

Introduction to the Special Issue. Connecting sociological research with social problems and public policies: implications for Southern European Societies / *Presentación del monográfico. Conectando la investigación sociológica con los problemas sociales y las políticas públicas: implicaciones para las sociedades del sur de Europa*

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BACKGROUND

Europe is facing new and radical challenges that demand extraordinary resilience from EU members, especially southern European societies, because of their outlying position and specific social problems in comparison with their EU neighbours. The difficulties of building a united Europe in the wake of the economic, financial and political crisis have exposed divergences in EU governance. In this context, sociology is an important tool to inform public policies and to provide the general public with an understanding of current challenges. The uses of sociology have social, political and practical implications in fields that are especially significant for southern European societies, such as welfare, work and employment, education, migration, social cohesion and political participation.

However, the usual tensions in the organization of scientific research are now particularly intense

in terms of how the sociological knowledge utility is understood and communicated. The trend toward internationalization in current research systems forces research communities to compete in a global market of scientific production, where English is the dominant language, and to publish results for an academic audience. Simultaneously there is a pressing need to make sociological knowledge relevant and applicable to regional and local problems.

THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION OF THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

The RES is the official journal of the Spanish Federation of Sociology. This Special Issue has been released jointly by *Sociologia On Line*, the official journal of the Portuguese Sociological Association (issue not available yet), and *Sociologia Italiana. The AIS Journal of Sociology*, the official journal of

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the Italian Sociological Association, and whose Issue can be found here: <http://www.sociologiaitaliana.it/it/21/archivio-rivista/rivista/3435505>.

This Special Issue of RES offers articles in both Spanish and English. They come from three different countries involved in this Special Call: Spain, Portugal and Italy. It means an interesting approach to the current situation of social problems in their sociological analysis in Southern Europe.

The Guest Editors of the Special Issue in *Sociologia Italiana*, Consuelo Corradi and Paola Borgna, express the goal of this coordinated experience as follows (see the website cited above). This twined experience “illustrates the framework of scientific cooperation between the sociological associations of Southern Europe”. Thereby, the three Journals try to explore “issues that are particularly significant for Southern European societies, such as changes in the welfare state, work and employment, education, migration, social cohesion and political participation”. The website mentioned above offers the papers published in the Italian Journal.

AIMS AND SCOPE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Holding this background in mind, this special issue will discuss the challenges and dilemmas of different sociological orientations in order to complement internationalization and academic research with the uses of sociology aimed at solving social public problems in specific territorial contexts. Participants are invited to send papers on the relevance of sociological knowledge in recent years as a means to understanding southern European societies, at a local, regional and international level. We have focused especially on some key topics as follows:

— Empirical and conceptual approaches on social problems in Southern European societies, specially related to knowledge transfer and their use in public policies.

— Impact of the economic crisis on the social reality of Southern Europe. Transformations in institutions, social movements and forms of coexistence.

— Analysis and evaluation of European policies and their impact on different European realities.

— Knowledge transfer in sociology: conceptual approaches, organizational modes and research.

— The role of sociology as an academic and scientific discipline to detect social problems and contribute to the design of public policies in Europe.

The call was widely supported by an interesting representation of around 60 proposals that arrived for their consideration to RES. The four coordinators of this Special Issue had to do a great work of blind evaluation of the proposals, searching for the closest works to the aims of the call. Many good pieces of research were refused for this particular Special Issue. The result is introduced in the section below.

THE PAPERS THAT COMPRISE THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The nine papers that compose this Special Issue have been organised according to their level of generalisation of the focus they propose in their analysis in relation to the aims of the proposal. Therefore, the first paper, titled *Public Sociology and Southern European Societies: a Critical View*, has been elaborated by Andrea Borghini, from the University of Pisa (Italy). According to the author, the article tries to analyse the role public sociology can play in approaching Southern European societies from a proper reformed view, by which he means a public sociology that is reflective and aware of some limits, which are highlighted across the paper. Southern European societies refer to countries like Portugal, Italy, Spain and Greece, which are globally considered closer to the South of the world than to the North. The paper is organised in three parts. First, it draws on Burawoy's proposal. Second, it focuses on communication, ethical-political and epistemological dimension to denounce the dualism that runs through them. Third, the risk of leaving an empty space between sociologist and public, reflective and professional sociology, local and global knowledge, or North and South epistemology, are discussed. The article finishes with a proposal of solution defended by the author.

The second paper is written by Juan Arturo Rubio Arostegui, from the University Antonio de Nebrija, and Joaquim Rius-Ulldemolins, from the University of València (both in Spain), and its title is *Cultural Policies in Southern Europe after the Global Crisis: Impact on Cultural Participation*. The authors of this article consider Southern Europe cultural policies after the global crisis since 2008, in order to analyse its impact on cultural participation in this European area. According to them, the last third of the 20th century has made possible the beginning of the convergence between the cultural policies of this area compared to the North, while the global crisis has caused a decline of cultural participation. This has led to a breakdown of the trend towards the Europeanization of these policies. Based on this thesis, and from a comparative approach, the article analyses how the institutional density of non-formal artistic education, the formal educational system and the type of governance of cultural facilities contribute -in addition to the public cuts in education- to explain the phenomenon of the greatest fall of cultural participation in the model of Southern European cultural policy in relation to the liberal, Nordic and central European models.

The third of the papers of this Special Issue is signed by Eduardo Bericat, from the University of Sevilla, and Rubén Martín-Gimeno, from the University Pablo de Olavide (both in Spain), and it is titled *The Societal Quality of Southern European Mediterranean Countries*. The authors draw on the wide and deep empirical data about the 28 EU countries (72 focalized compound indicators that make up the Quality Index System of European Societies), in order to analyse the societal quality of the Mediterranean countries of Southern Europe (Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece) from a holistic, multidimensional and comparative perspective. They first present the position the Mediterranean countries occupy in the European rankings of societal quality. Second, after proving that the Mediterranean countries form a cluster on their own in relation to the Typology of the Five Europes, Mediterranean countries societal characteristics are analysed. Third, the authors offer a diagnosis based on the 14 societal quality domains from the index system to compare the quality of Mediterranean countries

with that of other European countries. They assert that this structural diagnosis -endogenous and exogenous- offers an approach that can be of interest for both social researchers and policy makers.

The fourth paper is titled *Mobilización colectiva, transformación democrática y resistencia contra la crisis y la austeridad en el sur de Europa: La experiencia de Portugal y de España*. It is signed by Ana Raquel Matos and Jesús Sabariego, from the University of Coimbra (Portugal). The authors argue that, since 2011, and due to the crisis substantial, several transformations have taken place in the field of social movements and forms of collective action over the world. The so-called “Arab Spring” and “Spring of the movements” show the global nature of this phenomenon. The use of digital means and expressions can, the authors assert, develop the conceptualization of a new subject of study within the theory of social movements. According to them, the movements that took place in Spain and Portugal are paradigmatic for this new proposal that challenges the dominant conceptions of social movements in recent decades, from the emergence of these new political actors and the new forms of mobilization and activism that have contributed to the redefinition of the relations between the State and civil society, as well as the classic understandings about political participation and democracy.

The fifth paper is titled *The role of Sociology in the promotion of actions aimed at social innovation in the Mediterranean area*. It is signed by Emiliana Mangone, from the University of Salerno (Italy). The author argues that the change in contexts and their complexity, especially in the Mediterranean area, has raised the need to start reflecting on modernizing innovative actions able to provide social responses to the real needs of citizens and, moreover, able to combine resources and quality. This is necessary since the expansion of rights is associated with a decreasing public funding capacity. The future challenge, she continues, will surely be a retrenchment in public spending, orienting it towards the threefold structure of choice (need, preferences, goods) overcoming the rational choice model (preferences, goods). In a context characterized by these features, Mangone considers that sociological knowledge becomes paramount for reading social

phenomena. The role of sociology is, thereby, to produce “knowledge” through which society can observe the occurring phenomena and recognize their problems, thus allowing for a continuous, on-going improvement.

The sixth paper is written by María Dolores Martín-Lagos y Mónica Luque, from the University of Granada (Spain). It is titled *Support and educational participation of families in the countries of Southern Europe: a comparison between Spain and Portugal*. This paper presents the results of a research about the levels and forms of support university students receive from their families in three Southern European cities: Granada and Melilla in Spain, and Lisbon in Portugal. A set of features that influence the daily interactions of their inhabitants is identified through a comparative research in these Southern Europe countries. This analysis of parents - sons/daughters relationships in education has allowed us to understand better the impact of the economic crisis on education at home, whether or not the gender division of roles is still true, the extent to which the daily life of school has repercussions on the Spanish homes and, finally, the emotional experience of students throughout their time in education. In order to unravel these discourses and experiences we adopted a qualitative methodology.

The seventh paper is titled *Ageing in Southern Europe. Emerging Perspectives and Challenges for Sociology* and is written by Francesco Marcaletti, from the International University of Cataluña, Tatiana Iñiguez, from the University of Zaragoza (both in Spain) and Emma Garavaglia from the University of Milano-Bicocca (in Italy). The process of transitioning to an ageing population has occurred later, but nevertheless more intensely, in Southern Europe than in other regions. These countries have been forced to politically, socially and economically adapt to this significant challenge. Sociologists play an important role in identifying and understanding social trends and issues, as well as in contributing to the design of public policies across Europe. However, research has tended to explore issues of ageing populations in Northern Europe, in spite of the notable demographic shifts and contextual specificities of Southern Europe. The study has a dual objective: first, to collect the theoretical and

methodological contributions of authors from or focusing on Southern Europe, and second to explore the originality of studies that belong to Southern European sociological traditions.

The eighth paper of this Special Issue is signed by Mar Venegas, from the University of Granada, Alicia Villar-Aguilés, from the University of Valencia (both in Spain), and Sofía Almeida Santos from the University of Porto (in Portugal). The paper is titled *Sex and Gender Equality Policies in Education in Southern European Societies: the three cases of Andalusia and the Valencian Community (Spain) and Portugal*. Gender mainstreaming is an international strategy in Europe towards gender equality dealing with new challenges for sexuality and diversity in education, from an intersectional approach. In this context, this paper aims two goals. First, to analyse sex and gender equality policies in education since the 2000s in three Southern European Societies: Andalusia and the Valencian Community, in Spain, and Portugal; second, to arrive at some comparative conclusions about the recent developments in sex and gender equality policies in education in these three societies. The authors end up with some comparative conclusions. First, there is the political orientation of the government that seems to be of relevance. Second, the policies and plans reviewed show a move from (binary) gender equality to a more inclusive gender equality that intersects with sexuality and diversity. Sexuality education, already available in Portugal, is still missed in Spanish schools. These three experiences can inform European public policies.

Almudena Martínez del Olmo, from the University Antonio de Nebrija (in Spain), signed the ninth paper, called *The housing system of southern Europe: continuity or rupture?*, in which the author sets that the strong impact the crisis has had on housing has questioned the continuity the residential system presents in Southern Europe. It puts the discourses that proclaim the universal implementation of a liberal housing system into question too. Thereby, this paper analyses the residential dynamics in Spain since the beginning of the 21st century, within a framework that encompasses key countries of Southern Europe, in order to verify to what extent its system remains in force with respect to the European Union. According to the data,

and despite some alterations, the paper concludes that its uniqueness continues, which reinforces the importance of examining residential systems in order to understand the functioning of housing, residential practices and their problems.

Matilde Massó and Nazaret Abalde, from the University of Coruña (in Spain), have written the tenth paper, titled *The importance of attitudes towards risk to explain indebtedness in Southern European countries*. In this paper, the authors analyse the sociodemographic determinants and individuals' attitudes towards risk to explain indebtedness in Southern European countries. This analysis is done within the context of an increasing process of financialization of individual behaviour. We use the Household Finance and Consumption Survey (HFCS), drawn up by the European Central Bank between 2009 and 2011. The methodological plan consists of a combination of a multiple correspondence analysis in order to identify the various household debt models and a logistic regression analysis in order to detect the explanatory variables that best explain the differences between indebtedness models. The main contribution of this paper is the identification of those variables that explain the economic differences in household debt levels. Results are showing a relevant influence of individual attitudes to explain indebtedness in Southern Countries in detriment of sociodemographic variables which are not relevant explanatory factors.

All the ten papers collected in this Special Issue, from a quite international setting, will help

readers interested in Southern Europe current trends to approach a sociological insight of some outstanding social phenomenon. As seen above, we start with a reflection on the role of public sociology in Southern Europe. We then move to cultural policies. After that, we analyse societal quality in Southern European Societies. Then, we focus on mobilisation and resistance against the crisis and austerity in this part of Europe, where the crisis has been suffered more. After crisis, innovation becomes a crucial issue. The three following papers are dedicated to three great areas of production of knowledge in sociology, such as the family, ageing and gender and sexuality, the three of which identify current social tendencies in Southern Europe. The residential and indebtedness models are approached. All the ten papers illustrate how sociological knowledge can inform public policies to improve democracy, equality and social justice in the Southern side of the European Union in a historical moment in which the social, economic and political idea of Europe as a community, this is the very idea of the European Union itself, is put into question from some political positions emerging all over Europe, and making sociological analysis and knowledge even more necessary than ever before. We really hope to have contributed to reach this aim somehow with the articles gathered in the following pages. We, coordinators of the Special Issue, thank all the authors and reviewers of these papers to have made it possible. We really appreciate that the Spanish Journal of Sociology (RES) had trusted us for this nice venture.

