Title: Social Acceptance and the Reduction of Inequalities as Means for Peace and Sustainable Development - The Role of Mass Media in Shaping Standards

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Abstract

In this paper, we will examine how social inequalities impact the harmonious coexistence of citizens, ultimately acting as obstacles to peaceful living, development, and progress of nations. After identifying dominant forms of discrimination in contemporary states (gender, race, age, religion, education level, social or economic status, etc.), we will analyse them in light of the need to expand "social acceptance," aiming for a more harmonious and functional coexistence of local communities. Through literature references and examples, we will document how traditional structures (such as educational institutions) and influential cultural entities (such as museums and galleries) could decisively contribute to uprooting outdated perceptions and limiting inequalities rather than perpetuating them. In this context, the role of lifelong education of the social collective will be highlighted in the battle against divisions, recognizing the role of technology in the modern era of information and knowledge for achieving this goal. The paper will present – emphasizing on the Greek example- the historical role that Mass Media has played in narrowing the gap between citizens. Furthermore, it will highlight the emerging opportunities and possibilities in the era of "political correctness," social movements (#me too, Black Lives Matter, etc.), and social media. The aim of this paper is to ascertain the extent to which central goals of the United Nations' Agenda 2030 - such as peace, justice, gender equality, reduction of inequalities, poverty alleviation, and hunger reduction - can strengthen our planet.

Extended Abstract

The modern Western world is full of distinctions and inequalities. Racial segregations are documented daily in professional and other spaces. The common element in all forms of racism is that "the value of a person is undermined by stereotypes based on prejudices" (European Commission, 2020, p.2). According to official data, 59% of Europeans believe that discrimination based on ethnic origin is widespread. One in three individuals of African descent reports experiencing racist harassment in the last five years, and the spectre of Nazism persists, influencing the lives of Jews throughout the EU (European Commission, 2021, May 3).

Ethnic origin and skin colour are not the sole causes of discrimination. Religion often influences how people treat each other. Ideological and political positions sometimes unite or divide citizens. Even culinary preferences lead to categorizations like meat-eaters, vegetarians, vegans, etc. Gender is often a cause of discrimination or even abusive behaviours. Every year, an estimated 47,000 women are murdered by their partners or family members. A woman or girl is killed within her family environment every 11 minutes (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2021), a phenomenon many attribute to the patriarchal structure of some societies. Even sexual

orientation isolates individuals, subjects them to targeting, and significantly burdens their psychology. A study by Yale University's School of Public Health, examining 10,000 suicide cases of individuals aged 10 to 19 between 2003 and 2017, found that LGBTQ+ community members who died by suicide more frequently reported bullying than their non-LGBTQ+ peers (Greenwood, 2020).

Social classes have certainly drawn a dividing line from ancient Greece (aristocrats, perioikoi, slaves) to the present day. Educational and economic levels are the root causes of individual segregation. In recent years, specifically in 1776, Adam Smith introduced the concept of social classes in his famous work "The Wealth of Nations," discussing capitalists earning profit, workers earning wages, and landowners earning rent (Μηλιός Γιάννης, 1995).

Through literature references and examples, this paper will attempt to highlight how reducing inequalities—officially one of the 17 goals of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—can heal the wounds of the past, contributing to a more peaceful and functional coexistence of people. As UN Secretary-General Antonio Gutierrez has acknowledged, "The Sustainable Development Goals are the path that leads us to a fairer, more peaceful and prosperous world and a healthy planet" (United Nations, n.y.).

In this study, we will focus on possible ways to expand "social acceptance" to overcome cases of marginalization. Specifically, we will examine the role that powerful, traditional structures, such as the education system (kindergartens, elementary schools, high schools, universities), and cultural institutions (museums, theatres, art spaces, etc.), could ideally play in absorbing social shocks and reinforcing inclusion and tolerance. First, however, we must acknowledge that in the past, these entities reproduced patterns that entrenched divisions, often as defenders of national identity, as identity is linked to "*an effort of 'communization', as defined by M. Weber*," meaning a prerequisite for action according to a subjective sense of belonging to the same social entity (Badie, 1993, p. 193). As Giannis Hamilakis notes, in agreement with Appaduarai, "*as today in many states the concept of the national economy recedes more and more, due to privatizations and the dominance of the multinational, or rather supranational, capital, the field of culture emerges as the area where fantasies of cultural purity, authenticity, and, I would add, hereditary exclusivity and sovereignty find fertile ground*" (Χαμηλάκης Γιάννης, 2009, p. 64). "*The national state, as a socio-political organization, and the nation as a symbolic identity group, developed based on constructing a common past, establishing a common present, and ensuring a common future for its members*" (Χρυσοχόου, 2011, p. 236), simultaneously creating borders for those who were not considered members.

The term "social acceptance" describes the degree to which people are more or less acceptable in the social environment in which they live (Davies James, 1991). Before delving into how the expansion of "social acceptance" can benefit society, we need to clarify what we mean when using the term "society." Does society represent a form of alienated consciousness according to critical theory? Is it a fragile order of things, according to ethnology? Is it a social system in which all parts functionally assemble, according to functionalism? Do we mean the social order that, according to

interactionism, is the subject of negotiation and renegotiation among acting subjects? Or do we see society as a structure of relationships between economic foundations and political and ideological constructions, according to Marxism? Do we refer, according to positivism, to the structure of relationships between social phenomena? Do we mean the system that emerges, according to structuralism, from the basic structures of human thought? Perhaps we favour Weberianism and, thus, the relationships between different social strata and groups (Ταουτσής Δημήτριος, 1995, p.79)? Beyond sociological perspectives and outside the narrow confines of definitions that sometimes mislead us, in our case, "we approach society as a non-static, living organism attracted by external stimuli and interacting with them" (Λασκαράτος Κώστας, 2023, p. 145).

Finally, we will address how the media contribute to reducing inequalities and disseminating healthy standards that enhance inclusion and assist in the more harmonious coexistence and collaboration of all social groups. Research has occasionally highlighted deficiencies and shortcomings in this field. For example, a study on Latin American media identified a critical deficiency in the discussion on rights and justice, particularly the limited inclusion of issues related to race/ethnicity. Only 0.27% of pieces on children and adolescents made reference to factors involving race/ethnicity, and gender coverage was virtually non-existent, appearing in only 0.07% of the analysed content (Child Rights International Network, n.y.). Meanwhile, according to UNICEF, "Information on the extent to which indigenous children are denied their rights to survival, health-care services and education relative to the national average is limited" (State of the World's Children 2006, p.19). However, in this paper, we will attempt to highlight the perennial problems of the press through a series of examples, mainly from the Greek reality. At the same time, we will examine how journalism is approached and ensures social cohesion in the technology, AI, and social media era.

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