

## Maurizio Bach – Christian Lahusen – Georg Vobruba (eds): Europe in Motion. Social Dynamics and Political Institutions in an Enlarging Europe

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tions of large regions in the world do not overlap on the income ladder, except rich individuals or very small groups. Not even the richest people in rural India intersect with the poorest people in France. The 'middle class' (in terms of countries identified by relative fractions of GDP) is disappearing and polarisation is increasing. Between 1960 and 2000, almost all countries with a middle relative income fell among poor countries, and as the rich countries only Western countries remained.

More income means obviously more power, and the gradual concentration of power makes the idea of a global tax authority and equalisation at the citizen's level a mere illusion. Thus one can tend to agree with the author's reluctance to forecast the possible shape of future income inequality. He follows Vico and Tocqueville in rejecting any such 'laws of motion' and lists numerous various factors that can affect development in unpredictable ways. On the contrary, he criticises deterministic theories that 'under the false air of inevitability, they sap all effort to effect social change' (p. 148).

Going back to the prose of inequality, many questions arise. Is the benchmark of poverty nation-specific or global? Is poverty absolute or relative? The opinions vary: one is that poor people are desperate enough to improve their material conditions in absolute terms rather than 'march up' income distribution. However, globalisation increases awareness of differences in living standards, and also leads to migration, which causes certain national and cultural standards to spread and become shared generally. With globalisation, reference consumption increases as people get to know more about each other. We can document this in the behaviour of Czech citizens, who once the iron curtain had fallen began relating their own standard of living to that in Austria or Germany.

If 'the mother of all inequality disputes is the concept of inequality', then it is 'the father's' task to take care of the data, even if they differ in quality and availability. In the

three countries that determine world inequality first and foremost – the USA, India and China – the quality of surveys is not the same. In fact, for the latter two countries, the most populous ones, only grouped data are available, 'groups sometimes very large', as the author notes (p. 105). Here there are also the added problems of different units of observation (families sharing resources in those countries often cross the boundaries of households), measuring income in kind, etc. Some criticism could therefore be lodged in this regard. In any case, I cannot share the author's optimism about the feasibility of a homogeneous worldwide income survey – greater obstacles need to be overcome than the ability to obtain resources and political will.

Collecting reliable data on income is a problem everywhere. The choice of the 'best' income indicator, suitable even for a worldwide comparison, will remain a problem forever. The debate about global justice and legitimacy of redistribution will evolve further on different levels and from different ideological perspectives. The task of obtaining the right data is permanently on the agenda. One thing is sure in all these contexts: the enormous contribution of Milanovic's book, which is without a doubt the best and most comprehensive reading on world inequality written so far.

*Jiří Večerník*

**Maurizio Bach – Christian Lahusen – Georg Vobruba (eds): *Europe in Motion. Social Dynamics and Political Institutions in an Enlarging Europe***

Berlin 2006: Edition Sigma, 224 pp.

What is the pace and the pattern of development of the enlarged European Union (EU)? No doubt this question warrants serious attention from social scientists after the Treaty to establish a European Constitution was rejected in France and in the Netherlands, but also in view of the controversial debates on enlargements (past and future). Not much of

the academic literature on the future of the EU has been produced by sociologists. For about five decades, studies on the process of European integration have mostly been written by lawyers, political scientists, or economists. This book, edited by three German sociologists, is an attempt to reflect on the EU from a sociological perspective. In their introduction, the editors explain why, for sociologists, working on the EU is a difficult but also challenging task. In 'looking for the societal dimension of integration', sociologists 'are confronting with a bewildering paradox: the further European integration proceeds, transforming the very fabric of society in each member state, the more society vanishes as a relevant unit of reference for social integration. [...] Social integration, social inequality, collective identity or even citizenship somehow seem to lose their explanatory power and too analytically fail to grasp the specific dynamic and aggregate effects of supranational systems building'.

If the editors are quite right to observe that society, in terms of 'a model of social integration, as the first and foremost trajectory of values' is decomposing with European integration, it is regrettable that all the chapters of the book are not organised around this powerful question. As it happens at times with collective books, the contributions are not all connected to the research agenda set out in the introduction. This is particularly true in Part 1 titled 'The New European Geometry'. For instance, the chapter by Martin Heindenreich on 'the decision making capacity of the European Union after the fifth enlargement' is an institutional account of the EU political system, which is far from any questioning of the EU as a social entity. The chapter by Georg Vobruba on the 'internal dynamics and foreign relations of the European Union', analysing the foreign policy capacity of the EU, is also disconnected from the main research question raised in the introduction.

Most of the other chapters published in Part 2 ('Institution of Social Integration') and

Part 3 ('Identities and Cultural Institutions') try to re-introduce society as a key factor of the European integration process.

I will concentrate only on some of the chapters that I found particularly inspiring. The chapter by Richard Münch entitled 'Solidarity and Justice in the Extended European Union' shows that a new paradigm of social policy is emerging in the enlarged EU. This paradigm supports the employability of the single individual instead of job security, equal opportunities instead of equal results, and the justice of achievement instead of status security. 'The different paths of the individual member states, writes Münch, are steering towards a common goal through inclusion into a common developmental process and a common social discourse, where a new common vocabulary and semantics and a corresponding new paradigm of social policy are being developed'. No doubt there is a growing number of common features to the social problems and policies of the EU 25, with regard to access to the job market, health care, or the elderly, which are represented by a liberal paradigm of the empowerment of the individual. But differences also remain between states, according to their respective historical experiences. Focusing too much on convergence, Münch forgets to look at divergence, which still constitutes the other side of the coin. The chapter by Christian Lahusen is built on the assumption that the EU is eroding the national compartmentalisation of civil societies in two respects: first, by providing an inclusive policy arena of interest representation; second, by introducing the free movement of capital, goods, labour and services. Lahusen writes, 'These objectives are applied also to the service sector and particularly to the social economy as a means to spur employment and fight social exclusion more effectively'. He goes on to add that this creates specific problems for the non-profit sector in the member states, because these new requirements challenge the organisations committed to membership participation voluntarism and altruism. Com-

mercialisation, professionalisation and managerialism have become the news trends of non-profit organisations, a development that is particularly interesting to observe in the new member states. Barbara Wasner's chapter on the integration of civil society organisations of the new member states into European networks is complementary. It shows how the European institutions (especially the EU Commission) try to establish layers of European networks in the new member states, on issues like employment, the environment, education and justice, in order to facilitate the implementation of regulations. The interesting point is that organisations are sometimes just 'planted' and have no real anchoring in the 'third sector' of the new member states, making misfits out of domestic institutions and European regulations. Several political scientists have also observed this in the old member states. Thus the research community is invited to continue its reflection – with enlargement – on the viability of the Commission's policy to implement integration through European networks.

In the end, this book – which is somewhat of a patchwork – contains relevant chapters, which help provide a look at the societal dimension of European integration. But it is only an invitation to go further.

*Christian Lequesne*

**Sandrine Devaux:** *Engagements associatifs et postcommunisme – Le cas de la République tchèque*

Paris 2005: Éditions Belin, 319 pp.

The topic of civic engagement is unquestionably very popular in contemporary sociology and the political sciences. To a large degree the focus on civil society is linked to the fact that social scientists are interested in understanding the process of democratic transformation in post-communist countries. Amidst

the boom in 'civil society studies', it is legitimate to ask: what can another book on civil society in a post-communist country add to our understanding of a topic already so substantially analysed?

In *Engagements associatifs et postcommunisme – Le cas de la République tchèque*, the French political scientist Sandrine Devaux persuasively demonstrates that another approach to the topic can provide an impressive array of new information. Her book shows that despite the abundance of literature and empirical research on post-communist civic engagement, the mainstream Anglo-American approach of 'civil society' prevails, and that we are overlooking other, alternative approaches that could facilitate a deeper understanding of the real social processes behind post-communist civic engagement.

Sandrine Devaux specialises in the study of the political and social transformation in Central and Eastern Europe and focuses on new forms of civic and political participation. She is also the author of books on the relationship between civic associations and political parties in the Czech Republic, on collective identities in post-communist Europe, and on the new civic and political activities in enlarged Europe. The reviewed book is based on her doctoral thesis.

The author opens the volume with a very instructive and systematic critique of mainstream approaches to the study of democracy, especially the Anglo-American approach of 'civil society', which according to her has reached an impasse. The author largely criticises the use of such terms as 'social movement', 'civil society' or 'non-profit sector' in any analysis of post-communist societies. She labels them as normative and functionalist, remarking that this kind of approach can obstruct the effort to obtain a real understanding of social facts. Even if this criticism is probably apt, it must be admitted that these terms 'imported' from the West are used owing to the lack of 'indigenous' terms or original concepts developed by scientists from post-communist countries. (The