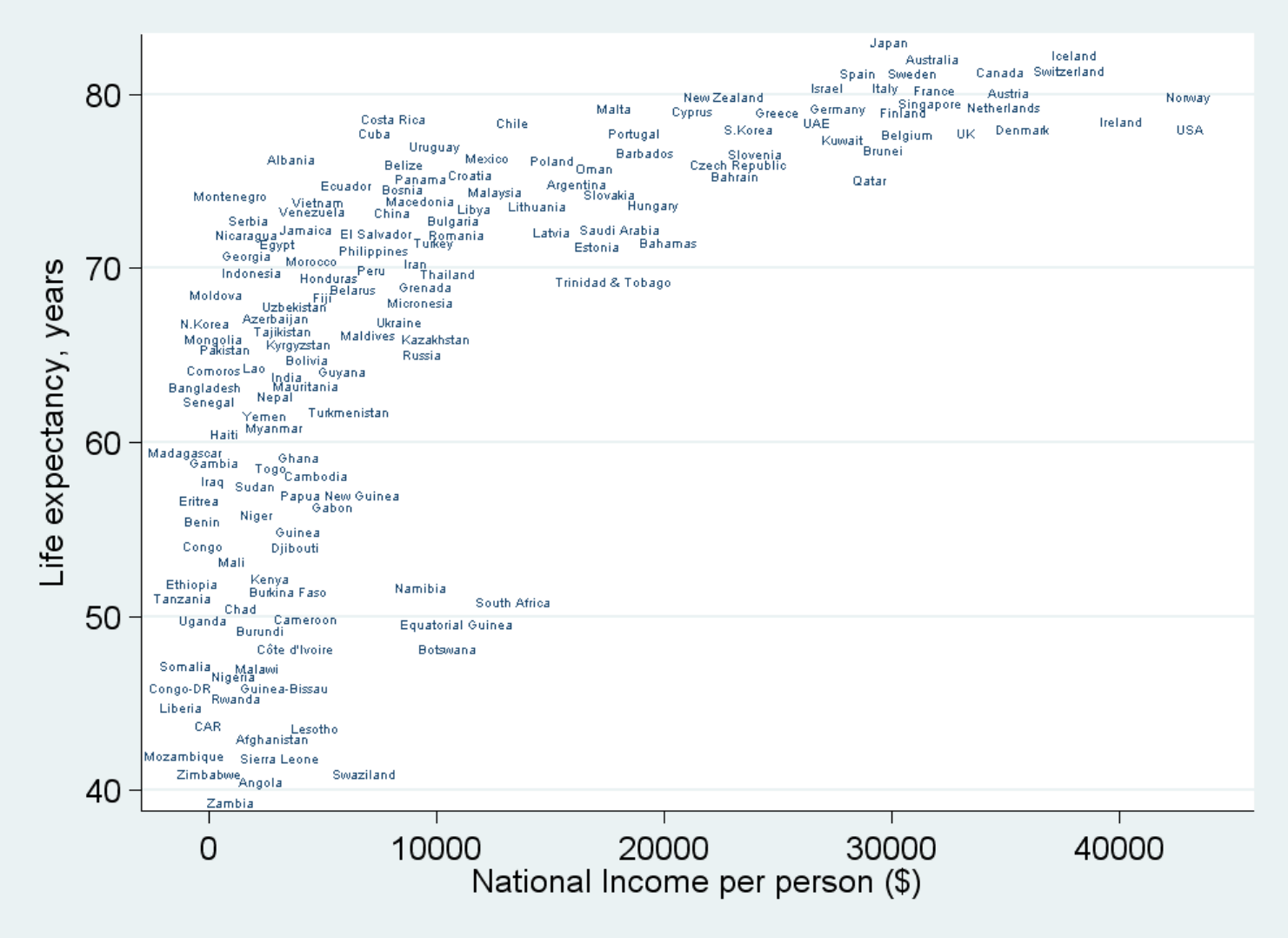
The Real Quality of Life, Inequality and Sustainability

Emeritus Professor of Social Epidemiology

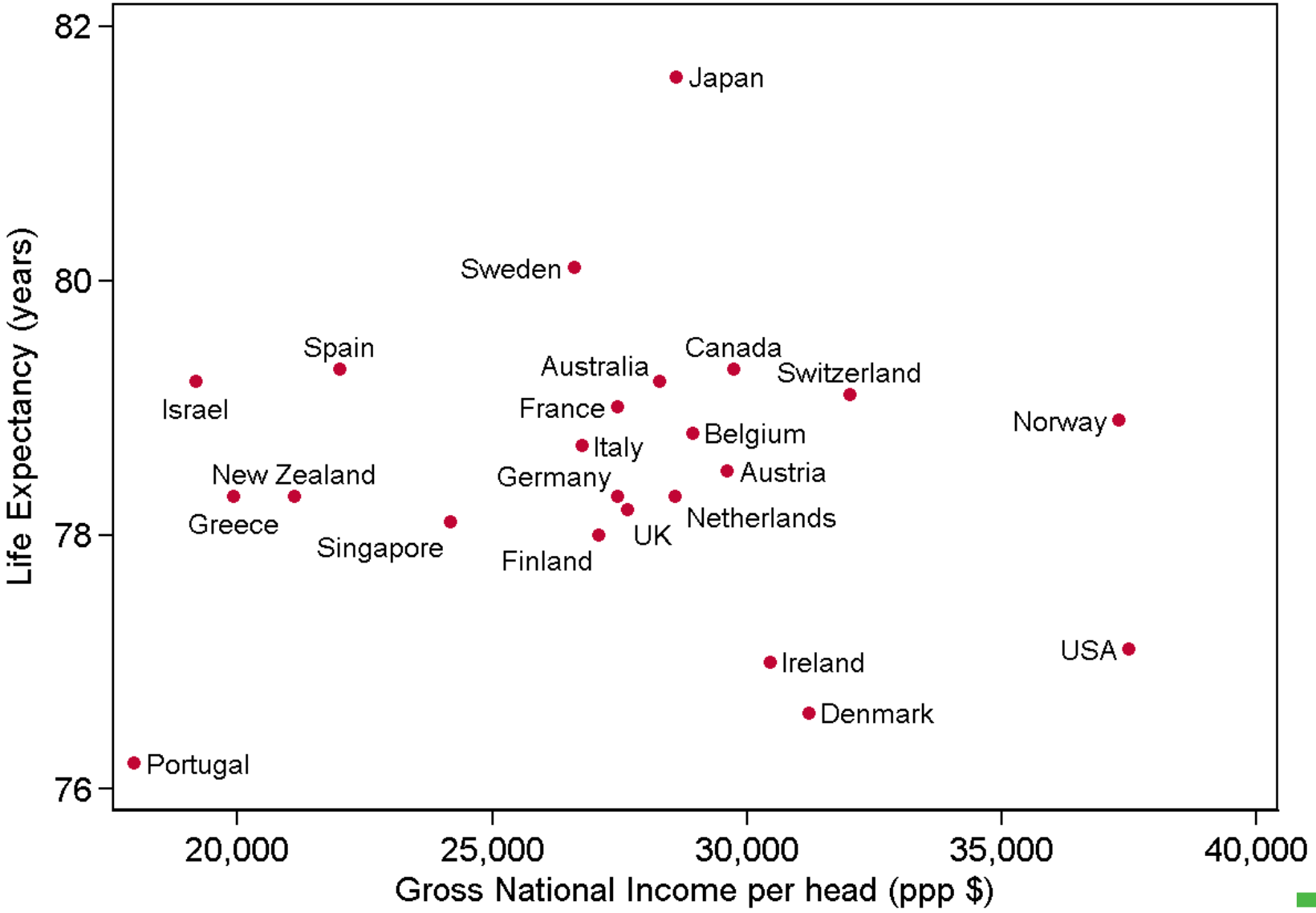
Photo by kind permission of Matt Stuart

Income per head and life-expectancy: rich & poor countries



Source: Wilkinson & Pickett, The Spirit Level (2009)

Life expectancy in rich countries is no longer related to National Income per head

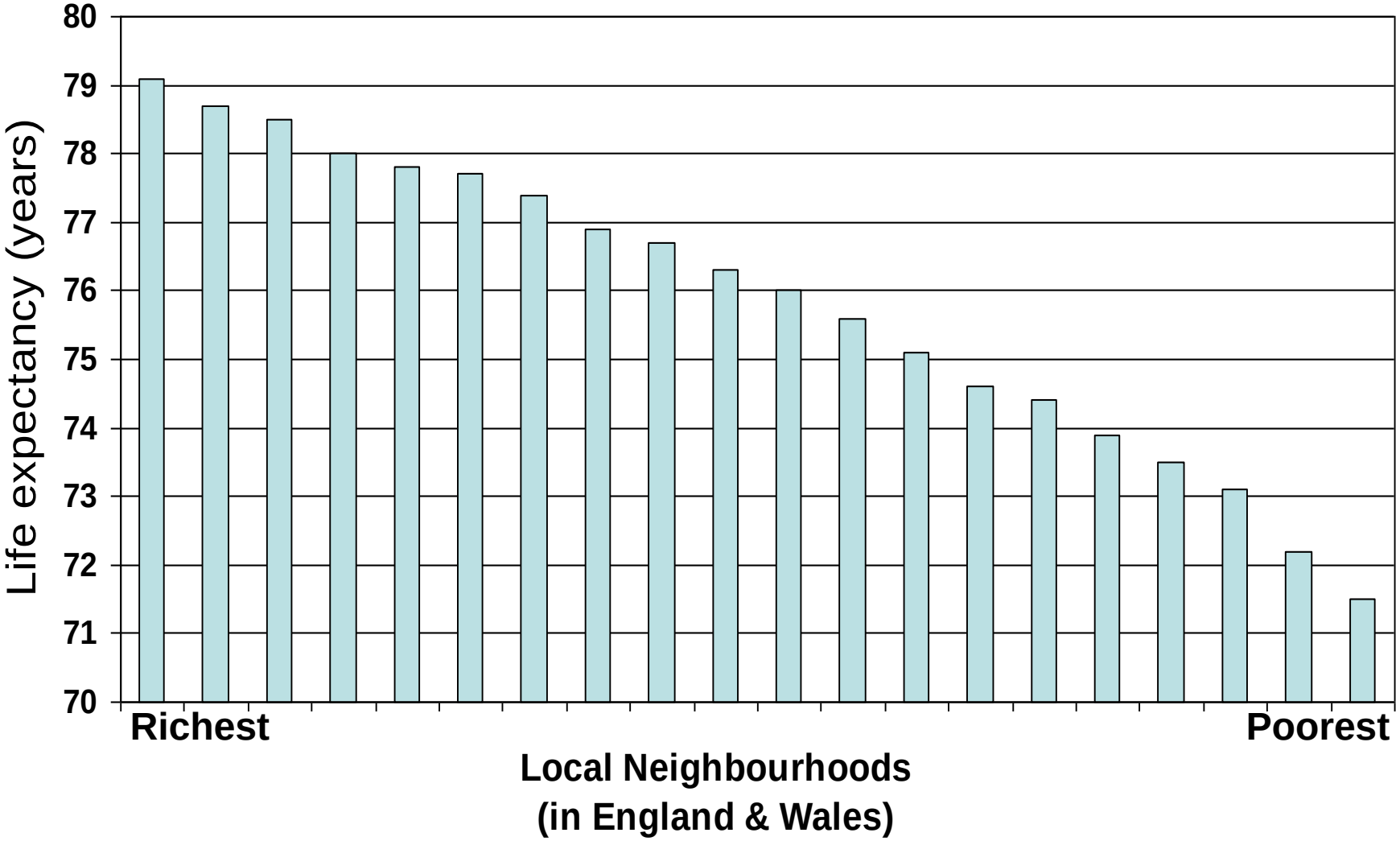


Wilkinson & Pickett, The Spirit Level

www.equalitytrust.org.uk

The Equality Trust

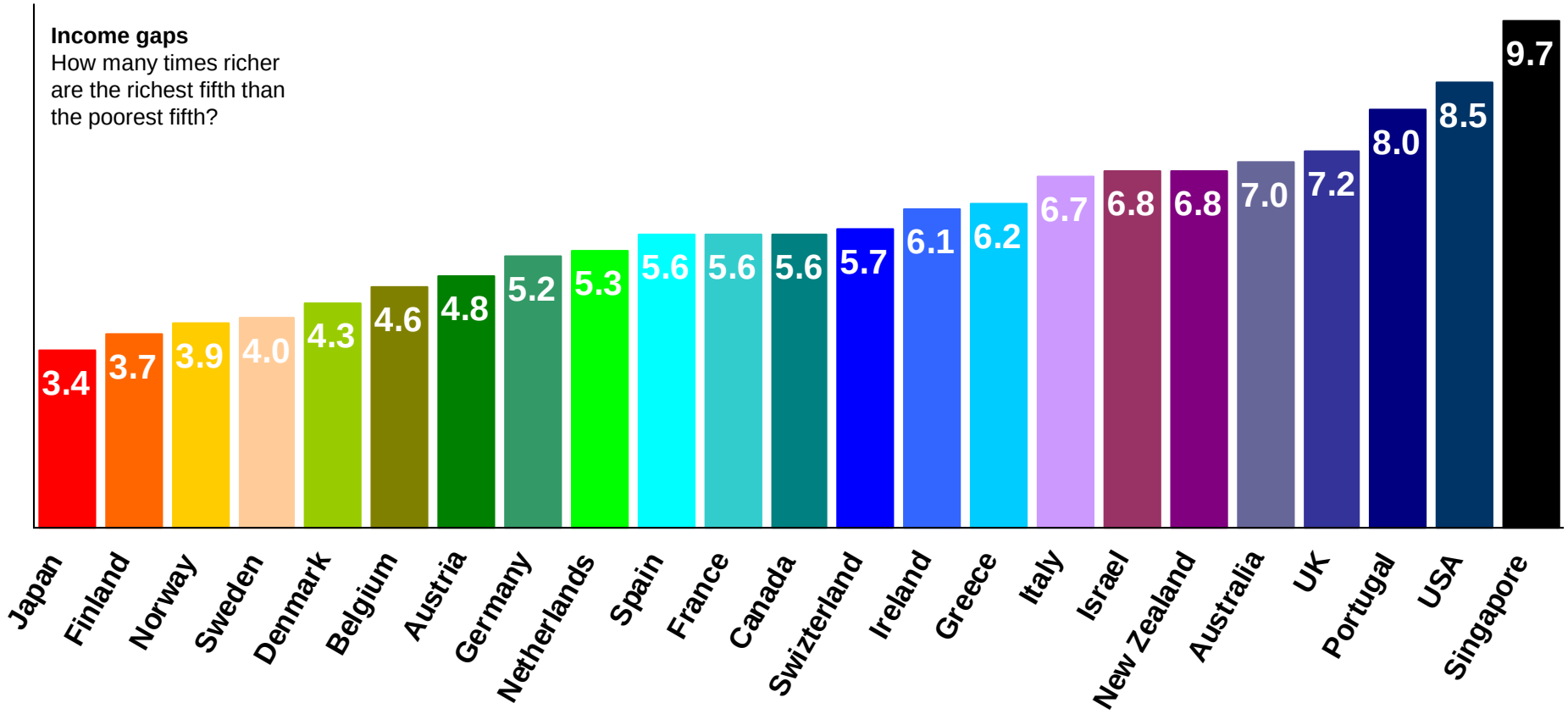
Life expectancy is strongly related to income *within* rich countries



Wilkinson & Pickett, The Spirit Level

Inequality...

How much richer are the richest 20% in each country than the poorest 20%?

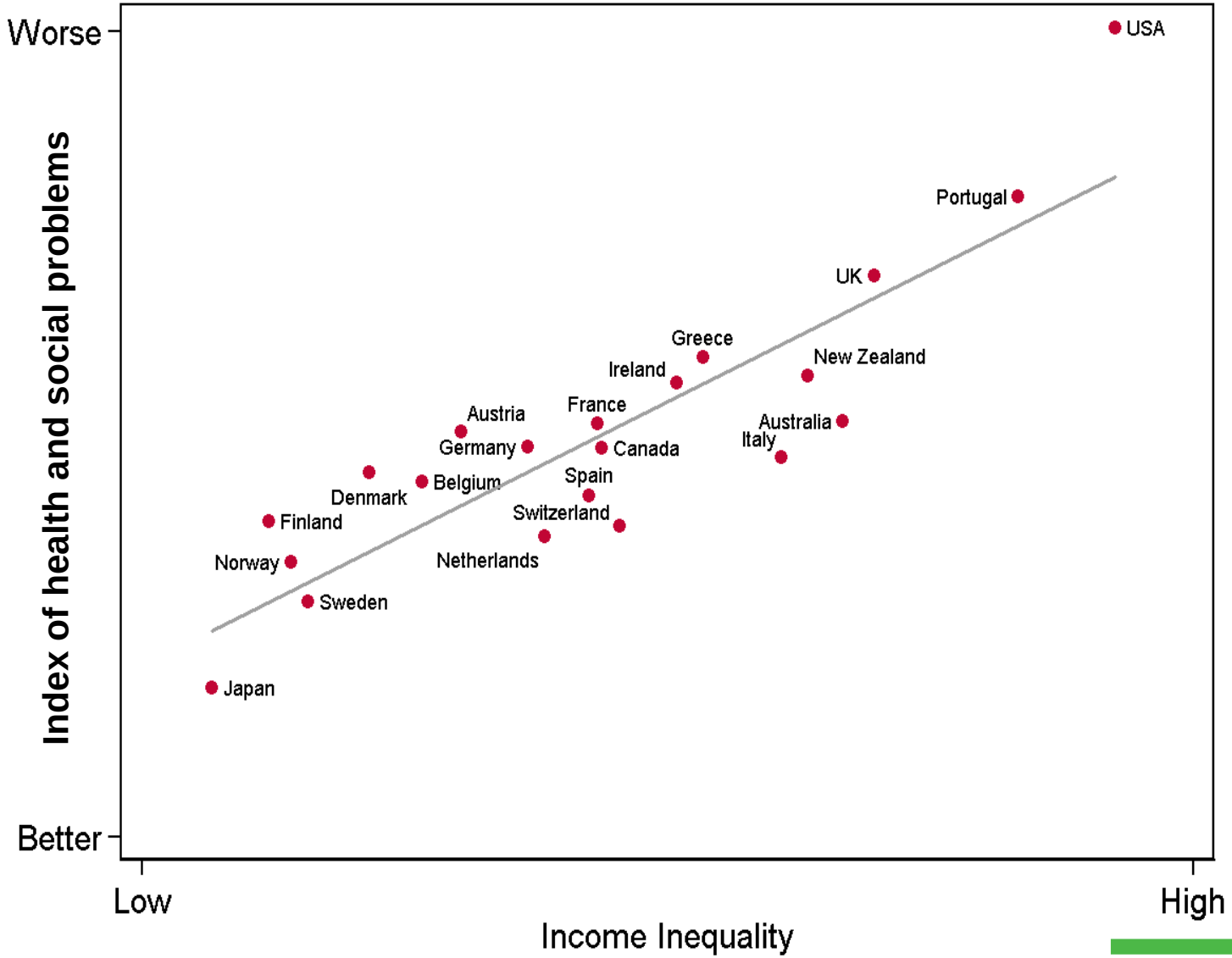


Wilkinson & Pickett, The Spirit Level

Health and social problems are worse in more unequal countries

Index of:

- **Life expectancy**
- **Math & Literacy**
- **Infant mortality**
- **Homicides**
- **Imprisonment**
- **Teenage births**
- **Trust**
- **Obesity**
- **Mental illness – incl. drug & alcohol addiction**
- **Social mobility**



Wilkinson & Pickett, The Spirit Level

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Neither health nor social problems are related to national income per head

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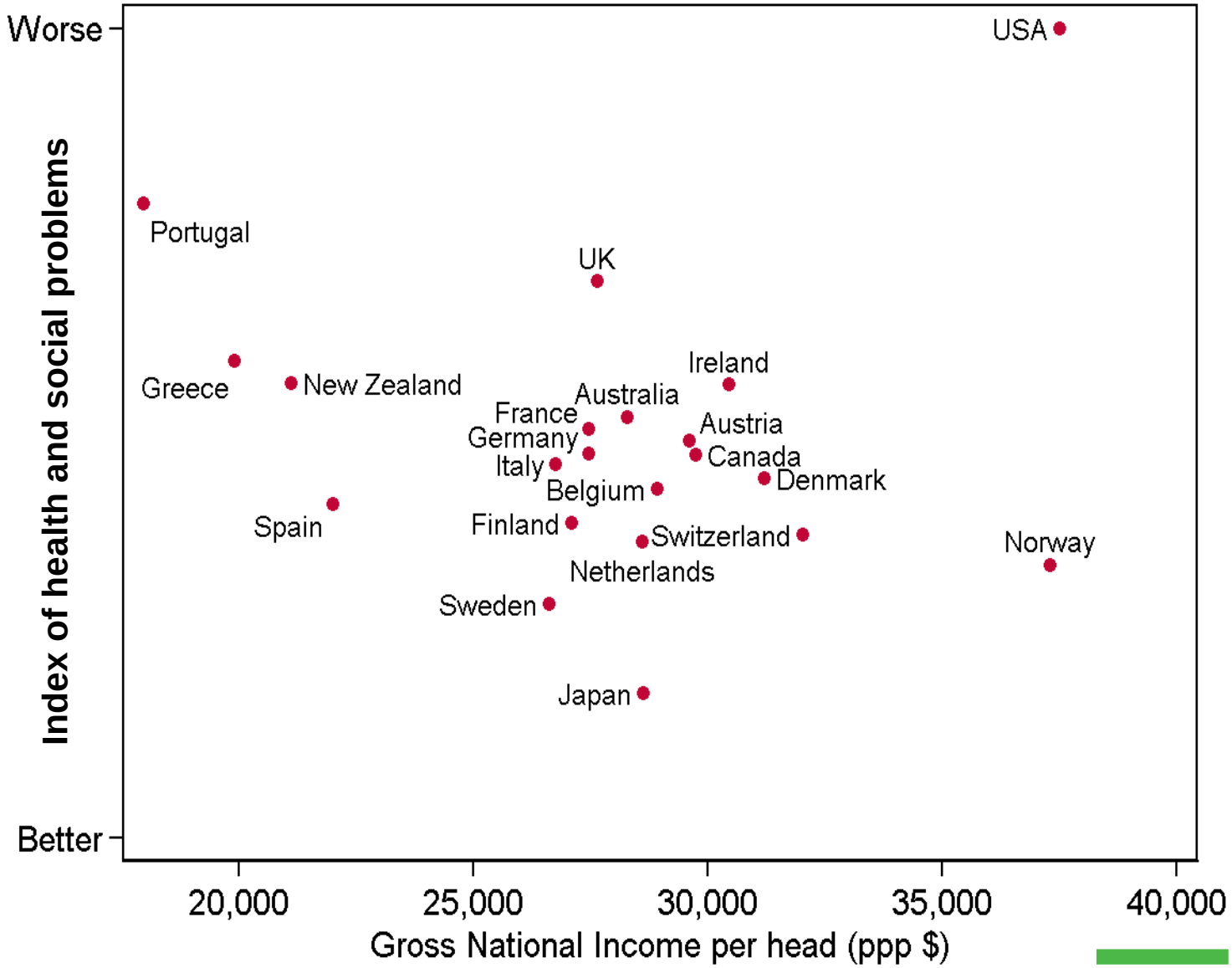

Wilkinson & Pickett, The Spirit Level

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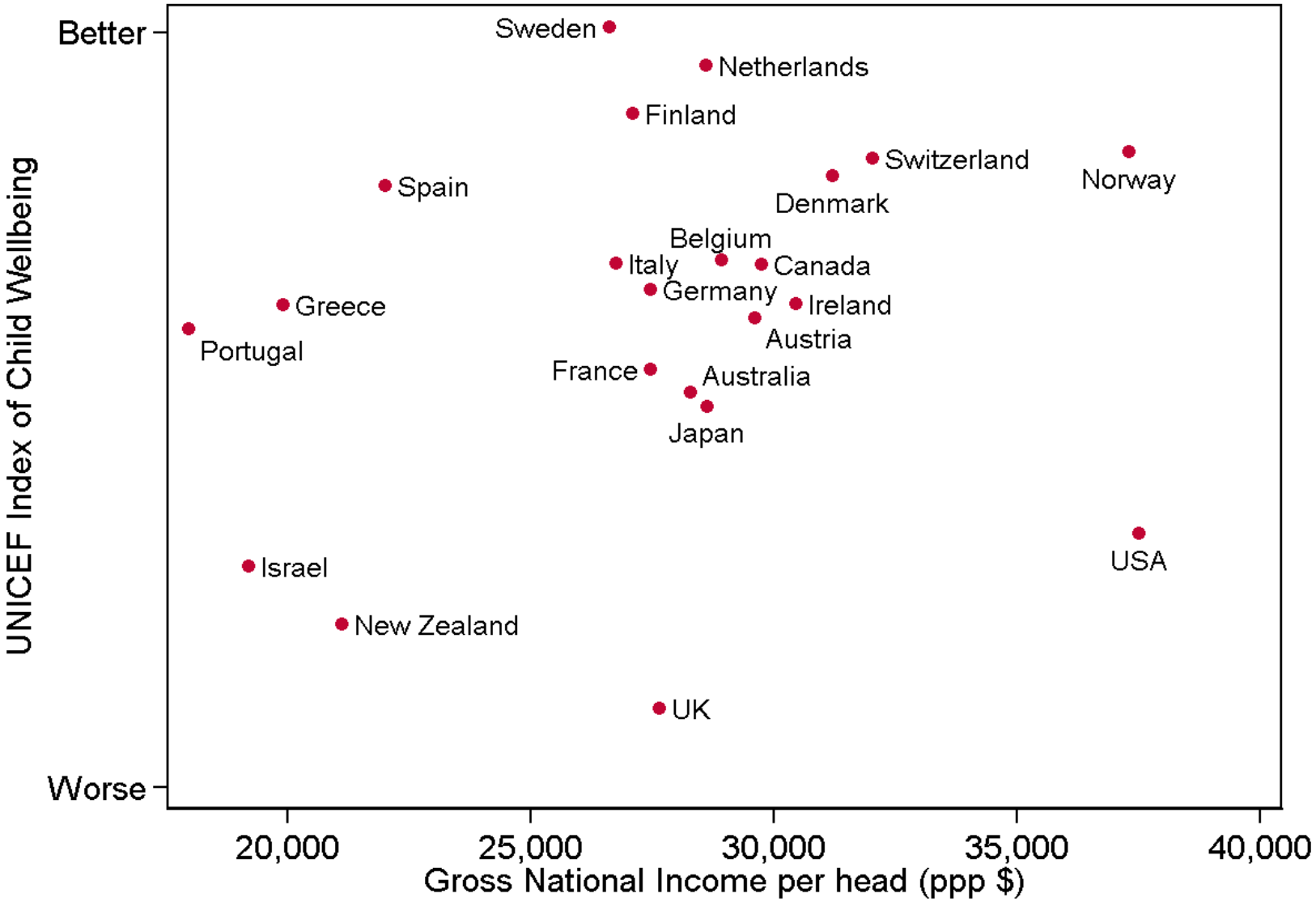
Child well-being is better in more equal countries

Wilkinson & Pickett, The Spirit Level

The Equality Trust

The UNICEF Index of Child Wellbeing is not related to National Income per head



Wilkinson & Pickett, The Spirit Level

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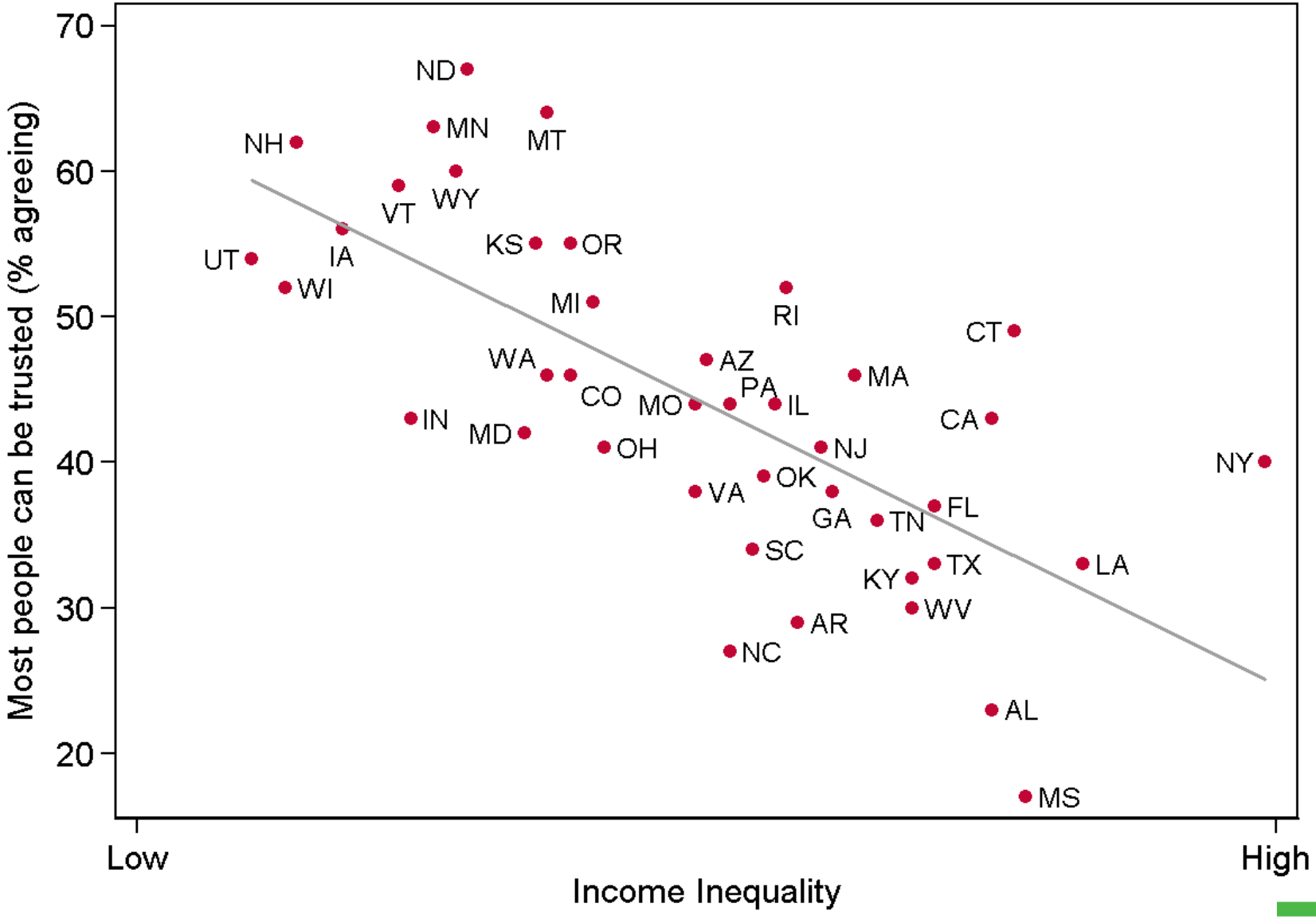
People in more unequal countries trust each other less

People in more unequal states of the USA trust each other less



Wilkinson & Pickett, The Spirit Level

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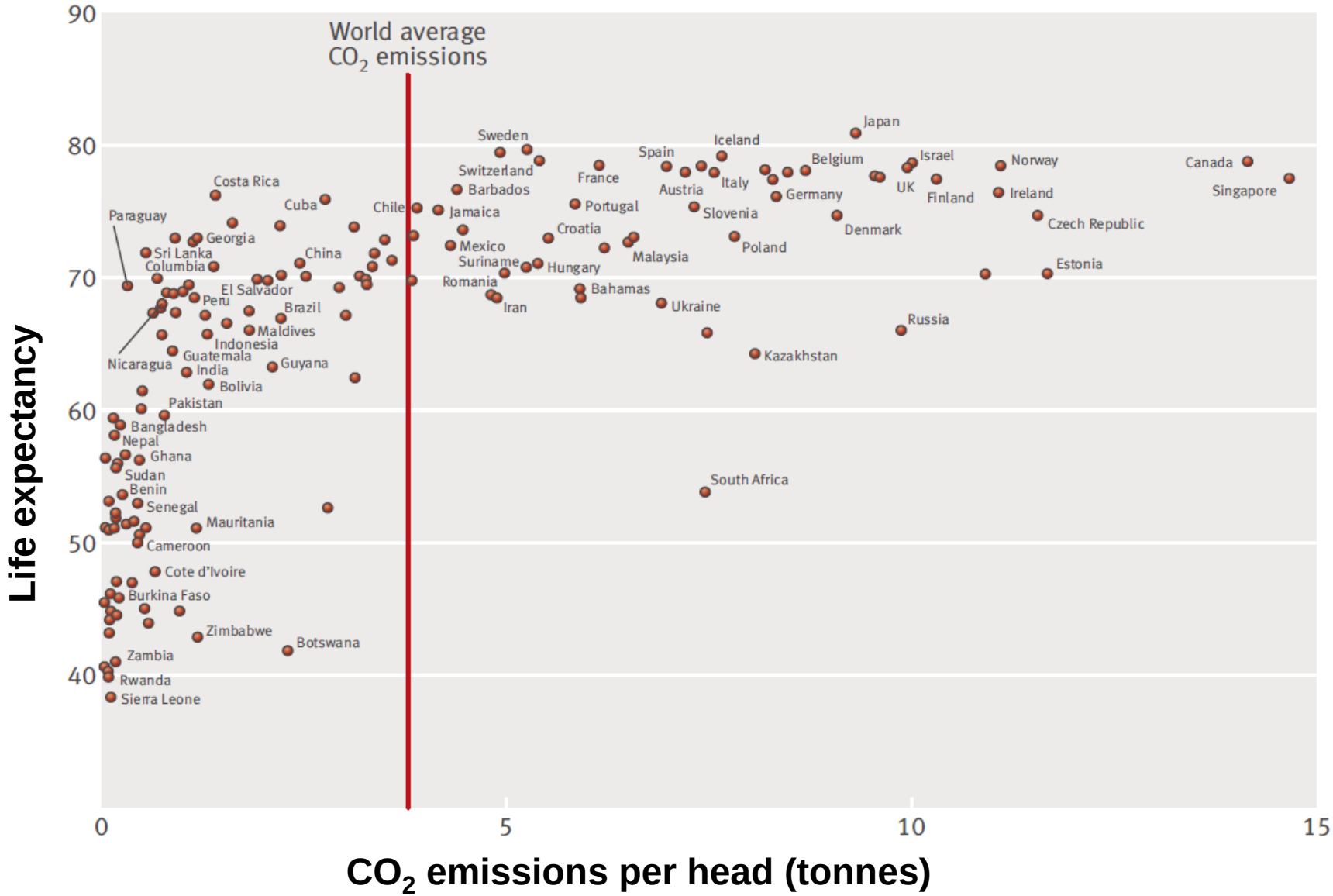
Equality and Sustainability

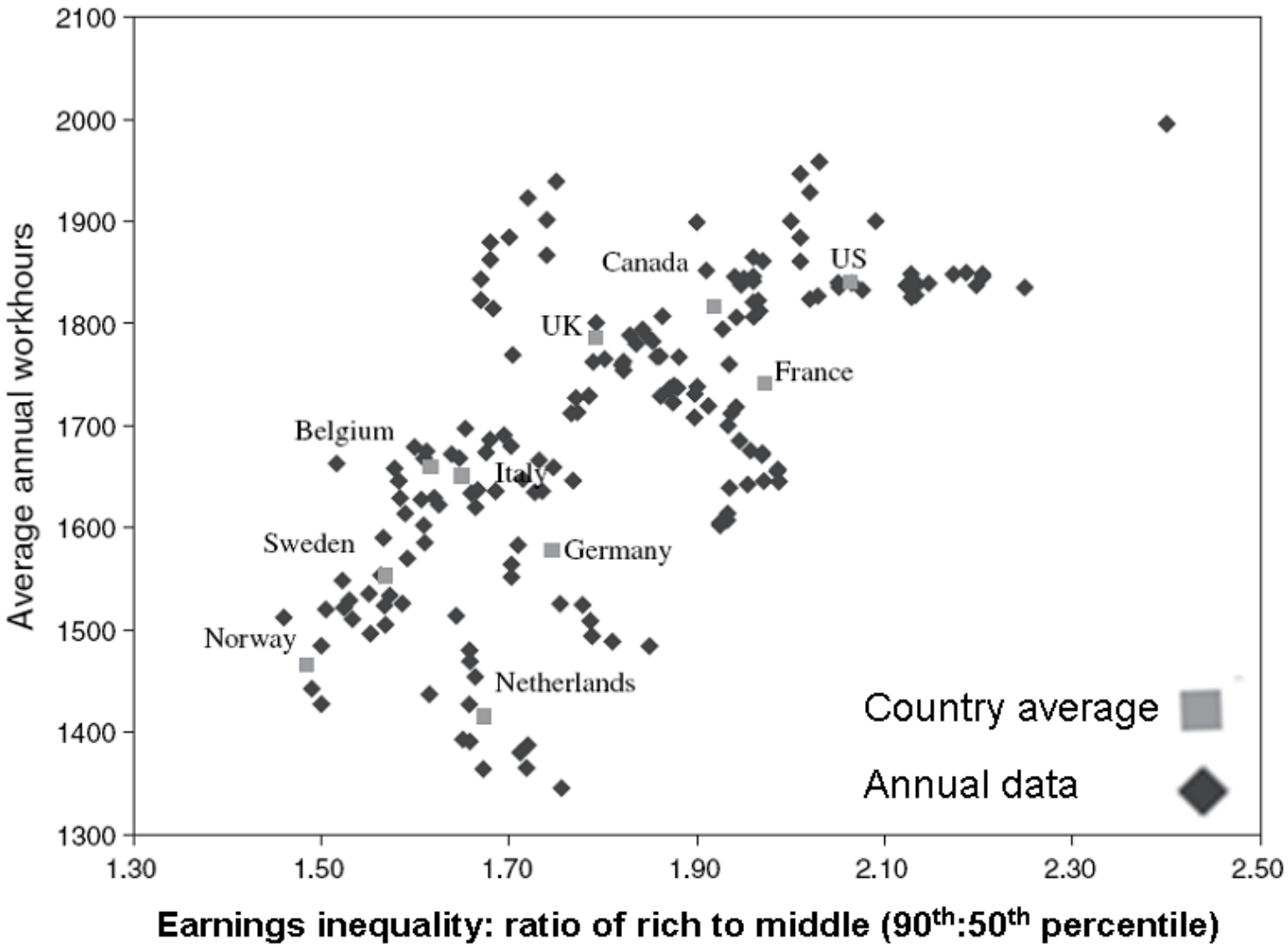
- **Reducing carbon emissions does not mean reducing the real quality of life**
- **Great inequality intensifies consumerism**
- **People in more equal societies are more public spirited, better able to act for the common good**

Life expectancy and CO_2 emissions per head



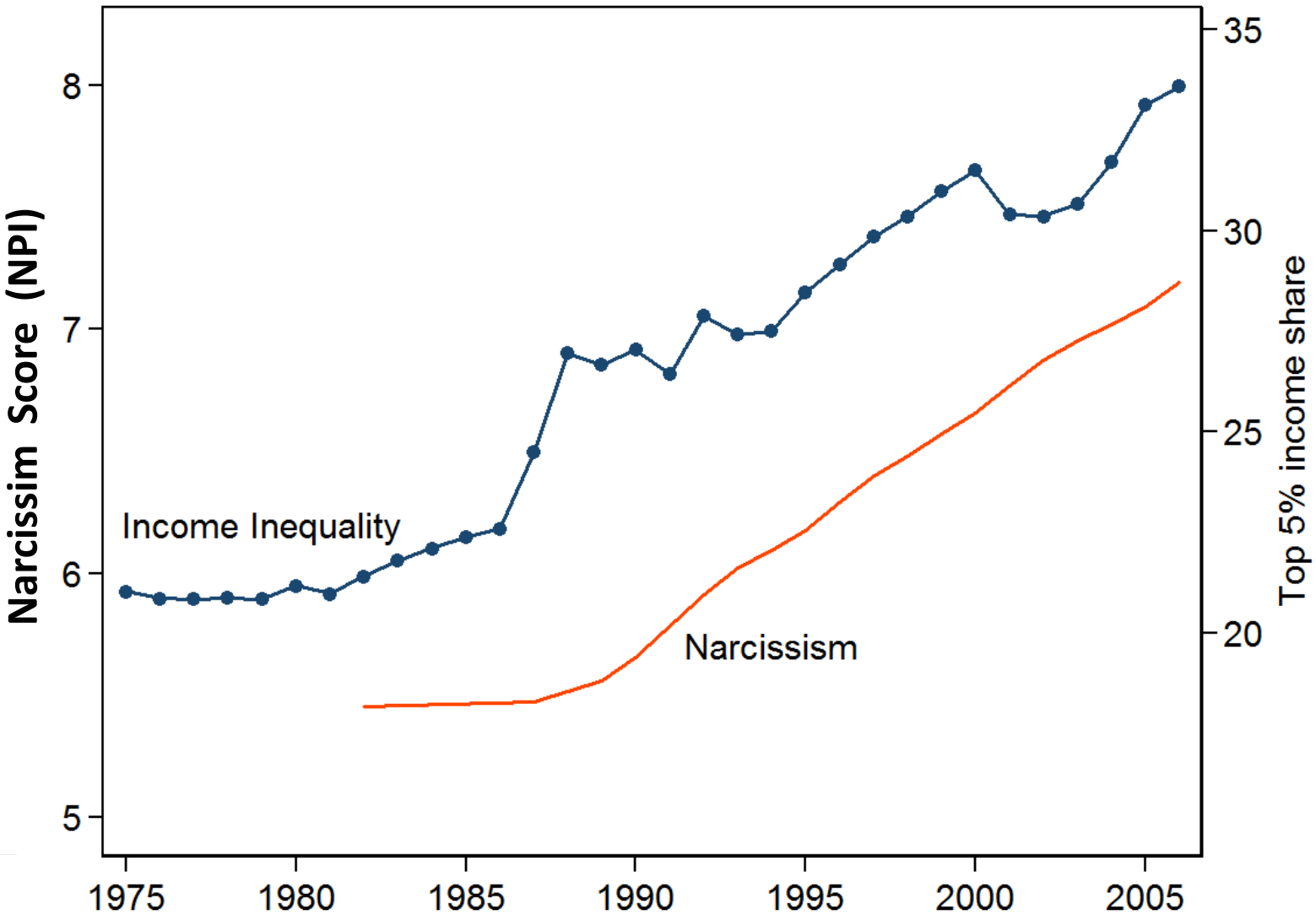
Wilkinson R, Pickett K & De Vogli R. BMJ 2010; 341:1138-1140

Working hours are longer in more unequal countries



Source: Bowles S, Park Y. Economic Journal 2005; 115 (507): F397–F412. 2005.

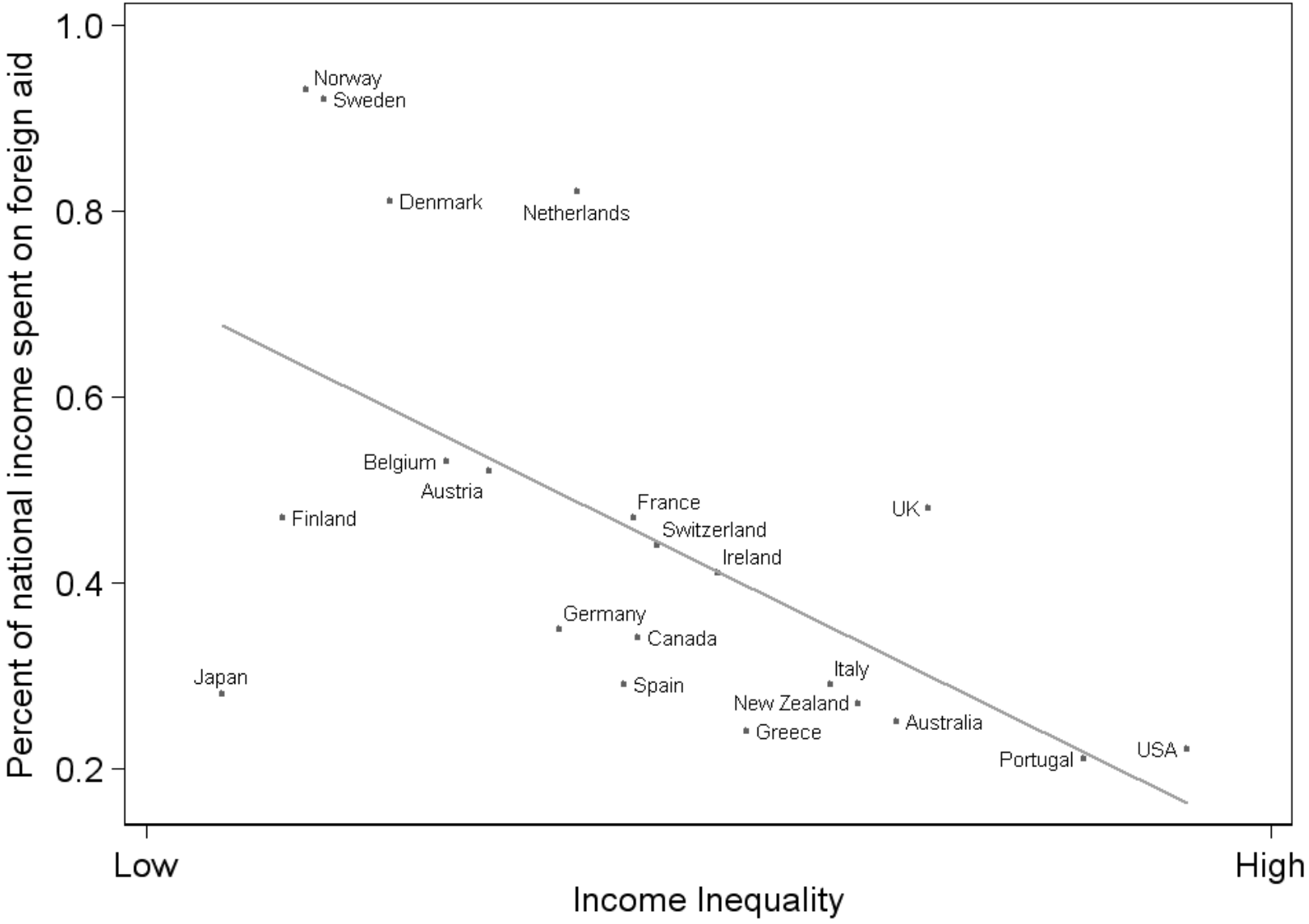
Rising Narcissism & Income Inequality in the USA



Inequality data from World Top Incomes Database

Narcissism data from Twenge JM, et al., Journal of Personality 2008; 76(4): 875-901.

More equal countries are more generous foreign aid donors



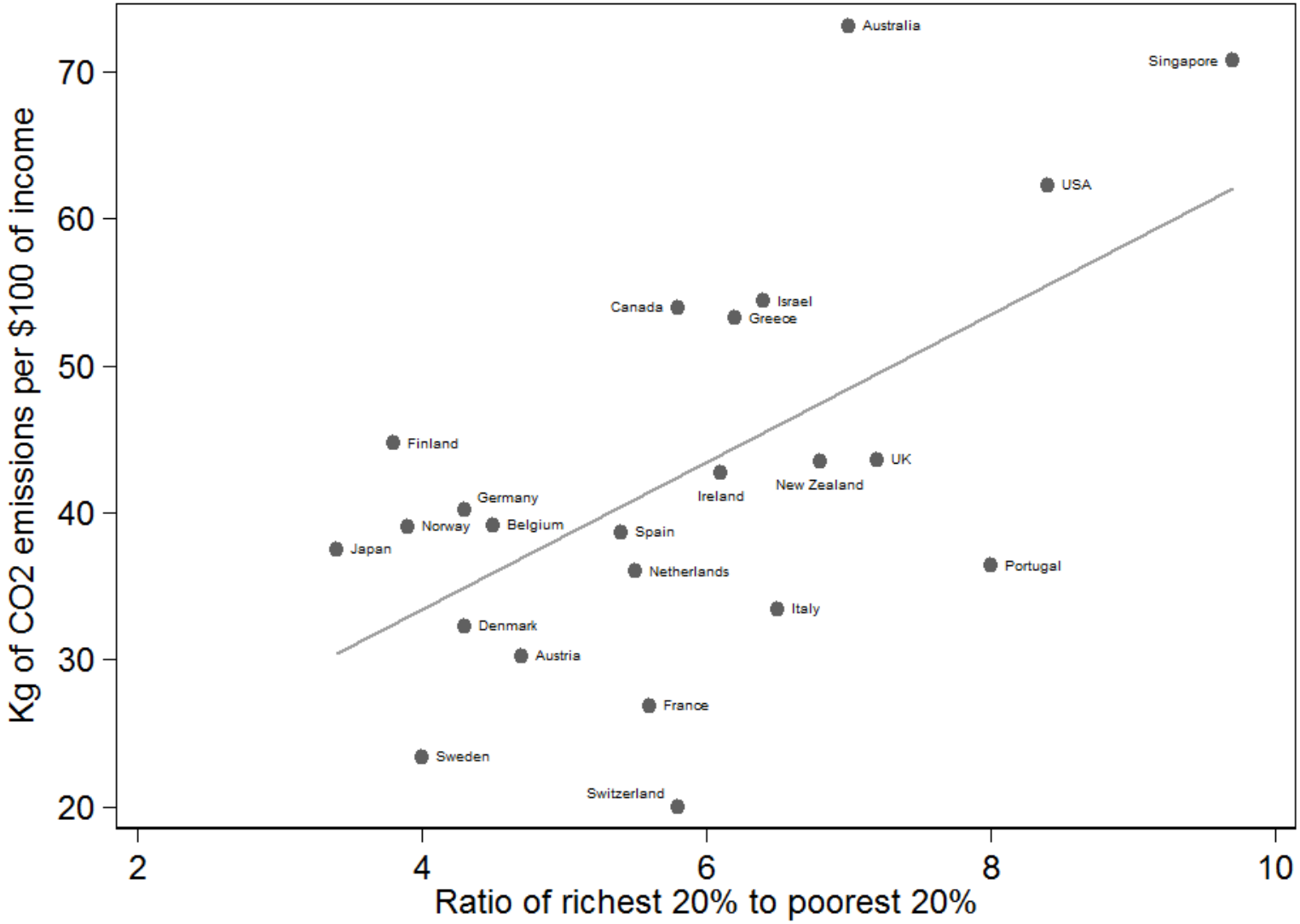
Business leaders in more equal countries give a higher priority to complying with international environmental agreements

With permission from R De Vogli & D Gimeno

More equal countries recycle more waste

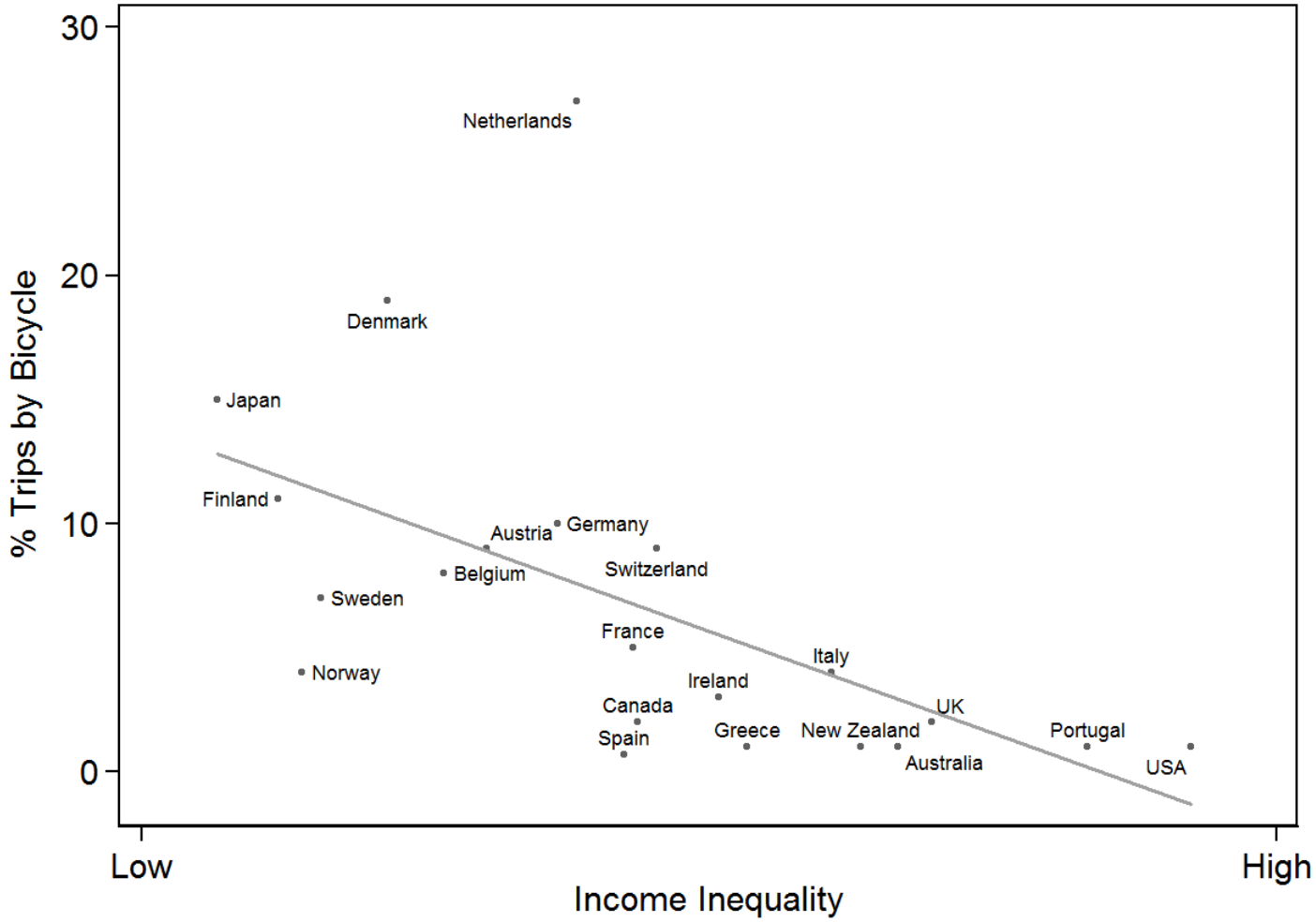
Source: Wilkinson & Pickett, The Spirit Level (2009)

More Unequal Countries Emit More $C0_2$



From: Wilkinson RG, Pickett KE. The impact of income inequalities on sustainable development in London.
A report written on behalf of The Equality Trust, commissioned by the London Sustainable Development Commission, 2010, http://www.londonsdc.org/lsdc/resear

People use bicycles more often in more equal societies

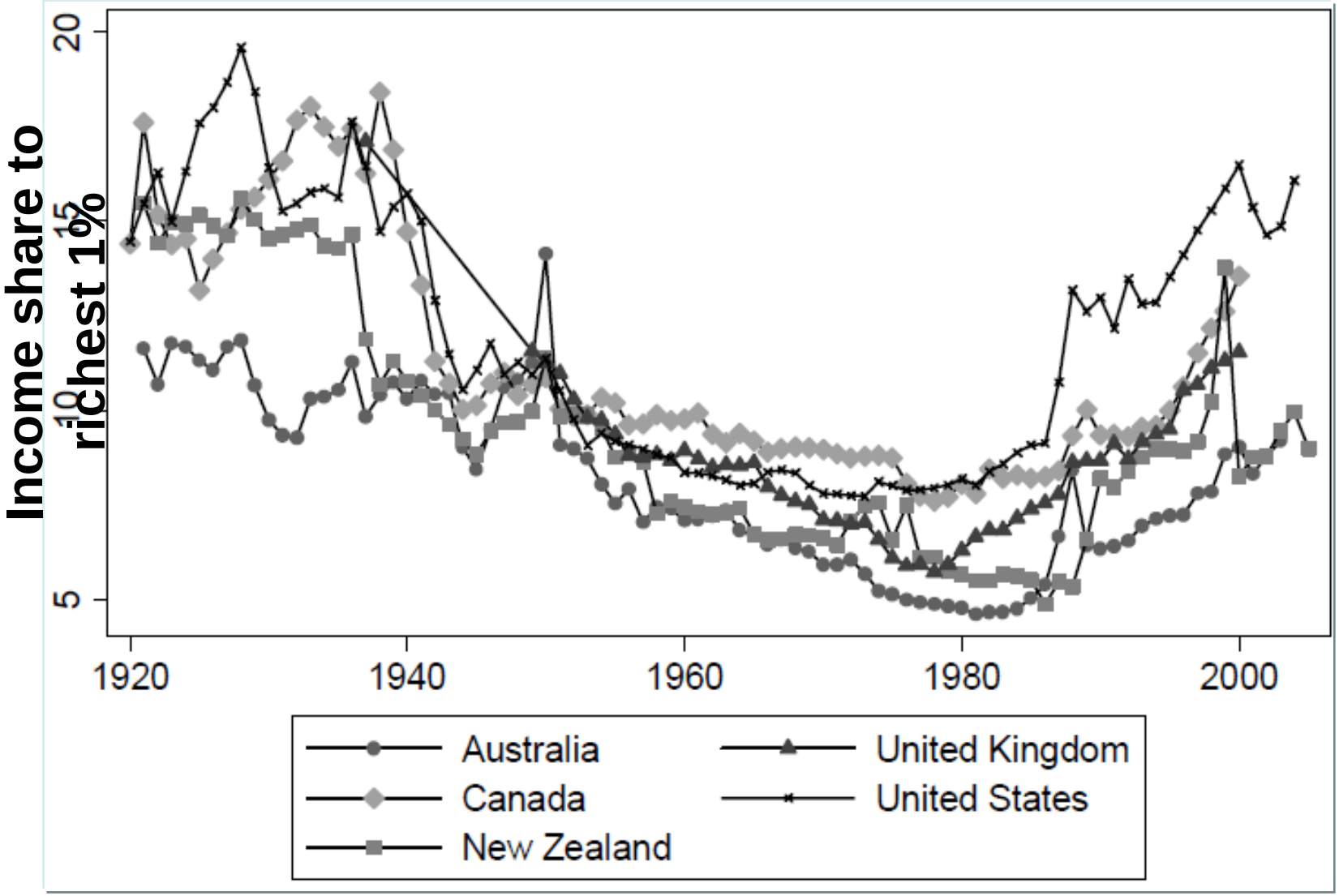


Data compiled by Oy Kanjanavanit from various sources

"Growth is a substitute for equality of income. So long as there is growth there is hope, and that makes large income differentials tolerable." - Henry Wallich, former governor of the US Federal Reserve Bank and professor of economics at Yale.

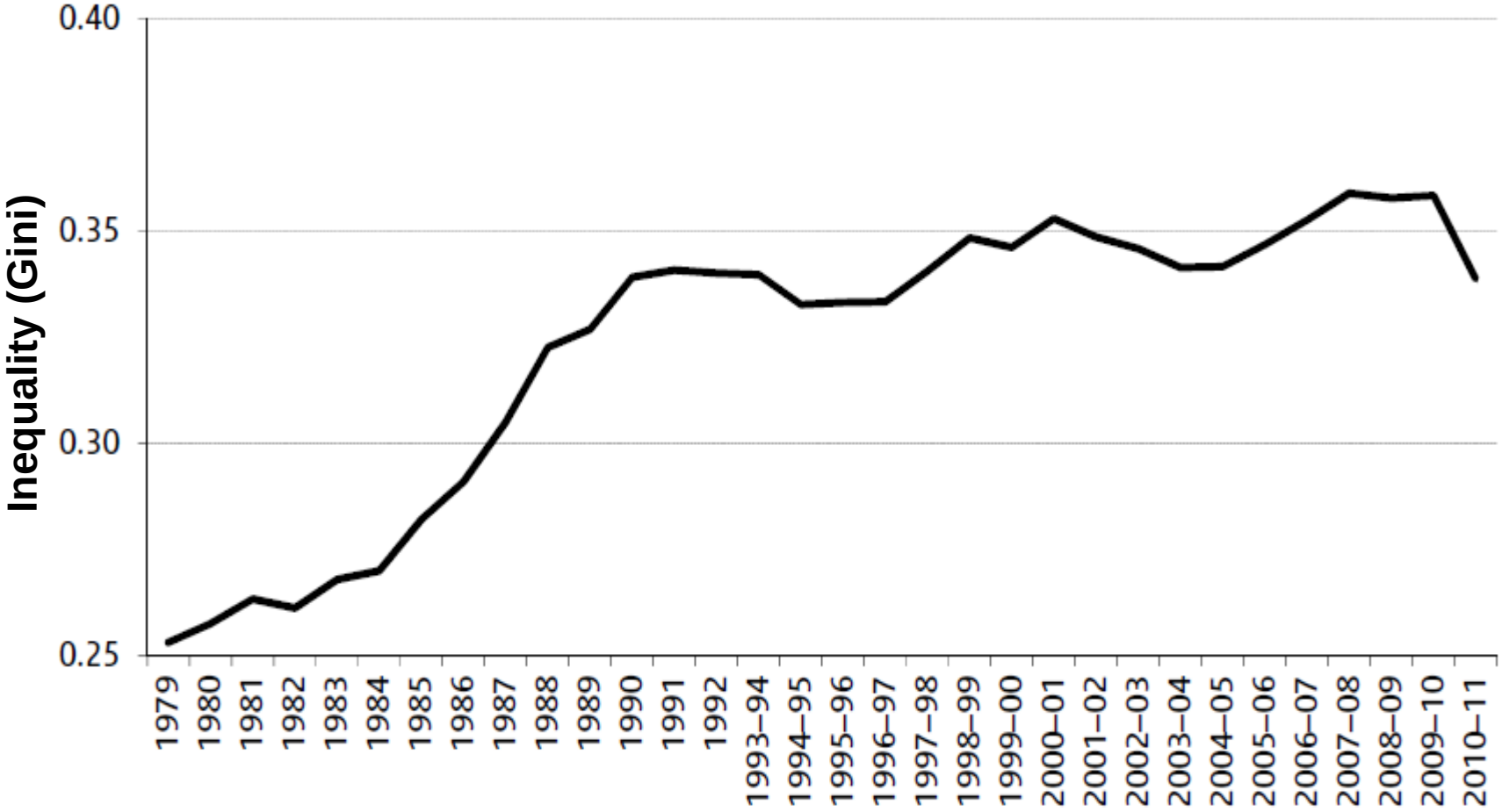
But...if growth and equality are substitutes, then equality maybe a precondition for a steady-state economy.

Income share of richest 1% in Anglo-Saxon countries 1921-2002

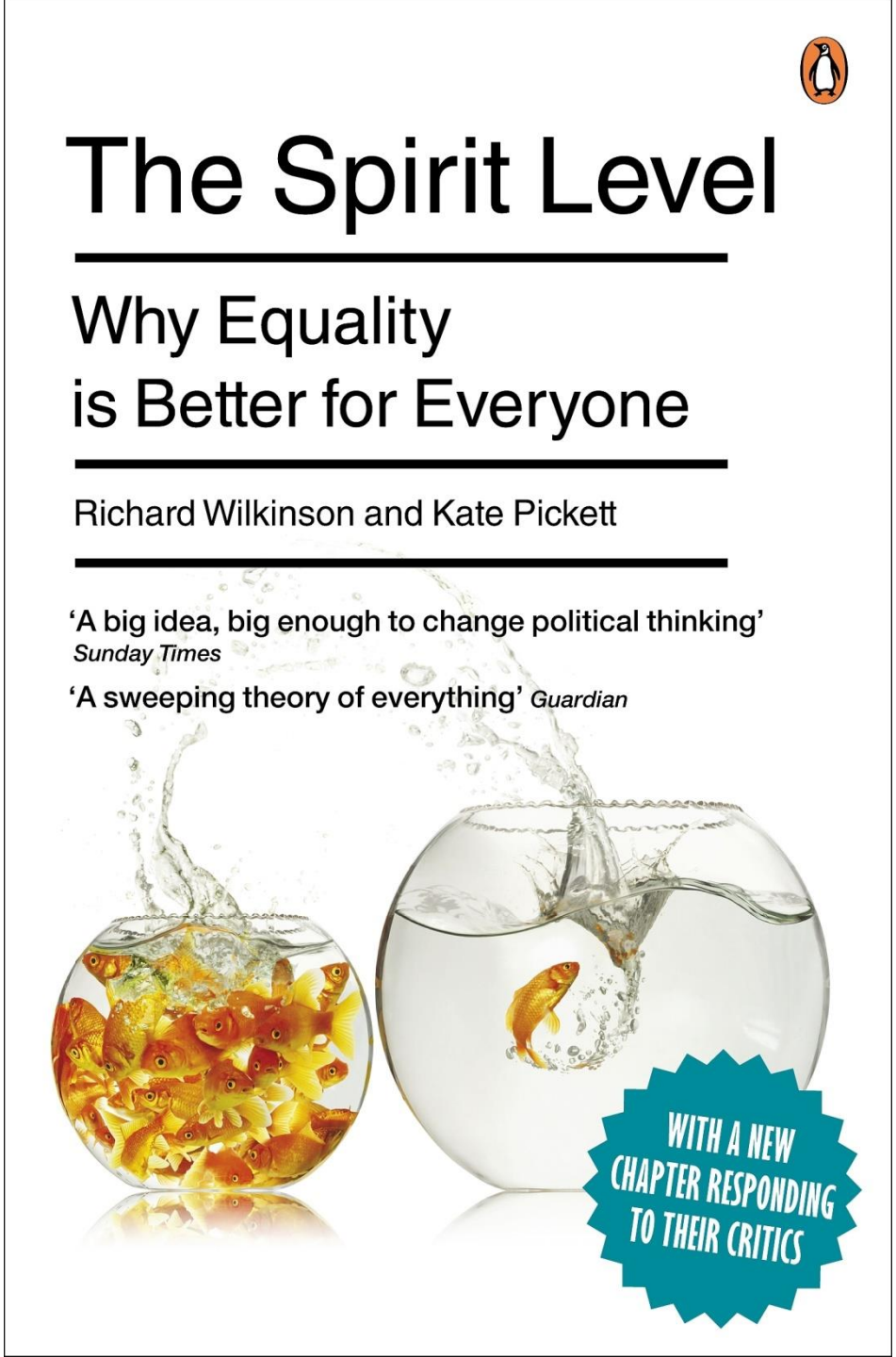


Source: Atkinson AB, Leigh A. (2010) Distribution of Top Incomes in Anglo-Saxon Countries. IZA discussion paper 4937, Bonn Germany

Rising income inequality in Britain 1979-2011



Cribb J, Joyce R, Phillips D. Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2012. Institute for Fiscal Studies, London 2012



For more information:

… a book

and a website…

The Equality Trust

http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk