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EDITORIAL

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In this issue on “Culture and Democracy” you’ll find 8 excellent articles. Each with another aspect of culture as a focus.

Some cultural issues are coming back in several articles. It will be worthwhile to follow up on some of these themes:

1. The issue of the relationship between the individual and the group.

Prof. Kessels makes the case that sometimes the Common Good for the community at large is forgotten by polarizing groups.

In 4 other articles the focus is more on the distinction between at one hand Collectivist cultures where people belong to defined in-groups where in return for loyalty they are taking care of by their in-group and at the other hand Individualistic Cultures where the focus is on individual rights and what that means for morality and democracy. This is discussed by Varkey, Zwaenepoel, Lanzer and Husain&Husain-Cornelissen. Moral concepts are discussed like Wasta in Arab countries, Ubuntu in Africa and similar concepts in India and Latin America.

2. A very cultural issue is shown in the articles by Davies and Stephen about Brexit.

It concerns the question: *who* decides what the common good exactly is. In the Contest (the Anglo-Saxon countries) it is seen as self-evident that it is a matter of voting by all concerned and the winner (half plus one) takes all. Even in politically utterly important decisions like choosing between leave or remain. In the articles by Varkey , Husain&Husain-Cornelissen, Zwaenepoel, Carpinski, Lanzer and Wursten it is shown that in hierarchical countries it is the privilege of the top of the system to decide about the content of Common good and that in Network countries (Scandinavia and the Netherlands) people decide in terms of “shared interest” by all participants in the debate at hand.

3. The role of morality in Democracy and the rule of law.

Wursten and Lanzer make the case that Universal human rights are a reflection of- and acceptable for individualistic cultures. The same rights for all individuals regardless of gender, color, ethnicity, religious affiliation or sexual preference. In collectivist cultures the in-group interests are central and not the individual. This does mean that morality is taking another shape in collectivist cultures. In these cultures it is the task of local leadership to provide for a sense of justice. Mostly in the shape of a counsels of wise elders who decide about what is just and fair in the case of disputes. It gives a lot of insight to read the articles by Varkey , Husain&Husain-Cornelissen, Zwaenepoel and Lanzer who show how this works in resp. India, Arab, African and Latin American cultures. Lanzer points at the potential pitfall for the rule of law in Collectivist countries: “To friends, everything; to others, the rigors of the law”.

Wursten shows that Democracies with a narrow definition of the Rule of law (Democracy with inclusion of universal human rights) are a reflection of Individualism. Professor Carpinski convincingly writes about the consequences and solutions for the European Union.

He recommends looking at the Dutch school of thinking. Of course you understand that I’m not biased about that!!

4. A very important aspect is discussed by Kessels and Carpinski: the role of lifelong learning in democratic countries.

Two sides of the same coin, in the words of Kessels. It is very important especially because of the influence of social media, to have informed citizens who are able to make a distinction between fake news and facts. Kessels urges to avoid having a too narrow, economic, focus for lifelong learning.

I recommend to take the time to read all papers. It will be worth your time!