

Family and education

HELLENISM shares with certain other cultures an emphasis on family strategy for success. The Greek family invests in the success of its members; parents virtually sacrifice themselves for the sake of their children's progress. In today's modern state, this tendency often has negative consequences. When the criterion of success is securing a job in the public sector, the entire family applies its energies in this direction, using well-known means. But this phenomenon typifies only a single period; it will be disappearing as rent-seeking loses ground under the pressure of international competition.

Traditional family investment targeted education, and still does. Education was the only stable and inalienable value in the fluid and uncertain economic environment with which Hellenism was familiar for centuries. Wealth provoked the envy of conquerors; land and buildings were forfeited when their owners were forced to flee from brigands, pirates or invaders. But knowledge could not be taken away or lost, unlike gold or possessions. It did not

require transportation. The importance of education also explains the social mobility typical of Hellenism. The acquisition of knowledge, funded by the sacrifices of families, was pursued in a decentralised manner. In the Ottoman Empire the Church played a crucial role, but at different periods people also searched for educational opportunities elsewhere, such as western institutions of learning.

The Greek state developed its educational system, in part to meet the high demand in society, but mainly for the purpose of ethnogenesis: it was necessary to disseminate the centralist national model. But Greek families systematically sent their children abroad to round off domestic education. The diasporic nature of Hellenism strengthened and was strengthened by this tendency.

The inclination to learning, even if regarded from a narrow utilitarian vantage point, has never ceased to typify Hellenism. Families continue to invest exorbitantly in the education of their children. The results in Greece belie the hopes invested and the sacrifices. The problem is not structural, however. In the past decades the failure of education has been the consequence of ideological rigidity, wrong choices, and the general problem of public administration.

The phobic Athenian elite, in its effort to control public frustration, enhanced state intervention in the area of education as well. Bloated centralism was later exploited by the champions of rent-seeking. Greek education, regulated entirely by the state, was transformed into a mechanism for the distribution of salaries and preferment. Instead of working for the benefit of students, education has been subordinated to the trade unionist interests of teachers and professors; indeed, education has changed into an organ of 'regional development policy' designed to maintain the rate of construction in provincial cities!

This situation is already being upset by the crisis. University students demand knowledge—not only diplomas. Sooner or later, pri-

vate institutions will impose competition on their state counterparts, and inadequate funding will put an end to the financing of university units that have no reason to exist. A still more important agent of change is the emerging educational revolution produced by the reticular economy of knowledge. The acquisition of knowledge will be detached from its territorial basis, and this will at the same time diminish the importance of bodies that offer only technical instruction. The only surviving university departments will be those that can deliver something superior, which cannot be broadcast by the internet. The only remaining professors will be those able to create new knowledge and to pass this ability on to the young: these are functions that the internet cannot replace.

The Greek educational landscape will, then, change radically. Structures linked to statism and unionisation will atrophy by themselves. They will be replaced by new forms that will operate on scales broader or narrower than the national. The local scale will regain its position, particularly in primary and secondary education. As in the past, the local community will control and maintain schools and teachers. In higher education Greece will energetically join international networks thanks to the huge advantage of having a robust diaspora of university professors and by dint of her ability to penetrate the markets of the developing world. These new conditions will end the current impasse and prevailing inflexibility; this will happen not through the reform (which is hopeless) of the existent system but through its supersession.

Once it is emancipated from its present shackles, the inclination to learning, based on centuries-old family strategies, will give life to a complicated, chaotic but productive field of Greek education, which in turn will revive intellectual, artistic, and scientific activity.

This hope will be especially significant for the world of tomorrow. The mobility of capital, the globalisation of production, and the ease of transport have crucially reduced the importance of material goods. No country can retain its influence merely because it has

wealth-producing resources or capital invested in its territory. Everything can be devalued or displaced. The same holds for personal wealth. No material value is stable, belying the assumption of Greek real estate owners until recently: this traditionally 'secure' investment has in effect been debauched.

Knowledge again proves to be the only secure value in the inconstant geo-economic environment. By returning to their traditional habits of investment, i.e. by stressing education, Greeks will be able to adapt to the new world much more successfully than peoples of different cultural origins who are accustomed to centuries of stability. Educational renewal will not take place through the simple restructuring of the state-maintained system. On the contrary, this will happen through the gradual shrinkage of the system as it increasingly proves to be out of touch with the overwhelming changes produced by the rise of the new non-material economy. This will allow ample scope for the development of the new reality.

From this point of view, the crisis in the Greek educational system may speed up the process of adaptation, which, by contrast, will be slower in countries with a relatively healthy but outmoded educational system.