

Social Change in Modern Greek Society: the Contribution of the Young Generation

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Currently, Greek society is experiencing significant economic, political and social change. Much has been written and said regarding the economic and political challenges that Greek society has to confront. However, the aspect of *social change* of this specific society has not received equal or systematic attention. Young Greeks are now experiencing a different social reality (in relation to older generations) which is characterised (*inter alia*) by uncertainty, insecurity, mobility and the incapability to produce specific projections for their future lives.

One of the central questions within modern sociology concerns social change. 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? The answer to such questions remains incomplete, despite the attempt of classic social theory to provide a variety of possible answers. What remains enigmatic is the power of individuals (or citizens) to contribute to social change and the degree of their influence.

In current social theory, social change is approached through the ability of individuals to be(come) reflexive (and therefore critical) upon society and themselves. Archer (2010) maintains 'no reflexivity no society', and Giddens and Beck (1994) (although following a different approaches on reflexivity) acknowledge that modernity is understood in terms of reflexive modernisation. Such approaches support the view that social change is indeed related to the ability of agents to critically evaluate their selves, social reality and their place within society. Giddens, referring to reflexive modernity, even implies that individuals have the power to change the formation of social reality. Therefore, in the case of social change such a phenomenon is directly connected and influenced by social agents (individuals, the people) and vice versa. However, social agents are not merely passive receivers of such change, but instead, active contributors. This means that social change maintains its autonomous powers and properties (associated with economic, political and social forms, norms, expectations) but at the same time agents are also recognised as possessing autonomous powers and properties (ability to produce reflexive deliberations and process the social world).

Therefore, on the one hand, social change is not understood as a sole consequence of economic, political, historic and circumstantial factors but rather as the outcome of the citizens' praxis and actions. However, on the other, it would be a simplistic overgeneralization to conclude that the responsibility for the formation of Modern Greek society merely derives from citizens rather than policies (or politicians). To the contrary, what is important is to explore the reasons why Greek society is reformed although a big part of its population resists such change. Current Greek society constitutes a first class example of a society that is going through significant changes and it offers an exceptional opportunity to investigate, a social phenomenon (social change) as it develops in real time and conditions, and to understand, how Greek people contribute to the formation of a new society.

Greek young generation is now called to resolves social anomalies inherited by older generations. Such social discontinuities concerning aspects of Greek mentality which are not effective any more, such as the demand for a permanent life-lasting job and a secured pension, the expectation of state support (in terms of health, education, unemployment), the desire for rapid social mobility and social recognition and the anticipated power gained through social networks. Greeks are now called to reform economy, policies and social reality but they are also called to change old practices, established mentalities, and more importantly ways of living. Such alterations are related to the aspects of uncertainty, insecurity and constant readjustment to a new reality. This new social reality may include repeated relocation, continues job hunting, constant seek to access to new information and technologies. In that

sense, young Greek generation is now called to reform current Greek society and also be reformed by it.

Such change is phenomenal in terms of the formation of Greek society, which has been rather resistant to big changes over the last twenty years. The establishment of the ways of thinking that Greeks have been using during this period has proven to be unhelpful and young Greeks are now called to abandon them within an extremely limited period. Habits (such as consuming patterns) or mentalities (such as prioritising the personal over collective interest) must now change and be reformed as the new reality demands different ways of thinking and rapid adaptation to a new way of living which will be economically restricted and politically unstable. In that sense, Greek young generation is currently trying to become reflective upon the past, consider what part of the old generation's established mentalities will use and what aspects of their way of living will alter. Young Greeks experience enormous uncertainty and insecurity about the future and they are trying to create their own mechanisms to cope with the unknown, especially regarding the working environment, and they also try to maintain their hope which will enable them to remain creative and productive in the present.

Although such description of current Greek society may be perceived as pessimistic and rather abstract, the fact remains that modern Greek society is currently reformed rapidly and in some sense unnecessarily cruelly and this may only result to the formation of a new social reality which will be structured by the young generation as they are going to be the ones to live in it. The post war generation and the 'Polytechnio' generation have shaped and lived in Modern Greek society and they have raised their children in it. It is now time to seriously consider and critically realise what aspects of their heritage, the young generation will keep and what features will change. Albeit the cruelty of the current economic reform, a rare chance is offered to Greeks to become honest and critical toward ourselves and responsibly decide what kind of society we want to live in. Such deliberation should have already been processed; however it is still not too late to start considering what went wrong and how we can make it work better.