

“A Framework for Socio-Economic Development in Europe? The Consensual Political Cultures of the Small West European States in Comparative and Historical Perspective”

Acronym: Smallcons, lasted 2003-2006; financed by the 5th Framework of the EU and the Swiss Ministry of Education). Participants: University of Amsterdam (U.Becker, overall coordinator), University of Lausanne (H-U. Jost), University of Copenhagen (L. Kaspersen), University of Göteborg (Bo Rothstein), University of Graz (H. Konrad), University of Helsinki (P. Kettunen & H. Stenius).

Smallcons comparatively and historically analyses the consensual patterns of social and political interaction in Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. These patterns are the cultural framework of these countries' effective corporatism and, based on this, of their successful socio-economic development. The overarching question is whether this framework can be an option for other European countries and whether it could contribute to a truly European 'social model'. The project analyses the link between the small countries' socio-economic achievements and their consensual framework, and aims to describe and explain the rules of the game patterning their consensualism as well as the involved structural relations – including dominance - in historical perspective. Another objective is to identify the differences between the project countries as well as the differences between them and other European societies. Special attention goes to Austria and Finland who, after a break in their development paths, established consensualism and effective corporatism only after WW II. The related objective is to explain this process and to look whether similar changes could be possible elsewhere in Europe, including the 'accession states'.

The research consists of cross-country analysis for variation finding and a European analysis for determining the specificity of the project countries. The historical part will concentrate on path dependence and path 'breaks'. The research will be done by the construction and continuous refinement of a typology of cultural modes of regulation, by systematic secondary analysis of information widely scattered, interviews with relevant participants in the consensual game and survey research among a wider range of actors. The scientific results will be reported in regular reports, in a paper series, a number of comparative articles in refereed international journals, in books, doctoral dissertations and at international conferences. They will also be presented to and discussed with a panel of politicians, policy-makers and other practitioners members of which will be invited to the regular meetings of the consortium as well as to the Final Presentation.