

Essays on Social Themes

**Edited by
Gregory T. Papanikos**

**Athens Institute for Education and Research
2011**

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Essays on Social Themes: An Introduction

Gregory T. Papanikos, ATINER, Greece

This book is a collection of essays presented at various conferences organized by the Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER) held in Athens, Greece during the 2008-2010 period. The essays offer an interesting compendium on social themes based on a variety of academic opinions and schools of thought. Some of the essays are the authors' initial attempt to address the social issue at hand and its inclusion in this volume should be viewed as a preliminary exposition to the lights of the academic community. What it is also of interest is that the authors of the 23 essays come from 11 different countries (USA, Canada, Portugal, Kosovo, Lithuania, Italy, Australia, U.K., Estonia, Spain, Mexico) which satisfies the mission of ATINER, namely to bring academics together from different countries to exchange ideas on current and future research developments in a broadly defined academic theme, such as sociology and social policy. This diversity is fully reflected in the essays of this book and we do hope that the reader will find it fruitful and constructive. The book is organized into four parts: politics and policy; education knowledge and new technologies; youth and family issues; and gender. Each part contains five to nine essays. In the following sections of this introductory chapter, we will briefly present each one of the different contributions.

Politics and Policy

Democracy and democratic policies are the common factors in all five papers presented in this section. This issue goes back to ancient Athens and it seems that there is a great interest in the subject particularly in the modern era where the nation-state is challenged by both sides: the global and the regional. On the one hand how does globalization affect the democratic legitimating process which is usually identified at the national (state) level? On the other, how do regional (peripheral) states or provinces within a nation-state affect the democratic process at national level? All essays in this section deal with some facets of these questions.

The first essay of this part looks at the modern version of the democratic process which started in the late 18th century. John Markoff argues that our perception of democracy has changed due to social struggles. He identifies a

common element between ancient Athenian democracy and modern democracy. Democracy relates a given territory (city, region, nation, and planet) to self-governing people. Globalization demands transnational institutions. He sees a new era of democracy which requires a re-design of the democratic process. It might need a new political culture which is the subject of the second essay of this section of the book (chapter three). Trevor W. Harrison claims that the role of the nation-state in determining political culture has been largely underestimated. He applies this concept, after defining it, to provisionally analyze Canada's national political culture alongside its diverse provincial politics.

Chapter 4, authored by Alice Cunha and Patrícia Calca, continues this discussion of modern democratic processes. They look at the Portuguese democratic participation in electing Portugal's members of the European Parliament. The evidence shows a decline in the participation over the years. They consider the need of a 'new citizen', necessary to face the challenge of globalization. A number of questions still remain unanswered which the authors promise to deal with in future research.

Chapter 5 examines a European peripheral state by analyzing the party system of Serbia. Uros Suvaković looks at the multi-party democratic process and how this might lead to the ruin of democracy. The concept of a party-state is employed to analyze the current situation in Serbia. The party-state attempts to control all the pillars of democracy, including the judicial system. Corruption is the result.

The issue of corruption in the judicial system, particularly in the plea bargaining system is examined in the last chapter of this section of the book. Michael W. Smith examines this system in the United States and provides recommendations to reform what he claims a 'corrupt plea bargaining system'. He draws from his long experience as public defender in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts providing a series of policies which, it is certain, apply to other democratic countries as well.

Democracy is directly related to education and its evolution depends very much on the developments of technology. Studies of both issues are presented in the next part of the book and a summary presentation is given in the following section of this introductory chapter.

Education Knowledge and New Technologies

Democracy requires educated and informed citizens. In ancient Athens, the democratic values were enshrined during the education process, both the formal and the informal. In this section, nine papers are presented that deal with education and new knowledge. Technology is new knowledge.

The first chapter provides an overview of Max Weber's Theory of Values which has certain implications for the democratic process and policies as well as for the education process. George E. McCarthy starts with the latter, his essay emphasizing the objectivity in teaching and ends with the implications of

Weber's approach, actually Aristotle's approach, on the democratic processes. This opening paper provides the philosophical background for the more technical and focused papers of the rest of this part of the book.

The issue of social values, education and the production of new knowledge is further discussed in the next chapter of this part of the book. Elvira Martini and Fransesco Vespasiano examine the Triple Helix Model which links enterprises, universities and governments to produce social values through knowledge. Collective learning, cultural exchanges and social inclusion are the key ingredients of this model.

The following chapter becomes even more explicit (descriptive) by presenting the extent of the available social network opportunities on the internet. Abrar A. Qureshi claims that social networking, through the internet, has transformed world ideas, goals, and values. The author examines the technological and software developments and their impact on modern society.

The subsequent paper, written by Anne Statham and Helen Rosenberg looks at service learning which is linked to civic participation. Using a sample of University Studies in the USA, they found very interesting results pertaining to learning skills. The next study, by Heili Pals and Nancy Brandon Tuma, continues with an analysis of youth behavior and participation in another country setting of five post soviet societies (Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, a region in Russia, and a region in Ukraine). Their issue of investigation is youth non-compliance. They argue that there are two types of compliances, reminding me of Hesiod's Work and Days of the 8th Century B.C. of two types of strifes: a good and a bad one. The good non-compliance, in a changing world, may lead to an increase in entrepreneurial participation. Their findings support the hypothesis that higher adolescent non-compliance leads to higher adaptation to an unpredictable and rapidly changing social context, reaping any benefits from new but risky economic opportunities.

The next chapter deals with a topic which has received immense attention both at the academic level and in the popular press. Distant learning always existed but the new technologies have given the student and the teacher tremendous flexibility in terms of time and space. The invention of radio and television has had an impact on distant learning but both time and space were restricted. Students had to be close to an area where the program was broadcasted and be attentive during a specific time. Internet has changed both. Andrew Demirdjian argues that there is overwhelming positive literature on new distant learning opportunities without mentioning the negative points. The author investigates whether online education in a virtual university runs the risks of "dehumanization," and generates "deficient group experiences." It's a result, students suffer from "deprivation dwarfism" in their development toward maturity.

Online education demands literacy in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), the simple one being the use of the internet. ICT literacy is discussed in the next chapter. Nelson Vieira looks at ICT literacy in Portugal along three dimensions: Internet availability, Internet usage and e-skills. An important conclusion reached has to do with the use of internet, not for

information exchange (and thus learning) but for leisure, entertainment and social networking.

The following chapter looks at a different social policy of the inside-out prison exchange program. Barbara Ryan, Sidney R. Jacobs, Kathryn N. Healey and Kathryn T. Mason after documenting that USA has the highest number of prisoners and incarceration rate, examines new social policy initiative. The inside-out prison program consists of college level courses with the participation of students from the inside (inmates) and outside (college students). The author looks at one such program in USA educational institute and finds positive feedback for both the inside and outside students. These programs can help in mitigating the social exclusion effects of modern societies.

Chapter 15, the last chapter of this part, continues the examination of the more general issue of social inclusion, using another social stratum, that of beggars in Lithuania. The study involves the survey of first year social work and social education college students in Lithuania in order to identify their knowledge of the social exclusion problem with emphasis on beggars. Students perceive beggars as integrated into the society by as the author, Irena Luobikiene, claims, more research is needed in the area.

Youth and Family Issues

The third part of the book examines a variety of youth and family issues. In chapter 16, Karen A. Polonko, Nicholas Adam, Nazia Naeem and Ava Adinolfi, review the literature on child sexual abuse in Middle East and North Africa countries. They found similarities but important differences between these countries and the rest of the world. They, however, recommend that more research is needed in the area.

The next chapter looks at a different youth cohort and social problem. Lena Rodriguez examines second and third generation of Polynesian migrants into USA who are becoming members of urban gangs. This is a growing area of research because the urban problem based on cultural identities will intensify in many other developed countries.

The following chapter continues this discussion of youth violence in two other countries that of Canada and Sweden. Valerie Hiebert looks at youth media violence consumption and youth aggression. She compares the youth crime rate of Sweden and Canada, two countries that differ in youth's media violence exposure. Sweden has more restrictive policies. The evidence shows that Canada's youth is engaging in considerably higher rates of physical and non-physical forms of aggression than Sweden's youth.

The following chapter uses the synergy among all agencies in welfare provision to demonstrate that better results can be obtained. U.K. children are used as a case study. Adina I. Dudau does an exercise which contributes to an area of public management research which currently lacks adequate research. The involvement of many organizations in providing services to children

requires further research and this paper demonstrates the differences in attitudes and behaviours of all the stakeholders involved: schools, police, health organizations (hospitals), and social service agencies. It also unravels the central role of individuals who represent the various organizations. Looking at individuals as opposed to the organizational cultures they represent may produce more fruitful results in understanding and creating 'collaborative capabilities'.

The last chapter of this section studies the role of parents in monitoring their children's use of internet. Triin Roosalu and Veronika Kalmus emphasize differences according to the institutional context of the welfare regime. They use survey secondary data from Europe and provide (a) a typology of parents' strategies of mediating children's internet use (b) a subsequent classification of European countries and (c) an explanation of country differences. The authors conclude that parents' strategies depend on public welfare (gender) regimes, particularly female labour force participation and the availability of public childcare. The gender issue is further discussed in the next part of this book which is, briefly presented in the next and last session of this introductory chapter.

Gender

Four chapters make up this part of the book, all dealing with various issues of gender. The first chapter, Chapter 21 of the book, analyzes the current state of social theory on feminism and masculinity and based on this literature the author, Richard Christy, makes some recommendations for future research. As the author claims, few studies can ignore issues of gender equality, gender identity and gender roles.

The following chapter is a small note on the gender balance in the Spanish Law of Equality. Pilar Núñez-Cortés Contreras and María del Mar Ridaura López examine the principle of gender balance of 60-40 percent in the electoral system, in Public Administration Offices, on the Boards of Directors for big companies and in Labour Relations. The emphasis is given on the latter. The principle states that both sexes are represented no more than 60% and no less than 40%.

The next chapter examines gender issues in Mexico. Olga Rojas and Jose Luis Castrejon look at male and female experiences among several generations and social groups, in order to explore the existence of changes over time and to identify different patterns in the way the first sexual intercourse is experienced by the Mexican population. The discussion includes differences among-rural-urban and low, middle and upper socioeconomic strata. Using a large dataset of women and men, the authors confirm gender differences in sexual initiation but also that differences appear between young and old generations.

The last chapter, authored by Richard Christy, explores the historic role of fathers. He looks at the Canadian society both at the micro (story-telling) cases and at the larger picture in an historical – descriptive approach. Today there is

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a social and cultural problem in understanding the role of the father. The author suggests that the role of father, distinct from that of a mother, is in nurturing. They should encourage their children to become sociable and good citizens.