

Selected Topics in Social Sciences

Edited by

**Bettina Koch, Fevronia Soumakis &
Teresa Cierco Gomes**

Athens Institute for Education & Research
2016

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Selected Topics in Social Sciences: An Introduction

Bettina Koch, Fevronia Soumakis &
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This book contains peer reviewed papers presented at the various conferences organized by the Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER) and especially by the Social Sciences Research Division. Social sciences is currently at a cross-roads. The subjects covered are so diverse and the methodologies so different that it has become increasingly challenging to compare results in order to advance the knowledge about the society. If we add the diversity of societies then it makes the communication between social scientists a thorny issue. The same social issue is viewed differently depending on the country of origin and the social and academic background of the principal investigator. However, bringing these social scientists together makes the communication easier and one can only hope that this will be for the best of research on social sciences, useful to all societies in the modern turbulent world we live in.

This is exactly the mission of ATINER, i.e. to bring social scientists together in the historic city of Athens to discuss the current developments and the future prospects of social science research. This book includes 6 essays written by social scientists coming from five different countries; namely, Netherlands, USA, Italy, Poland and Turkey. The same dispersion is noted in the topics covered. It is an anthology of essays determined only by the specific interests of the authors. The six papers are organized into four thematic sub-sections: the first one includes studies in the area of political science, the second one focuses on demography and human geography, the third comprises papers in the area of environmental social sciences while the last one is centered on history.

Chapter 1 presents an essay, in which **Auke R. Leen** explores the benefits and controversies of the introduction of an EU value added tax (VAT) as a direct source for funding the EU budget. He claims that a direct EU-VAT would increase both the EU's financial autonomy but also its political accountability. Yet, the introduction of an EU-VAT comes with the likely downside of higher tax burdens for all EU-citizens and an uneven burden throughout the member states that may burden citizens in the Southern member states more than in the, in tendency, richer Northern states. Tax fraud, however, is potentially also an issue. One of the main difficulties in introducing an EU-VAT lies in the acceptance in the member states itself because it implies a loss of the member states' financial sovereignty. As an alternative, the essay suggests a declaratory tax that would allow the member states to maintain their financial sovereignty while still showing the citizen their contribution to the EU budget.

In chapter 2, **Christianna N. Leahy** challenges the conventional wisdom that simply equates democracy with elections and argues for the need to consider social movements for consolidating and legitimizing democracy. By utilizing the examples of Portugal and Greece during the global financial crisis, the essay shows how subterranean movements "re-politicize the questions of debt, wealth distribution, and the very organization of society that were effectively de-politicized and obscured by the market mechanism." The essay emphasizes the protest movements' potentials for renegotiating the relationship between the citizen and the state for "new types of more equitable, participatory, just, and effective governance."

Chapter 3 introduces the subsection devoted to demography and human geography. **Barbara Zagaglia** and **Eros Moretti** analyse recent demographic transitions taking place in Southern Mediterranean Countries. The theoretical models developed to explain demographic transition from the late 1980s onwards constitute the basis for the analysis of the demographic developments in the Mediterranean region. Mortality and fertility indicators, as well as the population growth rate, are used to investigate the demographic trends prevailing in the southern Mediterranean countries. The study also attempts to provide a well-grounded answer to the question whether two types of transitions took place in the area during the period under analysis or whether it was rather two subsequent stages of the same transition.

The sub-section on environmental social sciences begins with chapter 4. In this chapter, **Mozharul Islam** studies the effect of climate change on the coastal regions of Bangladesh within the context of the environmental dimension of globalization. The paper elucidates the identity crisis of environmentally displaced people. In doing so, it uncovers the relationship between globalization and environment. By taking this relationship into consideration, special concentration is placed on the effect of climate change on the coastal regions of Bangladesh. The Paper clarifies the identity of the environmentally displaced people on the bases of general and intellectual ideas and argues for a distinct law for the protection of this group of people.

Chapter 5 presents a study conducted by **Marco Carradore** on European environmental culture. The prevalent environmental perceptions are compared across European countries in search of a general cultural pattern. The main findings suggest that not only has environmental culture changed over time, but that different environment cultures exist across Europe. The study shows that the country of residence is a decisive determinant of the environmental culture. Additionally, the level of social participation in activities concerning the protection of the environment is shown to decline from 1990 onwards in all countries under analysis.

Finally, chapter 6 includes a historical study. **Adam Paluchowski** explores the transformation of landed property in Crete during the Hellenistic period utilizing literary evidence from selected works by Polybius, Plato, and Aristotle. The author situates his research within the larger context of change in the structure of private landed property and in the relationship of those who cultivate such properties. He argues that the shifts that occurred displaced one class of workers, namely the serfs, and introduced a slave workforce that altered the contours of Crete's political economy. The author examines the

extent to which the klarotoi and aphantotai, the serfs who worked the small-sized agricultural holdings owned by Cretan citizens, were displaced by the end of the second century BC. The use of slave labor to complement the labor of serfs in land cultivation is also referenced in Plato's Alcibiades 1, where Paluchowski draws our attention to an idealized aristocratic and rich landowning image of Spartan society. This image, he argues, is corrected by Aristotle's work (Politics 2.1270a) where the effects of the uneven distribution of wealth in terms of land and property among the Spartans resulted in a grossly inequitable society. To that end, the author's discussion of the Spartan socioeconomic framework in the fourth century BC is related to two factors—the increase in land accumulation and the use of slave labor to cultivate the enlarged estates that could not be accomplished by serf labor alone. This process, he argues, was mirrored in Cretan society as well, as evidenced by the gradual displacement of the klarotoi and aphantotai and their replacement with slave labor. Whether this process originated in the fourth century or later is inconclusive.