when controlling for economic context factors. It is therefore too hasty to assert the relevance of country differences without controlling for other factors that may influence regimes.

However, the failure of the median voter model does not necessarily involve dispensing altogether with the approaches of political economy and the thesis that people align their redistribution demands with the existing contexts. GDP, for instance, provided a highly plausible explanation of the varying level of redistribution demands. According to the aforementioned theories, this effect of GDP ought to be traced back to the fact that in the case of buoyant economic development, people assign less responsibility to the welfare state and define the market as the place where the individual can accrue more wealth. Economic prosperity means that demands for redistribution decline. This shift in the definition who is responsible for welfare occurs the more if people live in a liberal country.

The results do not support an unconditional, but rather a conditional form of egalitarianism. If the economy fails, then the social state should step in and correct the situation. This conditional egalitarianism tends to intervene with the exception of the case of liberal countries. A strong economy is the basis for the belief to gain credence that everyone has the opportunity to gain from the economic wealth that is generated. This is subjectively true regardless of whether this ideology is incorrect.

Explaining public support for income redistribution with reference to inequality in a country (as measured by the Gini) is complicated, because there is no uniform causal nexus. In some countries, low demand for more redistribution coincides with low inequality (as in Sweden, Norway, and Germany). However, this correlation between the level of inequality and the demand for redistribution does not hold true in liberal or post-socialist regimes. Hence, it cannot be denied that redistribution preferences are the result of some kind of rational calculus.

The relevance of *individual factors* in influencing demand for redistribution must be given greater emphasis. Even if they are not treated explicitly in this work, most of the variation emerging in the data is attributable to the individual level. Finally, some critical reflections on conducting the analysis with regime variables ought not to be omitted. In this analysis, the economic shares of regimes were controlled for, under the assumption that then only the ideological dimension would remain relevant. Naturally, it would be better to identify the ideological dimension more directly, f.e. by means of collective variables that are constructed from individual factors. However, this approach was avoided here on account of the number of countries in the case study that did not warrant exposure to further computational analysis.

Appendix

Table A 1: Mean of the sum-index 'support for redistribution' (scale 1 and 10) and of the single variables of the index (ranking).

Country	**Mean index redistribution demands**	**Standard deviation**	**Inequality too high**	**State reduce inequality**	**N**
Portugal	9,27	1,253	4,8	4,5	1123
Russia	9,12	1,362	4,8	4,4	1613
Bulgaria	9,11	1,367	4,8	4,3	1048
Hungaria	8,77	1,411	4,6	4,2	1180
Slovakia	8,68	1,439	4,7	4,0	1123
Slovenia	8,55	1,422	4,4	4,2	975
Latvia	8.51	1,318	4,5	4,8	1050
Poland	8,47	1,464	4,3	4,2	1045
Czech. Rep.	8,33	1,865	4,4	3,9	1766
Germany–East	8,29	1,410	4,4	3,9	487
Spain	8,23	1,431	4,2	4,0	1172
France	8,11	1,861	4,4	3,7	1844
Austria	8,10	1,663	4,3	3,9	951
Great Britain	7,74	1,621	4,1	3,7	752
Sweden	7,46	1,968	3,9	3,6	1105
Japan	7,36	2,180	3,9	3,5	1174
Norway	7,35	1,905	3,8	3,6	1213
New Zealand	7,12	2,061	3,8	3,2	1038
Cyprus	7,16	1,613	3,7	3,5	966
Germany-West	7,13	1,834	3,8	3,3	813
Australia	7,03	1,758	3,8	3,3	1583
Canada	6,86	2,057	3,8	3,1	919
US	6,69	1,909	3,8	2,9	1159
Total	**8,00**	**1,862**	**4,2**	**3,8**	**26017**

Source ISSP 1999, own calculations

Table A-2: Data and data sources (ordered by regimes)

Country (regime)	Gini Index[1] (data source)	GDP per cap.[2] (US Dollar, PPP, current prices).
Australia (li)	0,317 (LIS 2001)	25448
UK (li)	0,343 (LIS 1999)	24014
United States (li)	0,368 (LIS 2000)	33013
Canada (li)	0,311 (LIS 1998)	26631
New Zealand (li)	0,362 (LIS 1999)	19378
Japan (li)	0,249 (OECD 1999)	24801
Germany (con)	0,275 (LIS 2000)	24029
Austria (con)	0,257 (LIS 2000)	26504
France (con)	0,278 (LIS 2000)	24235
Hungary (post)	0,292 (LIS 1999)	11146
Czech Rep. (post)	0,254 (LIS 1999)	13133
Slovenia (post)	0,249 (LIS 1999)	15977
Poland (post)	0,313 (LIS 1999)	9742
Bulgaria (post)	0,300 (Eurostat)	5071
Russia (post)	0,456 (LIS 2000)	7473 [4]
Latvia (post)	0,324 (Eurostat)	6264 [4]
Slovakia (post)	0,258 (Eurostat)	10010
Norway (soc)	0,251 (LIS 2000)	30002
Sweden (soc)	0,252 (LIS 2000)	25108
Spain (med)	0,336 (LIS 2000)	19477
Portugal (med)	0,385 (?)	16368
Cyprus (med)	0,354 (?)	19006[3]

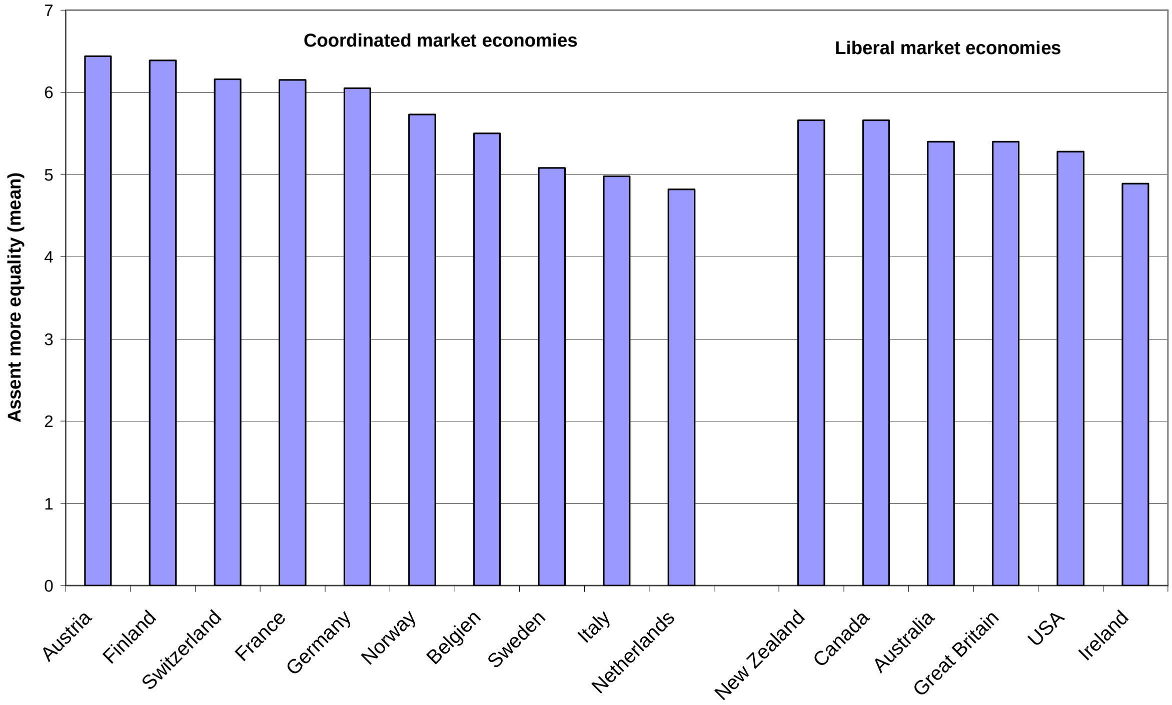
Notes: 1) Source LIS key figures or Eurostat. LIS key figures accessed at http://www.lisproject.org/keyfigures.htm on 6.4.08. Access at Eurostat interactive tables. Income and living conditions; income distribution and monetary poverty, income-distribution, Gini-Coefficient.

Eurostat: General economic background; population and living conditions.

2) Source: OECD Factbook 2005: Macroeconomic trends, gross domestic product http://ocde.p4.siteinternet.com/publications/doifiles/302005041p1T008

3) Data-source is Human Development Report, Worldbank.

Figure A2: Organised market economies vs. liberal market economies



Source: ISSP 1999, own calculations.

Table A2: Correlation matrix of country characteristics (Pearson's r)

	Index redistribution (mean)	Gini-Index	GDP	Social exp. % GDP
Index redistribution (mean)	-			
Gini-Index	0,064	-		
GDP	- 0,325	- 0,252	-	
Social exp.	- 0,026	- 0,570	0,377	-
Unemployment	0,224	0,129	- 0,703	- 0,157

Source: ISSP 19999, own calculation.

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