

Eleni Apospori and Judith Miller, eds. *The Dynamics of Social Exclusion in Europe: Comparing Austria, Germany, Greece, Portugal and the UK.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2003. xvi + 199 pp. Tables, notes, graphs, index. \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 1-84064-893-7.

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Published by H-German (July, 2006)

Measuring Social Exclusion

The volume consists of eight essays with a precise focus: the study of the "dynamics of social exclusion" as reflected in data available for 1994 to 1996, when a detailed survey of a sample of households in EU countries, the "European Community Households Panel," was conducted. On the basis of these data, the authors document the extent and prevalence of poverty generally and specifically in regard to particular risk groups defined in terms of age, health and personal circumstances (young adults, lone parents, people with sickness or disability and retirees).[1] The analysis was carried out for five countries: Austria, Germany, Greece, Portugal and the United Kingdom, which were taken to be representative of the extremes of EU membership: north and south; wealthy and poor; large and small. The essays discuss income poverty (measured as incomes at 40, 50 or 60 percent of median incomes) as well as housing problems, access to basic necessities like food and utilities, access to consumer durables and social interactions.

The essays document not only that the extent of poverty varies between countries--a well-known fact--but also that its causes and effects continue to differ even in an increasingly united western Europe. Austria had the lowest proportion of the population in poor households (17 percent--compared to 18 percent in Germany, 21 percent in the United Kingdom and Greece, and 24 percent in Portugal). While sickness and disability were likely to impoverish individuals in all the countries studied, this was particularly true of Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom (that is, northern Europe); retirement was more likely to result in income poverty in the south. The north-south divide was less relevant for parents; single income households with children were particularly

likely to suffer from income poverty in the United Kingdom, Germany and Portugal. Poverty was more likely to be persistent than merely a brief phase in the life cycle. Persistence rates of income poverty were around 80 percent in Greece and Britain, above 70 percent in Portugal and above 60 percent in Germany and Austria. But the effects were rather different. In the United Kingdom, high persistence rates of income poverty coincided with low persistence rates (34 percent) of amenities deprivation, whereas the persistence of necessities deprivation was relatively low in Greece at 39 percent.

The volume was conceived as a contribution to policy decision-making in the aftermath of the 2000 Lisbon Declaration, which focused (among other things) on poverty and encouraged member states to set more concrete targets for dealing with social exclusion. Some member states did so; Britain, for example--a country where income poverty was particularly likely to result in deprivation of basic necessities--vowed to abolish "poverty" by 2020.

The volume is a treasure-trove of data and empirical analysis; it makes essential, though at times rather trying, reading for anyone interested in the extent of social exclusion, and the likelihood of falling into or escaping from it. It also provides ample proof--if any were needed--that governments seeking to combat social exclusion have to set different priorities, because they are not attacking the same phenomenon.

Unfortunately, the empirical as well as the more conceptual contributions reveal some of the approach's and the book's shortcomings.[2] The book's very advantage--providing a precise research agenda--is also a drawback. With its focus on three years, and on the life-cycle rather than

more stable factors such as ethnicity, occupation or regional origin, the volume presents a particular image of the risk (and duration) of deprivation, which may be more or less comprehensive for different countries. The narrow temporal focus makes one wonder whether measuring poverty's "persistence" of poverty makes much sense for such a relatively short time. Such doubt is enhanced when considering some of the oddities in the results: how did households that remained poor in the United Kingdom manage to get their hands on consumer durables? (The same question could be asked for the sudden increase in access to necessities in Greek households.) Illustrating the empirical findings with more concrete examples would have been helpful, particularly when they are counterintuitive, for instance the statement that patterns of poverty in eastern and western Germany were converging in spite of the continuing divergence in unemployment patterns.

Another question--admittedly suggested by events of the last several years--is whether ethnicity, regional origins or occupations are not more important in determining the extent and duration of social exclusion than life cycle. These factors were not, and partly could not be, measured on the basis of the data used, but have moved to the center of policy debates today. This matter relates to another issue the book does not address: who is to blame for poverty, and what roles have governments and the European Union assumed in determining poverty patterns and trends? Have past policy choices--for instance, cutting benefits; increasing "flexibility" in labor markets; encouraging the emigration of jobs (such things the European Union is frequently accused of doing)--made a difference? Is combating poverty a serious policy agenda, or merely window-dressing to make the "reforms" that were key to the Lisbon agenda for modernizing the EU more palatable?

Europe seems to be facing an internal contradiction between the agenda of competition and privatization (which results in higher access costs to essential services for "low value" customers) and the agenda of abolishing poverty. This contradiction is partly sustained by U.K. data. Which element is and should be more important to the European Union or national governments is hotly debated, but of course serious contributions to the debate require a comprehensive review of the present state of affairs through the type of careful studies of which this volume is an excellent

example.

Notes

[1]. The country studies were written by Karin Heitzmann (Austria); Wolfgang Voges and Olaf Jürgens (Germany); Eleni Apospori (Greece); Alfredo Bruto da Costa, Ana Cardoso, Isabel Baptista and Pedro Perista (Portugal); as well as Laura Adelman and Andreas Cebulla (Britain).

[2]. These pieces include the introduction by Sue Middleton, Matt Barnes and Jane Millar; a life cycle interpretation of the risk of exclusion by Panos Tsakoglou; and a final piece on policy recommendations by Christopher Heady and Graham Room.

Citation: Andreas Fahrmeir. "Review of Eleni Apospori and Judith Miller, eds, *The Dynamics of Social Exclusion in Europe: Comparing Austria, Germany, Greece, Portugal and the UK*, H-German, H-Net Reviews, .

URL: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=281821160497717>.

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