

REVIEW

**(UN)MAKING EUROPE: REPORT ON THE
13TH CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN
SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
(29TH AUGUST – 1ST SEPTEMBER 2017, ATHENS)**

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The European Sociological Association (ESA) organized its 2017 conference with a thought-provoking title: *(Un)Making Europe: Capitalism, Solidarities, Subjectivities*. It is generally characteristic of the biannually held ESA conferences that they deal from a specific sociological perspective with issues considered important on a European level, and within it a region or specific countries. This time the program was dominated by questions regarding Europe's destiny as a whole. Europe can be made or unmade, and this is especially true since the financial and economic crises of 2008. European society, and even the very idea of Europe, is under threat – says the welcome note of the conference. The plenary and semi-plenary sessions examined the three elements included in the conference title (Capitalism, Solidarities, Subjectivities) in great depth, and among the themes of the sections subdivided according to the special fields of sociology (Research Networks, RNs) there were several that discussed problems which are considered of critical importance, as well as the results of their related research. The keynote presentation of the conference was provided in the form of a lecture by an American professor, David Harvey (City University of New York), which was presented at the opening ceremony, entitled *When Money Betrays Value*.

The conference's venue was of symbolic significance, since the epicenter of the complex European crisis is Greece. The country's situation and ongoing processes were topics very frequently discussed at the event. The largest university in Greece, the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (a university with a classic structure and seventy thousand students, established in

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1837), offered to host the conference. However, this offer was withdrawn in the preparatory phase of the conference because of financial difficulties. Thus, other venues had to be found quickly. Two “younger” universities in Athens offered to organize and manage the conference: Panteion University, which is expressly a university of social sciences (established in 1927, it currently has eleven thousand students), and Harokopio University, which on the other hand is a rather small university with a highly specialized profile (Environment, Geography, Applied Economics, Digital Technology, Health Science and Education; established in 1990, it currently has 1,150 students). The two host universities did not have the capacity to provide a venue for every conference event. This is how it happened that certain sections held their sessions in the luxury conference rooms of the nearby Athenaeum InterContinental Hotel, while the plenary sessions were hosted by other representative cultural institutions in the city. This was indicative of the widespread joint efforts that promoted the success of the conference.

“Capacity” was very much needed at this conference, since over 3,500 participants attended who could select from among 850 section sessions organized by 37 research networks and 10 research streams. There were a total of 2,900 presentations in the program.

From the perspective of content, reports about the characteristics of conferences of this magnitude are unavoidably subjective and selective, so here I present experiences and impressions regarding only a few topics, and only briefly.

As expected, the phenomenon of migration received considerable attention at the conference, the topic being discussed in semi-plenary and special plenary sessions. At the RN sections there was also practically always a presentation based on theoretical or empirical work that introduced a specific problem that was somehow connected to this subject. The Sociology of Migration RN, which has been institutionalized for a long time, obviously analyzed this topic area, but it also received significant attention in the Disaster, Conflict and Social Crisis RN, and among other areas it appeared in the program of the Sociology of Culture RN and the Urban Sociology RN.

I present a few examples here to reflect the diversity of approaches and lectures that were aimed at less widely known terrains and correlations. In one of the sections of the Disaster, Conflict and Social Crisis RN, two papers were presented regarding the research of Turkish sociologists, which analyzed changes in settlement structure, the extraordinary increase in the proportion of urban population, and resulting social problems. The lecture, entitled “The Effects of Mass Migration on Urban Life Standards in Turkey”, described the two great waves of migration that Turkey went through in the period between 1990 and 2017. These partially coincided in time, thus their combined effect

has caused and is causing extraordinary social burdens and challenges. Starting in the 1990s, enormous internal migration started occurring which mostly represented the flow of rural population into cities as a consequence of the economy's structural transformation. The other form of migration involved the flood of external refugees that commenced in the 2010s. The living conditions of previously relatively well-to-do social groups were severely degraded. A critical evaluation of this process is very significant for the planning of future post-migration processes and for the creation of livable cities. Specifically, in the course of these processes, traditional, socio-cultural, psycho-social, economic, legal and institutional coordination must equally be considered.

A lecture entitled "The Middle East Refugees, Turkish Efforts, and a New Urban Planning Agenda", as a sequel to the former lecture presented research that had analyzed the operation of currently functioning international networks and projects, and the general legal framework of refugee policies that deal with the issue of settling refugees. The presenters concluded that these are inadequate from the perspective of both the local population and refugees. Researchers formulated proposals for the renewal of spatial planning policy, a goal which may not only be relevant in Turkey, but also in other cities affected by migration in the Mediterranean region.

In this same section, a lecture entitled "Refugee Crises and Global Labor Relations" presented the work of a Polish research team who had studied the situation of migrant workers in Germany and Turkey. Their research focused on Syrian refugees. They explained their choice with the fact that Syrian refugees constitute a relatively well-educated group, whose labor market situation is substantively comparable to that of local employees. The researchers prepared interviews with families living in Turkish refugee camps and German cities, as well as those who are "on the road" in refugee camps in Greece. The respondents were primarily among those who had found employment in the textile industry. Thus, the researchers were able to gather multifaceted information and opinions from a well-delineated and specific sample. They summarized their findings with the concept of Economic Racism, which a significant portion of the migrant population experiences, but those who are the poorest and most defenseless suffer from more intensely, resulting in their considerable exploitation. The main issue is the limited access to labor rights of refugees and migrants. Current migration policies, labor law regulations, the violation of labor rights and segregation affecting labor affairs have contributed to an emergence and increase in inequality between the local population and the migrants. All of this is a substantial impediment to fitting in, and social integration.

Following my personal professional interests, I mostly participated in the Sociology of Education RN section. The classic subject, the development of

social inequalities and their reproduction, dominated the field as expected. Among the presentations I consider important was one entitled “Quality versus equality in European higher education policy”. It introduced a phenomenon that is well-known to those who professionally deal with higher education, but is not generally expressed with such clarity and subtlety. This is related to one of the important consequences of the expansion of higher education. In the first phase of the expansion (the 1960s and 1970s), massification commenced with generous government support, which was a step towards the realization of equal opportunity in education and conformed to the principles of social justice and social cohesion of the welfare state. By the 1990s it had become clear that attention in the meantime was being transferred to the topics of quality and efficiency. Circumstances and conditions support the development of the market-driven university, which fits the concept of knowledge society and places the responsibility for learning on the individual. The state only effects control through intermediary organizations, specifically based on performance criteria. This is the path of the withdrawal of the welfare state, primarily during times of crisis. The large European projects – the Bologna-process and the Lisbon Strategy – implicitly but intensely support this process.

The issue of migration also emerged in research into the world of education. Among the related presentations were two that particularly attracted my interest.

A lecture entitled “Italian Educators’ Views on Education for Integration in Multi-Ethnic Societies” called attention to the fact that education policy must urgently think through what concepts and practices are capable of dealing with culturally-diverse students and integrating them into national education systems. It argued that intercultural integration can be successful in the new multi-ethnic society. Therefore, it is not already recognized multicultural solutions that should be preferred, but rather intercultural ones. In practice, this means that from the perspective of the curriculum, getting to know the culture of students’ own countries should be awarded equal weight with learning about the culture of the host country. For example, Italian may be listed as the second language of students: this is the principle of multilingualism. It must also be recognized that some refugees will eventually return to their home countries, if the living conditions there are consolidated. Their children must be prepared for this possibility as well. For all of this to happen, a great number of teachers trained in this concept are necessary, thus the introduction of the new model also represents a great challenge for teacher training.

In the roundtable discussion that dealt with higher education we heard a contribution entitled “Contesting Knowledge in Higher Education: Ethnocentric Syllabi in Universities”. A professor from the University of Liverpool described the nowadays intensifying campaigning on British university campuses that has

become known for its question-based slogans such as ‘Why is my curriculum white?’, and ‘Why is my professor not black?’ These questions are being asked by students with an immigrant background and affect the fundamental content elements of university education. They raise the issue that university textbooks frequently only discuss themes from the Western perspective, and the time has come to integrate non-Western knowledge into curricula. For example, among the great sociologists of sociology, from Max Weber to Pierre Bourdieu and contemporary Western scientists, Arab, Chinese, Indian, Indonesian and Iranian concepts and thinkers are not even mentioned. This urgent change in mindset poses great challenges for Western universities (and naturally, other levels of the education system).

The General Assembly of the association took place in the framework of the conference. President Frank Welz (Austria) stated that the number of members has risen to 2,741 (in 2015 it was 2,118), which suggests that despite the negative predictions, interest in the profession of sociology is growing. Young people are continuously joining the organization, and the two now-regular Summer Schools for PhD students are obviously contributing to this. One of them is organized between the two conferences – its purpose is to provide concrete forms of professional assistance to students as concerns finalizing already written drafts of publications (in 2016, 25 participants were selected to attend from among 55 applicants). The other is the Pre-Conference Summer School, also on the subject of publication activity, and including theoretical and practical approaches. This year it took place in the two days prior to the conference (25 participants were selected from among 106 applicants). This year the subject of media appearance was the special theme.

The Executive Committee has continued its efforts in the past two years to strengthen ESA’s voice in sociology by intensifying collaboration with two important European organizations: the European Alliance for Social Science and Humanities, and the Initiative for Science in Europe. In the area of international relations outside of Europe, a new element is that the Chinese and Indian sociological associations have indicated their interest in cooperation, the preparatory steps for which have already been taken (in the previous cycle, the Arab Sociological Association institutionalized its relationship with the ESA).

In the field of the Association’s own publication activity, one new development is that the ESA Newsletter has been given a new title (“European Sociologist”) and a more member-friendly format. A decision was made regarding the commencement of publication of a third periodical (proposed title: “European Sociological Debates”) in an open-access format, in addition to the Association’s two periodicals (“European Societies”, “European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology”).

Other significant progress includes a new website and logo. The website has improved not only in terms of image but also in its functionality of use by Research Networks and in terms of member participation. The Monthly Bulletin is now called “ESA news” and will be linked to announcements on the website (“Opportunities”).

The General Assembly’s mandatory duty include the election of new officials, and a vote for a new President and members of the Executive Committee. The new president is Sue Scott (UK). A decision was made regarding the venue for the 2019 conference, which will be Paris.