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Social Change in Modern Greece: the contribution of young generation.



Research Questions

- When and how do societies change?
- Why do different societies change in different ways?
- How individuals respond to such changes?
- How do they contribute?
- From where does this change derive?
- Enigmatic: the power of individuals (or citizens) to contribute

Theoretical background

- How far and in what ways human societies change?
- Show to what degree there is any alteration (or not) of the underlying structure of the given (or any) society over a period of time.
- How? → apply the theory of social change and reflexivity (Archer, Beck, Giddens) which supports that society changes because of reflexivity

Theoretical background

- 'Reflexivity' (Archer, Giddens, Beck, Lash) = the ability of individuals to become critical towards themselves and society.
- Archer (2010): 'no reflexivity no society'
- Giddens (2000), referring to reflexive modernity, even implies that individuals have the power to change the formation of social reality.
- How? → different forms of reflexivity that different generations use over the period of time

Reflexivity:

- Agents (or citizens) are able to consider, critically evaluate and possibly respond to social expectations (or forms, structures, norms) (Chalari, 2009, Archer, 2009)
- Therefore, social agents are able to process and reflect upon social (or political, economic, historical) change, consider themselves in relation to such change and even produce a response to it (personally or collectively).
- Social agents are not merely passive receivers of such change, but instead, active contributors (Archer, 2010).

Theoretical Frame

- Does social change derives from reflexivity?
- How?
- By using the Greek case as a society which alters in real time due to economic, political and circumstantial reasons and examining whether Greeks (agents) contribute to this change by altering their own way of thinking and evaluating social reality.

Research

- 20 semi-structured interviews taking place over August/September 2011 at Athens, Mytilene and Syros islands
- Participants: 8 M, 12F, age 25-45, (5 from each subgroup) from middle socio-economic class, with variation of educational background.
- Sampling: snowball & gatekeepers.
- Most were employed and few were parents
- All agreed to participate by signing the relevant consent form
- Analysis: thematic analysis based on the themes emerged out of responses
- I shall try to utilise the findings whilst keeping in mind that the circumstances change rapidly

Frames of research

Subjective experiences associated to:

- PRESENT (current society)
- PAST (in relation to our parents' generation)
- FUTURE (future society)

PRESENT

Themes

- Uncertainty
- Disappointment
- Pessimism
- Insecurity
- Fear
- Anger
- Misery
- Negativism
- Pressure
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Lack of trust
- Unnecessarily extensive consumption
- Negative influence of the Media
- “we see our dreams to get destroyed and our hopes for a better future to disappear” (Emma, 27, Athens)
- “we might be afraid of the fact that we will no longer be laid back but we will have to become more Europeans” (Makis, 35, Syros)
- “the biggest problem is the bad habits that we had for over 10 years and have ended up here” (Grigoris, 34, Athens)
- “it has never been worse” (Elias, 44, Athens)
- “the situation creates insecurity to everyone about the future” (Mina, 45, Eresos)

Responsibility/contribution:

- Most participants acknowledge that:

“all have contributed up to a certain extend” (Melina, 32, Syros)

And they explain how (eg):

“if you accept the ones who govern and vote for them again and again in order to ask for a ‘rousfeti’” (Antonis, 29, Syros)

“silent acceptance makes me responsible” (Nicos, 35, Athens)

“yes I have contributed but I was forced to do it because this is how the system works” (Georgia, 38, Eresos)

“most of us are ‘volemenoi’ and we don’t do anything” (Petros, 30, Syros)

PAST

Themes

- Better working conditions
- Careless/simpler life
- Secure work after University
- Moral values/principles
- They had less but they were happier
- Most people uneducated

BUT

- They didn't pass their experiences and values to next generation
- They were overprotective
- They established the "meso" mentality
- They were more pretentious
- "our parents were and still are overprotective and they were asking favors from politicians for our benefit" (Giorgos, 41, Eresos)
- "they didn't pass their knowledge and experiences of difficulties to us" (Maro, 37, Athens)
- "there are things that we should keep from our parents' generation, like simplicity and respect" (Eleni, 34. Athens)
- "our parents were tougher and stronger and they tried to make their living in any way that they could. Whereas we avoid difficulties" (Lina, 27, Syros)

- Participants were critical (albeit some of them even nostalgic) towards older generation.
- Therefore there is a realisation that established behaviours and mentalities inherited by past generations are not working any more ('customer relations' ways of voting, 'rousfeti', 'meso', extensive consumption)
- This becomes more clear when they were asked what do we need to do differently?

"if the situation is as bad as it is now, this means that they did something wrong" (Amy, 38, Eresos)

"the fault of the previous generation is that they made us feel as we were the centre of attention, this is why we criticize more and reject more easily" (Eleni, 34, Athens)

"we need to change the mentality of 'customer relations'" (Ira, 38, Athens)

"our parents were more conservative and most of them uneducated" (Petros, 30, Syros)

"we need to stop having the mentality of 'lamogio' that our parents had" (Emma, 27, Athens)

Theory?

Therefore social change is not perceived only as a mere consequence of the economic, political and historical circumstances but also as the result of peoples' actions/behaviours/ways of thinking

THEORY:

Archer (2010): younger generation needs to have knowledge that older generations didn't have and they work at posts that didn't even exist in the past

Therefore young generation face significantly different developments which can not be processed by repeating the traditional knowledge of previous generations

The need of reflexivity is more demanding than ever before, exactly because of the rapid changes in society and the consequences of globalization.

FUTURE

Greece in the future:

- more difficulties
- it will take time
- we will be controlled
- eventually things will improve

How would you like things to be?

- punishment
- justice
- stop corruption/meritocracy
- better education
- secured jobs
- capable scientist to take over
- government to care for citizens
- prospect, development

Will you contribute?

“I try to change my habits my way of living” (Giorgos, 41, Eresos)

“in my everyday life I try to be as conscious as I can in my decisions” (Amy, 38, Eresos)

“the most important thing is to be able to realise what is going on. And to be aware of my own responsibility” (Christina, 36, Athens)

“to be as good as I can in my job, pay my taxes and pass to my children the right values” (Lina, 27, Syros)

“taking part in non-profit organisations, join demonstrations” (Ira, 38, Athens)

“I try as friend, as mother, as wife to improve things on my own” (Georgia, 38, Eresos)

What it means?

- Participants do not perceive themselves as victims of the situation or as passive receivers of other peoples' decisions
- They feel insecure, uncertain and they are afraid about the future
- But they believe that the situation will eventually improve and they do not blame exclusively the politicians, the parties or the EU
- There are repeated references to the impairment of the Greek state, the lack of justice, the need of punishment, the incomplete health and educational system
- At the same time though participants displayed a critical understanding of the current situation, of their contribution and responsibility
- The element of maturity is the one that emerges out of all interviews.

‘What helps?’

- “To offer my help to people who need it” (Theodoris, 44, Eresos)
- “I tell myself that things will improve” (Amy, 38, Eresos)
- “I have faith” (Maria, 37, Athens)
- “I think that Greece has everything, they are jealous of us” (Makis, 35, Syros)
- “The more prepared I get, the better I feel” (Eleni, 34, Athens)
- “I dream” (Nicos, 35, Athens)
- “I share my thoughts” (Antonis, 29, Syros)
- “I try to get informed” (Kety, 26, Athens)
- “I think that I am still young” (Emma, 27, Athnes)

Conclusions

- A) Although disappointment and insecurity were main themes in all interviews no intention of violence emerged, rather the need of collective forms of peaceful resistance was evident (even though the situation in Greece alters rapidly).
- B) All responses entail the elements of maturity, realisation of responsibility and ability to produce critical thinking.
- C) The traditional way of responding (action-reaction) is not evident. To the contrary, participants carefully consider the current difficulties, they look for possible solutions and plan alternative options (confirmation of Archer's and Giddens' theory).

Conclusions

- D) In the answers of participants, priority is given to their personal every day life and their own concerns. Collective actions follow.
- E) Participants display disappointment and disapproval towards politicians.
- F) New generation seems more honest and conscious in comparison to previous generation (adulthood and maturity).
- G) They do not exclude their personal contribution as part of the solution.
- H) Abandonment of the irresponsible mentality of 'ohaderfismos'.

As society and the politico-economic circumstances alter, insecurity and fear about the future increases.

From now on Greeks should constantly readjust to new developments and realise that this is how they shall live their lives from now on.

Archer explains that the epoch of the New Millennium is characterised of the constant readjustment to new technologies, non-secured jobs, social and labour mobility and uncertainty about the future.

Therefore future from now on shall not be predictable or stable and we thus need different 'tools' to confront it.

This is a new element compared to the past which supports the assumption that societies (along with the Greek society) change, that citizens should readjust to the new reality and that new generation will inevitably reform society towards that direction .