

Three Main Ways of Analysing European Societies

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Summary

1. Globalized capitalism as a motor of changes in power relations and social divisions

(Manuel Castells: The Information Age, 3 vol., (Blackwell) 1st ed. 1996-1998; Manuel Castells: Materials for an exploratory theory of the network society, in: The British Journal of Sociology 51 (2000) pp. 5-24)

1.1 Which are the prime movers for the genesis of global capitalism in the information age?

- A crisis of the economic development model (in the early seventies)
- libertarian social movements
- information technology revolution combined with the morphology of networks

1.2 Which are the fundamental features and institutions of the new economy?

The new economy is informational, global and networked. Central institutions are network enterprises and global financial markets.

1.3 How have the relations of work and power changed?

Individualization/flexibilization of the relationships of work; the power of globally mobile capital has increased, whereas the bargaining power of locally restricted, individualized labour has been weakened.

Social divisions: (a) between self-programmable labour and generic labour; (b) between employable labour and the excluded. Additionally, the legitimacy and capability of national politics and social policy in particular have been weakened -> Social risks have increased..

1.4 Strengths and weaknesses of Castells's approach

Based on broad empirical findings, differentiated and balanced argumentation; a great ability to synthesize and to qualify essential changes; neo-Marxist background

2. Liberty in forward or reverse gear? Individualization between societal coercion and - already decaying? – promise of redemption

(Ulrich Beck/Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim: Individualization. Institutional Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences, London/Thousand Oaks/New Dehli (SAGE) 2001)

2.1 What does “individualization” mean?

Individualization refers not to the (neoliberal) idea of autarky for free-market individuals, but to “institutionalized individualism”. It means both the disintegration of traditional social forms on the meso-level (class, gender roles, neighbourhood....) and new macro-institutional incentives and controls (e.g. by the job market, education system, welfare state etc.) to create one's own biography and networks. Individualization cannot be equated with “individuation” or an individually “good life”; it might mean “broken biography” or “failed biography”.

2.2 What are the features of the “life of one's own”?

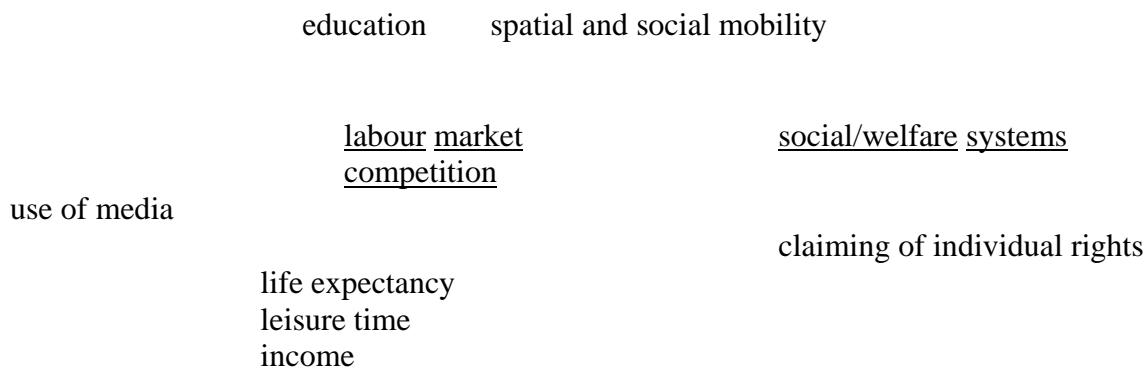
- “Condemned to activity”
- dependent upon (macro-)institutions

- experimental life-style
- reflexivity
- individual risk
- ascription of individual responsibility (-> insufficient political perception and problem-solving of societal problems; individual mental illnesses)
- de-traditionalization (conscious decisions; modern techniques)

2.3 Why has individualization become so important?

- The high level of functional differentiation forces individuals “to take into hands that which is in danger of breaking into pieces: their own lives? (Beck 2001: 23).
- Complex, rapidly changing societies with abstract steering media (money, law) require “generous” fields of individual actions: individualization as modern form of social control. The “negative” image of this – structurally imposed - control is suppressed by a positively rated cultural current of liberty, here called “individualization” (Cornelia Hahn: Soziale Kontrolle und Individualisierung, Opladen 1995).
- Individualization as a non-scientific, quasi-religious term with a “component of redemption” (Karl Otto Hondrich: Zur Dialektik von Individualisierung und Rückbindung am Beispiel der Paarbeziehung, In: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 48 (1995), 3-8, here: 8)

2.4 The institutional framework of individualization as an analytical tool



What has changed between 1983 and 2007?

- More individual communication means;
 - stagnating (Western-Europe) or increasing (Eastern Europe) income;
 - globalization -> increased competition in the labour market + cut in social policy regulations;
 - rising ecological consciousness
- > altogether: a reverse trend to more “collectivization” in Western Europe??

1.4 Strengths and weaknesses of Beck’s approach

Helpful keyword to catch modern attitudes to life; opens up new concepts of sociology, but lack of empirical data and theoretical accuracy; generalizes the special habitus of the educated middle-class; underestimates the meso-level (e.g. social movements); stresses individual options, but overlooks the function of “Ligaturen” (Ralf Dahrendorf: Lebenschancen. Anläufe zur sozialen und politischen Theorie, Frankfurt (Surhkamp) 1979), namely bonds, values, cultural priorities that are necessary requirements to take decisions. Have we already exceeded the zenith of individualization and are now in a backward

movement towards (community-based) values?

3. Breakdown of traditional religiosity, new spiritual longing, strong “brands” in competition and stiffened secularization: On the diversity of religious landscapes in Europe (a mixed approach of the sociology of religion)

3.1 Which (historical) factors differentiate between countries (acc. to David Martin)?

- Relation between politics and religion;
- kinds and proportions of denominations;
- relation between religion and nation (“cultural defense”);
- power of secularized elites to penetrate society;
- geographic location: periphery or centre?

3.2 Which trends of actual religious phenomena do we perceive?

(1) processes of **shrinking, traditional, Church-related religiosity**: melting of religious milieus; reductions in religious vocations, church membership, religious practices and beliefs (but exemptions!)

(2) phenomena of more or less **persistent secularity**: in certain milieus; age groups; geographical areas; important subsystems of society (economy, science [especially biology, neural-sciences], media, art, and, to a large extent, politics); church-produced secularity

(3) a new emergence of religious symbols, practices and issues, which are multilayered.

- (1) in the cultural sphere (theater, lyrics, films);
- (2) in marketing and the presentation of consumer goods;
- (3) in parts of philosophy, psychology and even sociology;
- (4) in proceedings at law and in the media (conflictive; exotic);
- (5) in neo-spiritual scenes (experiments in privatized, fluid social settings; “pilgrims”: one’s own spiritual way; unscrupulous crossing of borders of religious systems);
- (6) other world religions as newcomers in the EU: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Pentecostal churches, African religions...;
- (7) within European Christianity/Catholicism trends of new religious vitality: at mega-events; in strong pious “brands”; in profiled, innovative pastoral settings

3.3 How to interpret this new visibility of religious symbols and actors?

- Epistemologically, today a much more open access to reality;
- Partially the “boom of religion” weakens substantial religion: advertisements and films which de-construct contents and forms of traditional religion; interest in religion for fear of conflicts or in instrumental intention (to fight against undesired, e.g. bioethical, developments in society);
- Also the new impartiality of the religious in art is (to some extent) a sign of lost church control;
- Often - measured in traditional terms - a weaker quality of religiosity: (a) a less “imprinting” of religious socialization; (b) “feeling” instead of dogma and morals; (c) spirituality without interest in justice;
- Altogether no comeback of traditional religion, but a patchy, inconsistent mix of contemporary religiosity. -> This pluralization will amplify - and get politically (more) radicalized, where religious divisions and socio-economic exclusions reinforce themselves.

3.4 How to explain the simultaneous phenomena of new religious interest and “stiffened” secularity? From religion back to society

Functional differentiation (the separation between the mundane and the religious spheres and the successful functioning of the the former) presents one main problem in being and remaining religious today (cf. Joerg Stolz, Lausanne: secular competition for immanent and transcendent goods, which were once “produced” by the Church). On the other hand, functional differentiation has also been religiously productive: It has liberated religious actors (bishops, priests...) from economic, political etc. functions, so strengthening their specific religious role (José Casanova): But have we lost the key for this religious logic?

Some hypotheses in order to explain the new interest in religion:

- (1) A **disillusion with the promises of modernity** (postmodernism; J. Habermas [“slipping up of modernization”]): An ongoing controversy on how our societies should take up a position with regard to Modernity and the Enlightenment.
- (2) Rising **insecurities** (risks of unemployment, divorce, dismantling of the welfare state et cetera) as impulse to look for stable spiritual support (in the line of Norris/Inglehart: Sacred and politics worldwide, 2004).
- (3) Ralf Dahrendorf’s **desert-argument**: The new openness for religion as a trial to cope with the modern dilemma that we endlessly have to take decisions, but lack criteria for that.
- (4) The longing for **spiritual re-enchantment** (“Wiederverzauberung”, the reverse of Max Weber’s argument) **as a counter-movement against rationalized modernity**. (Insofar as the Church is perceived as a rationalized bureaucracy, the de-institutionalization of the Church can be interpreted as a rejection of this kind of modernity.)
- (5) Arguments of **globalization** and **religious economics**: Side effects of globalization (migration, tourism, internet...) make available new religious ideas and actors (Buddhists, Moslems, Pentecostals...). The more numerous religious suppliers are in a given market, the more they will try to make attractive religious offers: Religiosity will get more vital. There is certainly a new religious competition between religions in Europe, but economic concepts like “markets” and “goods” do not quite fit well with religion (c.f. Steve Bruce, Joerg Stolz): no colonization of religion by means of economics.