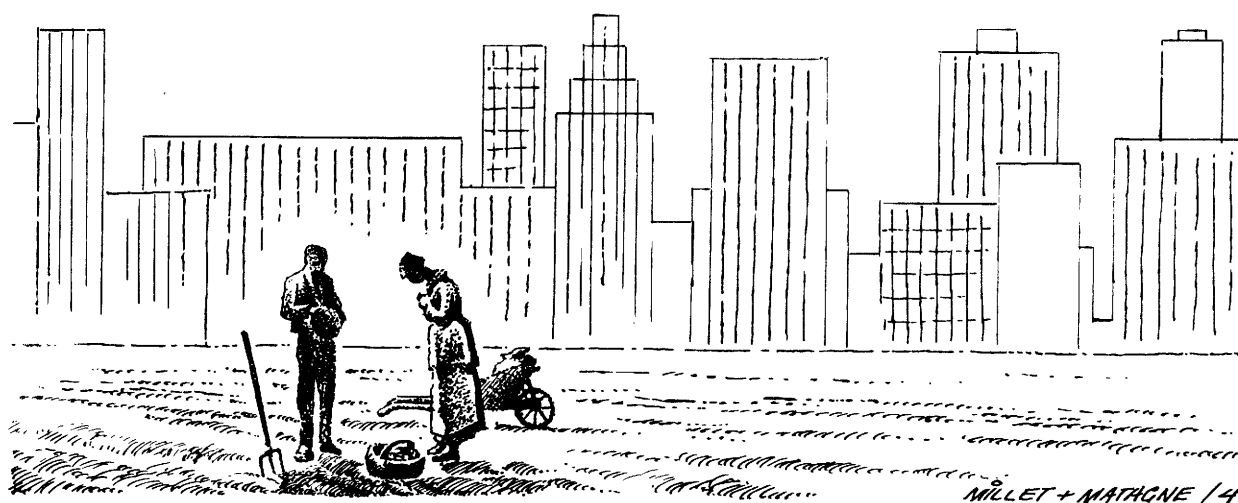


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LIFE STYLES AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN WESTERN EUROPE

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The present crisis has brought a new urgency to the search for an alternative model of economic and social development. Whilst many of the knowledgeable theories which abound today deal with changes in the politico-economic structures, most of them remain ominously silent on the concrete impact of such models on the way of life.

Within the European Community there is a great diversity in the life styles. Over the next decades they will change, and the Community will somehow have to find role to play in this change. In a study drawn up for the European Commission, the French sociologist Victor Scardigli has thrown some thought-provoking light on these questions.

Euroforum presents below extracts from Victor Scardigli's conclusions. The views are naturally enough those of the author and not necessarily the European Commission's. The full report is to be published at a later date.

Mr. Victor Scardigli is the former director of France's Centre for Consumer Research and Documentation (CREDOC) and member of the National Scientific Research Committee (CNRS) in Paris.

W. EUROPEAN WAYS OF LIFE : CONTRASTS AND CONVERGENCES

A. The post-industrial problem

A mosaic of peoples, cultures and languages, Western Europe is from the historical and ethnic view and area of fascinating diversity. Customs and ways of life however, like values and ideals rarely coincide with national frontiers. Some ways of life extend beyond national barriers, others are strictly regional or even local.

The multitude of divisions can be reduced to a manageable size by adopting a socio-economic definition of what precisely constitutes a way of life. A way of life then becomes the way members of a group organise their daily, and life-long activities in relation to the mode of production which determines the economic, spatial and institutional framework of these activities. Academic as it may be, by using this definition five distinct forms of society can be identified : at the one extreme there is the rural way of life which is still predominant in the Community. Its traditional values still have great influence in the economically less developed regions. At the other extreme there is intensive urbanisation with its high concentration of people and division of labour. This style of living induces a segregation between the time spent at the work place and non-work activities, leisure, etc. This style of life also results in large expenditures in both time and money for the urban dweller in conforming to the imperatives of both geographical and professional mobility, combined with pressure towards over consumption.

The use of this definition brings out two important facts :

1. the geographical location of these different life styles reflects the history of battles between cultures and regions

Ways of life are not however a static phenomenon. The poor regions which are still rural and located on the periphery are slowly abandoning their diverse values and customs and adopting in their place those of the rich industrialised regions at the economic centre of gravity of Western Europe. The effect of this has consequently been the progressive domination of the Mediterranean life style by the Northern European way of life.

The old Mediterranean cultures which conquered the world, powered first by Roman armies and then by the Catholic religion, have been retreating under the peaceful counter-attack of the Germanic cultures (in the broad sense including Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon and Netherland cultures) fired by the values of protestantism and economic liberalism.

This Nordic way of life has been greatly influenced by the protestant ethic which puts great store behind the virtues of work, accumulation, endurance, thought, inner spiritual life etc. It encourages a sharp division between work and private life. The centre of private life is the home to which great importance is attached in terms of time spent there and expenditure on household equipment.

This ethic promotes also the virtues of progress, efficiency, technicality, the functional outlook and the frugal life. It rejects ostentatious display of wealth and position, discourages sensuality and public expression of feelings. Women's rights are akin to (but not yet equal to) those of men. It encourages belief in a certain equality in sharing the fruits of economic growth and belief in the merits of democratic industrial management.

In contrast the Mediterranean way of life places less importance on spiritual life and more on social life and on the arts of expression. Work is, like in all traditional societies, integrated into the rest of daily life and does not have 'progress' as its main objective. Leisure time is spent outside of the home. Great value is bestowed upon the flamboyant baroque style and emotional exuberance. Ostentatious display of wealth and success, either real or fictitious, is accepted as is the virtue of good living and giving free rein to the senses. The social inferiority of women remains pronounced. Social inequality readily displayed, provokes more open social tensions, more radical political stances and a rejection of power sharing by both wage earners and the ruling class.

These descriptions are naturally enough stereotypes and in some cases caricatures, and are not always universally applicable, even across the same region. They do however contain an element of truth which has been confirmed in the few studies undertaken which cover consumption patterns and conflicts at work.

2. The post-industrial way of life is the common destiny of most regions of W. Europe.

Technical progress, mass production, concentrated living, universal education and general mobility has brought W. Europe closer to 'abundance'. This much dreamed of abundance, it is hoped, will satisfy the escalating needs of the individual whilst at the same time guaranteeing social cohesion.

The unprecedented growth over the last thirty years has, however, been achieved at a cost. The social consequences of the upheavals it has provoked are only now beginning to be perceived.

a. - Demise of the socio-cultural heritage, a regional problem

One similar mode of production and life style which is characteristic of a transition towards a post-industrial form of society, stretches from Genoa and Marseilles to Copenhagen and Glasgow, whilst the traditional southern and far western life styles are being pushed out from the fringes of the industrialised world towards the poor rural regions. This homogenisation of life styles represents, however, an immense loss to our cultures.

Also the 'marginalisation' of these life styles by the dominant ones could bring about political tensions which might ultimately implicate the Nine.

b. - Upheavals in social patterns and social structures, an individual problem

The individual's inability to cope with the pace of change is without doubt one of the most serious problems of the time. Older people become disorientated by the upheaval in the structure of urban life and the obsolescence of patterns of reasoning they were familiar with and of values which they had cultivated such as work and thrift. Many of the country folk of Europe's peripheral regions have been brutally launched from the Middle Ages into the new industrial zones. Low qualified workers of mature age adapt with difficulty to the needs for more frequent professional retraining and greater geographical mobility.

It is frequently the case that individuals enticed to the city by 'progress' find themselves torn from their environment, from their family or their small region and from their religion or traditional code of morals. They find themselves uprooted with all links broken, all goals shattered and in some cases inclined towards social or mental pathology. The nuclear family is the sole survivor but is, in turn, threatened by the new role which it is expected to play as the individual's protector against society.

The dynamics of the industrial process has led to a scaling up of the system which in turn has meant a loss of power for the individual, and induced a feeling of impotence and uselessness.

The enormity of the conurbations and modern companies has taken the centre of decision-making far away from the worker, the inhabitant and the citizen. The individual now rarely has a say in the planning of his job, or his living environment, or municipal services, or even the production of the consumer goods which he needs every day. One can add to this the impossibility of achieving job satisfaction since the low qualified jobs which are now the norm prevent any creativity. At the same time the individual's goals and aspirations have developed enormously along with his educational and professional capacity.

- c. - To the crisis of an increasingly alienated society can be added the problem of permanent injustice

Our pressured industrial development has coincided with increasing exploitation of man by man. Even if the average standard of living has risen considerably within our countries the inequalities have remained. Despite an active social policy, the productive system tends to increase the number of poor. The exploitation taking place within the developed countries comes of top of that caused by the international division of labour. This relatively new technique of achieving growth carries with it however a special responsibility towards the Third World.

- d. - The growing complexity of our societies creates, last but not least, increasing technical difficulty in resolving economic or psychological problems or contradictions.

The slow down in the population growth and the extension of the 'non-productive' period (education, holidays, retirement) and the development of national social budgets are all increasing considerably the financial burdon on the working population. The popular movement towards hedonism and individual fulfilment cannot be reconciled with the need to increase the productive effort to satisfy all the new-found needs.

One way to remedy the allergy to work could be to abolish the division of labour. This would, however, undermine one of the fundamentals of our economic progress. Urbanisation is destroying a life style which the post-industrial era would have us benefit from. The return to sustained growth will also increasingly destroy the resources of our old continent.

All these incompatible factors exacerbate psychological and social tensions and at the same time multiply the possibilities of serious crisis and paralysis in our economies.

B. European concern for its people's welfare

The study of life styles and their development does not however reveal any peculiarly Community traits nor does it show up any need for a Community response to the problems raised. Certainly it will be many decades before we can identify any characteristics unique to living in the Common Market. For the moment it is only possible to observe

a number of life styles and emerging trends in W. Europe.

Despite this, some tentative conclusions can be drawn. Since 1945 Europe has experienced an extended period of peace which is rare in its history. Though the Treaty of Rome may have contributed to this, it can in fact be argued that the Common Market has had a divisive effect. It has contributed to the growth of capital formation in the rich industrial regions and thereby widened the gap between them and the poor rural regions on the periphery of the Six and now the Nine.

Also the numerous Community harmonisation measures dealing with the free movement of workers, goods and ideas, the rights of the individual etc. already seem to have had an appreciable impact on the working life of the Community's citizens.

However, from the point of view of ways of life the European Community does not exist. If its inhabitants do not regard themselves as Europeans it is probably because they feel the Community is not concerned about its own people. It still remains above all market, a playground for the big firms, rather than a political arena where people can fight for a better daily life.

We suggest two possible strategies by which the Community could add this other dimension.

1. By developing a new overall growth policy directed towards the more human aspects of the post-industrial way of life
 - a. - The aim : abundance without chaos

Such a policy should aim to keep the advantages of post-industrial abundance, i.e. a high level of education, expectations of a better life, high quality of communal services and increased social solidarity, whilst minimising the disadvantages. Most important this means a "controlled slow-down" in social and therefore economic change. Without doubt it would be necessary to reduce the long-term rate of growth by discriminating between the indispensable and the superfluous and thereby escape the expansionist spiral which could once more lose us control over events.

We should also direct this growth to more human ends, taking into account the real needs of the individual rather than those of capitalist expansion.

If it is true, as our analysis indicates, that life style is directly linked to the means of production, it is obvious that this slow-down and re-planning of growth must be achieved by way of a new means of production. Now we have our list of problems, we can begin to look at the cost of such an immense task. One cannot attempt to change the quality of work and prevent injustice without profoundly changing the hierarchical system, reintroducing qualified and responsible work and also returning to small and medium-sized production units. A more human life would not be possible without giving back an

autonomous economic, intellectual and cultural life to the small social groups whether villages or boroughs. It would also imply orientating town-planning closer to nature, spreading out employment and helping the growth of more solid community relationships.

b. - The means : a new planning body

As described above the action to be taken is immense. However, it is not for us to even outline the action that should be taken by the Community to redirect growth to more human ends except to say that three conditions have to be reconciled if there is to be any chance of success :

- research has to be undertaken to obtain a better understanding of the causes of changes in life styles, and to formulate the technical requirement for achieving this new direction.
- a forum for reflection and discussion has to be provided where all of Europe's political, trade union and regional groups can discuss other ways of life based on different politico-economic scenarios.
- finally it is necessary to implement a policy aimed at replanning the way of life.

What is needed is a body of independent experts, a permanent group of "wise men" who could deal with the first point by :

- encouraging the observational work on social changes (perhaps the instigators of this "observatory" could participate in the group of wise men)
- instigating more technical research on the economic incompatibilities mentioned above, as well as the means for redirecting growth.
- by producing each year completely independent reports on the state of society and the ways of life in the Community.

The second point calls for the organisation of seminars and a series of hearings involving businessmen, trade-unionist, regional activists, etc. under the responsibility of the wise men, where they can talk informally. This would complement the conventional procedures of parliamentary work and concertation between the economic and social partners. This last condition intimates that the authority dealing with the problem must have real powers with respect to the Community and to governments, to be able to bring about the structural transformations it deems necessary.

2. Starting a Mediterranean renaissance

If we intend to defend tens of millions of Europeans from 'marginalisation' and at the same time preserve their traditional way of life we run two risks : that we will simply set up glorified folklore museums or that we set up new European 'Indian' reservations.

The aim must be to breathe new life into the "dominated" régions by first of all acknowledging their existence and by giving them above all a true political, economic and cultural existence. Three kinds of action would be appropriate :

- a. - It is necessary to encourage extensive decentralisation in all fields. This fits in well with the principles of a more human life mentioned before. Specific Community action should not be at the regional level (each region taken by itself will not be able to overcome the power of the dominant regions) but instead should be concentrated on regrouping the peripheral regions around common cultural or economic interests.
- b. - Perhaps the most efficient way to compensate for the penetration of the N. European way of life would be to re-balance the Community by moving its "centre of gravity" towards the Mediterranean in the geographical, political economic, demographic and cultural sense.

This re-balancing could certainly be attained by allowing entry to such countries as Spain, Portugal and Greece ; by strengthening relations with other Mediterranean countries (independently of the political and economic interests which justify cooperation between the Community and Arab countries) ; and perhaps by establishing contacts with Latin-American countries who have the same cultural heritage as us.

- c. - Finally the Community could take a limited but nevertheless intellectually bold initiative in encouraging research into a "harmonious synthesis" of the Mediterranean and N. European ways of life. A conference on such a theme could produce a valuable exchange of ideas between activists, urban administrators, artists, planners, lawyers, researchers, trade unionists etc.

Under the influence of the Germanic culture all the social restrictions applied to Mediterranean women are slowly disappearing : the crimes of honour which strengthen the taboos of virginity and adultery, the fetters of divorce and abortion, the large amount of time devoted to children and meals, the low value put on womens' work, the legal impotence of married women etc.

It would be nice to rediscover instead a civilisation where the city dwellers could take the time to enjoy life more and discover, once more, human warmth and social solidarity within their local community. Utopia perhaps, but an aim which might induce us to build another world instead of patching up our present growth policies.

The search for another model of post-industrial life could draw great benefit from studying the values embedded in the traditional rural societies, the agro-industrial balance achieved by certain other regions, and the style of town

planning and organisation of daily life in regions that are today on the periphery, notably in the "Mediterranean (1) area.

The redirection of growth and this change in the relationship between the two ways of life can only be brought about at a price, and the price would be that of conflict between regions and classes engaged in struggles for influence. But far from ignoring this new battle line-up, the European Community should at least try and increase the awareness of all the parties involved. It will gain respect in the eyes of its inhabitants if it can become the centre of ideas and action to create a more human growth pattern, as well as create a Mediterranean renaissance.

II. LIFE STYLES AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

A. Inadequate scientific back-up

The ideas we have put forward could scarcely be implemented given the present lack of scientific data and predictive analysis. In fact there is almost a complete lack of data dealing with even our most fundamental question of what the essential components of our different ways of life are, and what the factors are which cause them to change.

This disturbing situation reveals itself most clearly at the international level where virtually no comparative data on ways of life exist. Even at the national level one is struck by the complete absence of an overall vision of man's future.

There is an overabundance of statistics on income, purchases in each economic sector, household equipment, population structure and even on employment and strikes. These are often excellent studies whether in the field of classical statistical description or in the newer fields of social indicators of the standard of living and future aspirations.

But in every case the consumer, worker, citizen etc are all studied separately. "Objective" behaviour and "subjective" attitudes are unpopular in these approaches and one basically has to choose between numerical forecasting models and intuitive predictions. Using such diverse methods and dividing humanity into such fragments no overall view is possible.

(1) If the USA, which has been confronted with the same problems before us, has not succeeded in discovering a new post-industrial way of life, it is no doubt because their problems have yet another dimension (wealth of natural resources, the apparent irreversibility of the choice of a liberal and expansionist economy, and the absence of a socio-cultural inheritance to respect) but also because they do not possess the wealth of examples from past and present which is available to us.

B. Towards a W. European social science research policy

The situation calls for an extensive programme of action and it will have to involve more than just making studies on different ways of life. First the Community must make clear the necessity for such a programme and demonstrate the political will to implement one. It must assert itself as an institution capable of designing a more human growth policy, new social patterns and another post-industrial way of life.

There is also a second preliminary to the achievement of valuable studies since a study programme alone is not enough. It must be surrounded and aided by a complete scientific framework of field observations and explanatory theories. Our analysis of the present situation in Europe demonstrates the need and urgency for a considerable effort to gather and analyse data.

Going by the experience of other organisations it is not plausible to expect results in a reasonable time-period by simply coordinating the efforts of the Member States. For this reason we feel that the Community should set the foundation of a truly European social sciences research policy

This policy should be composed of two parts :

- the coordination of national scientific policies
- a strategy for the Community's own research

C. More action specifically concerning ways of life

It seems to us that one of the pillars of this scientific policy should be the establishment of an "observatory" of social change. This "observatory" would have the job of identifying the ways of life and presenting thoughts on the economic and social changes which affect them. Within this body a 'social synthesis and research' group would be required to :

- plan the research work of the 'observatory' and identify the major trends
- provide a link between the work being carried out by different bodies concerning the post-industrial way of life, including all the other Community bodies that are focussing their attention on new growth strategies (for example the work being undertaken by the Dublin Foundation on Working and Living Conditions) and also concerning the work undertaken outside these bodies on the effect of environment and economic policies on life styles at the European and world level.
- to provide information to the Community decision makers should they attempt to engineer a Mediterranean 're-balance', a slowdown of economic and social change, or if they propose taking decisions which affect the nature and quality of life tomorrow.

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