Meritocracy

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Meritocracy may be characterised as a framing concept, as the basis for discussing meaning and measuring knowledge, learning, and competencies for personal and social development. In the last few years, this concept has entered discussions in many media and political discourses. A great deal of literature has emerged, with authors reaching diverging conclusions and assessments about its importance and role in society. The article offers a comprehensive overview of the current literature on the topic of meritocracy and critically challenges different views on the importance of meritocracy for social (in)equality, mobility, education or the production of knowledge and the relationships between experts, politics and public opinion. The authors discuss the following questions:

- Can meritocracy succeed only in a democratic society or also in a country that is led undemocratically or autocratically? How can democracy and meritocracy complement and contradict each other?

- Which assumptions should be fulfilled in order to be able to talk about an inclusive meritocracy and which forms of exclusivism appear?

- How can we distinguish the real application of meritocratic principles from just the formalistic consideration of certain meritocratic components (such as tertiary education, a diploma, or standardised tests)? Can we talk about the simulation of meritocratic criteria in personnel and human resources policies?

Meritocracy assumes a privileged position in society for those individuals and groups that possess higher (above-average) levels of human capital. This privilege should be democratic or inclusive since

The texts presented in the chapter "Appendix" do not belong to the central part of the symposium. These are summaries of articles in progress and were presented at the symposium with the aim of discussing the continuation and conclusion of the articles.

it is supposed to be accessible to all, who are, no matter their class origin, talented and cultivate and improve their talent through individual engagement (effort) in the processes of education and lifelong learning. Yet, this is only possible in environments where all individuals, especially the young and those attending education, have comparable starting opportunities, where equality of opportunity exists.

Although some authors oppose the concept and believe that meritocracy does not reduce social inequality based on the individual's class position but actually reproduces this inequality, no other appropriate alternatives can be found in the literature. Thus, authors are often left halfway through, leaving many new questions unanswered. One of the big ones is certainly the problem of defining meritocratic criteria ('merit') and measuring merit. It is clear that the knowledge society is very compatible with the concept of meritocracy. Yet the question remains of whether only visible aspects (related to certificates and diplomas) are taken into account or whether other less visible factors are also included, such as the ability for self-reflection, synthetic thinking, creativity, and the existence of professional autonomy and integrity. This raises not only the issue of the individual's position on the social ladder, but the broader social context as well: which skills are preferred in society? Here, the relations between different social spheres are important – how they understand meritocracy (which competencies and knowledge they prefer) and whether they mostly promote knowledge that benefits wider society or only narrow interests.

Meritocracy encourages investment in the individual's competencies and productivity, while it also adds to the importance of knowledge and science in society. At the same time, some authors (Bovens and Wille 2017; Babones 2018; Mijs and Savage, 2020) are concerned that meritocracy leads to elitism, which can bring negative consequences for a society. There is the impression that authors are aware that meritocracy, as a normative-regulatory principle of social organisation, has no real alternative or that the other alternatives are even worse.

Communes between utopia and reality
Darka Podmenik

A contribution for a new monograph on the Slovenian student movement, which is to be published this summer.[37] The author conducted a minor study; for the history of communes, she drew from a study by Vinko Zalar published in *Journal for the Critique of Science* in 1975; testimonies from Slovenian participants in the student and the communitarian movements were obtained through the analysis of existing secondary sources and author-conducted semi-structured interviews.

Let us summarise some of the discussed issues of relevance to the IRSA symposium:

1 – The problem of the utopian nature of socio-political movements and projects, which is generally addressed by documenting the achievement of long-term objectives.

The author builds on the Berger-Luckmann viewpoint that utopia is a plan of action that progresses step by step towards set goals and envisions a future state, with the meaning of action being prospective, and its outcome making sense only retrospectively. In this context, through a comparative analysis the author discovers that looking far back into history reveals certain „utopian social projects" as part of the real world, and conversely, some parts of already confirmed human history as utopian. According to several indicators, many of the so-called utopian communes are (at least partly) institutionally realised, long-lasting, and scientifically processed. As a counter-example, McCord's provocative statement is cited: „... Marxism, the most widespread utopian ideology of the century, had its ‚emperor's clothes' taken off in the 1980s", and the author's chorus: „And where did we live, citizens of previous socialist countries: in a utopia or reality; Slovenes for about 46 years?".

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[37] So far published on the website of the internet publisher Locutio:https://locutio.si/index.php?no=128&clanek=4154.