

An Individuality in Parenthesis? Social Vulnerability, Youth and the Welfare State in Crisis: On the Case of Neets, In Greece, Within the European Context ¹

Dimitrios Kotroyannos², Kostas A. Lavdas³, Nikos Papadakis⁴, Argyris Kyridis⁵, Panagiotis Theodorikakos⁶, Stylianos Ioannis Tzagkarakis⁷, Maria Drakaki⁸

Abstract

Promoting individual freedom is a primary objective in liberal societies. In this context, a properly functioning market economy is supposed to promote individual freedom, thereby enhancing also the inclusion of individuals in societal structures. However, the increasing percentages of new forms of social vulnerability and social exclusion in the EU and especially, in Eurozone peripheral countries such as Greece, indicate the existence of extended problems in reaching the aforementioned objective. Such a social problem is the emergence of the group of NEETs (young people aged 15-24 not included in education, employment or training). The aim of this paper is to examine NEETs in the EU and especially in Greece, based on recent data, in order to investigate and analyze their basic characteristics, the causes and the possible effects of this social phenomenon in the context of the modern individualized market society which aims both at achieving individual autonomy and social inclusion for each and every citizen.

Keywords: Social vulnerability, NEETs, youth unemployment, social policy, individualism, Welfare State

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² Professor & Director of the Centre for Human Rights (KEADIK), at the Department of Political Science, University of Crete.

³ Professor and Director of the Centre for Political Research & Documentation (KEPET), at the Department of Political Science, University of Crete and The Constantine G. Karamanlis Professor of Hellenic and European Studies at The Fletcher School, Tufts University, USA

⁴ Professor and Deputy Director of the Centre for Political Research & Documentation (KEPET), at the Department of Political Science, University of Crete Address: Department of Political Science, University of Crete University Campus of Gallos, Rethymnon, P.C. GR- 74100, Greece

⁵ Professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Thessaloniki, former Chair of the Hellenic Sociological Association..

⁶ PhD, Member of the Specialized Teaching Personnel at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Peloponnese. President of the Board of Directors of the Greek Public Opinion (GPO)

⁷ Political scientist, PhD candidate at the Department of Political Science, University of Crete.

⁸ Sociologist, PhD candidate at the Department of Political Science, University of Crete.

1. Introduction

A dominant characteristic of post-industrial liberal societies is the promotion of individuality (freedom and responsibilities). However, due to the existed explicit specificities of every case, different outcomes emerged. For instance, in Greece there is an antinomy in terms of achieving the abovementioned objective. This antinomy arises from the existence of high percentages of social exclusion and social vulnerability, which indicate that there is a lack of individual rights, opportunities and responsibilities promotion within the market economy. This paper aims at studying one of the most important social exclusion and social vulnerability issue in Greece and in Europe; the emergence of the group of NEETs. To begin with, we will examine the concepts of social exclusion and social vulnerability in the context of the current societies in order to explain NEETs emergence and the intellectual issues it creates.

Social exclusion comprises a relatively new concept, as it was firstly introduced in 1974 by Lenoir, but currently it represents one of the most important factors which proclaim citizens' deprivation from basic political, social and economic rights (Byrne, 1999; Silver, 1998). The exile from access to employment, health, education and from all social activities and institutions explicitly depicts the concept of social exclusion which is closely interwoven with economic inequalities and poverty. Thus, extended social inequalities and discriminations lead to social marginalization of individuals who lack of specific capabilities. Moreover, it is widely accepted that long-term exclusion⁹ from basic social goods leads to social marginalization. For instance, long-term unemployment is a major danger for social exclusion as it increases deprivation from access to labour market and consequently, to individual independence (Atkinson, 1998). Therefore, social exclusion as a result of socio-economic problems' intensification, sets individuality into question while, at the same time, its emergence comprises one of the most significant objectives in the post-industrial societies.

The reduction of social exclusion and the re-inclusion into the collective sphere of all individuals who experience forms of social marginalization is the pinnacle of the welfare state's objectives in the developed democratic countries (Schnapper, 2008). However, during the last two decades this problem was dramatically increased due to the constant restriction of social policies, as a result of neo-liberal conceptions predominance, which consider the welfare state as an obstacle to individual development and freedom (O'Brien and Penna, 1998; Harvey, 2005).

The patterns that social exclusion may take are associated with specific social integration deficiencies for each social group, distinguished on the basis of common elements of its members. Those which may encounter more serious problems are commonly called "vulnerable social groups". Although in the academic literature there is a lack of a commonly accepted definition for vulnerable social groups, in terms of employment exclusion, it refers to the risk of marginalization from the labour market and exclusion from other social activities (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2002). The risk of poverty and deprivation of necessary commodities is indefinitely a crucial criterion for the classification of a group as a vulnerable. Furthermore, the fact that employment is the basic instrument for the removal of social risks sets it as a primary cause of social exclusion. Thus, relevant research outcomes highlight the need for further research, analysis and detection of specific social and personal-individual factors, such as debt, family problems, education and lack of skills, which lead to the exclusion from employment (Pillinger, 2001; Ditch and Roberts, 2002).

In this context, young people constitute a social group which has received huge setbacks due to the current financial crisis which limited the opportunities of entering into the labour market. As a result, the phenomena of youth social exclusion increased. Such a phenomenon is NEETs; young people aged 15-24 who are not included in the educational, employment and training structures. Therefore, this paper aims at

⁹ There is a significant disagreement over whether labour market exclusion is a direct social exclusion factor. Sen (1997) distinguish between exclusion from the labor market and long-term unemployment as a factor causing social exclusion, as he does not consider that the first automatically leads to social exclusion but only after a relative time. Conversely, Bradshaw et al. (2000) and Atkinson (2000) include the exclusion from the labor market (unemployed and inactive) in their study on social exclusion.

analyzing NEETs as a social vulnerability and social exclusion phenomenon, in the context of the new conditions that have been shaped in the post-industrial era (for further reading about the transition to the post-industrial era see: Taylor-Gooby, 2004).

2. NEETs: an Individuality “in Parenthesis”?

What actually constitutes NEET phenomenon? An explanation is not uncomplicated, as the phenomenon is multidimensional, but there is one constant element; the failure of individualistic system to fulfill its purpose. This is nothing more but the emphasis on individual skills and capabilities, as a precondition for the emancipation of the individual in the context of the competitive post-modern environment. This failure is analyzed in the next paragraphs.

• On the Definitional Issues

The term NEET (Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training) was first introduced in the UK in 1999, within the government report “Bridging the gap” in order to develop an indicator capturing and monitoring youths (aged 16-18), who were absent from the structures of education, employment or training (Social Exclusion Unit 1999 as cited in Euro found: 20; Social Exclusion Unit 1999: 6-9).

Different terms to describe NEETs have also been adopted, at a European and international level: “Angry young rebels, Quitters, Rebels without a cause, Cool dudes, Hedgers, Settlers, Escapists, Strugglers” (BBC news, 5 November 2007 as cited in European Commission 2008: 132). These terms are rather descriptive than evidence-based.

Nowadays, the NEETs’ case does not just concern European Union, but it extends at a broader international level (see in detail Papadakis, 2013: 48; Papadakis 2011). As Liang (2009: 18) points out, the phenomenon of NEETs in many Asian countries constitutes a major problem not only at family level but also at governmental and societal level, such as in China, Japan and Korea (see also Drakaki, Papadakis, Kyridis & Papargyris 2014: 243). For instance, in Japan this socially vulnerable group extends to the age of 34 years and is divided into two sub-categories: The first sub-category includes NEETs, aged 15-34, who are not included in the Japanese labour force of Japan, are not housekeeping plus not attend school (OECD 2008a as cited in Euro found 2012: 20). The second one includes the so-called freeters. This term is a combination of two words: freelance and (the) Arbeiter: noun of the German vocabulary which means employee/worker (Innui 2009: 176).

Specifically, freeters are young people, aged 15-34, not involved in education (for women concerning the unmarried) and divided into three categories: “a) young people who work part-time or in temporary jobs, b) unemployed looking for a temporary job or a part-time job and c) non active youths (except those, who are housekeeping) looking for a temporary or a part-time job (OECD 2009: 56 as cited in Papadakis, 2013: 49).

“Today, despite the lack of an internationally accepted definition of NEETs, an indicator has been developed in the EU (NEET indicator), which has been widely used since the beginning of the recession to perform cross-country comparisons at a European (EU) as well as at an international level (OECD countries)” (Drakaki, Papadakis et al. 2014: 243).

Specifically, the term NEET:

- In most European countries refers to young people aged 15-24 (European Commission, 2013: 2),
- In Japan, refers to young people aged 15-34 (OECD, 2008 as cited in Euro found, 2012: 20),
- In OECD’s data- bases, refers to young people aged 15-29 (OECD, 2013: 326),
- In International Labour Office, refers to young people aged 15-24 (International Labour Office, 2012:9).
- While in some national cases (e.g in the UK), it mainly captures teenagers in the age of 16-18, or 16-24 (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999: 2).

As regards NEETs' sub-categories among their total population, according to the Euro found (2012) NEETs in Europe may be classified in five main sub-groups, namely the following: "the conventionally unemployed, the largest subgroup,..the unavailable,...the disengaged....the opportunity-seekers....the voluntary NEETs" (Euro found, 2012: 24).

It seems that specific groups have an increased probability of becoming NEETs, including those "with low levels of education, an immigration background, some level of disability or problems of mental health as well as young people with a problematic family background" (Euro found, 2012: 55-56). In several cases "for some young people it is their health, low school attainment, bullying or parenthood that are associated with becoming NEET, for others it is a much more complex picture of multiple and mutually reinforcing issues" (Hutchinson, Korzeniewski and Moore, 2011: v as cited in Drakaki, Papadakis et al. 2014: 244).

Based on the abovementioned, there is obviously a heterogeneity within the NEETs category/ group (Drakaki, Papadakis et al. 2014: 244). The share of the NEETs population varies among EU member states. On this ground, countries with similar patterns have been grouped together, by Euro found, in order to form four clusters (based on a certain degree of similarity in terms of the size and characteristics of the NEET population, such as status, previous work experience, gender, educational level, extent of discouraged workers and inactivity, etc), and subsequently to facilitate analysis for this category of social vulnerability (see Drakaki, Papadakis et al. 2014: 244). Thus, based on the findings of the study of Euro found (2012) "the clustering ranges from extremely high NEET rates (above 17%), to very low rates (below 7%)" (see Euro found, 2012: 28 as cited in Drakaki, Papadakis et al. 2014: 244).

While a certain degree of variability is still to be expected, in general, the country differences within each cluster are smaller than those between the clusters (see Euro found, 2012: 38 as cited in Papadakis, 2013: 57-58).

• **NEETS in Europe: Brief Remarks on the Current State of Play**

In 2008 NEETs (15-24) in E.U.-28 were estimated to be 11% while in 2013 this rate increased in 13% and it differs significantly among Member-States while remaining higher than before the onset of the economic crisis (European Commission, 2015: 17). It's more than obvious that there is a direct correlation between the impact of the crisis and the NEET rate.

In Greece, Italy, and Bulgaria the rates exceeded 20% in 2014, while in Spain, Cyprus, Romania, Ireland and Croatia the NEETs' rates increased significantly since the onset of the financial crisis in European Union. In the vast majority of the abovementioned countries, the rise in NEETs rates was a consequence of the increase in youth unemployment rates rather than inactivity. Specifically, in Greece, Spain and Croatia around 70% of NEETs are unemployed but active, while in Bulgaria, Romania and Italy the majority of NEETs' population are inactive (European Commission, 2015: 48).

Based on the study of Eurofound (2012) about NEETs, the majority of this socially vulnerable group, aged 15-24, is low-skilled (see Eurofound 2012: 31). On the other hand, there are remarkable exceptions, namely countries where NEETs have a higher educational level. Greece is one of them, since more than 30% of the NEETs are Higher Education Graduates (Eurofound 2012: 32).

Recent Eurostat data show that in 2014, NEETs' rate in EU-28 is almost stagnated, compared to the one of 2013 (2014: 12.4%/ 2013: 13%), while it was increased by 1.4 percentage points compared to 2008, namely since the onset of the financial crisis. In countries such as Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Italy, Croatia and Romania the NEETs' rates increased considerably since the onset of the multiparametric economic recession until 2014. In 2014 the rates in these countries reached 20.2%, 19.1%, 17%, 17.1%, 22.1%, 19.3% and 17% respectively (Eurostat, 2015: <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>).

- **NEETs in Greece: Brief Remarks on the Current State of Play**

In 2014 the total NEET rate, in Greece, reached 19.1%, namely 1.3 percentage points below the total NEETs' rate in 2013 (20,4%). Although the Greek NEET rate was almost equal to the European rate in 2008 and 2009, however as observed in 2010 the rate increased to 14,8% (EU: 12,7%) in 2011, to 17,4% (EU: 12,9%) in 2012 and reached its maximum (20,4%) at the end of 2013 (EU: 13,1%), namely 9 percentage points above the rate of 2008 in Greece (Eurostat, 2015: <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>).

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that regarding NEETs' percentages by gender in Greece, during the period 2008-2011, the rate of NEET women in Greece was higher than NEET men. Recent Eurostat data show that in 2014 the NEET rate of women was higher than men in Greece, namely 19.6% for females and 18.7% for males (Eurostat, 2015: <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>). Thus, at the moment the female NEET rate is slightly higher than the male one.

In Greece, until recently, no field research dealing with NEETs has been conducted. According to the 2012 Eurofound study, Greece belongs to the cluster of European countries with high NEETs' percentages, an inherent gender dimension, remarkable rates of inactivity, no particular work experience, medium and highly educated NEETs, who are particularly disheartened (Eurofound 2012: 39-40 and Drakaki et al. 2013: 148).

The national-scale research project on NEETs, namely the "Absents' Barometer: The NEETs" confirmed several of the Eurofound assertions and findings, while it questioned others.

- **Crisis, Welfare State and a Heterogeneous Social Vulnerable Group: Synthesizing Recent Research Qualitative and Quantitative Findings**

Who is the Greek NEET? In trying a first response to this, multiparametric, question we hereby synopsise some of the key findings of the abovementioned Research project (lasting from June 2011 to August 2013). The extremely high rate of NEETs in Greece (confirmed by the "Absents Barometer" research, the Euro found and the Eurostat) is a particularly troubling finding, "that directly challenges the public policies complex, in order to provide reliable and effective answers" (Papadakis 2013: 8). The allocation of NEETs in the Regions appropriates to the corresponding breakdown of all of the relevant age group, while NEETs rate is higher in regions with average lower educational achievements (including high rates of early school leaving), higher youth unemployment and traditionally high rates of seasonal and temporary employment (i.e. touristic destinations) (see analytically Papadakis et al 2015: 48- 50). It is worth noting that there is a limited correlation with the urbanity (see in detail Drakaki et al. 2013: 226 and GPO & KEADIK 2013: 12). The major critical variables are age, gender, household income and education level.

Gender affects, to some extent, the possibility of ending up NEET (see GPO & KEADIK, 2013: 12 & 17; Pandis & Zagkos, 2013: 111 and Papadakis et al. 2015: 50). "More precisely the percentage of women who are NEETs is slightly larger than that of men. In detail the percentage of women NEETs stands at 17.4% compared with the general population of that age group, while in the case of men the rate is 16.5% (see GPO & KEADIK 2013: 12, 17 and Graphs 2 & 3)" (Papadakis et al 2015: 50).

Age is a main determinant, and perhaps the most important, affecting the chances of someone to be classified as NEET. NEETs show their largest proportion in the age group of the 20-24 year olds, where the rate reaches 30.9% compared with 4.2% of the youngest population (see GPO & KEADIK 2013: 12). In other words "the vast majority of all NEETs (87.5%) belongs to the age group of 20-24 years old, while only 12.5% is younger (see also Pandis & Zagkos 2013: 111-112)" (Papadakis et al 2015: 51).

With regard to NEETs' educational level, they are graduates of lower education (the smaller percentage/ 3.4%: primary school, 4.5% Junior High School), upper secondary education (the majority of them/ 37.5% High School ('Lyceum'), 26,2% Vocational High School and Technical School), while the category of NEETs who are tertiary education graduates is remarkable (28.4%) (see GPO & KEADIK 2012: 33, Pandis & Zagkos 2013: 113 and analytically Papadakis et al 2015: 52- 53).

NEETs themselves blame the educational system for inefficiency (see Kotroyannos et al. 2013: 183-185), dissociation from the labour market, emphasis on knowledge rather than skills (lack of a competence-based perspective) (see analytically Papadakis et al 2015: 53- 54, 61, 68). The majority of NEETs who are early school leavers (few in total), has done it mainly for economic reasons (42.9%) (see: GPO & KEADIK 2012: 33; KEADIK & KANEP/GSEE 2013: 35-36; Kotroyannos et al 2013: 182).

According to a recent survey of KANEP/GSEE, the unemployment in HE graduates has increased by 188% in the period 2008-2012 (KANEP/GSEE, 2013). This fact raises critical questions about higher education as such and clearly documents that HE keeps on losing its social dynamics. It seems that being a young NEET in Greece “is not a outcome of choice and free will – like maybe occurs in some other countries, but a result of a deadlock in the economic, social, educational and political situation (see Drakaki et al. 2013: 231 and Fotopoulos 2010: 4)” (Papadakis et al 2015: 54).

The above-mentioned hypothesis is confirmed by NEETs themselves, who in their vast majority identify themselves as unemployed, i.e. as active individuals, who are trying to find a job but do not succeed, while just a 6.8% spontaneously reply that this specific period “does nothing” (see in detail GPO & KEADIK 2012: 34 and Papadakis et al 2015: 54).

Of particular interest is the fact that the majority of NEETs live in households with low or very low income (see in detail GPO & KEADIK 2012: 27 and GPO & KEADIK 2013: 24-25¹⁰). More specifically “46% of NEETs come from families with very low income (less than 1000 euros), while 13.1% from families with monthly income of 1000-1500 euros. At the same time there are no NEETs in families with high income, over 3000 euros” (Papadakis et al 2015: 54- 55). Moreover Greek NEETs compared with the rest of their peers, live in homes in which a) inhabit more and b) work fewer household members (see GPO & KEADIK 2012: 22 and GPO & KEADIK 2013: 19) which aggravate their already financially troubled families and by extension themselves (see Papadakis et al 2015: 55).

It is obvious that the inclusion in the category of NEET is directly correlated (more precisely: determined by) with the family income. Most simply, as smaller is the monthly family income the greater the chances for a young person to come into the category of NEET: “The correlation of economic capital and inclusion in the category of NEETs confirms the case of poverty’s intergenerational transmission in Greece (Papatheodorou & Papanastasiou, 2010). This case is reinforced by the finding (see in detail & KEADIK KANEP 2012: 56-57) that, in relation to the whole, parents of NEETs have lower educational attainment, while usually fewer members of their families work compared to the overall condition of the corresponding population having the same age (see Chart 5). It is also worth noting that the educational level of parents is, primarily, that of secondary education while those attained higher education are less (very few are those who are primary school graduates - GPO & KEADIK 2012: 56). In relation to the whole, parents of NEETS have markedly lower educational attainment (see GPO & KEADIK 2012: 25), which raises the question of the correlation between deficits in educational-cultural capital and socio-educational inequalities, also based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural osmosis”(see in detail, Bourdieu 2002; Drakaki et al. 2013: 228)” (Papadakis et al 2015: 56). Despite the limited assets of their families, the vast majority of NEETs are fundamentally supported by them. The absolute dependence by the family (see also Kotroyannos et al 2013: 194) is also supported by the fact that only 4.5% of NEETs receive some kind of state benefit, while for the 85% of NEETs family is the only source of income support (see GPO & KEADIK 2013: 24; Pandis & Zagkos 2013: 116 & also see GPO & KEADIK 2012: 36 and Papadakis et al 2015: 56).

Regarding training, the minority of NEETs has attended a training program and the vast majority considers training ineffective). It is obvious that despite unemployment, NEETs don't trust training (see in details Papadakis et al 2015: 58- 59). 87.5% of NEETs has never followed a training program, and in many prefectures this percentage exceeds 90% (see in detail GPO & KEADIK 2012: 31-32).

Two out of three NEETs have worked in the past (66.2%), mainly in the tertiary sector (see in detail GPO & KEADIK 2013: 20). NEETs usually have previous work experience, due to seasonal employment,

¹⁰ Noteworthy, however, is the percentage of NEETs not knowing the monthly income of their family.

mainly for a period of time less than 1 year or even six months, (see GPO & KEADIK 2013: 49; Drakaki et al. 2013: 229; Pandis & Zagkos 2013: 114-115 and Kotroyannos et al. 13: 188). It seems that “NEETs usually have previous work experience, but one that is largely seasonal-casual employment....they mainly have worked in catering, leisure and tourism. From the group of NEETs with prior work experience, the majority are men 20-24 years old. Several NEETs though (30.7%) have not even entered the labor market, while there are several long-term unemployed at older ages (32.6% of NEETs total who had worked in the past-see GPO & KEADIK 2013: 20). Delaying entry into the labour market decisively hampers the possibility of integration into employment in general. Regarding the employment situation and broadly the relationship of NEETS to employment, it is clear from the findings that the economic crisis has contributed decisively to their unemployment, as grosso modo two main categories of NEETs have been formulated: those who have not worked at all and those who worked for a while and have been laid-off either because of cutbacks in personnel, either due to bankruptcy of the company that were employed, or because they were seasonal or occasional workers....Summing up, it can be observed that the working environment in general is not conducive to the formulation of those circumstances which will contribute to the creation of stable and adequate working conditions. Indeed, it is a parameter that is also strongly emphasized in interviews, in which the lack of employment opportunities both in public and in private sector is also highlighted” (Papadakis et al 2015: 57-58).

Within this context, the vast majority of NEETs (76.1% in total, a percentage that climbs up to 86.4% in the ages 20-24 years old (see GPO & KEADIK 2012: 35) is in the process of finding jobs.

NEETs consider as pivotal the role of the Welfare State in reversing the situation in which they have fallen into. But they are absolutely frustrated both by the operation of the welfare State, as well as by the State in general, its structures, the Greek political system and personnel and the political parties. A case of mis-trust is evident (see in detail GPO & KEADIK 2013: 42; KEADIK & KANEP/GSEE 2013: 29, Kotroyannos et al. 2013: 193 Drakaki et al 2013: 231). Furthermore, they consider the State, the existing public policies and governmental choices as primarily responsible for the difficult situation they face (see KEADIK & KANEP/GSEE 2013: 24 and Kotroyannos et al. 2013: 193). Additionally, NEETs “consider that cutbacks in the welfare State and its gradual weakening bear great responsibility for the situation in which they have fallen, while at the same time all these played a role in the widening of social inequalities” (Papadakis et al 2015: 63)

A seemingly paradoxical finding is related to whether NEETs, a typically socially vulnerable group, unemployed and cut off from institutions and the considerations of the welfare State, feel socially excluded: and yet NEETs do not feel socially excluded at a rate of 84.1% (see KEADIK & KANEP/GSEE 2013: 28; Kotroyannos et al 2013: 196 and Drakaki et al 2013: 232). But does this finding consist a paradox indeed? There is no doubt, that NEETs qualify for classification as socially excluded. However as already stated they do not feel so themselves: “the family security grid (70.5% find not only economic but also psychological support within their family-see GPO & KEADIK 2012: 39), groups of similar, the widening of social vulnerability that inevitably brings many young people in a similar situation with NEETs, reduce the feeling of alienation and isolation. Many of NEETs stand on the fact that they have friends and companions (social protection grid) on which they rely and thereby feel that participate actively in society (see KEADIK & KANEP 2013:28 and Kotroyannos et al. 2013: 196). From the above it appears that the lack of the sense of exclusion felt by NEETs is due greatly to the sense of collectivity and solidarity they feel between them. In other words, that they are not on their own and there are others like them” (Papadakis et al 2015: 64).

While generally, early school leaving comprises one of the most significant factors for youth social exclusion, increasing unemployment and inactiveness (European Commission, 2012: 14), in Greece unemployment, as a result of the limited vacancies due to economic downturn and the lack of connection between education and labour market, is by far responsible for youth inactivity and exclusion. Therefore, the phenomenon of NEETs in Greece can be considered as a part of the more general issue of asymmetric and variegated policy change in a reform-resistant context (Lavdas 1997) resulting in unemployment which in turn leads in individuals becoming socially marginalized. It is obvious that the financial crisis impeded social

re-integration of these young people, even if they have adequate educational background, through the reduction of employment vacancies.

As it is already mentioned, a percentage of about 37.5% of Greek NEETs are early school leavers primarily by personal choice and secondly as a result of economic problems. However, exploring deeper the causes that have led them to withdraw both from education and training and simultaneously, increased their intention not to return to education, it turns out that the frustration for the educational system is dominant, as, according to NEETs, it does not manage to provide them with the necessary guarantees for a subsequent work rehabilitation (Kotroyannos et al. 2013: 187). This tendency becomes more evident by the fact that 54% of NEETs indicate that are interested in returning to education but this choice does not constitute an immediate priority because education in Greece will definitely not offer additional possibilities for future inclusion in the labour market. Instead, they prefer to focus on finding, as soon as possible, a job once the educational system is not linked with labour market requirements (Kotroyannos et al. 2013: 187). Not surprisingly, the second option does not seem to yield positive results for them, as on the one hand, they are not able to respond to the competitive labour environment and on the other, employment opportunities are increasingly limited. At this point, the failure of the system in supporting individuality is clearly visible, as education does not promote individual future prospects, but, on the contrary, it creates a marginalized individuality, with limited options, possibilities and opportunities.

Under these circumstances, NEETs in Greece are seeking for work in an environment that increasingly restricts the opportunities for labour inclusion, as, according to the most recent Eurostat data (2015), youth unemployment reaches 52.4%. Obviously, labour market inclusion, especially for early school leavers, becomes even more difficult. In addition, long-term unemployment of young people is a problem both in terms of elimination of future employment rehabilitation prospects and in terms of job quality. As several scholars argue (Oreopoulos et al. 2000; Gartell, 2009; Mroz & Savage 2006), the combination of lack of basic education and skills and of early and long-term unemployment (15-24 years-youth unemployment) contribute to the establishment of long-term problems that can be visible in future attempts of the unemployed to enter the employment structures, as they are connected with increases in inequalities and economic difficulties once entering employment. Therefore, young people of this category are at risk of becoming marginalized not only in the short term but also in the near future as long as it is contingent to continue to experience social inequality and the risk of in-work poverty. Moreover, this marginalized individuality will not easily escape from social exclusion since restrictive policies tend to reduce drastically and continuously, the existed regulations, as a means to promote individuality. But, this individuality is being promoted perversely, yet widening social gaps.

The abovementioned view is reinforced by the fact that 39% of Greek NEETs remain unemployed for a period longer than one year, while the main cause of withdrawal from their previous work was the necessity of staff reductions due to financial difficulties (Kotroyannos et al. 2013: 188). Moreover, the failure of the system to cope with the increase of this marginalized individuality becomes visible, also by the ineffectiveness of the basic institution for employment rehabilitation (OAED) and of training programs. As a consequence, only 9% of NEETs consult the OAED services for finding employment as they do not consider that it can facilitate their integration (Kotroyannos et al. 2013: 189). This result indicates the inability of the system to protect citizens who encounter social integration problems and therefore, comes in direct contrast with the principles of social justice (see: Barry, 2005). At the same time, training programs comprise another failure of the system to promote individuality, as according to “Absents’ Barometer” outcomes, the vast majority (60%) of those who had participated in such a program (only ¼ of the respondents have attended any training program) declares that it did not, even slightly, contributed to their social inclusion (Kotroyannos et al. 2013: 189). It turns out that national and European funding for training programs, which aim at increasing social reintegration of young people, practically reveal poor results and do not appear to have the potential to reduce the problem of youth unemployment and exclusion.

The welfare state clearly fails to include and protect the majority of these young people even in terms of medical care, as long as NEETs are either not registered officially as unemployed and thus, are actually uninsured (51.2% indicate uninsured) or are still covered by their parents insurance (Kotroyannos et al. 2013:

190). Thus, the countervailing and protective factor for NEETs is the family. Unquestionably, if NEETs did not have family's protection they would have faced extended survival problems. Family support, that constitute a key element of the Southern European welfare model (Ferrera, 1996; Rhodes, 1996; Ferrera, 2010), currently serves as an impediment to the despair feeling. However, the perpetual continuation of the phenomenon is bound to increase these rates (i.e. despair), especially once family will no longer have the ability to support them. Furthermore, the relatively low percentage of those NEETs who consider themselves as socially excluded (19.2%) can be explained by the extensiveness of the phenomenon (1/2 is unemployed), by the supporting role of the family and by NEETs expectation that they are temporarily unemployed (Kotroyannos et al. 2013: 196). At present, the Internet (28.4%), social media and sports (26.1%) appear as everyday alternatives for NEETs (Pandis & Zagkos, 2013: 117). In fact though, these alternatives can be explained as options that internalize oneself, to some extent in a narcissistic way, that carry the real world inaccessibility in a controlled but virtual condition.

3. An Irreversible Reality? Conclusions and Discussion

Practically, the phenomenon of NEETs can be categorized as a post-industrial outcome that reveal a significant contrast. Generally, during the post-industrial era, the dominant objective is the promotion of individual's self-management. For this reason, training and educational procedures are used in order to prepare the individual for its subsequent integration into the labor market. In this case, however, a phenomenon of individual abolition is promoted through the emergence of an individuality "in parenthesis". NEETs comprise such a phenomenon as long as, even if they have acquired skills through training programs or have completed higher education, they have a restricted possibility of entering into the labor market, which is their primary objective. Education and training provisions do not actually contribute to their integration, as there is a lack of effective connection with the labour market. But, how is it possible to promote individuality by improving individual skills when opportunities for their flourishing do not exist? In this case, two crucial factors should be taken under consideration. Either the provided education and training is not targeted enough or the economic and political circumstances restrict the improvement of investment potential and job creation. A synthesis of these two issues can best describe the abovementioned social vulnerability and exclusion situation. At this point, the aforementioned contrast becomes apparent. Individualism has been promoted, either through education or training, but it is thrown aside by the time the individual remains outside the labour market, despite constant efforts and because there is no reliable balancing-regulatory mechanism to operate in a reparative way.

Furthermore, although there are obvious differences of the phenomenon between countries, the abovementioned contradiction is not waived. The main reason is that, on the one hand, European governments and the European Union use training, specialization and labour flexibility as key mechanisms in the competitive deregulated market economy. The main objective is to create a capable, skilled and flexible workforce to produce competitive products and services. But, on the other hand, the result does not seem to meet the target. The greatest proof is the continuous increase of NEETs percentage that highlights a socially marginalized individuality. In countries such as Greece, an individuality, which does not have the possibility to participate in social structures, is being aggravated, it is provisionally protected by the family and appears to adopt specific behaviors. It is a social group with a trampled individuality. Although "Absents' Barometer" did not explore NEETs' ideological beliefs and political preferences, a possible enlargement or even preservation of the phenomenon, accompanied with the alarming rise of the extreme –neonazi – right, which relies heavily on young people, create disturbing questions for its future social and political impact.

Actually, poverty constitutes a moral inconsistency of the society that deny freedom and autonomy. NEETs' social exclusion and the risk of poverty that they encounter, may lead many of them to inconsistency-conflict with the democratic society as a result of its previous moral inconsistency. Through this way, the marginalized, "in parentheses", individuality, may challenge its inclusion in the collectivity. Currently Greek NEETs comprise of individuals who – at the aggregate level – do not seem to presage a significant tendency towards a form of radical politics. But NEETs do constitute a serious challenge for both

policy and politics. In this context, the role of regulatory mechanisms becomes critical as a means of preventing possible social unrest and promoting social, political and economic stabilization.

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