



Inevitability and Multi-dimensional Character of Social Justice Perspective Towards Higher Education

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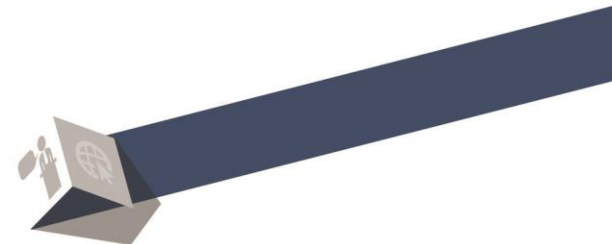
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Outline

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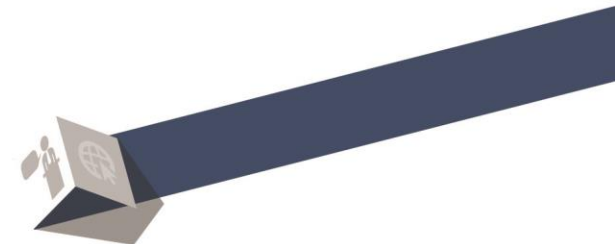




Introduction (1)

Background

- ❑ Studies show that although expansion and massification of higher education (HE) have led to widened access to HE for students of lower social background, this is still not enough to significantly reduce inequalities in access to HE (e.g. Blossfeld and Shavit 1993; Lucas 2001; Pfeffer 2008; Ilieva-Trichkova and Boyadjieva 2014).
- ❑ The Covid-19 crisis and the digital divide have sharpened the educational inequalities (e.g. Farnell et al. 2021; Darmody et al. 2021).
- ❑ The paper draws attention to the crucial importance of the social justice perspective for understanding participation in HE and its potential to influence individuals and societies.

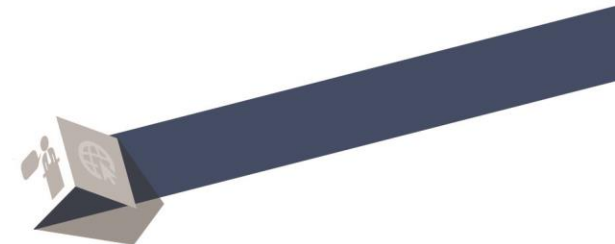




Introduction (2)

Aims

- 1) *To argue for the inevitability of the social justice perspective in studying HE***
- 2) *To conceptualise the multi-dimensional character of social justice in HE***
- 3) *To empirically explore some of the aspects of the multi-dimensional character of social justice in HE, more concretely:***
 - the inclusion and fairness aspects of social justice for social groups of low and high social background;***
 - the 'access to what' aspect of social justice, i.e., the involvement of students from different social background in higher educational fields, which differ in their social prestige.***





Theoretical considerations (1)

**Theoretically,
the paper builds
on insights
from:**

- **Rawls' understanding of social justice as fairness**
- **Sen's capability approach and**
- **Fraser's three-dimensional model of social justice.**

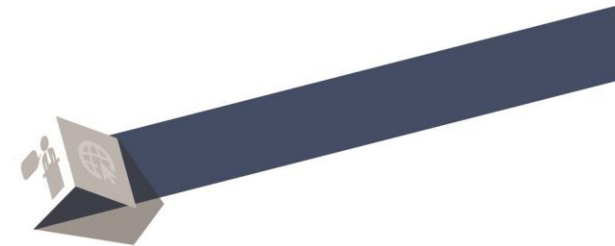




Theoretical considerations (2)

Justice as fairness

- ❑ John Rawls (1999 [1971]) theory of ‘justice as fairness’ is based on the idea of establishing a hypothetical social contract which aims at contributing to the achievement of justice in society.
- ❑ This approach is focused on identifying perfectly just institutions and implies the identification of the right behaviour or right institutions.
- ❑ The metrics of justice in this Rawlsian theory are that of primary goods, which may be rights, liberties, opportunities, income, or wealth.
- ❑ Their distribution should be regulated by the principles of equal basic liberties, of fair equality of opportunity, and the difference principle (ibid.).





Theoretical considerations (3)

The capability approach

- ❑ Sen adheres to the idea that justice may be achieved on the basis of making comparisons between the different ways in which people's lives may be led, thereby ascertaining which are more or less just.
- ❑ According to him justice is a “momentous concept” (Sen 2009, p. 401), and comparative questions are inescapable for any theory of justice that intends to give some kind of guidance for public policy or personal behavior.
- ❑ He acknowledges that there is a possibility, even with just institutions, for injustices at the individual level and in people's everyday lives. Sen's comparative approach to justice could contribute to identifying spaces of injustice and engaging in their removal.
- ❑ The informational basis of Sen's theory of justice is human capability understood as a special kind of freedom which refers to the alternative combinations that are feasible for a person to achieve.





Theoretical considerations (4)

Nancy Fraser's three-dimensional model of justice

- ❑ This model goes beyond distributional dimensions of justice and includes: redistribution, recognition, and representation (Fraser 2003; 2009).
- ❑ Fraser argues that to conceive recognition as a matter of justice means to view it as an issue of social status. Such an understanding requires examination of the institutionalised patterns of cultural value and whether they constitute actors as peers— who participate on a par with one another in social life—or as inferior, invisible, excluded others.
- ❑ Fraser's conceptualisation of recognition as a matter of justice draws attention to the obstacles that impede people from fully participating in social life. It is important to emphasise that she points not only to economic factors but to cultural ones, as well (Fraser 2005).





Theoretical considerations (5)

We argue that social justice regarding participation in HE has a multi-dimensional character and that the most prominent of its dimensions are the following ones:

- inclusion,***
- fairness,***
- social justice for whom,***
- social justice where, and***
- social justice to what.***





Theoretical considerations (6) – inclusion and fairness


The inclusion perspective:

- refers “to the significance of improvement in participation of any particular group, irrespective of how other groups have fared” (Clancy and Goastellec 2007, p. 146);
- focuses on growth in the absolute number of people from under-represented socio-economic groups (Marginson 2011).

The fairness perspective:

- “implies ensuring that personal and social circumstances – for example gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin – should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential” (Santiago et al. 2008, pp. 13–14);
- concentrates on the proportional distribution of student places (or graduations) between different social groups (Marginson 2011).





Theoretical considerations (7) – social justice to whom, where and to what

Social justice to whom?

- reflects the different ways in which inclusion and fairness are revealed with regard to different social groups, differentiated on the basis of social background, initial education, occupational status, place of residence, age, sex.

Social justice where?

- refers to social justice at the access of HE and social justice at the graduation from it.

Social justice to what?

- reflects the facts that higher education is not a homogenous good and higher education systems remain stratified everywhere;
- refers to the qualitative side of educational inequalities, i.e. we should ask not only the question “Does this individual/group have an access to HE?”, but also the question “To what kind of institution/programme of HE this individual/group has an access in terms of quality and prestige?”





Data and methodology (1)

Data

- ❑ European Social Survey, implemented in 2008, 2010, 2012 & 2014;
- ❑ Labour Force Survey, 2009, 2013 & 2018;
- ❑ EUROSTUDENT Survey IV (2008-2011) & V (2012-2015); &
- ❑ Bulgarian University Ranking System, 2018.

Measures

- ❑ To measure the inclusion and fairness aspects of social justice for social groups of low and high social background we have introduced 2 indices:
 - ✓ **lincluHE** &
 - ✓ **lfairHE**.
- ❑ To measure the ‘access to what’ aspect of social justice, i.e., the involvement of students from different social background in higher educational fields, which differ in their social prestige we have used **Education Equity Index (EEI)** (Usher & Medow 2010).

We calculated these indices for those with a low level of father’s education, ISCED 1997 0 to 2, and those with a high level of father’s of education, ISCED 1997 5 to 6 or ISCED 2011 5–8. We selected these 2 extreme categories in order to more clearly account for the educational inequalities.





Data and methodology (2)

Index of inclusion in HE (IicluHE)

- ❑ Measures the trends towards more or less inclusion of a given social group in HE
- ❑ Based on logistic regression separately in 18 countries
 - ✓ Dependent variable – whether or not people aged 20–34 had a tertiary education degree.
 - ✓ Independent variable – social background (father's highest educational level).
 - ✓ Control variables – gender, age and ESS round.
- ❑ Ratio between the predicted probabilities of a given social group to participate in HE between the two selected temporal periods (2009 and 2013).
- ❑ Index values
 - > **1**: indicated increased inclusion of a given social group within one and the same country within a given period of time
 - < **1**: shows a tendency towards exclusion of this group over time
 - = **1**: no change was made regarding the inclusion of this group.





Data and methodology (3)

Index of fairness in HE (IfairHE)

- ❑ Measures how the fairness of representation by a given social group in HE within a given country for a given year has changed over time.

- ❑ For its calculation:

First, for the high social background group, we calculate the ratio between the % of all males aged 45–65 with a high level of education in the overall population and the % of all students whose fathers have completed HE. As for the social group with lower father's education, this formula is reversed.

These scores vary between 0 and 1.

The closer the ratio is to 1, the fairer the system; and vice versa.

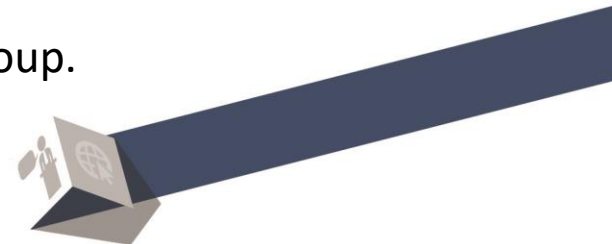
Second, we calculated the ratio between these scores for two temporal points.

- ❑ Index values

> **1**: indicates increased fairness of representation for a given social group within one and the same country within the above-described period of time,

< **1**: shows a tendency towards less fairness of this group over time.

= **1**: indicates that no change in the fairness was made by this group.



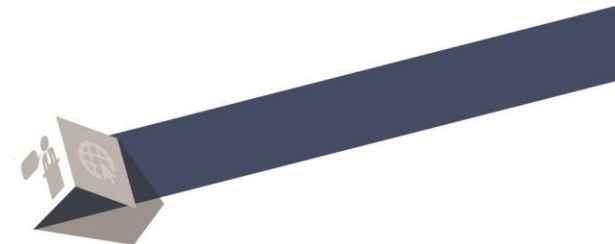


Data and methodology (4)

Education equity index

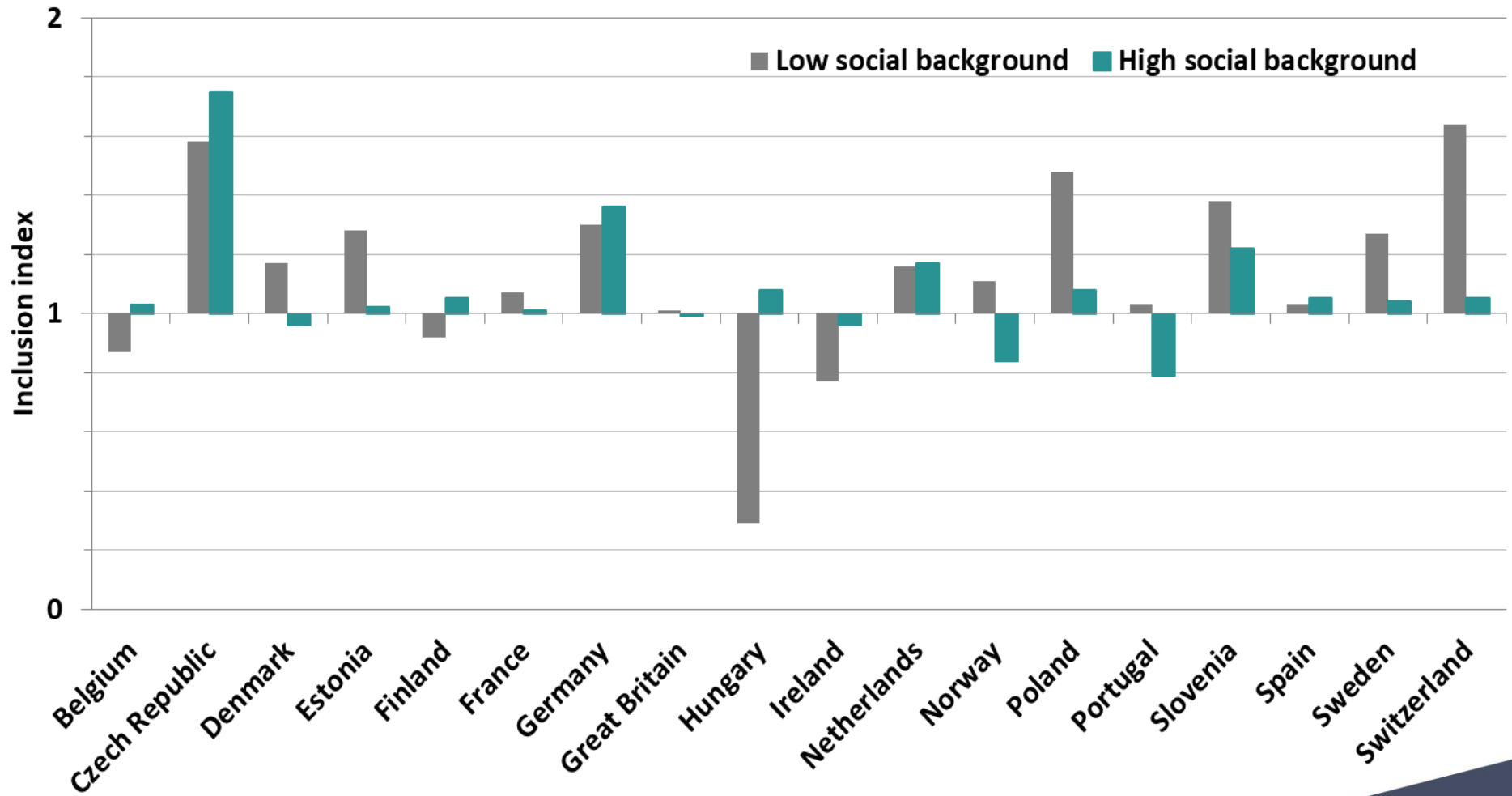
$$EEI = \frac{\% \text{ of males aged 45–64 in the general population of a country with a HE degree}}{\% \text{ of the student body whose fathers have a HE degree}}$$


- This index ranges between 0 and 1.
- We have applied it for different professional fields.
- Data are as of 2018.



Index of inclusion in participation in HE for people of low and high social background for the period 2009 and 2013, by country

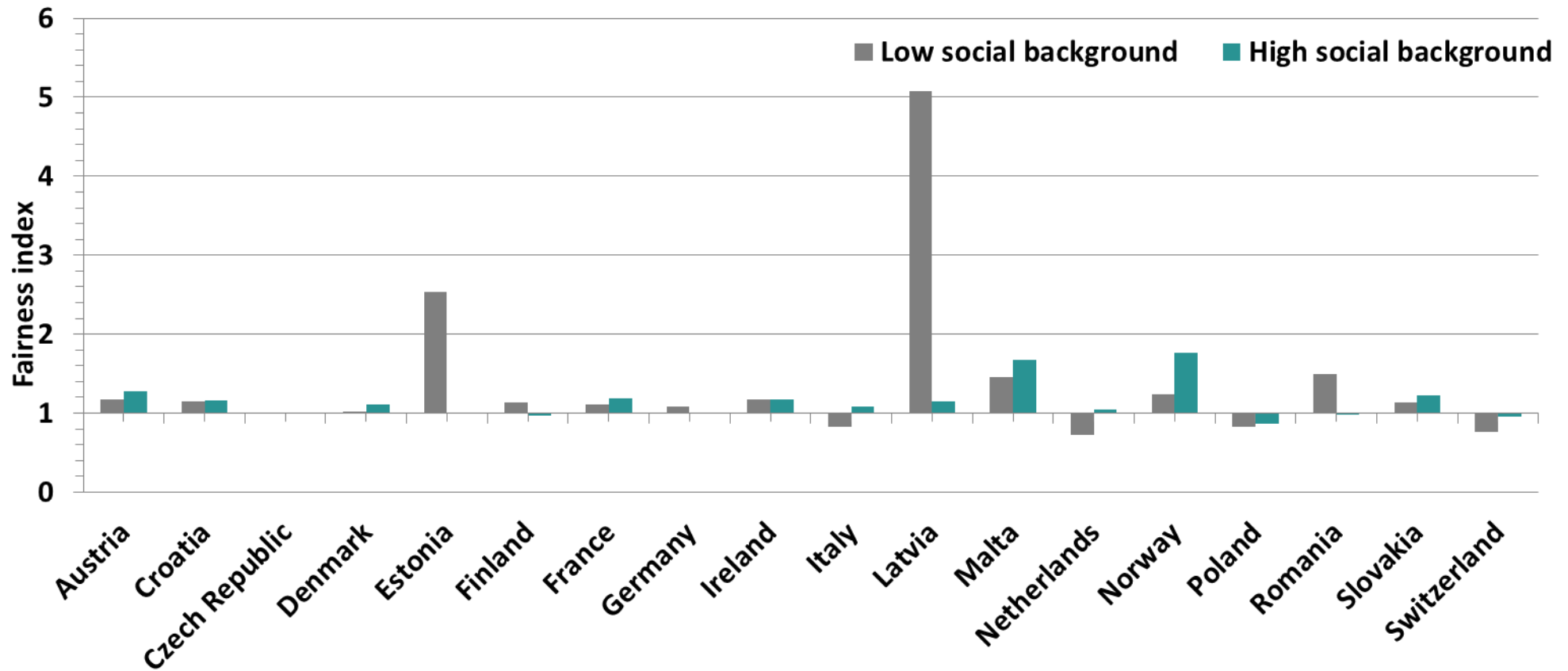
Source: ESS 2008–2010 and ESS 2012–2014





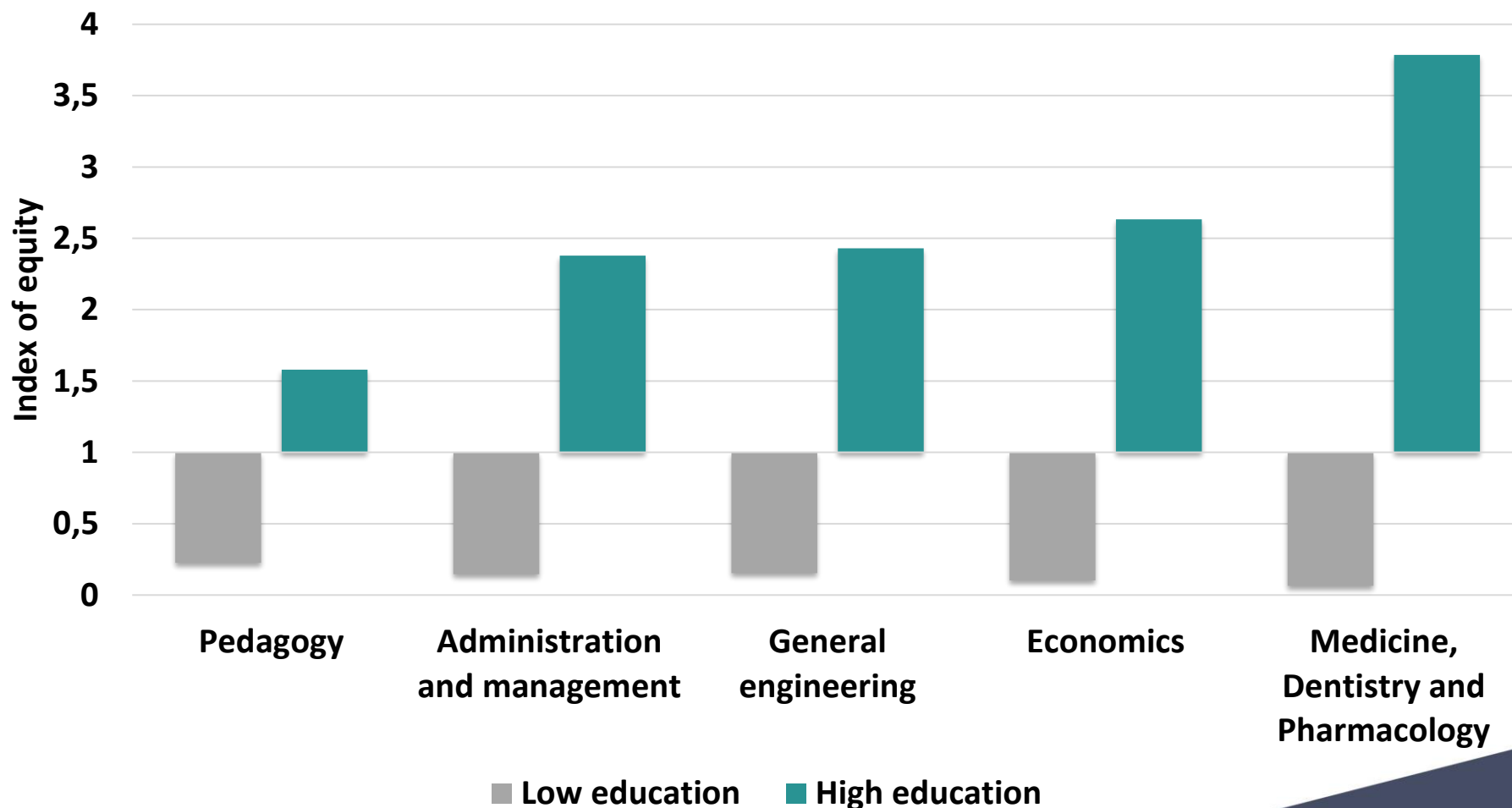
Index of fairness in participation in HE for people of low and high social background for the period 2009 and 2013, by country

Source: EUROSTUDENT IV 2008–2011 and EUROSTUDENT V 2012–2015 and Eurostat, LFS data for 2009 and 2013 extracted on 14.03.2018, code: edat_lfse_03



Index of equity regarding participation in HE in five professional fields, which differ in their social prestige

(Source: Bulgarian Universities Ranking System, Survey among Students 2018, and Eurostat, Data code: edat_ifse_03 [Extracted on: 16.5.2020])





Discussion (1)

- ❑ By bridging of Rawls' understanding of social justice as fairness, the Sen's capability approach, and Fraser's three-dimensional model of social justice we could take into account that social justice regarding participation in HE has a multi-dimensional character and to consider its different aspects, for example: inclusion and fairness, social justice for whom, social justice where, and social justice to what. We focus on:
 - ✓ the inclusion aspect which emphasises the significance of improvement in participation in HE of a given group of people, independently of the achievements of the other groups;
 - ✓ the fairness perspective which refers to the proportional representation of students from different social groups within the student population (for example, the overrepresentation of students from high social background).
 - ✓ the question 'Access to what?' i.e. access of students from different social backgrounds to professional fields, which differ in their prestige.

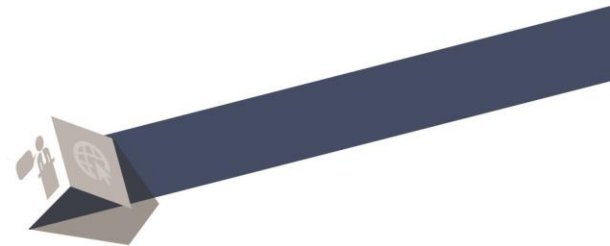




Discussion (2)

Our analysis demonstrates that:

- a given HE system could be fair without being inclusive,
- the qualitative aspect of social justice in HE – ‘access to what’ – is very important,
- social justice is an indispensable and independent perspective for assessing widening access to HE for both research and policy-making.





Discussion (3)

More concretely, the result of our analysis has shown that:

- specific features of participation in HE which have not yet been captured through previously-existing measures could be revealed via the lincluHE and IfairHE. This is evident from the fact that some countries which have relatively low participation rates in HE among low and high social background groups are more inclusive and fairer in comparison with countries where such rates are high (e.g. Switzerland and Austria have relatively low participation rates for people with low social background but are among the fairest countries with regard to this group).
- people with HE were overrepresented in all five professional fields studied, whereas those with low education levels were underrepresented. This is in line with other studies suggesting the stable and persistent effect of socioeconomic background on access to HE (e.g. Blossfeld and Shavit 1993; Lucas 2001). Besides this, we have found considerable differences across various professional fields. Medicine, dentistry, and pharmacology, among the most prestigious professional fields in Bulgaria, are the least fair.





Conclusion (1)

Further research

- To continue the theoretical reflection on the understanding of social justice in HE and how it relates to other issues in HE, e.g. quality and effectiveness.
- To calculate the developed indices for measuring social equity in (access to) HE for other social groups based on characteristics, such as gender, place of residence or ethnic origin, and using different time periods.
- To investigate factors at macro level (referring to the three scales of justice – distribution, recognition, representation) in order to explain differences between countries as far as the inclusion and fairness aspects of social justice in HE are concerned.
- To explain in depth the results obtained for each one of the countries studied through a thorough analysis of the concrete HE systems.





Conclusion (2)

Policy implications

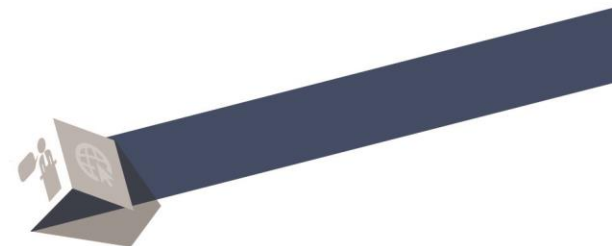
- By revealing that social justice in HE is a complex multi-dimensional phenomenon the present paper provides a reliable conceptual basis for developing strategies and concrete policies regarding access to HE at the institutional, national and European level.
- The results of the indices can be used to monitor social justice in HE. In this regard, regular collection of such data is crucial for this process. These indices can be applied as a tool by policy-makers in their design of adequate and justified policies on access to HE.





Conclusion (3)

- ❑ The essence of recent trends and studies in HE can be summarised in the following way: although “there is a worldwide tendency to high-participation systems” in HE, the “[e]quality of opportunity in the full sense is unrealisable, because of the persistence of irreducible differences between families in economic, social and cultural resources” (Marginson 2016, p. 69).
- ❑ The recent corona virus pandemic highlighted the crucial importance of a new type of inequalities for access to all forms of education – digital.
- ❑ That is why the social justice perspective is indispensable if we want to fully grasp the processes in participation in HE and its actual and potential role for promoting social justice.





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<https://justedu2020.eu/>





THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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