

Views on globalisation shaped less by education than we tend to think

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Globalization is a divisive issue in Western European societies, hotly disputed between people who are open to blurring the boundaries between nations and people who are resistant to doing so for fear of

losing their culture and their way of life. There is a correlation between level of education and the side of the divide that citizens are on. Sociologist Sander Kunst studied whether and how education contributes to views on European integration and immigration, the most significant topics associated with the divide. He concludes that our views are shaped less by education than we tend to think and that the parental environment exerts a marked influence. He will defend his Ph.D. thesis at the University of Amsterdam on Thursday 17 February.

In recent years, globalization has increasingly set groups in Western Europe in opposition to one another. The two most significant political topics of contention are immigration and European integration. There exists a strong correlation between level of education and the stance adopted by citizens. In that respect, the well-educated are more likely to be pro-immigration and pro-EU, whereas those with a lower level of education are more likely to be against. However, there is still a considerable lack of clarity on whether and how exactly education might bring about these differences of opinion. Sociologist Sander Kunst studied the education gap in views on globalization and concluded that differences in type or duration of education alone are insufficient to explain this gap between the well-educated and those with a lower level of education. "It may well be that the parental [environment](#) exerts a marked influence that cannot be completely undone by education."

Can views be molded by education?

Kunst tested two hypotheses about the possible influence of education level:

1. Views can be 'molded' and are susceptible to alteration through education
2. Experiences in early childhood and parents' level of education are decisive factors and children's views already differ even

before they start school. Children from well-educated families have a greater degree of exposure to positive ideas about immigrants and the EU and are more likely to end up reaching the highest levels of education.

Kunst started by analyzing whether views on immigration and European integration can be influenced and molded by education. He was unable to find any conclusive evidence for this. "This runs counter to the idea that the education system has the capacity to socialize students into espousing core democratic values, such as tolerance, pluralism and equality with an open, tolerant world view." What his analysis did show was that students of social studies are less likely to harbor anti-immigration views, though it also turned out that they held their current views prior to starting their course of study.

What influence does parental environment have?

The dearth of conclusive evidence for the [education system](#)'s socializing role prompted Kunst to turn his focus to the extent to which the parental environment's influence can be undone by education. He tested the degree to which people residing in 26 European countries and having a higher or lower level of education than their parents held on to views stemming from the parental environment or else moved away from these views to adapt to their new setting. He discovered a significant level of continued adherence to views associated with the social environment in which the holders of those views grew up. "Hence they cannot be completely undone by education." As Kunst sees it, parental environment can serve as a buffer and 'protect' people who reach a lower level of education than their parents from negative views on globalization. However, it can also act as a ceiling and have an inhibitory effect on the capacity of people who reach a higher level of education than their parents to become fully assimilated into their new environment.

What role do segregation and school environment play?

Finally, Kunst investigated the role played by school environment and segregation at school in perpetuating inequalities by parental background. "If children from particular groups are unevenly distributed across schools, then they are more likely to be surrounded by classmates with similar social and political views, potentially giving rise to opinion 'bubbles' comprising like-minded individuals."

Drawing on data on schoolchildren in six European countries, Kunst discovered that there was indeed a correlation between a lower level of diversity of social backgrounds within schools and a lower level of diversity of opinions on globalization. "Whereas students from privileged backgrounds are exposed to other students of a cosmopolitan bent and their cosmopolitan principles, adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds miss out on these opportunities and stimuli."

Education may not be the great leveler

Kunst concluded that the relationship between level of education and views on globalization is not causal by definition. "I did not find any conclusive evidence that education brings about a greater degree of support for European integration or immigration." This calls into question the notion that society can be molded by education. "Even though there is some correlation between level of education and views on globalization, I did not find any solid evidence that education is the sole factor shaping these views. Views are also shaped by the social environment one hails from and education cannot totally undo this." Kunst takes this to indicate that [education](#) may not be the 'great leveler' that can completely override the effect of people's social origins.

More information: Dissertation: Sander Kunst, 2022, 'The Educational Divide in Openness towards Globalisation in Western Europe'. Supervisor: Prof. H.G. van de Werfhorst. Co-supervisor: Dr T. Kuhn.

Defense: [www.uva.nl/content/evenementen ...
oSzB0JSoqJd5FDJBTfwQ](http://www.uva.nl/content/evenementen...oSzB0JSoqJd5FDJBTfwQ)

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