

The Economic and Social Review, Vol. 36, No. 2, Summer/Autumn, 2005, pp. 185–187

Book Review

TONY FAHEY, BERNADETTE C. HAYES and RICHARD SINNOTT, 2005. *Conflict and Consensus. A Study of Values and Attitudes in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, pp xiii, 291, €40.00. ISBN 1-904541-18-6.

The book *Conflict and Consensus* offers an analysis of the European Value Survey (1999-2000) and the European Social Survey (2002-2003). It takes its place in a sequence of publications presenting the results of previous European values and attitudes surveys. The first book in this tradition was written by Michael Fogarty, Liam Ryan and Joseph Lee (*Irish Values and Attitudes. The Irish Report of the European Value Systems Study*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1984), and it reported on the Irish part of the 1981 European Values Study. The second book was edited by Chris Whelan (*Values and Social Change in Ireland*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994) and gave an account of the 1990 European Values Survey. These three books share the characteristic of endeavouring to make sense of the vast amount of information that has been generated by attitude surveys, in which the same questionnaire is administered to a range of national samples.

These publications function, at least in part, as reports and they convey a great deal of information. The reading of a survey report, however monotonous at times, is usually instructive. In fact, the book goes far beyond the straightforward reporting of surveys results. The Fogarty-Ryan-Lee book constituted a fairly straightforward report of the main results, with separate interpretations of the findings by the three authors. Both Fogarty and Ryan pointed to the continuing strength of traditional values and attitudes, while discerning the rumblings of a “modern and restless Ireland”. The Whelan book discussed in a more direct way the framework provided by modernisation theory, and concluded that this model of interpretation only partly fits the evidence generated by the survey.

Conflict and Consensus has moved away from the tradition-modernity perspective and focuses instead on political cleavages in Ireland. The framework of interpretation is far more precise and in many ways tighter than the previous focus on the process of modernisation. But its very narrowness and precision make it difficult to consider the full range of topics which are included in the study. Some of the topics which are covered in the book cannot be subsumed under this heading. For instance, the considerations on social capital and confidence (Chapters 8 and 9) do not fit in – although very interesting in their own terms. Furthermore, the authors seem to have adopted the view that they are dealing with political culture. Their analysis of identity

never goes beyond the general categories of national, citizenship and "political tradition" identity. Nothing is said about new forms or aspects of identity in Ireland (nothing on immigration issues and on non-political identity); civic identity (indicated by "to feel Irish", page 69) is not explained or developed; and ethnic identity is equated with religious denomination. Relevant information was probably not available in the survey on this broader dimension of identity. Nevertheless, the failure to mention these other forms of identity or even to address the rich theme of identity is disappointing.

The concept of cleavage remains somewhat ambiguous in the book, as it explicitly refers to political patterns while really relating to cultural (attitudes and value) differences. Having pointed to the significance of the conservative-liberal cleavage, the authors write: "The fact that this cleavage has not expressed itself in party political terms does not make it less real" (page 138). This statement acknowledges that a cultural pattern does not necessarily translate into a political one, and this represents an important idea. It raises the significant question of how cultural differences are politically translated. But the tendency to treat cleavage/political cleavage as the same concept does not permit the analysis to take on board or even acknowledge the reality of this gap. Furthermore, political cleavage implies politically organised and entrenched attitudes, while attitudes and surveys may well constitute less rigid and fixed cultural orientations.

The latter comments point to an interesting aspect of the pattern of attitudes and values which is revealed by the study. The cleavage liberal-conservative is closely related to the secular-religious dimension. The intensity of the religious commitment, rather than the Catholic or Protestant denomination, matters most as far as values and attitudes are concerned. It is also revealed that the cleavage right-left is not easily applied to the Irish context (if by left one means a valorisation of equality and state presence and by right a valorisation of market and individual autonomy). In fact, to be politically on the left in Ireland is associated more with liberal issues and to be on the right with conservative attitudes. This implies that the left-right configuration to a large extent collapses into the liberal-conservative difference, which is itself closely linked with the secular-religious orientation. Cleavages keep disappearing into each other. As a final comment on this topic, the authors consider the possibility of a "postmaterialist" orientation. On the basis of the rather flimsy evidence which is presented (e.g. is gender role a postmaterialist issue?), I find it difficult to accept their conclusion that no such cleavage exists in Ireland. The authors may well be right, but it would demand a far more sustained analysis.

The comparison of Northern and Southern Ireland leads to some intriguing conclusions. The same cleavages in values and attitudes are observed in both parts of Ireland, but differently ranked. For instance, the religious/moral cleavage appears most significant in the Republic, while the nationalist cleavage plays the dominant role in Northern Ireland. The two parts of Ireland differ in some ways: higher national pride in the Republic, higher subjective well-being, more positive attitudes towards politics and public institutions. But the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland remain very close in international terms. They both experience a trend towards more privatised religious beliefs, while remaining among the most Christian parts in Europe. They are also slowly shifting toward more liberal views on family and sexual matters, but they are still firmly located on the conservative side of Europe. In the same way, they cluster on the right of the right-left scale. They both retain a high level of personal trust. Although participating in a very different political dynamic, Northern

Ireland and the Republic of Ireland display a rather similar pattern of attitudes when looked at within a broad international context.

In his contribution to *Irish Values and Attitudes*, Joseph Lee expressed his scepticism about the value of attitude surveys of this kind. And, of course, he was raising an important issue. He emphasised the lack of correspondence between what respondents say and what they do. Why does the European Union assiduously persist in conducting these regular attitudes surveys? They probably help policymakers in Europe to monitor the diversity of cultures within the Union. More crucially from a social scientific point of view, values and attitudes continue to be considered a predictor of behaviour; they offer an early signal of potential problems ahead. Whatever the reasons for them, they produce at regular intervals a mass of information which has to be processed and interpreted. Reporting and analysing the findings of these large-scale attitude surveys is a difficult exercise, and it has been well handled by the authors. They have produced a very competent book, with a great deal of information and a coherent frame of interpretation. There is probably sufficient imagination within social scientists to make sure that the next book in this tradition, possibly in ten years time, will again offer a distinctive angle on values and attitudes in Ireland.

National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Michel Peillon