

Session 3: **The Social Gap**

**“Citizens talking about Europe” team presentation**  
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**Attention to Europe: where social groups really differ**  
**Comparative analysis of French, British and (French speaking)**  
**Belgians focus groups.**

*First draft – comments would be much appreciated*

### Introduction

In a recent quantitative analysis of attitudes towards integration, Bruno Cautrès and Gérard Grunberg confirm (after Gabel, Belot, McLaren, Marks et Hooghe, Anderson et Sanchez-Cuenca) 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. According to Cautrès and Grunberg, this cannot be interpreted only in utilitarian terms. Indeed, elites do benefit more visibly from the new opportunities offered by the EU, but as important, is the fear that accompanies European integration, a fear that relates in general to nationalism, and more specifically to a possible decrease of the Welfare State. They thus suggest, for further analysis, to take into account affects as well as interest. This conclusion comes close to Lisbeth Hooghe and Gary Marks’s when they observe that: “A multi-level model that combines both sources of preference 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.” Affects and identity matter in support to European integration; but surveys are ill-equipped to record them.

On the contrary, our project, as explained in session one, seems particularly adequate for taking affects into consideration. The dynamic of conflictualisation, which is at the core of our research design, 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 2006). They take it only when an opinion at stake matters to them, when they feel committed to support it even at some price. These opinions that participants defend in these discussions, are not the kind of “strong views” that Michael Billig analysed in his superb chapter “The Argumentative Nature of Holding Strong Views” (Billig, 1991). They are rather the expression of a “perspective”, as Cramer Walsh puts it, that is, opinions that embody one’s perception of position in the social place, one’s identity (Cramer Walsh 2004). Affects are at stake as a motivation, a cause for participants’ involvement; they are also a consequence of it as the open expression of disagreement, and the conflictualisation that may result, generate lots of feelings of fear and hostility. The observation of the group

discussions, thanks to the video recording, is in this respect fully convincing: the body language of participants tells a lot about their emotions, do they speak or remain silent.

So: does our research project, which does take into account affects and identities, improve our understanding of the European “elitist bias”? Yes, indeed. However, this might not exactly go in the direction that Cautrès & Grunberg or Hooghe and Marks expected. What our focus groups’ analysis shows is not so much that less privileged people dislike the EU because they fear a loss of national identity and the breakup of the Welfare State. They do have these fears, but they are generally related to globalisation, not specifically to the EU. Regarding European integration, what distinguishes working class groups – and, to a lesser extent, white collars – is a dramatic absence of attention - of interest, but in the sense of being (not) interested in - based on the certainty that nothing can be done against it. Being in favour or not in favour of the EU is not actually a question for them, while it is a question for the managers and the activists.

Our research design was indeed very appropriate to include affects in the analysis of attitudes towards European integration; it has its drawbacks though. Not only was it quite difficult and costly to carry out (as explained in session one), and the data are quite difficult to interpret and handle; furthermore, a consequential disadvantage lies in the demonstration. Quotes of interviews are never a proof; the best they can do is to illustrate a point. It is even worse here, as participants’ arguments are seldom if ever complete, two or more points overlap most of the time and participants’ behaviour tells us as much as the words and sentences they pronounce. We tried to figure out diverse ways of showing what our narrative analysis and dynamic interpretation<sup>1</sup> told us about attitudes towards European integration in these groups. One of the solutions<sup>2</sup> we found that we will present in this paper is a specific analysis of the answers that participants worked out, in groups of two or three, to the question “Who profits from Europe?”. Section one will present this analysis, which shows the structure and content of opinions related to the distribution of EU benefits, and confirms the magnitude of social differences. Section two will elaborate on the basis of narrative analysis and fuel the interpretation of the European social gap.

## **Section one: Who profits from Europe?**

### *A. About the “Who profits from Europe?” exercise*

This was the third question in the schedule, but the first of the second session. It took place just after the break. Participants were told to group together by two or three. They received paper cards and markers and were asked to elaborate, within their sub-groups, about six answers to the question “Who profits from Europe?” (the question was not made posed before they were ready to work). Once they were finished (this took about 10 minutes in most groups), the moderator collected the cards, shuffled them and then posted them up on the board, one by one, waiting for participants’ comments that would, in turn, be written and displayed on the board. (See below an example of what a board, at the end of the session, looks like - the pink (or dark card in black and white print) cards were written by participants, the others by the moderator).

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief presentation of this analysis, see panel two paper : « National Framing Revisited ».

<sup>2</sup> An other one being the automatic (also sophisticated) content analysis provided by the software package Alceste. This was used in the second paper (panel two) to help account for national differences



Code	N	Examples
LIB	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, environnement, 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 <sup>4</sup>
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

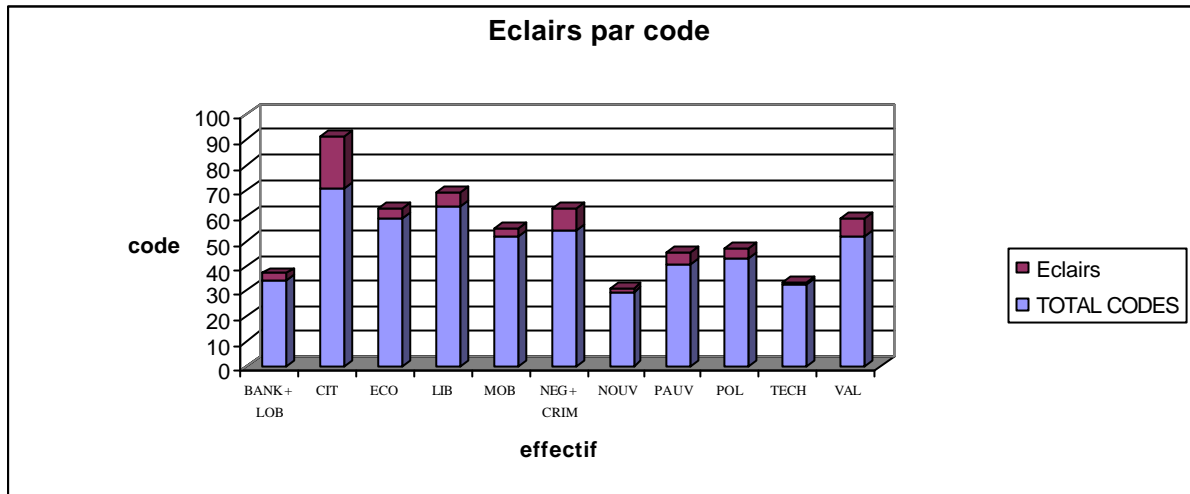
As such, these answers are not astonishing although, compared to clichés, the rarity of Brussels, for instance, or agriculture may be surprising. References to the economy were so numerous that we decided to distinguish between plain references and references that incorporate a size element, some reference to the “big business”, the world market, or capitalism in general. 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. What is more surprising, for us who are familiar with the discussions in these groups, is that the tone of these cards’ content is generally neutral or even positive. The strictly speaking negative cards are rather rare (18), and the ones referring to mafia and crime even more so (7)<sup>5</sup>. But the general tone of the discussion itself was far more sceptical and far less positive. This may first be considered a consequence of the question itself, which already includes a negative nuance<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, these cards were submitted, as the whole of the discussion, to the “flash” rule – that is, participants were expected to let the moderator know if they had any

<sup>4</sup> These cards were explicitly a “tribute” paid to the moderators ...

<sup>5</sup> In contrast with what we saw in panel 2.

<sup>6</sup> The question of what “profits” meant, and if it could be understood as “benefits” or not was often raised by the participants.

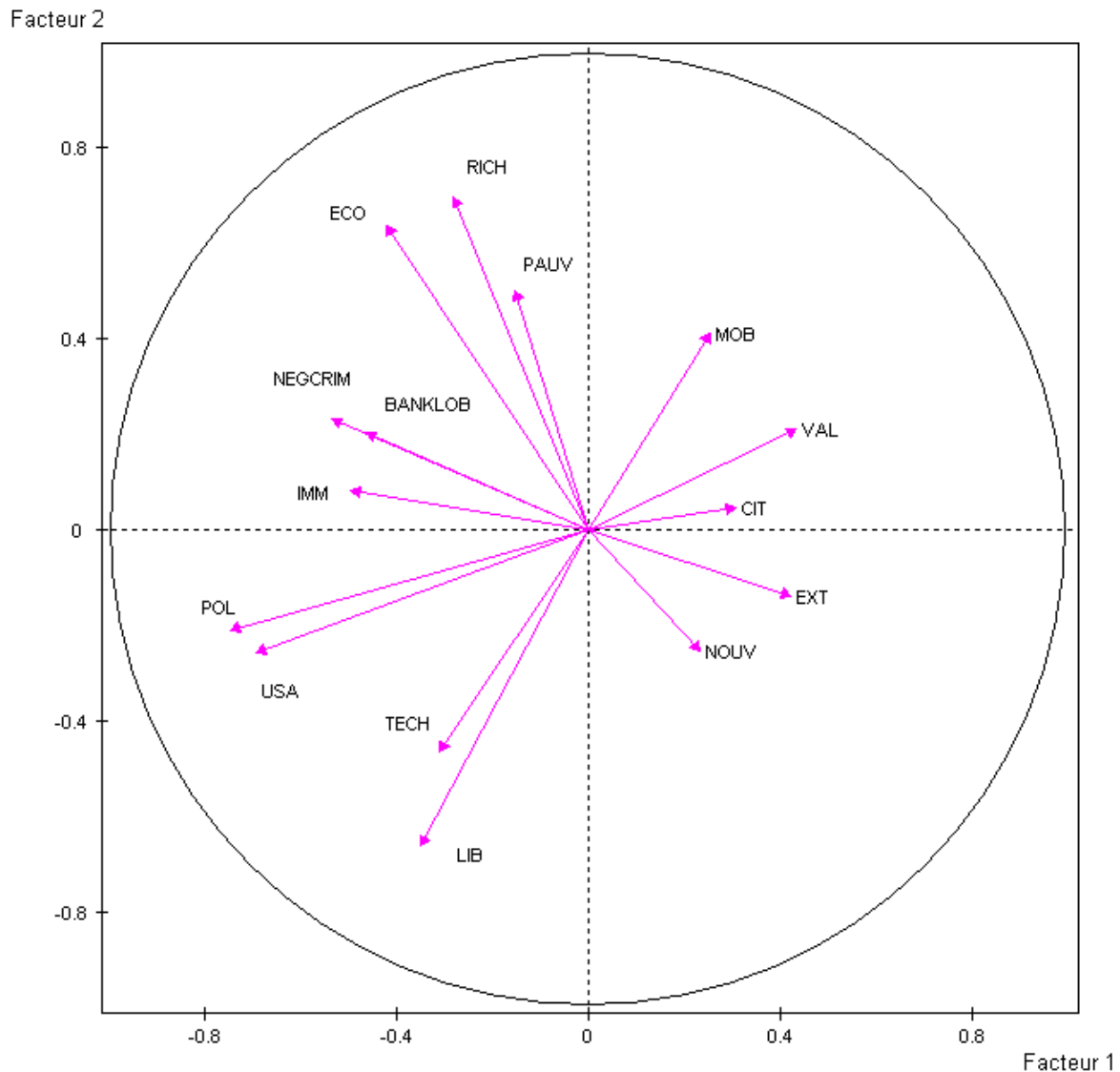
objection against a card put up on the boards. These cards, written directly by the participants, got flashed too, 63 times, that means, almost one in five (17,6%). The distribution of flashes shows that the most positive answers – CIT and VAL – were the most disputed, even more than the most negative ones (CRIM and NEG).



*C. An economically driven perspective of the EU:*

In order to get a overview of EU consequences as displayed by these answers, and to get a precise idea of how social categories fits into it<sup>7</sup>, we proceeded to a correspondence analysis – a principal component one.

<sup>7</sup> The number of answers per code does not allow meaningful simple crosstabulation.



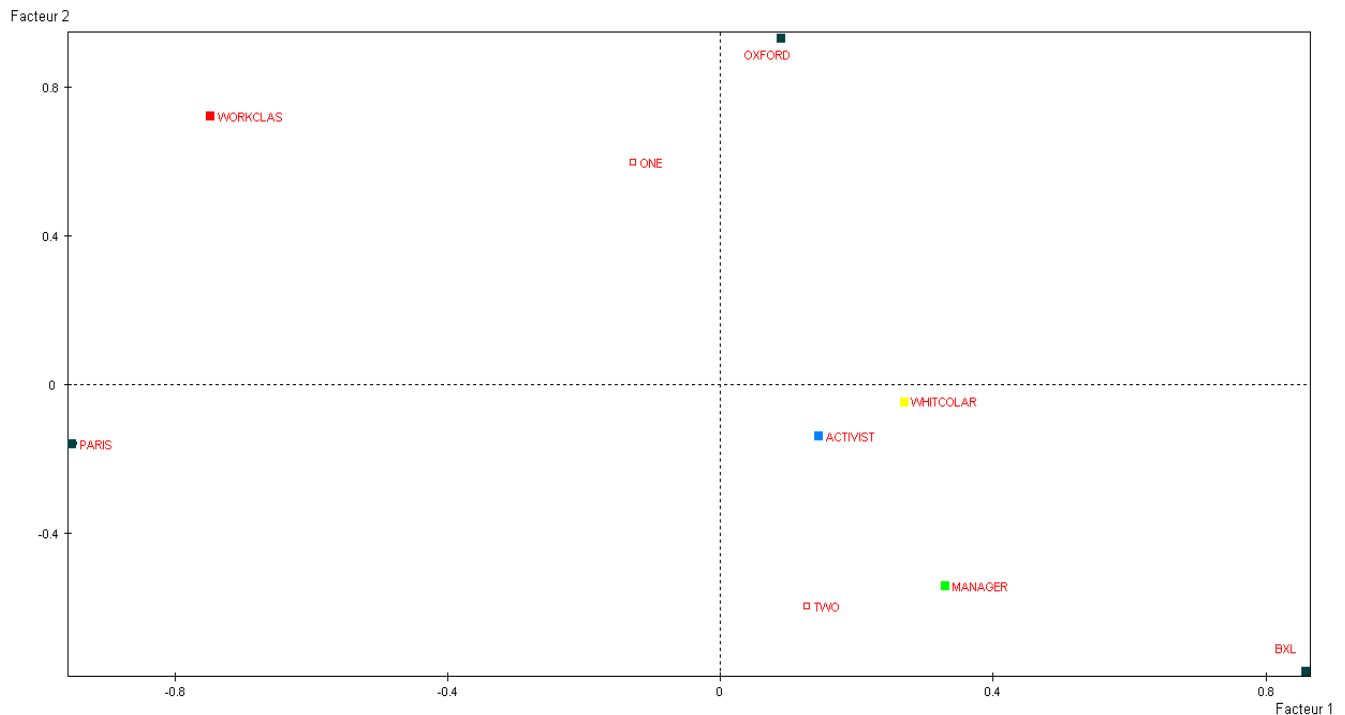
Two factors explain 35% of the variance (respectively 19.14% and 15.39%)<sup>8</sup>.

- The first factor opposes an economical and political concept of the EU to a concept more oriented towards value, mobility, equality and openness. A projection of the distribution of flashes between groups (as an illustrative variable) confirms that the latter conception, the valued one, is more contested see diagram in the annex)
- The second factor opposes, within the economical understanding of EU effect, groups by whom the economy is more conceived as driven by big businesses, technocrats and politicians, and in the benefice of the United States, and groups where the economy seems to have more autonomy but also less direction. In this latter case, things seem ambivalent, the economy is both beneficial (to poor countries and poor people as well as rich ones) and damaging (growth goes together with the increase of crime for instance). Immigration, as we hear in the discussions, embodies this ambivalence: it's

<sup>8</sup> 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.

both beneficial for the people who immigrate as they get a chance to avoid poverty, but this costs them a hard life, and damages the life of people in immigration countries because of the pressure on the labour market and the resulting low salaries.

Let's now have a look at projection of the illustrative variables<sup>9</sup>:



- This analysis confirms a strong national differentiation in the ways European integration is framed in the three countries – or the three cities. On one hand, Parisian groups display in comparison with the discussions recorded in Brussels a conception of Europe mainly oriented towards the economy, while our French speaking Belgian participants mentioned more often, even if this was to be debated, European values. On the other hand, Oxford participants share an understanding of European input into the economy which remains a free market, with its own dynamic, with brings Europeans growth and crime at the same time, and advantages competitively the rich and the poor; while the Brussels participants emphasize a EU political contribution to a globalized capitalism, for the benefice, amongst others, of the United States. This confirms the prevalence of national frames (analysed in session two) and reminds us that, as Cautrès and Grunberg put it, if social differences of opinions regarding European integration remain strong in all countries, the social bias operates within the countries. In this sense, national differences are first and social differences second.
- However<sup>10</sup>, the diagram shows a clear differentiation between working class groups and others. Working class groups' representations of EU consequences are much more embedded than others in an economical perspective, that does not offer much

<sup>9</sup> The projection of the individuals – namely here, the groups – is displayed in annex. It shows the influential role of two Parisian groups – a working class and a managers' – in the distribution.

<sup>10</sup> We will not comment on the difference between the two families of focus groups, although it is obviously very effective. We consider it a confirmation of our analysis strategy, which consists of focusing the interpretative analysis on the first family, whose comparability is much better. The second part of this paper will be limited to family one.

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 integration that leaves room for political action. In this second opposition, white collars are, like activists, somehow in-between working class groups and managers.

As we said in introduction, this "Who profits from Europe?" cards' analysis was meant to provide some kind of "objectification" of social differences between groups, a way to display, to show, in the primary sense, results that proceed quite dramatically from our narrative analysis. It is quite congruent with the preceding paper on national differences as it shows how much the EU is overwhelmingly apprehended through its economic impact, and that this is far from being in positive terms. Part of this is because it is largely confused or even dissolved into a broader perception of globalization. Let's try to give some elements of this now, in order to rephrase the so-called European "elitist bias".

## **Section two: The Unequal Strength of the European Cleavage...**

Let's be blunt: our design was meant to measure or record the saliency of European attitude by observing 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. But this did not happen on European topics.

A. *How our design did work with working class and whits collar groups*  
We carefully designed the scenario and carefully selected the participants in order to prepare for conflict between Eurosceptics and Europhiles, as we intended to record what would be at the core of their disagreement, the strong, intense, deeply grounded arguments between them.

- 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. But 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 and white collar groups, quite a lot of non response) that we gathered, in each group, people of diverse opinions on that matter.
- The first session of the discussion was meant as a warm up and an opportunity for participants to identify others' opinions, particularly on European topics. "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 or becoming Europeans. The second question, 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. We thought that after this one hour and a half discussion, we should, 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 with or antagonism to 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 the Oxford groups, or by sidetracking, as in Paris groups – or they basically agreed – as in Brussels groups: Europe will be (may be, but who can tell) nice in the future.
- We had thought that, after the break, we would be able to form pairs or groups of three participants according to the views they had expressed on European issues. We wanted to put together participants who were closest in this respect, in order to have the sub-groups writing cards that would be much contrasted and would facilitate conflictualisation<sup>11</sup>. But most of time, we just could not tell, from the first session, which pairs would be appropriate for this. Having the questionnaires in hand hardly helped, as the views expressed in the discussion seemed only loosely related to former answers. We thus kept hesitating between asking the participants to choose with whom they would work after the break – 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 – 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 from the activists groups where it worked quite well. We could put up on the board opposed or even antagonistic answers – as some cards do correspond to the quite provocative tone of the question – and get flashes. However, 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 affect and openly expressed disagreement. But not on Europe. Be it by side tracking, or because the questions and our moderation technique, inspired by non-directive approach, allowed it, participants got to conflict on important issues: immigration and welfare (how many 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 European and former colonial countries responsible for poverty in ex-colonies, and 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? These questions never generated strong feelings nor conflict in our groups – apart from the activists.
- In comparison, the next question on Turkey’s entry did produce a large amount of conflict. Disagreement referred to human and women’s rights, secularisation and Islam, immigration again, and geo-strategic issues. How far can enlargement go – in

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<sup>11</sup> We even imagined that participants would choose spontaneously to work with the people who had similar views.

the sense of: how many countries might enter the EU without putting it at risk, as a political system – was never an issue. It was mentioned, but not debated.

*B. Europe is not an issue for all: Brief recapitulation by category*

What results from this analysis is that the difference between working class and white collar' groups on the 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 there are differences in their representations of the EU – although both are true, these differences exist. What is most striking is that European integration is not an issue for working class and white collars' groups while it is matter of debate and openly expressed disagreement for managers and activists.

Why is this so? Because for working class and whites collar' participants, the EU is there. They don't know why, and hardly know what it is, but it's 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 prevent things from getting worse. But they do not identify it either as a particular source of nuisance compared to what really damages society: constant change (newcomers, job market), the failure of political elites (that nobody trusts), and globalisation. In comparison, managers and activists do discuss Europe as an issue, and suggest different possibilities regarding the future of integration.

We said it is difficult to “prove”, to demonstrate with such groups. It is even worse when the point is to demonstrate that something is not, to prove an absence. Let's briefly go through the groups by category:

- Working class groups: what characterise all of them, is the expression of a feeling of been dominated. British participants 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 don't count for anything: they are just numbers, dots they say, while commenting of the general disaffection from 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 financiers”). 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 doubt that, no disagreement follows.
- White collar groups: although they seem more receptive to some positive elements of the European project, in term 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; and 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 collar participants 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 profits from Europe?" question and they clearly indicate that they said what they were told to believe. But they consider that the current price for the EU is high and they have to pay. Although they are all quite young, they mention future generations who will have become European because they would have been made so – they compare this process to a chip that will have been incorporated in younger generations.

- 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 others about 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.

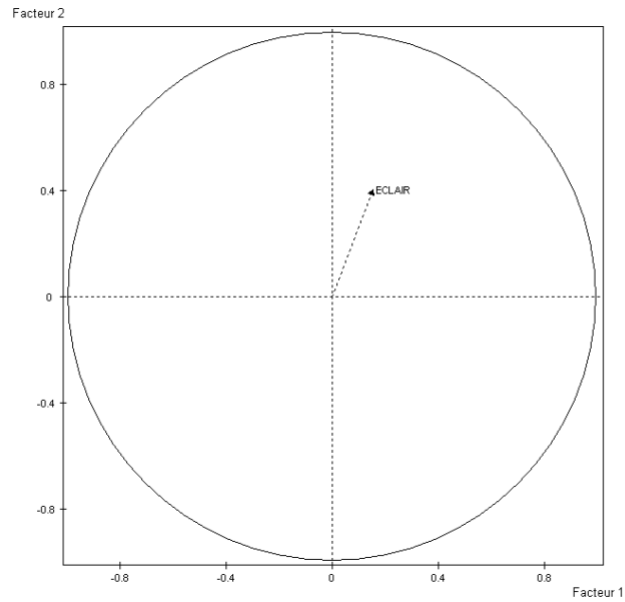
### **Conclusion: rephrasing the social gap.**

Although it is difficult to show, this research project confirms the enduring national and social differences regarding attitudes toward integration. In the latter case, the most striking is not that working class and white collars' groups are more Eurosceptic than the managers and the activists; the difference lies more particularly in the way European integration is an issue for the latter and not for the former. If our hypothesis was correct – the fact that conflictualisation in these groups would allow us to record salience of opinions – we find that working class participants and white collars do not particularly like or dislike the EU; they undergo it. And in many respect, they seem to suffer less from it than from many other changes that are underway, and in particular globalisation.

Annexe:

Correspondence analysis of the “who profits from Europe?” cards.

1/ Projection of the number of flashes on these cards per groups (illustrative variable)



2/ Projection of the individuals:

