

EDITORIAL

This issue concentrates on issues of welfare and politics, together with some interesting discussions of education and identity.

In ‘The welfare state and social capital inequality’, Wim van Oorschot and Ellen Finsveen of the Department of Sociology at Tilburg University, The Netherlands, have used longitudinal data on values from thirteen European countries to explore the relationship between welfare regime and inequalities in social capital. They focus on social networks, civic norms, and generalised trust as the key elements of social capital, and they look at inequalities in relation to gender, age, employment, income, and education. Their findings are largely negative, as they show that it is not the case that less well-developed welfare regimes are associated with higher levels of inequality. This finding, they argue, contradicts the view that welfare provision is aimed at the reduction of inequality.

The issue of the determinants of welfare provision is directly addressed in ‘Who wants what from the welfare state?’ by Giuliano Bonoli and Silja Hausermann of Idheap and the University of Zurich, Switzerland. They examine whether differences of class (as measured by income and education), age, and gender are associated with distinct patterns of welfare policy preference. Using evidence from voting studies of Swiss referendums, where policy preferences can be clearly identified, they show that while age differences have some impact on policy preferences, the structural factors of existing inequality seem to have less relevance than differences in values that are unrelated to these inequalities.

Political factors and social participation are more directly explored by Thomas van der Meer, Peer Scheepers, and Manfred te Grotenhuis of Radboud University in Nijmegen, The Netherlands. In ‘States as molders of informal relations?’ they look at international variations in the effect of political institutions on informal social relations of kinship and community. From data on European and non-European societies, they conclude that there is some evidence that the provision of high levels of social security through state institutions reduces informal support and dependence on the extended family. A far stronger relationship is found, however, between political exclusion (through a lack of social rights) and reliance on a range of informal supports.

Sabina Jelenc Krašovec and Sonja Kump of the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia are concerned with the relationship between the informal social

networks of family and community and learning. Their paper on 'Adult learning activities, social networks and different neighbourhoods' argues that family and neighbourhood networks are the basis on which differences in values are inculcated and that these become the basis of adult dispositions to learn successfully, whether formally or informally. They see this learning as an important element in building the instrumental and emotional commitments that further socialisation within the family, so establishing an intergenerational reproduction of social and educational capital.

In the final paper on 'The "Europeanisation" of reference groups', Christopher Whelan and Bertrand Maître of ESRI, Dublin, Ireland, build on their paper on inequality published in Volume 9 (2) of this journal. They argue that people's expectations concerning the extent of inequality adopt primarily national-level reference groups. As yet, there is little evidence of a shift in identity to European-level points of reference. The move towards a Europe-wide measure of income inequality, they argue, is not associated with the adoption of Europe-wide reference groups or forms of identification. Their findings raise serious questions for the current emphasis placed on the European social model, critically examined by Graham Room in *European Societies*, Volume 9 (2).

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