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Social capital in Iceland: the exception to the (Nordic) rule?

Cross-national surveys have shown that the four Nordic countries Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark stand out with high scores of social trust compared to other nations. Meanwhile, trust scores for Iceland, the fifth Nordic country, have always been much lower and more often along the line of Anglo-Saxon nations. Research has pointed to social, cultural and political factors in explaining high levels of social trust and social capital. These factors are often considered to be characteristic for the Scandinavian countries and include: high levels of associational memberships, egalitarian societies and relatively homogeneous populations, Lutheran traditions, as well as

public confidence in government institutions and the welfare system. Iceland shares very much the same cultural, socio-economic and political characteristics of the other Nordic countries, but, why does Iceland not share with them the same high levels of social trust?

The paper is devoted to an analysis of social capital in Iceland in Nordic and European contexts. A comparative analysis will reveal how social capital indicators for Iceland vary from the other Nordic countries, presumably providing an indication of why social trust levels in Iceland do not follow the Scandinavian trend. The paper concentrates on three theoretical frameworks of social capital: social trust and civic and social participation; social trust and confidence in public and government in-

stitutions and; social trust and equality. The analysis is based on data from the four waves of the European Values Study, from 1981 to 2008.