

Persistent Working Class Disinterest in the EU: Rewording the Social Gap.

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In recent quantitative analyses of attitudes towards integration, all scholars (among whom: Belot 2002; Cautres & Grunberg 2007, Hooghe & Marks 2004, 2005 & 2009; McLaren, 2006; Tilley & Wlezien 2008, for instance) agree that in every European country, independently of the overall support for integration, the “elitist bias” toward the EU persists. The higher their social status, the more likely Europeans are to support European integration. This is not solely interpreted in utilitarian terms. Indeed, elites benefit more visibly from the new opportunities offered by the EU. But two other important explanations are suggested: cognitive mobilization, that makes people with higher education more likely to identify with a remote political community (Ingelhart 1970); and identity. Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks observed that: “A multi-level model that combines both sources of preference [*interest and identity*] can explain around a third or more of the variance across individual citizens in the EU, and the bulk of variation across countries. However, we find that identity appears to be the more powerful influence.” (Hooghe & Marks 2005, p.418). According to their “constraining dissensus” model, although public opinion regarding further European integration is considered a construction of political parties and leaders strategies and preferences, people’s identity is constraining them; the game has changed and the tension between the scope and depth of European integration and “relatively stable identities” – implicitly exclusive national identities² – has become salient (Hooghe & Marks 2009, p.13).

¹ This paper is based on a research conducted for the last four years with Florence Haegel, Guillaume Garcia, Elizabeth Frazer and André-Paul Frogner. We are very much indebted to them. For details about the whole project, visit http://erg.politics.ox.ac.uk/projects/discussion_political/index.asp

² Although Hooghe and Marks acknowledge the fact that national identities can be inclusive as much as exclusive, their discussion of the politicisation of Europe mainly focuses on the mobilisation of the exclusive dimension. “The period since 1991 might be described, by contrast, as one of constraining dissensus. Elites, that is, party leaders in positions of authority, must look over their shoulders when negotiating European issues. What

Identities seem to matter in attitudes toward European integration according to opinion surveys, but surveys, which represent a quasi-hegemonic data in the field of European studies, are ill-equipped to record them. Identities are supposed to be in-depth and long lasting attitudes and surveys don't differentiate between superficial and flexible answers, partially given by chance and conformity to what is believed to be "the right answer"; and in-depth and meaningful responses, that correspond to profound preferences and refer to issues that matter to the interviewees. More generally speaking, surveys are not particularly appropriate to record opinions that lack saliency. They might reveal "non-attitudes" but only if analysed accordingly (Converse 1974). No need to be a fierce opponent of mass survey to agree with the fact that when an issue is not salient enough, using surveys to analyse opinions on this issue misses the point. This question is worth asking regarding attitudes toward integration³.

The data that we analysed in this paper – a series of focus groups conducted in three cities, Paris, Brussels and Oxford - was collected in order to record opinions regarding European integration in the context of a public discussion, that is, in a context where opinions are not mere declarations but might be explained, argued, challenged, debated, and even contested. What it shows is a possible potential for politicization of European integration, but mainly the (persistent) lack of saliency of related issues in less-privileged social groups, in comparison with politicised and executive groups of participants. Regarding European integration, what distinguishes working class and white collar discussions is a dramatic absence of attention - of interest, but in the sense of (not) being interested in - based both on a basic passive acceptance of what had been done and the conviction that what really matters is beyond Europe, the important thing being globalisation. Being or not in favour of the UE is actually not an issue for them, while it does polarise the discussion between managers and activists.

Section one of this paper will present the research design and the data. Section two will provide an overview of what these focus groups talked about. Section three will show how European integration was not an issue for working class and white collar groups and suggests the rephrasing of the social gap. Section four will provide a few evidence of this new formulation in Eurobarometer data. Section five will look beyond working class and white collar non-attitudes towards the EU and see how it fits with more general attitudes towards authority and globalisation.

they see does not reassure them." (Hooghe & Marks, p.5. Later (p.9) they explain that "The decisive change is that the elite has had to make room for a more Eurosceptical public."

³ In the same way that Netjes & Binnema (2007) did from the political parties perspective, which means comparing data sources.

Section one: Focus groups and conflictualisation: brief introduction to the research design

This research project builds on a decade of careful scrutiny of citizens' attitudes toward European integration. They show the persistence of major national and social differences regarding the level of acceptance of this process (From Niedermayer and Sinnott, 1995 to Hooghe & Marks 2005). However, most analysts in this field use survey data – notably because of the complexity of collecting comparative qualitative data, especially at a 25 countries scale. Survey researchers have got used since the mid-90^s to comment on citizens' attitudes in terms of “European identity”, but this change of terms is questionable⁴ as they lack information about the depth and saliency of citizens' opinions on European integration. What we do know is that Europeans are poorly knowledgeable and interested in the EU (Tilley & Wlezien 2008). Does this not question the validity of Eurobarometer data? Different authors (Belot, 2000; Diez-Medrano, 2003; Bruter, 2004; Favell, 2007; White, 2007 & 2008) have tried using other methods to study European integration in order to avoid major drawbacks of survey data. So did we, with a project that suggests an original way to assess the saliency of European issues.

Concretely, this paper is based on twenty-four focus groups organized in 2005 and 2006 in Paris, Brussels and Oxford. We compare not only different national contexts but social backgrounds too. Talking politics in a public setting is not easy and the impact of social differences on the way people discuss issues, and especially on their reluctance to talk, is very strong. We therefore⁵ brought together participants who shared roughly the same social background. Three social profiles (“working class”, “white collar”, “professional-manager”) were specified in each country. In addition, in each location we convened two groups of ‘activists’.

Of course, the socio-professional homogeneity turned out to be relative; the groups were heterogeneous according to other criteria such as age, gender or ethnic origin, amongst others⁶. Regarding political homogeneity, the groups were deliberately constituted to include

⁴ It is questionable because it does not result from a convincing conceptual proposition (Duchesne 2008). Favell is even more sceptical about it as he believes Europeanization should not be addressed through identity building but primarily through behavioural changes (Favell 2005).

⁵ This decision was made according to standard research focus group method (Morgan, 1988; Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Duchesne & Haegel 2004). Participants got a £40 reward.

⁶ For a detailed analysis of the recruitment process and composition of the groups, see Garcia & Van Ingelgom forthcoming (preliminary version at http://erg.politics.ox.ac.uk/materials/european_citizenship/Duchesne%20Garcia.pdf).

participants with various political orientations (measured by political party preference, the way they voted in the last general election and opinions regarding European integration). The discussion occurred in a public setting: it was organised in a public building, a university or a research centre, and video recorded. Moreover, it was potentially controversial: the people who took part in the focus group discussions did not know each other, and thus did not know about others' opinions. They would discover in the course of the discussion that they were sometimes in disagreement with them. Participants met for an extended period (three hours including a break with drinks and feed allowing for some socializing).

What chiefly characterizes our focus groups is the method we have developed to facilitate discussions⁷. It consists in recording participants' views on flipcharts as they are being expressed, so that the group can reflect upon and react to them (Figure one – see below section two - provides an example of the charts). A scenario has been carefully tested that organises the general discussion, each of the five questions being written successively on top of the paperboard that participants face. However, participants are not forced into the topic; the moderator leaves them free to talk about what they want, even when they seem to address issue not related to European integration. The crucial characteristic of this method is that it encourages people to express dissent. The facilitator explicitly invites reactions from participants, urging them to formulate any form of hesitation about what is being written on the board – be it incomprehension, a desire for a change in wording, a need for precision, disagreement, etc. - and indicates it by a “flash” next to the incriminated sentence. Flashes are later subjected to special round of discussion, where questions and disagreement are the norm.

Discussion schedule (scenario):

Q1 (30 minutes):

What does it mean to be European?

Participants discuss, moderator writes what is said on cards, puts them on board, in order for the participants to face their own discussion.

Q2 (45 minutes)

How should we distribute the power in Europe?

Boards are separated in four sections, with a source of power written in each of them: the nations, MPs, experts, the market.

Participants asked to discuss advantages and dangers of giving the power to each of them.

Finally, participants given 6 stickers ('votes') each and asked to distribute them between the four sections.

Break (30 minutes)

Q3 (30 minutes)

Who profits from Europe?

⁷ It was adapted from a consultancy technique called Metaplan®.

Participants work in pairs (or in threes). They write answers to the question on cards (one answer per card). Cards are put up on the board and discussed by the whole group.

Q4 (30 minutes)

In favour or not of Turkey's entry in the EU?

Participants are first asked to vote (with a sticker) in favour or not in favour. Then everyone is asked to find arguments in favour of the minority answer, and then arguments in favour of the majority answer.

Q5 (15 minutes)

In favour or not of Turkey's entry in the EU? Political parties.

Participants are asked to mention parties. A card (with logo and picture of the leader on top) is provided for each party. Participants have to decide where the card should be put up on the board – in relationship with the 'In Favour' and 'Against' that are stuck on the board - and explain why.

These different features of our focus groups' design altogether – gathering people with diverging views and having them to discuss together for a couple of hours; encouraging the expression of dissent and letting them direct the discussion on topics that were more interesting to them – were meant to make the conflictualisation of these discussions possible. The dynamic of conflictualisation consists fundamentally in participants taking the risk of acknowledging publicly disagreement with unacquainted people – a risk that participants would not take for any reason (Duchesne & Haegel, 2007). They take it only when the opinion at stake matters to them, when they feel committed to support it even at some price – that is, when the issue is salient. The five questions introduced in the discussion quite varied topics related to European politics and policies; however, as we said, we let the participants wander off the question if they wanted. As a consequence, we are in the position to record which topics they found boring and abandoned, which topics they were happy to discuss, and which topics they found so important that they even got to publicly express their disagreement and accepted the risk of conflict. Although it was not originally designed for this, we eventually used this dynamics as a way to attest saliency. We observed which topics gave rise to conflictualisation and which topic did not, and considered the former salient and the latter not. More generally speaking, the groups were organised, unlike surveys, in order to give participants room to orient the discussion according to what makes sense to them and necessary time to think about what might seem to them a not very familiar topic, European issues⁸. Thus these discussions provide us with a comparative overview of the different framings that characterise different national and social groups' conception of European

⁸ Contrary to survey research which considers spontaneous answers meaningful, qualitative research tends to value more statements that are the result of some thinking – here some discussion.

integration. Before going back to the saliency issue, let's have a look at the general structure of EU conceptions as pictured by these discussions.

Section two: Who profits from Europe? A discussions' overview.

Figure 1: an example of paper boar:



N.B. The pink (or dark, if printed in black & white) cards are the cards that the participants wrote themselves. The yellow or paler ones were added by the moderator according to the groups' comments.

A very obvious and general result of these discussions is that the different categories of groups do apprehend Europe very differently. But summarizing these about 75 hours of

relatively free discussion is complicated. One question though seems more particularly appropriate to get an overview of what these discussions were about. It is the third one in the scenario, and takes place just after the break. Participants are then told to group together by two or three. They receive paper cards and markers and are asked to elaborate, within their sub-groups, appreciatively six answers to the question “Who profits from Europe?” (the question is not made apparent before they are ready to work). Once they are finished (this takes about 10 minutes in most groups), the moderator collects the cards, shuffles them and then posts them up on the board, one by one, waiting for participants comments that will, in turn, be written and displayed on the board. (Figure one gives an example of what a board, at the end of the question, looks like). We thus consider this series of statements as particularly meaningful: they are not “top-of-the-head” answers provided by people in isolation. Each of them was elaborated by (at least) two participants who had just had lunch or dinner together and had, beforehand, discussed about the topic for about one hour and a half.

Altogether, these cards represent 357 answers (for about 330 cards: participants were asked to write one idea per card but did not always follow the rule), distributed among 24 focus groups. Each of them contributed from 6 to 22 cards. The answers are fairly varied, although some answers are repeated by most groups in a similar form, like “to us Europeans”, “to businesses”, “to politicians”, “to travellers”. We coded them into 23 categories (including an “others”) as follows:

Code	N	Examples
CAP	37	Liberalism, capitalism, big companies, world companies, Disney, L’Oreal, the world market
CIT	34	us, to the citizens, the Europeans, those who are inside, equality between Europeans, consumers, workers (any word that would refer to the participants)
ECO	31	the economy, business, enterprises, retailers
MOB	29	Travels, mobility, translators, students (ref to Erasmus)
VAL	26	Rights, environment, associations, peace, culture, or other values
POL	24	politicians, MP’s
PAUV	20	Poor countries, inside or outside the EU
NEG	18	Any explicit negative answer: NOT the Europeans, NOT the elderly, NOT the farmers, NOT us, and so on.
TECH	18	Experts, technocrats, Commission people
NOUV	17	Eastern countries, new EU countries, former new countries
XXX	14	Other: very varied. May be a joke, or a topic that was quoted once only (ex. Eurovision, media)
BANK	13	banks, bankers, finance, money
EXT	12	the countries outside the EU, the world
AGRI	11	agriculture, farmers
IMM	8	immigration, to foreigners

RICH	8	Rich countries, the rich
USA	8	The United States, the Anglo-Saxon world
CRIM	7	the mafia, crime, terrorism
RECH	7	research or researchers ⁹
LOB	5	lobbies, lobbyists
PAY	5	Each time a specific country name is given, except the US
DEF	3	defence, the military
BXL	2	Brussels, Brussels' inhabitants

As such, these answers are not astonishing although clichés and negative statements are rarer that might be expected. What is striking is the amount of references to the economy. We thus had to distinguish between plain mentions of it and references that incorporate a size element, the “big business”, the world market, or capitalism in general¹⁰. Moreover, what seems noticeable is that these representations of Europe are not limited to European actors. Groups and institutions that are supposed to “profit” from Europe are not at all restricted to the continent. NOUV, CIT, TECH, MOB and AGRI mainly refer to Europeans (as well as smaller codes like BXL, DEF, PAY and LOB). But the biggest ones that are CAP and ECO, as well as VAL and POL not only are not specified, but we know from the discussion that they are broadly apprehended. The fact that the US is mentioned more often than all other single European country might be considered an illustration of this.

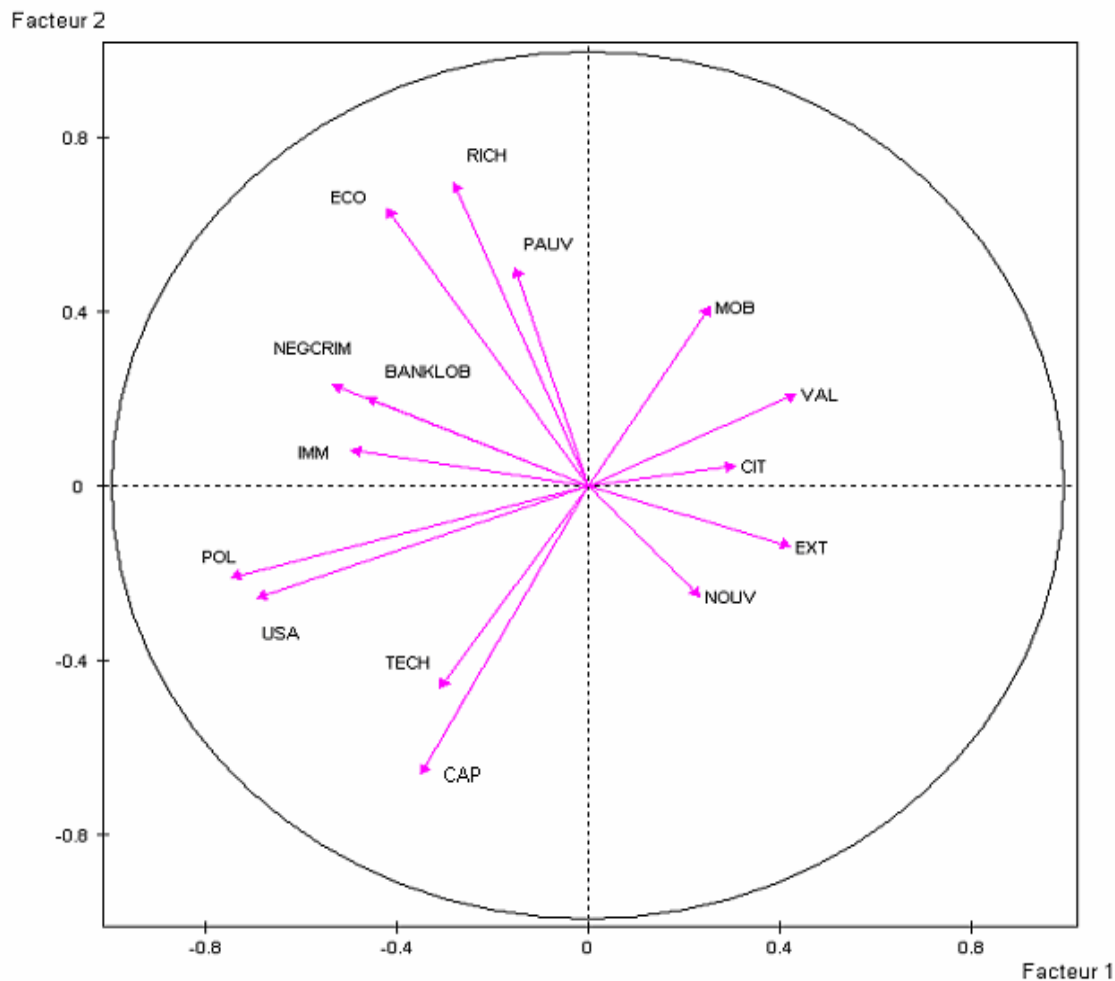
In order to get an overview of EU consequences as displayed by these answers, and to get some idea of how social and national categories fit into it, we proceeded to a factor analysis of the categories of answers distributed by groups. This gives us an indication of how the categories of answers relate to one another (see Figure 2). The figure shows how the different codes relate to one another in the answers of the different group. The projection of each arrow on the axes give indicates their contribution to each factor. The analysis shows that two factors explain 34% of the variance (respectively 19 and 15)¹¹.

⁹ These cards were explicitly a “tribute” paid to the moderators...

¹⁰ At the end of the day, this coding was relatively straightforward compared to other coding procedures we’ve been through, in this research or others.

¹¹ We confirmed these result in running another analysis without some codes that seem to play an important role but have only a small number of cases, such as USA, RICH, EXT and IMM; the general configuration hardly moves.

Figure 2: Factor analysis of the groups' answers to "Who profits from Europe?"



- The first factor reflects the ambiguity of the question¹², "Who profits from Europe?" It opposes positive answers – for whom is the EU a good thing? – to negative or ironic ones - who cashes in on it, at the expenses of others? EU profits mainly to politicians, the US and immigration; while it benefits to us, people like the participants, as well as values and the outside world. This factor encapsulates a double opposition: politicians against citizens and values on one hand; the US against the rest of the world on the other. The economy and capitalism belong to the dark side of European integration¹³.
- The second factor reflects the difference we made between plain economical references and mentions of big business and capitalism. What is noticeable then, is the distribution of categories that go along with these two. ECO displays some kind of market representation, basically neutral, that is both beneficial (to poor countries and poor people as well as rich ones) and damaging (growth goes together with the

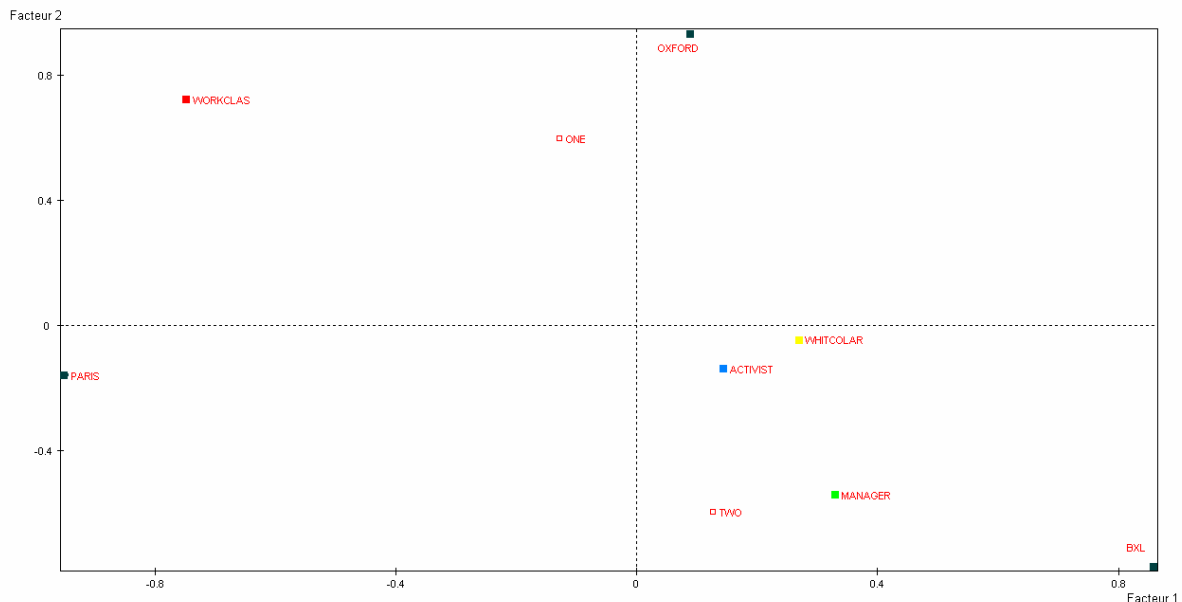
¹² Participants explicitly commented on this ambiguity.

¹³ Contrary to what Juan Diez Medrano got in the interviews he collected a few years before.

increase of crime for instance); CAP refers to a system that is driven by big businesses but also technocrats, where the EU is mainly understood as the Trojan horse of wild capitalism, where European experts are suspected of making things easy for international corporations instead of taking care of Europeans' interests and welfare.

What seems quite important to us in this analysis is that it does not reflect primarily a European cleavage that would oppose pro and anti-Europeans in relationship with any kind of “sovereignism” or nationalism. It shows that European integration is clearly apprehended with(in) globalisation, actors and processes at stake are global and European. It is clearly not seen as an autonomous process where competitive actors would be national governments against European governance, first of all because of the major influence of the economy in the process.

Figure 3: Projection of the illustrative variable on the factor plan:



The projection of the illustrative variables (see figure 3) – city and social group/activists¹⁴ – first confirms the strength of national frames¹⁵. However, the diagram also shows a clear differentiation between working class groups and others. Working class groups' representations of EU consequences are much more embedded than other in an economical

¹⁴ We will not comment on the difference between the two families of focus groups, although it is obviously very effective. These two “families” dissociate two series of 12 groups, the first putting together three national series of 4 groups as similar as possible in term of social categories. The second family is more heterogeneous. These two families were constructed at the beginning of the analytical phase – that is, once the focus groups had been conducted – in order to improve the social comparability of our data. The second part of this paper, that provides a narrative analysis of our data, will be limited to this family, that is, to 12 focus groups only.

¹⁵ National frames are the focus of another paper that Florence Haegel is working on. For a preliminary analysis that shows the weight of colonialism and post-colonialism on European attitudes, see http://erg.politics.ox.ac.uk/materials/european_citizenship/Haegel.pdf

perspective, that do not offer much consideration to other European achievements concerning mobility, citizenship and values. Moreover, working class groups understanding of the economical influence of the EU is somehow parochial and meaningless; while the managers display a conception of the European economical integration that leaves room for political action. In this second opposition, white collars are, like activists, somehow in-between working class groups and managers.

This “Who profits from Europe?” cards’ analysis was meant to provide a brief overview of what our participants discussed about Europe. On this basis, one could argue, in reference to the debate involving, among others, Simon Hix and Stefano Bartolini (Bartolini & Hix, 2006), that it shows some potential for the politicisation of the EU. But two dimensions are at stake then. The first refers to the importance of values in the European project and the role of the EU in world politics; the second involves contrasting conceptions of the economy, either confident of the market or distrustful of money and business.

However, this analysis also aimed at proving some kind of “objectification” of social differences between groups. We thought it was a way to display, to show, in the primary sense, a result that comes out quite dramatically from our narrative analysis: that is, the strength of social differences. It also shows how the EU is overwhelmingly apprehended through its economical impact, and is largely confused or even dissolved into a broader perception of globalization. Let’s try to give some more evidence of this now, and suggest a rephrasing of the so-called European “elitist bias”.

Section three: Europe’s low saliency in the working class and white collar groups.

Our design was meant to observe how people get into conflict on European issues. It did not work. Not that the method failed: we did get participants to disagree openly and involve themselves into conflicts; and we did get interesting argumentation about Europe. But participants did not involve themselves into conflict on European integration as such – that is, we did not get bursting conflict between pro- and anti-Europeans, what our design was meant to facilitate. Let’s us recapitulate how we designed the scenario and selected the participants

in order to prepare for conflict between Eurosceptics and Europhiles and what we mean when we affirm that it did not work.

- Participants were selected in order to achieve a sufficient degree of social homogeneity, first because we knew from focus group research that this is a necessary condition for real communication and dynamic interaction; but also because we wanted them to share some commonality in their experience of European integration. On top of that, we selected participants in order to ensure – at least on paper – a diversity of opinions towards the EU. Using Eurobarometer-like questions, we made sure, as much as possible (as we got, in working class groups and white collars’, quite a lot of ‘Don’t Know’) that we gathered, in each group, people of diverse opinions on that matter. (see Table 5 in the annex)
- The first session of the discussion was a kind of warming up: participants would gather their thoughts on the topic and would have a chance to get some idea about others’ opinions. “What does it mean to be European?”, in particular, was expected to get participants to express identity feelings, to tell about their likes and dislikes about the idea of being/becoming Europeans. The second question (How should we distribute the power in Europe?), also designed to record knowledge and misunderstanding about the EU political system, was expected to facilitate the expression of trust and distrust toward the European governance. Four sources of power were suggested (experts, the market, M(E)P’s and the nations) that offered a clear opportunity to express any feeling of antagonism between one’s nation and the EU. We thought that after this one hour and a half discussion, we should, like all persons in the room, be able to tell who could be considered pro- or anti-European. Moreover, we expected participants to have developed some degree of collusion or antagonism with each other regarding this general orientation. This did not happen, especially in working class and white collar groups.
- What happened in these groups is that participants either avoided the topic –either by keeping very quiet, hardly speaking, as in Oxford groups, or by sidetracking, as in Paris groups; or they implicitly agreed on keeping a certain distance with the European system in such a way that opinions on that topic little mattered. In the Brussels groups, Europe was pushed back into the future; in the Oxford ones, to the other side of the Channel; in the French groups, at the periphery of the strong national centrality¹⁶.

¹⁶ The fact that the French groups were conducted in Paris has an obvious effect and raises comparative issues with the Oxford ones.

- After the break, as explained above, participants would work in pairs or groups of three. We had thought that we would be able to sort out participants according to the views they had expressed during the first session on European issues. We wanted to put together participants who were closest in this respect – Eurosceptics on one hand, Europhiles on the other - in order to have the sub-groups writing cards that would be much contrasted and would facilitate conflictualisation. But most of time, we just could not tell, from the first two questions, which pairs would be appropriate for this. Having the questionnaires in hands hardly helped, as the views expressed in the discussion seemed very loosely related to former answers. We thus kept hesitating between asking the participants to choose with whom they would work after the break¹⁷ or making the pairs on the basis of the questionnaires. In both cases, we ended with sub-groups that were never particularly matching European disagreement.
- As a consequence, the “Who profits from Europe?” question was the less interesting question in respect to conflictualisation – apart in the activists groups where it worked very well, and to a lesser extend, professional-manager groups (especially when there was politicized participants in it). We did put up on board opposed or even antagonistic answers – as some cards did correspond to the quite provocative ton of the question – and get flashes, but arguments would then be recorded without much emotion.
- Again, this does not mean that these groups were a failure, generally speaking, regarding conflictualisation. We did get quite a lot of affects and openly expressed disagreement; but not on Europe. As our moderation technique, inspired by non-directive approach, allowed it, participants got to conflict on issues that were important to them: immigration and people’s welfare (how much incomers can a society absorb? How to evaluate the relative cost of immigration for those who come and those who receive them? How incompatible cultures can be? How much are former colonial countries responsible for poverty in ex-colonies, en hence immigration?), individual responsibility and State intervention (regarding unemployment and parents’ education: who is responsible for incivility, petty crime and long term benefit? What can governments do in a globalized economy? Who suffers the most in today’s society) for instance. But: “Do we need more or less European power? Do we want European federalism or a supra-national State? What

¹⁷ A choice they obviously felt very uncomfortable to make; they thus tended to “choose” the person they were speaking with when once we told them to choose a partner.

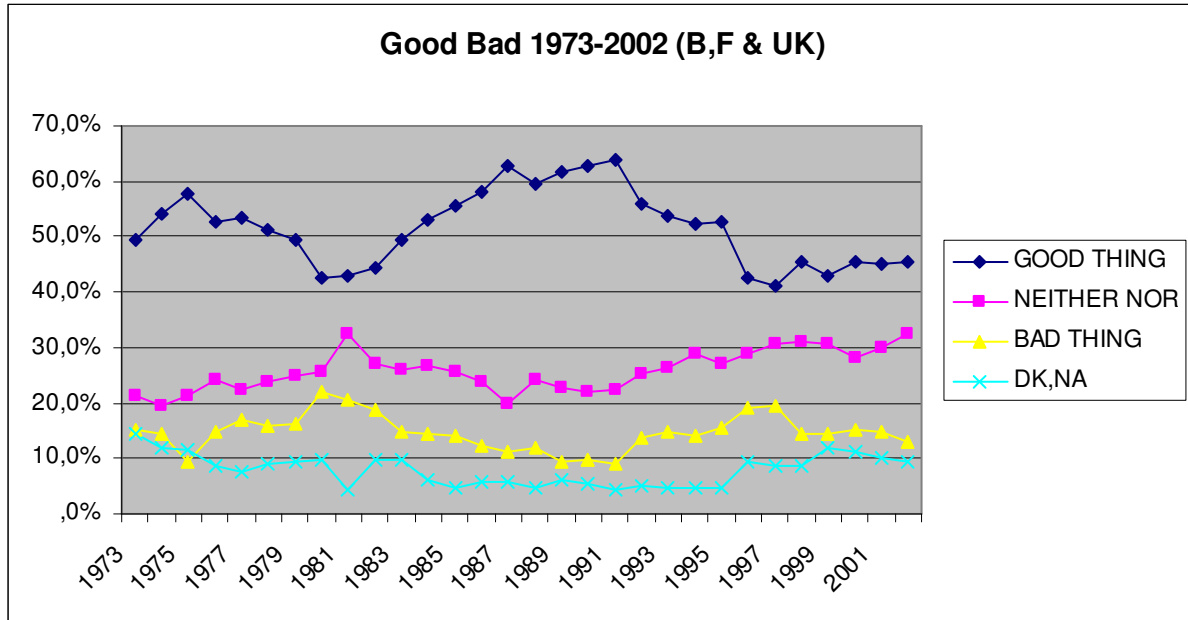
kind of EU do we want?": these questions never generated strong feelings or conflict in our groups – or more precisely, in working class and white collars groups.

- In comparison, the fourth question on Turkey's entry did produce large amount of conflict. Disagreement referred to human and woman rights, secularisation and Islam, immigration again, and geo-strategic issues. How far can enlargement get – in the sense of: how many countries might enter the EU without putting at risk, as a political system – was hardly an issue; it was mentioned but not really debated – again, in working class and white collars' groups.

What results from this analysis is that the difference between working class and white collar groups on one hand, and managers and activists on the other, is not so much that the former are less in favour of European integration and the latter more, nor that they differ in their representations of the EU: the most striking is that European integration is not an issue for working class and whites collars' groups while it is matter of debate and openly expressed conflict for managers and activists. We thus suggest rephrasing the social gap regarding European issues: it is not, as it is understood most of the time, more or less implicitly, especially since the referendums on the Constitutional Treaty, a cleavage between Eurosceptics and Europhiles; it is a contrast between popular indifference and elites' growing polarization on the issue, a saliency gap.

Section 4: A quantitative confirmation of the rephrased social gap

Figures 4: Distribution over time answers to the EB question: Generally speaking, do you think that your country's membership is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad? (Belgium, France & UK)¹⁸

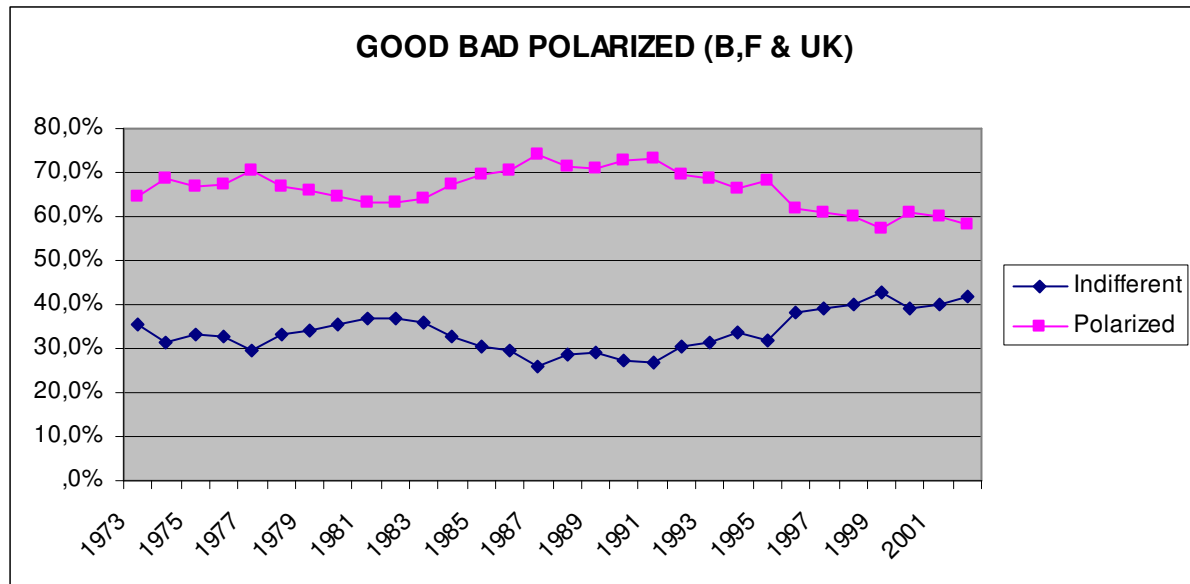


Data source: The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File (1970-2002)

Eurobarometer data do not contradict our qualitative results, on the contrary. Let us have a look at the trend question: “Do you think that your country’s membership is a good thing, a bad thing, neither good nor bad?” (Figure 4) Most researchers would comment on this focussing on the decline of the “Good thing” answer, or of the net support, that is the amount of “good thing” answers minus the “bad thing” ones (see for instance Hooghe & Marks 2008, p.10). But what we want to emphasize here is the increase of “neither good nor bad” answers and the absence of evolution of the negative answer. Altogether, what happens over time (see figure 5) is a decrease of polarized answers and an increase of indifferent (neither good nor bad + DK) answers – at least for three countries where we conducted the focus groups, Belgium, France and the UK.

¹⁸ All the analysis or data display provided were first made at the country level.

Figure 5: Indifference and polarization over time (Belgium, France & UK)
 Distribution over time answers to the EB question: Generally speaking, do you think that your country's membership is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?"
 "Neither good nor bad" & "don't know" answers were added and coded as indifferent;
 "Good thing" and "bad thing" answers were cumulated as polarised answers.



Data source: The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File (1970-2002)

According to our groups, indifference toward European integration characterises working class and white collar discussions while executives and most of all activists could easily get to conflict on the issue. We do see with Eurobarometer data the same cumulative effect of education and politicisation on European issue saliency. We computed for 2004 an index of polarization by recoding and adding answers taken from the membership question and the question on the hypothetical dissolution of the EU¹⁹ (see table 2). In the three countries, the relationship between the age when interviewees left school and the polarisation of their answers on European integration is significant (tested with Pearson chi-squares). In each case, people who left school before 15 years are more than 10 points less likely to declare polarised opinions on the matter than people who got to higher education.

¹⁹ "If you were to be told tomorrow that the European Union (European Community, Common Market) had been scrapped, would you be very sorry about it, indifferent or very relieved?" These two variables were chosen because they have an "indifferent" suggested answer and not too many modalities.

Table 2: Indifference or polarised opinion by education (Belgium, France, UK)

	Belgium				France				United Kingdom			
	Indif	Pol -	Pol+	N	Indif	Pol -	Pol+	N	Indif	Pol -	Pol+	N
Educ 15 less	21,5	34,8	43,7	100% 135	28,5	32,6	39,0	100% 172	26,8	34,8	38,4	100% 302
Educ 16 to 19	21,2	40,1	36,6	100% 339	24,9	33,7	41,4	100% 374	30,8	38,0	31,2	100% 468
Educ 20 & more	13,0	28,6	58,4	100% 409	14,2	29,2	56,6	100% 366	13,9	35,5	50,9	100% 173
Still study	13,3	33,3	53,3	100% 15	14,1	33,3	52,5	100% 99	23,6	40,0	36,4	100% 55
Total	17,4	34,0	48,7		20,6	31,8	47,6		26,3	36,7	37,1	

EB 2004 – Data source: Gesis/Zacat

Moreover, the degree of politicisation of interviewees has an even stronger and cumulative effect (table 3). People who frequently discuss politics and have attended university have 75% chances to have a strongly polarised opinion on European integration, while interviewees who left school at 15 and never discuss politics have only 31% chances to do so.

Table 3 Indifference or polarised opinion by education and politicisation²⁰

		Belgium, France, United Kingdom			
		Indif	Pol -	Pol+	N
Political discussion: Frequently	Educ 15 less	14,5	25,5	60,0	100% (55)
	Educ 16 to 19	15,2	23,2	61,6	100% (125)
	Educ 20 & more	5,5	18,8	75,7	100% (181)
	Still study	0	31,8	68,2	100% (22)
	TOTAL	9,7	31,8	68,2	
Political discussion: Occasionnally	Educ 15 less	23,1	32,8	44,0	100% (268)
	Educ 16 to 19	24,9	36,9	38,2	100% (651)
	Educ 20 & more	15,7	30,2	54,1	100% (580)
	Still study	14,7	36,3	49,0	100% (102)
	TOTAL	20,6	33,7	45,7	
Political discussion: Never	Educ 15 less	31,2	36,8	31,0	100% (285)
	Educ 16 to 19	31,5	42,4	26,1	100% (403)
	Educ 20 & more	15,0	40,6	44,4	100% (187)
	Still study	31,1	35,6	33,3	100%(45)
	TOTAL	28,8	40,0	32,0	

EB 2004 – Data source: Gesis/Zacat

²⁰ We cannot compute a three-level crosstabulation for each country for lack of sufficient numbers.

This is not the result of a more general social and cognitive effect: politicised and educated people might be expected to have firmer or more definite and authorised opinion, but this is not the case. We showed in former work that politically sophisticated people are on the contrary more likely to express political opinions in ways they want subtle and hence, avoid simple polarization (Duchesne & Haegel 2001, 2007). For this paper, we choose to make a rapid test and had a look at the national pride question (as a counter example): clearly, less educated and politicised interviewees have more polarised opinions regarding their national feelings than more educated and politicised people (table 4 in the annex).

Section 5: Beyond working class and white collar European non attitudes...

We know it is always difficult to make survey researcher accepting that opinions not always exist, at least in mass publics. In the case of European integration, it is all the more difficult than the majority of researchers in the field are dedicated Europhiles who long for a European demos²¹. But our focus groups provide clear evidence that in spite of all our efforts, working class and white collar participants do not bother about European integration.

Why is it so? Let us have another look at our discussions. If working class and whites collars' participants show no interest in European integration, it is because they know there is nothing that can be done about it. They don't know why the EU exists, and hardly know what it is, but they know it is there, and that's it. Or more precisely, it is somewhere – on the other side of the Channel, in the future, all around. It does not do particularly well, as all complain about the present situation and obviously, the EU did not prevented things to get worse. But they do not identify it either as a particular source of nuisance compared to what damages society: constant change²² (newcomers, job market), the failure of political elites (that nobody trusts) and globalisation. In comparison, managers and activists do discuss Europe as a salient issue, a question where different decisions regarding the integration process will have important consequences on the future of people in Europe. Let us briefly go through the groups by category:

²¹ The same thing happens with the relationship between national and European identification : despite clear evidence in the data, it took a decade to get most researcher acknowledge the fact that they are more cumulative than exclusive (Duchesne & Frogner 1995, 2001, 2008)

²² Bernhard Wessels suggested years ago that the social gap could be analysed as an elite bias toward change (Wessels 1995). This might still be the case.

- Working class groups: what characterise all of them, is the expression of a feeling of been dominated. British participants do refuse the idea of being told by the French what they should do and seemed to oppose the EU for that reason. But later on, they agree on the fact that as citizens in their own country, they count for nothing: they are just numbers, dots they say, while commenting of the general disaffection for voting. The French working class participants hardly talk about Europe or the EU. Their discussions evoke a globalised world dominated by the rich, a few people (they mention “the 200 families”, a traditional image of the richest French families who are supposed to dominate the political system as well as the economy; or the “barbarian of finance”). The Belgians, even if they demonstrate some knowledge of how the EU works as a political system, agree on the fact that they are currently paying for European integration. Some of them suggest that their children will benefit from it; but when others openly doubt it, no disagreement follows.
- White collars groups: although they seem more receptive to some positive elements of the European project, in terms of values, they remain rather indifferent. In the British group, a participant declares that she had talked about Europe in this discussion more than she ever wished to. The discussion never really begins in this group, until the question on Turkey’s entry; but then conflict refers to Islam and Islamophobia. The only participant who seems to have a clue keeps asking questions that nobody answers. The others only ask, regarding the pound, why things should have to change. In the French groups, the white collars participants keep sidetracking. The only participant who tried several times to go back to the topic, Europe, eventually gets to the conclusion that what matters is not that France belongs to Europe but the fact that it’s a rich country. Again, the Belgian white collars are the only ones who are capable of carrying on the discussion on Europe. They first give a quite positive note, look clearly pro-European. But as the discussion goes on, the overall positive appreciation tends to weaken. Their reservation increases with the “who profit from Europe?” question and they clearly indicate that they had said in the first session what basically they had been told to believe. But they consider that the current price for the EU is high and are the ones who pay. Although they are all quite young, they mention future generations which will have become European because they will have been made so – they compare this process as a chip that will have been incorporated in childhood.
- Managers’ groups: By contrast, being pro- or anti-European means something to the managers. In Oxford, the participant the more involved in the discussion challenges

the other for their Euroscepticism on various grounds. Belgian managers do conflictualise the matter; although we should mention that religion is referred to from the beginning and Belgian groups always come to conflict when religion is at stake. As for the French, the discussion is structured by a growing antagonism between a young communist doctoral student and an engineer in his fifties. The clear Euroscepticism expressed by the young woman is only one among many other arguments in their long-lasting conflict.

- Activists' groups: in the three groups, European integration and the current state of the EU remains the main object of discussion for the whole session. Among the British, this disagreement comes close to fundamental disagreements about social justice and market regulation. Among the Belgian, it is more a matter of geo-strategy but remains at the core of the discussion all the same. However, they play the conflict more than they feel it. The French activists have specificity: most of them are actually quite marginal regarding the dominant position of the party they represent in the discussion. They do involve themselves in order to justify a position that is personal more than partisan. They are, among the French groups, the only ones to discuss at length the referendum on the Constitutional treaty: the three other French groups' participants hardly seem to remember it, six months only after the campaign.

Conclusion: Rephrasing the social gap.

Since the mid-90's and the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, scholars working on attitudes towards European integration have enacted the end of the "permissive consensus" analysed by Lindberg and Scheingold in 1970. Although it is widely accepted that the European Union is a political system that cannot be directly compared to a national political system and analysed with its categories and criteria, the want of a European demos is so strong that analysts of attitudes towards European integration tend to postulate it implicitly and find evidence for it in these *ad hoc* surveys that are Eurobarometers. This paper belongs to the minority of research projects that use alternative and qualitative method to address the question of citizens' opinions toward the European process. The results generated by this different way of producing data are clearly different too. Our data do confirm the well-known social gap that exists between elites and mass public support to European integration. But they

suggest rephrasing it. This gap is not a cleavage between Eurosceptics and Europhiles; it opposes indifferent mass public to polarised elites.

It is a complicated task to get evidence for an absence. In this research design, we use conflictualisation of discussions as a marker of saliency. Although we did everything we could think of in order to get French, British and (French-speaking) Belgian participants to disagree about European integration, we only succeeded with political activists and executive participants. Working class and white collar groups did clash with each other about many things, but not Europe. They made perfectly clear that they had no interest in the topic. The fact that they are poorly informed and interested in the EU does not mean that they cannot talk about it (and answer pre-formatted questions if required). Their discussions even show some potentiality for a politicisation of the European issue, on two dimensions: on the importance of values in the European project as such, and on the confidence the EU system should have in the market. But they never show any involvement in the discussion as they did for other topics like unemployment, immigration, the future of the Welfare-State or children education. For the moment, they don't care.

They don't care because the EU is an on-going reality, it is just there, it has been set up by elites and there is no question about it. They don't care because what bothers them is beyond Europe. They do care very much about the loss of sovereignty of their nation. But this loss of sovereignty is not for them a consequence of European integration, that's a result of the globalisation of the economy and the failure of politics to control it. Oxonian working class and white collar groups here are somehow different as they do consider that the EU would challenge British sovereignty but because of confusion with the Euro, they tend to believe that Britain is still out of it. However, all of them – Oxford, Paris and Brussels working class and white collar participants – experience the EU as a distant reality that hardly concerns them. Clearly, the growing influence of the EU on European citizens' life did not generate the same level of interest.

The lack of saliency regarding the European issue among the working class is the simplest explanation for the constant decrease of turnout to European elections: European citizens don't vote because most of them don't feel concerned by the EU. It might be because building a demos takes time: feelings of belonging to a political community do not grow all of a sudden, they are long term constructions that are transmitted from one generation to the other. This might as well never happen, be it because the EU is really a political system of a new kind and does not need a demos, only a public sphere; or because European integration will rapidly be outdated by global integration.

Annexe:

Table 1/ Distribution of “on paper” European attitude:
Has or would have voted in favour or against the Constitutional Treaty?

	In Favour	Against	DK, abstention	N
BXL Working class 1	1	1	4	6
BXL Working class 2	0	4	1	5
BXL White collars 1	3	0	1	4
BXL White collars 2	3	1	1	5
BXL Executives 1	3	2	1	6
BXL Executives 2	0	4	0	4
BXL Activists 1	4	2	0	6
BXL Activists 2	2	3	0	5
PAR Working class 1	0	1	4	6
PAR Working class 2	0	3	3	6
PAR White collars 1	1	3	1	5
PAR White collars 2	0	1	4	6
PAR Executives 1	2	4	1	7
PAR Executives 2	3	2	1	6
PAR Activists 1	4	2	1	7
PAR Activists 2	1	5	0	6
OXF Working class 1	2	1	2	5
OXF Working class 2	0	0	5	5
OXF White collars 1	2	2	2	6
OXF White collars 2	2	1	3	6
OXF Executives 1	1	3	1	5
OXF Executives 2	2	0	4	6
OXF Activists 1	3	3	0	6
OXF Activists 2	2	2	0	4
Belgian sample – total	39	23	31	93
French sample – total	30	47	60	137
British sample - total	60	46	75	181

Table 4: Effect of education and politicisation on national pride (Belgium, France & UK)

	Belgium			France			United Kingdom		
	Indif	Pol	N	Indif	Pol	N	Indif	Pol	N
Educ 15 less	46,7	53,3	100% 135	38,5	61,5	100% 174	27,7	72,3	100% 307
Educ 16 to 19	63,8	36,2	100% 340	53,3	46,7	100% 375	51,9	48,1	100% 473
Educ 20 & more	70,2	29,8	100% 409	64,3	35,8	100% 366	64,5	35,5	100% 175
Still study	53,3	46,7	100% 15	71,7	28,3	100% 99	64,1	35,9	100% 55
Total	64,0	36,0		56,5	43,5		26,3	37,1	

EB 2004 – Source: Gesis

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