

Attitudes towards the welfare state and patterns of solidarity in Austria

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Mixed methods study 2018



PART I: Attitudes towards the welfare state in Austria

- **based on European Social Survey (Round 8)**
 - periodic and representative opinion survey (cross section)
 - captures living conditions and attitudes of people in Europe
 - face-to-face interviews 2016/2017 (15 years and above)
 - Austrian sample: n=2.010



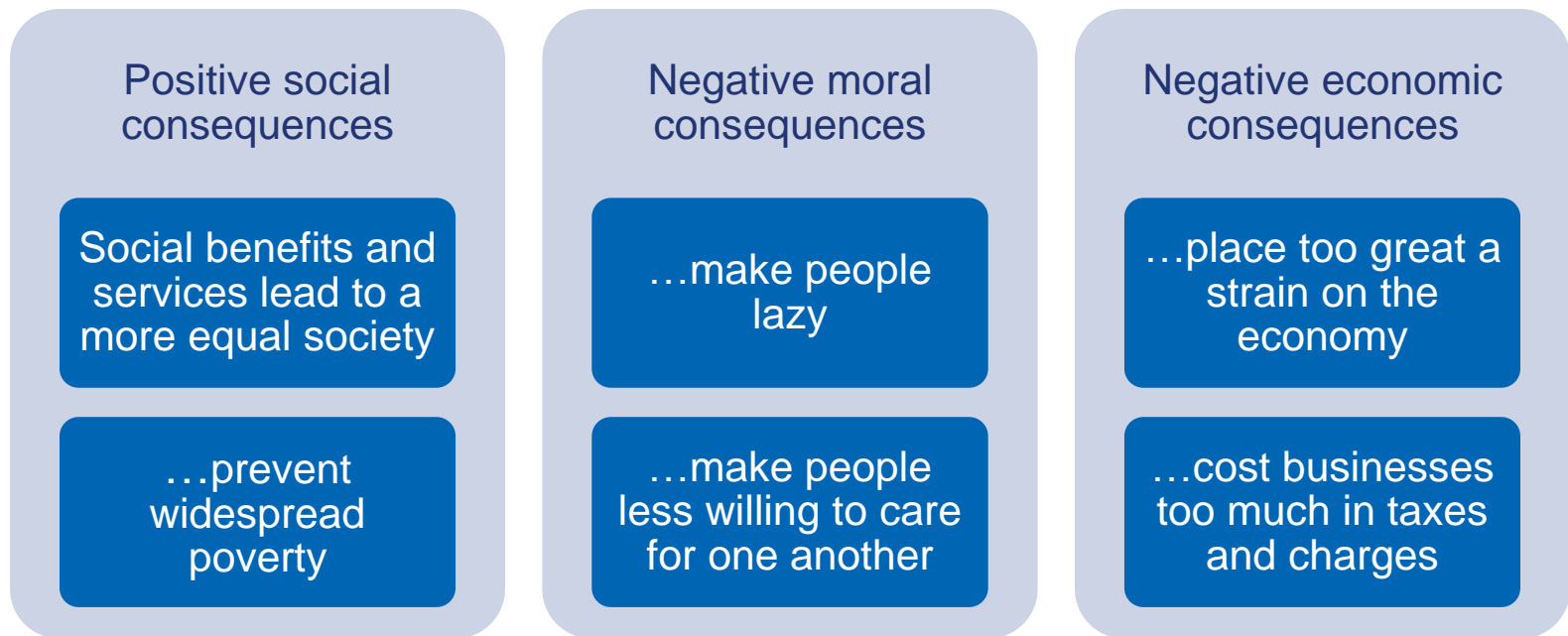
PART II: Working conditions and welfare state attitudes in three (more rural) regions

- **based on company case studies with 40 semi-structured interviews**

Part I: ESS Data

Attitudes towards the welfare state

- are captured in form of the consequences people associate with social benefits and social services:



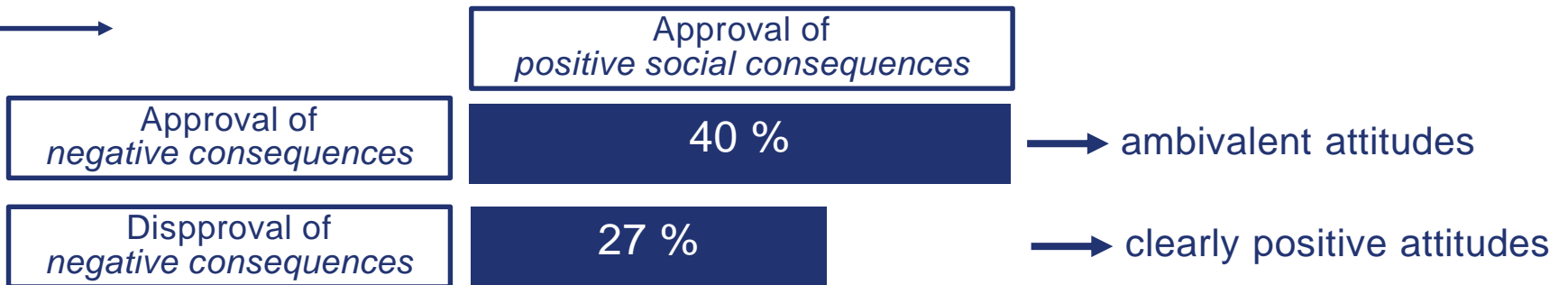
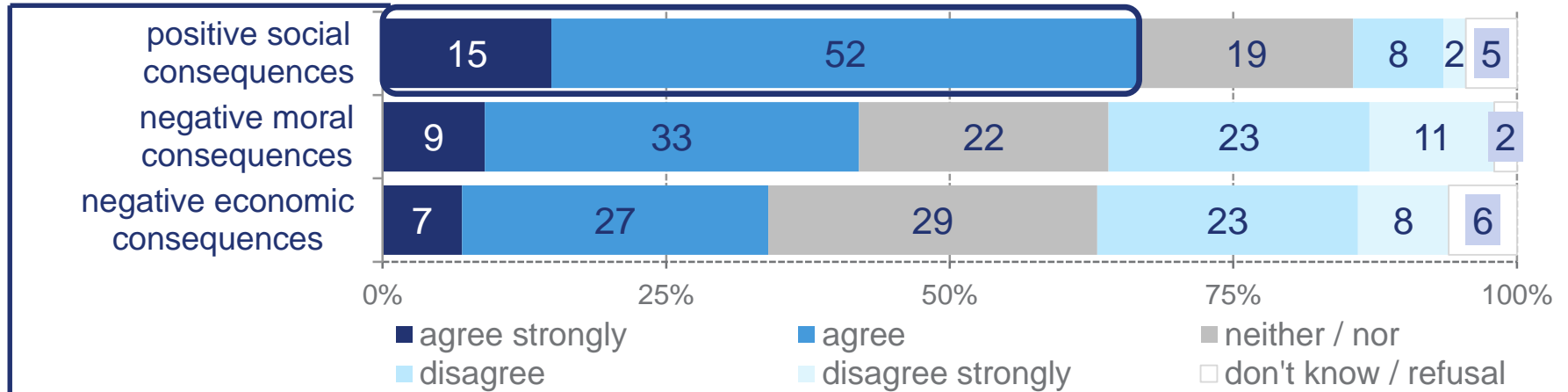
Method: Principal Axis Factoring with Oblim Rotation

Positive social consequences: factor loadings .711 / .719; Cronbach's Alpha .75

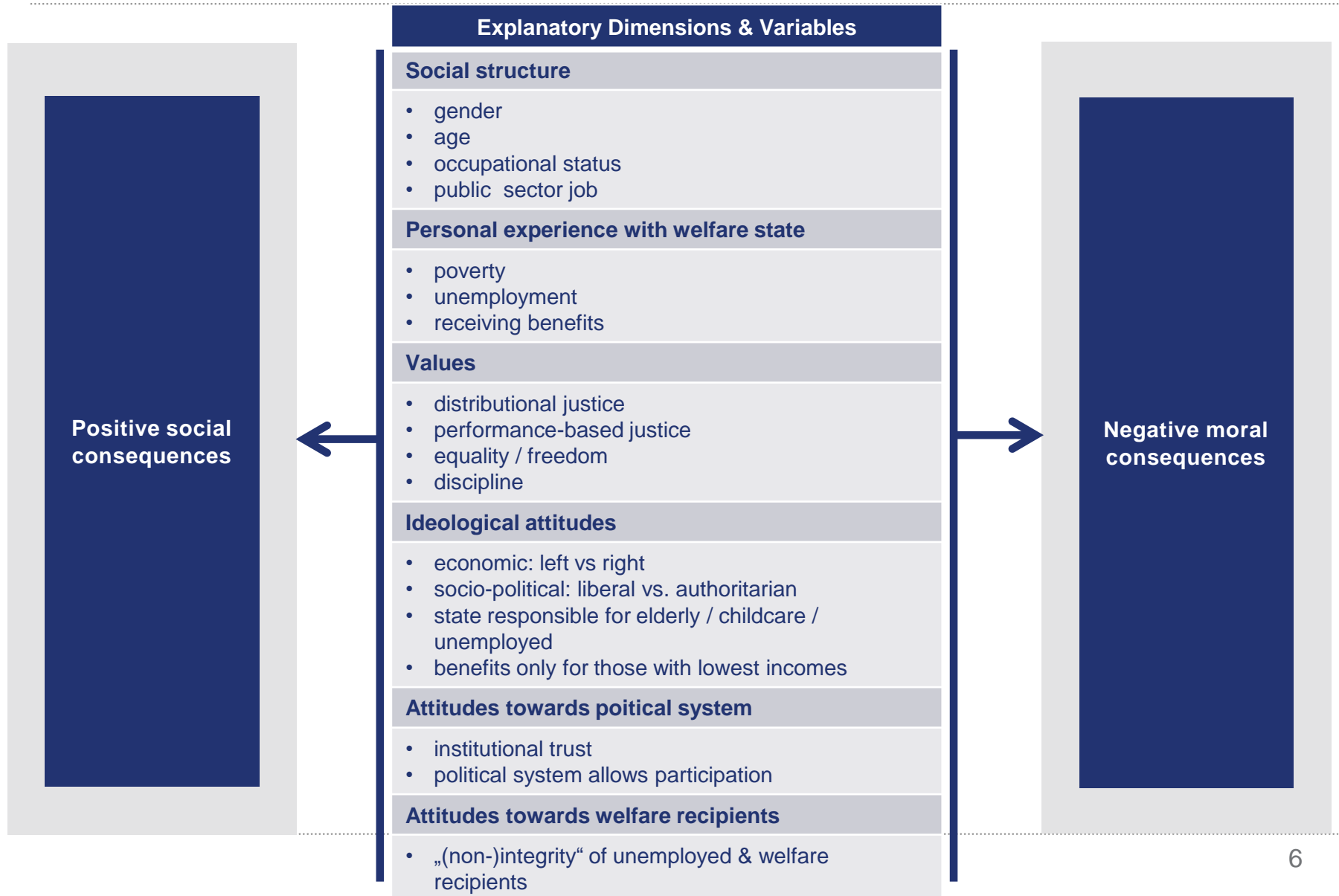
Negative moral consequences: factor loadings .842 / .824; Cronbach's Alpha .79

Negative economic consequences: factor loadings .762 / .757; Cronbach's Alpha .73

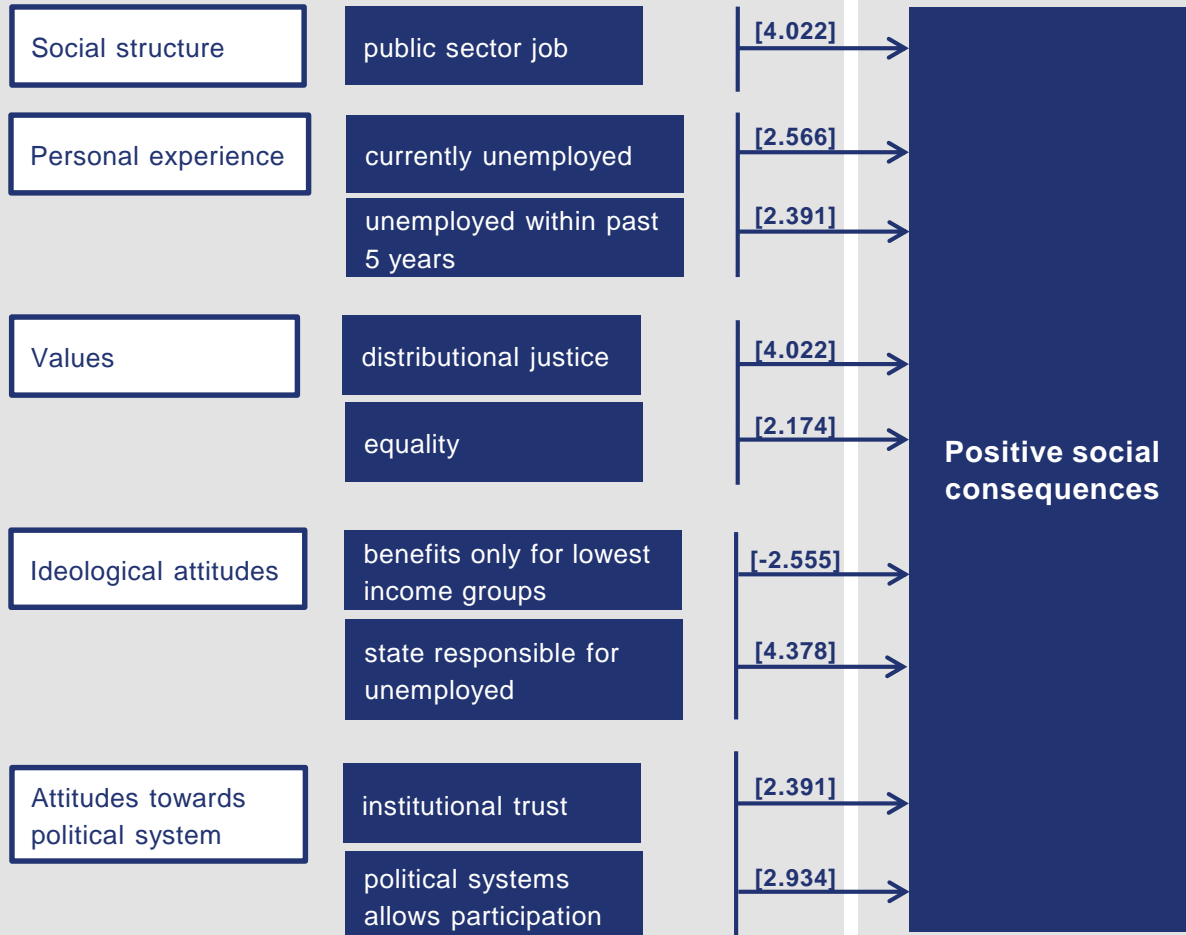
Approval of *positive social consequences* is crucial for legitimacy of the welfare state



Explaining individual differences in attitudes towards the welfare state



Positive social consequences are reinforced by

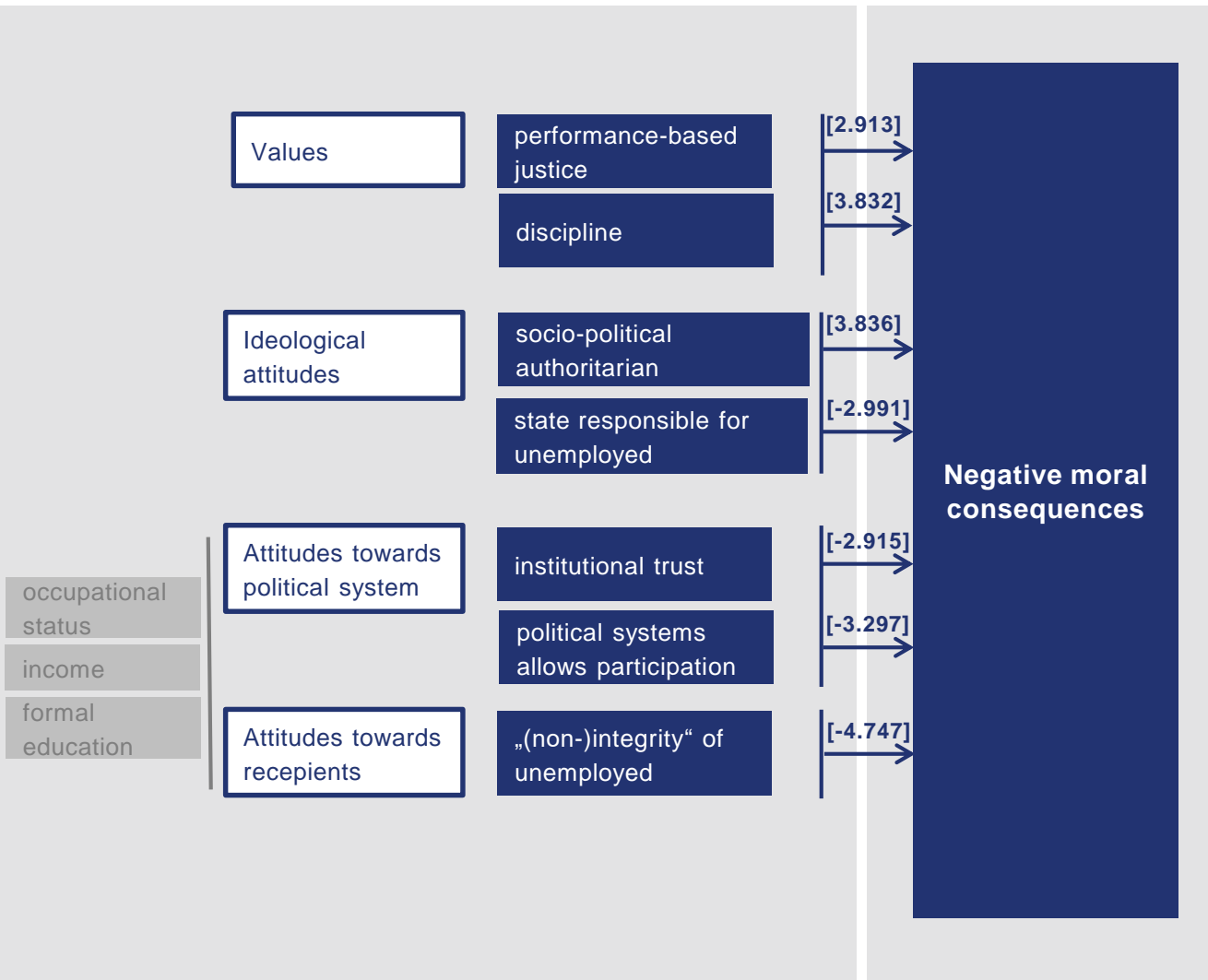


- **overall positive relation to the state:**
 - trust in its institutions
 - included in political processes
 - state is important for shaping living conditions & balancing unequal opportunities
- **experiences with reliable welfare state in times of crisis**
- **basic values** concerning
 - distributional justice
 - equality

Method: Stepwise Multiple Linear Regression, $R^2=.32$

Note: Figure shows significant effects and their standardized regression coefficients.

Negative moral consequences are reinforced by



- overall ambiguous relation to the state:
 - low trust in its institutions
 - exclusion from political processes
 - state is important for shaping living conditions & balancing unequal opportunities – but not for everyone:
- negative attitudes towards different groups
- basic values
 - performance-based justice
 - discipline
- ⇒ **deserving vs. non-deserving groups**
- status preservation

Method: Stepwise Multiple Linear Regression, $R^2=.36$

Note: Figure shows significant effects and their standardized regression coefficients.

Part II: Semi-structured interviews in companies in three regions

Focus on welfare state attitudes in rural regions, due to...

- population dynamics, public infrastructures (e.g. kindergarten, transport, medical services...)
- dynamics of labour markets, business structures, patterns of qualifications and occupations
- degrees of conservatism, i.e. acceptance of diversity vs. hostility to foreigners / refugees (documented in electoral behaviour)
- moral foundations (achievement, equality, welfare, vested interests)
- scope of fairness principles (universal vs. particularistic)
- direct vs. indirect patterns of solidarity (e.g. voluntary firefighters vs. payments to insurance)
- degrees of company loyalty vs. working class solidarity
- ...

Case study regions Waldviertel, St. Pölten, Liezen

Northern Waldviertel districts (forest quarter)

- periphery in Lower Austria, next to Czech Republic
- declining population, withdrawal of “the state“ (shops, pubs, schools, medical practitioners, public institutions...)
- limited labour market with craft sectors, small trade, services

Liezen district

- alpine region in Styria, large tourism sector (hotspot Schladming)
- quite stable population

St. Pölten district

- central region in Lower Austria (50 kilometers to Vienna)
- growing population with expanded infrastructures, growing labour market with dominance of service sectors

Focus on companies with medium-qualified workforce

6 companies, 2 in each region

+1.000: Retail trade, patient care (in each company one subsidiary)

+100: wood processing, food production

<100: hotel business, event management

40 interviews

- gender: 22 men, 18 women

- employment status:

 - 34 employees (including management staff)

 - 2 self-employed / company owners

 - 4 additional interviews with unemployed persons

- qualifications:

 - 18 with A-levels (Matura), some with university degree

 - 22 with apprenticeship, some without vocational training

Topics in problem-centered qualitative interviews

- basic data
- previous working biography
- current working conditions
- labour market perspectives (especially in home region)
- level of knowledge on labour market instruments and public services
- attitudes towards labour market policies and welfare state issues

Empirical Insights (1/3)

Company loyalty vs. working class habitus

“We are about 120 employees, but the familial spirit is still there. The boss invites you to a barbecue once a year, in his garden, and there’s a Christmas party anyway. Solidarity and humanity are at the forefront.” (male, employee, production sector)

“Sure, the rich people just pay too little tax. They have all the advantages from which they can benefit, with the help of tax advisors. A man like me can't afford that. They should pay more tax, because they also use the entire infrastructure.” (male, employee, service sector)

Empirical Insights (2/3)

High, medium and low approval of welfare state (solidarity, reciprocity, market principles)

“Who else is supposed to do it than those who earn well. Either we have solidarity or not. If we live in a welfare state, then the money has to come from someone. And then those who earn more money have to pay for that.” (female, employee, service sector)

“Everyone has to pay into a pot. And if you want to get something out of the pot, you have to deposit something. It’s not possible for anyone to never pay in and not feel the need to work.” (male, employee, service sector)

“If I am looking for a sales manager in Austria, then it’s useless to talk to the labour market service (AMS).” (male, business owner, production sector)

Empirical Insights (3/3)

Universal vs. particularistic attitudes towards welfare state (statements on unemployed people, migrants/refugees)

“It’s okay to help these people, so that they have a good start. They are refugees. And a refugee is fleeing from something, so you should focus on ending that. I don't understand that at all why everyone is so nervous because of the refugees.” (male, employee, service sector)

“You always go to work, you make sure that everything fits well. Then you get unemployed, maybe for a stupid reason and then you get 900 Euros. Every foreigner, every refugee who comes in ... everything is put into his ass, he doesn't need to do anything. That's something that annoys me so much.” (female, employee, production sector)

Differences towards welfare state approval along...

▪ **Qualifications**

- persons with medium qualifications (e.g. apprenticeships) hold quite similar positions → reciprocity as balance of contributions to and utilization of social security benefits
- people with higher (and lower) qualifications show more differences, from more universal positions (“solidarity“) to more economic arguments (“market“)

▪ **Occupations** (branch of industry)

- employees in service sectors (e.g. tourism, retail, leisure services) show more reflexivity towards universal welfare principles, i.e. acceptance that unemployed or foreigners should get social security benefits (→ contact hypothesis)

▪ **Regions**

- in prospering region St. Pölten more openness to “share“ welfare services compared to the rural northern Waldviertel; while the latter criticises the withdrawal of the state (due to the shrinking population)

Conclusion

- large majority appreciates welfare state principles and instruments; only a small minority where negative arguments prevail (too expensive, too few benefits for me...)
- level of knowledge on labour market issues differs remarkably, due to experiences (e.g. of unemployment, as recruiter...)
- 2 ideal types – that capture more than 2/3 of respondents

„Solidarity“ – high approval to welfare state	„Reciprocity“ – medium approval to welfare state
redistribution, social compensation	insurance principles (≠ pure market based exchanges)
support for deprived people more or less unconditional (unemployed, also migrants / refugees)	support for deprived people linked to willingness to work and / or other modes of giving back benefits
actors to ensure solidarity: state, public institutions, workers' representation	actors to ensure reciprocity: individual, community, company (as family)

Final suggestions based on results

- one should recognise “reciprocity“ compared to the higher standard of (universal) solidarity, as it’s the position of the majority (at least in rural regions)
- ideals of universal solidarity (i) were always troublesome for (national based) labour unions; (ii) are hard to realise in more and more heterogeneous societies
- “solidarity“ or “fairness“ are hollow without specific programme / content, i.e. can be exploited quite easily by political actors (i.e. populist parties)

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