Young Greeks and Democracy: social representations and imaginaries and the impact of the crisis

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Democracy, as a representation and imaginary for the Greek Youth (18-30 year’s old)

- This *over-time* study started at the end of the 1990’s in Athens with 30 participants. Simitis, socialist pro-European and reformist is prime minister with PASOK.

- The second study with 18 participants takes place in 2009 after the revolt in 2008 triggered by the death of an adolescent, Alexis Grigoropoulos, caused by a police officer. Revolts are extended to most cities in all the country. Karamanlis of NEA DEMOKRATIA is Prime Minister.

- Another study with 18 participants takes place in January 2011 after the 1rst Memorandum with Yorgos Papandreou as Prime Minister and PASOK in power. The economic crisis has been felt by the whole population. It is before the movements of Aganaktismeni, or Indignados in June 2011.

- The last study, from November 2015 to January 2016 with 31 participants takes place after the election of SYRIZA and ANEL, the referendum of July 5th and the 3rd Memorandum.
« Grounded theory » (Gaskell&Bauer 2000; Flick, 2002) or how an empirical question leads to a « theory »

– The research question as a starting point and a guide through the research (non directive interviews)
– Triangulation of methods (of data analysis)
– Reflexivity between the research field, the theory, the methods and the results
– The result is a theory « grounded » on the specific research
– The choice of a dialogical epistemology (Bakhtin, 1980, Markova, 2003)
Qualitative research methodology

• The method used to gather data is qualitative, based on «non-directive interviews », (Magioglou, 2008). There is only one question « if I tell you the word democracy what comes to your mind »?

• The interviewer tries to stay back and allow the interviewee to develop her/his thought, which is sometimes a process rather than a cristillized sequence of ideas. The role of the interviewer is to follow this process without introducing new themes.

• Interviews are transcribed and analysed following different methods (content analysis, homogeneity analysis, discourse analysis and a narrative analysis). The results suggest a potential reading of the participants’ thinking.
1rst study

- **Method:** 30 non-directive interviews (looking for the participant’s perspective)
- **Objective:** qualitative representativity or when to stop interviewing in order to gather a variety of discourses
- **Theoretical framework:** Social Representations theory (Moscovici, 1976)
- **Location:** Athens, Greece, but also people originary from different parts of Greece
- **Population:**
  - **Age**
  - 18-21: 8 « Upper middle » 6
  - 22-26: 22 « Middle » 14
  - « Lower » 10
  - **Gender**
  - F 15
  - M 15 Students 18
  - Working with diploma 7
  - Working without any education 5
Logic for the population choice (in all the studies)

• Choice of population: "a qualitative representativity" of the sample. The objective is to include people with different profiles and experiences related to the object of study and the type of question asked (f. ex. Gaskell & Bauer, 2000).

• Sociological categories are taken into consideration such as level of studies of the people interviewed but also of their parents, occupation, and parent’s occupation, part of Athens they live in, part of Greece they come from, income (as a combination of the part of Athens they live in, their parents education level and occupation, their own occupation and level of studies. Their gender, men and women.

• I only interviewed Greek citizens.

• People with different political or apolitical positions, by combining the information on their occupation with that of their parents’ and information I had by different informants who presented them to me. (i.e. Golden dawn voters, different anarchists, indifferent, right and center... those who changed their mind...)

• Interviewers also informed me of different profiles I should consult, such as the long term unemployed who is not looking for a job.

• People having migrated for a year and considering migration again, people with different sexual orientations, married, single, divorced....
The generations participating in the samples

• The eldest participants are born at the downfall of the dictatorship, when the generation of the National Technical University of Athens revolts.

• They have all grown up during the 3rd Greek Republic, established after the end of the dictatorship and have benefited from a period of peace. They were used to the alteration of *Pasok* and *Nea Demokratia*, the major political parties, to power. They have grown up in relatively prosperous years where salaries rose and consumption was possible (it was easy to be lended money to buy a car or go on holidays)

• Certain participants of the 2015-2016 study have participated at the 2008 demonstrations as adolescents or young adults for the eldest. They have experienced the crisis from their adolescence. Some of them have been part of the movement of Indignados that occupied the Syntagma place in 2011. They have been born in the 90’s.
Intergenerational inequalities

• Despite the social inequalities, the majority belongs to the generations raised in the prosperous years whose parents expect them to fulfill their ambitions of social mobility (Magioglou, 1994; 2009). Their youth has been more prosperous than that of the previous generations they have «everything for them » as their parents used to say.

• Their parents’ ambitions for social mobility is oriented either towards the acquisition of a University diploma, a masters in a European country or better in the USA, and a well-paid job in the third sector. Being related to the public sector if possible, or having a privileged relationship with this sector. These aspirations doesn’t correspond neither to the aspirations nor to the reality these generations face.
Being young for a longer time and living in precarious situations

- A strategy in order to face intergenerational inequalities is to stay young for a longer time. When I started the study at the end of 90s, researches were talking of «young adults» between 18 and 24. Then, the group of young adults raised up to 30 years old in different European studies.

- This phenomenon is not only related to the social representations of Youth (Galland, 2009) but also to the fact that criteria used to measure the passage to adulthood take more and more time to meet: a financial independence and the creation of a family unit.

- Even before the financial crisis, the percentage of young adults living with their parents and continuing a lifestyle of an adolescent are important not only in Greece but also in other European countries, such as Spain for example (Chauvel).
The social profile of the Young Adults participating in the research on Democracy.

• Young adults participating in the studies both at the end of 90s, in 2009, 2011 and 2015-16 either live with their parents and other family members, up until they are 30 years old, or flatshare in case they come from the province. The most fortunate have their parents pay for the rent of a place to live. The financial interdependance with the parents is not related to the social and education level either of the parents or of the participants.

• Those who work, work mostly for the family business: it can be a coffee shop or technical control a building’s elevators. The others are in precarious situations, and they might not get paid for the amount they were promised to.

• *Effect of the crisis*. Intergenerational inequalities diminish in favor of more « tradtitional » forms of inequality between those who are better off and those who are in more precarious situations. In the last study there is a differenciation: some of the participants stay at their parents’ home because they can’t afford a place of their own, but they work and the parents are unemployed, so they share the family resources.
**Results on the structure of the representation of democracy: the presence of two « logics »**

- An « *All or nothing* », dualistic social logic oposes a form of ideal democracy to the reality of democracy. It is very difficult to have democracy anywhere because: **Democracy= Freedom and Equality and Justice everywhere and all the time**
- A gradual social logic, takes a step by step approach where if an element of democracy is present, you can build from there a « better » democracy. In this case:
  - **Democracy= Freedom and/or Equality and/or Justice**, in most social environments if possible, or at least in certain social spheres.
An example of a dualistic logic all or nothing logic in the representation of democracy

- Dimitris, interview no 23:
  - “that which democracy dreams is beautiful, but, it cannot be realized because the human beings meddle with it and ruin everything”.
  - “democracy is something ideal, eh... that everyone, for example, independently from their job or other things, can be equal for the law, but, I don’t think that this happens in reality”.
  - “the police ought to protect... the citizens, the judges are there in order to apply the law, ...but, everything is corrupted”.
A “gradual” logic in the representation of democracy

• “... politics is not something that interests me, ... I don’t know why, ... actually, I have never thought for what reason, ... I do what I have to do, I don’t harm anyone, neither my country nor other people, all right, because I know my limits, apart from that, ... honestly I think that it is irresponsible what I do, if everybody said the same thing there wouldn’t exist anything, there would be chaos? how can I say that, there would be nothing, anyone could take the power, ...
The last studies: November 2015-January 2016: to live or to survive

• The general « morale » of the participants is better than in 2011 when they were extremelly angry and some were talking of violence as a form of action. The end of the intergenerational inequality? The effect of political mobilization in 2015 for or against the present government?

• Most of them have a theory on the reason there is a crisis: international capitalism, Europe, Greeks without education who are influenced by populist ideas... with one exception; On the contrary, end of the ‘90s they felt something was wrong but it was helpless to act. Now they are ready to act, and even for some of them, fight.

• Political ideologies act as « guiding principles », with a lot of ambiguities and contradictions, in the same way as in the former studies. Ideas traditionally marxist are found f.ex. in the discourse of a future priest who respects hierarchy: « equality is to give to each person according to their needs »

• The idea of democracy as « tirage au sort », is proposed by active party members of New Democracy

• The idea of aristocracy and meritocracy is present in the discourse of people who see themselves in the right
Results (1)

• The difference between «living and surviving» both as a person and for democracy. Among 31 participants those who think democracy exists even partly are 9. They adopt a consensual logic, some elements of democracy are present, so there is a basis to build from there: freedom of expression and will, artistic expression are important, even if equality and justice are not always present.

• Who are these 9 people?

• Strategies adopted in their every day life: Migration, retreat (working only to have enough for going out with friends, time is more important than money), or temporary jobs; working for the armed forces, the police, or multinational companies which operate in Jordan, Algeria, Turkey, Google;

• They have different social background: they have barely finished school, or studied finance, they are engineers. Their parents are football player and trainers, without higher education, coming from migration but having acquired certain financial means;

• For the other 22 participants the all inclusive logic is adopted and democracy is absent or corrupted, following the pattern found in the very first study before the crisis.
Results (2)

• The representation of democracy is related to the way the participants represent their personal future: the possibility to become financially and socially integrated. Their social status, education, their parents’ income are less important.

• If they are hopeful they adopt a gradual logic where democracy is a step by step process and there is a possibility to act. If not an all or nothing logic.

• In the last study – contrary to the previous ones, the majority is more confident for their role in the public sphere and consider voting important.