

Artículos / Articles

## The societal quality of southern European Mediterranean countries / *La calidad societal de los países mediterráneos del sur de Europa*

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### ABSTRACT

On the basis of extensive empirical data that the 72 focused composite indicators, making up the *System of Indices on the Quality of European Societies* (SIQES), provide on the 28 EU Member States, this paper analyses the *societal quality* of the Southern European Mediterranean countries, namely, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece, from a holistic, multidimensional and comparative perspective. First and foremost, it indicates the position of these Mediterranean countries in the European societal quality rankings. Secondly, after confirming that, in accordance with the *Five Europes Typology*, the Mediterranean countries form a distinctive cluster, it includes an analysis of their social characteristics, comparing them with those of the other four clusters. Thirdly, on the basis of the 14 societal quality domains included in the system, it offers a diagnosis by contrasting the societal quality of the Southern European Mediterranean countries with that of the rest of the EU Member States. This structural diagnosis, endogenous as well exogenous, offers a panoramic view of great importance to both social researchers and policymakers.

**Keywords:** social quality; quality of life; Mediterranean countries; Europe; composite indicators.

### RESUMEN

*En base a la amplia información empírica que sobre los 28 países de la UE aportan los 72 indicadores compuestos focalizados que componen el Sistema de Índices de Calidad de las Sociedades Europeas, este artículo analiza la calidad societal de los países mediterráneos del sur de Europa, Portugal, España, Italia y Grecia, desde un perspectiva holista, multidimensional y comparada. Primero, se ofrece el posicionamiento de los países mediterráneos en los rankings europeos de calidad societal. Segundo, tras comprobar que, de acuerdo con la Tipología de las Cinco Europas, los países mediterráneos forman un cluster propio, se analizan sus características sociales. Tercero, en base a los 14 dominios de calidad societal que incluye el sistema de índices, se ofrece un diagnóstico comparando la calidad de los países mediterráneos con la del resto de países europeos. Este diagnóstico estructural, tanto endógeno como exógeno, ofrece una panorámica de gran interés tanto para los investigadores sociales como para los responsables políticos.*

**Palabras clave:** igualdad social; calidad de vida; países mediterráneos; Europa; indicadores compuestos.

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this work is to analyse the societal quality of Southern European Mediterranean countries from a holistic, multidimensional and comparative perspective. A society can hardly be understood as a mere aggregation or juxtaposition of unconnected and independent elements. Rather, it is composed of frameworks of structured and structuring relationships. Societies are units that integrate, to greater or lesser extent, a series of factors, processes and institutions in a characteristic societal configuration. Thus, it is impossible to gain an understanding of any social phenomena, any problem affecting a society and the real impact of any policy implemented in it, without a minimum knowledge of its global configuration. In this sense, the *societal quality* of a country, viz. the combination of its *social quality* and the *quality of life* of its citizens, has to be studied as a structure of connected but independent areas and domains that, together, determine to what extent citizens live a *good life in a good society*.

Specifically, this paper aims to provide descriptive and empirical answers, with estimates based on a very large dataset, to two basic but fundamental questions for pondering on the social characterisation of any country: what level of societal quality have the Southern European Mediterranean countries attained? And what is the quality level of the domains making up their social structure? We are fully aware that a mere descriptive knowledge of reality does not entail its full explanation or comprehension. But we are also convinced that without sufficiently valid, reliable and robust empirical data, theoretical thinking can go astray, devising hypotheses and ideas far-removed from reality. In this sense, the intention of this study is to provide social researchers, policymakers and all those with an interest in getting to know the social reality of these countries, with an information matrix that helps them to reflect carefully on how to improve both the social quality of Mediterranean societies and the quality of life of their citizens.

The analysis performed here is based on data retrieved from the System of Indices on the Quality of European Societies (SIQES) (Bericat and Jiménez-Rodrigo, 2019), comprising 72 composite indi-

cators created by different institutions and social researchers. Each one of these indices measures the societal quality of the EU Member States in many different domains, such as child well-being, environment, gender inequality and democracy and governance. Specifically, the analysis employs the synthetic information provided by both the Societal Quality Index (SQI) and the Five Europes Typology created by Bericat (2019). Firstly, on the strength of the SQI estimates we will be able to identify the societal quality of the Southern European Mediterranean countries, in addition to the divides between them and the rest of the EU Member States. Secondly, in view of the multidimensional grouping that the Five Europes Typology offers, and after verifying that the Southern European Mediterranean countries form a distinctive group within the European Union (EU), it is possible to determine their characteristic social traits. In this sense, even though it is true that the classic typology of the three welfare regimes developed by G. Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) did not initially include the “Mediterranean type”, subsequent analyses (Ferrera, 1998; Boeri, 2002) have revealed many similarities between these countries (Bericat, 2019).

Both an analysis of the societal quality of the Southern European Mediterranean countries and an analytical assessment of the homogeneity or heterogeneity of their multidimensional domain structures have been performed by applying two complementary comparative frameworks, namely, external or exogenous and internal or endogenous. The former is obtained by comparing societal quality levels in Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece with EU averages, while the latter is established by comparing the quality levels of each one of their domains with respect to their own SQIs.

This analysis of the differences between exogenous and endogenous quality levels (deficits and surpluses) enables us to offer a diagnosis of overall and individual societal quality levels in the Southern European Mediterranean countries. It is evident that deep-seated structural, historical, economic, political and cultural frameworks underlie the realities revealed in the diagnosis of these countries that, as could not be otherwise, have their strengths and weaknesses. Their peripheral and marginal position in global power structures, the

time-honoured delay in their processes of economic modernisation and social development, their patterns of inequality and associated elitism and cronyism, and the Mediterranean culture itself, which is no longer hegemonic in relation to the models defining it, among others, are deep-seated structural problems.

In sum, the main strengths and weaknesses of these countries can be determined with sufficient clarity and rigour using this holistic, multidimensional and comparative approach. This will doubtless contribute to the design of more efficient policies both for addressing their weaknesses and resolving key social problems and for leveraging their main strengths and endogenous resources as a means of further enhancing their societal quality.

## THE SOCIETAL QUALITY INDEX OF THE EU MEMBER STATES

In order to lay the groundwork for the analysis, what follows are the results of a multidimensional index, designed by Bericat (2019), which will serve to gain a comprehensive and synthetic picture of societal quality levels in the EU Member States.

The SQI is based on a vast quantity of data gathered by the SIQES<sup>1</sup>, a system composed of a wide range of indices developed by different researchers and/or social institutions for the purpose of measuring different aspects of societal quality and quality of life in order to compare and monitor them over time. The system is divided into 14 different societal quality domains (see Table 1). Each one of its composite indicators is formed by between two and six dimensions which, in turn, contain between two and six simple indicators. The system provides estimates for the 28 EU Member States in 72 indices and in over 280 dimensions. The 72 focused composite indicators were selected by the members of the research team responsible

for creating the SIQES by applying strict methodological quality criteria (Bericat and Jiménez-Rodrigo, 2019).

The design and creation of the SIQES were inspired by the theoretical frameworks of two previous indicator systems. Firstly, it is based on the framework created by Heintz-Herbert Noll and his fellow researchers (Berger-Schmitt and Noll, 2000; Noll, 2002) to construct a pioneering system, that is, the European System of Social Indicators (ESSI), based on 14 vital domains and three major social challenges, *i. e.* quality of life, social cohesion and sustainable development. Secondly, it is grounded in the concept of *social quality* developed by Abbott and Wallace (2012) and van der Maesen and Walker (2005), based, in turn, on four strategic goals: social empowerment, social inclusion, socio-economic security and social cohesion (Bericat, Camarero and Jiménez-Rodrigo, 2019). Due to space limitations, it is impossible to offer a detailed description of the SIQES, the selection of composite indicators, the theoretical framework on which it is based, the design of the SQI or the Five Europes Typology. Those interested can find this information, together with the design, construction, rankings and scores offered by each one of the 72 indices in the book entitled, *The Quality of European Societies. A Compilation of Composite Indicators* (Bericat and Jiménez-Rodrigo, 2019).

The calculation of the SQI was based, first and foremost, on a transformation of the original scores for the composite indicators and, secondly, on an aggregation of the transformed scores. First of all, the scores of each index were normalised by applying the min-max transformation. The EU Member State with the highest quality level (max.) was assigned a value 100 and that with the lowest (min.), a value of 0. With these two references, the percentile rank—which defines the position of the rest of the countries on a scale from 0 to 100—was obtained. The societal quality of a country is higher the closer it is to 100 and lower the closer it is to 0. After calculating the percentile rank of each one of the 58 indices finally used to calculate the SQI, initially the arithmetic mean of all the indices forming part of each one of the system's 14 domains was estimated, thus obtaining the quality index of each domain. In a second phase, for

1 The SIQES is the result of a study performed by a large research team, led by Eduardo Bericat and financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness. CSO2012-35032: "Social quality in Europe. Design and development of composite indexes for the measurement and monitoring of the quality of European societies".

**Figure 1.** Ranking of the EU Member States according to their societal quality levels. Societal Quality Index (SQI). Percentile ranks (0-100).



Source: own elaboration.

calculating the general SQI the arithmetic mean of the quality indices of 13 domains was estimated<sup>2</sup> (Bericat, 2019).

The data provided by the SQI are highly relevant, for they show the position of the Southern European Mediterranean countries in the societal quality ranking with sufficient clarity and accuracy (Figure 1). Three important conclusions can be drawn from the data contained in this graph: firstly, that the societal quality of all the Mediterranean countries is lower than the EU average; secondly, that it is heterogeneous, insofar as they occupy different positions in the bottom half of the ranking of EU Member States with lower societal quality levels; and, lastly, that both their societal quality and quality of life are still far-removed from those of continental Europe and, above all, the Nordic states, thus leaving room for substantial improvement. In short, in the EU there is still a marked imbalance as regards societal quality, which seriously compromises social cohesion.

In Figure 1, which includes the score obtained by each country in the SQI, it can be observed that the arithmetic mean of quality levels in all the EU Member States, weighted according to their respective populations, is 52.9. This signifies, as already noted, that the societal quality of the Southern European Mediterranean countries is clearly lower than the EU average. Spain, with a percentile rank of 49.7, is the country with the highest level, followed by Portugal (42.9), Cyprus (42.7), Italy (41.6), Malta (39.3) and Greece (27.4). Accordingly, in the context of the EU it can be claimed that the Mediterranean countries, except for Greece, have intermediate societal quality levels, with percentile ranks ranging from 40 to 50 in the SQI. These data paint a new picture that contrasts with the cliché that the Mediterranean countries are bringing up the rear of the EU, which is plainly incorrect. However, the data confirm that their societal quality levels cannot, under no circumstances, be equated with those of the continental European countries, although the distance separating them is not insurmountable and future processes of approximation may lead to the much sought-after convergence. Finally, there are notable differences between the Mediterranean countries and the Central and Eastern Europe states (CEECs) in terms of societal quality, in favour of the former.

2 To calculate the general SQI, the “environment” domain was excluded due to the fact that it correlates negatively with the rest, for the greater the development of a country, the greater its environmental deterioration. However, environmental sustainability, a key societal quality domain, was included in the rest of the analyses.

A question frequently posed by analysts is whether the Southern European Mediterranean societies form a group of countries with common structural features. Without anticipating the analysis described in the following section, Figure 1 shows three different levels of societal quality, thus making it impossible to confirm that they form a totally consistent group. Spain would occupy the first level; Portugal, Cyprus, Italy and Malta, a fairly homogeneous second level; and Greece, the third. The difference between the SQIs of Spain and Italy is 8.1, and between those of Italy and Greece, 14.2. Thus, there is a considerable disparity between societal quality levels in Spain and Greece, equivalent to 22.3 points on the SQI scale. Nonetheless, since the Greek case is apparently an exception, it should be analysed in further detail. Perhaps its eastern location brings it closer to the Eastern European countries or maybe its unsuccessful process of modernisation (Bericat and Camarero, 2017), together with its recent economic crisis, intensified by the austerity policies and the financial adjustments implemented by the EU, have prevented it from converging at the same pace as the rest of the Mediterranean countries. The position of Italy, a country that, notwithstanding its high level of economic development, has moderate societal quality levels, is as remarkable as it is peculiar.

The room for improvement of even the Mediterranean country occupying the highest position in the ranking is considerable. The difference between Spain and Sweden, the country with the highest societal quality levels in the EU, is 34.6 points, *i. e.* a third of the scale. In the case of Italy, this increases to 42.7 and in that of Greece, to 56.9. Subsequently, it is urgent for the Southern European Mediterranean countries to design and implement adequate societal development strategies aimed at their convergence with those European countries with the highest societal quality levels. Even so, these strategies should be adapted to the nature of their societies, to their baseline societal situations and to their aspirations and social resolve. In this respect, it is important to take into account that there is a cultural trend—even reflected in the statistics currently available—to design quality indicators better adapted to the societal performance

of the Nordic and continental countries. The Nordic states, as was the case with the Mediterranean countries in other historical periods, currently constitute a paradigm and utopian goal with regard to societal quality. However, just as any light casts a shadow, so too any utopia has its grey areas.

Finally, Table 1 shows the societal quality indices of the 28 EU Member States in each one of the 14 domains of the SIQES, as well as their general SQIs. The data contained in this table enables us to conduct a detailed study on the societal quality of the Southern European Mediterranean countries, discovering, by comparison, both the peculiarities of each country and those of the cluster as a whole. The analysis and interpretation of these data are complex tasks, for which reason in the following three sections we will implement a number of strategies that will allow us to gain a better understanding of both the general framework and the precise picture.

## THE TYPOLOGY OF THE FIVE EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN CLUSTER

When characterising the Southern European Mediterranean countries, first and foremost it is essential to know whether, in terms of their societal quality levels and distribution, they form part of a cluster that is relatively homogeneous and distinguishable from others in the EU.

The Five Europes Typology offers an answer to this question. With the aim of determining whether the EU Member States can be grouped in terms not only of their general SQIs, but also of the quality levels of all their domains, a hierarchical clustering analysis was performed on the data matrix shown in Table 1. After identifying all the different possible solutions, it was considered that the most socially and politically relevant model, as well as the most optimal in terms of scientific parsimony and precision, was that which classified all the EU Member States in five clusters (Bericat, 2019).

The construction of this typology, unlike others such as the classic typology developed by Esping-Andersen to classify welfare regimes, was not essentially inspired by the inference of types on the basis of a preselected theoretical framework.

**Table 1.** The societal quality of the EU Member States. General SQI\* and domain quality levels\*\*.

Country	CLUSTER	RANKING	ICS	Quality of life	Subjective well-being	Social participation	Culture and innovation	Democracy and governance	Consumption	Quality of work	Social equality	Gender equality	Child well-being	Well-being of the elderly	Health conditions	Crime and safety	Environment
Sweden	1	1	84.3	97.4	77.7	87.5	79.1	92.0	68.1	66.6	98.0	89.2	81.5	100.0	75.4	83.2	72.2
Denmark	1	2	82.3	93.1	100.0	83.0	78.4	96.6	73.0	86.5	88.7	73.1	70.3	84.2	60.4	82.1	52.9
Holland	1	3	79.2	83.1	71.7	72.3	82.7	85.7	63.2	69.9	94.2	70.3	99.5	87.9	72.6	76.5	27.0
Finland	1	4	78.7	88.2	82.3	47.1	79.5	91.5	80.1	62.3	92.6	87.3	77.1	75.5	72.1	87.9	73.6
Austria	2	5	66.9	77.1	75.3	32.1	58.6	86.1	74.9	51.6	91.3	41.2	62.7	66.5	70.9	81.8	58.3
Germany	2	6	66.5	75.4	62.9	40.9	56.7	76.4	80.8	39.9	84.5	61.4	70.7	79.2	65.4	70.9	51.7
Luxembourg	2	7	65.8	70.6	74.8	46.2	45.4	79.7	88.6	66.2	91.3	35.0	64.5	65.1	69.2	59.3	46.5
Belgium	2	8	63.5	70.6	61.9	37.2	54.0	69.7	66.8	50.7	77.7	66.9	60.2	54.6	79.4	75.2	18.8
United Kingdom	2	9	62.3	65.5	55.5	28.8	78.8	68.6	71.3	63.2	72.7	49.6	48.0	83.5	59.2	65.7	49.6
Ireland	2	10	60.8	71.8	69.1	39.7	66.5	60.9	55.1	50.3	48.9	51.2	65.6	73.9	65.2	72.3	54.4
France	2	11	58.4	65.9	50.8	32.3	66.5	51.6	65.9	41.9	83.9	58.0	54.0	67.0	72.4	49.6	40.8
Slovenia	3	12	51.6	54.9	45.9	30.2	44.3	48.2	50.8	41.2	83.6	56.5	69.9	43.3	44.3	57.6	56.5
Spain	3	13	49.7	53.8	59.5	26.2	50.3	42.7	38.0	37.9	58.7	46.2	60.3	50.5	62.8	59.8	47.9
Czech Republic	3	14	45.4	51.5	44.1	10.6	35.0	42.1	40.9	30.1	91.2	25.9	49.8	58.3	56.2	53.9	58.1
Portugal	3	15	42.9	37.3	39.1	27.3	27.7	47.9	41.9	33.4	51.5	43.7	43.8	43.7	57.9	62.6	61.1
Estonia	3	16	42.2	41.4	27.8	13.8	56.4	47.3	35.6	41.5	70.0	38.0	44.9	57.6	36.7	38.0	57.8
Cyprus	3	17	42.7	38.0	53.2	20.3	12.5	48.4	53.5	41.4	61.8	16.9	76.8	50.5	48.8	32.3	57.5
Italy	3	18	41.6	48.8	48.0	30.1	37.9	27.4	45.3	32.5	59.2	24.0	39.8	45.3	65.3	36.7	46.2
Malta	3	19	39.3	32.0	48.7	30.2	24.2	45.9	49.7	42.7	58.4	10.8	44.7	36.2	74.9	12.2	29.6
Poland	4	20	37.9	39.1	41.2	14.2	28.6	36.3	30.1	35.6	65.2	36.4	36.7	36.6	32.0	60.7	45.1
Slovakia	4	21	34.3	39.6	32.1	19.8	21.7	36.6	40.1	31.1	72.9	19.2	41.7	17.6	32.7	41.0	72.8
Lithuania	4	22	31.1	36.4	31.7	5.7	26.3	35.4	38.7	34.8	45.5	41.1	22.6	29.6	31.6	25.0	61.0
Hungary	4	23	28.8	32.6	17.5	3.6	24.9	29.2	27.6	29.4	47.7	26.6	39.8	31.6	31.2	32.4	53.2
Latvia	4	24	28.7	23.2	18.3	4.8	32.2	34.1	35.8	44.1	26.0	50.2	22.7	41.6	15.7	24.9	76.3
Greece	4	25	27.4	31.2	19.4	24.5	20.7	13.5	38.9	21.0	38.6	18.3	38.6	12.4	61.5	17.6	50.3
Croatia	4	26	26.6	19.9	47.0	33.2	16.2	16.7	8.4	28.8	48.8	12.0	19.9	30.6	37.8	26.6	52.3
Bulgaria	5	27	17.7	8.5	12.1	12.0	8.9	3.5	6.9	28.3	3.2	50.4	15.5	32.6	33.5	15.2	52.2
Rumania	5	28	15.4	7.6	29.6	11.5	8.8	3.0	12.8	24.0	12.1	19.1	6.5	33.1	6.3	26.4	47.1
Total unweighted			49	51.9	49.9	30.9	43.7	50.6	49.4	43.8	64.9	43.5	51.0	53.2	53.3	51.0	52.5
Total weighted			52.9	57.8	52.5	31.6	51.7	52.2	55.2	42.7	69.4	47.0	52.5	60.6	58.7	56.4	48.3

Source: own elaboration.

\* Arithmetic mean of the percentile ranks of the first 13 domains. \*\* Arithmetic mean of the percentile ranks of the composite indicators included in each domain.

Rather, the Five Europes Typology is the result of an inductive process employing a vast quantity of empirical data on the 28 EU Member States<sup>3</sup> pertaining to the concept of societal quality. Also, unlike Esping-Andersen's typology and those of other authors, mainly based on relevant but specific features of the social structure, the Five Europes Typology is of a multidimensional and comprehensive nature, for it classifies the countries in terms of a broad set of domains, indices, dimension and indicators. Finally, it should be stressed that the classification provided by this typology is consistent with many other scientific efforts to gain insights into the diversity of social, cultural, economic or political structures in Europe. From these endeavours a key idea has emerged that the EU is far from being a socially homogeneous political unit. This obliges us to bear in mind its basic social diversity when designing or implementing any EU policy. This basic diversity should also be taken into consideration in any study of European social reality.

According to the Five Europes Typology, whose geographical distribution is shown in Map 1, it is obvious that the Southern European Mediterranean countries do indeed form part of a specific cluster. Cluster 3 differs from Cluster 1, comprising the Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland and Denmark) and Holland; from Cluster 2, formed by the European continental countries (Austria, Germany, Belgium, Luxemburg and France) and the western islands (United Kingdom and Ireland); from Cluster 4, comprising the Central and Eastern European countries (Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Hungary, Latvia and Croatia) and Greece; and from Cluster 5, made up of Bulgaria and Rumania. In short, apart from Greece, the rest of the Southern European Mediterranean countries (Spain, Italy, Portugal, Malta and Cyprus) do form part of the same group.

Cluster 3 is a hybrid group that, in addition to the Mediterranean countries, also includes three CEECs, namely, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Estonia. Although this is not the place to offer an explanation for this mixed group, two fundamental facts should indeed be noted. First of all, that they have the wherewithal to reach similar societal

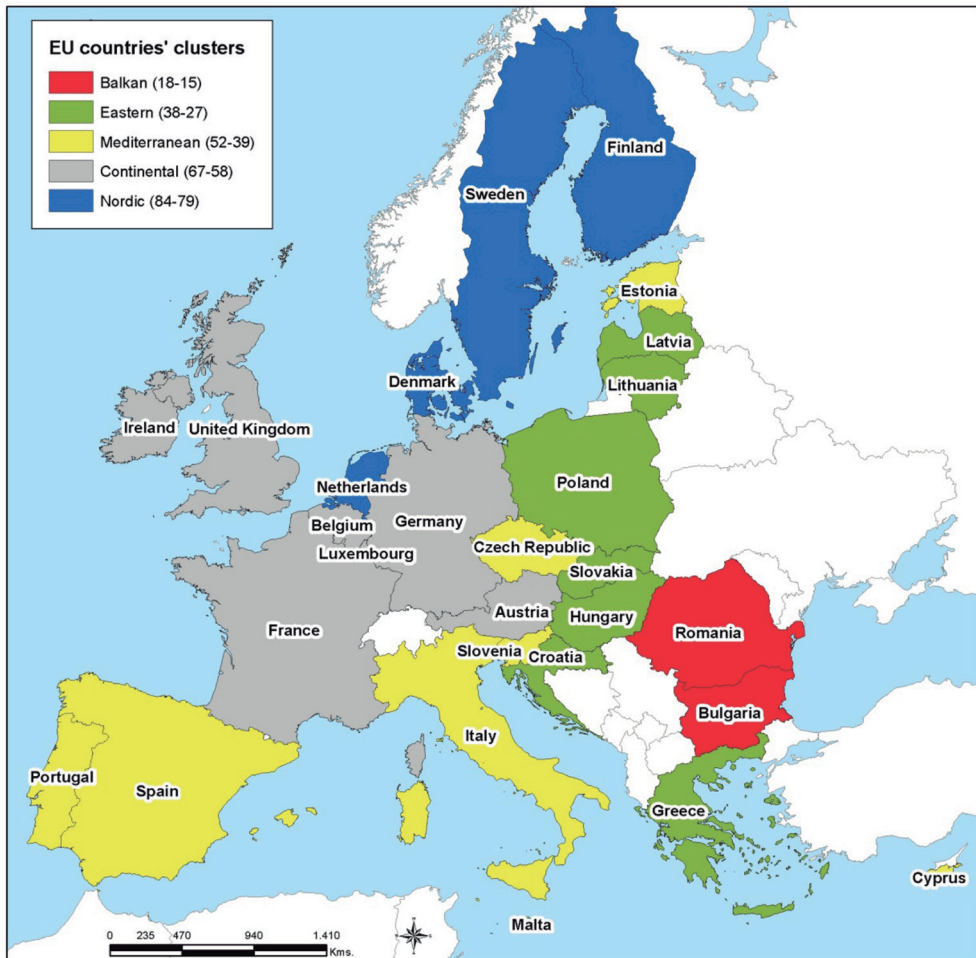
quality levels departing from different social, cultural, political or economic realities, as is the case with Slovenia (SQI = 51.6) and Spain (SQI = 49.7). Secondly, that the traditions or idiosyncrasies of each country, in accordance with path dependence theories (Sewell, 1990; Mahoney, 2000), establish prior constraints, but never completely determine its future. It is evident that the clusters shown in the map correspond to groups of countries that have sustained, for decades or even centuries, very different levels of growth, cultures, geopolitical power and social structures. There is no evidence, therefore, of full, across-the-board convergence. But it is also true that each country, among those included in the same cluster, has advanced at its own pace, attaining different societal quality levels.

According to the Five Europes Typology, the Mediterranean countries do indeed form part of the same cluster within the EU. This begs the question of whether, as a group, they share some distinctive social features. In order to answer this question, let us take a look at the data contained in Table 2, which includes the average quality indices for all the clusters, as regards both their overall quality (SQI) and that of their domains. To this end, the arithmetic means of the countries forming part of each cluster, weighted by their respective populations in 2016, were calculated. The row "Total" shows the societal quality of the EU (weighted mean). Given that the "Mediterranean" countries (except for Greece) form a hybrid cluster and that Malta and Cyprus both have relatively small populations, it was decided to create a new group with the four major Mediterranean countries: Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece (4MC).

In order to study the distinctive features of the 4MC, two different comparative frameworks have been used: exogenous and endogenous. The former analyses the differences between domain quality levels registered in the 4MC and the respective EU averages (Total), while the latter analyses the differences between the quality of each one of the domains of the 4MC and their overall SQIs. The exogenous and endogenous differences included in the last two rows of Table 2 can be positive or negative, indicating quality *deficits* or *surpluses*. When characterising the 4MC, it is also important to con-

3 Since the Brexit negotiations are still dragging on, the United Kingdom is still considered part of the EU.

**Figure 2.** Societal quality: The Five Europes Typology.



Source: own elaboration.

sider whether the exogenous differences are higher or lower than the mean exogenous difference. From the analysis of these data the following conclusions can be drawn.

The societal structure of the 4MC reveals exogenous and endogenous deficits in both the “democracy and governance” and “gender equality” domains, specifically 18.8 and 13.9 points below the EU average, respectively. Substantial endogenous deficits can also be observed in both domains (−10.0 and −10.3, respectively). These are higher than the average endogenous deficits in the EU as a whole. In sum, in the 4MC there are notable so-

cietal deficits in democracy and governance and in gender inequality.

The 4MC have exogenous and endogenous surpluses in both health conditions and environmental sustainability, the quality level of the former being 4.8 points higher than the EU average. Even so, a correct appraisal of this figure involves taking into account that the average exogenous deficit of the 4MC with respect to the EU as a whole—that is, the difference between their SQIs and that of the EU—is −9.5. This means that the relative improvement in health conditions is equivalent to 14.3 points (the sum of 4.8 and 9.5). The endogenous



**Table 2.** Societal quality in the Five Europes and the 4MC. General SQI and domain quality levels\*. Exogenous and endogenous difference.

Cluster	Social Quality Index	Quality of life	Subjective WellBeing	Social participation	Culture and Innovation	Democracy and governance	Consumption	Quality of work	Social Equality	Gender Equality	Child Well Being	Well-being of the elderly	Health Conditions	Crime and safety	Environment
Nordic	80.9	89.0	79.1	74.2	80.7	89.8	68.4	70.4	94.1	78.0	87.2	88.7	71.4	80.7	49.3
Continental	62.9	69.8	58.0	34.7	65.6	67.1	72.7	48.0	80.3	56.5	58.9	75.2	66.5	64.2	46.8
Mediterranean	45.0	49.8	50.8	26.8	41.3	36.2	42.2	34.6	61.5	34.0	48.9	48.1	62.5	48.4	49.2
Eastern	33.7	35.5	33.4	15.2	25.7	30.8	31.1	32.1	56.7	30.3	35.9	30.5	36.2	44.7	50.9
Balkan	16.0	7.8	24.9	11.6	8.8	3.1	11.2	25.1	9.7	27.4	8.8	33.0	13.5	23.4	48.5
Total	52.9	57.8	52.5	31.6	51.7	52.2	55.2	42.7	69.4	47.0	52.5	60.6	58.7	56.4	48.3
4MC**	43.4	48.2	49.0	28.0	40.2	33.4	41.8	33.6	56.7	33.1	47.5	44.3	63.5	45.6	48.4
Exogen. diff.	-9.5	-9.6	-3.5	-3.6	-11.5	-18.8	-13.4	-9.1	-12.7	-13.9	-5.0	-16.3	+4.8	-10.8	+0.1
Endogen. diff.	0,0	+4.8	+5.6	-15.4	-3.2	-10.0	-1.6	-9.8	+13.3	-10.3	+4.1	+0.9	+20.1	+2.2	+5.0

Source: own elaboration

\* Arithmetic mean, weighted by population, of the average percentile ranks of the countries in each cluster. \*\* 4MC: Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece.

surplus in this domain (+20.1) is more than remarkable. Regarding the “environmental sustainability” domain, the absolute exogenous surplus is lower (0.1), the relative surplus thus amounting to +9.6 (the sum of 0.1 and 9.5). This domain also has a high endogenous surplus (+5.0). In short, in the 4MC there are noteworthy societal surpluses in health conditions and in environmental quality.

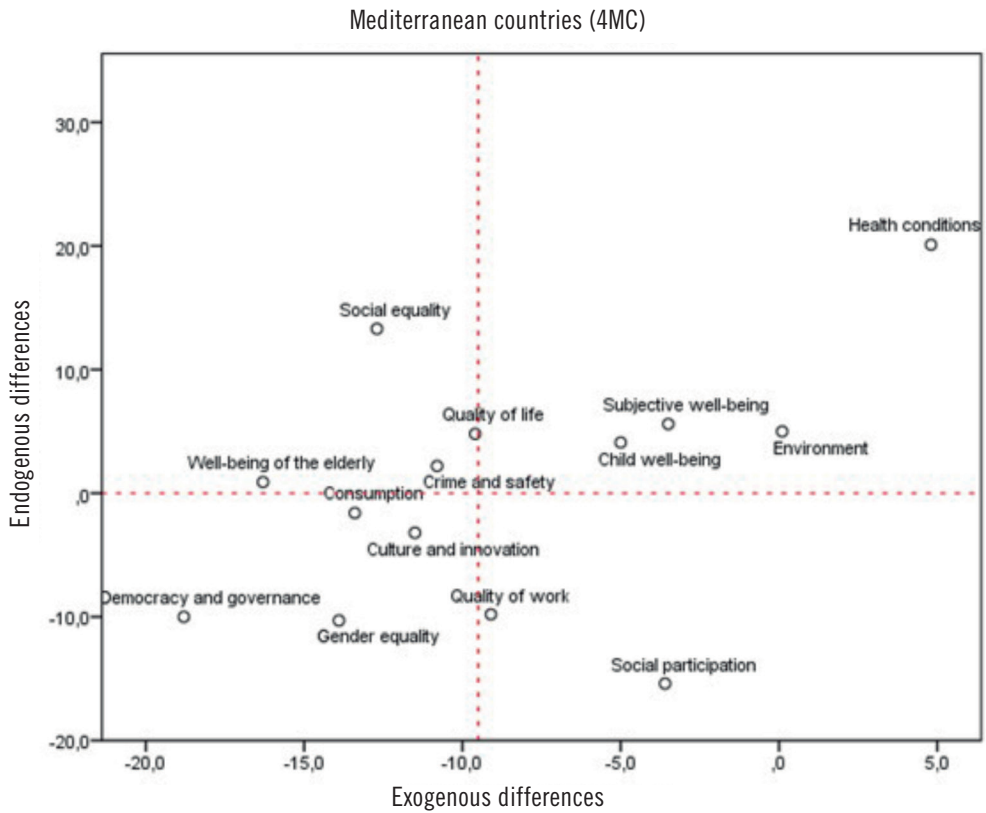
As to subjective well-being, there is an exogenous deficit that, nonetheless, is lower than the general one (-3.5 versus -9.5), which should be interpreted as a relative surplus. Accordingly, the endogenous balance is positive (+5.6). In other words, the 4MC enjoy a relatively high level of subjective well-being, at least judging by their average societal quality levels in this regard.

The 4MC have exogenous deficits that are higher than average in the following domains: well-being of the elderly (-16.3); culture and innovation (-11.5); and consumption (-13.4). However, when comparing their respective quality levels with their general SQIs, only slight endogenous deficits are detected (+0.9, -3.2 and -1.6, respectively). In brief, the societal quality of the 4MC as regards the well-being of the elderly, culture and innovation, and consumption is far-removed from EU averages, although in these three domains no lags in their own societal progress can be observed.

Lastly, it is important to comment on the situation in two key domains, viz. those of social participation and social equality. The levels of social participation and capital in the 4MC (28.0) are way below those in the Nordic countries (74.2), yet still comparable to the EU average (31.6). This is due to the fact that the high political and social participation in the Nordic countries is an exceptional case. Such a high maximum level, in addition to demonstrating that the levels of participation in the rest of the EU Member States leave a lot to be desired, means that these all have important endogenous deficits. This is the case with the 4MC that, although they have a slight exogenous deficit with respect to the EU average—which even approaches that of the continental cluster—have a very high endogenous deficit (-15.4).

In the “social equality” domain, the data reveal a paradox. When comparing societal quality levels with the EU average, an evident exogenous deficit (-12.7) can be observed, which is even higher than the general exogenous deficit of the SQI (-9.5). But when the quality level of this domain is compared with the general SQI, a high endogenous surplus is revealed (+13.3). In short, even though the level of social equality in the 4MC is quite a bit lower than the EU average, it is significantly higher than that of their own average societal progress.

**Figure 3.** Exogenous\* and endogenous\*\* differences in the 4MC cluster, according to societal quality levels by domain.



Source: own elaboration.

\* Differences between domain quality levels in the 4MC and EU averages.

\*\* Difference between domain quality levels in the 4MC and their general SQIs.

In conclusion, it can be held that societal quality levels in the 4MC have evident peculiarities, differing from both those of the rest of the clusters of the Five Europes Typology and the EU average. Figure 2 shows the exogenous and endogenous differences in each one of the 14 domains. The vertical dotted line intercepts the x-axis at the value of the average general exogenous deficit (-9.5).

### EXOGENOUS SOCIETAL QUALITY BALANCE IN THE 4MC

The analysis performed in the previous section has revealed the distinguishing features of

the Mediterranean cluster as a whole. The time has now come to ascertain whether these features are shared by the 4MC or, on the contrary, each one of them has its own characteristic societal quality levels. Therefore, it is necessary to continue with the analysis in order to determine these levels in each one of the four countries in order to identify the distributive patterns of the different domains. If societal quality levels in Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece are similar in a specific domain, this could lead us to conclude that their social structures have certain similarities. In contrast, if there are cases of divergence or different country sub-groups, we should assume that the social, economic, political or cultural characteristics of these countries differ in some way or another.

The data contained in Table 3 are sufficient to identify these distributive patterns, as well as the degree of homogeneity or heterogeneity of domain quality levels in the 4MC. Using these data, we will now analyse the exogenous balance, namely, the differences between domain quality levels in each country and the EU as a whole, leaving the analysis of both the endogenous balance and the individual profile of these countries for the following section.

The data in the final row of Table 3 show the differences between the SQI of each one of the 4MC and that of the EU (52.9). These reveal, as already noted, that the SQI of Spain is very close to the EU average, that Greece is way below it and that Portugal and Italy, between both extremes, have fairly similar societal quality levels. However, the distribution of these levels in the different domains can vary greatly. Indeed, the analysis has revealed four

different distributive patterns: *a)* a *homogenous* pattern in which the four countries have similar quality levels (Dp 4); *b)* a *quasi-homogeneous* pattern in three countries with similar quality levels, and a fourth that clearly diverges from the rest (Dp 3/1); *c)* a *paired* pattern formed by two pairs of countries (Dp 2/2), and *d)* a *heterogeneous* pattern, similar to the general pattern described at the beginning of this paragraph, comprising two different countries and two similar ones (Dp 1/2/1).

*a)* The domains displaying a homogeneous distributive pattern in the 4MC (Dp 4) are as follows: health conditions; social participation and capital; and consumption.

In the “health conditions” domain, quality levels are positive (mean difference = +3.2) and slightly higher than the EU average, except in the case of Portugal (−0.8). The fact that the quality

**Table 3.** Exogenous balance in the 4MC. Differences between societal quality levels in each country and EU averages by domain.

	SQI of the EU	Differences between societal quality levels in each country and the EU average				Exogenous balance		
		Greece	Italy	Portugal	Spain	Surplus/deficit	Average difference*	Distributive pattern
Quality of life	57.8	−26.6	−9.0	−20.5	−4.0	----	−15.0	2/2
Subjective well-being	52.5	−33.1	−4.5	−13.4	7.0	----+	−11.0	1/2/1
Social participation	31.6	−7.1	−1.5	−4.3	−5.4	----	−4.6	4
Culture and innovation	51.7	−31.0	−13.8	−24.0	−1.4	----	−17.5	1/2/1
Democracy and governance	52.2	−38.7	−24.8	−4.3	−9.5	----	−19.3	2/2
Consumption	55.2	−16.3	−9.9	−13.3	−17.2	----	−14.2	4
Quality of work	42.7	−21.7	−10.2	−9.3	−4.8	----	−11.5	1/2/1
Social equality	69.4	−30.8	−10.2	−17.9	−10.7	----	−17.4	1/2/1
Gender equality	47	−28.7	−23.0	−3.3	−0.8	----	−14.0	2/2
Child well-being	52.5	−13.9	−12.7	−8.7	7.8	----+	−6.8	3/1
Well-being of the elderly	60.6	−48.2	−15.3	−16.9	−10.1	----	−22.6	3/1
Health conditions	58.7	2.8	6.6	−0.8	4.1	++-+	3.2	4
Crime and safety	56.4	−38.8	−19.7	6.2	3.4	--++	−12.2	2/2
Environment	48.3	2.0	−2.1	12.8	−0.4	+--+	3.1	3/1
Total (weighted)	52.9	−25.5	−11.3	−10.0	−3.2	----	−12.5	1/2/1

Source: own elaboration.

\* Unweighted arithmetic mean of the differences between the 4MC.

levels of this domain are fairly homogeneous in the 4MC may indicate that certain social features, such as the Mediterranean diet, among others, place health quality levels in these countries on par with the EU average. In the Health Measures developed by Klomp and de Haan (2010), it can be observed that their ranking in the “individual health” dimension is higher than in that of “quality of the health-care sector”.

Regarding social participation, be it political or social capital, quality levels in the 4MC are clearly below the EU average (mean difference =  $-4.6$ ), except perhaps in the case of Italy ( $-1.5$ ). This homogeneity may also be due to a social feature deeply rooted in Mediterranean culture. Nonetheless, when interpreting these data it is important to distinguish between two types of social capital: bridging and bonding. Both institutional and general interpersonal trust are rather low in the 4MC. However, community links, in addition to the networks in which they are forged, tend to be denser and stronger than in other European countries. The Index of Social Capital in the European Union (Parts, 2008) also reveals low levels of political interest in the 4MC, especially in Spain and Portugal. Nevertheless, the levels of political participation in Italy and Greece are higher than in Spain and Portugal and similar to those in other countries.

The third homogeneous pattern revealed in Table 3 affects the “consumption” domain where important exogenous deficits can be observed with respect to the EU average (mean difference =  $-14.2$ ). These differences do not derive exclusively from the low consumption levels inherent to the 4MC, and not even from scant consumer satisfaction, but basically from deficient consumer well-being stemming from the limited development of consumer culture and rights, as well as to the low level of knowledge and empowerment of Mediterranean consumers. Accordingly, in the Consumer Empowerment Index (Nardo *et al.*, 2011) the 4MC rank between 20 and 25 out of a total of 27 European countries.

*b)* The domains featuring a quasi-homogeneous pattern (Dp 3/1) are as follows: environment; child well-being; and the well-being of the elderly.

The quality levels of the “environment” domain (mean difference =  $+3.1$ ) are similar to the EU

average. Yet, as can be seen in Table 3, Portugal stands out from the rest with a level ( $+12.8$ ) well above this. Although the level of economic development is inversely related to environmental quality, this cannot completely explain Portugal’s high level of environmental quality, for even though Greece obtains a similarly positive score ( $+2.0$ ), it is only slightly higher than the EU average.

Unlike environmental sustainability, the quality levels of the “child well-being” domain in the 4MC (mean difference =  $-6.8$ ) are clearly below the EU average. In this domain, Spain ( $+7.8$ ) is an exception to the rule. According to the estimates of the Index of Child Well-Being in the European Union (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2007), Spain is ranked 13<sup>th</sup>, while Italy, Portugal and Greece come in 19<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> place, respectively. These positions remain unchanged, barring a few exceptions, in all the dimensions of child well-being included in the index, such as health, subjective well-being, social relations, material well-being, risks, education and housing.

With regard to the well-being of the elderly, the extraordinarily low average quality levels in the 4MC (mean difference =  $-22.6$ ) are conditioned, in part, by Greece where levels are very low indeed ( $-48.2$ ). In the ranking of the Global AgeWatch Index (Zaidi, 2013), Greece brings up the rear in the EU and in the Active Aging Index (UNECE, 2015), is penultimate. All in all, the other three countries are far from the top positions, ranking between 15 and 18, thus leaving plenty of room for improvement in the well-being of the elderly in the 4MC.

*c)* The domains with a paired pattern (Dp 2/2) are as follows: quality of life; gender equality; crime and safety; and democracy and governance. In three of these domains, the average difference in the 4MC ranges from  $-12.2$  to  $-15.0$ , but drops to  $-19.3$  in the “democracy and governance” domain. Although Greece and Portugal, on the one hand, and Spain and Italy, on the other, form pairs as regards the “quality of life” domain, in the other three domains Greece and Italy have lower societal quality levels, while Portugal and Spain obtain better results.

The fact that Italy and Spain enjoy a higher quality of life is a direct result of their level of economic development, which is higher than that of

Portugal and Greece. Nonetheless, quality of life is also conditioned by social quality. In the comprehensive Better Life Index, published annually by the OECD for its 38 member countries, Spain was ranked 19<sup>th</sup> (6.31) in 2017, between France and Slovenia; Italy 25<sup>th</sup> (5.49), between Israel and the Czech Republic; Portugal 28<sup>th</sup> (4.98), between Poland and Korea; and Greece 35<sup>th</sup> (4.3), between Brazil and Turkey.

The fact that Italy is paired with Greece with respect to “gender equality”, “crime and safety” and “democracy and governance” is conclusive evidence that a country’s level of economic development is by no means proportional to its level of societal quality. Italy is similar to Greece in some aspects. Gender equality in both Greece (−28.7) and Italy (−23.0) is much lower than the EU average, the situation in Spain (−0.8) and Portugal (−3.3) being far more favourable. In the “crime and safety” domain, quality levels in Greece (−38.8) and Italy (−19.7) are also substantially lower than in Spain (+3.4) and Portugal (+6.2). This same pattern appears yet again in the “democracy and governance” domain in which both Greece (−38.7) and Italia (−24.8) obtain very negative results in relation to Spain and Portugal that, albeit negative as well, are nonetheless much closer to the EU average.

d) Table 3 reveals that there are another four domains with heterogeneous patterns, formed by two single countries and another two that are fairly alike (Dp 1/2/1): subjective well-being; culture and innovation; quality of work; and social equality.

In two of these domains, quality of work and subjective well-being, the 4MC are distributed analogously to their general SQIs. Greece has the lowest quality levels of work and subjective well-being; Italy and Portugal both have similar intermediate levels; and, finally, Spain is the best placed among the four. In the case of quality of work, the analyses performed by Green and Mostafa (Eurofound, 2012) allow us to identify interesting peculiarities in each country. For instance, Italy and Greece obtain poorer results in dimensions relating to the intrinsic quality of work, although Italy, unlike Greece, occupies a good position as regards working time quality. The deficits of Portugal, however, are generally to be found in dimensions relating to the net earnings of its workforce, while Spain

stands out negatively for its low labour and professional prospects. With respect to subjective well-being, Greece has satisfaction levels way below the EU average, owing to the huge emotional impact of the profound economic crisis in which it is still immersed; Italy and Portugal have intermediate levels, even though in this case subjective well-being in Portugal is clearly lower than that in Italy; while in Spain it is clearly higher than the EU average.

Moving on to the “culture and innovation” domain (mean difference = −17.5), what stands out are the poor results of Greece (−31.0) and Portugal (−24.0) versus Italy (−13.8) and, above all, Spain (+1.4) where quality levels are, relatively speaking, substantially higher. Lastly, in the “social equality” domain Greece and Portugal register the lowest quality levels, although it should be noted that those of Italy (−10.2) and Spain (−10.7) are still substantially lower than the EU average.

To sum up, the study of these distributive patterns and the differences between exogenous domain quality levels in each one of the 4MC and EU averages have shown that, together with the existence of a general common pattern, each one of these four countries has idiosyncrasies that no analysis should overlook. On the one hand, it has highlighted the societal homogeneity characterising the Mediterranean countries in seven of the 14 domains. On the other, their singularities have been revealed in both those domains in which they are distributed in pairs—Greece and Italy, on the one hand, and Portugal and Spain, on the other—and those in which they are distributed according to their higher or lower societal quality levels. From the perspective offered by the data shown in Table 3, it is evident that Greece is currently experiencing a major collapse as regards societal quality, which explains its distancing from the Mediterranean countries as a whole; that Italy, notwithstanding its high level of economic development and quality of life, has evident societal quality lacunae and deficits; that Portugal enjoys societal quality levels that are higher than would be expected in light of its economic performance, an area in which certain shortcomings can be observed; and that in Spain there is an acceptable balance between quality of life, which can be achieved with adequate economic development, and societal quality, which entails

a correct distribution and investment of resources in order to build a good society.

### ENDOGENOUS SOCIETAL QUALITY BALANCE IN THE 4MC

In the previous section, with an eye to performing an exogenous diagnosis and analysis of the 4MC, their quality levels have been compared with EU averages, thus revealing the distance separating them from full convergence in societal quality. Likewise, the data shown in Table 1 also make it possible to determine the distance separating any one of the Mediterranean countries from other EU Member States. That said, it should be taken into account that when comparing different countries, what is being compared are their social realities whose nature and structure can differ greatly. Hence, these types of external comparisons sometimes offer distorted pictures of reality and, in many cases, underpin social appraisals that do not do justice to the peculiarities of each country, namely, its history, culture, political structure or level of economic development. For example, when comparing the Mediterranean countries with their Nordic counterparts that, as has been seen, are at the pinnacle as regards societal quality, we implicitly assume not only that the former should attain equally high quality levels—which is doubtless a reasonable and legitimate goal—but also that they should achieve this mimetically emulating the latter's economic, social, political and cultural structures, that is, becoming carbon copies of them, all of which does not make sense.

So as to avoid this undesirable implicit assumption, *i. e.* the idea that there is only one type of societal progress and only one way of achieving it, what follows is an analysis of the data from the SIQES employing a different comparative framework, which we will call “internal” or “endogenous”. The central idea of the endogenous approach is that societies are organic bodies whose components display a certain degree of integration and, therefore, must evolve as a whole, adapting their processes and characteristics to the transformation of their general social systems. This implies that the progress of one sub-system requires the

parallel development of the rest of them, it being highly improbable, for example, that the economy will fully develop without the parallel development of culture, society and politics. It also suggests that the social structure from which it has originated, as held by path dependence theories (Mahoney, 2000), is decisive.

Hence the need to discover to what extent the quality levels of the different domains of a specific country differ, positively or negatively, from its respective overall SQI. This enables us to identify those domains with endogenous surpluses or deficits with respect to the average level of societal progress in each country (see Table 4).

The domains in which the 4MC have *endogenous surpluses* are as follows: health conditions (+21.5); social equality (+11.6); environment (+11.0); child well-being (+5.2); and quality of life (+2.4).

Given that in the first four domains it is possible to observe a homogeneous or quasi-homogeneous pattern, it may be concluded that they are all endogenous societal strengths. Yet, some variations can be observed in the four countries. Thus, with respect to their health conditions the surpluses of Greece (+34.1) and Italy (+23.7) are clearly greater than those of Spain and Portugal. In the “social equality” domain, the endogenous surpluses of Italy (+17.6) are plainly greater than those of Spain, Portugal and Greece. In the “environment” domain, the endogenous surpluses of Greece (+22.9) and Portugal (+18.1) are much greater than those of the two more economically developed countries, *i. e.* Italy and Spain. In relation to child well-being, a pairing pattern can be clearly observed, the endogenous surpluses of Greece (+11.2) and Spain (+10.6) being greater than those of Portugal and Italy. Lastly, with respect to the “quality of life” domain, in which it is also possible to observe endogenous surpluses, the exception of Portugal, with an evident endogenous deficit (−5.6), is remarkable.

The domains in which the 4MC have *endogenous deficits* are as follows: social and political participation (−13.8); quality of work (−9.2); democracy and governance (−7.5); gender equality (−7.4); and culture and innovation (−6.2).

Given the huge importance of these five domains and that they all show a clear average rever-

**Table 4.** Endogenous balance in the 4MC. Differences between the domain quality levels and SQI of each country.

	Greece	Italy	Portugal	Spain	ENDOGENOUS BALANCE (Surpluses / deficits)	
	Societal Quality Index (SQI)				Surplus/ deficit	Mean difference
	27.4	41.6	42.9	49.7		
	Differences between each domain and the SQI					
Quality of life	3.8	7.3	-5.6	4.1	+ + - +	+2.4
Subjective well-being	-8.0	6.4	-3.8	9.7	- + - +	+1.1
Social participation	-2.9	-11.5	-15.6	-23.5	- - - -	- 13.8
Culture and innovation	-6.7	-3.6	-15.2	0.6	- - - =	- 6.2
Democracy and governance	-13.9	-14.2	5.0	-7.0	- - + -	- 7.5
Consumption	11.5	3.7	-1.0	-11.8	+ + = -	+ 0.6
Quality of work	-6.4	-9.0	-9.5	-11.9	- - - -	- 9.2
Social equality	11.2	17.6	8.6	9.0	+ + + +	+ 11.6
Gender equality	-9.1	-17.6	0.8	-3.5	- - = -	- 7.4
Child well-being	11.2	-1.8	0.9	10.6	+ = = +	+ 5.2
Well-being of the elderly	-15.0	3.8	0.7	0.8	- + = =	- 2.4
Health conditions	34.1	23.7	15.0	13.1	+ + + +	+ 21.5
Crime and safety	-9.8	-4.8	19.7	10.0	- - + +	+3.8
Environment	22.9	4.7	18.1	-1.9	+ + + =	+ 11.0

Source: own elaboration.

sion with respect to the level of societal progress in each one of the 4MC, it is essential to stress the pressing need for these countries to design specific national plans aimed at correcting, the sooner the better, these key weaknesses in their social structures. However, although pinpointing and disclosing these weaknesses is essential, it is undeniably insufficient. With the aim of adequately designing these social action plans, the 4MC would have to promote joint research programmes that explore the direct and indirect causes of these weaknesses. Without bringing to light the web of causal mechanisms that perpetuate these key weaknesses, be they internal or external, it will be impossible to conceive the most efficient and effective ways of tackling them. Nonetheless, although the five abovementioned domains seriously hinder the progress of these countries, there is no reason why they should thwart it. Judging by their average societal quality levels, the 4MC have both the capacity and sufficient resources to tackle these

endogenous deficits successfully. To this end, due to the fact that aspects deeply and secularly rooted in their social structures must be tackled, it is also essential to forge an unshakable political will capable of catalysing and concentrating the necessary energies so as to bring about their real social transformation.

The fact that the 4MC have endogenous deficits in social and political participation shows that this weakness is a social feature inherent to them all. That the deficits are substantial in Spain (-23.5), Portugal (-15.6) and Italy (-11.5) demonstrates that participation and binding social capital do not improve with general social development and, therefore, they should look for new models of social participation and new ways of increasing both social capital and general interpersonal trust.

As to quality of work, the 4MC register very similar endogenous deficits, which indicates that this is a general feature shared by all. According to the data provided by Green and Mostafa, these defi-

cits affect both extrinsic (wages, contracts, working hours, etc.) and intrinsic labour dimensions (rhythm of work, significance, social relations, etc.) (Eurofound, 2012).

The endogenous deficits in democracy and governance confirm the view that this is also a defining feature of the 4MC. Yet, this is much greater in Italy (-14.2), Greece (-13.9) and Spain (-7.0), than in Portugal (+5.0), a clear exception to the rule. In the European Quality of Government Index (Charron, Lapuente and Dijkstra, 2012), Portugal ranks 14<sup>th</sup>, only one position behind Spain, while Greece and Italy rank 22<sup>nd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, respectively. Both the Democracy Barometer (Bühlmann *et al.*, 2012) and the World Governance Indicators (WGI) (Kaufmann, Kraav and Mastruzzi, 2010) bear out this pattern.

The endogenous deficits in gender equality are yet another structural weakness of the 4MC, the huge deficit in Italy (-17.6) and, to a lesser extent, in Greece (-9.1) being particularly noteworthy. From the analysis of the three dimensions of the European Gender Equality Index (Bericat and Sánchez, 2016) it can be observed that the main weaknesses of the 4MC are to be found in the area of power inequality between men and women. In this respect, both Italy (32.4) and Greece (26.6) have a very low level of gender equality, while in Portugal (42.9) and above all Spain (50.1) this is slightly higher as regards power, but nonetheless still falling way short of full equality.

Lastly, another major endogenous deficit in the 4MC is to be found in knowledge and innovation culture. Portugal (-15.2) has the greatest deficit in this domain, while the situation in Spain (+0.6) is more favourable. Specifically, Portugal ranks low in the Global Creativity Index (GCI) (Florida, Mellander and King, 2015), especially as regards technology (investment and patents) and talent (creative classes and qualifications).

In sum, since the endogenous approach involves a multidimensional comparison of the internal structure of the 4MC, it is ideal for constructing a profile of their own deficits and surpluses, irrespective of any external comparison. The synthetic profiles of Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece, which can be constructed from the data contained in Table 4, are shown below.

The major endogenous deficits in Greece affect the well-being of the elderly, democracy and governance, crime and safety and gender equality. On the plus side, health conditions and environmental sustainability, as well as consumption and social equality, stand out.

In Italy, the greatest endogenous deficits are to be found in gender inequality and democracy and governance, followed by social and political participation and quality of work. In contrast, it has endogenous surpluses in health conditions and quality of the healthcare sector, social equality and quality of life.

In Portugal, there are important endogenous deficits in social and political participation, culture and innovation and quality of work. As to its endogenous surpluses, noteworthy are its good health conditions, low crime rate and high level of safety, in addition to its good environmental conditions.

The greatest endogenous deficit in Spain is in social and political participation, followed at a distance by consumption and quality of work. As to its endogenous surpluses, there is no domain that stands out above the rest, but five that are equally positive when compared to the country's average level of societal quality: health conditions, child well-being, crime and safety, subjective well-being and social equality.

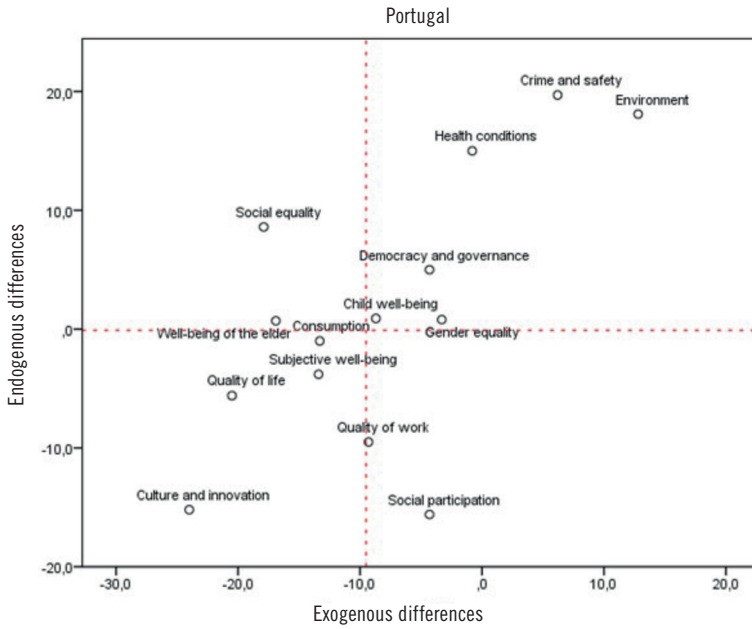
Lastly, the full profile of the endogenous and exogenous surpluses and deficits in the 4MC is represented in Figure 3, while those of Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece can be seen in Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7, which show the distance separating each domain from both the EU average (exogenous difference) and their overall SQIs (endogenous difference).

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study has been to offer researchers, policymakers and those interested in getting to know the current situation in the Southern European Mediterranean countries, an overview of their societal quality levels from a holistic, multidimensional and comprehensive perspective. In this sense, the analysis of the data provided by the *System of Indices on the Quality of European Societies*

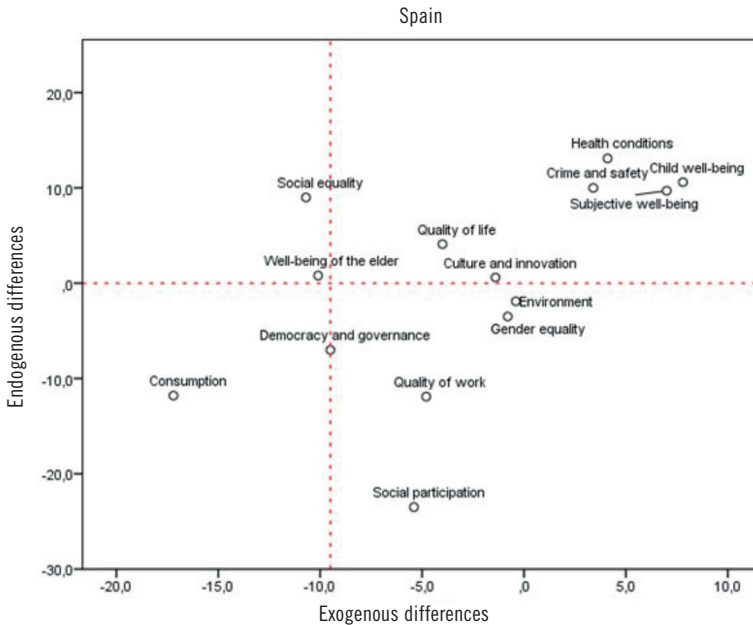


**Figure 4.** Portugal's exogenous and endogenous deficits and surpluses, by societal quality domains.



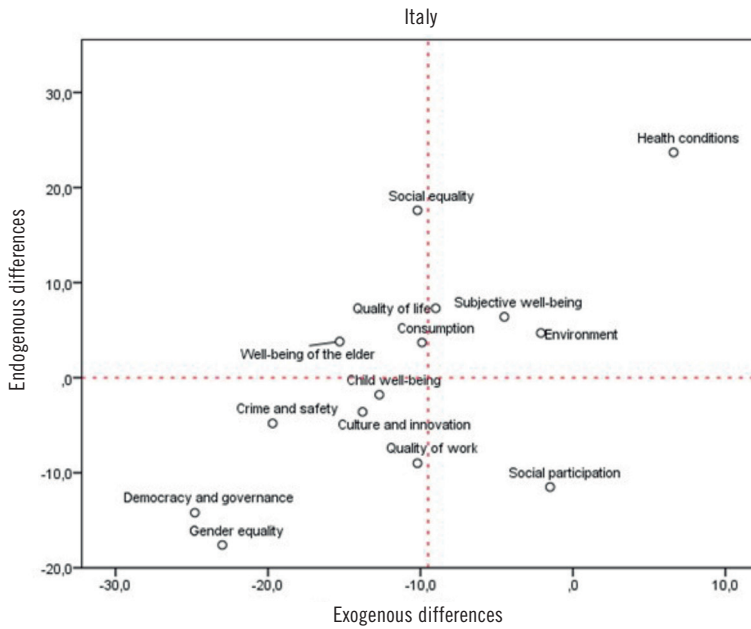
Source: own elaboration.

**Figure 5.** Spain's exogenous and endogenous deficits and surpluses, by societal quality domains.



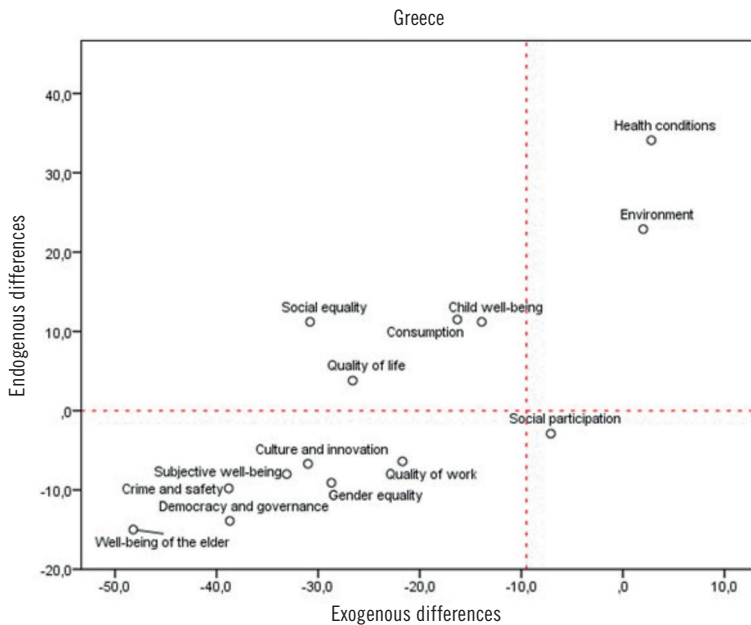
Source: own elaboration.

**Figure 6.** Italy's exogenous and endogenous deficits and surpluses, by societal quality domains.



Source: own elaboration.

**Figure 7.** Greece's exogenous and endogenous deficits and surpluses, by societal quality domains.



Source: own elaboration.

(SIQES), has demonstrated that a diagnosis cannot be performed on the strength of a sole aspect, however relevant this may be. In light of the above, it has been possible to demonstrate that neither do all the domains attain the same quality levels nor do all the countries have an identical profile.

The problem arising when offering a simple and unequivocal diagnosis lies in the multidimensional and complex nature of social reality itself. For this reason, examining societal quality in many of its domains and in a large number of countries offers us an extraordinary overview. A knowledge of this global configuration contributes to frame analyses of specific social settings and phenomena in the context of a broader social structure, which in a way gives it meaning. In other words, it contributes to prevent missing the forest for the trees in its necessary study.

In no way do we suggest that social analyses of specific phenomena are less necessary than multidimensional or comprehensive ones, or vice versa. On the contrary, we believe that both are complementary and essential for offering a detailed, complete, structural and timely picture of social reality. Throughout these pages, and to the extent permitted by space limitations, we have attempted to ascertain, here and there, some of the details of current reality revealed by the data provided by the *focused composite indicators* forming part of the system. It is clear that the structural overview offered here is pointless without an exhaustive knowledge of the social features described above. But it is also equally evident that studies and research conducted on particular aspects of the social reality of the Southern European Mediterranean countries (4MC) now have an overview in which to contextualise and integrate their results. Indeed, we believe that the analysis of the research performed by the authors of the composite indicators forming part of the system is fundamental. Therefore, we will yet again refer readers to the book entitled, *The Quality of European Societies. A Compilation of Composite Indicators*, which contains comprehensive estimates and bibliographical references for all these indices.

At any rate, what is relevant is that the Southern European Mediterranean countries may continue to make progress in order to reach higher levels

of societal quality in the foreseeable future. Since their SQIs are located in the percentile ranks of between 40 and 50, they currently occupy intermediate positions in the context of the EU, although that of Greece, a country currently immersed in a full-blown social crisis, is substantially lower at present. Therefore, even though it is true that societal quality levels in the 4MC fall short of those in continental Europe and especially the Nordic countries, they certainly do not bring up the rear anymore, as some are wont to say.

The analysis performed here demonstrates that the Southern European Mediterranean countries have sufficient endogenous potentialities to face new societal development challenges. To this end, they must clearly define those challenges and have the political will to tackle them. For example, we have seen that, in spite of their general endogenous deficits, they exceed the EU average in environmental quality and health conditions, which is an enormous achievement in two essential areas. In other domains, such as subjective well-being and child well-being, they are ranked comparatively high.

Before concluding we feel that we should recap on the five domains in which the Southern European Mediterranean countries have evident *endogenous deficits*, namely, those with quality levels below their general SQIs. These are as follows: social and political participation; quality of work; democracy and governance; gender equality; and culture and innovation. These are key areas not only because achieving high levels of societal quality is inconceivable without substantially improving each one of them, but basically because societal development in the Mediterranean depends on these five domains as essential drivers of progress. Their future transformation will depend on the development and enhancement of new forms of social participation and cohesion, on the adequate management of their labour markets and improvements in the workplace, on the reform of their political systems and the enhancement of their democratic quality and on a final push towards a model of society based on gender equality and the expansion of education and knowledge in a social context in which priority is given to creativity and innovation.

The development of these five domains would not be so crucial if it were not for the fact that

they are all structural weaknesses inherent to the Southern European Mediterranean countries. It has been demonstrated here that these countries form a group because they share common features, essentially those that have undermined, and still undermine, their societal progress.

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