
This edited volume represents a collection of chapters dealing with the analysis of the European Social Survey 2002. The authors have focused on social capital and its perception in various European societies, using the primary data collected in the European Social Survey (2002). The work itself is a very useful read not only because of its analytical nature, using generally available data, but also because of the very good theoretical background to the social capital and related issues, offered by the authors.

The book is organised in 11 chapters grouped in two thematic blocks: Causes of Social Capital, and Consequences of Social Capital, preceded by a very readable and concise introduction and followed by a sound concluding and summary chapter. At the very beginning the editor in his introductory chapter offers the reader a powerful statement that “European history is a history of nations” (p. 1) and mentions the number of crucial years in European history – from the Westphalia Peace Treaty to the fall of the Berlin Wall and dissolution of Socialism. Although, it may be more appropriate to say that the modern European history has been a sequence of nation-building exercises that have taken place in different countries at different times, it is a fact that the nations and their interrelations have dominated the European prosperity and modernisation. The social capital has also been central in the understanding of history of European societies, and is defined as comprising ‘a person’s social relations in the sphere between private life and organizations, which is called the ‘civil society’ (p. 1). The introductory chapter offers a sound analysis of social capital, taking into consideration most recent developments in the field and reviews scholarly work coming from the schools of different provenience. The editor subscribes to relational and system capital. In the analysis of the issues the volume looks at the causes and consequences of social capital. Amongst the causes the authors have listed resources/attitudes such as relations, trust, norms and the totality of all three, whilst amongst consequents they have looked at the politics and workplace. Country effects on social capital have also been explained (at country level) as there are always processes that are largely country specific and cannot be neglected in the on-site
analysis of societal processes. For instance, the authors have found that the higher is GDP, the more likely it is that the citizens will be engaged with the wider civil society. But, the authors critically notice that the mere fact of a richer ‘average citizen’ not necessarily explains the choices and societal participation. In fact, our ‘average citizen’ cannot anymore serve as an explanation of country differences, but rather some country specifics might have contributed to the fact that citizens are more proactive in their approach to societal governance. The role of mass-mEDIATE, notably television is also explored, and it has been established that watching television makes people passive and consequently the social capital, as such, must be deteriorating due to such behaviour.

The authors also look at the social differentiation and choices of collective action, leading to the development of the country’s opportunity structure. Choices of collective action, in turn, even if made decades or centuries ago, might have left a living influence on the system and the very features of the system. The authors refer to Chancellor Bismarck’s welfare reforms and re-emphasise the influence they have had on the further development of united Germany. However, the modern societies are diverse societies.

The issue of trust has played a prominent role in studying the causes of social capital. Rather than focusing on theorising trust, the author focuses more on what makes people trusting others in their society. Together with the study of the role of the state in shaping or informing the informal connections (relationships) amongst fellow citizens, and normative conceptions of peoples’ civic duties, the authors focus on the different influences of television on one side and (news)paper reading on the other on the formation and maintenance of social capital. Politics and political engagement is seen, primarily, as a consequence of social capital. Issues of political trust and political activism which favour European countries have been rather thoroughly studied. Finally, the last analytical chapter focuses on the empowerment in the workplace.

This volume is a very useful read, not only as it very cleverly presents the results of the European Social Survey (2002), but as it presents a very good analysis of its results and focuses on a number of not at the time EU countries. The sample has included some central European countries and Israel as outliers at the time. Israel has often been excluded from the analytical sample, as not being, stricto sensu, a European country. If included in the sample Israel has often been with the minority subsample, like in the case