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## Boekbespreking van: Social Quality: AVision for Europe

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Wolfgang Beck, Laurent J.G. van der Maesen, Fleur Thomése and Alan Walker (eds.), *Social Quality: A Vision for Europe*, The Hague/London/Boston: Kluwer Law International, 2000, 390 pages, ISBN 90-411-1523-4, EUR 81.50

This is the second product from the European Foundation on Social Quality, which drafted the *Amsterdam Declaration of Social Quality of Europe*: a broad platform that was signed by more than 800 scientists. It may be seen as a symposium in which some of those scientists reflect on comments that an overwhelming majority of them suggested after the first volume was published in 1997. It should deepen the theoretical basis for the topic of social quality and provide new steps towards its operationalization. The book consists of three Parts, encompassed by Forewords, an Introduction and an Epilogue. In the Introduction the editors reflect on the question 'For whom and for what is the European Union?' In Part One, 'The Social Quality of Europe: Assessing the Concept', Göran Therborn, Antonio Ojeda-Avilés, Denis Bouget, Marina Calloni, Kees van Kersbergen, David Phillips, Yitzhak Berman and the editors represent an international palette of thinkers that reflect on the definition of social quality. Part Two, 'Tendencies in Europe: Developing the Concept', contains contributions from Jan Berting, Christiane Villain-Gandossi, Ota de Leonardis, Adalbert Evers, Guy Standing, Georg Voruba, Svein Andersen, Kjell Eliassen and the editors about processes that challenge the concept of social quality. In Part Three, 'Creating the New Perspective. Theorizing Social Quality', the editors discuss the concept's validity and its empirical and political applicability. Gyorgy Konrad wrote the Epilogue, 'The Social Quality of Europe is Culture'. The *Amsterdam Declaration on Social Quality* is inserted in the volume as an Appendix.

The scientists who subscribed to the Amsterdam Declaration were brought together in the nineties by the scientific and political conviction that traditional approaches to policy making were inadequate. These subordinate social policy to economic policy and reflect a top-down form of governance. They thus "cannot provide a secure basis on which to build a socially just Europe or one that reflects the needs and preferences of citizens" (p.7). Instead they sought "a rationale of social policy *per se*". That independent rationale should be social quality, which is defined as "the extent to which citizens are able to participate in the social and economic life of their communities under conditions that enhance their well-being and individual potential." The level of this social quality depends upon four characteristics: the degree of socio-economic security, the level of social inclusion, the extent of social cohesion, and the level of empowerment.

Enriching is the chapter written by Van Kersbergen. He gives an overview of the critique on the functionalist hypothesis of convergence between national welfare states causing quasi-welfare state development at the EU-level. Empirically, there is no such development. However, he argues that, on a theoretical level, rejection of the functional reasoning and spillovers may stretch too far. Rather than discarding functionalism, he opts for an 'open functional theory' of the logic of adjustment of national welfare states in the context of European integration. An open functional theory claims that functional explanations may be hazardous, but not worthless. This

theoretical position is, in my opinion, a very fruitful one. It shows that politics can make a difference by dealing with practical market pressures in such a way that the strategic ideal of social quality may be attained.

Important is also the contribution by Georg Voruba, who compares the European and the US-models under the subtitle 'The globalisation dilemma'. He convincingly shows that social quality is not only the result of Europe's economic prosperity, but also its indispensable precondition. At the same time this means that the costs of European welfare states generally lead to relatively high labour costs, especially in wage-centred systems of social security, financed by contributions. In the United States social policy in terms of labour costs is much less relevant. In a global market the United States might thus compete more successfully and Europe could be compelled to lower its standards of social quality. Voruba, however, points to the fact that it is not the absolute level of labour and non-wage labour cost that counts, but the cost/productivity ratio. In this respect the European model with its institutions can still compete, while the US-model has deficits in the educational system and vocational training that hinder the improvement of productivity. Voruba predicts that the American model is much less capable of coping with the challenges of the globalization dilemma than the European model.

Both chapters set the framework within which social quality might remain a characteristic of European culture. That is what the authors are striving for. The editors are aware of the normative character of this goal: "The initiative is not a neutral one" (p. 9). Their objective is "to subject the values of the Enlightenment to new circumstances." And "The initiative encourages participatory and consensus-based societies." This is why many chapters deal with 'the third sector', 'social capital', a non-utilitarian but rather personalistic view on human beings, human dignity, solidarity, etc. I do not think that we can expect to find the adherents of Friedrich Hayek among those 800 scientists who signed the Amsterdam Declaration, nor the advisors of President Bush. Such libertarians believe that economic growth is the best thing for the poor, produced by as much freedom as possible for the strongest part of society. In their view, any social arrangement by government is a blockade for such growth.

This clear normative position does not reduce the scientific qualities of the book. In fact, by stating their normative paradigm the authors open up their work for critique in a better way than those who conceal their position behind a veil of neutrality and use their norms much more implicitly or as pretended common sense. The book gives an honest overview of the critique on the concept of social quality, as it was defined in the first volume. It sums up ways to overcome this critique and defines the domains where solutions must be found. It offers descriptions; it discerns aspects of the problem; and it points to relations between the aspects and to further ways of deploying the concept as a scientific and a political theme. It outlines the framework within which this should be done. Especially the two closing chapters of the book, written by the editors, give a convincing scientific description of, or lay a normative claim on, the social quality concept as a 'rationale for policy *per se*'. The concept is clearly distinguishable from the alternative

and dominant option that reduces social quality to social protection and lets social protection follow from maximizing employment. The authors make it very clear that social quality means more than social protection, and that the single focus on economic growth and competitiveness may endanger social quality.

This conclusion contains a fundamental critique of the dominant views in the European Union and in the member states, which are mostly governed by politicians who represent social-democratic political parties but are implementing and supporting neo-liberal ideas. So the book may not only be seen as an excellent example of interdisciplinary and internationally coordinated social research on the basis of a clear normative paradigm, but also as representing the inner struggle within European social democracy with its own inheritance. The results open a view on a real Third Way, a way between casino-capitalism and state-controlled social security systems. The book shows that, at least on a theoretical level, there is an alternative. Sooner or later this insight may become a part of the political programmes too.

The book ends not only with an invitation to politicians but also to social scientists. From them the editors seek responses to the ideas set out in the book. In this perspective I have two points. First, the subsidiarity principle could be an answer to the editors' conclusion that social quality cannot be defined objectively, but is dependent on the human praxis in different cultures. Remarkably, however, the volume refers only a few times to the subsidiarity principle and sees it more as a blockade than as an aid. From the perspective of subsidiarity, as it is meant in its philosophical roots, the higher level of decision-making should not only hold back (the EU-interpretation), but also support the smaller-scale levels to realize their goals. This interpretation deserves more attention.

Second, I suggest that the concept of social quality will be elaborated further not only as a concept in *opposition* to neo-classical economic theory and Anglo-Saxon economic practice, but should be incorporated into a broader framework that encompasses ecological and economic aspects too, both on a theoretical and practical level. Theoretically, there are other economic theories, such as neo-institutional economics, besides the dominant neo-classical paradigm, that offer the possibility of a much better relationship with social quality. These relations should be explored. Practically I point to the global movement of businessmen who have started to work with the *triple P bottom line* (People, Planet and Profit) as a basis for their corporate strategies. The *Global Reporting Initiative* supports this by developing a system of *integrated* indicators on the social, the ecological and the economic aspects of business and society. In my opinion, the Foundation's next volume should be about societal quality in terms of social, ecological and economic indicators. As such it might offer ideas not only to the European Commission, but also to the upcoming debate between the World Bank and the anti-globalization movements.

Kees Klop

Richard Gunther and Anthony Mughan (eds.), *Democracy and the Media. A Comparative Perspective*. Communication, Society, and Politics Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, ISBN 0- 521-77743-7, xv + 496 p., £ 19.95.

Comparing countries can be a very fruitful type of research, and may be rewarding for the researcher as well. It gives the individual researcher an opportunity to compare his or her results with colleagues from other countries. A comparative perspective makes clear what is the rule, and what are the exceptions. However, this only works if the volume is edited in a strict fashion with substantive introductory and concluding chapters. If not, edited volumes comparing countries on some aspect of politics or communication tend to deliver a jumble of insights and approaches. Individual chapters may be very readable, but the reader is likely to lose the bigger picture.

*Democracy and the Media* is a comparative study, and is thus a promising as well as a vulnerable undertaking. The task Gunther and Mughan assumed proved difficult. To describe the interplay between politics and media in ten different countries is prone to become a mixture of perspective and perceptions. Fortunately, this worked out in a positive way. The editors have given ample room to the individual authors to focus on the differences in developments in the individual countries. Countries as different as Russia and the Netherlands deserve such a different approach. Gunther and Mughan then succeed in bringing the ten descriptions together. The introduction and conclusion are actually very insightful chapters. Especially the conclusion does what it is meant to do: all the similarities, all the differences and all the anomalies from the ten countries are woven into a well-balanced overview, that does not hesitate to challenge common knowledge.

Gunther and Mughan brought together ten authors, who had the task of describing the historic and current situation of political communication in ten very different countries, all with two foci: the connection between media and politics from a macro perspective, and the connection between media and politics from a micro perspective. The volume seeks to achieve a conjoint between the macro perspective (how is politics regulating media?), and the micro perspective (how do media influence the audience, the politicians and thus politics?).

The respective country descriptions are divided into two groups: countries that have transcended in the last 25 years from an authoritarian, or a totalitarian regime to democracy, and countries that have been democracies for longer. The former category comprises descriptions of countries such as Spain and Chile, but also Russia and Hungary. The latter consists of chapters on media and politics in the United States of America and some European countries, but also in Japan.

The four chapters about countries that have transcended from an authoritarian regime to democracy are the most salient. This applies particularly to the chapter on Spain, a country that was suffering under the regime of *Generalissimo* Franco just 25 years ago, and which, since then, has worked its way to a central position in Europe.