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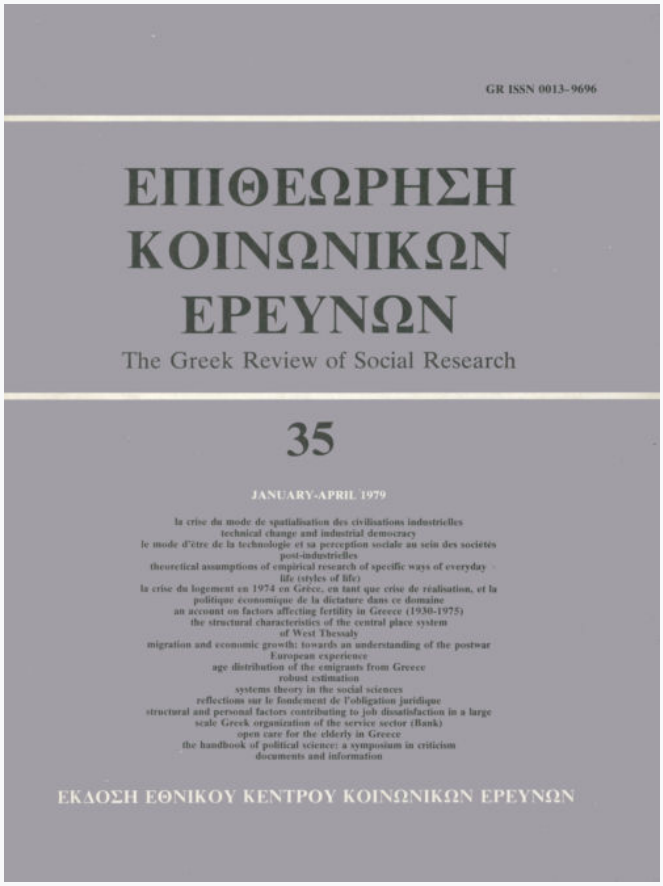

Cultural and human aspects of migration in Western Europe: (Strasburg, 19-20 April 1979)

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CULTURAL AND HUMAN ASPECTS OF MIGRATION IN WESTERN EUROPE

(Strasburg, 19-20 April 1979)

by K. Kassimati, Ph. D.

The meeting, organised by IDERIC and the ESF (European Studies Foundation) should be considered as a continuum to the meeting at Nice, December 1978. The main concern was focused at (a) methodological guidelines for the study of cultural changes, (b) evaluation of the present situation of studies dealing with the human and cultural aspects of migration and (c) recommendation for an international cooperation project between sending and receiving migrant countries.

The participants: Dr. R. Ward (England), Prof. H. Körte (W. Germany), J. Heÿke (The Netherlands), Prof. I. Baucic (Yugoslavie), Dr. K. Kassimati (EKKE-Greece), and Prof. M. Oriol, S. Audizian and M. Flasaquier (France) attempted to prepare practical propositions intended eventually to allow the definition of elaborate or new researches within a cooperative framework. The base line was to adopt an approach which would give references to the internal dynamics by putting the emphasis on the national specificities in terms of socio-political and historical factors.

The context of «cultural» and «human» terms is extremely difficult to be defined since different social conditions and value systems delineate each country. Probably, one may speak of social and cultural consequences of migration and direct effects, that is how migrants have changed because of migration and indirect effects, i.e. how migrants after repatriation influence their environment, should be considered.

Furthermore, it is almost impossible to separate economic from human aspects, as they are blended. For instance, the style of life includes both anthropological and microeconomic elements. However, if concepts such as «human» and «cultural» aspects of migration imply difficulties to be defined, the fields where human and cultural elements can be met are easy enough to be determined. Lodging, family changes, children's education, religion, daily life, etc. are some of the relevant fields and as such have been studied, but rather from an anthropological approach than as a system within a community of migrants or of political culture.

Insofar as the evaluation of historical outline of research on this topic is concerned, the trend is:

(a) The receiving countries have developed many studies since 1918 on a general concern about adaptation, adjustment, integration, assimilation, acculturation, etc., whereas the sending countries suffering from an obvious lack of resources and coordination, are much more centered on the disruption of cultural «cost» of migration.

(b) The contrast between the receiving countries and migrant communities is generally conceived in terms of initial opposition between development and underdevelopment or modernity and tradition. Migration has been looked on very commonly as a way of accelerating the process of general evolution of groups coming from underdeveloped countries.

In the field of international cooperation the problems are more complex, because of differences in many aspects of social, economic and political area in each country. However, there is a relationship of influences between sending and receiving countries as both are affected by migratory currents. The main concern for migration and the basic concepts elaborated for a better understanding of their features and factors are rooted in a national experience of internal migration. This offers the ground for cooperative research on a very large scale. But it is somewhat depressive because it does not lead to a genuine recognition of the specificity of the cultural aspects of international migration. We must admit that many publications are examplifications of common theories of urbanisation or integration into working class of rural population, using the same theoretical tools since 1918. But on the other hand the failure of previsions inspired by the evolutionist theory and mainly the increasing interest in the expression of cultural identity may lead to the development of new comparative approach. This means that the displacement of emphasis from «cultural structure» to «cultural identity» may help the promotion of comparative studies on second generation or family roles. Furthermore, this cooperation will challenge the way in building up a more variegated set of theoretical concepts and methodological tools. But in a practical context the most workable proposal is to establish simultaneous projects for certain topics between sending and receiving countries.

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