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SOCIOECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE EU COMPETITIVENESS *

The article focuses on the main features of the EU social systems and their linkages to economic productivity and competitiveness. Furthermore, it compares the EU member states by the selected pillars of the Global Competitiveness Report with their position in the Index of Social Capital. The examination of the relation between overall competitiveness and social capital has indicated that countries rich in social capital tend to recover more rapidly from financial crisis than their counterparts with lower levels of social capital. The findings suggest that, although there isn't a relation between countries' ranking in the selected pillars of competitiveness and their belonging to a particular group of welfare state typology, the Nordic countries have evidently better economic and social performance.

Keywords: country's competitiveness; social capital; welfare; the EU.

JEL classification: D60; F68; I31.

Сімона Шкорвагова, Крістіна Дрієнікова СОЦІАЛЬНО-ЕКОНОМІЧНІ АСПЕКТИ КОНКУРЕНТОСПРОМОЖНОСТІ ЄС

У статті розглянуто основні особливості соціальних систем ЄС та їх зв'язок з продуктивністю та конкурентоспроможністю. Проведено порівняння країн-членів ЄС за окремими складовими конкурентоспроможності відповідно до Звіту з глобальної конкурентоспроможності та позицій в Індексі соціального капіталу. Дослідження зв'язку між конкурентоспроможністю та соціальним капіталом продемонструвало, що країни, багаті на соціальний капітал, як правило, швидше відновлюються після фінансової кризи, ніж країни з нижчим рівнем соціального капіталу. Результати також показали, що хоча і немає очевидного зв'язку між рейтингом країн за окремим показником конкурентоспроможності та їх приналежністю до певної групи в типології держав загального добробуту, в скандинавських країнах соціально-економічні показники значно вище, ніж в інших країнах ЄС.

Ключові слова: конкурентоспроможність країни; соціальний капітал; добробут; ЄС.

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Симона Шкорвагова, Кристина Дриеникова СОЦИАЛЬНО-ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ КОНКУРЕНТОСПОСОБНОСТИ СТРАН ЕС

В статье рассмотрены основные особенности социальных систем ЕС и их связь с производительностью и конкурентоспособностью. Проведено сравнение стран-членов ЕС по отдельным составляющим Отчета о глобальной конкурентоспособности с их позицией в Индексе социального капитала. Исследование связи между конкурентоспособностью и социальным капиталом показало, что страны, обладающие большим социальным капиталом, как правило, быстрее восстанавливаются после финансового кризиса, чем страны с более низким уровнем социального капитала. Результаты свидетельствуют, что хотя нет очевидной связи между рейтингами стран по отдельным показателям конкурентоспособности и их принадлежности к определенной группе в типологии государств всеобщего благосостояния, у скандинавских стран социально-экономические показатели значительно выше, чем в других странах ЕС.

Ключевые слова: конкурентоспособность стран; социальный капитал; благосостояние; ЕС.

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Introduction. European social systems have evolved over centuries. They are based both on cultural and economic principles. These systems reflect the economic prerequisites of European countries that have affected their position within the global economy. The European Union plays a significant role in the world economy. However, it also deals with the problem of its inner competitiveness disbalance. The financial-economic crisis has revealed many structural weaknesses and increased concerns about balanced social models. This article analyses the main features of the European Union social systems and their linkages to economic productivity and competitiveness.

The paper is aimed to evaluate the competitiveness of the EU member states in relation to their prevailing welfare state regime.

Welfare state, competitiveness and social capital. One of the most influential researches on welfare states is the typology of Esping-Andersen which has been used to compare various types of social models. The concept of 3 "welfare regimes" has become very popular in a comparative welfare state research whereby it has launched robust discussion among academia as well as intense criticism. The critique concerns the methodological approach to the typology; gender equality point of view is missing there, and classification of certain countries has also been questioned (Beblavy et al., 2011).

Besides the ideal Esping-Andersen's tripology of welfare state regimes (liberal, corporatist and social-democratic), a wide variety of competing typologies and additions have been proposed, as well as several types or definitions of other social regimes in Europe related predominantly to South European countries. These are based mainly on the works of S. Leibfried (1992) and M. Ferrera (1996) (Aiginger and Leoni, 2009). G. Bonoli (1997) labelled 4 types focusing exclusively on European countries – British, Continental European, Nordic and Southern types (Fenger, 2007: 7–8). The first 3 in general overlap with the original Esping-Andersen's typology. The Southern welfare state regime forms an addition to the original classification. Nevertheless, Esping-Andersen's typology has been proved as still relevant, even two decades after its creation (Poder and Kerem, 2011; Fenger, 2007) and it still prevails in a comparative debate over the welfare states theory (Beblavy, 2008).

The concept of competitiveness has been the centre of attention for various academics, policymakers and entrepreneurs over years. It is a contemporary issue drawing particular attention as it might help coping with new realities of the current socioeconomic context. There is no consensus about the definition of competitiveness. The commonly cited definition often used in literature is that of the World Economic Forum (WEF) which defines competitiveness as "the set of institutions, policies, and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country" (WEF, 2014). When analysing competitiveness, the European Union takes into account 3 main indicators – labour productivity, exports, and innovation. Based on these dimensions of competitiveness, the European Commission has identified Denmark, Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands as the states with strong and improving competitiveness (European Commission, 2014a). Competitiveness is crucial for further development of the EU. For this reason the European Commission highlights the importance of creating jobs and growth. This approach is supported by the fact that when measuring competitiveness, a variety of indicators, models and methods might be used depending on the desired objectives.

Social capital determines the effectiveness of society's institutions when resolving public problems (Lee et al., 2011). Social capital is an intangible asset that is difficult to measure (Social capital in the 21st century, 2015). Particular components of social capital are subject of many academic disputes, but most studies have focused on trust, social norms, and group interaction. Only a few studies have provided a broad measure of social capital across countries. D. Lee et al. (2011) created the Index of social capital across criteria like trust (the feeling of societal fairness, confidence in public institutions, political parties, and press); norms (corruption, the rule of law, the prevalence of tax evasion and benefit fraud); networks (for instance how likely people are to join religious groups, arts, sport clubs etc.), and social structure (culture and social conflict).

Problem statement and research objectives. The EU is a significant world player in international trade. Nevertheless, the rise of China and other countries poses a new challenge for the EU member states that need to redesign their policies in order to maintain their competitive position in the world economy (Ruzekova et. al., 2013). Even though many attempts have been made to identify and solve the inconsistency of economic performance and social sustainability, their relationship have not yet been universally defined and described. A choice between competitiveness and social issues remains one of the unresolved dilemmas within the mainstream economics (Cyrek, 2014).

Based on Esping-Andersen's typology our aim is to describe and analyse the main characteristics of the EU member states social models to find out whether there are any linkages between the social model and national competitiveness. We search answers on the following questions: How do particular welfare types of social models differ in terms of their economic prosperity? Are the most competitive EU member states those that have strong social systems (according the results of Esping-Andersen: the goals of welfare state are met mostly successfully by social democratic regimes contrary to liberal ones)?

To answer these questions, we begin with the characteristic of welfare types in the EU and their main features. Furthermore, the analysis of their competitiveness has to be conducted. There are several methods of measuring competitiveness taking into account qualitative macro and micro-based competitiveness indicators, but the most commonly used research methods in this field are still quantitative and use indexing and classification methods. For the assessment of competitiveness, the methodology of the World Economic Forum is used. The Global Competitiveness Index 2014–2015 enables evaluating the impacts of certain factors on national competitiveness. For our analysis 3 pillars related to social issues were chosen, namely: health and primary education, higher education and training, and labour market efficiency.

Finally, we compare the ranking of the EU members by the selected pillars of competitiveness with their welfare state regime. Our aim is to find out whether there are any similarities in social and economic outcomes within the same social model typology. In addition, we provide a comparison of the overall competitiveness ranking of the EU member states with their ranking in the Index of social capital. The Index of social capital consists of 44 variables that influence social cooperation. The comparison of two indices enables the answer on whether there is a possibility to have

strong economic performance and high levels of social capital according the premise: countries with high levels of social capital tend to be richer (Lee et al., 2011).

European welfare state regimes. In the EU, social policy is mostly a national affair. There is no single European welfare state. The role of the EU in social policy is limited as a part of shared competences between the EU and its member states. The EU provides arrangements within which the EU member states must coordinate their policies (Kittova et al., 2014). However, the EU member states have different social policies that share both similarities and differences. Nevertheless, European countries have been clustered into 4 main (more or less) homogeneous welfare state regimes based on the original Esping-Andersen's typology.

The Nordic (or Social Democratic) welfare state regime stresses the right to high generosity of welfare benefits for everyone. The overall purpose of the system lies in reducing social inequality which has in general a very low degree. The state together with local authorities carries out most of welfare tasks and is in charge of financing and organising a broad supply of social benefits for the citizens. This welfare state model is the most comprehensive one with high level of social spending and a considerable emphasis on social inclusion.

Continental (or Corporatist) social model is based on welfare benefits which depend predominantly on employment as the main criterion. Its key purpose is to protect employees from the risks associated with non-favourable labour market or lifecycle conditions. The generosity of welfare benefits is high on average; however, depends on to whom benefits are provided. The level of social spending is high. The direct role of the state is limited to providing benefits necessary to maintain income. Their provision depends on the status of employment.

Responsibility of individuals for themselves characterises the Liberal, or *Anglo-Saxon* model of welfare state. The main purpose of this social system is to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Benefits are very modest; they primarily concern low-income working-class and state dependants. Therefore, the main criteria to welfare benefits are means-based. The level of social spending is very low. This welfare state regime might be distinguished by high degree of social inequality.

And the *Mediterranean* (or Southern) type of welfare state is characterised by high reliance on family, and supportive role of family networks. Similarly to the Continental one, employment forms the principal criterion to receive welfare benefits, although the generosity of them is low on average. There is a strong internal polarization of social benefits, the state is not efficient in reducing poverty and generally its role in welfare is extremely low. The level of social inequality is high. This welfare state type is rudimentary with almost no tradition of social policies.

These 4 models differ in terms of social stratification policy design or institutional characteristics. Nevertheless, many countries have included features of different welfare regimes into their social protection systems. This typology of welfare state regimes, however, refers primarily to the old EU member states (EU-15) forasmuch as have been shaped and developed gradually from the 1990s (Table 1). With the EU enlargement on the East and South, the number of the EU member states has increased by 13. These form an independent group of welfare state type that could be added to the abovementioned 4 categories. This type refers predominantly to transition countries (Central, East and South-East European countries) which are not co-

vered by the traditional typology. The academic debate is not unified whether these countries form one separate social system or could be classified into several more as there are significant differences among these countries. M. Fenger (2007) has examined to what extent they fit into any of Esping-Andersen's welfare types. The region encompasses a wide variety of countries and these welfare states cannot be reduced to one type and therefore cannot be clearly distinguished from traditional Western (European) welfare state regimes. However, according to him, there is no specific post-communist welfare states type; he subdivides these countries into 3 groups: former-USSR type (the Baltics), post-communist European type (Czechia, Hungary, Croatia, Bulgaria, Poland, Slovakia), and developing welfare states type (Romania). On the other hand, according to K. Poder and K. Kerem (2011: 69), a clearly post-communist cluster could be determined (with Hungary and Czechia as outliers which align with the Mediterranean welfare system and the three Baltic states which are closer to the Anglo-Saxon model). A combination of their specific characteristics with the Continental or with the Liberal welfare system is more likely to be the scenario for their future social system development.

Table 1. Welfare state types in the EU, adapted from (Aiginger and Leoni, 2009; Beblavy et al., 2011; Esping-Andersen, 1990)

	Anglo-Saxon (Liberal)	Continental (Corporatist)	Nordic (Social- Democratic)	Mediterranean (Southern)	Hybrid
Countries	Ireland, United Kingdom	Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands	Denmark, Finland, Sweden	Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain	Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia

Welfare state regimes of the new EU member states differ from the EU-15 regimes and thus cannot be classified to any of the above mentioned 4 types. These social systems are much smaller and strongly emphasise redistribution to prevent poverty (Beblavy, 2008: 16). Nevertheless, some of them cluster with the main group of the EU-15, whereas others form an entirely new cluster (Beblavy et al., 2011). Even among these countries there are significant differences. Their social systems are too heterogeneous to identify common features and create a clear typology. These countries have different welfare traditions and structures and have adopted some of the principles of social policies of the aforementioned welfare states, thus creating "hybrid" models of welfare states (Adascalitei, 2012; Tache and Neesham, 2011). Therefore, the EU member states can be now classified into 5 types or clusters of welfare state (Table 1).

Social dimension of the EU member states competitiveness. Growth prospects in the EU seem to be influenced by various factors with many countries recording stronger growth while some suffering from numerous external circumstances. For instance, the beginning of Ukrainian crisis has resulted in a decrease of the EU's competitiveness (Zabojnik and Harvanek, 2014). The question arises whether the success of some EU countries is supported by their strong social justice embedded in their social systems. It is generally accepted that countries with more developed social

systems tackle economic crises more successfully than their counterparts with lower social protection (Euzeby, 2012).

Social welfare spending in many countries is often considered to be a barrier in achieving economic performance and might be soon unsustainable in terms of maintaining competitiveness of a country. Population of the EU represents 7% of the world population but half of its social spending (Special Report: The Nordic Countries (2), 2013). Furthermore, social welfare spending of Europe's generous social welfare systems might prove as unsustainable in the not too distant future (The helpful side of demographic change, 2010). Competitiveness of the EU member states is driven by many determinants. Regarding the competitiveness of the EU and its welfare state regimes, further analysis focuses on the examination of the EU member's ranking by the selected pillars related to socioeconomic indicators.

Health and Primary Education. Healthy workers are the prerequisite for productivity increase. Poor health of the population might create additional business costs as workers are not operating effectively. Healthier employees are less likely to be absent and have better performance. In addition to health, this pillar evaluates also primary education which is seen as a critical path to economic development and progress. Literacy rate, quality and quantity of education affect the level of production processes and techniques applied in the economy. Provision of primary education and at least minimal level of healthcare might have a profound effect on competitiveness enhancement. Thus, the role of state in providing these types of services is crucial in maintaining countries competitiveness.

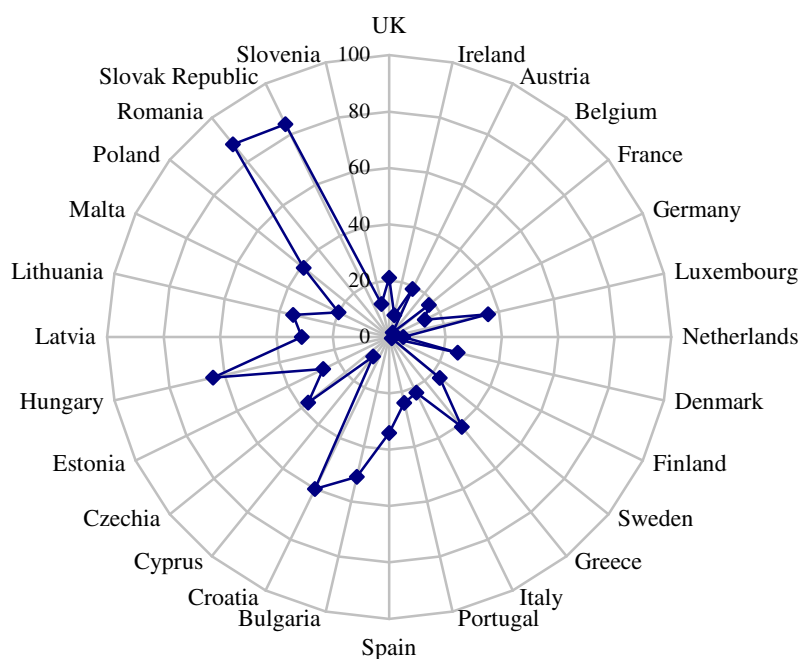


Figure 1. Health and Primary Education – The EU states' ranking, adapted from (WEF, 2014)

As seen in Figure 1 there are no clear similarities in the Health and Primary Education Index among 5 groups of the EU welfare types. The United Kingdom has worse ranking in comparison with Ireland. In the Continental group there are significant differences in rankings. In the Nordic group, Sweden and Denmark have almost the same ranking while Finland ranks 1st in this pillar. The most problematic is the last – the hybrid group of countries where individual economies gain absolutely different positions in the ranking. Malta, Cyprus and Slovenia exhibit a strong performance in this dimension of competitiveness. Also, the Baltic states score relatively same positions. The worst results in workers’ health and quality and quantity of primary education have recorded Romania and Slovakia.

Higher Education and Training. The education level of the country demonstrates skills and productivity of workers. The more educated workers are, the more skills they acquire, and the more likely they contribute to country’s productivity. Well-educated inhabitants allow countries develop or embrace advanced technologies. Moreover, the quality of higher education and training is crucial for the creation and improvement of the value chain by producing more sophisticated products. Skilled and talented employees are also the source of innovation and might help the country to get at the forefront of research. These employees possess unique skills, contribute to the creation of know-hows, and support the emergence of non-technological innovations.

Figure 2 provides the details on the ranking of the EU member states in Higher Education and Training.

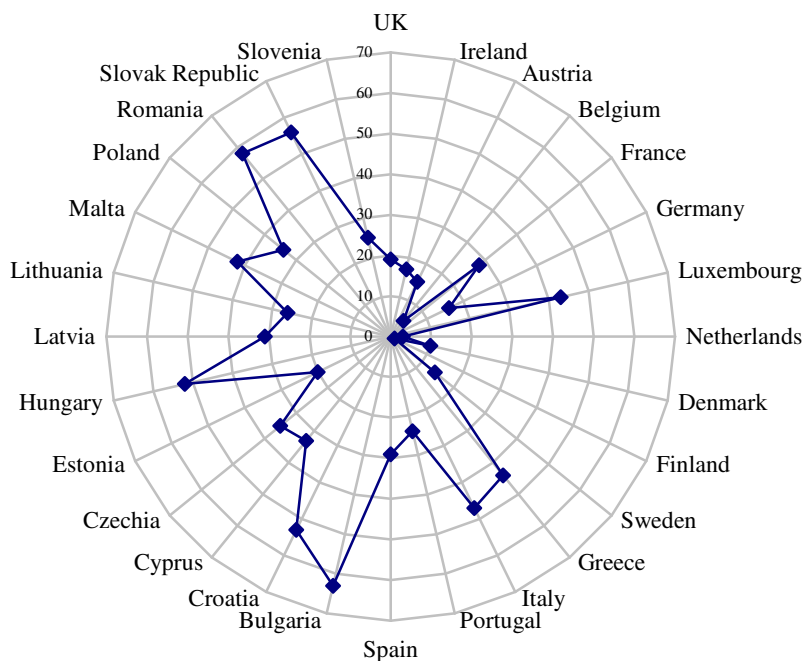


Figure 2. Higher Education and Training – The EU member states’ ranking, adapted from (WEF, 2014)

States with Anglo-Saxon welfare system rank similar position in this pillar (UK – 17th, Ireland – 19th). There are again significant differences among states in the Continental group where the Netherlands and Belgium are among top 5 while Luxembourg ranks 43rd. Germany and Austria achieve similar rankings. In the Scandinavian model, Finland tops the pillar, Denmark has 10th place and Sweden goes 14th. Their remarkable success is also related to the fact that their free education allows citizens achieve their potential and promotes innovativeness (Special report: The Nordic Countries (1), 2013). In the Mediterranean group Portugal and Spain have better position than Italy and Greece. In the Hybrid group – Slovenia tops in this dimension of competitiveness, Latvia, Cyprus, Poland and Czechia are close behind. The worst quality of higher education is in Bulgaria which is ranked 63rd.

Labour Market Efficiency. This pillar explores effectiveness and flexibility of the labour market in the country. It considers the allocation of workforce and its effectiveness, labour market rigidity, gender inequalities or incentives provision. Efficient labour market supports the creation of a pleasant business environment that might have positive effect on the overall performance and productivity.

Figure 3 illustrates the efficiency and flexibility of labour markets in the EU member states. UK gains the best place in this pillar while the worst position belongs to Italy at 136th place globally. There are no similarities in the ranking among all welfare type groups or within the groups by this particular index. Scandinavian group is the only one with relatively similar results. This implies that welfare systems do not demonstrate common features related to labour market efficiency measuring.

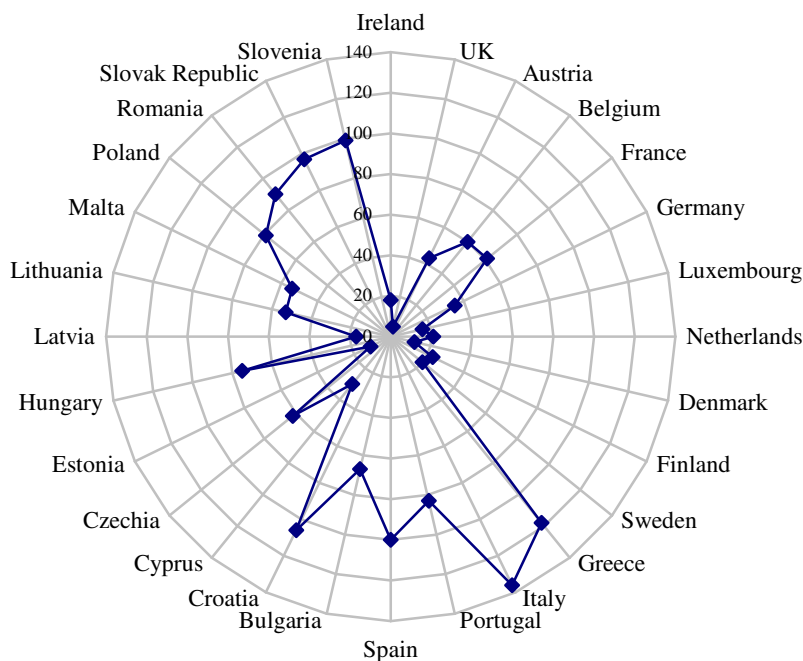


Figure 3. Labour Market Efficiency – The EU member states' ranking, adapted from (WEF, 2014)

Competitiveness and Social Capital. The competitiveness of the EU has been undermined during the financial and economic crisis. The EU faces a daunting task – to restore its long-term competitiveness while resolving critical social issues as the reduction of unemployment or poverty. This requires a new approach to social systems structure that will possess the ability to adapt to new realities of the current socioeconomic context (such as population ageing, the immigration crisis, massive unemployment etc.). However, there is no unique welfare state system that enables achieving this goal fully. Furthermore, the diversity of European social systems makes it difficult to evaluate which welfare state is the best option for the EU.

As shown in Figure 4 the comparison of the EU countries rankings in the Global Competitiveness Index and in the Index of Social Capital significantly differs among 5 welfare state groups. For instance, in the Mediterranean group Portugal and Spain have similar ranking in the Competitiveness Index, but they earned different scores for social capital distribution. Greece is almost in between of Portugal and Spain by the Index of Social Capital; however, with the worst ranking in the competitiveness among all the EU member states. This implies that there are no homogenous results in the Mediterranean welfare state type. Not surprisingly, the position of the Hybrid group countries varies widely which indicates the diversity of their social systems and different economic performance. Romania has the lowest level of social capital of all EU member states; on the contrary, Czechia has earned the highest score of social capital in this group. Countries in the Hybrid group are mostly in transition of their economies and with regard to diversity of their historical and cultural background, they have developed welfare regimes that have incomparable features. Their transformation processes carry both new threats and tremendous opportunities (Rakauskiene and Ivashinenko, 2011). Many countries in Central and Eastern Europe exhibit low trust due to former socialist ideology. Moreover, they have included features of traditional types of welfare states differently. The comparison of their position in these two indices has shown that their approach to social capital differs and to classify them only as the Hybrid group is insufficient.

The countries of the Nordic, the Continental, and the Anglo-Saxon groups have higher level of social capital than the other groups. Similarly their ranking in competitiveness is in top-30. They have recorded positive results both in social and economic measurements. These findings are not fully according to Esping-Andersen vision that the goals of welfare state are met mostly successfully by social democratic regimes. In this case, the Liberal regime has also recorded positive social and economic performance. Higher social capital scores of these groups might also explain their high ranking in the Competitiveness Index. This is consistent with the findings of (Lee et al., 2011) that countries rich in social capital tend to recover rapidly from financial and economic crises because their governments can take necessary political and economic actions to overcome recession more easily. In particular, Nordic countries have leading positions in the surveys of social trust. Generosity of their welfare benefits and reduction of income inequality enhance general trust and support confidence in the government.

Furthermore, governments that have gained public trust often operate in a fair and efficient manner. Thus they govern more effectively and transparently what supports the creation of a more stable environment and strengthen competitiveness of

their economies. They have succeeded promoting balanced development, especially by reducing social and economic disparities and in providing more equal opportunities than the others. Moreover, high level of trust often result in lower transaction costs thus encouraging risk-taking behaviour. Such environment enables them to be one of the best in all rankings of society health ranging from economic to social indicators. They have proven that there is no need to choose between competitiveness and social issues. Scandinavian countries have achieved both economic effectiveness and generous welfare state.

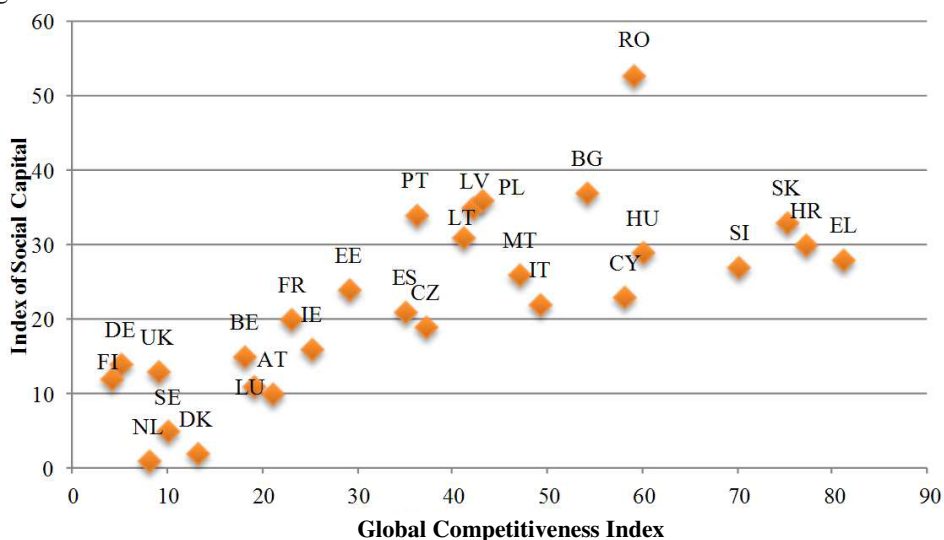


Figure 4. **Competitiveness and Social Capital Index**, adapted from (WEF, 2014; Lee et al., 2011)

Conclusion. The conducted research has taken into account two approaches to evaluating competitiveness of countries in relation to their prevailing social system. First, we have analysed the selected pillars of the Global Competitiveness Index, afterwards we compared the two indices to achieve detailed results.

The analysis of the selected pillars of the Global Competitiveness Index has shown that there are no countries which have similar rankings in Health and Primary Education pillar and in Higher Education and Training pillar. Only Scandinavian countries have comparable position in Labour Market Efficiency pillar. States with Anglo-Saxon welfare system have also ranked similar in Higher Education and Training pillar. The analysis has not confirmed there is a relation between the countries' ranking in the selected pillars of competitiveness and their belonging to a particular group of welfare state typology. This indicates that individual welfare state type has no strong effect on the score that has been achieved in the selected components of competitiveness.

Furthermore, the examination of the relation between overall competitiveness ranking and social capital has been carried out. This comparison indicates there are linkages between economic performance and welfare state regime. Strong social systems which provide equality of opportunities enable their citizens to participate in economic growth by expanding and improving their labour skills, encouraging inno-

vation possibilities, and advances in technology in order to increase the living standards. Access to high-quality education is also one of the most influential instruments for the creation of opportunities and it fosters economic growth. The EU member states comparison has revealed that the best positions have been achieved by Scandinavian countries which have both excellent ranking in the Competitiveness Index and rich social capital. Thus it appears that adopting strong social priorities does not exclude stimulation of productivity in a country. However, the Nordic model is difficult to imitate. Their social policy is the result of historical and geographical conditions that have provided Nordic nations with general trust and belief in individual rights. Their value system is unique and political decisions are widely accepted. On the contrary, Mediterranean countries might be characterised by low levels of trust which is often associated with corruption. Such social norms limit the establishment of a social system similar to the Nordic model. Under these circumstances it is difficult to create a universal welfare state regime suitable for all the EU countries. The comparison demonstrates that the development of social systems has been affected by cultural and social norms which are diverse among the EU member states.

It also appears that the Hybrid group of welfare state does not have common features regarding social policy. Therefore, further analysis should focus on their classification in examining relation between competitiveness and social capital. There are significant differences among countries in this group which make it difficult to evaluate their socioeconomic balance. Furthermore, in order to prove the relation between competitiveness and adopted social policy, detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis should be provided.

Nevertheless, it seems that there is a desired model of economic development which successfully harmonise the increases in competitiveness and supports social aspects of economic development.

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