Summaries

Abram de Swaan

Rational Choice as Process: The uses of formal theory for historical sociology

The major drawback of rational choice theory is not its individualistic approach, on the contrary it is well suited to explain aggregate outcomes; rather it is its essentially static, or at best cyclical, character which prevents it from coming to terms with social processes in which not only variables, but in the course of time also parameters and even 'constants' must be considered as changing entities. But this is incompatible with the requirements of formal conceptualization and statistical testing procedures. Nevertheless, in decisive episodes, human beings tend to be 'alert' and 'scheming': the key notions of rational choice theory are too productive to be ignored by historical sociologists who would do well to incorporate them as intellectual concepts in a pragmatic manner.

Hans De Witte & Peer Scheepers

On the Two Faces of Political Right Wing Extremism in Flanders and the Netherlands
Confronting the ideology of extreme right wing parties with the ideology of their voters

In this article, we analyse the ideological differences between extreme right wing parties and their voters in the Flemish part of Belgium and in the Netherlands. Extreme right wing ideology is supposed to consist of five core elements: (biological) racism, extreme ethnic nationalism, the leadership principle, anti-parliamentarism and an anti-leftist attitude. All these attitudes refer to a basic value: the belief in the inequality of individuals and groups. An analysis of the ideology of the Vlaams Blok in Flanders shows that it adheres to these core elements of extreme right wing ideology. An analysis of the attitudes and motives of the voters of this party, however, shows that they cannot be considered as right wing extremists. The ideological gap between the Vlaams Blok and its electorate is due to the strategy of this party, since it cultivates 'two faces': a populist, moderate face in order to attract votes, and a radical extreme right wing face in order to recruit and motivate militants. In the Netherlands, less is known about the ideology of right wing parties and that of their voters. Current research however, suggests that the conclusions from Flemish research may very well be generalized to the Netherlands.

Miranda Moerland & Anneke van Otterloo

New Age: Counter-culture, Para-culture or Core-culture?

This article deals with the recent upsurge of New Age as a cultural phenomenon in the Netherlands. New Age is loosely conceived here as a multicoloured network of beliefs and practices implying an esoteric world view. New Age underwent a shift in sociocultural position between the 1960s and the 1990s. It began as one of the countercultural movements of the 1960s, it moved into a para-cultural phase in the margin of society in the 1970s. After 1980 New Age shifted increasingly towards the cultural center. A growth in the number and size of New Age manifestations and a change in the type of organization mark this shift. Processes of psychologization and commercialization are important developments in New Age, as well as in society at large. In view of the pluralistic and fragmented character of current culture New Age probably will not dissappear soon.

Brieuc-Yves Cadat & Meindert Fennema

The Self-image of Amsterdam Migrant Politicians in the 1990s

The Amsterdam municipal elections of 1986 were the first elections in which foreign residents were allowed to vote. This induced the political parties to present 'migrant-candidates' on their list. Migrant-candidates also included many politicians of Surinamese and Antillean extraction, who where legally speaking not 'foreign' and had voting right in the Netherlands since 1953. The political campaigns of the migrant-candidates and the discussion surrounding their selection focussed on the issue of ethnic minority rights rather than civil and political rights of foreign residents. In the 1990 and 1994 campaign the issue of affirmative action was high on the political agenda. Affirmative action can be defended on the grounds that migrants have to make up arrears, but it can also be defended on the grounds that migrants are discriminated against. Migrant-candidates, on the other hand can emphasize their ethnic identity, or they can emphasize their status of migrant, being confronted with racial discrimination. How is it possible to understand the formation of ethnic and anti-racist identities and the relationship between these identities and political strategies? We interviewed twenty-nine migrant politicians, candidates or elected politicians, in 1990 and 1994, on these issues. The Turkish politicians argue predominantly from an 'ethnic perspective'. Surinamese and Antillean politicians, on the other hand, tend to argue from an 'anti-racist' perspective. Moroccans take an intermediate position. The self-images of these three groups were reflected in the image they had of each other. Turks tend to see Surinamese as black Dutchmen with an inferiority complex, Surinamese, on the other hand, criticize the Turks for their unwillingness to adapt to Dutch society. Moroccans, because they share the experience of a colonial past, sympathize with Surinamese, yet, as migrants they compare their position to the position of Turks. These rival images suggest potential conflict in the existing advocacy coalition of migrant politicians.