

9

Re-organising Everyday Greek Social Reality: Subjective Experiences of the Greek Crisis

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Greek society is experiencing significant difficulties due to the global economic recession. Poor politico-economic foundations have left Greece exposed and particularly vulnerable, and unable to manage or control such a major crisis. This exposure has left it unable to control the debt inherited from older generations, which has magnified during the last ten years. In 2013 the national debt stood at 169.1 per cent of GDP, increasing by 19.9 per cent since 2012 (the highest increase in Eurozone) (In.Gr, 2013). This led Greece to seek assistance from the EU and the IMF, which have in turn implemented a sequence of unprecedented austerity measures. Such measures, however, have had a substantial effect on the everyday lives of Greeks. Since such measures have not been implemented in any other EU country before, the possible political and social consequences have not been effectively calculated or, in many respects, even anticipated.

The aim of this study is to investigate the subjective experiences of three different age groups¹ of Greeks (20-29; 30-39; 40-55) in order to understand the impact of the crisis on their everyday lives. It is argued that the experiences of Greeks during the crisis show that dramatic economic, political, historical and social transformations in Greece have two relatively distinct impacts: the undeniable negative and harmful effect on Greeks' everyday lives as well as the reorientation and re-prioritisation of the way Greeks think, act and behave. As recession expands to more European countries (the most recent being Cyprus), this study provides an initial overview of the possible effect of social changes that these age groups have to confront in their everyday lives due to the consequences of the economic depression.

The impact of the crisis on Greek society

One of the quantifiable and most tragic impacts of the crisis has been the huge increase in suicides. Greece used to have one of the lowest rates in the EU, however according to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2013) suicides and suicide attempts increased by 17 per cent between 2007-09 and thereafter there has been an annual increase of up to 22.5 per cent. The Ministry of Public Order estimates that the actual number for 2012 is 3,124. Sadly, this

follows a well established pattern. As Durkheim (1951) demonstrates in his classic study, suicide rates tend to increase during periods of depression and weak social solidarity.

Another symptom of the crisis has been increased rates of unemployment. According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2013), the unemployment rate reached 28 per cent in 2013, with women and the younger generation suffering the most. One in ten university graduates have emigrated, most of whom are overqualified. Six in ten university graduates are willing to or planning to do the same (Metanasteusi, 2013). The basic salary has dropped from €780 in 2008 to €562 per month in 2013 (Kathimerini, 2013). The average pension is currently estimated to be around €425 per month (LibertyLife, 2013). Further reductions in salaries, pensions and investments is anticipated according to the new Memorandum of Understanding (Mnimonio, 2013), including a longer term freeze in public sector wages, VAT increases from 17 per cent to 23 per cent, a rise in the retirement age to 65 for both men and women, freezing pensions and increasing taxes (Knight, 2012a). The dismal situation in society and the economy is accompanied by even worse political collapse, as support for the largest political parties has shrunk enormously due to a lack of trust in politicians. Indicatively in the 2012 elections 38.8 per cent of Greeks didn't vote, which was the highest ever (Greek National Elections Results on line, 2013).

While illustrative, an examination of aggregate data does not allow us to explore how established behavioural patterns/norms within Greek society are being reshaped by it. As Narotzky argues, "the current [circumstances] in Greece is not a situation devoid of history; it is rooted in social and cultural practice, global networks and political policy" (2004; cited in Knight, 2012a: 354). Comprehending these roots is crucial if we are to understand how different age groups are affected by the crisis and how they respond to it. Tsoukalas (2008) and Alexakis (2008) for instance interpret the ills and dysfunctions of Greek society as a symptom of the absence of rational organisation at the state level, whereas Mouzelis and Pagoulatos (2003) underline the relatively low levels of civil society engagement and solidarity towards co-citizens, compared to other European states.

As important as these issues are, the current problems have deeper routes in Greek history. In previous research (2012) I have argued that Greek society and the state have suffered ongoing social and structural dysfunctions over a prolonged period, which have caused significant delays in their social, political and economic development. The entire 20th century was extremely turbulent for Greece in terms of political, social, economic and especially historical stability, which did not allow the Greek society to be formed and organized freely and fully. Sotiropoulos (2004) explains that after the fall of the Military Junta in 1974 democracy in Greece was restored rapidly but not systematically and thoroughly. As a result of these upheavals, Greek society has been subject to multiple and, at times, competing influences which have helped to shape the so-called 'Greek mentality'. Panagiotopoulou (2008) argues for instance that it has been extremely difficult for Greek society to fully absorb the values, principles and ways of thinking (related to progress of science and secularism) of Western Europe, since it had been influenced by the Eastern (Ottoman) way of life during the time that Western Europe was evolving intellectually, scientifically, politically and socially. Mouzelis (2012) similarly believes that certain elements in the Greek mentality derive from the fact that Greece was under the occupation of the Ottoman Empire for over four hundred years and certain customs and patterns of behaviour have therefore become

inherent in the way Greek society and state operate. An example of this is the word 'rousfeti', which comes from Turkish and denotes clientelism. This forms part of what Alexakis (2008) and Voulgaris (2006) describe as one of the main characteristics of the 'Greek mentality' – the tendency of Greeks to act in an individualistic manner.

Crises and social transformations: the importance of subjective experiences

These well-established behavioural patterns and social norms have an important impact on how Greeks interpret the current crisis, however it must be emphasised that individuals interpret crisis situations in different ways. Established cultural norms play a role in these interpretations, but crises also provide opportunities for the re-evaluation of those norms. As Elder (1974: 10) explains, "crisis situations [...] challenge customary interpretations of reality and undermine established routine". Moreover, crises can also provide the impetus for societal change and, indeed, may be essential for such changes to occur. Nisbert (1970: 328) argues that, "no substantial change in social group or organisation, or in the structure of any form of social behaviour, takes place except under the impact of events that cause crisis".

Rather than responding to the crisis in a homogenous and undifferentiated manner, individuals are likely to experience different aspects of the same crisis. The impact of social change may vary dramatically among individuals, as their subjective experiences disclose different levels and ways of engagement with the crisis. According to Pinguart and Silbereisen (2004), social change affects social institutions and poses a range of psychological constraints on individuals. Pinguart and Silbereisen et al. (2004: 76) further argue that structural forces significantly affect human agency, although Silbereisen (2005) adds that societal progress is also related to 'agentic' development. According to Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 963, cited in Silbereisen et al, 2007:74), agency refers to "a temporally embedded process of social engagement informed by the past [...] but also oriented toward the future [...] and toward the present [...]". Silbereisen et al. (2007:74) explain that agency is associated with action and social engagement which can be revealed in a specific circumstantial context of past experience and future goals. Regarding social change, there seems to be an agreement that agency is always limited to relevant social constraints (Evans, 2007; Pinguart and Silbereisen, 2004, Elder, 1999) although Stetsenko (2007) believes that this cannot be a universal conclusion.

In cases where social change is associated with worsening rather than improvement of conditions (as in the Greek case), Silbereisen (2005:3) explains that "the high rise in potentially distressing encounters [...] such as increasing unemployment rates, reductions of social benefits, adaptational pressures related to the new social institutions, and the loss of former frames of reference [...] result in impaired levels of well-being and negative self-related attitudes". Sablonniere et al. (2010) further argue that during periods of dramatic social change, collective deprivation does impact personal well-being. Cheung and Leung (2010), in a study conducted in Hong Kong also maintain that the negative effects of social change may become more detrimental to people with a lower quality of life before the change occurs. Furthermore, in a study carried out in Germany, Grumer and Pinguart (2011) concluded that there is a strong association between social change and psychological

depression and they emphasised that optimism and social support may help to manage of depressive symptoms.

One way to examine individual experiences and the prospects for social change is to focus on generational differences. As Karl Mannheim (1997) argues, each generation is held together by common experiences of historical events, especially if such events are traumatic. He adds that generations radicalised by traumatic experiences can transform society by challenging customary thought and offering new political and cultural visions. It was anticipated in this study, that different age groups might experience the crisis in different ways and probably interpret the ways Greek society changes in distinct forms. Hood and Joyce (1999), while referring to their study on crime in London, further support the argument that different generations experience same events in different ways. The most appropriate way to understand these differences and comprehend how society changes is to look into the ways people live their everyday lives, how they change or maintain habits, routines and ways of thinking (May, 2011). Pinguart and Silbereisen (2004: 292) further confirm that different age groups perceive social change and crisis in different ways and that there are different perceptions regarding stress management and coping strategies. Individuals may respond similarly at a collective manner but individual well-being and personal development is usually affected distinctively for each human being. For example, Archer (2010) explains that cultural capital inherited by older generations is no longer as useful to the younger generation, since different skills are now needed in the job market. This means that the new generation cannot repeat routine actions of the previous generation, and cannot use the cultural capital inherited from them, because such practices and ways of thinking are no longer as productive and rewarding, for example because of increased computerisation. This might explain why Greek younger generations are more critical towards harmful mentalities established by older generations.

Furthermore, the younger and middle generations in Greece, have now realised that certain social dysfunctions inherited from older generations will no longer apply, as everyday living in Greece has become more complicated, demanding and challenging. These anomalies refer to aspects of the Greek mentality which are no longer effective, such as the concept of 'volema' (to get into, or remain in, a situation/position that works for oneself without considering others), 'meso' (the medium – usually a political figure – who helps to accomplish what needs to be accomplished), 'rousfeti' (clientalism), and 'ohaderfismos' (to 'get by' without caring about tomorrow) (Chalari, 2012).

The manner in which individuals react to the crisis offers an exceptional insight into the way(s) that Greek society is being reshaped. As May (2011: 374) explains, people respond to social change in a "fragmentary fashion" – the way people are affected by social changes relates to the gradual alteration of their ways of thinking as well as to their habits and routines. May maintains that as people behave and think differently, or as they resist doing so, they actually contribute to further social transformations even if they do not produce a collective course of action (or reaction). As Dietz and Burns (1992) explain, agents are restricted in producing action due to structural constraints. Actions or even reactions, may be seen as necessary or impossible because of structural rules, or agents' (re)actions might be restricted by other agents. Edmunds and Turner (2005:562) also explain that generations alter from being passive into becoming politically active and self-conscious, when they are able to

exploit recourses (political/educational/economic), to innovate in cultural, intellectual or political spheres. As the circumstances in Greece remain fluid it is still uncertain if and how different generations might produce any specific course of (re)action. At the same time, Edmunds and Turner add that generations become active when recourses, opportunity and strategic leadership become available; this might explain why different generations in Greece have not (yet) produced a collective form of (re)action, as the current political, economic and social circumstances in Greece keep on reinvent themselves.

Methods

To explore subjective experiences of the crisis, 32 semi-structured, in-depth narrative interviews (Bryman, 2008) took place in Greece during August and September 2011 and August and September 2012. These interviews aimed to inquire into how participants lived their lives during the crisis, if and how they were affected by it in their everyday lives, who was responsible for the most harmful aspects of the crisis and, crucially, whether and how they would alter their behaviour or engage in some form of collective action to address these problems if they could. Participants were selected to ensure diversity in terms of age, class, gender, employment status, educational status and relationship/family status (see table 9.1). The average age of participants was 35.1, and every effort was made to ensure an equal distribution of gender.

According to most of the contemporary sociological literature, generations are usually conceptualised on the basis of age-cohorts. This approach enables the operationalisation of the concept but limits the kind of sociological questions that can be asked, since the same questions should be asked in all age groups and therefore the researcher is unable to explore further differences related to each age group. (Edmunds and Turner, 2005: 560-561). In this study, the three different generations were divided according to the three main age groups used in data collection: Younger (age sub groups: 20-24 and 25-29, total: 9 participants), middle (age sub groups: 30-34 and 35-39, total: 11 participants) and older (age sub groups: 40-44, 45-49 and 50-55, total: 12 participants). The investigation of the subjective experiences of these age groups relates to the expectation that different age groups may experience the crisis differently and it might be interesting to see how much shared assumptions they have about the previously mentioned pathologies.

In order to secure diversity of location, interviews took place at the two biggest Greek cities: 12 interviews in Athens, the capital and 10 in Thessaloniki (the second biggest Greek city), and in two smaller towns: 5 in Ermoupolis a town on the island of Syros, as a relatively proximal, peripheral, medium-sized town, and 5 in Eresos, a village on the island of Lesbos island, as a small village on a remote, peripheral island. These localities were chosen as being representative of different Greek sub-cultures according to the geographical proximity to the capital, the size and geographical/urban specifications (islands/mainland, urban centres/town/village).

The research questions addressed during interviews were informed by the research literature and were asked in an open-ended format (Kvale, 1996). Each interview, later transcribed and translated into English, lasted an hour on average, with participants encouraged to tell their stories on how they experienced the crisis. Themes emerged as part of

participants' responses to the questions regarding their views on the way they lived their life in contemporary Greece. Participants were encouraged to express their personal concerns and evaluations associated with the transformation of Greek society by describing how their way of living had been affected and the ways they experienced everyday transformations (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2005:144). Thematic analyses (Ryan and Bernard, 2003) consisted of repeated readings of the translated transcripts of the interviews, focusing on meaningful and relevant categories and themes associated with the lived experiences of three generations (younger, middle and older).

All participants agreed to participate by signing a consent form stipulating confidentiality and anonymity. They were also informed that they were not obliged to participate in the research and that they could stop at any time, refuse to answer a question or ask for clarifications. The questions asked were identical for all respondents in terms of content and order. The recruitment strategy in Athens and Thessaloniki used 'snowballing' (Becker, 1963), with some of the participants introducing the researcher to others. 'Gatekeepers' (Henn, Weinstein and Foard, 2009) were used in both Syros and Lesbos, as a local 'mediator' was needed in order to secure trust between researcher and participants. The study focused on the exploration of subjective experiences of thirty two participants and therefore the purpose of the study was not to ensure a representative or random sample. It would therefore be more appropriate to refer to this study as an exploratory investigation (Hoaglin, Mosteller and Tukey, 1983) which reveals possible tendencies concerning the subjective experiences of the Greek crisis. The participants were adults and were fully informed about the process; the questions did not raise any sensitive issues and therefore no ethical authorisation had to be considered.

A larger number of participants would have been required in order to allow generalisations to be made about the wider population. Furthermore, the researcher was aware of the subjective evaluations and understandings involved in qualitative research and consequently a conscious attempt was made to offer a balanced interpretation of the participants' views and opinions.

Findings

Younger Age Group (20-30 years old)

Younger participants expressed their anxiety and concern about the current situation in Greece, as well as the future. Some of them were more optimistic than others but no matter the geographical area of origin or their gender, they all seemed to share common agonies and concerns. The way they experienced the crisis is described by similar narratives, characterised primarily by uncertainty and insecurity:

There is a lot of anger and disappointment and we are all scared of what more can happen. The main problems are the despair we all feel, the fear and insecurity about the future.

Kety, 26, a postgraduate student from Athens

This situation creates additional anxiety for a young person who is starting her life. It feels that I am not allowed to dream anymore. There is so much uncertainty about the future and I just don't know if I will have a job tomorrow.

Lina, 27, a part-time private sector worker from Syros

Pinquart and Silbereisen (2004: 291) explain that in times of social alteration “the proximal developmental contexts such as family, school or work place (...) affect the individual development”. This is evident in this study's data as younger participants, even as students or young professionals, experience a wide variety of damaging feelings such as uncertainty and insecurity in an intense way.

The authors (p. 292) note that social change causes disparity between claims and resources and this leads to a sense of loss of control. Therefore people try to adjust to the new situation by developing new modes of behaviour to cope with the new challenges. This process may change the individual's life-course. So for example Emma, 27, unemployed from Athens, explained that “whatever we need, we have to think twice before buying it” and Antonis, 29, a part-time teacher from Syros said that:

The situation is unbearable, I am thinking of the future and I don't even know if there will be a future! There is no desire to take a walk or to buy something. I need to think about it again and again because I do not know what tomorrow may bring.

Therefore, as the crisis continues to unfold, with the intensification of austerity measures, public insecurities and economic deprivation, the younger generation experiences even higher degrees of pessimism, anxiety, and dissatisfaction and change of habits such as consuming patterns and even ways of living or the life-course itself. Generally, participants acknowledged that they now think more thoroughly about their future, possible plans and solutions and ways to cope with the situation:

My main concern is what is going to happen in the future. I won't be able to have my own family any time soon. Most probably I will be another unemployed graduate.

Marios, 22, a student from Thessaloniki

The prospect of unemployment is what most participants of a younger age worry about. According to the Eurobarometer survey (Spring 2013) 62 per cent of Greeks (but not exclusively the younger generation) believe that the economic situation will get worse in the future when in the EU, only the 11 per cent of Europeans express a similar concern. The same survey also revealed that Greeks are pessimistic in regard to their personal job situation with 35 per cent saying things will get worse and the two key issues which the country faces are unemployment (65 per cent) and economic status (49 per cent). Those figures confirm the fears especially of the younger participants regarding their future. Even those who have a job are afraid of losing it:

This situation influences my personal goals. We are now afraid of becoming unemployed

Emma, 27, Athens

Professionally, I don't know if I will have a job tomorrow

Antonis, 29, Syros

Some participants had even considered leaving Greece and going abroad (therefore changing their life-course) like Kety (26, Athens): "Now there is a possibility to go abroad, which is something very common in my age. This is something I wouldn't like but it is now a possibility". It is also interesting to note, that unlike the middle age group, the youngest participants of the younger generation (ages 20-25) were very reluctant to accept any responsibility regarding the formation of the current situation. Characteristically, Xanthos, 24, a student from Thessaloniki explained, "I don't think that young generation had the chance to contribute. We are not the ones to be blamed!" However Petros, 30, working part-time at the private sector from Syros took a different view: "of course I have contributed by doing nothing to change the situation".

Sablonniere et al. (2010) explain that dramatic social changes, as well as social deprivation, affect personal well-being. According to participants' narratives, there seems to be homogeneity in terms of the ways their lives and concerns have changed. They clearly struggle coping with the present difficulties and they find it particularly difficult to make plans for the future. 68% of Greeks and 35% of EU citizens say the current situation does not allow them to make plans for the future and that they live day to day (Eurobarometer, Spring, 2013). As Emma, 27 from Athens, very characteristically said:

We see our dreams get destroyed and our hopes for a better future disappear.

Middle Age group (30-40 years old)

Like the younger generation, the middle generation perceive the current situation in Greece mainly in pessimistic terms and they are also worried about the future. However there is an agreement in their narratives primarily regarding harmful mentalities and they express a more critical attitude towards Greek society and themselves:

Many mistakes have happened in public administration and money have been taken by politicians. But a part of society is also involved mainly in terms of mentality since citizens have a relationship of 'volematos²' with the politicians.

Ira, 38, a civil servant from Athens

Unfortunately in Greece there is the tendency of "ohadelfismos³" which means that I try to do the best for myself and do not care about the people next to me.

Maria, 37, a private sector worker in Athens

Tsoukalas (2008) emphasises that the Greek mentality of 'free-rider' is the main reason why Greek society remains dysfunctional and incapable of forming and maintaining a comprehensive and efficient state and effective political system. Participants became more specific about how their everyday life is affected by the crisis and compared to the younger generation. They explain that it is not only a matter of uncertainty or insecurity. It is also

about all the things that never worked properly in Greek society and because of that the situation is even worse:

The economic growth of Greek society has always been fake. Greeks got used into extensive consumerism through borrowing money without limitations or control. But the problem remains social.

Eleni, 34, a part-time secretary in Athens

The economic crisis has influenced all of us but the bigger problem is the bad habits Greeks had for over a decade. This is the reason why we have ended up here. I can't only blame the politicians, I believe that the main part of responsibility is our own.

Grigoris, 34, a manager at a private company in Athens

It is therefore seen, that participants display a clearer view regarding the causes of the crisis. And they are willing to become critical towards their own contribution. Also there is a homogenous narrative that concerns harmful Greek mentalities which allowed the crisis to get magnified. At the same time participants describe how they have been affected by the crisis. Compared to the younger generation, this age group is not as terrified. Also, the middle age group is more homogeneous regarding the recognition of their own contribution to the formation of the current problematic situation, as all participants admitted that they have responsibility for the current reality in Greece:

"I have contributed in a passive way. I didn't react when I should had reacted"

Nicos, 35, private sector worker from Athens

"I have engaged in the so called 'clientalism' so I guess this makes me responsible"

Ira, 38, a civil servant from Athens

This shows that, as Archer (2007) explains, agents do not perceive themselves as victims of the situation or as passive receivers of other peoples' decisions, although they do feel insecure, uncertain, and are afraid of the future. On the one hand the narratives of the middle generation reveal their personal responsibility, but on the other, uncover repeatedly the aspects of disappointment, recognition of the state's unreliability and a lack of trust in politicians. According to Eurobarometer (Spring, 2013) large majorities of Greeks do not trust their government (90 per cent), the Parliament (89 per cent) or the EU (80 per cent). Furthermore, only 4 per cent of Greeks trust political parties. Participants, and particularly the middle generation, are more concerned about the reasons behind the crisis, like lack of trust. The narratives of this specific age group seem to agree with Stetsenko's (2007: 111) view, that "people are created by the social conditions of their life at the same time as they also actively create and shape these conditions", as they realise that they have actively contributed to the formation of the current problematic situation and have become critical towards it.

Older Age Group (40-55 years old)

Lived experiences of the older age group do not differ, compared to the previous two, in terms of the feelings of uncertainty, disappointment, anxiety and lack of trust. The anxieties

of this age group, though, are more materialistic as most of them have families and loans and the repeated cuts in salaries and the increasing taxes have caused them more profound difficulties. One participant described these changes in her life:

Especially during the last two years I have seen a huge difference in our family income but also in the way we live our lives. I cannot afford to pay my son's English exams fees! As a family, we have lost at least 5,000 Euros over the last year because of the cuts! I am constantly paying bills.

Popi, 40, unemployed from Thessaloniki

Because this generation have more to lose they have faced more intense worries than other generations. This is also the reason why they express their anger more explicitly:

I oppose the mentality of the 'guilty society'; we are not all to blame. No, it is not everybody's fault! Of course we share responsibility (as citizens) but we can't be blamed for everything! Actually the consequences that we have to deal with in our everyday lives are disproportionately greater than the difficulties the politicians have to deal with.

Vaso, 42, self-employed from Athens

Compared to the two previous generations, there is a slightly altered emphasis in terms of how the participants evaluate the current situation and the role of politicians within it. Anger is more evident and the sense of disappointment is even more profound. According to Sablonniere et al. (2010), although the ways people cope during crisis vary significantly, there is a tendency for some groups to evaluate their group's status by comparing it with what it was at another point in time. The reason for this is that dramatic social change destabilises many aspects within their current environment. The older generation seem to experience this destabilisation more intensely compared to the younger generations as they have suffered more material losses, since salary cuts were greater to senior workers, they have more taxes to pay if they have families. They have also lost more privileges since they had more time to establish them during their life.

At the same time, 68% (Eurobarometer, Spring, 2023) of Greeks (in general not exclusively the older generation) believe that the worst is still to come in terms of the negative impact of the crisis on the labour market. As discussed, Silbereisen (2005: 3) explains that distressing encounters faced by people during periods of dramatic social change result in impaired levels of well-being and negative attitudes to self. But many participants in this particular age group have become much more critical and disapproving of politicians' roles and responsibilities. Anger is once again involved here. For example:

I am not sure that politicians pay to the extent that they ought to. There is no justice! The current situation doesn't inspire trust, since there is no equality or fair justice. Laws are not implemented equally.

Giorgos, 41, a civil servant from Eresos

At the same time though, this age group becomes willing to self-reflect and acknowledge part of their responsibility. Although not all of the participants felt the same way, most of them realised that it is not only politicians who are responsible for what has happened.

Greek politicians are not able to confront the situation and give solutions. But the truth is that this is also our fault. We all need to become self-critical but it seems that politicians have not done this yet. And this is the ultimate reason why we get from bad to worse.

Vaggelis, 47, a private sector worker in Thessaloniki

98 per cent of Greeks describe the situation of their national economy as “poor”, according to a Eurobarometer survey released on July 2013. Regarding their household situation, 78 per cent of Greek citizens believe that things are “bad”, while 58 per cent of them believe that their personal job situation is “bad”. According to Cheung and Leung (2009) people with a low quality of life before the crisis will be affected the most and this seems to be the case for participants who had low incomes before and after the crisis. It is also important to note that as Bandura (1997) supports, people who avoid risks or have low self-efficacy beliefs will probably stay in their old pattern of thinking and behaving as long as possible. For example Giannis, 47, unemployed from Syros confessed that:

I would have liked not to do the same things again but unfortunately I know that I will. What should I do if I do not have enough money?

There are more examples like the one above which show that on the one hand, the older generation has realised what the harmful behaviours and patterns that have contributed to the intensification of the crisis are, and on the other, that this generation feels trapped and cornered as it seems practically very difficult for them to change old habits (such as clientalism, act in a more individualistic rather than collective manner). Pinquart and Silbereisen (2004) remind us that in times of rapid social change it is difficult to foresee future behavioural alterations. For Silbereisen et al (2007), in order for individuals to change their reactions and for institutional reforms to follow, time is needed; this is an on-going process, which requires repeated circulation of social action. Therefore it remains to be seen whether such damaging behavioural patterns will be finally disrupted or if they will resist current social change.

Conclusion

Although common concerns were revealed in all generations, each age group adapts different approaches in order to evaluate the ways Greek society changes. The lived experiences of the Greek crisis were examined through the perspectives offered by the narratives of three different generations. Variations were evident regarding how each generation processes the dramatic social, economic and political changes that are currently taking place in Greece. At the same time, similarities were also reported, especially regarding the ways participants feel about the current situation and the future prospects of Greek society.

Following initial findings of my previous research in 2012, some of the common themes emerging from this study include the aspects of disappointment, pessimism, insecurity, fear, anger, despair, depression, anxiety, dissatisfaction and lack of trust about the present situation and, insecurity and uncertainty about the future. All three generations experience such feelings, in different ways and to different degrees. Furthermore, all narratives clearly reveal the difficulty of the participants in coping with the present situation and their difficulty to make concrete plans about the future. All participants expressed their frustration and concern about the crisis and displayed a clear understanding of the personal difficulties they currently face. Furthermore, all age groups were critical of the harmful established mentalities and damaging behaviours and habits embedded in Greek society.

At the same time, as Manheim (1997) would suggest, each age group emphasised different aspects of the crisis, focusing on specific issues relating to their everyday lives and the difficulties of the near future. The younger generation was mainly concerned about their future prospects of getting or maintaining a job. The middle generation was particularly critical towards established harmful mentalities that enabled the magnification of the crisis. Finally, the older generation was more concentrated about the losses they have suffered because of the crisis and were particularly critical about the actions of politicians. Participants therefore processed the crisis in different ways and displayed different levels of engagement with the current situation as their lives may have been affected in diverse manners. Notably, the living experiences of the older age group seem most complicated, as it appears that they are affected in a more profound way by the crisis. Nonetheless, each age group expressed comparable agonies about the current situation, despite participants being interviewed in different geographical areas and coming from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The subjective experiences of the participants' narratives during the crisis reveal, on the one hand, the undeniable negative impact of the crisis on the everyday lives of Greeks and on the other, the willingness of the participants to critically consider what went wrong and how they have contributed.

As the situation in Greece remains fluid and uncertain, agents may feel restricted in producing collective courses of action because they cannot operate on a stable basis. It seems that Greeks remain in a defensive mode as they anticipate further difficulties, and feel threatened and cornered by the prospect of additional measures. Even if the conditions for collective action may appear to be available it seems that, as things stand, participants feel more confident in producing a different course of action at a personal and interpersonal level, rather than in organising a collective form of reaction. As Edmunds and Turner (2005) might suggest, such actions may follow as these groups have already started altering established mentalities and embodied behaviours, but what remains extremely significant is the tendency towards disruption of the habitual or routine actions inherited from older generations.

Notes

¹ As Manheim (1997) explains each generation is held together due to common experiences of historical events especially if such events are traumatic. It is therefore important to see whether and how different age groups perceive differently the traumatic consequences of the Greek crisis.

² "Volema": to get into to remain in a situation/position that works for oneself without considering others.

³ “Ohadelfismos”: to ‘get by’ without caring about tomorrow.

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Chapter 9

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Table 9.1 Participant selection criteria (N = 32)

Age Group	Class	Gender	Employment	Educational	Relationship/ Family		
20-24	4	Upper	11 Male	12 Full-time	13 University	20 Married	18
25-29	5	Middle	16 Female	20 Part-time	9 High School graduates	12 Non-married	14
30-34	5	Lower	5	Unemployed	10	Parents	11
35-39	6					No children	21
40-44	7						
45-49	2						
50-55	3						