

ESF SCSS Exploratory Workshop Grant 2001

**Identity and Technocracy in a Changing Europe ITCE**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## **I. Objectives**

The objective of the ITCE Workshop was to explore the possibilities to reach to a comprehensive approach to the identity of the technocracy in Europe, and to acknowledge the effect of social and political developments on this group. The various disciplines and the countries represented at the Workshops brought a great contribution to the multifaceted understanding of the subject matter.

The objective of the Workshop demanded initial clarification of the concepts in use, e.g. "technocrat" and "technocracy" today and "social and collective identity". For the purpose of elaborating a research proposal, also the state of the art on the specific characteristics of the technocracy in different countries was incorporated in the discussions including the transformation the nations are going through in the present. The Workshop fulfilled the overall objective to initiate a search for a common theoretical and methodological frame which would serve as the basis for analysing the identity of the technocracy and for elaborating a research project. Drawing on this knowledge and procedures, the team worked towards the research proposal, the guidelines for the collection of empirical data to facilitate a fruitful understanding of the subject matter; and towards building a network of researchers working on the field. The two paths are closely related, and both together could achieve useful theoretical and practical knowledge to set an initial common methodology, and contribute to the development of the European Research Community.

## **II. Identity and Change**

The identity of the technocrat at a time when significant global changes have taken place is a subject that has been less studied in the Sociology literature. It is apparent that, in order to cover the interface between identity and technocracy, different disciplinary perspectives to address the issues are not only possible, but also required. Introduction of innovative approaches seems essential to now address the social, political and personal aspects of the contemporary identity of the current technocracy. The Workshop benefited from interdisciplinary discussions and different levels of expertise on the subjects of study.

The Identity and Technocracy in a Changing Europe (ITCE) Exploratory Workshop investigated the factors that possibly contribute to the identity of the technocracy as this relates to political, scientific, cultural and economic changes over time. Various approaches to the concepts of technocracy and also of identity were explored and the identity of the technocracy in Europe and in few European countries in particular, was discussed. The team also developed a research proposal drawing on theories and methodologies on the development of different technocracies in European countries as a major social and political component of contemporary society and identity.

The ITCE Exploratory Workshop held three meetings during the year's award. The Workshop concluded that whereas there are competent definitions for identity and for technocracy, less known is whether there is such a thing as 'the identity of the technocracy' in current times, and what are its characteristics in relation to contemporary society. The challenge therefore, is now to investigate the possibilities to define the identity of the technocrats. It is apparent that the current historical period plays a strong influence on the social and personal identity of the technocracy; yet, it is unknown what these features are. Any definition of the identity of technocracy should take into account the particular social transformations of the last decades, the issues of gender and education as well as adhering to national influences in the formation of such identity. The centrality of this subject is reflected on the evident and also less visible influence that the technocratic mind-set has had on the ways that society acquires knowledge and also how society has evolved.

A further feature of great significance for society is that the technocracy influences and also decides upon scientific and technological research and implementation and also on the general political and social organisation of society. Apparently, the technocracy has particular ways of thinking, and of ideology; it might be possible to call it a technocratic paradigm. For example, among the most common features are the belief of its scientific-unbiased positions for solving social problems; the primacy of the economic criterion of efficacy; *credentialism* or the legitimization of positions through academic and managerial degrees; *meritocracy* as the yardstick of resource distribution; the belief that technical progress and production levels indicate "human progress"; and the conviction that public interference in collective issues compete with real "rational" solutions. Nonetheless, it is impossible to a priori assume the extent to which the technocrats make up a distinct identity category with respect to their attitudes, beliefs and perspectives *vis-a-vis* themselves, individually or collectively with respect to society, the nation, Europe and globally. It is not clear however whether the technocrats differentiate themselves from the identity of non-technocrats with whom they work in their respective organisations.

The notion of identity occupies a central place in contemporary literature. A most important distinction has been made between personal identity or "self" (Giddens, 1991; Cherni, 2000) from social identity and collective identity. The personal identity or the self indicates the images an individual share of him or herself as a private human being and it influenced by numberless family, social, historical or other circumstances. This personal identity responds to three basic questions: how far a person values him/herself as an individual, how far s/he sees him/herself unique or just a participant to wider entities, and how s/he sets him/herself in contrast to "others".

Also collective identity is applicable to the technocracy. Collective identity indicates that individuals feel committed to fellows whom they see as fellow-members of their group, and perceive the group as conveying cultural singularity. Accordingly, individuals with collective identity define their relation to non-members of the same identity group. Such notion describes an essentially subjective phenomenon and can never be seen as acquired once for good; it involves dilemmas rather than unambiguous assertions. This means that the same identity may be phrased in different (possibly antagonistic) terms, over time or among different groups.

A further perspective of identity thus, and that is suitable to understand the technocracy, is represented by social local identity (Cherni, 2000). It has been defined as being not uniform and dynamic in the measure that it responds to changes in society. The spatial perspective becomes significant when considering that global social changes during the 1970s and 1980s have caused local reactions and local politics in a globalised world. This identity explains that exposure to changes takes place at local levels while these economic, social and political transformations that affect these local communities are in fact globally defined. People construct an identity, which is different from other cultural, national, etc., identities, because they are formed out of the actual position of the individual in relation to social change. Drawing on a basis that social identity is dynamic but also socially stratified, the identity of the technocrat would correspond with the type of identity that develops out of positions of security in relation to change.

The role of female technocrats has been practically neglected. As much as it is often impossible to identify by name and appearance, who the technocrats are, a similar situation has existed in relation to *women*. Like with women – who have remained anonymous members of society for long time – it has been always necessary to judge technocrats according to signs rather than concrete information. Technocrats, like women, fulfill essential roles in society, yet they are not openly seen. It is apparent that technocracy is acting in favour of women by not posing a threat to the female identity while also possibly developing further the identity of a technocrat. Whether it is possible to feed a technocratic identity and at the same time to maintain a feminist identity that may fight for women's rights and against sexual discrimination, it is a question that needs full exploration. The issue of gender is a novel aspect for exploration of the identity of the technocracy.

### **III. The Technocracy/Technocrats – Definitions**

There is a high level of consensus on the definition of the concept technocracy as "a political system in which the determining influence belongs to technicians of the administration and the economics" (Meynaud, 1968; Etzioni-Halevy, 1985; Fischer, 1990). In spite of this, the term "technocrat" –has been differently understood as an analytical tool. This topic seems of extraordinary importance, i.e., the technocracy as a stratum of people that appears beyond the national boundaries and apparently shares more than ever before in Europe, immense power in an increasing number of societies.

A technocrat is a highly-educated expert and a manager of big organisations. This very position endorses him or her with the duty of strategic thinking and the power of elaborating projects that should orient the development of the complex system which he or her are in charge of. This position, moreover, endows the technocrat with considerable influence over public decision-making and the evolving of nearby institutions and organisations. For a deeper understanding of this group, there is need to use a wider definition, that will be able to include and compare different kind of features and identities. As such we follow the definition that argues that technocrats are individuals with a high level of specialised academic training. This characteristic serves as a principal criterion on the basis of which they are selected to occupy key decision-making or advisory roles in large, complex organisations - both public and private (Silva, 1991).

A most important point here is not only the definition of the technocrats' characteristics but the impact that their attitudes and actions have on the social praxis. A central factor in these attitudes and actions is the social identity of the technocrat as a powerful actor in the public sphere. There are however, serious and often polar divergences between the scholars regarding the points above.

From a sympathetic side, we can present Daniel Bell's position referring to the technocrats as part of the professional class. They are seen as a neutral, objective elite, free from personal or elite' interests, acting for the sake of society. Among the most famous formulations, we can think of Habermas or Gouldner. The problem is that they pay attention to the technocratic tendency to override the technical or administrative technocratic paradigm. This paradigm is apt to deal with rational pragmatic professional decisions on effectiveness and economic efficacy in very different aspects of human life; i.e. the public sphere of interaction and conflict in social, political, moral or ideological issues (see Larochelle, 1993).

An accepted feature of the technocracy has been its technocratic thinking, ideology or paradigm. Some elements that accompany this paradigm are: its scientific and objective arguments for solving social problems; the primacy of the economic criterion of efficacy; *credentialism* or the legitimization of positions through academic and managerial degrees; *meritocracy* (which applies to equity rather than equality) as the system of distribution of resources in society; the belief that technical progress and production levels indicate "human progress"; and the conviction that public interference in public issues are competing with "rational" solutions.

It is widely accepted among scholars that technocrats share typical modes of thinking which centre on the belief of objective and instrumental rationalism as an effective functional basis for solving not only economic and political but also moral and social problems. There is a self-proclaimed objectivity and lack of inclination towards any type of government or society. As part of this paradigm, technocracy is assumedly reluctant to legitimise ideological, ethic, political and social motivations in public decision processes. While, however, the paradigm of the technocracy has been partly studied, its social identity in relation to the local community, and when it is spoken of the supra-national technocracy, its relation to the national community, and to the identity of the non-elite groups in general has been widely neglected (Topel, 2001).

In summary, technocrats fulfill central functions as managers; and their central functions as coordinators bestow the option to exercise power on society. Yet, great transformations occurred in the way the power of technocrats and their identities have been developing and influencing society. Changes in the international market have affected the way the relationship among the nation state, science and technology, and the industry had operated after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. Indeed, it was also mentioned that before the late 1960s and in the early 1970s, the identity of technocrats might have been connected to trade unions; but today, their identity seems to be constructed more as part of multinational corporations. Another important shift has affected the identity of technocrats. The previous role of national companies, managed in large part by bureaucrat technocrats was to provide services to the citizens. This role has changed in accordance with global transformations. The overall objective of companies where

technocrats operate has become to provide the consumers with a larger choice of goods - and by implication, with 'freedom' - and to increase the total sales of services so as to become more competitive in today's global market. Globalisation seems to have had a strong effect on the characteristics of contemporary technocrats.

Technocrats aim at achieving effectiveness and efficiency as a way to rise living standards for larger numbers of people. Whereas technocrats seem to represent a new class in a changing society, they also hold formal credentials and draw on a strong pragmatic rationalism. Therefore, it is suggested also to see the technocracy as a category, rather than a social group, who shows particular yet paradoxical characteristics. Technocrats represent an elite in society that advances conservative ideas, dedication to technological, managerial and political innovations. But they also indicate interest to promote changes in society. It could be argued that the identity of the technocrats hints at intrinsic contradictions. Not only that the power status of the technocracy has become more dominant, but also the source of its power as well as the main characteristics of the technocrats have changed all of which has posed specific threats to a wider participatory democracy.

#### **IV. Interpretations of Identity**

The notion of identity is certainly a most popular one in the contemporary social sciences literature. Personal identity or "self" (Giddens, 1991; Cherni, 2000) is distinguished from social identity and collective identity. The personal identity or the self indicates the images an individual share of him or herself as a private human being. It is, of course, influenced by numberless family, social, historical and other circumstances. This personal identity responds to three basic questions: how far a person values him/herself as an individual, how far s/he sees him/herself unique or just a participant to wider entities, and how s/he sets him/herself in contrast to "others".

Different from individual identity, a social identity indicates that individuals consider themselves as sharing with other people given traits or attributes that significantly impact their social life. Examples of this kind of identity are professional identities, local identities of dwellers of a city or a region or generation identities (Eriksen, 1996). A further kind of identity is collective identity. It indicates that individuals (1) feel committed to people whom they see as fellow-members of their group, (2) perceive that group as conveying cultural singularity, and (3) accordingly define their relation to non-members (Ben-Rafael, 2001). This notion describes an essentially subjective phenomenon and can never be seen as acquired for good; it involves dilemmas more often than unambiguous assertions. This means that the same identity may be phrased in different (possibly antagonistic) terms, over time (i.e., diachronically) or among different circles in the group (i.e. synchronically) which it, more or less clearly, delineates and evinces.

These different versions formulate the same identity only because they answer the same questions on the commitment of members, the perception of their singularity as a group, and an understanding of the relation to non-group individuals. Such different versions of a same identity articulate distinct symbols, or attach contrasted meanings to the same symbols. However, they all broadly draw the symbols of their choice from the same “store” including language, styles of speech or, at least, a given register of familiar tokens. These symbols mark the group’s contrastive identity (Fishman, 1989).

An important differentiation is the concept of identification. It refers to individuals’ reluctance to downplay their allegiance to a given group and their tendency to evince their dissimilarity from “others”. One may point out here to three factors that, according to the literature, should be of crucial impact for exercising identification. One factor is social status. It is assumed that unequal access to social and educational opportunities, deprivation, prejudice and discrimination may nourish the tendency of inferior class, immigrant or ethnic communities to crystallise as distinct conflict entities (Barth, 1969; Poulantzas, 1975). On the other hand, we also know how far higher status may be factor of group crystallisation. Identification with the collective is a core aspect of this process and it most often expresses itself in the group’s inventing a legacy and symbols of its own (Parkin, 1983). The last factor is the culture that is dominant in society. Identity can be interpreted as part of culture, or as a sub-culture, and it relates to how people define themselves in relation to other cultures.

Also ‘social local identity’ (Cherni, 2000) as a form of contemporary identity is relevant for the identity of the technocracy. Social local identity is not uniform and it is dynamic as it responds to changes. Exposure to changes takes place at local levels but the transformations in economic, social, political spheres are global. This contemporary identity reflects the ever more controversial character and impact of policy and globalisation, such as, social exclusion, as well as economic opportunity, threat and empowerment, and opposition to risk. In this case, the interface between identity and technocracy refers particularly to construction of an identity that develops through a position of *security* in society. This identity benefits from structural changes; such identity also implies, for example, high self-esteem, and an insured perceived livelihood, central roles in the management of society.

It is the case that global and local changes are neither good nor bad for society. It is the opportunities that they provide and the mechanisms they create through which identity, technocracy and democracy reveal themselves, which ultimately determine their value. The problem is that the opportunities provided by globalisation and other changes are uneven and these will show as threat, opportunity, risk, or empowerment for the individual. Whereas the perspective of social local identities in Europe recognises that a proportion of social interrelations in one specific place will link beyond the area being referred to, it is necessary to include other aspects of identity.



As far as the gender issue is concerned, feminism is no more a sex, or man-woman fight, or even a struggle for equality. The new feminism offers a new perspective, i.e., the female view, and this approach is useful for considering the technocrat identity. It establishes a gender difference which is a new progress coming from the base of human nature instead of chauvinism and authoritarianism used to be. Whether it is possible to have a technocratic identity and at the same time to maintain an identity that can fight issues of sexual discrimination at work is a question that needs full exploration.

## V. European Identity of the Technocracy and National Technocracies

Modernity and post-modernity have been linked to a rising individualisation whereby traditional social contexts are in decay. As a consequence, modern times offer the end of poverty and new available living standards which promise the freedom of social man from old ties (Beck,1998; Giddens, 1997). To find new relations is the task of the individual. The context the individual life is understood to be in constant change driven by the processes of Europeanisation and globalisation. However, despite that wider processes are taking place, the role of identity and of identification have also prevailed. The question is how far, and in what ways do European technocrats effectively represent - through self-perception as technocrats, a *transnational* and perhaps also a *European* category of identity. Furthermore, a question that emerges is how they might concretise the ideal of a European unity that stands beyond and above Europe's individual settings.

It is of special interest to identify whether the technocrats are the carriers of a European idea of unification. That is, whether or not the very idea of Europe does constitute a major motto of technocrats' strategic thinking and, if this is the case, what its objectives are. Europe is often described as a "matter for technocrats". This appreciation endows technocrats an immense role in the making of Europe. The Workshop attempted to capture the following question in the research proposal, how far technocrats, who are citizens of different countries, do share similar perspectives about themselves and their work, about the environment and development, and above all, about Europeanisation. An additional question that has been asked is how far does their professional identity (or identities) conglomerate into coherent tokens of comprehensive collective identities. And further, how these collective identities (if such develop) relate to, coexist with, and eventually melt with other aspects of identity – e.g., ethnic-cultural, local, national, and gender, eventually.

As to national technocracies, the workshop explored the cases of England, France, Germany, Spain and Israel as part of the future research proposal submission, England, France, Germany, Spain and Israel. Each country was chosen for typical characteristics that would help define the identity of the technocracy; England: because of its democratic tradition, differentiated elites and a recent history of Thatcherism and European Union scepticism; France: has a centralised state, a clear 'classe politic' and an important role in the process of European unification. Germany was elected because of economic strength and success federalism and the ways the country manages the massive financial and social problems linked to the effects of the reunification. Spain is a case study because of her short democratic history, the country's position between centralism and regional

dissatisfaction, and the poor economic situation as a southern European country. The case of Israel is justified by representing this country a special condition where the same economic and political elite is growing in a very politicised society.

## **VI. Assessment of the Results and Contributions to the Future Direction of the Field**

- A main conclusion of the Exploratory Workshop has been on the limitations of the term technocracy as it does not fully represent the actual functions deployed by this population.
- The Workshop has indicated that renewed information of the identity of the technocrats constitutes a first stage for any thorough understanding of democracy and political power in this particular period of globalisation and local manifestations of change. Further stages would involve research on the influential political role that the technocracy exerts in society and the dynamics of institutional change.
- A further outcome of the Workshop was the realization that not sufficient attention has been conferred in the literature to the analytical perspectives of gender and locality in relation to the technocracy. The environmental concern might also be a subject of importance. It is not only possible, but also fundamental to incorporate these subjects not previously included in the study of identity and technocracy, i.e., gender, environmentalism and locality.
- The Workshop has contributed to the future direction of the field of study by raising the possibility to refer to spatial (i.e., local and global, spaces of identity), dynamic (transformations of technocracy, uneven change, purpose of power) and identification (who they are) features of the identity of technocrats. These features cannot be isolated from other contexts such as other identities, techno-structures, and the logical action of technocrats. It would be important to refer to possible alliances that the technocrats make up and through which power might be put in action.
- Expansion of the current team through a network of interested researchers is seen as the necessary follow up for next year.
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- Finally, a central outcome of the ESF Exploratory Workshop is the preparation of a research proposal that fully draws on the lines of the topic of the award. The Workshop stressed the need for a comparative and international research on the subject. A research proposal is being prepared for submission in 2002. The prospective investigation will draw on the practical experience of current technocrats who occupy key offices in a variety of socio-economic sectors at various geographic and political levels. Expansion of the current team through a network of interested researchers is seen as the necessary follow up for next year.

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