Summaries

Globalisation, images of society and democracy

by Jan Berting

Starting from the idea that social life is basically a totality of collective representations, we analysed the major collective representations of society in relation with processes of economic and societal change, generally referred to as 'globalisation' . We could distinguish between six major images of society: the welfare society, the social exclusion paradigm, the market society, the risk society, the security society and the multicultural society. These collective representations of society imply different strategies to deal with problems of economic and social change in terms of adaptation. We singled out the multicultural society, which is especially in its communitarian version at odds with some basic principles of modern democracy.
We argue that the different images of society, each of them emphasising an important societal problem, cannot be included into an overarching model of society without decreasing the democratic quality of society, as such a development would imply 'the end of ideology' and even 'the end of history'. But also without such an undesirable attempt to 'integrate' the different images of society, there is a common deficit in all of the images of society in front of us: being phrased in terms of adaptation to 'unavoidable' technological and economic impacts on social life, they do not convey ideas about how to influence future societal and social conditions, both on the national and the European level. We discuss briefly this state of affairs and the necessity to escape from this rather unsatisfactory condition.

Education in a symbolic society. Are individualism and meritocracy still tenable?

by Mark Elchardus

Over the past decade meritocratic ideals and the conviction that modern societies are individualising have often guided educational policy. This article argues that the individualisation theory is highly misleading, and that the meritocratic ideal becomes dysfunctional. It proposes to replace individualisation and detraditionalization theories by the notion of a symbolic society. This society's mode of social control gives the individual ample room for choice and decision, but tries to determine the choices by way of extensive socialisation and influence, performed and exerted by schools, mass media, advertisement and propaganda. Because of the important role of schools, life chances are strongly dependent on the level and kind of education, while the shift in the mode of social control puts more emphasis on personal responsibility. Because of these joint developments the meritocratic ideal is called upon to justify inequalities which it can no longer legitimate.

Suburban dreams: Ideals and practice of living in a new town

by Rob van Ginkel, Léon Deben en Tineke Lupi

In the perception of critics, Suburbia in the Netherlands is the locus of uniformity, monotony, shallowness, boredom, bourgeois conventionalism and middle-class conformity. Despite this negative image, suburban settings have

338

attracted many residents. At present, a majority of the Dutch population is living in a suburban environment. Zoetermeer, situated near the country's seat of government The Hague, is a prime example of a suburb whose inhabitants are generally extremely content with living in a suburban environment. But in recent years they are facing problems due to physical and demographic expansion and concomitant phenomena like growing crime rates and what the residents perceive as increasing deprivation. In the present article, the authors focus on the inhabitants' ideals and appreciation of living in Suburbia and their fear of those who in their view especially undermine the suburban dream: viz., 'loitering youth' (hangjongeren).

Regional differences in carrying out asylum policy

by Peter Mascini

The presupposition that underlies the discussion on the need of an even tighter asylum policy is that asylum seekers get the permit they deserve. On the basis of administrative data of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (N=77,347) this article demonstrates that this presumption is wrong. The carrying out of the asylum policy leads to inequality of rights, as could be expected on the grounds of the characteristics of this bureaucratic practice. For asylum seekers it makes a difference which region dispatches their application. Regional differences on the first decision persist when controlling for the nationality, age, and sex of the asylum seeker, and the date of application. On top of that, these differences have increased between 1998 and 2000. Finally, the stage of appeal does not make up for these differences.. The ver-

dicts of courts of law and the organization and composition of personnel of the Immigration and Naturalization Service offer possible explanations for the regional differences in the carrying out of the asylum policy. The testing of these explanations is important, because it can offer points of contact to increase equal chances on a permit.

'Everything is connected': Towards a sociology of paranoia and conspiracy theories

by Stef Aupers

Conspiracy theories flourish on the internet and are popularized in postwar literature, films and tv-series like 'Millennium' and the 'X-files'. This review article discusses three books on 'the culture of conspiracy' and tries to develop a sociological approach on this phenomenon. It is argued that conspiracy theories can no longer be simply dismissed as irrational, pathological illusions, like Freud did and contemporary scientists still do. The typical modern distinction these authors make between rational/irrational, truth / fantasy and normal/pathological is problematized. Moreover, the interest in conspiracy theories can be seen as the logical result of a widespread suspicion against scientific authorities and the autonomization and globalization of social, economic and technological systems. These developments lead to the 'normalization' of paranoia and conspiracy theories. In the conclusion it is argued that the erosion of 'trust' in the 'risk society' Beck and Giddens write about, creates a fertile ground for conspiracy theories.

339