

Bréchon Pierre (eds.), *Les Européens et leurs valeurs. Entre individualisme et individualisation*, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2023, 310 p. (Europeans and their Values. Between individualism and individualisation)

Introduction

The European continent does not have very clear borders. Geography can help to identify them, with the Atlantic seaboard to the west, the Mediterranean to the south and the Arctic Ocean to the north. It is in the east that geography is the most imprecise when it comes to drawing a border, as there are no obvious barriers. It is generally considered that only a small part of Turkey is European, that to the west of the Bosphorus and the Black Sea. Further north, the Ural Mountains are often regarded as a potential border, but it is a political rather than a geographical criterion that explains the choice of a Europe "from the Atlantic to the Urals", as Charles de Gaulle put it. Political relations between states do not make it any easier to define European borders. The scope of the Council of Europe is very different from that of the European Union (EU). The former currently has 46 members and, since 1949, has brought together countries that want to establish a democratic area, guaranteeing the fundamental rights of individuals and public freedoms. The Council opened up to the countries of Eastern Europe as soon as they distanced themselves from the Soviet Union in 1989, and Russia also joined in 1996, but it was repeatedly challenged and condemned, before being excluded in March 2022 following the invasion of Ukraine¹. The EU had just six members when it was created in 1958, and it has expanded considerably to the north, south and east, but the United Kingdom left the Union in 2020, reducing its size to 27 members. Finally, we should mention the European Economic Area and the Schengen area, which do not have exactly the same borders as the EU.

We can also try to call on the study of civilisations to find an identity that defines a coherent European cultural whole. But it is doubtful whether this will produce a satisfactory result. Over the centuries, there have been many empires likely to give rise to a culture specific to the Old Continent, and very often they were multinational, so it has often been observed that national cultures had a certain capacity to resist the efforts of central political authorities to redefine and homogenise them (Pierré-Caps, 1995).

As far as religions are concerned, Christianity is far from having unified Europe, since it was initially divided between the West and the East, and later within Western Europe between Catholicism and Protestantism. Other religions also tried to establish themselves. Muslims had a strong presence in Spain for several centuries before being driven out, as were the Jews. But there is still a Muslim Europe, with a significant very ancient presence in the Balkans and a more recent presence in many countries, as a result of migrations.

It is therefore probably illusory to postulate the existence of a culture and values common to the whole of the Old Continent. Instead, we need to look at the diversity of cultures and values within this territory with its ill-defined borders. This is what we will attempt to do in this book, using data from the *European Values Studies* (EVS). The survey has been in existence since 1981, at the initiative of sociologists and political scientists who wanted to gain a better understanding of the changes taking

¹ This war should result in a clearer political boundary on Europe's eastern flank, with all the countries recognising the fundamental principles of democracy and the rule of law on one side, and the countries under Russian influence on the other. The war significantly modified Ukrainian values and brought them closer to the European Union (Bréchon, 2022b).

place in European societies by analysing the evolution of the values underpinning them. In particular, they feared that the erosion of Christianity would lead to the disappearance of common values, which were seen as a necessary foundation for the coherence of Western Europe (Stoetzel, 1983).

From the outset, the founding fathers of the survey believed that values formed a system: what people believe in one area is not unrelated to what they believe in others. It is therefore only possible to study changes in values with a detailed questionnaire that attempts to measure them by taking into account the main areas of life. The questionnaire therefore included many questions on relationships with others and sociability, the family, the meaning of work, religious beliefs and practices, and people's relationship with politics.

Studying change also meant repeating the survey at regular intervals so that the results could be compared at different points in time. It was repeated approximately every nine years (1990-1991, 1999-2001, 2008-2010, 2017-2020) with a largely identical questionnaire, but which had to adapt to societal changes, with some questions becoming less relevant while others had to be included to take account of new themes that had become important (Bréchon, 2022a). Each new series of data makes it possible to analyse the evolution and see whether previous trends are being reinforced or whether there are reversals or reorientations (Ester, Halman, de Moor, 1993; Arts, Halman, 2004 and 2014).

This survey, which has become one of the great standards in quantitative social science surveys, therefore has unrivalled depth for identifying both perennial differences between values in different countries and changes in them, because cultures are not intangible. The question of whether or not globalisation and the construction of Europe have brought cultures closer together is a fascinating one, which we will try to shed some light on.

The French team of researchers and academics, brought together in the Association pour la recherche sur les systèmes de valeurs (ARVAL), carried out the survey in France and published an analysis of the results, both for France (Bréchon, Gonthier, Astor, 2019) and for European comparison in time and space (Futuribles, 1995, 2002, 2013, 2021; Bréchon, Gonthier, 2017; Revue européenne des sciences sociales, 2021). This book follows on from the previous works, attempting to identify what is most fundamental in the change in values over recent decades.

It is often said that our consumerist societies are increasingly individualistic, with everyone forgetting collective ideals and seeking above all to maximise their personal existence, without concern for others. The 2008 wave of surveys showed that individualism should be clearly distinguished from individualisation, although many observers wrongly identify them (Bréchon, 2017). The process of individualisation corresponds to the rise in the value of individual choices, with personal autonomy becoming one of the great hopes of Western societies. If we operationalise the two dimensions, one valuing 'Every man for himself', the other 'Every man his own choice', we can see that in many European countries, the more favourable people are to individualisation, the less individualistic they are. In other words, the desire to make personal choices does not lead to a focus on one's own narrow interests but, on the contrary, is more easily combined with an openness to others. This link between individualisation and individualism is at the heart of this book. These two attitudes, which are central to value systems, will be analysed through a multitude of themes covered in the survey, before the concluding chapter summarises the relationship between the two dimensions, taking into account the differences between Europe's geographical areas.

The first part deals with social ties. What is happening to altruism in our societies? Do we trust each other or are we, on the contrary, very suspicious of each other? How important are the values of

tolerance and respect for others in social relations? Is the liberalism of morals, which is one of the concrete manifestations of individualisation, developing everywhere? Despite the existence of values of tolerance, how can we understand the resistance of xenophobia? What is happening to family ties in an increasingly individualised society? And what about work and leisure relationships in societies where populism has also developed?

The second part is devoted to changes in political values. It begins with a chapter on political involvement, i.e. the different forms of political and social action in the European Union. It is followed by chapters on democratic values, which many claim, but in the name of quite different conceptions, depending on whether they see democracy as a system guaranteeing civic rights and basing the legitimacy of power on free elections, or rather as an economic system ensuring development on an egalitarian basis, or finally along rather authoritarian lines to ensure social order. We will see that, while many people have high expectations of democracy, they are also easily disappointed and dissatisfied with the way their political system works. A specific chapter is then devoted to the types of citizen control that Europeans find acceptable and legitimate in societies where it seems increasingly necessary to combat crime and terrorism. This is followed by a chapter on the very unequal trust placed in institutions (for example, between welfare state institutions and political parties) and another on electoral processes, which can be more or less egalitarian and fair depending on the political system.

The section ends with two chapters on more specific themes. One deals with nationalism, which is fairly well developed in Europe, and is on the increase at a time when European sentiment seems to be stagnating, and the other with the rise of ecological concerns, which are more or less evident depending on the geographical area.

The third part is much more cross-cutting, aiming to identify whether the different types of social group share the same values, or recommend very different value systems. First we look at the fact of being a man or a woman, and then at belonging to a younger or older generation. We will then consider the values of the privileged categories and those of the deprived, before targeting the values linked to religious affiliations as opposed to those of the non-religious, even if we will see that there are also many internal differences between these two major groups. Finally, a chapter looks at the native-born versus immigrants and shows that their differences in values are less significant than might be expected.

The concluding chapter will then summarise the differences in values observed for different themes and social groups and place them in the overall context of a Europe that is increasingly individualised but rather less individualistic than before. But beyond the overall figures, we will see - as in all the chapters - that there is a great deal of diversity in the way individualisation and individualism are articulated in Europe, depending on the geographical area. Once again, we will see that Eastern Europe is very different from the West, the South and the Nordic countries.

Pierre Bréchon

Bibliography of the introduction

Arts Wil, Halman Loek, 2004 (eds.). *European Values at the Turn of the Millennium*, Leiden (NL): Brill.

Arts Wil, Halman Loek, 2014 (eds.). *Value Contrasts and Consensus in Present-Day Europe. Painting Europe's Moral Landscapes*, Leiden (NL): Brill.

Bréchon Pierre, Gonthier Frédéric, Astor Sandrine (dir.), 2019. *La France des valeurs*, Grenoble : Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.

- Bréchon Pierre, Gonthier Frédéric (eds.), 2017. *European Values. Trends and Divides Over Thirty Years*, Leiden (NL): Brill.
- Bréchon Pierre, 2017. « Individualization and individualism in European Societies », in Bréchon Pierre, Gonthier Frédéric (eds.), 2017. *European Values. Trends and Divides Over Thirty Years*, Leiden (NL): Brill, p. 232-253.
- Bréchon, 2022a. « What Do Changes in the EVS Questionnaire Reveal ? », in Luijkx Ruud, Reeskens Tim, Siegen Inge (eds.), *Reflections on European Values. Holnoring Loel Halman's Contribution to the European Values Study*, Open Press TIU, p. 100-112.
- Bréchon, 2022b. « Russes et Ukrainiens : des valeurs qui se différencient progressivement », *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, vol. 60/2, p. 47-69.
- Ester Peter, Halman Loek, de Moor Ruud (eds.), 1993. *The Individualizing Society. Value Change in Europe and North America*, Tilburg: Tilburg University Press.
- Futuribles, 1995. *L'évolution des valeurs des Européens*, numéro spécial 200, juillet-août.
- Futuribles, 2002. *Les valeurs des Européens. Les tendances de long terme*, numéro spécial 277, juillet-août.
- Futuribles, 2013. *Les valeurs des Européens. Les grandes tendances de long terme. Convergences et divergences entre pays. L'individualisation des sociétés*, numéro spécial 395, juillet-août.
- Futuribles, 2021. *L'évolution des valeurs des Européens*, dossier thématique, n° 443, p. 5-50.
- Pierré-Caps Stéphane, 1995, *La Multination. L'avenir des minorités en Europe centrale et orientale*, Paris : Odile Jacob.
- Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, 2021. *L'Europe des valeurs*, vol 59/2 (coordonné par Olivier Galland et Cyril Jayet).
- Stoetzel Jean, 1983. *Les valeurs du temps présent : une enquête européenne*, Paris, PUF.