

Soziologie – Sociology in the German-Speaking World

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Edited by
Betina Hollstein, Rainer Greshoff,
Uwe Schimank, and Anja Weiß

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A Companion to German-Language Sociology

This book provides the first systematic overview of the current state of sociology in German-speaking countries in the English language. Its thirty-four chapters review advances and current trends, relate them to the international discussion and point out challenges and perspectives for future research. As the variety of topics shows, the contributions to this volume span the entire range of sociological research areas that address pressing questions both theoretically and empirically.

With this special issue of the *SOZIOLOGISCHE REVUE*, the only German-language sociological review journal, we want to give international readers some insight into the sociological discussions in German-speaking countries—that is, Germany, Austria, and parts of Switzerland—and familiarize them with the discussions that are still largely conducted in the German language. We believe that many aspects of these discussions are of interest to an international audience as well and that knowledge about the wider context of the history of ideas in which the German-language debate is embedded and how it has evolved over time will not only enhance mutual understanding but might also stimulate and fertilize the broader international debate.

In the following, we will first briefly address some characteristics of the German-language sociological discourse and its historical background. Second, we will address the question why, despite the increasing internationalization of German-speaking academia, a substantial part of the sociological discussion is still being conducted in the German language. Finally, we provide the reader with some guidance on what to expect in the articles to follow and offer some tips on how to navigate this volume.

1 Is There a “German-Language Sociology”?

When we approached the experts who contributed to this volume, we asked them to review the research literature and the discussion in German-language sociology in their fields of expertise over the last 15 to 20 years. Specifically, we asked them to identify the defining features of the discussion in these fields and relate them to the international debate. Are there specific topics or certain perspectives that are characteristic of the German-language academic discussion? What have been the particular advances during this period? Are there areas in which the discussion is perhaps lagging behind? Are there specific highlights or “selling points” unique to the discussion in German-language sociology and, if so, what specifically have they yielded in terms of our understanding of the respective topic?

Despite stark differences among the different sociological fields, we can identify some features that are widely shared among much of the German-speaking sociological community.

Perhaps the most distinct feature of the debates among German-speaking sociologists is the generally strong interest in philosophically informed theory, methodology, and epistemology. The political scientist and sociologist Johan Galtung (1981) once spoke of a “teutonic” intellectual style in German-speaking countries,¹ which he compared to the “saxonic” intellectual style in British and US academia. While Galtung saw the “saxonic” style as being characterized by a primarily empirical, strongly data-driven approach that is less theory oriented, he perceived the “teutonic” style as being marked by a stronger focus on theory-building and analysis of the underlying paradigms. Although this characterization may be a bit stereotypical, it underlines the fact that German-language sociology has strong roots in *Geisteswissenschaften* (humanities) and idealism.

As Alvin Gouldner pointed out, German social science “developed out of a dialectic between Romanticism and science” (Gouldner, 1973: 93). This tension between *Geisteswissenschaften* and science, between idiographic hermeneutic traditions and nomographic deductive science can be found in the works of the classics, such as Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber, and has been a leitmotif in German-language sociology ever since—with times of more or less “peaceful co-existence” and phases of fierce debates, such as the Popper–Adorno controversy (the so-called *Positivismusstreit* [positivism dispute]) in the early 1960s (Adorno, 1969).

Beyond these theoretical and intellectual roots that extend far back in time, the political and social upheavals of the 20th century left their imprint and continue to influence German-language sociology still today. During the Nazi regime, many sociologists fled Germany and Austria and frequently went into exile in the United States, where they became influential members of the sociological community, amalgamating German traditions with the US-American style of sociological work.

The year 1945 marked a historical break that motivated many students to study sociology who later went on to shape the development of the discipline (cf. Fleck, 1996; Bolte and Neidhardt, 1998). As Heinz Bude and Friedhelm Neidhardt describe in a volume that contains autobiographical memories of sociologists of this generation, born in the 1920s, these young people sought to understand this dramatic societal discontinuity, “where in some respects everything was different, but in other respects much remained the same. The politics, the economy, or the law had changed radically, but, if they had survived, the people in their families, in their neighborhoods, or in the conversations on the corner were basically the same as before” (Bude and Neidhardt, 1998: 407; our translation). This young generation of sociologists, such as Ralf Dahrendorf, Renate Mayntz, or Erwin K. Scheuch, was generally very skeptical of ‘grand theory,’ and was characterized above all by a strong orientation towards empirical research, in many cases promoted and intensified by research stays in the US (Bolte and Neidhardt, 1998).

¹ According to Fiedler, the “teutonic” intellectual style can also be found in Eastern Europe and Russia (2012).

The next generation, in the late 1960s, was inspired by a global student movement, which in West Germany was characterized by a deeply felt moral indignation about the ways that the German mainstream had dealt with its Nazi past. This generation connected with the work of exiled scholars—both those still in the US and those who had returned—and revived an interest in theory, especially in the works of Marx, the critical Frankfurt School, and Freudian psychoanalysis. Inspired by the ‘new social movements,’ the expansion of the higher-educational system, and a broad, enduring cultural change, the sociology of the 1960s also witnessed serious theoretical and methodological debates, such as the aforementioned *Positivismusstreit*. The so-called *Theorienvergleichsdebatte* (methodologically reflected comparison of different theoretical paradigms) in the 1970s tried to integrate the different sociological paradigms as complementary approaches to the social world (Hondrich and Matthes, 1978). In the 1980s, the discussion about Habermas’ normatively imbued theory of communicative action and Luhmann’s systems theory, which denied all moral implications, dominated the debate in social theory.²

In the GDR and Austria, by contrast, the student movement was not as pronounced and influential as it was in West Germany, although for different reasons. Austria had witnessed no such dramatic social discontinuity comparable to that in Germany after 1945. Officially, Austria never fully acknowledged its own National Socialist past, and the small student movement encountered much more ossified structures than in Germany (cf. Lepsius, 1989). In the GDR, the socialist regime that built the Berlin Wall in the early 1960s had officially overcome the fascist Nazi regime and any student movement was suppressed (Wolle, 2001).

After 1989, German reunification strongly affected the economic, social, and political development in Germany. Germany’s demography changed owing to high unemployment rates and economic insecurity in East Germany, which induced a massive decrease in fertility in the East and motivated many among the better educated to seek their fortune in the western parts of the country. The various aspects of the intense societal change that emerged in the wake of reunification became the subject of a special area of sociological research that has been termed *Transformationsforschung* (Teckenberg, 2000) but were also thoroughly investigated in other fields of sociology (see, e.g., Höpflinger, DEMOGRAPHY AND AGING, this volume; Konietzka/Feldhaus/Kreyenfeld/Trappe, FAMILY AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS, this volume; Koenig, RELIGION, this volume). At first glance, it seemed as if this unification was predominantly a “Westernization” of the former GDR and that West Germany was less affected by the fall of the Berlin Wall.³ Yet this proved true only in the short run. Today, all of

² On the various debates, see Kneer and Moebius (2010) and Moebius (HISTORY OF SOCIOLOGY, this volume).

³ This was also true for the development of East German sociology, which was shaped by Marxism–Leninism and had evolved separately with almost no contact to West German sociology (cf. Meyer, 1994). After unification, the former social-science departments at GDR academic institutions were dis-

Germany is affected by increasing inequality, internal East–West migration, recent political polarizations, the re-emergence of right-wing movements, and threats to social cohesion. In fact, this applies to all German-speaking countries and across all of Europe. All of these topics have increasingly become a subject of sociological research in recent years, in particular in political sociology (Lamla, *POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY*, this volume), the sociology of social movements (Kern, *SOCIAL MOVEMENTS*, this volume), of migration (Pries, *MIGRATION*, this volume), and of social inequality (Otte/Boehle/Kunißen, *SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—EMPIRICAL FOCUS*, this volume).

2 Internationalization and Institutionalization of German-Language Sociology

As mentioned above, the degree of internationalization varies remarkably among different sociological fields. In some areas, discussions overwhelmingly take place in German—a situation similar to the largely Francophone debates in France—even though there are many interesting contributions that could enrich the international debate, for instance, in sociological theory (Schneider, *SOCIAL THEORY*, this volume; Schimank, *SOCIETY*, this volume; Schützeichel, *MICROSOCIOLOGY*, this volume), qualitative research methods (Hollstein/Kumkar, *QUALITATIVE METHODS*, this volume), cultural sociology (Karstein/Wohlrab-Sahr, *CULTURE*, this volume), biographical research (Huinink/Hollstein, *LIFE COURSE*, this volume), and the history of sociology (Moebius, *HISTORY OF SOCIOLOGY*, this volume). Other fields of research are highly internationalized with most research published in English, such as life-course research (Huinink/Hollstein, *LIFE COURSE*, this volume), comparative sociology, quantitative methodology (Barth/Blasius, *QUANTITATIVE METHODS*, this volume), or quantitative research on social inequality (Otte/Boehle/Kunißen, *SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—EMPIRICAL FOCUS*, this volume) and migration (Pries, *MIGRATION*, this volume). In many other areas, parts of the discussion predominantly take place in German with a certain “German twist” and with only certain parts of this discussion entering the international debate. For example, in technology studies the German-speaking research community has established a distinct sociological perspective on technological development compared to the rather interdisciplinary field of science and technology studies (STS) (Rammert, *TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION*, this volume).

Part of the reason why historically a great deal of scientific output was not published internationally is the sheer size and diversity of the German-speaking community. Today, more than 80 universities offer degrees in sociology in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The profession saw enormous growth, especially in the third

mantled and replaced by newly established institutes that were staffed primarily with West German scholars.

quarter of the 20th century in the wake of booming Western economies, educational expansion, and cultural change. This development was particularly pronounced for West German sociology: After the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, West German sociology restarted with just a handful of chairs in sociology, occupied, among others, by René König (Cologne), Helmut Schelsky (Hamburg/Münster), and Max Horkheimer (Frankfurt/Main), the latter with a chair also in philosophy. In 1960, there were about thirty sociological professorships, a number that increased tenfold by 1980 (Lepsius, 1979; Burkart and Wolf, 2002). Especially the generation of '68, who entered tenured professorships during this boom phase of sociology at an early age, did not need to publish in English, at least not for career promotion. Of course, there were several notable exceptions, such as Claus Offe and a little later Richard Münch and Ulrich Beck, to name but a few. But on the whole, this generation, which decisively shaped German sociology until their retirement around the turn of the millennium, was largely self-contained and felt no pressure to undertake the sometimes rocky endeavor of translating one's work into a foreign language and relating it to the wider international discourse. The situation has always been much different for smaller language communities, such as the Dutch academic community, who—owing to their smaller size—are more inclined to communicate in English for the purpose of professional recognition.

Yet, as mentioned above, there are still remarkable differences in the degree of internationalization between different fields of sociological research. This suggests that there are other reasons that come into play besides the overall size of the German-speaking sociological community. Certain parts of sociological analysis, such as the fine-grained advancement of philosophically grounded social theory or the nuanced interpretation of qualitative research material, require a level of language proficiency and linguistic skills that makes the endeavor of translation even more daunting. Furthermore, in some areas such as social theory and qualitative research, a substantial part of the research output still takes the form of monographs (at least in “teutonic academia”), which represents another hurdle given the strong competition for publishing opportunities in internationally renowned publishing houses. Additionally, the more theory-oriented and less pragmatic “teutonic” intellectual style might not always attract substantial interest in the Saxonian academic world (cf. Fiedler, 2012). Finally, there are some substantive debates in German-language sociology that are either unique to it or run contrary to trends in English-language sociology, thus making it difficult to connect them to international discussions, and perhaps also less attractive for German-speaking scholars to undertake the endeavor in the first place. This held true, for example, for large parts of the discussion on Ulrich Beck's individualization thesis (cf. Allmendinger and Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2000) as well as for major parts of the quite advanced methodological discussion on interpretative methods (Hollstein/Kumkar, *QUALITATIVE METHODS*, this volume).

However, this situation is about to change. Since the mid-1990s, the German academic system has undergone distinct changes. Among others, “new public management” has brought about an increasing orientation towards performance indica-

tors and a particularly strong focus on international publications. These changes are especially pertinent for the new generation of younger sociologists who are about to enter the academic job market. Now, at a time when the generational turnover in sociology has come to an end and most of the positions vacated by the retirement of the generation of '68 have been reappointed, the heightened competition is pressuring younger sociologists to focus much more on their international publication record than ever before, leading to a much higher internationalization in all areas of sociological research.

With the generational turnover now behind us, we think that this is a perfect time to take stock and ask what has been achieved so far and also to look ahead to the challenges sociology faces and the pressing open questions to which it can contribute. And as the motivation to publish in English is gaining momentum, this is also a perfect time to do so in English.

3 The Articles in this Volume

The thirty-four chapters assembled in this volume review the state of the art and the development in the respective fields of sociological research in German-speaking countries over the last 15 to 20 years. Since such a review is necessarily selective, we asked the authors to focus on important publications and major trends. What are the specific contributions of German-language sociology? What exactly is their relevance to the subject area in question, and how do they relate to the international discussion? Finally, each article points out challenges and perspectives for future research.

We consider this book to be a companion to German-language sociology, designed to be accessible and informative and to contribute to a better understanding of this diverse, lively, and innovative scientific community.

At this point, we must define more precisely what we mean when we speak of “sociology in the German-speaking world.” This demarcation is not an easy task since many German-speaking authors today also publish in English. In this volume, we are concerned with the sociological discussions in Germany, Austria, and the German-speaking parts of Switzerland and the work of German-speaking authors, respectively. This does not only include German-language publications. To the contrary, we deliberately sought to include English publications in the bibliographies, if available, to enable readers not proficient in German to follow up on these discussions if they choose to do so.

The contributions in this volume span the full range of sociological research topics, from culture to work and labor, from social inequality to transnationalization and the Global South, from the sociology of the body and space to the environment, from trends in sociological theory to innovative research methods. To do justice to the breadth of the work on sociological theory and methodology and its significance in German-language sociology, we have included three articles on sociological theory (the chapters on SOCIAL THEORY, MICROSOCIOLOGY, and SOCIETY) and three arti-

cles concerned with methods of empirical research (the chapters on QUANTITATIVE METHODS, QUALITATIVE METHODS, and MIXED-METHODS AND MULTIMETHOD RESEARCH).

We have deliberately chosen to arrange the articles in the alphabetical order of the contributions. This underlines the handbook nature of this volume and avoids the otherwise unavoidable hierarchization and prioritization of the subject areas, which is ultimately always arbitrary and unsatisfactory.

Some additional features have been added to support the accessibility, functionality, and usefulness of this companion. Keywords at the end of this volume should help the reader to find topics that are covered in several articles, such as digitalization (covered, e.g., in the chapters on MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION, and WORK AND LABOUR), knowledge (see, e.g., CULTURE, QUALITATIVE METHODS), or social change (MIGRATION, SOCIETY, LIFE COURSE). Cross-references point to other relevant articles.

Finally, we want to thank the people who have made significant contributions to this landmark undertaking. First and foremost, we would like to thank Stefan Giesen from the De Gruyter publishing house, who has accompanied the endeavor of publishing this special issue of *SOZIOLOGISCHE REVUE* with great enthusiasm and much support from the very beginning. Moreover, we would particularly like to acknowledge the help of the people from *SocioTrans – Social Science Translation and Editing*. With great diligence, Stephan Elkins and his team—Eric J. Iannelli, David Haney, John Koster, Karen Margolis, Cathleen Porter, and Andrea Tönjes—translated a number of the articles and copy-edited the entire volume. Siba Fitzau from the *SOZIOLOGISCHE REVUE* editorial team proofread the manuscripts with reliable accuracy and great commitment. We also want to thank Jessika Dirks and Florian König for their help with the index. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the University of Bremen, which made it possible to publish this volume in its entirety as open access. We hope this volume finds a wide distribution and a sympathetic readership.

Betina Hollstein, Rainer Greshoff, Uwe Schimank, and Anja Weiß

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Culture

Uta Karstein and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr

Abstract: This article discusses the major currents in the analysis of culture in German-language sociology. First, it sheds light on the role of culture in the history of sociology. Second, it reconstructs the main fields of research in the last 20 years. The authors employ the distinction between sociology of culture and cultural sociology. With regard to the first, the article addresses new types of work in the creative sphere, the changing role of the public, as well as the relation between class and culture. With regard to the second, with its focus on social meaning, the article presents theoretical contributions as well as research from different fields in sociology, in which a cultural sociological perspective has proven to be illuminating.

Keywords: Cultural sociology, sociology of culture, social meaning

1 Cultural Sociology as a Sociology of Meaning

Writing about cultural sociology in German-speaking countries has long meant writing about *sociology* as such. The founding fathers of sociology were at the same time the classics of cultural sociology, and teaching cultural sociology means teaching sociological theory still today. Another characteristic of German-language sociology is that there has not been a sociological “family drama” comparable to the one that Jeffrey Alexander and his colleagues determined within US-American sociology (Alexander, Jacobs, and Smith, 2012: 6), a rift that was triggered in the US by the rebellion against Parsons’ sociology. An effect of this rebellion was that culture as a reference of sociological explanation largely disappeared. In Germany, by contrast, none other than Max Weber prominently addressed the “cultural significance” of social and historical phenomena, and Georg Simmel focused on the tension between subjective and objective culture. The legacy carried over to the next generation of sociologists: Karl Mannheim addressed the relationship between styles of thought and socio-cultural milieus (Endreß, 2019a; Corsten, 2010); Alfred Schütz laid the theoretical and methodological foundations of a phenomenological theory of culture (Endreß, 2019b);¹ Norbert Elias closely intertwined social analysis and cultural analysis in his works on the theory of civilization; and within the framework of the philosophical anthropology of Helmuth Plessner and Arnold Gehlen (Delitz, 2011),

¹ Both Mannheim and Schütz are usually associated with the sociology of knowledge rather than with the sociology of culture. For reasons of space, we unfortunately cannot further illuminate the connections between the two here. The sociology of knowledge has established itself institutionally independently in German-speaking countries, but the connections to cultural sociology are obvious. Below, we will consider some publications as examples.

culture became the constitutional foundation of humans and their sociality. Even today, this starting point distinguishes German-language sociology from that of other countries (Moebius, 2019: 64).

However, the history of German cultural sociology is not without ruptures. After 1945, cultural sociology led a shadowy existence in Germany up until the 1980s—a result of the dominant reception of structural functionalism and the resurgence of historical materialism. At times, cultural sociology was only mentioned within the framework of philosophical anthropology (cf. Fischer and Moebius, 2014: 12).

As elsewhere, the 1980s saw a radical change with the rise of the cultural turn, which again paved the way for cultural sociological perspectives in Germany. With the foundation of the Cultural Sociology section in the German Sociological Association in the mid-1980s, cultural sociology was able to establish itself in Germany. This “revitalization of cultural sociology” (Gebhardt, 2005: 23pp) took on a characteristic form in that founding figures such as Friedrich H. Tenbruck, Wolfgang Lipp, and Hans Peter Thurn deliberately tied in with “Max Weber and a decidedly historical view of the social and cultural” (Moebius, 2019: 74; our translation). The works presented in more detail in the following sections explicitly stand in this tradition.

Cultural sociologists such as Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, Joachim Fischer, Heike Delitz, and Robert Seyfert continued the tradition of philosophical anthropology. Since then, other scholars have proposed conflict-theoretical (Rehberg, 2014), affect-theoretical (Seyfert, 2011), life-sociological (Fischer, 2015; Delitz, 2011), and historical-genetic (Dux, 2000) reformulations. They have given a specific character to research fields such as the sociology of architecture as well as the sociology of the body and the sociology of the senses and affects. The major work of Günter Dux (2000), who has brought together natural science (especially brain research) and sociology in a new way, is worthy of special mention here. In Dux’s work, *biological anthropology* replaces philosophical anthropology as the basic science of the humanities and social sciences.

Moreover, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School has remained an important point of reference in cultural sociology. It was above all Hartmut Rosa (2013) who adopted the critical impetus of the Frankfurt School. In his work, acceleration becomes the central concept of a theory of modernity and is cast as a form of alienation. In his works, which are in essence diagnoses of the contemporary period, Rosa pursues a normative theory of modernity, deliberately crossing the boundaries of academic sociology. In particular, his more recent work on resonance (Rosa, 2016) deals with the question of global relations in a society that moves beyond the growth imperative.

Cultural sociology in Germany has long been a sociology thoroughly oriented towards theory and its history. It was successful in this regard, especially after the return of Jewish exiles or the delayed reintegration of their work into German-language sociology. There was enough material to preoccupy the discipline with dealing with Germany’s own history and heritage (Gebhardt, 2005; Adloff et al., 2014; Moebius and Albrecht, 2014; Schmidt-Lux et al., 2016; Moebius, HISTORY OF SOCIOLOGY, this

volume).² However, there have also been movements away from this heritage. Niklas Luhmann (1995), for example, referred to “culture” as a semantics born from comparison and dealt with it from the perspective of a theory of second-order observation.

Hartmut Esser (2001) has also presented an original approach. The last volume of his six-volume textbook is dedicated to culture. There he aims to develop a unified theory of action in which he integrates the “normative” and the “interactionist paradigm,” which he rephrases as “interactionist-rational.” From a background of rational-choice theory, he approaches his goal through an extension of this theory. He thereby focuses on cultural frames, which, in Esser’s analysis, establish the code of subjectively and socially meaningful action. The essential place of acquisition of these frames, according to him, are various *social groups* in which people participate. Through this he intends to show that his model of sociological explanation is also suitable for “explaining the interactive genesis of commonly shared patterns and models of orientation and action—and thus the emergence of culture and social meaning as collective phenomena” (ibid.: XIV; our translation).

Over the last 20 years, the perspective of German-language cultural sociology has been increasingly broadened (cf. Wohlrab-Sahr, 2010). Scholars in this field have shown growing interest in both the French discussion and the Anglo-Saxon debates. Recent handbooks document this broadening of perspective but also the lasting influence of the German sociological tradition. One of them is the two-volume handbook by Stephan Moebius, Frithjof Nungesser, and Katharina Scherke (2019). It adopts a broad understanding of cultural sociology. Noteworthy is the view beyond the ‘Western’ context when, for example, contributions deal with cultural sociology in Japan (Morikawa), Latin America (da Mota), or in South Asia (Rehbein). In addition to the ongoing exchange with history (Scherke), what is evident is also a strong interest in the dialogue with philosophy, ethnology, and (social) anthropology, sparked by the interest in the relationship between nature and culture (Laux, Bogusz, Schützeichel).

Parallel to the re-establishment of cultural sociology as an academic discipline, qualitative methodology was elaborated as well—driven, for example, by authors such as Ulrich Oevermann, Fritz Schütze, and Hans-Georg Soeffner, who have also drawn heavily on sociology’s interpretive tradition (Hollstein/Kumkar, *QUALITATIVE METHODS*, this volume). However, an integration of these two perspectives in a decidedly empirical turn in cultural sociology was still to come. Recently, a push in this direction has come from the “Empirical Sociology of Culture Network” (Böcker et al., 2018).

² The definition of the relationship between cultural sociology and cultural studies was also discussed (Albrecht, 2009; Moebius, 2010).

2 Cultural Sociology versus Sociology of Culture

Jeffrey Alexander and his colleagues (Alexander et al., 2013) have—while promoting their “strong program”—distinguished between the sociology of culture and cultural sociology. Whereas the former sees culture as a subject area—such as art, popular culture, youth culture, and so on—that needs to be explained, cultural sociology represents an approach that addresses all social phenomena with regard to their meaning and significance and considers ‘culture’ as an explanatory factor. In the context of American sociology, this has been promoted as a fundamental change of direction. Against the backdrop of the German history of sociology (Moebius, *HISTORY OF SOCIOLOGY*, this volume), however, there was no need for such a fundamental reorientation. Nevertheless, the distinction proposed by our American colleagues is also suitable for the German context and will be applied in the following.

Of course, the two are not mutually exclusive. A sociology of art, for example, can also address the cultural significance of the phenomena and objects under investigation, as Rehberg did with his analysis of the conflict between East and West German art, which he interprets as a representative social discourse on German reunification (cf. Rehberg and Kaiser, 2014). A similar perspective can be found in the study by Dominik Schrage, Holger Schwetter, and Ann-Kathrin Hoklas, who interpreted the popular music of the 1960s and 1970s—and thus its cultural significance—as a medium for the social-transformation processes of this period (Schrage et al., 2019).

In general, however, both perspectives are aligned with different sociological approaches and mostly with different methodologies as well. The sociology of culture often—though not always—relies on quantitative methods. Cultural sociology, on the other hand, has a certain affinity for qualitative approaches.

2.1 The current field (1): Sociology of culture

In the German-language sociology of culture, one primary interest lies in the conditions of the production and reception of culture, especially in aesthetic works and products.³ With regard to production, interesting contributions have come from the sociology of professions and the sociology of work. In recent years, the conditions of work in the cultural and creative professions have repeatedly been the subject of research (Schnell, 2007; Henning et al., 2019). The respective studies, often influenced by the works of Boltanski and Chiapello (2005 [1999]), Bröckling (2016 [2007]), and Reckwitz (2017 [2012]), stressed the adaptability of capitalism. The latter has recently adopted the working principles of artists and creative people in particular, who now function as role models for large parts of business and working world. Occupations in

³ There are also sociological views in this field that explicitly position themselves against the cultural turn (Gerhards, 2010).

the cultural and creative industries are situated between the professions and dependent labor. We often find deregulated employment combined with a high degree of personal responsibility (Manske and Schnell, 2018: 435). Particularly in fields of work that are still relatively new, such as design or cultural education, one finds hybrid forms of employment that continuously alternate between dependent and self-employed work.

Contributions that are of relevance to the sociology of culture also came from differentiation theory. The basic assumption is that social spheres can also be determined by the relationship between experts as service providers and the public as their service consumers. Against this backdrop, Jürgen Gerhards (2001) has reconstructed a general trend of growing demands for inclusion on the part of the public since the 1960s. This becomes visible through the ongoing criticism of established cultural institutions that are perceived as elitist and the associated demands for cultural participation as well as through the reevaluation of cultural practices beyond high culture. Nicole Burzan et al. (2008) have also examined the relationship of different social spheres with their publics. They are interested in what they call different “inclusion profiles.” Accordingly, art belongs to those social spheres in which the public is rather weakly included through active (amateur art) or passive (art reception) participation (Burzan et al., 2008: 95). Furthermore, it has been shown that those people who experience above-average inclusion in the sphere of art generally also do so in other social spheres such as religion, politics, science, and education and that this cannot be causally attributed to socio-structural characteristics alone (ibid.: 94). People who fit this inclusion profile are generally characterized by a strong interest in what is happening in the world and how these events can be explained.

These studies indicate the strength of a sociology of culture, as it allows for the comparison of the cultural field with other areas of society by applying general sociological concepts such as profession, public, or inclusion.

Another focus of the sociology of culture is the analysis of social stratification and lifestyle (Otte/Boehle/Kunißen, *SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—EMPIRICAL FOCUS*, this volume; Schwinn, *SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—THEORETICAL FOCUS*, this volume). Here, two competing currents have developed in recent years. On the one hand is a type of research that primarily follows Pierre Bourdieu and perceives cultural preferences as an expression of social stratification and habitus (Otte, 2008; Rössel, 2005; Vester et al., 2001). On the other hand is a type of research that argues in terms of individualization theory. It emphasizes the choices and willful constructions of the subjects (Hitzler, Bucher, and Niederbacher, 2001). In addition, there have been ambitious attempts to mediate between these two poles (Otte, 2007; Gebesmair, 2001; Berli, 2014). In so doing, these endeavors seek to take the intrinsic logic of the cultural field into account, with its distinct discourses, structures of recognition, and economies according to the specific areas or scenes within the larger field of art.

Rainer Diaz-Bone (2002) and Nina Tessa Zahner (2006), among others, have dealt with the inner logic of artistic fields. They have also worked with, and expanded on, Bourdieu’s conceptual toolbox. Zahner reconstructed the field of the visual arts in the

20th century and its transformation through the emergence of Pop Art, which could be classified neither in terms of a pure autonomous aesthetic nor as blatantly commercial art. The economic rise of the American middle classes and their resulting access to the art scene led to the two dominant sub-fields described in Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art*—that of pure production and that of mass production—being supplemented in the 1960s, as Zahner argues, by a “sub-field of expanded production” (Zahner 2006: 310; our translation). This sub-field incorporates mechanisms—innovation orientation, uniqueness of the work, and originality of the artists—from the other two sub-fields but also has mass-cultural characteristics such as low barriers to reception.

Diaz-Bone expands Bourdieu's “distinction” in terms of discourse theory. His central thesis is that “only the discursification of cultural objects and practices (of genres) creates a complete, lifestyle-related content so that genres as orders of discourse can have meaningful implications for the conduct of life” (Diaz-Bone, 2002: 17; our translation). Since the social significance of cultural objects cannot be determined either by their material constitution or by the socio-economic position of the social groups that appropriate them, the knowledge order of cultural fields must be given greater consideration. Against this backdrop, Diaz-Bone reconstructs the mechanisms of distinction, inherent to the field, of two music scenes by analyzing their most important magazines.

The problems of the autonomy of art and the epistemological significance of the concept of autonomy raised by these works were later examined both in terms of basic theory (Zahner and Karstein, 2014) and empirically for various subject areas (e.g., film, architecture) (Karstein and Zahner, 2017).

Finally, Anja Frank (Frank, 2018) has dealt with the collective orientations of volunteers in associations that support operas and theaters. In her aptly titled study *Große Gesellschaft in kleiner Gruppe* (*Society at Large in Small Groups*; our translation), she shows that these groups' specific understanding of the artistic work of the respective institution and their related engagement reflects the members' different concepts of self and society and thus infuses their work with a perspective attuned to the “larger society.”

2.2 The current field (2): Cultural sociology

The theoretical contributions discussed in the following are only a small selection of what can currently be found in German-language cultural sociology. We have chosen them primarily because they contribute to a theory of culture in a more specific sense. However, there are also other theoretical contributions that are worth exploring. The works on urban sociology and space by Martina Löw (2001; 2010; Berking and Löw, 2008) and Markus Schroer (2005), which are dealt with in a separate article in this issue (Löw, SPACE. URBAN, RURAL, TERRITORIAL, this volume), are particularly worthy of mention. Impressive works can also be found in the field of architectural sociology. While Heike Delitz (2009) in her sociology of architecture brings philo-

sophical anthropology into dialogue with the French sociology and philosophy of life of Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, and others, Silke Steets (2015) has extended Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's sociology of knowledge to the subject of architecture.

2.2.1 Recent explorations in cultural sociological theory

In addition to the continuation of existing theoretical traditions, the last two decades have also seen the emergence of new outlines of cultural-sociological theory, with Andreas Reckwitz's contribution certainly being one of the most highly regarded (Schneider, *SOCIAL THEORY*, this volume; Schimank, *SOCIETY*, this volume; Löw, *SPACE. URBAN, RURAL, TERRITORIAL*, this volume). His book on the transformation of cultural theories (Reckwitz, 2000) notes increasing convergences in this field. In these convergences, he sees the potential for the development of an integrated paradigm that should be grounded in practice theory (*ibid.*).

In recent years, Reckwitz has gained attention for his thesis of a comprehensive aestheticization of our society, including a specific culture of subjectivity (Reckwitz, 2006). According to this thesis, three essential thrusts in the direction of aestheticization since the 18th century have led to the implementation of the so-called *creativity dispositive*, which has affected more and more social strata and areas (Reckwitz, 2007). For Reckwitz, the typical phenomena of this development include the replacement of the work of art by the art event, the aestheticization of the economic, the culturalization of the city, and the aestheticization of lifestyle. The creative practice involved therein is an end in itself for the expressive subject and a means to an end for professional as well as private success. Reckwitz has further condensed this interpretation of modernity in his later publications, most recently *The Society of Singularities* (Reckwitz, 2020). Not only individuals but also larger social formations are thus under pressure to present themselves as something special, unique. Here we find parallels to Martina Löw's research program on the *Intrinsic Logics of Cities* (Berking and Löw, 2008). On the whole, Reckwitz wants to draw attention to the fact that modernity is not adequately understood as a "structural context of formal-rational objectification" (Reckwitz, 2015: 16). From its very beginnings, modernity also had a cultural-aesthetic side, without the energies of which it would not be viable because only the "expansion of aesthetic practices provides modernity with cultural legitimation and affective sources of motivation" (*ibid.*: 32; our translation). That this is a specific, albeit increasingly dominant form of middle-class culture, against which other cultural orientations position themselves in a mode of protest, is an issue that we will return to later.

Dirk Baecker takes a different approach to the concept of culture in his two volumes of essays, *Why Culture?* (Baecker, 2001; our translation) and *Cultural Calculus* (Baecker, 2014; our translation). He follows on directly from Niklas Luhmann's concept of culture within a theory of observation. In this perspective, culture is not the "sum of the values [...] with which a society is endowed but [...] an ongoing obser-

vation that keeps present the potential alternative to each value” (Baecker, 2001: 9; our translation). Following Luhmann, Baecker derives this concept of ‘culture’ from the experience of cultural contact and the resulting comparative perspective. In this view, culture is always both unity and duality at the same time. It identifies differences but relates what is different to what is common and gains its identity only from its comparison with other possibilities. In the context of a world society, culture becomes the “formula for the observation of possible differences” (our translation) and thus a second-order concept. This perspective proves to be particularly instructive for the interpretation of current phenomena in the context of globalization and migration processes and the resistance to them, which is becoming increasingly identitarian. Identitarian self-assertion, however, cannot escape the experience of the contingency of the cultural that arises from comparison.⁴

The analytical framework developed by Stefan Hirschauer (2014; 2017) for comparative research on the construction, intersection, and neutralization of cultural differentiations of people—on the ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ of social affiliations—is also based on a theory of observation. This framework ties in with the internationally discussed concept of “boundary making” (Lamont) and with approaches in which multiple affiliations are discussed. At the center of his work is the contingency of social affiliations and thus also the competition and temporality of such categorizations. They are contingent not only because they are socially constructed but also because they can be used as well as ignored and dismantled. Each act of ‘doing difference’ is thus a meaningful selection from a set of competing categorizations that either creates a relevant difference in the first place or—as an act of ‘undoing’—neutralizes it again.

Finally, we present a more recent contribution to the sociology of knowledge, which is documented in Hubert Knoblauch’s work *The Communicative Construction of Reality* (Knoblauch, 2020). Even if the concept of culture is not at the forefront of this approach, it is nevertheless of interest, since the approach deals with the communicative generation of meaning—and in this sense with the “culture of communication.”

In a certain way, this contribution must be seen as the result of both a collective reflection on the reformulation of communication theory and the empirical turn of the sociology of knowledge initiated by Schütz as well as by Berger and Luckmann. In addition to the works by Knoblauch, this includes those of Gabriela Christmann (2015), Reiner Keller (2005) and co-authors (Keller et al., 2013), Jo Reichertz (2010), and Regine Herbrich (2011). The turn from the ‘social’ to the ‘communicative’ construction of reality is revealing and at the same time establishes a connection between sociological theory and empirical communication research. This connection is based on a theory of action, yet one that leaves behind the narrow confines of Habermas’

⁴ From a different perspective, Friedrich Tenbruck (1992) pointed out that cultural comparison was not a sociological invention but rather emerged from comparisons within the lifeworld.

theory of communicative action. The ‘communicative construction’ approach conceptualizes communicative action not as free of domination and oriented toward [reaching] a common understanding but instead as embodied and reciprocal action that may also contain strategic moments. Communicative action extends to the meso levels of social order as well. This approach views institutions or organizations as generated and legitimized by specific forms of communicative action, which are mediated and objectified in various ways. This reconceptualization of communicative action has thus made it possible to include the changes observed in society over recent decades that have been caused by the emergence of certain objects, technologies, and media that were necessarily omitted from the early writings in the sociology of knowledge, which, before the onset of digitization, were inevitably rooted in an analogous understanding of the lifeworld.

The concept of the communicative construction of reality also contains—like the works of Reckwitz and Rosa—an element of a diagnosis of the contemporary period, inasmuch as a communicative liquefaction of knowledge and action is understood as an increase in discursivity. In this respect, the turn to communicative construction is part of a social transformation in which communicative action gains in importance.

2.2.2 Cultural sociology as a sociological approach

In addition to these fundamental theoretical works, there are plenty of publications in which the cultural-sociological perspective provides orientation for interpreting the most diverse social phenomena, in line with cultural sociology as a “strong program.” This naturally brings a broad spectrum of social phenomena into view, only a small selection of which can be presented here. We have deliberately chosen areas that would not be considered genuine subjects of “cultural sociology” at first glance.

a) Economy as culture

One of the most interesting areas to which cultural sociology can turn is the economy. It reveals its potential primarily as a corrective to the often narrow economic perspective. Interesting interpretations can be found here, for instance, in relation to the financial crisis of 2008.

Claudia Honegger, Sighard Neckel, and Chantal Magnin used biographical case studies to examine the practices and styles of thought of bankers (i.e., their production of meaning) shortly after the crisis and attempted to “reconstruct the fatal developments in the financial sector through the looking glass of the perceptions and experiences of the actors involved” (Honegger et al., 2010: 26; our translation). The focus here is on the practical interpretations and everyday knowledge of the experts in the field of banking and the “‘fit’ between habitus, worldview, and professional practice” (ibid.; our translation). The authors reconstruct the inner logic of the “switchyard of responsibility” that characterizes the banking milieu (ibid: 305). However, despite all

the mutual recrimination, the latter's ideological glue was a culture of success that made the creation of profits at any price socially acceptable (Honegger et al., 2010: 74).

The counterpart to this inner view is provided by Oliver Kuhn (2014) with his sociological analysis of lay discussions in Internet forums where responsibility for the financial crisis was debated. He shows that common-sense theories about the financial crisis participate in the same political and economic discourse that also organizes professional knowledge. What is different is the degree of complexity and morality with which the events are judged. The dominant perspective is overall one that turns on an "explanation of the crisis oriented towards the central political authority as the protagonist of the solution," is "critical of the elites and tends to be statist" (Kuhn, 2014: 393; our translation). Kuhn's analysis shows that the discursive order of the debates is structured along basic core values like productivity, order, freedom, and equality. One can easily imagine that his reconstructions of everyday theories conceived for the explanation of events might stimulate comparative research on the common-sensical interpretations of other social crises.

Birenheide et al. (2005) proposed an interesting cultural sociological explanation for changes in the savings behavior of ordinary people. Drawing on a qualitative survey of small shareholders, they argue that financial saving has broken away from the classical pattern of deferred gratification: "Saving as such has not disappeared, but it has lost its primary significance as a future-oriented delay in consumption. It has been replaced by the immediacy of credit-financed consumption on the one hand and by a speculative increase in financial resources on the other" (Birenheide et al., 2005; our translation). The authors see this change as being linked to the social process of individualization, accompanied by a "responsibilization" as a form of *disciplining through freedom*. The investors see themselves as subjects who fulfil the societal demand for self-responsibility (cf. Deutschmann, 2010: 646).

More fundamentally, Jens Beckert has analyzed economic processes such as value and price formation (Beckert, 2020) in specific markets, where prices are only marginally based on qualities inherent in the product and largely of a symbolic nature. The art market is a case in point. In other markets, product quality depends on future developments, which are chronically uncertain. Beckert looks at both of these cases to show that assessments of quality in markets are not primarily an information problem but are based on intersubjective processes of mutual observation "that unfold between market participants and are anchored in evolving institutions" (ibid.: 289). With reference to notions of "collective belief" (Durkheim) and "thought collectives" (L. Fleck), Beckert coins the term "valuation collectives." The consensus regarding the appropriate price that emerges in these collectives can be seen as a "meso-level social order in which actors (who can be individual or collective) are attuned to and interact with one another on the basis of shared [...] understandings about the purposes of the field, relationships to others in the field [...], and the rules governing legitimate action in the field" (ibid.: 289). He calls this the "markets from meaning" model.

In this respect, the field of economics, as it is examined in these studies, is a good example of what Jeffrey Alexander has called the “autonomy” of culture, which can certainly be used here to *explain* social facts.

b) Religion as culture

The sociological analyses of religion by the first generation of sociologists like Max Weber or Emile Durkheim could certainly be regarded as standard works in the sense of a “strong program” of cultural sociology since the cultural significance of religion is at the heart of their work.

At present there are also a number of works in the German-language sociology of religion that are characterized by a tight interweaving of perspectives from the sociology of religion and cultural sociology. These include the extensive work of Wolfgang Eßbach (2014, 2019).⁵ His systematizing interpretation of European religious history aims to break up what he considers the currently prevailing “bipolarity of Christianity and secularism” (Eßbach, 2014: 14; our translation). The starting point for his analyses is the assumption that there have been four dominant experiential periods since the Reformation: the post-Reformation religious wars, the revolutions of 1789 and thereafter, the establishment of the market society in the 19th century, and the increasing mechanization and aestheticization of the lifeworld since then. The collective experiences associated with these periods challenged the religious interpretative frameworks and led to their transformation. To show this, Eßbach reconstructs intellectual discourses and develops a typology of European religions, which by no means simply merge into denominational-ecclesiastical varieties thereof but also revolve around human reason, art, or science. This sociological-historical contribution need not fear comparison with Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*.

Also clearly inspired by cultural sociology are the works of Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Marian Burchardt on the sociology of religion (Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, 2012; Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr, 2013). Engaging with the international debate on secularization, inspired by Shmuel Eisenstadt’s concept of “multiple modernities,” and informed by differentiation theory, the authors distinguish between different ideal types of secularity (“multiple secularities”), which are understood as forms of symbolic distinction and institutional differentiation between religion and other social spheres and practices. These ideal types are conceived as solutions to social problems that become virulent in social conflicts. Each corresponds to a dominant guiding idea that represents the vanishing point of the respective response, lends it legitimacy, and plays a key role in shaping the dynamics of social conflicts. The authors speak of “cultures of secularity” (Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, 2012: 905). This perspective has

⁵ Cf. Koenig, RELIGION, this volume.

become the basis of an international interdisciplinary research network (Kleine and Wohlrab-Sahr, 2016).⁶

The proximity of the sociology of religion and sociology of culture is also evident when one looks at the sociological strand of cultural sociology in the tradition of Alfred Schütz. Its distinction between different degrees of transcendence was later fruitfully applied to the sociology of religion by Thomas Luckmann.⁷ In the German-language sociology of religion, it is primarily Hubert Knoblauch (2009) who has taken up this idea. While distancing himself from Luckmann's anthropological concept of transcendence and basing it on communication instead, he follows him in the assumption that religion is undergoing a transformation, for which he proposes the term "popular religion." By that he means a cultural form that is produced and propagated by the market and the media. The dissolution of boundaries between religion and popular culture becomes visible in formats in which religious issues are addressed but that are borrowed from secular popular culture as well as in communication that bears the marks of religion while being adopted by popular culture (ibid: 196). Such popular religion is the cultural expression of a new spirituality, the characteristics of which include a pronounced anti-dogmatism, holism, and an anchorage in subjectivity, as well as a low degree of institutionalization.

c) Social inequalities as cultural differences and distinctions

At first glance, diagnoses of social inequality might not necessarily be the subject matter of cultural sociology but rather that of the sociology of social stratification. Nevertheless, cultural sociology's interest in issues of social inequality has—probably not by chance—a long tradition especially in the US-American context. One need only think of Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, Park's and Stonequist's works on "the marginal man," or Sennett's *The Hidden Injuries of Class* and *The Corrosion of Character*.

In recent years, interesting books and essays have been published in the German-speaking context that focus on new lines of tension in which different socio-structural inequalities intertwine with conflicting mentalities. Some of these writings have analyzed a constellation that is currently becoming apparent on a global level in the new populist and identitarian movements, and in which precarious class positions (or those perceived as precarious) are intertwined with anti-migrant and increasingly also anti-Islamic positions. The background of this constellation is examined in analyses of the conflicts over upwardly mobile migrants and the negative classifications that are associated with them (Sutterlüty and Walter, 2005; Neckel and Soeffner, 2008). Jörg Hüttermann (2006) ethnographically examined the disputes over Islamic symbols and—following Norbert Elias—interpreted them as conflicts of hierarchy between estab-

⁶ www.multiple-secularities.de

⁷ Silke Gülker (2019) follows this distinction in her work on *Transcendence in Science* (our translation).

lished actors in urban society and Muslim immigrants. At that time, these disputes could still be interpreted as forms of a modern incorporation ritual and thus as a mode of integration through conflict. Since then, however, they have become increasingly overlaid by other dynamics. One of these is of a global nature and is articulated in the protest movements occurring around the world, especially the populist movements, in which socio-structural situations and threats amalgamate with cultural preferences and defensive attitudes.

On the basis of comparative ethnographic research of German and US-American protest movements, Nils Kumkar (2018) examined the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street as symptoms of the structural crisis of US capitalism and its class structure, as became evident in the financial crisis of 2008. The author argued that the protests were rooted in the crisis experience of the American petty bourgeoisie and that this discontent later played a crucial role in Trump's successful bid for the presidency. Also relevant here are the frames of interpretation that emerged during the crisis and were communicatively condensed, for example, into the trope of the constantly struggling individual who plays by the rules and patiently stands in line, while others, who do not care about the rules, come from behind and cut in line without having done anything to deserve it. This work relates to Arlie Hochschild's study on the American Right (Hochschild, 2016). Cornelia Koppetsch (2018) has also examined the connection between social and cultural declassification and political mobilization using the example of the supporters of the far-right political party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD).

A second dynamic that overlaps with and exacerbates this first one reflects the German situation in a specific way. It is nurtured by the ongoing dislocations that followed German reunification. Against the backdrop of different socio-structural situations in the GDR and the Federal Republic, these dislocations provoke constant East–West comparisons. In these comparative assessments, the East German population gets chronically short-changed. A significant number of East Germans are those whom Reckwitz in his book *The Society of Singularities* (2020) had attested to be on the defensive against the new, highly qualified middle class with its urban lifestyle (what this middle class views as “the good life”) as the leading social group. The culturalization of the social and the appreciation of the creative and unique thus produce—according to his thesis—new forms of social inequality.

The “Lütten Klein” study by Steffen Mau (2019) on life in the East German transformation society provides a very interesting insider's view. Impelled by socialist equality imperatives, the GDR sought to equalize social stratification at a relatively low level of income. After 1989, this came into conflict with cultural developments, the “singularization” in West German society, which, to quote Ulrich Beck, had experienced an ascendant “elevator effect.” Coupled with the upheavals of the transformation period, which again closed off the channels of ascent already blocked in GDR society, additionally devalued the lifestyles and cultural patterns developed there, and were often experienced as cultural colonization, this resulted in an explosive mixture that has found an outlet in, among other things, the resentments of right-wing

populist movements and parties. Mau concludes: “In this sense, the East–West discourse can also be interpreted as a cultural conflict in which a more traditional milieu shields itself against changes perceived as threatening” (Mau, 2019: 231; our translation).

This conflict situation takes on a special dramatic character because it is communicatively linked to the memory of the 1989 protests and thus becomes part of a resistance narrative (Hartmann and Leistner, 2019).

3 Conclusion

The sociological analysis of culture—in its two different strands as an analysis of the cultural field and a cultural-sociological approach to social phenomena of different kinds—has proved to be an extremely fruitful field of theory-building and empirical research over the last 20 years. It is not only the paths laid by the sociological classics of the first and second generation that have proven to be stimulating. So too have the approaches based on differentiation theory and a theory of observation, on praxeology, a sociology of knowledge enriched with communication theory, as well as an extended version of rational-choice theory.

The strength of cultural sociology, however, is not least demonstrated by its competence in providing insightful diagnoses of the nature of the times, both historically and in view of current developments. Across different areas of research, new types of production and subjectivity, new forms of evaluation and normativity, as well as new social divisions along cultural lines have been fruitful areas of study in cultural sociology. The current research connects with and contributes to international trends but also addresses specific German constellations related to the ongoing unification process.

Much of this research in German-language cultural sociology could contribute a great deal to the international academic discourse had it been translated into English. Here, we find a clear generational divide. Whereas the younger generation is much more present in the international sociology arena, authors of earlier generations have often largely remained within the German-language debate. This is not a matter of quality but rather one of academic tradition and heritage. Honoring this heritage and its academic language should not prevent these works from becoming better known outside of Germany. These exciting books should be translated.

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Demography and Aging

François Höpflinger

Abstract: During the last twenty years, sociological analysis has improved our understanding of the dynamic interrelationships between demographic aging and changes in individual aging processes, particularly by looking in more detail at structural and cohort changes in the life situation of the elderly population. Sociological research has provided particularly fruitful contributions on the impact of demographic aging (low fertility rates combined with increased life expectancy) on intergenerational relationships. While research on demographic aging and individual aging has made much progress, public perceptions and political discourses are still dominated by deficit-oriented and simplified views of demographic aging (also due to the fact that demographic aging is mostly measured by using obsolete chronological age definitions).

Keywords: Demographic aging, individual aging, longevity, intergenerational relationship

1 Introductory Observations

Low fertility rates and high life expectancy have resulted in strong demographic aging. In many European countries, this development has been reinforced by the aging of large cohorts of men and women born after World War II who themselves had few children (baby boomers). A substantial part of demographic and aging research during the last twenty years has been purely descriptive. This is particularly true for reports on demographic aging that contain an abundance of detailed statistical data but lack theoretical depth. The present review on the development of research on demography and aging in German-speaking regions concentrates on selected publications that link empirical and theoretical approaches or at least include innovative conceptual ideas.

In political discourses and media presentations, demographic aging is mostly negatively perceived as an actual or emerging social problem, resulting in, for example, massively higher health costs, huge deficits of social support systems, distressed care systems, or intergenerational conflicts. Such negative perceptions of demographic aging are reinforced by deficit-oriented images of old age. A substantial part of the sociological analysis of demographic aging and individual aging during the last twenty years has concentrated on refuting those purely negative interpretations of demographic aging or at least on interpreting demographic processes within a broader societal frame of reference. A good and widely read example of this approach is the book by Anton Amann (2004), which criticizes modern aging myths of an emerging

war between generations, a collapsing care system, or aging as a significant brake on innovation.

This article is organized as follows: Sections 2 and 3 discuss the place of sociology in demographic and aging research, with special reference to a new understanding of demographic aging in rapidly changing societies. Section 4 addresses relevant sociological topics on demography and aging (for example, an aging workforce, the impact of demographic aging on social structures and intergenerational relationships). The article closes with some general observations on the current state of sociological research on demography and aging.

2 Demographic and Aging Research—Sociological Contributions

When looking at the contribution of sociology in German-speaking countries to the topics of demography and aging, we have to take into account, on the one hand, that demographic and aging research is—ideally—multidisciplinary or even transdisciplinary. In many ways, sociological approaches are linked with socio-economic and socio-political fields of research, for example, when considering the effects of demographic aging on social policies or health systems. On the other hand, some sociological concepts (concepts of lifestyles, for instance) are widely used within demographic and aging research, often by researchers from other disciplines (statistics, economics, psychology, or geriatric medicine). Similar to what can be observed in regard to other relevant societal topics, here too sociological theories have been successfully integrated but often outside of sociological work.

The main impact of sociological approaches has been to link demographic processes and social structures in a differentiated frame of reference. A widely perceived introduction and analysis of demographic aging was published by Peter Schimany (2003). Besides providing an introduction to demographic methods and an analysis of the social consequences of demographic aging on labor markets and systems of social security, he argued for a sociology of aging that systematically analyzes socio-cultural changes of individual aging within a demographically aging society (a dimension that is mostly neglected in purely demographic research). A current and excellent overview of the German sociology of demography is provided by the reader edited by Yasemin Niephaus, Michaela Kreyenfeld, and Reinhold Sackmann (2016), which discusses nearly all relevant demographic topics within an open-minded but clearly sociological frame of reference. One of the main conclusions of their review is that demographic processes are rapidly changing as social conditions and individual aging processes are affected by strong cohort and period effects.

3 A New Understanding of Aging—Cohort Effects and Structural Changes of Aging Processes

In recent decades, demographic research and aging research have developed a more critical view of chronological age. Yet, chronological age measurements are still dominant in demographic statistics—particularly in regard to demographic aging. Demographic aging is traditionally measured by comparing the number of people aged 65 and older to the total number of persons within a given region and through dependency ratios that relate the number of people over 64 to those aged 20–64. This has not changed in the last twenty years despite increasing methodological criticism. A majority of demographic analyses—in Germany and internationally—does not, or at least only partially, take account of changing concepts of age and aging, even as new, dynamic indicators for measuring demographic aging have been developed (Sanderson and Scherbov, 2007). In aging research too (when analyzing individual aging processes or the lifestyles of older men and women), it has become more and more evident that chronological age itself is a variable that explains surprisingly little—at least until the very late phases of life. Other variables (from gender, social milieu, health behavior, functional health to subjective age or birth cohort) are more relevant. This is one of the main reasons why new concepts of aging have been developed (for example, active aging or healthy aging), reflecting an understanding of individual aging as a multidimensional and multidirectional process, a process that, even among men and women at the highest ages, is strongly related to social and psychological factors and involves significant cohort effects.

In modern and dynamic societies, demographic aging is happening at the same time that cohort changes in health behavior and the lifestyles of the elderly population are becoming more salient and new models of aging (such as active, productive, or creative aging or anti-aging medicine) are emerging, particularly among the more affluent elderly. Today's elderly are aging differently than earlier generations. As result of better education, new forms of family formation (and dissolution), and changing socio-economic conditions during the last few decades, the present generations of elderly generally display a more active attitude toward life after retirement. The lifestyles of today's cohorts of retired men and women are clearly evolving in the direction of more active lifestyles, at least among healthy and affluent European retirees. An interesting discussion of such structural changes—linking the lifestyles of new generations of retirees in Germany with the youth movements of the 1960s—has been published by Fred Karl (2012). The German aging surveys (from 1996 onwards) show that we can observe significant changes in life perspectives and lifestyles of the elderly population in nearly all social dimensions (Motel-Klingebiel et al., 2010; Mahne et al., 2017; Tesch-Römer et al., 2006).

Cohort and structural changes of individual aging have resulted in sociologically important conceptual developments: First, deficit-oriented concepts of aging have been replaced by concepts of active or even successful aging (for an overview, see

Klott, 2014; Kolland and Wanka, 2014). Individual aging is no longer perceived as a process to be endured passively but as one that can be formed and shaped actively. A radical consequence of an active attitude towards aging is the emergence of anti-aging medicine to prevent or at least slow down biological aging. Second, subjective and chronological age differ in significant ways as new generations define themselves as being much younger than their chronological age. Many retired persons define themselves as not being “really old” as long as they live at home without requiring extensive help (Graefe et al., 2011).

A trend toward a more ‘youthful’ life after retirement can be interpreted as an important countervailing factor to traditional concepts of demographic aging. When men and women at age 70 have lifestyles that correspond to the lifestyles of much younger generations, demographic aging does not result in a socially or culturally aging society. At the same time, new models of individual aging contribute to a greater heterogeneity or inequality of aging processes within and between European countries, as primarily affluent elderly in affluent European regions profit from more active retirement and longer healthy life expectancy.

Over the last few decades, the distinction of at least two different types of older persons has become popular in aging research. The traditional notion of age bifurcates between a new and rapidly expanding population of healthy and independent ‘young-old’ (third age) and a frail or dependent population of ‘old-old’ (fourth age).¹ The most important German study of life at advanced ages in the last twenty years has been the Berlin Aging Study, an interdisciplinary longitudinal research study (Mayer and Baltes, 1996; Lindenberger et al., 2010).

While the beginning of the *third age* is characterized by a socially crucial transition (retirement), the *fourth age* remains conceptually more ambivalent, as the start of the fourth age is not structurally defined. The concept of fourth age refers either to very old people aged over 80 or alternatively to frail or dependent old persons. The German gerontologist Ludwig Amrhein (2013) proposed the interesting thesis that the social upgrading of the third age has proceeded to a social devaluation of the fourth age. While the ‘young-old’ are perceived as active subjects, the ‘old-old’ are still primarily seen as passive objects of help and care. In a certain sense, the now popular distinction of ‘young-old’ versus ‘old-old’ reflects the societal difficulties of dealing with changing aging processes by using traditional concepts of age. A good and critical reflection on the (heuristic) construct of the ‘young-old’ has been provided by Sylke van Dyk and Stefan Lessenich (2009).

¹ The term ‘young-old’ was first used by the American gerontologist Bernice Neugarten (1974) and later developed into an elaborate theory of a third age by Peter Laslett (1989).

4 Demography and Aging—Relevant Sociological Topics

Demographic aging and individual aging are processes that affect practically all societal dimensions. In this section, I concentrate on select topics in which—at least in my opinion—sociological analysis has contributed to a new understanding of the societal consequences of demographic and aging processes.

4.1 Aging workforce

A hot topic over the last twenty years has been the consequences of an aging workforce on the labor market and enterprises (Aulenbacher/Grubner, *WORK AND LABOR*, this volume). This topic has generated a vast number of national and international reports and discussion papers (with actually only a very limited number of theoretically integrated approaches to the issue of older workers). From an economic point of view, there has been a broad discussion of questions related to decreasing economic productivity and less innovation as a consequence of a growing proportion of elderly workers. As far as consolidated results are available, the effects of an aging workforce on productivity seem to be very limited (Düzgun et al., 2006). Human relations approaches and psychological experts have emphasized the risks of decreasing work ability among older workers and discussed ways to improve their work motivation and ability (for example, Ilmarinen, 1999). Sociological research has primarily focused on two other aspects: first, changes in processes of retirement (for example, early retirement or flexible forms of retirement), often by comparing retirement decisions in different countries or occupations (Behrend, 2001; Kohli et al., 1991); second, the working situation, social status, and risk factors of different groups of older workers and employees (Clemens, 2001; Clemens et al., 2005; Naegele, 1992). In the latter context, questions of ageism and age-related discrimination in the labor market have been discussed in detail (for a good overview, see Brauer and Clemens, 2010).

A relatively new approach in the context of an aging workforce has been to look at intergenerational challenges within labor markets or at intergenerational exchanges in the workplace (George and Struck, 2000; Sackmann, 1998). One main conclusion of such approaches is that intergenerational differences (for example, regarding innovation or issues of work–life balance) are less determined by age but by differences in life stages and working biographies. (Huinink/Hollstein, *LIFE COURSE*, this volume)

Generally, the heterogeneity of workers and employees aged over fifty (who differ strongly according to educational attainment as well as actual and past occupational activities, status, and income) makes it difficult to arrive at firm conclusions, and rapid

changes in labor markets and workplaces have generally reduced the practical impact of sociological research.²

4.2 Aging and decreasing population combined

Since the 1990s a new demographic phenomenon has emerged in some German regions: the concurrence of demographic aging and a decreasing population. Questions of observed or expected population decline have gained greater attention. And in fact, for the first time in history, populations are decreasing not because of war or disease, but as a process occurring in peaceful and relatively affluent societies. Internationally, Japan and Germany are seen as the front-runners in such developments (Coulmas and Lützel, 2011). In general, a decreasing population is viewed as an indicator of economic stagnation or lack of social attractiveness. However, as regional analyses illustrate, a decreasing population can be the result of very different social and demographic factors (as diverse as emigration of young people from peripheral regions and functional differentiation between the places of work and residence; Bucher and Mai, 2006). In any case, demographic aging along with a declining number of inhabitants has many political and administrative consequences (Bartl, 2011). From a sociological perspective, the main challenge is that a decreasing population has different social, economic, and political impacts than an increasing population. As the sociologist Franz-Xaver Kaufmann (2005)³ observed, there is a structural lack of solutions for the problems of negative population growth in modern societies, that is, in societies that are bent on solving all problems via growth (115). He postulates that—contrary to population growth, which leads to stimulating diversity—depopulation is associated with consolidating or even intensifying social and regional inequalities.

4.3 Longevity and social structures

While the demographic and social effects of low fertility rates on the age distribution of a population have been intensively analyzed, the second dimension of demographic aging—increasing life expectancy—has been less discussed. In the context of increasing life expectancy, one has to mention the internationally widely cited article by Jim Oeppen and James Vaupel (2002), which at least partly originated within Germany (Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock). Their research indicates

² Under rapidly changing conditions, the impact of large research studies is limited by the fact that the results of a given study are quickly perceived as obsolete and no longer relevant to the actual situation.

³ Franz-Xaver Kaufmann can be seen as a pioneer of sociological approaches to demographic aging as his first publication on the topic dates back to 1960 (Kaufmann, 1960).

a surprisingly linear increase in life expectancy over the last one hundred and fifty years when we look not at single countries but at those countries that have experienced the highest average life expectancy during a given time period.

What is even more interesting from a sociological perspective is the effects of increased life expectancy on life phases and social structures. One of the most elaborate German works on the relationships between increased life expectancy and social structures in modern societies is the analysis by Helga Pelizäus-Hoffmeister (2011). Drawing on an earlier paper by Martin Kohli (1985), she reflects on, from a socio-structural perspective, how high life expectancy is interrelated with important dimensions of modern life, such as career planning, concepts of lifelong learning, saving for retirement, and so forth. In line with other sociologists (e.g., Höpflinger, 2016), she argues that elaborate and culturally accepted forms of individualism are only possible in societies with high and secure life expectancy.

In the last twenty years, international efforts have been made to develop a valid and comparable indicator of the quality of a longer lifespan. Indicators that seek to capture the extent to which individuals can expect to live a healthy, disability-free, or active life actually try to answer a very important question: To what extent is increasing longevity just an extension of years lived in ill health or in functional dependency, or to what degree does it involve a longer life in good health? Of particular interest from a sociological perspective are, however, primarily observations and analyses that inquire into the social inequalities of morbidity risks. One of the first German sociologists to analyze social determinants of active life expectancy was Thomas Klein (1999). He examined not only the traditional social inequalities in regard to life expectancy in general but also social inequalities in active life expectancy (relating to gender, educational attainment, lifestyles, etc.). His approach has gained increased importance both in discussing social inequalities and in measuring the quality of a longer lifespan. Methodological difficulties in measuring health status in a lifespan perspective have yielded inconsistent results, particularly regarding healthy and disability-free life expectancy, but large social inequalities in the quality of longer life expectancies remain obvious (for a recent overview of concepts, methods, and results, see Unger, 2016) (Otte/Boehle/Kunißen, SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—EMPIRICAL FOCUS, this volume).

4.4 Demographic aging and intergenerational relationships

Low fertility rates and high life expectancy have substantially changed intergenerational family structures, reducing the number of horizontal family ties and increasing the shared lifespan of family members (adult children and parents, grandchildren and grandparents). From the late 1990s onwards these structural changes—and their impact on intergenerational relationships—have been innovatively analyzed and discussed among German researchers (Lauterbach, 1995; Grünheid and Scharein, 2011). Late family formation in Germany, however, has resulted in families with four living

generations being less widespread than in other countries and families with three living generations being the dominant model (Puur et al., 2011). The emergence of new intergenerational structures has given rise to new social discourses on adult children and aging parents, for example, the powerful image of the middle generation being a ‘sandwich generation’, a term coined to describe a generation that has to invest both in the youngest and the oldest generations. At the same time, a second work-family conflict has gained importance: paid work and unpaid care for old family members. One of the first and still one of the best theoretical reflections on conflicts between family care and work responsibilities was published by Ursula Dallinger (1998). More generally, Marc Szydlik (2000; 2016) developed a widely cited theoretical model of intergenerational relationships and intergenerational solidarity. He linked the needs and the opportunity structures of adult children and aging parents with dimensions of family structures and cultural-contextual dimensions to describe intergenerational solidarity in modern societies over the lifespan of children and parents.

At least in my view, the topic of adult children and aging parents in dynamic but demographically aging societies is one of the research areas where sociology has made the most theoretical and empirical progress. This is an area where German researchers have been at the forefront of novel approaches.⁴ Since 2004, a large and ongoing European survey (Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe; SHARE)—coordinated by the Munich Center for the Economics of Aging and the Max Planck Institute for Social Law and Social Policy in Munich—has made it possible to analyze intergenerational relationships in later life in more detail on the basis of theoretically, integrated multi-level analyses (persons, households, intergenerational dyads, family structures of two generations, and contextual factors). It has facilitated analyzing in more detail the multi-local character of later family phases—as discussed, for example, by Wolfgang Lauterbach (1998)—for different countries, emphasizing intensive family ties even when family members are not living in the same household or building (Isengard, 2013; 2018). One central consequence of such research is that household statistics are not, or at least no longer, very important for describing social relationships in aging societies of today (Konietzka/Feldhaus/Kreyenfeld/Trappe, *FAMILY AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS*, this volume).

A group of younger sociologists have used SHARE data to link demographic aging and family variables and have thereby successfully described important determinants of intergenerational help, care, and financial transfers within different European countries (Brandt, 2009; Brandt et al., 2009; Deindl, 2011; Deindl and Brandt, 2011; Haberkern, 2009). Their multi-level analyses illustrate the impact of opportunity structures (for example, living nearby or not), of the needs of younger and older generations, and of family structures on intergenerational relationships in societies in

⁴ An interesting but still not fully researched aspect of longevity of parents is that new generations of women and men experience old age often twice or thrice: first, the aging of grandparents; second, the aging of parents; and third, their own aging (and the aging of older family members is often experienced as ‘shadowing one’s own future’).

which many adult children are confronted with aging parents. Two general findings of those studies are especially relevant in the context of aging societies: First, we observe different types of care systems in Europe (from family-oriented to professionally oriented), which indicates that socio-cultural dimensions and institutionalized welfare systems are important factors in structuring care systems and in dealing with the challenges of demographic aging (Haberker and Szydlik, 2008; Haberker et al., 2012; Schmid et al., 2012). The type of welfare system (family-oriented or state-oriented financing of elderly care) has clear effects on the distribution of care work among women and men—as a very interesting analysis by Tina Schmid (2014) illustrates. Second, the politically popular idea of crowding out family help by establishing professional care has been empirically refuted or at least put into a social context (Künemund and Rein, 1999; Künemund and Szydlik, 2009; Motel-Klingebiel et al., 2005). It becomes evident that, in demographically aging societies, intergenerational family help and care can only be sustained by supporting elderly care through qualified professional care systems (Pfau-Effinger/Grages, SOCIAL POLICY, this volume).

5 Conclusion

In the last twenty years—both internationally and in German-speaking countries—sociological research on demographic aging and processes of aging has resulted in a better understanding of the complex interrelationships between changing demographics and socio-political structures. Empirical and theoretical progress can be observed particularly in three relevant dimensions: First, chronological age is easily measured, but in modern societies this simple variable is losing its descriptive power. Cohort effects, lifestyle, and status indicators as well as the dimensions of health and subjective age are—at least until very late in life—much more important determinants of aging processes and aging populations than are chronological age measurements. Second, social consequences and the socio-cultural impacts of increased (disability-free) life expectancy on socio-political structures have been analyzed and discussed in more differentiated ways (resulting in new concepts of life phases). Third, the intergenerational dimensions of demographic aging and processes of aging have been empirically researched in much more detail. This in particular is one of the areas where sociological contributions—and contributions within German-speaking countries—have been most successful internationally. The last twenty years have resulted in a new consensus—at least among sociologists participating in this research—that the real challenge for demographically aging European societies is not demographic aging as such but a lack of social, political, and socio-political adaptation to new demographic conditions, in particular to an increased longevity of modern populations.

While research on demographic aging and aging processes has made progress, this is much less the case regarding the transfer of empirical observations and new

concepts to political decision-making and popular perceptions of demographic aging. Deficit-oriented and simplified perceptions of demographic aging remain dominant both politically and in media discourses. This situation is reinforced by the fact that aging processes and demographic aging are still measured and defined by using traditional definitions of chronological age (for example, in defining all men and women beyond age 64 as contributing to demographic aging). New, dynamic measurements of aging have yet to be institutionalized in official demographic statistics.

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Economic Sociology

Andrea Maurer

Abstract: Economic sociology today is often seen as a new branch of American sociology that is strongly tied to the concept of ‘social embeddedness’. However, European social science has a long tradition of analyzing economic issues from the broader perspective of social theory. This article focuses on the particular roots of German-language economic sociology and the goals that it has pursued during its redevelopment over the last 20 years. It argues that economic sociology in German-speaking countries is special due to its history and has now come to a crossroads.

Keywords: Social embeddedness, economic sociology, markets, capitalism, economic forms

1 Overview: What Makes German-Language Economic Sociology Special?

Economic sociology in German-speaking countries was reinvented at the end of the 20th century under the influence of writings by US sociologists. Yet, modern social-scientific thinking on the economy goes back to the European Enlightenment and to European sociological classics such as Karl Marx and Max Weber. In the past, classical European writers elaborated a broad socio-economic view of the economy in order to explain the rise of modern market capitalism. After a long interruption due to political events, economic sociology was rediscovered in the US in the late 1970s as part of new theoretical developments, especially the micro-macro debate and criticisms of structural-functionalism and standard economic theory. Since then, a research agenda has been established that focuses on social factors such as networks and institutions and the ways those factors shape economic action in the modern market economy. This newly established research program was initially called *sociology of economic life* (Granovetter and Swedberg, 1992) and was later labeled *new economic sociology*¹ (Granovetter, 1990) on account of its aim to overcome shortcomings in standard economic and classical sociological theory. Over time, other programs, with a different background, have also taken up research on the modern economy from a sociological point of view and new theoretical perspectives, principles, and tools have been applied. More and more sociologists, as well as social and

¹ The term *new economic sociology* is used as a designation for the program based on the notion of *social embeddedness* that originated in the US in the 1970s and 1980s. Other concepts that consider the economy from a broader sociological point of view are labeled *economic sociology*. In addition, the notion of socio-economics is applied to those approaches that integrate sociological, political, and economic factors and tools (see Maurer, 2012).

political economists and philosophers, have begun to turn their attention to economic issues and thereby replace on the one hand and enhance on the other the theoretical tools and perspectives of new economic sociology. Old competitors, such as economic theorists, have challenged sociologists in, and improved upon, traditional areas of sociological research, such as hierarchies, beliefs, and ideas, to mention only a few (see Schmid and Maurer, 2003). In the beginning, new economic sociology in the US explicitly aimed to explore *why* and *how social factors* matter in economic life, emphasizing their ability to reduce uncertainty. In this vein, new economic sociologists have highlighted that the modern economy is socially embedded and social factors have a positive impact on economic outcomes—aspects that standard economic and sociological theory have tended to ignore.

This article reconstructs both the history of classical sociological thought on the economy and the core program of new economic sociology in German-speaking countries and compares it to its US counterpart. It summarizes the program of new economic sociology as well as new lines of thinking that have emerged in German-speaking countries and the rest of Europe during the last twenty years. It also raises the question of what will happen in the future if the core program changes by opening up to other approaches.

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 outlines the specific history of German-language economic sociology by tracing the role of European classics and by considering the economy as socially embedded. The contributions made by German-speaking economic sociologists to the core program of new economic sociology are described in section 3 by referring to new theoretical developments and empirical studies on markets. Section 4 summarizes new tendencies within German economic sociology, and section 5 argues that new economic sociology has reached a crossroads.

2 Theoretical Foundations, Developments, and Trajectories

German-language economic sociology is based on specific theoretical roots and influenced by historic events that have enhanced particular lines of thought. Its development might be characterized by three phases and related trajectories. The first, classical phase started at the beginning of the 20th century and focused on economic systems. The second phase of sociological analyses of the economy, in the 1980s, was inspired by the concept of social embeddedness. The third phase, which began at the turn of the 21st century, is marked by new tendencies that have adopted more pronounced societal perspectives and have thereby challenged the core program of new economic sociology.²

² For an overview, see Maurer, 2017.

Sociology was established at the beginning of the 20th century when new social, economic, and political institutions emerged that led to the modern market economy or modern capitalism. The classical German sociologist Max Weber, in particular, offered a causal explanation for the emergence of specific modern institutions from the 16th century onward by referring to a set of individual motives and patterns of action defined by the ideas of Protestantism. The process of rationalization, triggered by religious ideas, was driven forward by the parallel rise of nation states, rational sciences, and so forth. Similar to Schumpeter, Sombart, and others, Weber (1922/1978) developed an institutional perspective that emphasizes economic institutions, which he saw as being mutually interrelated with cultural, social, legal, and political institutions. His classical writings provide an early outline of an economic sociology consisting of four major tools: methodological institutionalism, ideal-types, an explanatory-understanding sociology, and material studies on traditional as well as modern economic institutions: the stock market, the trading company, the craft guilds, or plantations (Weber, 1923/2013). The classics offer social science explanations of the modern capitalist economy that take social, economic, and political factors into account, assuming that economic action and outcome are the result of various social factors that may also be intertwined. For Weber, the main task was to analyze the rise and the functioning of modern capitalist institutions and how this is interrelated with social, political, and cultural factors.

The National Socialists' takeover in Germany and Europe and the ensuing Second World War interrupted this line of thought and ended the unique European debate on economic issues from a broad social-scientific point of view. Most representatives of sociology or socioeconomics were forced to leave Europe. It took some time after World War II for the classics to be reimported to German-speaking countries. Weber was reconsidered from the late 1960s on, as has been Karl Polanyi since the beginning of the 21st century. From the 1930s to the 1980s, there was no economic-sociology or social-economics program in German-speaking countries. There were merely a few individual scholars who wrote about the economy from a sociological point of view, for example, Hans Albert, Niklas Luhmann, and Klaus Heinemann. None of this, however, led to establishing economic sociology in German-speaking countries after 1945. The idea of linking the economy and society and exploring economic institutions in relation to social and cultural factors was nearly lost in the 20th century.

It was not until the end of the 20th century that economic sociology was *reestablished* in German-speaking countries—a development that was heavily influenced by the emergence of new economic sociology in America.³ At that time, economic sociology in German-speaking countries was a true offshoot of the US approach and was centered around the concept of social embeddedness. Mark Granovetter, who

³ Jens Beckert, who later became, and still is, the Director of the Max Plank Institute for the Study of Societies (Germany, Cologne), was a leading initiator (see Beckert, 1996; 2016) and successfully reintroduced the issue of uncertainty into German economic sociology (for a critical note, see Schwinn, 2010; Karstein/Wohlrab-Sahr, CULTURE, this volume).

coined the notion of social embeddedness in this context and championed the underlying idea that social relations and institutions are central factors in social and economic life, wanted to overcome the restrictions of both classical economic and sociological theories. At this time, standard neo-classical economics as well as structural-functionalism in sociology neglected social relationships as well as institutions as a factor in modern economic life. The dominant approaches made assumptions about competitive markets and the normative order constituting their social environment that led them to miss the potential influence of social contexts on individual action. Inspired by the new movement toward action-based explanations, German-speaking scholars started to think about new ways of conceptualizing economic phenomena and to reconsider the classics as a foundation for sociological explanations of economic structure. In the 1970s, German-speaking sociologists had already started to improve on action-based explanations by working on models and explanations that overcome the shortcomings of highly abstract standard economic theory and the failure of structural-functionalism and pure macro sociology to explain social change and unexpected phenomena.⁴ Thus, more and more sociologists rediscovered the methodological ideas of Max Weber's explanatory-understanding sociology (Schneider, *SOCIAL THEORY*, this volume) and related approaches such as institutional theory, the rational choice approach, and even parts of cultural sociology (Karstein/Wohlrab-Sahr, *CULTURE*, this volume). All of them share the classical aim of explaining social phenomena, including economic institutions and structures, by considering individual motives, meaning, and action as causal forces in the social world.

One strand of action-based explanations built on *rational choice theory*. Proponents of the rational choice approach all over the world seek to explain social, political, and economic phenomena by assuming that actors make rational decisions with respect to a given social context. By doing so, these theorists aim to develop an integrated social science program for analyzing and improving the social world by starting from the intentional actions from the viewpoint of individual actors. In Germany, Rolf Ziegler and Klaus Heinemann embarked on sociological analyses of economic phenomena based on this notion in the 1970s. Today, rational choice theorists pursue this same line of research by conducting empirical studies that show why and to what extent individuals employ social capital in market exchange or entrepreneurship. Their studies explore in a precise way why some social constellations hinder or facilitate entrepreneurship or market exchange by defining problems of cooperation, coordination, or conflict. Once the specific nature of the underlying problem is understood, social factors such as reputation, loyalty, norms, personal trust, or group control can be studied and analyzed as a means of overcoming that specific problem. This is what makes rational choice theory that part of economic

⁴ In my view, this is one of the main reasons why systems theory (Luhmann, 1970) has not become an important branch of economic sociology.

sociology that provides theses about why particular social factors improve economic institutions and outcomes from the viewpoint of a rational individual. The rational choice approach has received much attention and is a well-known international branch of sociology that has established a strong line of empirical studies on how social factors influence market exchange and entrepreneurship that is based on the calculation of costs and benefits. Nevertheless, rational choice theory was not the foundation of German-language economic sociology in the 1980s.

The revival of economic sociology in Germany at the end of the 20th century was guided by the notion of social embeddedness. Since then, German-speaking scholars in the line of new economic sociology have primarily explored the social structure and constitution of markets as well as of interests and rationality. Proponents of the social-embeddedness concept highlight various social factors that facilitate modern markets (see Beckert, 1996). Most are concerned with deciphering different social processes and mechanisms that emerge from social relations (for an overview, see Maurer, 2017). In this vein, they actually subscribe to the idea that not only action but also individual orientations and motives are influenced by social networks and institutions. As a result, economic sociology in German-speaking countries restarted as a movement loosely integrated by the core idea that social factors matter in different ways for economic action and outcomes and that modern market economies cannot be understood without reference to the social relations and institutions upon which they rest. The exclusive focus on rational actors and perfect competition markets are therefore regarded as unrealistic.

The assumption that social and cultural factors influence economic outcomes and structures through the individuals' actions and relationships has linked economic sociology to new institutionalism (Schmid and Maurer, 2003). The affinity between new institutionalism and new economic sociology has influenced the rediscovery of classical thought such as that of Max Weber and Karl Polanyi. A great deal of work has therefore been done on elaborating the logic and tools of sociological explanations connected to heterodox economic theory and the European classics, first and foremost Max Weber. Like institutional theories, network concepts (Hollstein, 2012; Mützel, 2017) have also gained considerable traction in sociology and inspired studies on markets, firms, and regions (see section 3). Moving beyond market studies, a few economic sociologists, in parallel to new economic institutionalists, have started to explore the question of when and why networks or hierarchical organizations can be expected to arise in the economic sphere instead of or in addition to markets. These sociologists have widened the notion of social embeddedness by considering markets as an alternative mode of social coordination to hierarchy, network, and others. Some have even claimed that cognitive and normative factors frame the economy and are important for explaining economic outcomes.

At the end of the 20th century, more and more scholars turned to theories focusing on ideas and beliefs as causal factors and on practices and routines as relevant action patterns. Some have drawn on French traditions, such as the concept of fields by Pierre Bourdieu (e.g., Florian and Hillebrandt, 2006) or the notions of “valuing” and

“judging” by Luc Boltanski, Laurent Thevenot, or Lucien Karpik (e.g., Diaz-Bone, 2011) in order to emphasize meaning as a relevant factor in the economy. Processes of legitimizing, valuating, or judging are taken into account to identify processes that make the world understandable and help individuals define orders. Recently, this has led some economic sociologists to focus on symbols and rituals as well as on ideologies and fictional expectations (see section 4). Another branch focusing on subjective interpretations and collective beliefs has emphasized knowledge, especially scientific knowledge, as an important part of economic life. Scholars in this line of research have demonstrated that markets are built according to the blueprint laid out in economic theories or at least their design is influenced by economic theory. Such performativity is mainly explored within the framework of the sociology of knowledge and has mostly been studied in regard to the financial system, following the writings of Jon McKenzie, Karin Knorr, Alex Preda, and others (see Maeße and Sparsam, 2017).

More recently, under the umbrella of convention theory, shared ideas, collective experiences, and, most of all, habitualized practices have entered the scene. This line of research sheds particular light on collective belief systems that are expressed in symbols, conventions, or rituals and give rise to normally unquestioned routines and practices that people become aware of and contest only in situations of conflict. This highlights cultural factors in markets that bring forth action patterns that are neither driven by conscious nor rational decisions on the part of individuals. This understanding has led to studies that explore especially how beliefs frame individual action and, in so doing, influence market exchange as well as entrepreneurial action (e.g., the degree to which entrepreneurs assume social responsibility; Hiß, 2006). In a wider perspective, this includes how we think and talk about the economy (see Maeße and Sparsam, 2017) and how we evaluate markets, firms, money, and production as well as theories, models, and so forth. In this sense, social movements and social groups become important for the analysis of economic institutions as a basis for their social evaluation (see van Aaken and Schreck, 2015; Koos, 2016). Such work has led to cognitive factors and normative beliefs gaining more attention and has changed the direction of research. A consequence of this reorientation is, above all, that the former question of how social factors facilitate market exchange is fading to some degree. Moreover, the revival of economic sociology in German-speaking countries has attracted new approaches that are likely to weaken the concept of social embeddedness, which was at the heart of new economic sociology at the end of the 20th century. In the meantime, it seems that economic sociologists are moving in different directions. Some are advancing the initial program. Others are introducing new goals, perspectives, and concepts, some of which are reconsidering classical European lines of thought.

To sum up, economic sociology was successfully reinvented and expanded in German-speaking countries after a long pause since the late 20th century. However, it is now turning in new directions by going back to the European classics and by adopting a broader view of social factors.

3 Recent Empirical Studies on Markets

The main concern of economic sociology over the last 30 years has been sociological studies of markets. The notion of social embeddedness had helped economic sociologists to conceptualize social factors as a way of reducing uncertainty and to study them empirically in modern economies. German-speaking scholars in particular developed the idea of markets being *socially structured* and constituted in social processes. Early on, this led them to investigate the social factors and mechanisms that emerge and play a role in markets. The notion of social embeddedness inspired new lines of sociological thinking by asking why particular social factors influence economic action and relations. Sociological approaches have addressed networks and institutions as frameworks that enable and restrict individual action in the economic sphere by defining the situations under which individuals must act along with the governance systems that link banks, firms, and related organizations (Häußling, SOCIAL NETWORKS, this volume).

Studies on markets still remain an inspiring field of research and continue to provide new empirical knowledge. In German-speaking countries, sociological studies on markets almost always deal with special goods such as art, science, religion, love, or fashion and particular social structures such as winner-takes-all markets (for an overview, see Maurer, 2017). Economic sociologists have begun to use the notion of special goods to highlight the fact that certain things cannot be priced yet still become a commodity, thus constituting special market structures. The question then is how the assumed and socially valued qualities of these goods shape the structures of these markets and how they function. Whereas sociology in general has lost sight of art as a topic, economic sociologists have been quite successful in analyzing markets for art and artists. Markets for art, wine, religion, and other special goods are analyzed as a system of social *reputation* that helps buyers and sellers value singular goods (Beckert and Rössel, 2004; Stolz, 2006). A particular strand of sociological studies on markets for special goods has explored the phenomenon of bestsellers by applying the idea of winner-takes-all markets developed by economists (Keuschnigg, 2012).

Furthermore, a rather new and rapidly developing research area deals with markets based on social reputation systems. For example, e-markets are described by some researchers as a cooperation dilemma in need of a system of social reciprocity, trust, and control. Andreas Diekmann, especially, as well as others have begun experiments that provide empirical evidence for understanding the rise and functioning of norms and reciprocity in auctions within e-markets and the signals, symbols, and so on involved therein (e.g., Diekmann and Przepiorka, 2017). These scholars argue that in e-markets sellers are highly motivated to invest in social reputation because of the expected returns. On this basis, reputation building leads to an increase in cooperation and a decrease in cheating in e-markets. Not surprisingly, the results of these rational-choice-inspired experiments are not so different from what new economic sociologists found in empirical analyses of markets for special goods, such as

wine markets, where greater social reputation leads to an increase in market activities and prices (Beckert and Rössel, 2004). Lately, German-speaking economic sociologists have been conducting studies on markets by trying to reflect real-world conditions better than economists. These studies examine a variety of rather different markets empirically while exploring different factors and finding different market structures. Although they offer insights into particular markets, such as the market for art, they are not well connected and lack an integrating sociological perspective. If economic sociology wants to keep up with economic theory, it would need to take the next step and develop a way to synthesize its theoretical and empirical findings.

As German-speaking economic sociologists have been focusing on markets, influenced by the concept of social embeddedness, they have largely ignored organizational forms such as the hierarchical firm (Offe, 2000; Wiesenthal, 2018) or alternative forms of organizing the economy such as community-based production, money, and distribution. Slowly they are starting to describe and analyze the economy as a complex institutional setting that consists of different institutional forms and is characterized by various interrelationships between economic and social institutions. Only once economic sociology adopts such an institutional perspective can it account for the emergence of new forms such as “social entrepreneurs,” “ethnic economies,” or “alternative forms of production” and their moral foundations. This would allow it to ask how economic and social forms change (see Weber, 1922/1978) and to compare different economic forms. Yet these questions are the ones most worth thinking about in the future.

4 New Lines of Research

Once economic sociology had been rebuilt, German-speaking sociologists started working on a broader view of the economy. By focusing more on societal aspects and developments, they began to reconsider the classics and detect the interrelationships between economy and society (Schimank, *SOCIETY*, this volume). This recent research has produced some inspiring insights that have given rise to new lines of thought.

One new line of thought revives traditions such as *market criticism* in the vein of (neo-)Marxism, political economy and socio-economics, or social philosophy, all of which highlight the limits and failures of markets from an ethical or normative point of view (van Aaken and Schreck, 2015). There are also some general sociological theories, such as systems theory, that emphasize changes in the logic of subsystems or structures and the increasing dominance of the economic logic. Uwe Schimank and Ute Volkmann have conducted promising sociological analyses of marketization processes in non-economic spheres (especially in publishing houses, the health system, and universities) on the basis of Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory and Pierre Bourdieu’s field concept (Schimank and Volkmann, 2017). They have traced the workings of economic criteria in subsystems that were formerly governed by other criteria, such as truth in science, aesthetics in the arts, or ethics in social groups, and

provided empirical evidence of the prevalence of the logic of competition, cost-benefit calculation, and profit orientation at the level of individuals, organizations, and society. These empirical studies on marketization proceed by comparing the degree of profit orientation or cost-benefit calculation in different societies, regions, or branches and by developing a typology of different degrees of economization. This enables researchers to analyze the extent to which subsystems or fields of modern society have been economized and to provide empirical evidence of the increase—less so the decrease—in the prevalence of economic principles in the fields under study over the last 20 years. Sociological studies of marketization reject the all-encompassing efficiency paradigm of markets in economic theory by arguing that market coordination gives rise to social and cultural costs that might weigh more strongly than their economic effects. Most of all, patterns of social stratification and social conflict, like inequality within and between societies, are considered one of the most important side effects of the modern capitalist market system (Berger, 2019). (Otte/Boehle/Kunißen, *SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—EMPIRICAL FOCUS*, this volume) Furthermore, processes of marketization are seen as a force that erodes norms and collective values, thus leading to changes in the patterns of social coordination. What is missing is a theoretical explanation of why which agents or factors cause which processes of economization or marketization. It remains an open question whether and how social forces influence the economic sphere—for instance, in matters of corporate social responsibility, business ethics, and similar—thus bringing in questions of legitimacy and social stability (Hahn and Kliemt, 2017).

The second new line of research deals with informal markets and alternative forms of production and consumption. Similar to early studies on ethnic groups or social groups that integrate around shared values and norms (Portes, 1995), which have always shown the ability of particular groups to establish systems of trust (a case in point being “rotating credit associations”), German-speaking economic sociologists have begun to analyze informal markets and alternative modes of production such as community-based production or ethnic entrepreneurship. Whereas informal markets have long been seen as part of traditional economies or utopian thinking, nowadays sociologists consider them to be a new institutional form that is based on particular social and cultural patterns that help facilitate a modern economy. A recently edited book by Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer (2016), two cultural scientists from Austria, gives attention to informal ways of organizing production and distribution as a sphere distinct from the official economy. The contributions in this volume outline the importance of informal markets and economies for non-privileged groups and developing countries and regions. They show how social relations and social mechanisms support economic activities when formal markets fail, or do not exist, because of a lack of reliable property rights, contracts, or even secure spaces such as marketplaces. In these circumstances, night and barter markets, hipster or underground markets emerge alongside or even replace official markets. These alternative forms of production and consumption are currently being studied as types of “ethnic economy,” “solidary forms of production,” or “green economy.” Although informal eco-

conomic institutions are a well-known phenomenon in the history of the Western world (Polanyi, 1979), they have neither been a topic of economic sociology nor of sociology in general in recent years. Nevertheless, present-day economic sociology has (re-)discovered them as an important subject of sociological inquiry, and economic sociologists are well equipped with the tools to shed light on them, thereby adding new insights to our understanding of the modern economy.

A third new line of interest arose after the economic crises of 2007–08 when German-speaking economic sociologists rediscovered capitalism and especially the role of financial markets and financial devices in capitalist economies. An increasing number of studies have been conducted since then on the positive and negative effects of modern capitalism (Berger, 2014; Kocka, 2013) and its tendency to collapse from time to time, engendering global crises. Collections such as *Finanzmarkt-Kapitalismus (Financial Capitalism)* edited by Paul Windolf (2005) or *Geld und Krise (Money and Crisis)* edited by Klaus Kraemer and Sebastian Nessel (2015) discuss the newly risen importance of shareholder value and financial logics as causes of the crises at the beginning of the 21st century. Particularly the early collection by Windolf draws attention to the governance structures of firms and the interrelationships between the productive and the financial sectors. The central thesis is that financial markets work as a control system within firms that is influenced by the dynamics and logic of invested capital. The later book by Kraemer and Nessel highlights the bubbles and breakdowns that come with capital markets and profit maximization. Overall, this work zeroes in on the transformation of social relationships, especially between banks and firms, managers and employees, as well as shareholders and stockholders (Beyer, 2002), and the dominance of new governance regimes driven by the logic of investment capital.

Particularly after the international crises in 2007–08, economic sociologists started to analyze certain financial devices and look at the political governance of globalized financial markets and the ability of political institutions to overcome such crises (see Mayntz, 2016). Money has been rediscovered as a social tool and a manifestation of capitalistic thinking and acting. To regain a general perspective on what money means to modern societies (for a classical attempt, see Max Weber, 1923/2013), German-speaking scholars have focused on the writings of Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, and others. Christoph Deutschmann (2001) has adopted the notion of “fetishism” to highlight the power of money when it comes to transforming complexity. In his prize-winning book *Imagined Futures*, Jens Beckert (2016) has conceptualized the idea of “imaginaries” that actors develop about the future and which influence their decisions when investing. Such “fictional expectations” can be empirically explored to gain a better understanding of the ways collective belief systems shape the economy. Beckert himself asks specifically what financial devices and imagined profits mean in today’s economy.

5 Concluding Remarks: Economic Sociology at a Crossroads

This paper has asked what makes German-language economic sociology special compared to the core program of new economic sociology in the US and what lies ahead of economic sociology in general, which has now become an international project. The article has explored old and new theoretical lines in economic sociology and marked important theoretical and empirical trajectories. It does not claim to be an exhaustive overview of all that is happening in the field but has sought to explore central lines of development in German economic sociology.

Three major trends were identified. First, the revival of economic sociology in German-speaking countries was initially inspired by new economic sociology in the US but has been developing and finding its own identity since then. Moreover, new lines of thought have been shaping economic sociology in Germany and all over Europe and are making it a bit different from its US counterpart. As a result, European as well as German economic sociologists might have more influence on the development of economic sociology in the future.

Second, the performance of economic sociology in German-speaking countries can be understood only by considering its complex process of development. Its initial development based on its roots in classical European thought was interrupted by political events in the 1930s, and it was US sociology that inspired its revival in the 1970s and 1980s (see Granovetter, 1990; Coleman, 1994). In this article, I have interpreted the restoration of a sociological perspective on the modern economy in German-speaking countries under the umbrella of new economic sociology as a result of new developments in sociological thinking. Criticisms of standard economic and sociological theory for failing to take social relations and institutions into account led to action-based explanations that explain economic phenomena as outcomes of individual action. In this sense, German-language economic sociology was an offshoot of new economic sociology in the US for a long time, but German-speaking sociologists have also been important contributors to the international macro-micro debate. Taking the classical roots, the interruption, and the reinvention in the 1980s into account, the overview presented here highlights that German-speaking economic sociologists have been influenced by new economic sociology in the US but have been reconsidering European classical thinking and incorporating the insights into their work and thereby also inspiring the international discussion. The scientific and political past has shaped the form and development of economic sociology in Germany and Europe.

Third, this article has discussed that economic sociologists have been working in line with the core program of new economic sociology for a long time and have contributed to strengthening the profile of economic sociology, mainly by doing empirical studies on markets and by developing action-based explanations. German-speaking economic sociologists have not only conducted studies on markets but have

also investigated the ways social factors support market exchange, facilitate markets for special goods, or constitute alternative modes of production. By offering theses on why and how institutions, beliefs, networks, and so forth improve market exchange and economic outcomes in general, they have supplied economic sociology with new concepts. Similar to the US, economic sociology in German-speaking countries was institutionalized in a short time by publishing handbooks, collections, series, and journal articles; by creating an economic sociology section within the German Sociological Association and scholars getting involved in international associations; and by creating institutions focused on economic issues particularly from a sociological perspective.

The reinvention and development of economic sociology in Germany, as well as all over Europe and the US, was a great success. Nevertheless, it seems that new economic sociology has come to a crossroads. While the core program has been applied to different topics over the past few years, influential newcomers from different contexts have entered the research field. Some of the newcomers have expanded the focus on which social factors matter for economic action and have emphasized the role of collective ideas and social structure. This raises the question of what the outcome will be if red and blue threads are woven into the initial white of the new-economic-sociology fabric. Can we expect the theoretical strands described above to enhance the core program of new economic sociology or will they weaken it? If we want to further advance economic sociology, we need to start thinking about how to theorize and synthesize the core concept of “social embeddedness” and how to sharpen the sociological focus on economic action and structure by means of more general action-oriented sociological models. In this sense, economic sociology in German-speaking countries has taken some important steps since its reinvention and could contribute successfully to further developing the core program in the future.

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Education and Socialization

Matthias Grundmann

Abstract: Education and socialization both refer to processes of intra- and intergenerational transmission of knowledge and practices. In line with Parsons, German-speaking sociology tends to think of education—as a secondary mode of socialization—in terms of an institutional arrangement that imparts universal competence and knowledge. Consequently, educational research in German-speaking countries concentrates on the analysis of educational school systems. Socialization research, by contrast, tends to focus on all those processes that are embedded in the relationships that make up the lifeworld. These relationships are also constitutive of education, which builds on socialization. This review of the German-speaking research in the sociology of education and the sociology of socialization follows this division. What becomes apparent is that socialization research is fundamental for a deep understanding of the social constitution of education and the construction of social inequality.

Keywords: Education, socialization, development, social construction, macro-micro-sociology

1 Introduction

Education and *socialization* are two terms that address, each in specific ways, processes of the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Education is mainly used to describe differential educational programs in institutional arrangements and the resultant opportunities for educational attainment. Socialization, on the other hand, refers to those primary social experiences that are inherent to intergenerational social relationships. From this perspective, socialization precedes all education. Parsons (1964) of course distinguished between primary and secondary socialization. This differentiation is still useful in addressing the relationship between socialization and education, as is the objective of this article. While primary socialization takes place in particular, lifeworldly reference groups, secondary socialization refers to institutionalized and hence socially regulated agents of socialization, such as schools. The universalistic educational aspirations pursued by the latter thus always build on the primary processes of socialization occurring in the former. This distinction enables us to describe the respective fields of research in education and socialization research as mutually intertwined, intergenerationally transmitted processes of generating understanding and knowledge that are, however, embedded in different—lifeworldly or systemic—contexts. In both cases, it is also important to note how these differential

Note: All quotes from German sources have been translated by Andrea Tönjes.

socialization processes are influenced by living conditions related to social background. A key feature of education and socialization research is thus that it provides findings that are crucial to the analysis of social inequalities.

When we consider both national and international education research against this backdrop, the first observation is that the sociology of education, with its dominant focus on quantitative analyses of education systems and their inequality-generating structures, primarily centers on the analysis of institutionalized educational arrangements and structures and their significance for social change. This also involves recognizing life-course-specific opportunity structures that enable individual actors to position themselves within a system of social inequality (Otte/Boehle/Kunißen, *SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—EMPIRICAL FOCUS*, this volume). Socialization research, by contrast, highlights the underlying social relationships that are rooted in lifeworlds and play a significant role in developing agency in general. This field of research thus focuses on analyzing processes of child-rearing and on the individual as well as socio-cultural generation of knowledge. This “division of labor” between education and socialization research is also due to the fact that drawing a clear-cut distinction between socialization and education is virtually impossible. Primary and secondary processes of socialization are far too intertwined and play a much too significant role in understanding social processes of education.

The present overview of the current state of education and socialization research in German-speaking countries thus focuses, first of all, on mainstream research in the sociology of education, which places its analytical emphasis on school-based education and mainly inquires into secondary processes of socialization (2). This overview will serve as our point of departure to show how socialization research contributes to a more in-depth analysis of educational processes rooted in the lifeworld and to outline how socialization and education research benefit from each other (3). What becomes evident is that socialization research in particular extends beyond the narrow focus of empirical education research to address those “educational processes” that precede any form of organized education provided by society. This leads to a holistic, anthropologically grounded understanding of education (4), and German-speaking socialization research contributes key arguments to the international professional debate on this issue.

2 Education as Institutionalized (Secondary) Socialization

There is consensus in empirical education research that educational processes in modern societies can be described as secondary processes of socialization, especially when we look at the institutional arrangements in which they take place (Brooks, McCormack and Bhopal, 2013). In this vein, mainstream research in the sociology of education focuses on school as an agent of socialization. This holds true both for

German-speaking countries and internationally. This research focus coincides with the specification of what constitutes the substance of the discipline as laid out in the ASA journal *Sociology of Education*. The journal views itself as a “forum for [...] research that examines how social institutions and individuals’ experiences within these institutions affect educational processes and social development” (<https://journals.sagepub.com/home/soe>, 10.08.2018). This moves social systems of education into the spotlight of sociology-of-education research. It examines how education is anchored in its respective national contexts and structural-functionally embedded within the system of social inequality. This is why analyses of school-based education account for the bulk of publications in the sociology of education, both in the national and international research discourse (see, e.g., the *Handbook of the Sociology of Education*, Hallinan, 2006). German-speaking education research has contributed considerably to the international debate in this respect, not least because the German education system has been a model for the global expansion of school-based educational arrangements.

International assessments of educational attainment, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, can be seen as a reference and anchor point for German-speaking education research to connect with the international research discourse (Maaz, Baumert and Neumann, 2014). The significance of the PISA study for international empirical education research has been underlined time and again, while it has also been emphasized that research demonstrating that educational success in Germany depends on social background has provided important stimuli for international education research as well. Particularly important in this respect are the traditional structures of Germany’s education system, such as the three-tier system of secondary schooling (*Hauptschule*, *Realschule*, *Gymnasium*)¹ and the two forms of post-secondary education, its dual system of vocational education and training and higher education. They have served as a blueprint for many other national education systems. At the same time, the German education system is marked by early selection based on academic achievement (after primary school), which is decisive for the strong persistence of educational inequality, which has been corroborated by many national and international studies. We thus encounter an ideal field for sociological education research, a field that has the status of a historical model and is also well suited to a detailed analysis of the selection dynamics, especially regarding the logics of producing and reproducing educational opportunities associated with specific social backgrounds and how these logics are anchored in educational policy. That is why much of the German-speaking literature in the sociology of education can be characterized by keywords such as educational expansion, educational mobility, educational privileges, and institutionalized inequalities. This research focus ties in with the international debate as described by Apple (2010), for

¹ In the German system, *Hauptschule* is the lower track of upper secondary education, *Realschule* the intermediate track, and *Gymnasium* the advanced track that qualifies for higher education.

example. All these studies analyze—and sometimes criticize—the education system and its political logic of reproduction, which is primarily governed by meritocratic principles. This criticism of a technocratic approach to education becomes obvious in Hartong's book (2012) *Basiskompetenz statt Bildung? (Basic Competence Instead of Education?)* on fostering basic competence instead of inculcating education, which shows how PISA changed the German school system. The PISA study was meant to measure students' actual basic competences and hence their educational potentials in an empirically meaningful way to facilitate international comparison. However, it also brought to light the massive institutional logics of governance and reproduction inherent in those educational careers, suggesting that the proper social background matters more than competence—which also exposes the principles by which the state evaluates educational success. What PISA has demonstrated is therefore the functional appropriation of education by politics and the economy. This approach thus addresses issues such as social and educational policy programs, issues of justice and sub-cultural educational needs (for instance, for the promotion of lifelong learning) but also opportunities for the commodification of education. An example of such a nuanced view of education as a functional instrument of governance is the volume *Bildung und Klassenbildung (Education and Class Formation)*, edited by Müller and Reitz (2015). In addition to discussing the paradigms in inequality research that are relevant from a sociology-of-education perspective, the book identifies the fault lines of current education policies and ideologies and critically examines the opportunities for social advancement via higher education.

The volume *Die Organisation von Bildung. Soziologische Analysen zur Schule, Berufsbildung, Hochschule und Weiterbildung (Organizing Education. Sociological Analyses on School, Vocational Training, Higher Education, and Professional Development)*, edited by Leemann et al. (2016), also provides a good overview of empirical research in the sociology of education that has been emerging in German-speaking countries along these lines. The fields of study presented in this book show that the German-speaking research literature offers a contemporary analysis of education systems, organizations, and structures as well as of the related ways of regulating and channeling different segments of the population. This invariably involves issues regarding the social development of the respective state-organized education systems and, consequently, of the different educational opportunities and opportunity structures associated therewith. Empirical research in particular has provided us with numerous publications on these issues, all of which document the great importance of education for social status, personal development, and the realization of life chances. They all confirm that education is of tremendous significance for generating inequalities and thus a key instrument in allocating and distributing social status in highly differentiated modern societies. In many ways, they also highlight the various theoretical approaches to society and inequality (e.g., by Boudon, Coleman, Bourdieu) on which the sociology of education draws—across all ideological and methodological differences that inform it otherwise. This work also connects with the international

state of research and discussion, as documented by Sadovnik and Apple (2007), for instance.

Most of these publications, however, adhere to a macro-sociological—and thus quantitative—analysis of education, even though they take into consideration processes of acquiring education that occur on different levels of action as well as processes of the inter- and intragenerational transmission and transformation of practical knowledge. The volume *Education as a Lifelong Process. The German National Educational Panel Study*, edited by Blossfeld, Roßbach, and von Maurice (2011), is an instructive example that illustrates the German-speaking contribution to international education research in a particularly impressive manner. Here we find a detailed analysis of the societal significance of education, both with regard to social change and as an intergenerational transmission belt for individual conducts of life in highly differentiated modern societies. In short, with some minor exceptions, nearly all pertinent German-language publications in the sociology of education conceive of education as a dimension of inequality that determines opportunities in life. These publications are marked by a detailed analysis of macrostructural “determinants” of education as a powerful human resource, which is arguably subject to social change, and this change needs to be documented.

Most German-language publications on education thus refer to a sociology of education that expands its horizon of knowledge by focusing on education’s potential to transform society. They illustrate that sociological research on education is also distinguished by its critical reflections on the social embeddedness of school-based education and the associated economic and political impact on the conduct of life, employment, career prospects, leisure activities, and media consumption and design. The probably most comprehensive volume presenting such a nuanced perspective on “educational processes” in German-speaking countries has been published by Maaser and Walther (2011). This book describes education as a process of practical appropriation and modification of the world, of developing craftsmanship as well as scientific understanding, of transmitting culturally generated stocks of knowledge, of perception and imagination, and as a highly diversified process in which different individual and social actors appropriate and shape differential living conditions. A similarly broad approach to the sociology of education also characterizes publications on the theory of education that emphasize the social significance of education and its influence on social change. One example of this is the volume *Recht auf Bildung (Right to Education)*, edited by Overwien and Prengel (2007), which also addresses the historical anchoring of education as a human right. It brings to the forefront issues such as the societal appreciation and recognition of education as well as questions of power within and by means of education. Several studies also discuss the implications of education for politics and social theory. These include, for instance, *Wissenschaft oder Dummheit? Über die Zerstörung von Rationalität in den Bildungsinstitutionen (Science or Ignorance? On Destroying Rationality in Educational Institutions)* by Demirovic (2015) or the collection *Bildung MACHT Gesellschaft (Education POWER(S) Society)*, edited by Sandoval et al. (2011). They pick up on the international discourse on ed-

ucation as compiled in Apple's (2010) *The Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Education* or Brooks, McCormack, and Bhopal's (2013) *Contemporary Debates in the Sociology of Education*.

3 Education as a Socialization Practice

All of the aforementioned publications share an approach to education that perceives it as being socially anchored in secondary entities of socialization, that is, in educational organizations and institutionalized educational arrangements. What they fail to consider is sociocultural and therefore milieu-specific processes of education. This provides the point of departure for socialization research with a focus on social stratification, and especially on the interplay between education in lifeworldly and institutional contexts. This line of research conceptualizes socialization and education as a mutually fruitful configuration of lifeworldly experience and school requirements. In this way, the sociogenesis of education can be reconstructed as the socially embedded development of knowledge, understanding, and skills (Grundmann, Steinhoff, and Edelstein, 2011; Grundmann and Steinhoff, 2014). This sheds light on the anthropological foundations of how humans generate knowledge and action, that is, on cultural practices of education that emerge as a result of socialization through human relations. From these foundations then derive the conceptions of and discourses on what people must learn, develop, and acquire in order to adequately position and realize themselves in highly differentiated societies. An illustrative example of this approach is the volume *Education, Welfare and the Capability Approach. A European Perspective*, edited by Otto and Ziegler (2010). Here the focus is on education as a resource for agency. This analytical perspective builds on the international state of research on agency and is also a characteristic feature of education research that draws on Bourdieu's concept of habitus. The volume *Schülerhabitus. Theoretische und empirische Analysen zum Bourdieuschen Theorem der kulturellen Passung (Student Habitus. Theoretical and Empirical Analyses Based on Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Fit)*, edited by Helsper, Kramer, and Thiersch (2014), presents in detail how socialization and education can be conceived of as a more or less successful fit between background-specific and academic requirements that young people have to meet and reconcile. A particularly detailed account of this nexus between socialization and education is also provided in studies on educational intergenerational relationships (e.g., Helsper et al., 2009). They illustrate how socialization practices and education processes are transmitted within and between generations. Their findings are relevant to international research not least because they confirm the considerable degree to which these relationships of fit determine young people's educational and life orientations not only within but also outside the school setting. They are thus also particularly illustrative of the challenges and demands that youths have to come to terms with in postmodern sociality. An outstanding demonstration of such detailed socialization and education research is the volume *Teenies und ihre*

Peers. Freundschaftsgruppen, Bildungsverläufe und soziale Ungleichheit (Teens and Their Peers. Friendship Groups, Educational Careers, and Social Inequality), edited by Krüger, Köhler, and Zschach (2010). This is because it not only finds that differentiated education generates inequality, but its considerations along the lines of action and practice theory also bring into focus the specific educational careers and their significance for identity development among adolescents and young adults (and peers in general) as well as the segmented educational landscapes that are constitutive of the German education system. In short, this approach also addresses processes of educating and socializing oneself that take place in joint experience and action on and by means of specific educational occasions. The emerging trend is that of a sociology of education informed by a critical view of practice and culture, which also touches upon changes in life-course regimes and in the arenas of education and socialization as a result of multiple differentiation in postmodern and global society.

Such a broad approach to socialization research that takes into account social stratification increasingly also directs attention to the creative, post-pragmatic nuances that characterize educational programs, arrangements, ideas, paradigms, and—last but not least—individual actors' potential for action. What becomes evident here is that the secondary processes of socialization, and therefore the institutionalized processes of education, are to an ever greater degree marked by an orientation toward agency. This also involves a “practical turn” and thus prompts the following questions: What are the actual characteristics of socialization and education practices? And how do they materialize in a co-constructive manner? This perspective calls for a view of education and socialization processes informed by social theory. A book that stands out from the usual treatment of education is the volume *Bildungspraxis (Educational Practice)* by Alkemeyer, Kalthoff, and Rieger-Ladich (2015) as it conceptualizes education as a practice of cultivating bodies, spaces, and objects, and hence as a complex process involving the “educability” of human activities. What comes into focus is that education takes place in the form of a continuous appropriation of the world and attribution of meaning to the world as people relate to their (physical, spatial, and material) environment through performative as well as modifying acts. In this vein, socialization and education processes can be understood as incessant processes of reproducing and reshaping the living conditions that are encountered. In this context, the German-speaking research literature draws on recent approaches in social theory, for instance, actor-network theories and other relational action theories as well as on corresponding approaches that have hitherto rarely been tapped in these fields of research. These studies also tie in with the current international debate, as documented, in particular, by Apple (2010) in *The Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Education*. There we find the outlines of a sociology of education that critically scrutinizes social backgrounds, relations of power, and the development of social stocks of knowledge.

Such a socially critical sociology of education informed by practice and network theories illustrates that all education rests on underlying socialization (as acts of jointly performing and producing practices and power relations). This is because

socialization invariably involves the performative appropriation and attribution of experiential and living spaces that individuals not only preconceive in their minds but constantly create anew in interaction, thereby producing distinctive stocks of knowledge and discourses. The focus of education and socialization research is then geared toward the practical performance of joint physical activities with the purpose of joint action. This kind of socialization research shifts the focus to co-operative and co-constructive practices that are constitutive of socialization in general (Grundmann, 2018). Consequently, socialization and education can no longer be simply defined as primary and secondary processes. They take place simultaneously and are always interdependent, specifically by means of engaging in a collectively shared practice of the conduct of life and hence by jointly experiencing, exploring, and acquiring cultural techniques (including the intergenerational transmission of agency and knowledge). Socialization is then not primarily interpreted as a process of individuation or of adapting to given social conditions (as implied in the concept of “education”) but is rather conceptualized as an expression of the socially desirable development of personality and social practices that precedes all education and therefore must conform to the institutionalized educational requirements. This also marks a nexus between research on education and on socialization—which is the hallmark of German-speaking socialization research. Accordingly, most German-speaking studies on socialization pursue an analytical approach that considers social stratification and thus direct their attention, similar to education research, to different living conditions and individual dispositions along with their effects on individual (personality) development. The *Handbuch Sozialisationsforschung (Handbook Socialization Research)*, edited by Hurrelmann et al. (2015), provides a detailed overview of current socialization research and is unique in terms of its comprehensive discussion of the many facets of the issue. This volume compiles basic theoretical considerations on the social constitution and development of human interaction and relations that lay the groundwork for the entire field of education research. Education, we might say, represents a special case of socializing acts, the socio-cultural product of engaging in joint action by which humans adapt to and create similarity between one another both within and across generations. Socialization research therefore addresses those basic processes of transmission and social co-construction that precede all education.

4 Socialization as Social Cultivation

The described forms of differentiated and theory-based research on socialization and education, a characteristic feature of the German-speaking research landscape, is rarely found in the current international discourse—and if it is, then not in sociology but in psychology or education-science literature (e.g., Grusec and Hastings, 2007). One of the main reasons for this is that empirical—and for the most part quantitative—research in the sociology of education predominantly focuses on life-course structures and the individual conduct of life. While these studies, as outlined above,

trace in detail the likelihood of educational opportunities being passed on to the next generation as well as the various ways in which family resources and personal dispositions influence educational processes in different settings (cf. Settersten and Owens, 2002), they adhere to an analytical perspective that conceives of socialization as a process of attuning oneself to existing lifeworlds. This, however, also entails an analytical narrowing of education and socialization to processes of individual development by neglecting those constitutive social practices that only take shape in and through socialization processes. This is why German-speaking socialization theorists in particular discuss the grounding of sociality and social practice in and through socialization. From their perspective, this aspect hardly seems to matter anymore in international research discourse.

Current sociological socialization research in German-speaking countries expands this perspective by incorporating social and practice theories of the kind mentioned above. In addition to analyzing social imprinting and integration requirements from a global perspective, this research mainly centers on the processes that shape changing social relationships. In doing so, this approach addresses issues such as the development of practical knowledge and procedures, the individual development of competences and agency, the collective formation of values and of principles and guidelines for action, as well as of associated socio-cultural beliefs regarding gender relations, role arrangements, and identity and habitus formations. All of this is discussed along the lines of educational issues related to the family, religion, social mobility, or to the diversity and social differentiation of life courses. The entire set of questions is not only addressed with regard to the cognitive level but also in terms of emotions and feelings, bodies, media, networks, practices, and cultures. Good examples of this approach are King's (2002) *Die Entstehung des Neuen in der Adoleszenz. Individuation, Generativität und Geschlecht in modernisierten Gesellschaften* (*The Emergence of the New during Adolescence. Individuation, Generativity, and Gender in Modernized Societies*) and King and Flaake's (2005) book on male socialization, which also focuses on such processes of co-construction. Both books describe how the younger generations are faced with new demands and challenges as they are called upon both as individuals (individuation) and as generatively bound members of (same-gender) reference groups. These demands and challenges cannot simply be reduced to identity problems. It is rather that postmodern subjects are called upon to conquer their own worlds—worlds that can be established and eventually marketed as a “new culture.” What comes into focus here are not only the various institutional and non-institutional agents of socialization, such as school, family, and peers, but also educational discourses and materialities (e.g., computers, chat rooms, Internet forums) that are produced in socio-cultural (or technological) processes and act as agents of interaction, as it were. This, however, moves to the center of attention in sociological education research the processes by which changing conditions and agents of socialization shape and change social relationships. In this view, education becomes visible as a process of shaping social relationships and practices in coordinated action between co-present participants in which the latter develop a sense of

collectivity and shared identity. Recent approaches in childhood research that emphasize the proactive and autonomous influence of youths as educational actors (Kelle and Tervoren, 2008) refer to similar connotations of socialization practices as discursive products of the continuous need to invoke and shape references and conceptions of everyday action.

The German-language debate thus opens up to an interdisciplinary field of research that conceives of socialization and education processes as taking place in ongoing processes of living together, that is, as part of interaction, communication, and relationship practices that are a major factor in generating inequality. Here, too, current German-speaking socialization research connects with the international research debate, for instance, on how social inequality affects childhood (see Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods*, 2003).

Looking at the diverse and recurring gender and childhood practices from a constitution-theoretical (e.g., social constructivist) perspective also has consequences for what we define as the substance of socialization as human development. Socialization and education, then, can no longer simply be reduced to socially predetermined structural parameters to which individuals adapt and conform in childhood and adolescence. What becomes manifest instead is that socialization and education play a key role as theoretical foundations in social theories seeking to identify those social processes of co-construction by which childhood, adolescence, and gender are recurrently generated “anew” as a result of discursive dynamics. Tracing how imaginaries and actual opportunities for shaping the conduct of life mutually permeate each other draws our attention to basic processes of socialization as co-constructive cooperation and the co-constructive formation of cultural practices—over the whole life course. If we conceive of socialization and education processes as practical action performed in multiple and, in most cases, also highly diverse contexts, we gain an understanding of how they lead to the emergence of cultural practices that shape both material and immaterial living conditions. These practices are, as stated above, fundamental to the intra- and intergenerational generation and transmission as well as to the continuous advancement of understanding and stocks of knowledge. Given the international debate, a distinctive feature of German-speaking socialization research is precisely that it sheds light on these constitutive processes. Pertinent publications in this respect are, for instance, Wagner's (2004) two-volume work on structural socialization theory, Beer's (2007) epistemological considerations on socialization, Sutter's (2009) book on interactionist constructivism, or my own publications on socialization (e.g., Grundmann, 2006, 2018). They all share an approach that sees socialization as being constituted in an interactive process that generates knowledge and action by social reference to others. Socialization thus underpins those educational processes that are, in their specific historical form, the research object of the sociology of education as apparent in the aforementioned (macro-)structural analyses of education. These publications further demonstrate that socialization is not only crucial for the inter- and intragenerational transmission of practical or intellectual knowledge that is constitutive of educational processes. Socialization processes also

hold a creative potential that not only goes beyond the existing social conditions but actually prompts their change (e.g., through the dynamics of subjectification). Grounding educational processes in socialization theory in this way directs attention to the social-theoretical works in network and practice theory mentioned above.

Günter Dux's (2017) recent book *Die Evolution der humanen Lebensform als geistige Lebensform* (*The Evolution of the Human Form of Life as a Spiritual Form of Life*) offers what is perhaps the most comprehensive view on education that such a basic theoretical perspective might yield. According to Dux, human beings become “cultural beings” by engaging in the various activities that shape their lives. These activities find their differential expression in acting and thinking—specifically, in conceptions of the practices and structures of generating understanding and knowledge that are to be developed. Language is the medium for transmitting these conceptions within and between the generations. In the course of this, educational processes—in their onto-, socio-, and historiogenesis—interweave into a peculiar medium-based, cognitively processed form of generating knowledge, which, at the same time, has to stand the practical test of real life. We then refer to education as a process in which opinions are formed, family relations forged, communities built, and so on. This perspective conceives of education as a historical process of acquiring knowledge, but one that nevertheless must take place anew and thus form anew in every individual. The primary insight to be gained from theoretical publications of this kind is that they refer to a “constructive performance,” specific to the human species, that underlies all empirical manifestations of socialization and education (Grundmann, 2018). However, this understanding of education does not interpret education in a deterministic manner as being governed by a specific rationality underlying the conduct of life or by a social functional system. Instead, education is rather seen as the product of a recurring process of “relating to the world” by which humans jointly construct, appropriate, shape, vitalize, and develop their spheres of living as well as the material and immaterial features that characterize these spheres. This leads us to an interpretation of education as an expression of an evolutionary cultural performance that humans employ in their conduct of life to express themselves as cultural beings.

5 Conclusion

In the German-speaking and international literature alike, sociological education and socialization research, as outlined in this article, represents a highly differentiated field of study that seeks to trace the most diverse—including sub-cultural and intangible—meanings that constitute the substance of socialization as the basic, co-constructive mode of shaping social relationships and of education as the cultural, co-constructive, and practical shaping of living conditions. It brings to light the socialization practices and formation processes that lie beneath the layer of education provided in institutional settings. This perspective describes socialization and education as highly subtle, multi-faceted, and mutually fruitful performances with social,

lifeworldly, and practical implications for the individual and collective conduct of life. The sociology of education's traditional focus on institutional educational arrangements and organizations is significantly expanded by empirical socialization research with an emphasis on those constitutive primary educational processes that emerge in socialization-related interaction, in relationship practices, and in reaction to different agents of socialization. From the perspective of socialization and education theory, we might state in a nutshell that humans access the world through meaningful, cognitively and interactively transmitted conceptions and images of the state of the world and seek to realize themselves by shaping the latter in their own "image." The institutional design of education in modern societies subscribes to a narrow conception of education because it is content with the status quo of a differentiated sociality and ignores the question of how educational occasions in everyday life and educational processes in human interaction could give rise to alternative educational paths and opportunities that have not yet been disavowed by the structural-functional logics of utility. This vests research with significance that conceives of education as a cultural performance that must form again and again in acts of socialization and exposes the "blind spots" of a narrow approach to education research in general and to sociological education research in particular. What is being neglected is above all the socio-genetic processes of education that also disclose to us the kind of education that is possible when we describe education in terms of recurring acts of recognizing opportunities for shaping and appropriating the world. When looking at education from such a basic theoretical perspective, we can also discern the outlines of a sociological theory of socialization and education that acknowledges socialization and education as fundamental expressions of human cultural development, regardless of their different embeddedness in social structures. From this vantage, we can also challenge the structural-functional and, often enough, "inhumane" ways in which educational institutions convey education and show what alternative educational practices and processes might look like. "Alternative" refers to options other than the impositions of a hypertrophic sociality that reduces education to a piece of information and a resource instead of highlighting its potential to shape lives, not least also for mastering the challenges and demands of such a hypertrophic sociality on a global scale. This refers to a research desideratum that sociological socialization research should address: research that exposes the constitutive practices of social formation that precede education of any kind.

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Environment

Anita Engels

Abstract: This essay highlights some of the theoretical debates in German-language sociology, for instance, metamorphosis and emancipatory catastrophism, social ecology, and the politics of unsustainability. The macro perspective is complemented by approaches that draw on environmental behavior and real-world laboratories as a way to promote environmental transformations. Three prominent topics of recent years (energy transitions, climate change, and sustainability) are discussed at some length before the conclusion suggests that the specific contribution of sociology would lie in a sober and unsparing analysis of the complex societal preconditions for transformational changes, which would involve highlighting piecemeal, incremental, slow, and unplanned changes, unintended consequences, and the role of conflicts and tensions.

Keywords: Climate change, energy transitions, sustainability, crisis, conflict

1 Introduction: Environmental Crisis and Environmental Sociology

It is a well-researched phenomenon that the general public in Germany shows high environmental concern in opinion polls and other surveys. The state of the environment became a mainstream issue following the nuclear accident in Chernobyl in 1986 and has remained a surprisingly consistent concern among the German population throughout economic crises and in spite of our ongoing love for meat, cars, and air travel. Even so, German-language sociology has been relatively reluctant to fully embrace the ecological challenge. In recent years, some topics have gained moderate currency, such as the energy transition in Germany, climate change, and sustainability. The concept of risk (risk society, risk governance) has inspired many important contributions (e.g., Renn, 2017). In German-language sociology, Ulrich Beck was obviously the scholar who went furthest to develop an inclusive theory of risk in modern society, and his untimely death in early 2015 has left a yet unfilled void. Beyond that, many social theories “writ large” still thrive without perceiving the need to integrate society’s ecological relations or without taking into account the increasing pressure on material resources (Schimank, SOCIETY, this volume). Hartmut Rosa and Stephan Lessenich are among the few who have sought to acknowledge that current ecological changes, anthropogenic climate change in particular, might transform the very fabric of contemporary society.

Within environmental sociology, a huge diversity of approaches coexists. Useful overviews are presented in volumes by Brand (2014), Besio and Romano (2016), and Groß (2011). For a long time, environmental sociology has been preoccupied with a

number of paradigmatic debates, for instance, on the extent to which social theory must include the non-social (material, physical, ecological) or which position to adopt in the realist–constructivist debate. In light of these debates, no one wants to fall short of basic insights from science and technology studies (STS). Yet growing environmental pressures and the sense of “real” crisis defy any relativistic standpoint (Kraemer, 2008).

This essay will highlight some of the theoretical debates in German-language sociology as to which approach is most appropriate to develop the field of environmental sociology in the face of growing environmental crises, which might become the dominant field of conflict and dominant driving force for social change in the near future. This review essay is organized into five sections. It will start with Beck’s late work on the concepts of metamorphosis and emancipatory catastrophism, and how his work might be discussed in light of two other theoretical directions: social ecology and the politics of unsustainability (section 2). Section 3 will provide a selective overview of competing approaches to understand environmental behavior, followed by section 4, which will focus on the specificity of experiments, both in terms of unintended large-scale experiments outside the laboratory and in terms of new methodological ways to promote change through real-world laboratories. Section 5 will highlight the three topics that have received the most attention in recent years: energy transitions, climate change, and sustainability. The final section 6 will provide a brief outlook on the future of environmental sociology.

2 Is the World Metamorphosing, and How Can We Theorize about It?

The late Ulrich Beck left an unfinished book manuscript in which he tried to grasp the full consequences that global climate change will unleash on society. The manuscript was finalized by his wife and long-term co-author, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, as well as his two colleagues John Thompson and Albert Gröber. It appeared posthumously in 2015 as *The Metamorphosis of the World*. The book contains Beck’s conceptual and theoretical suggestions to understand and anticipate the changing modes of human existence and what these imply for political action and the fate of humanity. The term *metamorphosis* is meant to designate epochal changes and transformations of a new quality that bring about a different mode of being in the world, even a different mode of human existence. In a nutshell, the book suggests three interrelated hypotheses: First, the experience of global catastrophic events (e.g., the Chernobyl accident, the September 11 attacks, global climate change) equates to a violation of unwritten norms of human existence and civilization. Second, the anticipation of such types of catastrophes leads to an anthropological shock, which might, third, harbor the possibility of social catharsis. Beck’s analysis of these changes unfolds around the notion of positive side effects of bads, which create a new normative horizon of common

goods. Threats like climate change also contain the seeds of hope, especially as a new global horizon emerges: the experience of a worldwide failure to address these threats and the anticipation of global catastrophe can motivate and mobilize cosmopolitan spaces of action. Beck calls this possibility “emancipatory catastrophism,” but throughout the book he remains firm in keeping the outcome of these metamorphoses open and ambivalent: success is not guaranteed, but at least there is a chance of reinventing democracy along cosmopolitan lines. His account is neither pessimistic nor optimistic, but it highlights the significance of political decisions. The most important characteristics of the metamorphoses relate to the nation state and its polity, and how it is increasingly superimposed by emerging cosmopolitan risk communities. According to Beck, this has important implications for how to think about social change. He suggests switching the perspective from considering the United Nations as the central space of global action to “united cities” precisely because (united) nations are no longer the main driving force of change. Increasingly, the “world” is the new unit of communication—not as a willful act of choice on the part of politicians and citizens but as an unavoidable outcome of global connectedness. I will take this book as a starting point to discuss two different strands of literature that have gained prominence in the German-speaking sociological world, both of which have their roots in political science. In this discussion, I will look at Beck’s emancipatory catastrophism through the lens of the politics of unsustainability and at his assumption of a cosmopolitized physical reality of side effects and inseparable connections between physical and social processes through the lens of social ecology.

Let us start with the latter. Social ecology was adopted in Germany as a new approach in research in late 1987. Its institutional origin was in Frankfurt, with some historical roots in the Frankfurt school of critical theory, and the founders tried to combine this tradition of critical analysis of relations of power and authority with critical feminist approaches to gender relations and critical analyses of society’s relations to nature. In *Soziale Ökologie. Grundzüge einer Wissenschaft von den gesellschaftlichen Naturverhältnissen* (2006; *Social Ecology. Features of a Science of Societal Relationships with Nature*), Egon Becker and Thomas Jahn compiled a comprehensive volume on this influential school in Germany. It not only resulted in the creation of a research institute but also in the formulation of a framework program for research funding that has guided state-funded research programs on environmental problems since 2000. This school rejects the methodological dualism inherent in environmental sociology, which stays on the social side of things, so to speak, and looks at the physical environment if and in as much as it is included in societal discourses or other societal dynamics. Social ecology is the attempt to integrate the social and the ecological into one coherent framework that allows us to analyze how society and nature are mutually constitutive and how these interdependencies have entered into a permanent crisis mode. One could say that this school is the German reaction to Catton and Dunlap’s call for introducing the new environmental paradigm into sociology (Catton and Dunlap, 1978). The social-ecology approach is embedded in the history of science, the history of society, and the history of science–society relations.

Becker and Jahn's book develops the theoretical outlines of social ecology and describes its implications for research. At the core of this approach is a commitment to analyze individuals, society, and nature together and to focus on the crisis of these socio-ecological relations. This also demands a new research practice, one that is highly inter- and transdisciplinary and solution-oriented, with a basic topical reference to ecological crises and a basic theoretical reference to societal relationships with nature. The social-ecology approach has since inspired many research projects and publications.

If the social-ecology approach is used here to make suggestions on how to understand Beck's cosmopolitized reality, the *politics of unsustainability* are a way to look (with notable skepticism) at his hope for emancipatory catastrophism and the social catharsis that may result from it. Ingolfur Blühdorn, a political scientist and sociologist, combines his analysis of the changing democratic forms in Western consumer societies with social theories on subjectification and the ecological paradigm. He has spelled out this program in several articles, books, and collections, among them *Post-Ecologist Politics: Social Theory and the Abdication of the Ecologist Paradigm* (2000) and, in a very condensed version, *Nicht-Nachhaltigkeit auf der Suche nach einer politischen Form. Konturen der demokratischen Postwachstumsgesellschaft* (2018; *Non-Sustainability in Search of a New Political Form. Contours of a Democratic Post-Growth Society*). In the latter, his analysis begins with the marked loss of credibility of three narratives that have accompanied green movements over the past decades: that green growth continuously creates new jobs, that democratic capitalism (or specifically the German version of a social market economy) secures legitimate forms of wealth accumulation and redistribution, and that the emancipation of subjugated individuals will accord with ecologically sustainable forms of subjectification. In direct opposition to scholars who are normatively oriented towards transitions, transformations, and a sustainable post-growth vision, Blühdorn insists on an unsparing analysis of actual societal processes. He argues that an actual (but involuntary) post-growth society is currently unfolding, one in which growth can only be achieved at diminishing rates. At the same time, it becomes increasingly obvious that liberal democracies are in tight complicity with unsustainable consumption patterns exactly because they privilege personal liberties over collective programs. The authentic self is predominantly stabilized by short-term material satisfaction—the once-predicted broad embrace of post-material values is empirically nonexistent. Together with other systemic phenomena of democratic crisis (democracy produces increasingly precarious, marginalized ways of life at the bottom of the economic pyramid and, at the same time, skeptical reassessments of the merits of equal voting rights and inclusive political participation in the wealthy middle), current democratic forms reveal dysfunctionality in at least two interrelated ways: decreasing problem-solving capacities in the face of complex sustainability problems, and a diminishing guarantee of liberal self-fulfillment of the individual. As a result, we are witnessing a transformation towards a new democratic form that—under actual (not normatively desirable) post-growth conditions—actively

protects non-sustainable lifestyles and, in order to do so, creates sharp forms of exclusion while giving up on what was once the democratic promise of inclusion.

Metamorphosis, social ecology, and the politics of unsustainability are concepts that offer explanations of the changing relations between contemporary society and its “natural” environment. They all emphasize crises, and they try to capture macro processes. Complementary to this perspective, many sociological contributions focus on environmental behavior and offer competing explanations of individual behavior, a perspective to which we will now turn in the next section.

3 How Can Environmental Behavior Be Conceptualized?

Environmental behavior is a fascinating sociological puzzle, as we have to acknowledge the persistence of environmentally damaging behavior despite growing environmental awareness and concern. The macro level provides some insights into structural barriers, but what about the individual level? In the German-speaking sociological community, some authors have positioned themselves in the tradition of rational-choice explanations, albeit in a critical reformulation, whereas others have developed a differentiated set of contextual, habitual, cultural, and lifestyle approaches.

The critical refinement of rational-choice explanations was most prominently advanced by Andreas Diekmann and Peter Preisendörfer, who inquired into factors that might explain the inconsistencies between environmental attitudes and (reported) environmental behavior. In their already classical study (1992), the authors distinguished between high-cost and low-cost contexts of environmental behavior. In many cases, environmental behavior refers to collective goods. In a very basic rational-choice mindset, solutions to these problems of collective goods are difficult to achieve because individuals weigh their personal costs of contributing to collective goods against the anticipation that the effects of their contribution might be counterbalanced by others’ free-riding behavior or that their own contribution might even motivate free-riding behavior in others. Even if individuals were to score highly in terms of their pro-environmental attitudes or were to perceive themselves as being concerned about environmental issues, the theory would not expect these attitudes to overcome the collective-goods dilemma. However, Diekmann and Preisendörfer showed—initially through a large quantitative phone survey in Switzerland—that environmental attitudes provide some explanatory value for environmental behavior at least in low-cost situations (Diekmann and Preisendörfer, 1992). Drawing on a phone survey conducted in Germany a decade later, the same authors showed convincingly that comfort and convenience privilege short-term-oriented and context-specific forms of rationality (*Green and Greenback: The Behavioral Effects of Environmental Attitudes in Low-Cost and High-Cost Situations*, 2003). Diekmann and Preisendörfer emphasized

the general limits of attitude research and of rational-choice theory. In light of their findings, they developed a number of practical and policy-minded conclusions: As many environmental problems actually have a low-cost character, they maintain that it would still make sense to promote pro-environmental attitudes because “small contributions of many people would have substantial effects in aggregate” (ibid.: 467). They also suggest that political action might aim more systematically at transforming high-cost situations into low-cost ones to achieve more efficacy in environmental matters.

In another attempt to modify and broaden basic rational-choice frameworks, Ulf Liebe contributed an insightful experimental study on the willingness to pay for biodiversity protection in a nature-protection area in Northern Germany. This was published as a monograph titled *Zahlungsbereitschaft für kollektive Umweltgüter. Soziologische und ökonomische Analysen* (2007; *The Willingness to Pay for Collective Environmental Goods. Sociological and Economic Analyses*). Dealing with willingness to pay in sociological perspectives allows one to modify and broaden the economic framework of rational choice or the psychological framework of planned behavior. Liebe demonstrated that moral motivations do have considerable explanatory power. Some open questions in the economic framework can be answered much better if altruistic behavior, or other attitudes, are systematically included in the explanatory framework. Liebe also suggested that willingness to pay should not be conceptualized as a hypothetical payment for buying a share of a common good but as a hypothetical contribution to the common good. This would imply a conceptual shift in terms of conceiving of the actors not as buyers but as active contributors.

Whereas Liebe, Diekmann, and Preisendörfer sought to modify and broaden the economic or psychological models of environmental behavior as an outcome of choice or planning, many other authors have emphasized alternative explanations that focus more on routines, culture, structural context, and lifestyles. Blättel-Mink, for example, summarized her own and others' works on consumption, including sustainable consumption, by emphasizing that a perspective centered on the individual will always fall short in light of complex decision architectures that are the dynamic outcome of structures and institutions (Blättel-Mink, 2019).

Among these alternative explanations, practice theories have gained prominence in the German-speaking sociological community. As was proposed by Elizabeth Shove (2010), a practice view of “consumption” offers a much-improved understanding of the complexities of behavioral patterns, their stability over time, and the (extremely limited) options to incite behavioral changes through information, education, and moral obligation (Jaeger-Erben, 2010). The combination of practice and social-innovation theories has opened particularly insightful perspectives on how new forms of sustainable consumption emerge in society. In *Sustainable Consumption through Social Innovation: A Typology of Innovations for Sustainable Consumption Practices* (2015), Melanie Jaeger-Erben, Jana Rückert-John, and Martina Schäfer suggested that sustainable consumption practices are actively developed as social innovations by consumers themselves and that learning from these innovations might identify new

ways of promoting sustainable consumption and increasing their sustainability effects. Drawing on interviews and guided by a modified grounded-theory approach, the authors show the dynamics through which concrete social innovations in the field of sustainable consumption emerge from challenges or dissatisfaction with established practices, are tried out as alternatives (e.g., in niches), and then become stabilized. The examples they analyze vary across four dimensions: innovativeness, formality, communality, and personal engagement. The authors deduce a typology of five different forms of innovation: do-it-together, strategic consumption, sharing communities, do-it-yourself, and utility-enhancing consumption, each of which comes with a specific set of challenges and opportunities. The authors emphasize the importance of bottom-up innovation processes for larger-scale sustainability transformations, and they shift the focus away from specific actor groups to the processes of problematization, experimentation, and re-stabilization through which new practices can gain ground.

In contrast to this rather optimistic tone, Armin Grunwald clearly warns against the expectation that sustainable practices could have the necessary structural macro effects. In *Wider die Privatisierung der Nachhaltigkeit—Warum ökologisch korrekter Konsum die Umwelt nicht retten kann* (2010; *Against the Privatization of Sustainability—Why Ecologically Correct Consumption Will Not Save the Environment*), Grunwald argued that sustainability is the responsibility of the political system. Nonetheless, a standard observation is that wide-ranging expectations are attached to individuals' environmentally sound behavior, especially as consumers. They are held increasingly responsible for switching to sustainable consumption and sustainable lifestyles. However, according to Grunwald, this expectation is misleading for at least three reasons: First, for an assessment of how sustainable products really are, one would have to conduct complex life-cycle analyses. Consumers typically lack this information and are therefore unable to make informed choices between more or less sustainable product alternatives. Second, there is no direct link between individual acts of consumption and the systemic level, as many intermediary levels influence the cumulative effects in often unintended ways. Third, modern liberal statehood rests on the separation of public and private spheres, which forms a difficult framework for a moralization of private affairs and the instrumentalization of environmentally sound private consumption behavior to achieve the political goal of sustainability transformations. To transfer responsibility to the sphere of private consumers is thus simply an illusionary solution. Broadly speaking, environmental behavior, or behavior that aims to contribute to a more sustainable society, should be understood as a political act that shifts the focus from understanding consumer choices to analyzing political power relations. Here, the analysis of the preconditions for individual sustainable behavior intersect with the macro-level contributions discussed in the previous chapter.

In light of the obvious persistence and structural inertia of environmentally damaging societal forms and behavioral patterns, much attention has been given to experiments as a way out of the stalemate. This is the focus of next section.

4 How Can Real-World Laboratories Serve as Analytical and Practical Tools of Ecological Transformation?

Throughout the history of science, laboratory experiments have been developed as an important mode of doing research, developing theories, and innovating under controlled conditions. With the advent of our current knowledge society, however, the boundaries of the lab would seem to have opened up, and the experimental mode has become more generalized—both accidentally and deliberately. This expansion of the lab is often discussed together with ecological risks and with ecological transformations. Embedded in a macro analysis of the knowledge society, the authors Matthias Groß, Holger Hoffmann-Riem, and Wolfgang Krohn issued a book in which real-world experiments are portrayed as a new type of experimentation that serves as a novel response to the ubiquitous experience of (ecological) risks and non-knowledge: *Realexperimente. Ökologische Gestaltungsprozesse in der Wissensgesellschaft* (2005; *Real-World Experiments. Processes of Ecological Design in the Knowledge Society*). Especially in the context of highly complex ecological challenges, the concept of real-world experiments can be used to understand how the experimental mode of learning and innovating can create more robust solutions that can accommodate the unexpected. In four detailed case studies on ecological experiments (i.e., the ecological redesign of a peninsula, changes to cattle farming, ecological cleanup of a lake, and the installment of a new system of waste treatment), the authors demonstrate that this new experimental mode should not be seen as a second-best scientific approach compared to properly controlled lab experiments but instead as a promising mode to deal with growing complexities under conditions of systematic non-knowledge.

This analysis has been broadened in theoretical and conceptual terms and has also inspired regional and national programs of research funding in environmental and sustainability fields. In *Experimentelle Gesellschaft: Das Experiment als wissenschaftliches Dispositiv* (2017; *Experimental Society: The Experiment as a Dispositive of the Knowledge Society*), Stefan Bösch, Matthias Groß, and Wolfgang Krohn assembled fifteen contributions to spell out the experimental mode as an encompassing dispositive in the Foucauldian sense. The dispositive refers to material settings, ways of dealing with non-knowledge, learning environments, expectations toward new findings, forms of participation, conditions of legitimation and acceptance, the processing of results, and responses to errors and failures. The experimental dispositive maintains that privileging knowledge (or knowing) is replaced by privileging research (the generalized mode to deal with the new, the unknown, the surprises), and that society at large has switched to accepting an experimental mode.

Empirical examples of this are increasingly found in large and small cities across Germany. They call themselves urban labs, urban transformation labs, living laboratories, or similar and are increasingly promoted by state-funded research programs.

Felix Wagner and Armin Grunwald reflected on the paradoxical effects of the new requirements of real-world laboratories in their paper *Reallabore als Forschungs- und Transformationsinstrument. Die Quadratur des hermeneutischen Zirkels* (2015; *Real-World Laboratories. The Conundrum of Being an Instrument of Both Research and Societal Transition*). The dual goal of designing transformations and doing research on them at first glance promises to highlight new paths from knowledge to action. Their illustrative nature can promote participation, provide a source of inspiration, and generally support a culture of sustainability. Pioneers who are involved in them can gain an external perspective that might drive a more critical self-evaluation. Through their limited scope and at least partial reversibility, such interventions may be met with greater openness, can function as a space for system innovation, and can potentially be expected to be better received by civil society. However, Wagner and Grunwald listed a number of conceptual and practical problems in their paper. Considering some of these problems, they suggested the need for a more systematic reflection on the modes of governance in these projects, as they often involve complex constellations of various actors (see also Engels and Walz, 2018). They also advocated for a better epistemological foundation to this new experimental and transdisciplinary mode of research.

The experimental turn in German policy and in research funding will be an interesting future object of research with particular relevance in the field of ecological transformations. For readers interested in project presentations as well as more theoretical reflections on this new type of research, the journal *GAIA* is, incidentally, a very rich source of information and a platform for the German-speaking academic community that is interested in these issues.

5 How Does Sociology Contribute to Understanding the Most Pressing Environmental Challenges?

In close connection to public debates and academic developments within sociology, three topics have gained some prominence in research over the past decade and have attracted an increasing number of scholars in the German-speaking sociological community: anthropogenic climate change, the German energy transition (*Energiewende*), and sustainability.

Climate change

Anthropogenic climate change has gained some weight as a topic in the sociological community in recent years (Reusswig and Engels, 2018; Engels, 2016). While the topic often serves as the ultimate example of and reference point for global ecological crises, its repercussions have been detailed for a huge variety of societal fields (Besio and Romano, 2016).

One important aspect of the broader topic of climate change has always been the negotiations to achieve global agreements as well as questions of global governance. While many important contributions in this field have come from political science, which typically focuses on concepts such as power, hegemony, and interest formation, Stefan C. Aykut has taken a different approach and offered an innovative view on negotiations, climate politics, and governance (Aykut and Dahan, 2015). As a longtime observer of the global dynamics of climate negotiations, he analyzed in several collaborative projects how climate governance is produced. He and his colleagues call the process “schizophrenic,” because at the same time as ever more areas in society are being associated with climate change and are being drawn into negotiations accordingly, some areas have remained strictly dissociated from any such connection and excluded from negotiations. Global energy markets and world trade are two areas in particular that remain unconnected to climate change and ignored in the negotiation process, with wide-ranging effects on the possibility of moving towards a low-carbon society. In an edited volume, Stefan C. Aykut, Jean Foyer, and Edouard Morena present the outcomes of a collaborative ethnographic observation of COP 21 in Paris in 2015 (*Globalising the Climate. COP 21 and the Climatisation of Global Debates*, 2017). This particular conference, which led to the so-called Paris Agreement on Climate Change, has been assessed by many commentators as a breakthrough in climate-change negotiations and as having brought about a paradigm shift. The contributions in this book take a more distanced view on this latter assumption. Using a collaborative methodology, they look at the global negotiations through the lens of a transnational mega-event and suggest that COP 21 could be seen as a total event in which various discourses, practices, and actor networks came together to result in a “climatisation of the world” (ibid: 5). In his own contribution, Aykut looks particularly at the practice of negotiating (e.g., how the order of climate conferences is negotiated), including its specific choreography and rhythm. It is interesting to see not only how the social sides of the negotiations—with thousands of people coming together for up to two weeks, some of whom have become negotiation aficionados—play their part but also the very technicized process of the actual negotiations. Aykut concludes, first, that COP 21 was of singular symbolic importance as it created the impression that there is an international community in charge of global problems; second, that the process of producing a text together was of central importance, more so than the actual outcome of the text; and third, that the event really marked a shift from governance through rule-making to governance by signaling.

Energy transition

The energy transition in Germany is a long-term process that dates back to the early 1970s and envisions a gradual replacement of coal and nuclear energy with renewable energy sources, in particular wind, solar, and biomass (Neukirch, 2013; 2018). Germany as a case study has attracted considerable attention in international debates on energy transitions because it is an example of a wealthy economy with high techno-

logical production standards and strong technological innovation capacities, all of which are embedded in a fairly well-developed welfare state, but represents a country that lacks a clear renewable replacement domestically (there is neither an abundance of hydropower options, nor of sun for solar panels, nor of vast open landscapes for windfarms). On the basis of a broadly shared risk assessment and given the unavailability of storage sites for nuclear waste, a phase-out of nuclear energy was decided as early as 2000, and this commitment was renewed after the Fukushima accident in 2011. In the context of Germany's climate goals, the phase-out of coal production has been discussed with increasing frequency in recent years and is now being decided with an official phase-out date.

An earlier study by Rüdiger Mautz, Andreas Byzio, and Wolf Rosenbaum analyzed the different historical phases through the lens of the sociology of technology (*Auf dem Weg zur Energiewende: Die Entwicklung der Stromproduktion aus erneuerbaren Energien in Deutschland*, 2008 [*On the Path towards the Energy Transition: The Development of Energy Production from Renewable Energy Sources in Germany*]). According to the authors, the history of the energy transition unfolded in three phases. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, a utopian vision of a soft energy path emerged. This was characterized by a decentralized system of provisioning renewable energy. In the following decade, some funding programs were established and the first viable forms of implementing and institutionalizing decentralized systems of provision were created. The third phase was characterized in part by a successful continuation and even expansion of the path toward renewable energy. At the time the study was conducted, however, the authors identified two paradigms that were in direct opposition: the old, centralized, fossil-fuel- and nuclear-based oligopolistic energy world and the new, decentralized, renewable energy world. They emphasize that the difference between the two is not just in terms of technological options but that a transition from one to the other would also involve a massive socio-cultural paradigm shift. The authors recognize that the energy transition had gained ground to a degree that entire landscapes had been transformed by wind turbines in Northern Germany, millions of solar panels had been installed on rooftops in the sunnier parts of Germany, and agricultural bioenergy production sites had diffused throughout the country. They saw the German energy transition at a critical juncture in the mid-2000s at which the path would either continue towards decentralization or energy provision would be re-centralized and again dominated by the large economic players.

Complementary perspectives to such a broad and historical view can be found in detailed case studies on local energy-transition projects. Such case studies include the dissertation by Angela Pohlmann, published in English, titled *Situating Social Practices in Community Energy Projects: Three Case Studies about the Contextuality of Renewable Energy Production* (2018). After the 2011 accident at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima, Japan, the German *Energiewende* received a boost in support as an important national technological and cultural mega-project. Many local initiatives emerged and tested new forms of organization and new business models. Pohlmann's study analyzes civil engagement in the actual process of energy production for

heating. She develops an innovative version of practice theory in which Theodore Schatzki's thinking is combined with Adele Clarke's situational analysis. Pohlmann compares three case studies in which non-state actors tried to combine renewable energy and cultural projects, two of them in metropolitan settings in Germany and the third in a rural area in Scotland. The study shows how people make sense of energy in an open-ended negotiated process resulting in only temporary fixes and thus in a situation that is always susceptible to new instabilities. These insights are important contributions to our understanding of transformative processes on the local scale. Energy derives its meaning not directly from some set of material technological features but always in combination with complex arrangements of other elements. Community development, the political fight against large corporate actors, or cultural activities can all be enmeshed in the material settings of energy production, with widely varying outcomes.

Sustainability

While energy transitions offer one way to look at concrete socio-technical changes, the recent debates on the UN Sustainable Development Goals widen the view to account for the connectedness between all kinds of problem perspectives and normative dimensions—from the local to the global scale. But how can a normative concept such as sustainability serve as a starting point for theorizing about contemporary society? Sighard Neckel et al. recently presented a programmatic collection titled *Die Gesellschaft der Nachhaltigkeit. Umriss eines Forschungsprogramms* (2018; *The Sustainability Society. Outlines of a Research Program*). In their sociological perspective, sustainability is not employed as a normative guiding idea that motivates optimistic transformative research but rather as an analytical category that guides a problem-oriented and reflexive observation of ongoing processes that are full of contradictions, dilemmas, and paradoxical outcomes. As we apply this category, we should place special emphasis on new lines of conflict, new formations of societal inequality, and hierarchies along with (obviously) the tight connection with power relations. Sustainability is thus considered a contested category in society, and in order to fully grasp the depth of these conflicts and contestations, it is necessary to situate any analysis of sustainable society in the context of theories of capitalism, as these conflicts and contestations are expressions of a renewal of the capitalist economy under dramatically changing conditions. The leitmotif for these conflicts is how to secure the regenerativity of ecological, economic, social, and subjective resources that are necessary for the reproduction of central institutions and functional spheres of society and how to keep future opportunities for development open. The different contributions in this small volume offer a selection of interesting topics that will no doubt be covered in the coming years, ranging from financial markets, certificates and labels, and practices and artifacts to the analysis of sustainability as an endeavor geared towards transcaptialism.

With some overlap but less emphasis on the capitalist framework, Anna Henkel and colleagues have suggested a research program that includes modes of reflexive responses to the multiplicities inherent in thinking about and acting on sustainability in contemporary society. The establishment of a network among the German-speaking community was accompanied by publishing several programmatic articles, such as *Soziologie der Nachhaltigkeit. Herausforderungen und Perspektiven* (2017; *The Sociology of Sustainability. Challenges and Perspectives*). The creation of this network is a promising sign for a growing sociological engagement with the topic of sustainability based on deep theoretical foundations. It is exactly sociology's richness in different perspectives that enables an adequate reflexive mode vis-à-vis current ideas of sustainable development. In addition to environmental sociology, this reflection can draw from the sociology of knowledge and STS, as well as from the rich diverse theoretical traditions of critical theory, systems theory, practice theory, and the program of social-ecological research mentioned above.

By turning the often criticized multi-paradigmatic character of the sociological discipline into a virtue, Henkel et al. suggest five tentative approaches: a “doing sustainability” perspective that looks at practices of cooperation and mutual care, a field-theoretical analysis of knowledge regimes, research that proceeds from the changing role of science as a core institution of society, an approach of epistemic governance, and macro-theoretical reflection at the level of society. Many of these conceptual and theoretical debates are taking place in the recently founded German-language journal *Soziologie und Nachhaltigkeit—Beiträge zur sozial-ökologischen Transformationsforschung* (*Sociology and Sustainability—Contributions to Social-Ecological Transformation Research*).

6 Current Challenges

This essay has shown the extent to which “the environment” has become a topic in the German-speaking sociological community. The specific contribution of sociology to contemporary normative debates about necessary ecological transformations could be a sober and unsparing analysis of the complex societal preconditions for such changes. Sociology is well prepared for this task, as many authors are interested in social theory and a good theoretical understanding of societal macro processes, and many contributions are built on fundamental insights from STS and political sociology. This helps to keep an open eye on piecemeal, incremental, slow, and unplanned changes instead of just assuming sweeping coherent transformations towards sustainability goals. A sociological perspective will, moreover, always focus on unintended side effects and consequences of willful interventions, on ambivalences and tensions, and on conflicts as a central driving mode of social change.

The field also co-develops with societal debates on environmental crises. Enlivened by Fridays for Future and other recent social movements, the current political conflicts about the right approach to climate change call for a broad sociological

engagement, even though the German-speaking community has not yet achieved a state of saturated debate comparable to the United States (see Dunlap and Brulle, 2015). However, environmental policies seem to be once more at a critical juncture. Typical debates in Germany are centered around the question of costs and market-based pricing solutions. This pairs with a passive conception of “public acceptance.” In this specific situation, sociology can emphasize the productive role of conflicts and the need to combine passive acceptance with manifold options for active engagement (Aykut et al., 2019).

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Europe

Monika Eigmüller

Abstract: While 20 or 30 years ago there was very little agreement among German-speaking sociologists that Europe was a relevant subject of sociological inquiry, it has since become widely accepted that Europe matters. Not least the growing nationalism and Euroscepticism in many EU member states raise questions that are highly relevant to the sociology of Europe and clearly underline that meaningful discussion of the future of Europe must necessarily include the contribution of sociological scholarship. However, a review of the German-language sociology of Europe shows that for a long time it surprisingly had less of an international or European orientation but was rather classically influenced by German-language publications, which were little known abroad. This has changed only gradually over the past two decades, and even then only for parts of the field.

Keywords: Sociology of Europe, European public sphere, post-sovereign territoriality, European solidarity

1 Introduction

The topic of European integration has long been ignored in German-language sociology, having been seen as a marginal field in political science, law, and economics. As Maurizio Bach has noted, “For sociology, the integration of Europe has been as good as non-existent” (Bach, 2015: 599). But this could only be justified as long as the social consequences of the integration project—and their effects—were not too obvious, and as long as its sociological relevance remained more or less in the background.

It is thus not surprising that the first publications on the subject of the EU came out of political sociology (Bach, 1992; 1999; 2000; Lamla, *POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY*, this volume) or were published jointly with political scientists (e.g., Leibfried and Pierson, 1997). These studies were mainly written for sociologists who had an interest in political science and who dealt decisively with questions of political order and political action in the context of European integration. From the outset, sociological analysis of European integration has sought to position its own theoretical instruments so as to enable sociologists to adequately describe and interpret these current developments.

Starting in the early 1990s, M. Rainer Lepsius and Maurizio Bach began to seriously grapple with the issues surrounding the integration process. Building on the work of Max Weber, Karl W. Deutsch, and Stein Rokkan, they developed a theoretical-categorical set of instruments that would support a specifically sociological approach

Note: All quotes from German-language sources were translated by the author.

to the subject area of EU integration. Starting with historical-sociological studies on the forms of socialization in the nation state (Lepsius, 1990), these early forays into European sociology focused above all on the question of institution building and—especially after the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty—on constitutional issues, always in terms of their societal impact (Lepsius, 1991a; 1991b; Bach, 1992; Lepsius, 2013; Brunkhorst, 2014). To what extent—as Peter Flora (1999) asked in the wake of Rokkan’s work in this field—can historically developed ties between the population and institutions of the nation state be transferred to the supranational level?

Georg Vobruba pointedly described this early sociology of European integration as one that spotlighted the tensions between national and European forces in the formation of European institutions. Ultimately, he noted, the “domain of the sociology of European integration expands [...] to the extent that the tension between European institutional development and the rival interpretations and interests of the relevant actors has practical consequences” (Vobruba, 2008: 48).

The European sociological research agenda that developed in subsequent years largely retained this view. Responding to the social conditions of national societies, it addressed the changes brought on by European integration, consistently using the nation state and its national society as a yardstick for sociological analysis. During these early years, the core sociological issue of the emergence and development of an original European society—alongside, or even instead of, the nation state—failed to draw much attention from scholars. In 2000, in a special volume of the *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* titled *Die Europäisierung nationaler Gesellschaften (The Europeanization of National Societies)*, which Bach himself had edited, he noted that research on the social consequences of European integration was still sorely lacking despite the topic’s fundamental relevance to social scientists. That continued to be the case during the following years, when scholars focused less on the social consequences of European integration and their evaluation and problematization than on the question of *whether* such an influence existed. Debate during these years centered mainly on the following themes: a) the emergence of a European public sphere, b) the change in spatial structures and borders in Europe, and c) the development prospects of European solidarity and social policy.

2 A European Public Sphere?

For a long time, the question of the emergence of a European public sphere (Eder, 2000; 2006; Trenz, 2002) determined sociological discussion on the state of European integration. Indeed, it provided an almost perfect case in point in the underlying scholarly debate on the topic of European integration. In fact, until well into the 2000s scholars who were engaged in this discussion were almost expected to point to the lack of a European public sphere as proof that social integration was impossible (Gerhards, 1993; Grimm, 1995; Kielmansegg, 1996). The public sphere—or so went the

dictum of the time—was to be found exclusively in the nation states. Neidhardt, for example, noted retrospectively that

“Europe provides an example where the topic of the public sphere also puts to the test a category system in which the central point of reference, namely ‘society,’ was always exclusively conceived in the social sciences as ‘national society.’ The academic disciplines themselves have long practiced precisely the same parochialism that they have attributed to their subject as a problem (Beck and Grande, 2004 [Germ.], 2007 [Engl.]). One can now rejoice that this stupefaction has been disrupted” (Neidhardt, 2006: 46).

The debate over the European public sphere gained critical momentum when the EU’s democratic deficit became a subject of public and scholarly discourse. Nevertheless, sociologists were deeply divided over the importance (and even existence) of this deficit. Some saw it as a logical consequence of the lack of a European public opinion and thus as an insuperable obstacle inherent to the EU—a conclusion that they corroborated empirically in a number of research studies (Gerhards, 2000; 2002; Eilders and Voltmer, 2003). Others offered much more positive visions of the EU. In particular, since the beginning of the 2000s Klaus Eder and Hans-Jörg Trezn have systematically developed an argument for the emergence of a European public sphere and substantiated it in several empirically grounded studies. For example, in his 2002 book *Zur Konstitution einer politischen Öffentlichkeit in der Europäischen Union (On the Constitution of a Political Public Sphere in the European Union)*, Trezn argued that the European public sphere should not be seen as competing with the national public sphere but rather as a communication context that develops on the basis of and in interaction with the latter. “Parallel to the unfolding of European governance and the institutional stabilization of a supranational order of government, intermediate communication contexts will also develop in the European space, connecting European rulers with a diffuse audience” (Trezn, 2002: 13).

Nevertheless, the existence of a nascent European public sphere only began to gain broad scholarly acceptance with the onset of the major fiscal and economic crisis that swept through the EU in 2008, which brought on a flurry of reporting on Europe and prompted EU member states to pay closer political attention to developments in other EU member states. Yet the original expectation that such a sphere would have a positive impact on European integration—by increasing democracy in the EU and promoting public participation, social connectedness, solidarity, and so forth among EU citizens—has yet to be fulfilled. On the contrary, it has become evident that the emergence of European media discourses and European social movements can also promote anti-European and anti-democratic sentiment (Roose, 2015).

It is against this critical backdrop that Christian Lahusen’s new study (2019) should be read. In his monograph *Das gespaltene Europa. Eine politische Soziologie der Europäischen Union (Divided Europe. A Political Sociology of the European Union)*, Lahusen gives a detailed and, above all, empirically rich account of how a common European social area and space for European discourse develops. He asks to what extent the European Union now influences the way Europeans think and act, whether

they now feel European, what this means in terms of individual identity constructions, and to what degree Europe has meanwhile become a space of experience and reference. Are Europeans aware of the situations in other European member states, and what relevance do those situations hold for them? Or do social conditions remain primarily national?

The context of Lahusen's study is the European economic and fiscal crisis of the mid-2000s, a watershed event that had dramatic social consequences throughout the EU, all of which provided an immense boost to the development of a European public sphere. The crisis has caused a sea change in European thought, Lahusen concludes, such that we in the EU are now gradually moving away from a "permissive consensus" towards a "constraining dissensus" (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). While the EU and its policies play an increasingly important role in the perception of European citizens, Lahusen finds major differences of opinion, which he suggests are largely determined by social structures. Persons who feel basically uninvolved in the European project, he notes, tend to express Eurosceptic or negative attitudes towards it, whereas those with better resources tend to be more pro-European (see also Fernández et al., 2016; Fernández and Eigmüller, 2018; Kuhn et al., 2016). Lahusen's study thus confirms the current state of research, with one important additional nuance: beyond these socio-structural determinants, regional differences—particularly those between urban and metropolitan regions on the one hand and rural areas on the other—play a decisive role and sometimes carry even more weight than the differences between countries. Overall, Lahusen shows that the European social space has become an important factor in the thinking of Europeans. Following Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, he shows that the nation state is still the relevant variable for European perception, but the EU is gaining importance as a complementary factor and is, of course, a key reference value.

Lahusen expressly stressed that this development also entails risks, "for there emerges a shared but nationally segmented discursive space in which the actors speak less with than about one another and in which they are less likely to develop an understanding than a lack of understanding for each other" (Lahusen, 2019: 274).

3 The Constitution of Spaces and Border Formation in Europe

Another strand of European sociological research has focused from the very start on the social consequences of the kind of territorial reorganization of politics, economy, and law that was gradually implemented over the course of the European integration project. The question of the constitution of social spaces and the formation of borders in Europe had become a focal point of scholarly research by 2004 at the latest, when debates over the EU's first eastward enlargement—which especially affected Germany—came to the fore. During the years that followed, the topic was elaborated in many

different analyses and came to represent an essential field in sociological research on Europe in German-speaking countries.

One seminal research study in this vein can be found in Georg Vobruba's 2005 *The Dynamics of Europe*. In this volume, Vobruba analyses the dynamics of integration and enlargement in the EU within the context of border-dismantling initiatives within the union itself and of massive fortification projects along its external borders. Starting from the concept of *border*, he describes the tensions between an emerging European society and European political institutions. The interacting processes of deepening and enlarging the European Union carry within them their own dynamics of expansion, such that each successfully completed round of enlargement sets in motion both integration and exclusion processes vis-à-vis the EU's new neighbors along its new external borders. The study's basic question is how the EU will continue to successfully manage this dual tension between social integration at home and the long-term stabilization of its periphery. Although some of his premises must now be regarded as outdated, since 2005 little has changed in terms of the fundamental dynamics that Vobruba observed or with respect to the political and social tensions they generate (here the recent attempts to integrate Turkey into the European asylum system come to mind). At the same time, the recent so-called "refugee crisis" has shown that the persistence of national borders should not be underestimated and that today's "borderless Europe" could soon become a Europe of nation states with reinstated national borders (Pries, *MIGRATION*, this volume).

In this context, the volume *Postsouveräne Territorialität* (2015), published ten years later by Ulrike Jureit and Nikola Tietze, was a crucial contribution to the sociological development of scholarship in this field. Like Vobruba, the authors also adopt a spatial-analytical approach to European integration but with an impressive combination of social-scientific and historical analyses. The book's added value lies mainly in its ability to set the new spatial concepts of the EU alongside familiar historical models, thereby giving a broader view of the nation. Historically speaking, the current entanglement of local, regional, national, and supranational power and activities is actually not new. However, what is new, according to the study, is a "post-sovereign territoriality," which describes a "change in statehood" (Leibfried and Genschel, 2008). From a sociological perspective, this shift in perception stemming from a new territoriality raises the question of the conditions for the development of society. The reason for this is that European integration has had a lasting impact on the territorial shape of Europe, with clear consequences for the territorial dimensions of society. The resultant changes in the construction of identities and subsequent shifts in the extent and range of solidarity that are called for have also become the subject of European sociological study: "The transformation of state order in the context of post-sovereign territoriality, which is becoming increasingly differentiated, not only leads to increasingly complex constellations of action and decision-making; it also generates structurally new conflict dynamics. This is exemplified by the disputes over European social policy" (Jureit and Tietze, 2016: 363).

This is because, from a sociological perspective, one significant result of European integration has been the increasing dissolution of the nation state's still-constitutive union between geographical space and that of official state membership. Unlike the earlier national welfare-state system, individual access to (or exclusion from) welfare-state services in EU states is currently determined by exactly where in the state, and for how long, that individual resides. In effect, this situation dissolves the congruence between these two state spaces—one geographical, the other membership-based—where social policy is financed, implemented, and used (Ferrera, 2004; Eigmüller, 2017). Taken together, these changes create contradictions between national and transnational European solidarity. “In the post-territorial interdependencies between the European legal space, the spaces of national membership, and the geographical spaces of social policy, a variety of tensions arise between the norms and standards that structure and legitimize these respective spaces” (Jureit and Tietze, 2016: 363).

Since borders have long been interpreted as constitutive not only of political power structures and state sovereignty within the modern nation state but also of national societies, the shift and reorganization of EU state borders has raised the question of how this “restructuring of the territorial-political order” (Bach, 2010: 165) will affect European societies. While the territorial principle represented the cornerstone of national identity constructions and “an indispensable prerequisite for the self-enabling of politics in modernity” (Bach, 2010: 163; Luhmann, 2000: 212f.), in the “postnational constellation” (Habermas, 1998 [Germ.], 2001 [Engl.]) this territorial principle no longer aids the formation of a transnational collective identity (Bach, 2010). Nor does the defining of common external borders help EU member states to form a common identity. On the contrary, it would appear that numerous potential political-territorial identities, with different and asymmetrical borders and opportunities for institutionalization, continue to exist and to differentiate themselves, as it were, within a plurality of different European countries.

So, at the end of the 2010s, we must conclude that a common European identity is not in sight. Thus, the question posed by the sociology of Europe in these years has not been surprising:

“How can a new kind of society and politics be discovered and justified that does not rely on the old stabilizing factors, building both internally and externally on the historically established forms of nationality, while opening them up and extending them? [...] And how can this horizon of possibility and reality opened up by dissociating basic social and political concepts and structures—society, state, politics, social inequality, mobility, ethnicity, justice, solidarity, etc.—from the national orthodoxy and redefining them from the cosmopolitan perspective?” (Beck and Grande, 2007: 5).

In a sense, their comments outlined the European sociological research program of the next fifteen years, which focused on two key questions: What are the consequences of European integration for national societies, and what are the conditions for the social integration of the EU?

4 Solidarity, Social Policy, Social Integration

This, in turn, brought scholars back to one of the most prominent questions of German European sociology, namely, the social dimension of European integration (Pfauffinger/Grages, SOCIAL POLICY, this volume). Here, too, research during the early years was clearly divided into the more political-sociological works that focused on the big political questions, especially those concerning the future and political preconditions of an originating European social policy (Vobruba, 1999; Leibfried and Pierson, 1997) and those that addressed more the individual preconditions of a Europeanization of the social sphere (Mau, 2003; Gerhards and Lengfeld, 2013).

Stefan Bernhard succeeded in combining both perspectives in his 2010 volume *Die Konstruktion von Inklusion: Europäische Sozialpolitik aus soziologischer Perspektive* (*The Construction of Inclusion. European Social Policy from a Sociological Perspective*). One of Bernhard's main contributions to the debate at the time was to offer a new theoretical perspective on the process of integration. Following Kauppi (2003) and drawing on Bourdieu's field theory, Bernhard developed an instrument for understanding social phenomena from the unequal distribution of and the struggle for power. Putting forth the thesis that European social policy is knowledge-based, he shows that the knowledge resources of European social policy take shape during the emergence of a political field and are used within the framework of this field. In contrast to previous studies, Bernhard not only described sociopolitical institutionalization processes but also showed how, at the European level, a social space has begun to grow out of the protracted and open-ended growth process in which political actors produce, discuss, and legitimize sociopolitical knowledge. "Europe can thus be understood as a transnational configuration of fields that can be distinguished from one another in their claim to validity and their expanse, in their degree of institutionalization and their conflicts" (Bernhard and Schmidt-Wellenburg, 2018: 389).

This field-theoretical approach was used and developed in various ways in the following years. Such an approach involves systematically adopting the perspective of a second-order observer and asking, for example, how scholars, experts, and professionals reflect on Europe and, in so doing, constantly revise and update it (Georgakakis, 2013; Büttner et al., 2015; Georgakakis and Vauchez, 2015).

Another innovative approach to the Europeanization of social policy was developed by Stefanie Börner, who adapted a historical-sociological perspective in her 2013 volume *Belonging, Solidarity and Expansion in Social Policy*. Drawing on her research into the historical process that steered the development of national social policy, she asks how institutionalized social policy at the supranational level can help expand the territorial framework of redistributive solidarity. This "historicizing" approach to the EU, which combines historical sociology with existing theory to dissect the EU's development over time and compares specific moments in its evolution to already completed phases of state-building or social integration (Börner and Eigmüller,

2015: 6), has proven to be a very valuable tool for analyzing and explaining social developments within the EU (cf. also Marks, 1997; 2015).

Above all, these studies were important because they broke with the dictum that had long prevailed in sociological research on Europe, which had unquestioningly made the nation state and national societies in their respective constitutions the yardstick of comparison. Especially in the field of social-policy research, it has long been conventional wisdom to stress that European welfare states in particular are so demanding with respect to the social conditions that must be given for their emergence and development that the nation state is the only viable unit of redistribution (de Swaan, 1992).

As in regard to the emergence of a European public sphere, this view only changed in the wake of the economic and fiscal crisis in the late 2000s, as the EU itself increasingly became the target of social demands. At the beginning of the 2000s, the EU enlargements at the time and the associated frictions and conflicts gave rise to a broad debate on the territorial dimension of European integration and its social relevance (cf. Eigmüller, 2010). No later than 2010, by contrast—once the dramatic social consequences of the economic and fiscal crisis had gradually come to light—the issues surrounding Europe’s social dimensions and the shortcomings in its social and societal integration had become a powerful issue on the agenda (Bach, 2019).

In this context, discussion of Europe’s crisis became the starting point for sociological debate on Europe; or rather, the crisis itself became the central theme (Preunkert and Vobruba, 2015). How much conflict does Europe need (Vobruba, 2015)? And how do these social conflicts affect the process of social integration (Fehmel, 2015; 2019)? While researchers agree that there has been a significant increase in conflicts within the EU, they offer differing interpretations of this trend. Some stress that these conflicts further minimize the already thin reservoir of perceived commonalities in and for the EU and thus recommend that European interdependence be partially reduced and the idea of subsidiarity strengthened (Immerfall, 2013: 35)—in effect, that demarcation efforts resulting in renationalization be bolstered (Fehmel, 2014: 115). By contrast, others stress that the surge towards integration and European socialization comes precisely out of the crises in Europe and the resultant politicization of crisis management and transnationalization of social conflicts that such crises express (Vobruba, 2015).

So, does social conflict lead to social disintegration or rather to further social integration? Answering this question would require expanding the usual European and institutional sociological perspectives to incorporate conflict theory (Tietze and Eigmüller, 2019: 1; Bach and Vobruba, 2012: 167) and, by extension, to address the question of social inequality within Europe (Heidenreich, 2006; Mau, 2006).

But in what direction is European social policy actually developing? Which social order and which forms of social integration can be observed in the EU and its societies? Richard Münch made significant headway towards answering these questions in 2008 when he showed that the construction of a European society could be seen as the interaction of a progressive European division of labor and the creation of a le-

gitimate order of these increasing dependencies. His central argument points to the emergence of a European cult of the individual that no longer unfolds in the collectively confined form of the national welfare state but rather in the context of the European internal market, which brings about a “superimposition of the collectivist mode of social integration by an individualistic mode and its semantic and institutional formation by constitutional liberalism” (Münch, 2008: 341).

As the driving forces behind the opening of a new scope for action and, above all, the emergence of transnational European solidarity, Münch identified the emerging European Economic Area (Münch, 2010), the expansion of education (2014), and the differentiation of occupation and living conditions and asked, most importantly, about the grounds for the legitimacy of these developments. He studied the latter question in light of the “legal construction of Europe” (2008: 18) and the accompanying national discourses.

Crucially, Münch showed that the European project is clearly based on differing ideas of solidarity and justice. The aim of European social policy, he observed, is not “the replacement of the national welfare state [...] but first and foremost an increase in the economic performance of all member states” (368). And that largely means dismantling barriers to market access, eliminating discrimination, and creating equal opportunities, thereby securing individual freedom and human rights in the process. The “neoliberal” principle underlying this solidarity pattern is “not post-market redistribution but pre-market promotion of the performance of those who have so far been less capable” (368).

This European social model, open to those outside and pluralistically structured on the inside, erodes national forms of solidarity and increasingly undermines the already eroding congruence of cultural homogeneity and political unity.

5 A European Society in the Making? European Identity and Societal Formation

In the end, all of these contributions revolve around a core question of the sociology of European integration: Is a European society in the making, and if so, what are its characteristics?

Initially, the debate about the conditions of social integration within the EU—that is, the question of the prospect of developing a European society—was clearly divided into two camps. Some scholars pointed to a “Europe without society” (Bach, 2008) and thus to a design that was still inadequate in comparison to that of national society. They stressed the reality of the unequal opportunities for participation within Europe and the existence of a “Europe of the elites” (Haller, 2009). Others soon began to investigate the social imprinting power of the European institutional project on the basis of empirical studies and drew conclusions about the future shape of European society “*sui generis*” (Lepsius, 2000: 213).

The inspiration for this somewhat empirically oriented European research was initially Karl Deutsch's transactionalist theory (Deutsch et al., 1957), which began to be connected to the subject of European integration at the end of the 2010s. Various studies have shown that the process of European integration increasingly served as an important driving force for new, cross-border activities. While research had previously concentrated on macro-level interactions, that is, interactions between nation states, regions, international organizations, and corporations ("transnationalism from above"), "transnationalism from below" gradually became the focus of interest. The concept of "horizontal Europeanization" (Mau and Büttner, 2010) now concentrated on individual interactions, such as cross-border worker mobility (Mau, 2007: 53) and exploring emergent interpersonal contacts and the formation of pan-European networks from which further forms of transnational integration could emerge.

How these results could be interpreted and applied to the study of European social formation and the social relevance of these transformation processes was finally resolved by viewing the EU as a type *sui generis*, "as an independent social sphere between nation and world society" (Büttner and Mau, 2010: 232).

According to Deutsch, for whom societies emerged from a densification of the processes of communication, interaction, and exchange, the European integration project now faced completely different questions. Does greater contact with foreigners bring with it a more cosmopolitan view of the world (Mau, 2007)? Does increased cross-border transfer of goods, money, communication, and personnel lead to increased mutual trust (Delhey, 2004; 2007; Kleiner, 2012; Delhey and Deutschmann, 2016)? Does all of this lead to a stronger identification with the EU and the formation of a European identity (Kaina, 2009; Kuhn, 2015)? And under what conditions do redistributive bonds of solidarity beyond the nation state emerge (Gerhards and Lengfeld, 2013)? The latter study showed, very impressively, that even at the height of the European fiscal and economic crisis, the willingness to support EU member states that were in need of solidarity remained surprisingly high and that solidarity in Europe was far greater than had previously been assumed in the public debate, both academic and political (Gerhards and Lengfeld, 2013; Gerhards et al. 2019).

On the basis of these and many similar studies, the ensuing years witnessed a number of further studies that no longer focused on the great question of the developmental conditions of a European society but rather on the individual preconditions of Europeanization. Max Haller (2009) was the first to give strong impetus to this debate in his argument centering on the "Europe of the elites" and the central problem to which it referred, namely, that Europe is most beneficial to the elite members of European societies, whereas *ordinary citizens* are not directly affected by the EU and its possibilities, nor do they even benefit from it.

This thesis was increasingly taken up in subsequent years when, with a view to the socio-structural dimensions of the process of Europeanization, researchers began to look closely at exactly who participates—and how—in Europeanization and who remains excluded from it. The scholarly focus thus shifted from the Europe of elites (Haller, 2009) to the Europe of ordinary citizens (Hooghe, 2003; Gaxie et al., 2011;

Fernández et al., 2016) and in particular to the social aspects of these developments. One example is Theresa Kuhn's 2015 study, *Experiencing European Integration: Transnational Lives and European Identity*. Kuhn describes in great detail the impact of transnationalism on EU support and European identity, shedding light on the transnationalization process that is transforming European societies. In so doing, she shows that not all transnational interactions have an equally positive effect on EU identity-building and EU support. Rather, these transnational interactions themselves are socially stratified, such that Europeans benefit from them or react to them in very different ways (cf. also Kuhn et al., 2014; 2018). Interestingly, it is above all this branch of German-language European sociology that has been most widely received internationally, presumably because many joint European research projects preceded it.

6 Outlook

In recent years, the sociology of Europe has developed just as rapidly as its subject matter. While 20 or 30 years ago there was little agreement among German-speaking sociologists that Europe was a relevant subject of sociological inquiry, it has since become widely accepted that “Europe matters: in all areas of life. [...] European society is not only a sociological chimera or a normative vision, although it is also the latter. Rather, it embodies not only a historical community of experience and destiny but also an economic, working, educational, solidarity, legal, religious, and cultural community” (Müller, 2018: 48). A review of the German-language sociology of Europe shows that for a long time this field of study surprisingly had less of an international or European orientation but was rather classically influenced by German-language publications, which were little known abroad. This has only gradually changed over the past two decades, and even then only for parts of the field. The recent renaissance of field theory in the area of European studies points to a closer connection to French debates, whereas work in the field of attitude and values research tends to follow the anglophone debates within the area of international European studies, where it has received increasing attention.

This realization and sociologists' greater consideration of the topic has entailed a significant qualitative change in the German sociology of Europe. Today, comparison to the nation state and national society figures increasingly less in the sociological engagement with Europe in all its dimensions. This carries with it the decisive advantage that current research in this field does not stop with the observation that EU development is inadequate compared to that of the nation state and its national society. It is both commensurate with the developments themselves and above all broadly empirical. Thus, the initial description of a “postnational constellation” (Habermas, 1998 [Germ.], 2001 [Engl.]) and the rather distanced view of a “Project Europe” (Münch, 1993; Wagner, 2005) have gradually developed into a European sociological approach that studies the EU itself and, especially, its impact on society. This explicitly includes a bottom-up perspective on the integration process. That this

development is not unproblematic has been shown very clearly in recent European sociological studies. Increasingly, scholars' optimistic interpretations of Europeanization and transnationalization as forces that can overcome national borders and promote the gradual emergence of a post-national society (Beck and Grande, 2010) have given way to a differentiated view of current social developments that stresses both the integrative as well as the disintegrative tendencies of European integration (Lahusen, 2019) and the newly emergent lines of social division (Kriesi and Pappas, 2015; Aschauer, 2017). The growing nationalism and Euroscepticism in many EU member states raises questions that are germane to the sociology of Europe, and these trends clearly show that meaningful discussion of the future of Europe must necessarily include the contribution of sociological scholarship. The future of the European project depends on whether it will be possible in the future to overcome the new social divisions and actually deliver on the European promise of similar and comparable living conditions for all EU citizens everywhere in the EU.

What the German-language sociology of Europe still mainly lacks (and what seems to have completely disappeared with the late Wilfried Spohn), however, is a view of the EU and its social development from the outside, as well as the consistent inclusion of a postcolonial perspective (cf. Spohn, 2009) in sociological studies in this field. Only by including such a postcolonial perspective can Europe's present be understood and analyzed. This becomes clear not least in the current daily debate over the consequences of the so-called "refugee crisis," with populism, Euroscepticism and nationalist movements on the rise in many EU member states (Bhambra, 2016: 199).

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Family and Intimate Relationships

Dirk Konietzka, Michael Feldhaus, Michaela Kreyenfeld,
and Heike Trappe

Abstract: This article provides an overview on research on intimate relationships and the family in Germany since the turn of the millennium. It is argued that “German family sociology” has undergone major changes in various ways. In theoretical terms, micro-theoretical approaches have largely replaced former macro-sociological debates on de-institutionalization and pluralization of the family. In empirical research, the application of a life course perspective and the use of longitudinal data have become more and more established. In substantial terms, researchers have pursued integrative research perspectives that link family dynamics to other life domains. Not least, publication strategies shifted in favor of English language and international journals. In sum, these developments have fundamentally changed the German research landscape on intimate relationships and the family.

Keywords: Family forms, gender inequality, intergenerational relationships, life course, panel data

1 Introduction

Twenty years ago, Rudolf Richter published an overview article in the *Soziologische Revue* that summarized key topics of and developments in German family sociology. This piece is still enlightening to read today as it also elucidates the changes that family sociology in Germany has undergone in recent decades. From today’s perspective, it seems striking that Richter’s review was exclusively based on German-language monographs and edited volumes (which included a German translation of *La Trame conjugale* by Jean-Claude Kaufmann). One of the review’s key topics was the discussion on de-standardization, de-institutionalization, pluralization, and the decay of the family (Richter, 2000: 62). The “pluralization thesis” (*Pluralisierungsthese*) echoed Ulrich Beck’s individualization thesis, which had strongly influenced not just family sociology but sociology more broadly. Even though international researchers were also generating rich empirical evidence on the diversity of family forms and living arrangements around that time, the concept of “pluralization” never really gained currency beyond German-language sociology. The terms “diversity” and “de-standardization” featured more prominently in the international debate, and scholars often reverted to concepts such as the “second demographic transition” to underpin empirical investigations of family change.

The pluralization thesis is a macro-sociological approach that still occasionally appears in contemporary German family sociology. However, many of the studies conducted since the turn of the century have been based on a micro foundation or

have linked micro and macro perspectives in a multilevel approach. While Richter had noted as early as 2000 that rational-choice approaches were on the rise, he did not foresee how rapidly the focal point of attention would change in the years to come. While a range of theoretical and methodological approaches is still being used, it is clear that the attention of scholars has shifted to the individual actor.

In this context, the economic framework has provided a handy micro foundation for understanding decision-making within the family, such as how couples bargain about housework or allocate time between different activities. However, family sociologists who investigate family decision-making usually go beyond the narrow economic understanding of the rational-choice approach by integrating the cultural context or by reverting to concepts of bounded rationality. Furthermore, family sociologists have questioned the inclusion of the “given preferences” concept in the economic model. For example, the cross-cultural studies by Nauck (2007) used the value-of-children approach to show that individuals may satisfy different sets of preferences by having children. Family sociologists have also opened up the “black box” of decision-making by investigating the pathways that lead from intention to family behavior, often by borrowing from socio-psychological concepts, such as the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985). As longitudinal survey data on values, attitudes, and intentions have increasingly become available, researchers have been able to explore how values and attitudes influence subsequent family behavior and how cultural determinants are moderated or mediated by economic factors.

Another cornerstone of contemporary family sociology is the life course perspective (Huinink/Hollstein, *LIFE COURSE*, this volume). The life course serves as a useful framework for empirical investigations that focus on the timing and sequencing of family behavior. Marriage, divorce, first birth, subsequent birth(s), partnership formation, separation, re-partnering, and leaving the parental home are among the processes that have been scrutinized in empirical life course research. The life course concept also represents a powerful approach for investigating how individual family behavior leads to family change at the macro level of society (Bernardi et al., 2019; Mayer, 2009). Empirical life course studies have significantly enlarged our understanding of family behavior in Germany and across countries. Such studies have also contributed to social-stratification research by showing how family behavior differs across population subgroups and how it amplifies or ameliorates social and economic risks. However, the tendency of many empirical studies in this area to focus on single life course transitions has come at the expense of taking a more holistic view of family change, which was more prominent 20 years ago.

Beyond these shifts in theoretical and analytical perspectives, German family sociology has undergone a fundamental transformation in recent years. Researchers have increasingly expanded across the borders of German-speaking societies and have entered into international collaborations. The foundation of the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (MPIDR) in 1996 started a new wave of research at the interface of family demography and sociology. The MPIDR has advanced empirical research through a rigorous commitment to event-history modeling and has supported

international data collection (e.g., the Generations and Gender Programme [GGP]) as well as international and interdisciplinary collaboration on family issues. The German Family Panel (pairfam), initiated in 2008, now provides more than ten years of panel data to examine family behavior. The National Educational Panel Study (NEPS), conducted by the Leibniz Institute for Educational Trajectories (LifBi), has further strengthened research on the interplay of education and family life. FReDA is a recently launched large-scale panel survey devoted to family behavior in Germany and in cross-national comparison. It was initiated by the Federal Institute for Population Research, GESIS, and the pairfam consortium. All of these projects are strongly committed to the life course framework.

In addition, these trends towards the internationalization of German family sociology have led to shifts in publication strategies (see also Schneider and Aebermann, 2019). Twenty years ago, most research in family sociology was published in German-language journals, monographs, and edited books. Today, family sociologists increasingly publish in international journals, and even national family journals have taken an international turn. The *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung* has been renamed the *Journal of Family Research*, while the *Zeitschrift für Bevölkerungswissenschaft* has been renamed *Comparative Population Studies*. The articles published in both journals are now exclusively in English.

Given these developments, it has become more difficult to draw a line between “German family sociology” and international research on the family. The language in which an article is published is obviously no longer a useful criterion for such distinctions. In the absence of strict criteria, our article will primarily consider studies that have been conducted within a German institutional context or empirical studies that particularly deal with the German case. Within this frame, our aim is to provide an overview of what we consider to be the major achievements, landmark studies, and shortcomings of research that has dealt with family behavior and intimate relations over the last two decades. Since it is beyond the scope of this article to give a full bibliographical account of this large body of literature, we will refer to a selection of publications that represent various fields of research.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 focuses on the particularities of family research that has dealt with differences in family behavior in East and West Germany as they relate to German reunification. We then summarize the large body of literature that has examined family behavior and employment in the context of changing gender roles (section 3). Section 4 addresses research on family forms and intergenerational relationships. Section 5 summarizes the potential of the rich dyadic and panel data that have become available in recent years. In this section, we also touch upon the innovations and limitations of official statistics. The concluding section 6 summarizes main achievements, dead ends, and gives an outlook on future family research.

2 The Unique Features of German Family Sociology after the Fall of the Wall

Despite the move towards internationalization, certain developments in family sociology over the past two decades were unique to the German case or were not applicable to family research in other countries. German unification was a major historical turning point that also stimulated family research. The abrupt changes in family behavior after the fall of the Berlin Wall, including trends towards the postponement of parenthood and marriage in East Germany, were interpreted either as signs of the “Westernization” and “modernization” of family behavior or as responses to the adverse economic conditions and labor-market uncertainties that prevailed in East Germany during the 1990s. With the passage of time, it has become apparent that much of the early work on these developments relied on simplified assumptions. This particularly concerns the belief that the convergence of the economic conditions would inevitably force East German family behavior to “adapt” to the prevailing West German patterns. The East–West differences in family and marriage behavior that persist until today have required family researchers to think more carefully about what factors contribute to societal change, how values and behavior are transmitted across generations, and how responsive family behavior is to changing economic conditions and legal constraints. Moreover, in-depth research on differences in family attitudes and family behavior between East and West Germans revealed that West German family patterns were less “modern” than was previously assumed (Huinink et al., 2012). Some studies explicitly focused on East-to-West migrants, that is, men and women who were socialized in East Germany but were then exposed to the West German economic and normative context (Arránz Becker and Lois, 2010). An important lesson from these studies was that East German women who had moved to the West returned to work more rapidly after childbirth than West German women in comparable circumstances. It was also found that East-to-West migrants stuck to a pattern of early family formation that was typical of East Germans (Kreyenfeld and Vatterrott, 2018).

Comparative welfare-state research also provided a new impetus for research on family behavior. In his seminal book, *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*, Esping-Andersen (1999) classified Germany as a conservative and familialistic welfare state. Feminist literature, such as Ostner’s (1995) article *Arm ohne Ehemann (Impoverished without a Husband)* rigorously criticized the German system for its bias towards the male breadwinner model. Furthermore, international scholars unanimously agreed that family policies in Germany were locked in a conservative trajectory that contributed to both low fertility and low female employment rates.

Despite these criticisms, major family-policy reforms were not enacted until 2005. The cornerstones of the new era of German family policy have been the expansion of daycare for children under age three, which started in 2005, and the parental leave benefit reform (*Elterngeld*), which was enacted in 2007. While it was the then Federal

Family Minister Ursula von der Leyen who eventually pushed these reforms through the legislative process, family sociologists like Hans Bertram, the lead author of the 2006 family report, laid out the path for change by showing how Germany's family policies and family patterns compared with those of other countries and with the Swedish model in particular (BMFSFJ, 2006).

3 Family Behavior, Employment Patterns, and Changing Gender Roles

Research on female employment and women's return to work, which dominated the family sociology literature of the 1980s and 1990s, has moved in a new direction over the last two decades. In addition to examining the effects of interruptions to mothers' careers, studies on parental employment explored a number of other questions, including the extent to which fathers have been taking leave to care for their children and how couples have been sharing parental responsibilities. There is a massive body of comparative research examining the interplay between family life, paid and unpaid work, gender, and social policies. These studies have highlighted the effects of institutional factors and labor-market conditions on female employment and have looked at how gender cultures influence couples' work–family arrangements (Steiber and Haas, 2010).

These cross-national studies have also demonstrated that, compared to their counterparts in other countries, couples in Germany are subject to the largest gender differences in working hours and in the division of labor in the home (Treas and Drobnič, 2010). These patterns have been attributed to the system of joint taxation of married couples, the large gender pay gap, and the ongoing lack of sufficient childcare (Hipp and Leuze, 2015). The family-policy reforms of the 2000s have led to slight increases in the full-time employment rates of mothers and the usage of parental leave by fathers. However, a large pay gap between men and women and a gendered division of paid and unpaid work between parents remain (OECD, 2017).

Researchers have increasingly adopted concepts such as “linked lives,” “coupled careers,” “dual-earner couples,” and “dual-career couples” to highlight that employment decisions are made in a couple context. In these studies, the couple context is defined as the locus where interrelated and gendered life courses are shaped and social inequality, particularly with respect to gender, is therefore (re-)produced (Rusconi et al., 2013). The assumption that ties between family members can represent both sources of support and constraints has, for example, been investigated with respect to residential relocations (Auspurg and Abraham, 2007) and promotion to leadership positions (Bröckel et al., 2015). By applying a relational perspective to couples' resources, these studies have provided important insights into bargaining processes and their gender-specific consequences, often with an explicit focus on better-educated couples (Rusconi and Solga, 2011). Using different theoretical and

methodological approaches, Wimbauer (2012) undertook an in-depth examination of the trade-offs within dual-career couples “between recognition and inequality.” Another line of research has looked into the correlates and consequences of a woman becoming the main earner in the family (Klenner et al., 2012). Building on earlier work by Koppetsch and Burkart on milieu-specific latent gender norms, Koppetsch and Speck (2015) reconstructed the milieu-specific coping strategies and shifts in gender identities among couples in which the male partner became unemployed. Overall, less research has been conducted on the dynamics of employment patterns and the negotiation processes among dual-earner couples with lower educational levels.

Numerous studies on the gendered division of paid work, domestic work, and childcare have highlighted the overlapping of these different life domains and have looked at how households and families coordinate and negotiate the allocation of time and resources to these tasks (Schulz, 2010). The findings of such studies consistently show that the gendered division of unpaid work is more unequal than the gendered division of paid work. Thus, even though there have been substantial changes in women’s employment patterns and in women’s and men’s attitudes toward gender roles, routine housework, and childcare are still largely seen as “women’s work.” None of the conventional theoretical approaches—the time-availability perspective, the relative-resources approach, the economic-dependency model, or the gender-role perspective—fully account for the slow pace of change in the domestic sphere.

Longitudinal studies have furthermore emphasized that couples tend to move towards a more unequal division of labor over the course of their relationship. Getting married and having a first child are important turning points in the shift towards a more unequal division of labor (Dechant et al., 2014). This research has benefitted from the integration of social-psychological approaches (e.g., equity theory) that can help shed light on how normative and structural factors complement each other in the partners’ evaluations of how they divide up paid employment and domestic work. A prime example of an investigation of the dynamic interrelation between gendered attitudes, identities, and institutions is a comparative qualitative study by Grunow and Evertsson (2016), which related couples’ parenting ideals and plans to family policies and gender culture. However, a systematic examination of the development of each partner’s gender-role attitudes and actual behavior over the course of a relationship is still missing. More generally, there is a lack of strategic research that goes beyond investigating heterosexual couples in order to gain a broader understanding of the division of labor in the context of family-related transitions. Paying more attention to gender expression and identity might help researchers better understand the mechanisms that underlie the gendered division of labor. In this regard, a qualitative study on couple dynamics during pregnancy by Hirschauer (2019) has revealed that the age difference within couples contributes to the remarkable persistence of parenting as dominantly feminine.

While quantitative methods have dominated recent research on couple behavior, qualitative research has provided a more nuanced picture of how family and house-

hold behavior and fertility decisions are negotiated and of how couples define and justify a gender-specific division of labor (Huinink and Röhrer, 2005; Koppetsch and Speck, 2015; Kühn, 2004). Furthermore, the use of mixed methods in family sociology is starting to bridge qualitative and quantitative research (Helfferich, 2001; Schneider et al., 2002), even though such approaches are still rare. Whether the mixed-methods approach (Knappertsbusch/Langfeldt/Kelle, MIXED-METHODS AND MULTI METHOD RESEARCH, this volume) eventually results in a reintegration of methodologies or simply leads to the emergence of another form of methodological specialization remains to be seen.

4 Family Forms, Partnerships, and Intergenerational Relationships

As we mentioned above, investigations of the “pluralization” of family forms and living arrangements in Germany conducted in the 1990s were heavily influenced by individualization theory. While the impact of concepts like individualization on empirical research surely diminished in the new millennium, several studies have still addressed the pluralization of family forms (Brüderl, 2004; Wagner and Cifuentes, 2014). Moreover, there is a large body of—predominantly descriptive—literature that uses different classification approaches to depict the prevalence of “modern,” “alternative,” or “non-traditional” family forms. Recent studies have also implemented a dynamic perspective on family forms by employing sequence analysis to map living arrangements across the life course (Fasang, 2014; Feldhaus and Huinink, 2011; Zimmermann, 2020). In general, this research has shown that, over the last few decades, the prevalence of the “traditional family” (parents living together with their biological children) has declined, while cohabiting couples, same-sex unions, single-parent families, as well as stepfamilies have increased. Moreover, qualitative studies have provided a more detailed rendering of the meaning of single parenthood (Schneider et al., 2001). More recent analyses on lone parenthood have sharpened our understanding of its variations along regional, cultural, generational, and institutional lines as well as its increasing heterogeneity regarding social origin, resources, and re-partnering behavior (Bastin, 2019; Bernardi and Mortelmans, 2018). Researchers have also explored the complexities and the behavior of stepfamilies in Germany as well as from a cross-national perspective (Martin and Le Bourdais, 2008; Steinbach, 2010; Thomson, 2004).

More broadly, family sociologists are increasingly turning their attention to the question of how partnerships and intimate relationships evolve. A strand of research has scrutinized the institutionalization of partnerships by reconstructing each step from the first kiss, to cohabitation, to marriage (Kopp et al., 2010; Lenz, 2003). Other studies have analyzed the dynamics of separations and divorces, taking into account individual and structural predictors and applying both sociological and psychological

perspectives (Arránz Becker, 2008; Burkart, 2018; Hill, 2004; Lenz, 2003; Weiß and Wagner, 2010). This research has been accompanied by a growing interest in the study of social relations and social networks (Diewald et al., 2009; Hollstein, 2001; Lenz and Nestmann, 2009; Häußling, *SOCIAL NETWORKS*, this volume). Moreover, a significant body of research has examined the macro-structural conditions that influence partnership behavior. These studies have shown that partner-market indicators (measured by the regional sex ratios, the age structure, etc.) not only determine the search costs and the degree to which an intimate relationship represents a “match” but also predict partnership satisfaction and stability (Häring et al., 2014).

Research on intergenerational relationships based on large datasets (such as the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe [SHARE] or the German Ageing Survey) has considerably enhanced our understanding of the consequences of population aging on family relations. A theoretical approach that is often used in such research is the concept of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson, 2001). Most studies have found that there is an extensive exchange between parents and their adult children, with most material transfers (often financial support) flowing from parents to (adult) children, and most immaterial services flowing in the other direction. These studies have examined various dimensions of intergenerational solidarity, such as emotional, immaterial, and material exchange processes; the transmission of norms and values; contact frequency; and both parent–child and grandparent–grandchild relationships (Arránz Becker et al., 2013; Hank et al., 2017; Kopp and Steinbach, 2009; Szydlik, 2016). Finally, family research has investigated the living and family-care arrangements of elderly people, as well as their health, social contacts, and networks (Mahne et al., 2017). A more detailed account of intergenerational family help and care in demographically aging societies is given by Höpflinger, *DEMOGRAPHY AND AGING*, this volume.

Recent research has also deepened our understanding of parent–child relationships and child development. By borrowing heavily from the psychology and the pedagogy literature, “new childhood studies” have shifted the attention to the child’s agency, activities, and perceptions of the parental behavior. Researchers have investigated how child development is related to the socio-economic status of the parents, poverty risks, parenting behavior, and other familial socialization conditions (Bertram, 2017; Esser et al., 2016; Kaiser et al., 2019). Scholars have explored the consequences of co-parenting and parental conflicts on partnership quality and child development. In addition, the family–school context, the role of parental educational aspirations, the parent–child relationship, and parental involvement in matters of schooling have emerged as research topics in family sociology (Walper et al., 2015). Another strand of research has looked at how sibling relationships and sibling status affect child development as well as children’s educational outcomes. It has, for example, been shown that sibling status has an impact on the prevalence of harmonious, hostile, affective, or uninvolved sibling relationships (Grätz, 2018; Hank and Steinbach, 2018; Kersting and Feldhaus, 2016; Walper et al., 2009).

In response to the high divorce rates, many family sociologists and psychologists have turned their attention to the effects of separation and divorce on family behavior as well as on the children's and the parents' wellbeing (Zartler et al., 2015). Among the issues investigated are shared custody (Langmeyer, 2015), contact with the parent not living in the household (Köppen et al., 2018), and the impact of separation on the wellbeing of children and adolescents. Furthermore, research has been done on the quality of relationships within stepfamilies (Kunze, 2015) and the frequency, type, and quality of contact between parents and adult (step)children (Arránz Becker et al., 2015).

5 Innovations in Official Statistics and the Potential of Dyadic and Panel Data

The developments in family sociology over the last 20 years must also be understood in conjunction with the data that have become available. An important “official” data source for analyzing family and household structures is the micro census conducted by Germany's Federal Statistical Office (Statistisches Bundesamt). It is important to note that since 2005 the Federal Statistical Office has been using a new “official definition” of a family unit based on the presence of children in the household. Thus, cohabiting couples with children and single adults with children are now considered a family unit, whereas a married couple without children is not. The Federal Statistical Office changed the definition in response to the long-standing call from family sociologists for the growing prevalence of cohabiting unions with children to be properly accounted for in the collection of the data. Other “non-traditional” family forms, such as stepfamilies and non-resident parents, cannot be identified in the data, though.

Important changes also concern the fertility indicators provided by the Federal Statistical Office. No official indicators on childlessness and age at first childbirth were available until recently. It is only since 2009 that the system of vital statistics started to register the biological order of birth (instead of the order of birth in a marital union). Furthermore, the micro census conducted in 2008 was the first to include a question on the number of children ever born to a female respondent. However, as this question was posed only to females, “male childlessness” still cannot be studied. Despite this limitation, the collection of data on the number of children of women enabled researchers to generate robust indicators of childlessness (Kreyenfeld and Konietzka, 2017) and total fertility by socio-demographic indicators, including migration background, a characteristic that has also been more thoroughly surveyed since 2005 (Bujard, 2015). The inclusion of country of origin and further migration-specific variables has enlarged the potential of the micro census to examine family behavior and living arrangements for migrant populations.

Beyond the official statistics, social-science datasets—such as the Family and Fertility Survey (FFS), the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), the Family Surveys

of the German Youth Institute, and the Life Course Studies of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development—have been valuable sources for longitudinal data analysis. However, the German Family Panel (pairfam), which was initiated in 2008, has been particularly helpful in broadening the potential for family research. It collects data on fertility desires, fertility intentions, and family attitudes. The panel design thus enables researchers to study questions such as whether positive fertility intentions have been stable across time and whether these intentions eventually lead to fertility transitions. Moreover, numerous studies have looked at how migration background, occupation, socio-economic conditions, religious affiliation, economic uncertainties, temporary working contracts, value orientations, and personality factors are related to fertility, family behavior, and family-related attitudes (Gebel and Giesecke, 2009; Kuhnt, 2014; Lois, 2011; Maul, 2012; Milewski, 2007, 2010; Reis et al., 2011; Schmitt, 2012; Schneider et al., 2015; Schnor, 2014). Apart from the anchor respondent, the German Family Panel surveys the respondent's children, current partner (including non-residential partners), and parents. Network analysis has been employed to show how friendship networks, parental expectations, social pressure, social support, and “social contagion” influence fertility behavior (Lois, 2016). This type of research has also provided us with a more nuanced picture of how couples make decisions (Stein et al., 2014). There is, for example, evidence that the transition to the first child is a joint decision, whereas the female partner plays the dominant role in the decision to have another child (Bauer and Kneip, 2012). The dyadic perspective has also emphasized the different views that couples tend to have on everyday activities, such as on the division of housework.

Methodologically, researchers have increasingly capitalized on the large pool of panel data to employ sophisticated modeling strategies, in particular event-history analysis, panel regression models, multilevel analysis, or dynamic panel approaches (Brüderl et al., 2019; Mund and Nestler, 2019; Barth/Blasius, *QUANTITATIVE METHODS*, this volume). Fixed-effects regression started seeping into family research around the turn of the century, providing new techniques for identifying the causal influences of partnership and family behavior. Although advanced event-history modeling, such as multi-process modeling, has been employed by family researchers, interest in this technique seems to have faded in recent years, possibly because of the strong assumptions these models rely on. There is a growing body of literature that is based on sequence analysis (Aisenbrey and Fasang, 2017; Zimmermann and Konietzka, 2018). In addition to providing more comprehensive insights into family life course dynamics, this research has responded to the call for more vivid graphical visualizations of research results.

6 Achievements, Dead Ends, and Outlook for Future Research

In his review published in the *Soziologische Revue* 20 years ago, Richter (2000: 68–70) identified seven research streams that he believed family sociology would further develop in the near future. Five of these streams have shaped family sociology in Germany over the last 20 years: (1) the sociology of the life course and of living arrangements; (2) the sociology of intergenerational relationships; (3) research on couple relationships and partnership quality; (4) the growth in the interdisciplinary character of family research; and (5) intercultural studies on the meaning of family and partnership, particularly with respect to migrant families. While he was correct with regard to these five important points, his other two predictions were not fully realized.

First, Richter anticipated that family indicators would feature more prominently in national and international reporting systems. It is indeed the case that the German Data Report (*Datenreport*) devotes more space to family-related topics now than in the past. There are, moreover, several international indicator systems that cover family-related topics, such as the OECD family database and the contextual database of the Generations and Gender Programme. These indicators have proven useful in examining differences in family policies and behavior between countries. However, the expectations of the early years that the collection of contextual information would boost multilevel research and enrich our understanding of the effects of contextual factors on individual decision-making have yet to be fulfilled.

Second, Richter predicted a further development and diversification of theoretical approaches. While he was right that the rational-choice approach would be refined in the following years, the theoretical approaches that are currently being used barely go beyond the bifurcation between rational choice and related micro-level accounts on the one hand and constructivist approaches on the other.

How can we finally evaluate the achievements and shortcomings of German family sociology over the past two decades? It seems safe to acknowledge that research on intimate relationships and the family has undergone a major transition. Research activities have clearly taken the path of internationalization and have become more interdisciplinary. The controversies that dominated family sociology in the 1980s and 1990s—such as discussions about the decay of the family and theoretical debates about pluralization—have largely given way to empirical research based on rigorous methods and complex datasets. As a result, family sociology in Germany has developed into a highly differentiated research landscape that addresses a wide range of topics and questions. It is nowadays common for mainstream family researchers to employ a longitudinal research design, large-scale datasets, and a cross-national perspective. These developments started well before the turn of the century; however, the strong commitment of researchers to (rational) action theory and the life course paradigm is a more recent development. Another major aspect of change is that family

sociology has opened up. In many cases, scholars who classify themselves as family sociologists contribute to adjacent fields and areas of research, such as social-stratification research, social-network analysis, demography, and social policy. In the same vein, research on the labor market, migration, and social inequality has increasingly taken into account individuals' commitment in intimate relationships and families. These developments clearly represent major achievements, not least because they have fostered integrative research perspectives that link family dynamics to other life domains. However, a strong reliance of German family sociology on "normal science" has come at a cost. This has been illustrated above by the lack of theoretical diversity that we identified among mainstream family sociologists. Scholars who adopt a more universal view or who contribute to the advancement of theory have become a rare species over the last 20 years. In line with these developments, universalists and scholars of "the family" are barely visible in today's public debates in Germany.

What direction will family sociology take in the next two decades? It is likely that the prominent themes will include couple relations, gender-role behavior, work-family conflicts, the impact of social and family policies on family behavior, the relationships of family members within and beyond the household context, and living arrangements of the elderly and intergenerational relationships in aging societies. Family sociology will also continue to contribute to the understanding of social and economic disparities, including wealth inequalities that exist by gender, family type, migration background, and region.

Beyond these topics, there are at least three areas of research that have received little attention in the past but might provide new perspectives for family sociologists in the years to come.

First, family sociologists have tended to view with a certain degree of suspicion the claim that biological factors are determinants of human behavior. For this reason, research in this area has been rather scattered (Huinink et al., 2015; Kolk and Schnettler, 2013). However, this attitude seems to be changing. An indication that a shift is occurring is that survey data on biomarkers are increasingly being collected. The TWIN-LIFE project is an example of a landmark study that examines how genetic factors influence family behavior and social inequality (e.g., Gottschling et al., 2019). In addition, the increasing use of assisted reproduction has led researchers to pay more attention to the biological foundations of having children (Trappe, 2017). It is also likely that the question of how the mental and the physical health of children and their parents affect family life and family behavior will occupy the next generation of family sociologists.

Second, it appears that the discourse on digitalization has yet to have any large-scale effects on German family sociology. As early as in the 2000s, Hans-Peter Blossfeld led a large-scale project on the role of dating platforms in partnership behavior (Skopek et al., 2011). However, to our knowledge, no major initiatives followed. Digital "big data" are currently being exploited for demographic analysis. The ability to web-scrape internet and social media content has led to the emergence of new types

of data sources for political scientists. Family sociologists have not yet tapped into this option on any substantial scale. However, it seems safe to assume that a growing number of younger family scholars will eventually take advantage of the new data sources that are available to study family behavior. Furthermore, there is a growing awareness of the role that social media, and digitalization more broadly, may have on family life, family relations, and family behavior. How digitalization shapes labor markets, work patterns, family relations, family care, and the compatibility of work and family life will certainly become a relevant social-policy topic.

Finally, gender equality is a topic high on the agenda of both the European Union and the German government. Up to now, this policy goal has mainly been addressed through the expansion of public daycare and the inclusion of women in the labor market. Efforts to reform working-time regulations, reduce the working hours of fathers, and promote changes in the behavior and the organizational cultures of employers were never embraced with the same enthusiasm. While family sociologists have advocated the dual-earner model, they have lacked a clear vision or policy strategy for achieving gender equality beyond calling for an expansion of public daycare. We do not yet know how the transformation of the labor market through information technologies will shape family life and behavior in the years to come—that is, whether it will generate new freedoms for parents to organize their family life as they wish or whether it will lead to the emergence of new social risks and divisions. The ability of future research to address these questions depends heavily on the continuity and innovations in data collection that sufficiently reflect the changes in the labor market.

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(Felt) Body. Sports, Medicine, and Media

Robert Gugutzer and Claudia Peter

Abstract: Since the beginning of the 21st century, the body has been a generally recognized object of investigation in German-speaking sociology. At the same time, the body is also discussed as a subject of empirical research and as a fundamental theoretical concept. A distinct feature of German sociology is that it differentiates between the physical body (*Körper*) and the felt body (*Leib*). This article explains both the philosophical foundation of this conceptual distinction and its sociological relevance and presents research in the fields of sports, medicine, and media. We show the different ways in which the felt body and the physical body serve as a theoretical basis in sociological investigations and/or are treated as empirical objects.

Keywords: Physical body, felt body, sports, medicine, media

1 Introduction

The body has become a common topic of investigation in German-language sociology since the last three decades of the 20th century. The first more comprehensive publications appeared at the beginning of the 21st century and included topics such as the body and gender (Villa, 2000), the body and shame (Koppetsch, 2000), the body and biography (Abraham, 2002), the body and identity (Gugutzer, 2002), the body and pop culture (Schmidt, 2002), the body and social order (Hahn and Meuser, 2002), the body and sexuality (Lewandowski, 2003), or the body, play, and sociality (Alkemeyer et al., 2003). The first introductory and systematizing works towards a sociology of the body came shortly afterwards (Gugutzer, 2004; Jäger, 2004; Meuser, 2004; Schroer, 2005). The establishment of the section “Sociology of the Body and of Sports” in the German Sociological Association in 2005 rapidly provided the sociology of the body with an institutional framework that played a major role in promoting this very new branch of sociology and getting it quickly accepted by scholars. This “body turn” (Gugutzer, 2006), still in a programmatic stage at that time, consequently gathered momentum and has since produced a considerable number of works on the sociology of the body. Research fields that have proven to be particularly closely related to the body include the sociology of sports (see below), of gender, and of sexuality (Duttweiler, 2017; Lindemann, 2011; Meuser, 2003, 2005; Reuter, 2011), of the senses (Loenhoff, 2001; Göbel and Prinz, 2014; Raab, 2001; Saerberg, 2007), of disability (Dederich, 2007; Waldschmidt and Schneider, 2007), of aging (Mehlmann and Ruby, 2010; Riedel, 2017; Schroeter, 2012), of beauty (Degele, 2004; Koppetsch, 2000; Penz,

Note: Translation from German, including all quotes from German literature, by Karen Margolis for *SocioTrans—Social Scientific Translation & Editing*.

2010; Villa, 2008), of dancing and movement (Klein, 2004a; 2004b; 2009; Müller, 2016), and of knowledge (Keller and Meuser, 2011; Knoblauch, 2005; Stadelbacher, 2016). For a concise survey of the present state of sociological research on the body, see the *Handbuch Körpersoziologie*, a work of nearly 1,000 pages published in 2017 (Gugutzer, Klein and Meuser, 2017; see also Alkemeyer, 2015).

Present-day German sociology typically no longer treats the body solely as a research *object* but just as much as a research *subject*. In the sense of a self-reflective turn, the sociology of the body is increasingly focusing on the body of the researcher as an instrument of sociological insight (Demmer, 2016; Dörpinghaus, 2013: 206–263; Gugutzer, 2017b; Peter, 2016; 2018a; 2018b). On the other hand, works are increasingly appearing in which the body is seen as a central category of general sociology, and an “embodied sociology” is being developed with the body as its starting point (Böhle and Wehrich, 2010; Gugutzer, 2012; 2017a; Lindemann, 2014; Uzarewicz, 2011). Even theories from outside the area of sociology of the body emphasize this categorical relevance of the body for sociology. This is particularly notable at the moment in *Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehungen* (*A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*) by Hartmut Rosa (2016; 2019), who highlights the body as an important medium for (socially ‘endangered’) experiences of resonance, or in Hubert Knoblauch’s *Kommunikative Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit* (2017; *Communicative Construction of Reality*), which includes a social theory that—contrary to Habermas—conceives of the key concept of “communicative action” as “embodied.”

A specific feature of German sociology is that it makes analytical use of its linguistic advantage of being able to distinguish between the physical body (*Körper*) and the felt body (*Leib*) (see Section 2). Using this peculiar aspect of German-language sociology, in what follows we shall structure the text along the lines of the distinction between the physical body and the felt body. We shall first explain the sociological benefit of the analytical distinction between the physical body and the felt body (2) and then provide an overview of sociological studies on physical bodies (3) before concluding with a survey of works that focus more intensively, or even exclusively, on the concept of the felt body (4). For the sake of brevity, we shall limit our examination to three sociological fields that have revealed, to various degrees, the social relevance of physical bodies and/or felt bodies: sports, medicine, and media. Our contribution ends with a short summary of the strengths and weaknesses of research on the sociology of the body in German-speaking countries and the possibilities of relating it to international research (5).

2 The Sociological Relevance of the Distinction Between the Felt Body and the Physical Body

The conceptual distinction between the felt body and the physical body has been part of the German philosophical tradition since Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. It has been

particularly stressed in philosophical anthropology (Scheler, Plessner) and phenomenology (Husserl, Stein, Heidegger, Schmitz, Waldenfels) (for an overview, see Alloa et al., 2012). Two main variations exist in relation to this concept of the felt body. The first, based on Husserl—and more closely defined by Merleau-Ponty—is the idea of the “functioning felt body” (*fungierender Leib*), while the other is the notion of the “sensing” or “feeling” body based on Scheler, Sartre, and Schmitz. The distinction between the physical body and the felt body is that the former is taken to mean the body as a physical object, which is externally perceivable (and scientifically “measurable”), whereas the term “felt body” describes the internal perception of the body-subject. Hunger, thirst, pain, fear, rage, sorrow, joy, desire, and so forth are felt-body (“pathic”) experiences of the subject, while the physical body is the actively usable instrument and expressive-symbolic object of human action. In other words, the terms physical body and felt body describe different phenomena but are nonetheless to be seen not as a dualism but as two analytic aspects that are mutually entangled in reality (Villa/Hark, GENDER, this volume).

The terminological distinction between the physical body and the felt body is sociologically relevant because it helps to uncover social processes and structures that are easily overlooked in the strands of sociology that are heavily oriented toward consciousness, intentionality, rationality, and (self-)control. In relation to the body, this means, for example, that social order is always a bodily order as well, that is, an order that is inscribed in the participants’ bodies and symbolically expressed through their bodies. Social interactions, on the other hand, are very often non-verbal; indeed, they are physical processes of negotiation and enactment by which social discourses are “conversely” inscribed in bodily behavior and feelings and thus achieve a social effect. The social importance of the felt body, in turn, results primarily from the fact that it guides social action and interaction in a way that is pre-reflexive, pre-conceptual, sentient, and palpable. Bodily sensations such as nervousness and shame are also socially relevant when and because they are physically visible (stuttering, blushing) and thus can be interpreted as bodily signs and hence guide action.

The discussion of the body, and particularly of the felt body, varies in importance among the different fields of sociology. In the following, we present three fields: sports, medicine, and media. *Sports* represents a research field in which the physical body and the felt body were discussed as topics very early on. *Medicine* is a research field that focuses more on phenomena relating to the physical body than the felt body but often presupposes the distinction between the two. And the *media* represents a research field in which, until now, the physical body alone plays a role.

3 Sociology and the Physical Body (*Körper*)

3.1 Sports and the physical body

Sociological investigations on the relationship between the physical body and sports focus first of all on embodied structures of sports; second, on the corporeality of social action and interaction in sports; and third, on discourses about the body.

Embodied structures of sports are discussed in works that inquire about how social structures shape the bodily action and experience of the sports actors. Two foci can be distinguished in the German-language sociology of sports: First, there are studies based on Bourdieu's theory of classes, habitus, and practice which show that not only structures of social inequality influence involvement in sports but that conflicts over distinction are fought out just as much in the sports sphere through physical representation work (Schmidt, 2009; see also Gebauer et al., 2004). Going beyond Bourdieu, some of these studies use examples of juvenile movement cultures to show in which way class-specific formation of habitus—and the concomitant formation of the self—are not only reproduced in sports but can also be transformed in the process (Alkemeyer, 2004; Alkemeyer and Schmidt, 2003).

Second, there are works of systems theory that are pivotal for the sociology of the body in the context of sports (and not only there) because they make clear just how much the physical practices of sports are a product of modern society. Bette, for example, with Luhmann's system theory in mind, speaks of a "paradox" due to "the increase both in alienation from the body and appreciation of the body" in modern society (Bette, 2005: 25–51). This paradox of both devaluation and revaluation of the body is particularly well illustrated in the case of high-performance sports insofar as the athlete's body, through his or her specialization, will be suppressed and, at the same time, shaped to achieve top performances (by doping, for example). But according to Bette, extreme, high-risk, and adventure sports are a reaction to the unintended bodily side effects of functional differentiation (rationalization, individualization, bureaucratization, etc.) that are supposed to be compensated within and with the help of these sporting practices (Bette, 2004).

Over the past ten years, the *corporeality of social action and interaction* has been discussed in the German-language sociology of the body and of sports primarily from the perspective of a sociology of practice. We can say that at present the most popular approach in the sociology of the body and sports is the praxeology of sports. Its status is demonstrated, among other things, by the fact that the journal *Sport und Gesellschaft* (*Sports and Society*) published two special editions on the topic in 2014 (Issue 3) and 2015 (Issue 2). Studies along the lines of a sociology of practice on the body in sports are concerned with the situated performance of sporting action and interaction and thus with the temporality and materiality (bodies and artifacts) of microsocial processes, as well as with the relevance of the (implicit) embodied knowledge that is gained and finds expression in the process (see Alkemeyer, 2006;

Alkemeyer and Michaeler, 2013; Brümmer and Alkemeyer, 2017; Schmidt, 2012). A recurring and important question is whether a human being can become a socially competent actor when engaging in one of the various concrete sports practices. Because of this, the main focus of praxeological studies on the body tends to be on training practices since they are particularly well suited for reconstructing the processes of how athletes are “incrementally enabled to participate in and contribute to the shared bodily performance” (Brümmer and Alkemeyer, 2017: 27), for example, in acrobatic sports (*ibid.*; Brümmer, 2015), martial arts (Schindler, 2011), or ballet (Müller, 2016). In this respect, sports training is a “formative practice” (Brümmer, 2015: 14) that is both socially regulated and produced by bodily interactions in the first place and in which the formation of a specific practice inevitably involves the “(self-)creation of its participants” (*ibid.*).

Studies on *discourses on the body in sports* concentrate on the interpretative patterns, ideologies, and images of the body circulating in sports as well as on the implicit attributions of normal/abnormal or right/wrong therein. At a theoretical level, they mainly draw on the post-structural works of Foucault and Butler. A popular research field is discrimination on the basis of gender and ethnic discrimination in high-performance sports, with the South African 800-meter runner Caster Semenya being a case in point (Günter, 2016). Another focus of study is the normative pressures of body ideologies in the area of sports for health and fitness. What is of primary interest here is the body with “normal weight” and, even more so, bodies that deviate from this norm, such as those of “fat children” (Körner, 2008).

3.2 Medicine and the physical body

Today, the majority of contributions relevant to body theory that are concerned with phenomena or objects that fall into the realm of medicine are not (or no longer) investigated by sociologists but by researchers on health, patient care, or rehabilitation, who work in an interdisciplinary mode and often have incomparably better possibilities for access “to the field.” In what follows, however, we shall concentrate entirely on empirical works of sociologists. In the past two decades, sociologists’ interest in theory of the body has mainly revolved around medical innovations and phenomena that have been discussed controversially in the public sphere or around status passages critical to the life course and that happen on a bodily level but are accompanied by medical monitoring and procedures.

Two investigations have examined the treatment of women facing the risk of genetic breast cancer: Zur Nieden (2013) designed her study as a discourse analysis and inquired into “embodiments of the genetic risk” in terms of how the women are affected by the subjectification of this risk. Pelters (2012) studied families, across multiple generations, in which the breast cancer genes were passed down and asked how the women who were affected talked about the balance between their shared propensity to genetic risk and regular prophylactics and personal individuation

through their own bodily experiences and their own patterns of interpretation and coping. Rödel (2015) approached pre-implantation diagnosis from the perspective of discourse analyses and showed how the concepts of gender and reproduction have changed since the introduction of this body technology in Germany.

Two studies are worth mentioning on the subject of the “fabrication” of gendered bodies with the desired characteristics: Sontowski (2016) is concerned with how practices of masculinity, the body, and sexuality are mutually entangled and uses the example of Viagra to explore this, while Meßmer (2017) refers to the phenomenon of intimate surgery to analyze the processes of “medicalization of aesthetics, which applies particularly to women’s bodies, and the aestheticizing of medicine” (ibid: 3) and employed discourse analysis for assessing the websites of professional actors.

Pregnancy is not only a significant status passage in biographical terms but is also relevant to issues concerning the theory of the body. In Germany, it is largely an event governed by medical procedures. The women concerned have to deal not only with their own (bodily) experience but also with attributions by medical professionals and their patterns of interpretation. In the first, seminal German-language study, Hirschauer and colleagues (Hirschauer et al., 2014) sociologized pregnancy as a special physical phenomenon and coined the concept of the “*inwändigen Anderen*” (“interior Other”) for the unborn child and the entanglement of the child’s life with the mother’s in this phase. Heimerl (2013) conducted a praxeological investigation of the medical practice of sonography and worked out how the unborn child in the womb, starting from an epistemically vague body, is successively made into an individual person.

3.3 Media and the physical body

Sociological investigations on the relationship between the body and media are mostly found in the context of media studies and less often in explicitly sociological contexts and publications. The analytical focus of these studies concentrates on (mass-)media discourses about the body, the media presentation and enactment of the body, and media-based technologies of the body and the self.

At the theoretical level, studies on *(mass-)media discourses on the body* are based primarily on the discourse theories of Foucault and Butler, and their main interest is the knowledge of specific bodies that is (re)produced in media discourses, together with the implied power mechanisms and normalization strategies. Investigations into the mass-media discourses on the body bring out the collective patterns of interpretation, ideologies, and public ideas contained in texts and images of bodies. The key form of media for this is print media. In this context, Villa (2006) showed in a discourse theory analysis of the *Tango Argentino* that the discourse about tango provides the transnational constitutional frame for the respective local tango practices and, conversely, that the dancers’ local tango practices keep the global tango discourse going. Klein (2008) has shown, using the example of the fit body, the way in which the

body images produced by the mass media take on interpretive power, which leads to the development of corresponding economic markets and individual structures of desire. Studies concerned with the contemporary cult of the body and beauty crazes point in the same direction. This is often connected with the question of the effect of mass-media ideals of the body and beauty. However, the common assumption that the omnipresence of such images tends to make people dissatisfied with their own bodies (Blake, 2014) is empirically controversial (Hoffmann, 2017: 170; Misoch, 2018: 273).

The attractive or beautiful body, the sexual, and the athletic body are a main focus in studies on *media presentations of the body*, while the key media formats are television, feature films, and the Internet. Thomas, for example, in her work based on governmentality studies, sees TV entertainment formats such as *Germany's Next Top Model*, *The Swan*, or *Popstars*, which all revolve around the (transforming) work on and with the body, as “modes of sociation in the age of neoliberalism” (Thomas, 2008: 220). TV shows like these present their participants as supposedly autonomous actors marketing themselves and their bodies by reproducing socially prescribed body and self-images or assimilating themselves to them. In doing this, these programs help to stabilize the dominant social relationships, and “celebrities” like Heidi Klum (see Seifert, 2010) can be seen as important mediators between media and society. The anthology by Schaaf und Nieland (2011) concentrates on the (self-)representation of female athletes in the mass media and underlines that media self-marketing strategies can not only utilize the beautiful body but the erotic body just as well. Less surprisingly, the volume shows that sex sells and, in fact, just as much for female athletes as for the media. Lewandowski devotes his social-theoretical analysis of pornography (Lewandowski, 2012) to the explicitly sexual body. Basing his ideas mainly on sociological systems theory, he is essentially concerned with the relationship between pornography and contemporary sexuality. One argument says: Internet pornography leads both to an increase in “deviant” (e.g., “perverse”) sexualities enacted in the media and to new forms of amateur pornography, that is, to the production of pornographic self-enactment by non-professional sexual actors. Aside from the Internet, in recent years German-language sociology has seen a boom in analyses of media representation of the body, particularly in film. Specifically worth mentioning here are the collections by Hoffmann (2010) and Ritzer and Stiglegger (2012); together they provide a comprehensive survey of the cinematic presentation of sexual, carnal, sporting, aging, violent, fat, mythical, virtual, and dead bodies.

The most recent publications on the relationship between the body and media address the increasing importance of technical, especially digital media, for people's relationship to their body and their self. The smartphone is a paradigmatic case in point of such *media-based technologies of the body and the self*. As Kaerlein (2018) has shown, a distinctive feature of smartphones is that they create a historically new, intimate type of relationship between computer technology and the human body. Smartphones are a “near-body digital technology,” a type of technology that is used in everyday life in a natural, habituated, “automatically physiological” way and one that thus plays a major role in the constitution of the subject in the late modern age.

Kaerlein's central proposition holds that, concomitant to this, the smartphone is becoming "the most important agent of the cyberneticization of everyday life" (ibid.: 18), which can be used, and equally misused, for manifold formats of surveillance and control. Both aspects are also discussed in studies on the digital measuring of the body and the self. This occurs, for example, from the perspective of reconstructing historically varying techniques of self-governance (Fröhlich, 2018) but particularly in relation to the current body and media techniques of self-tracking (Duttweiler et al., 2016) and lifelogging (Selke, 2016).

4 Sociology and the Felt Body (*Leib*)

4.1 Sports and the felt body

Sociological investigations on sports that are concerned with the felt body are mostly phenomenologically based and look particularly at bodily perception and experience in sports. In contrast to the international discussion, sports sociology in German-speaking countries focuses less on the subject's senses than on what is felt via the body. In this context, Anke Abraham, for example, has reconstructed the biographical influences and processing of bodily experiences of female rhythmic sporting gymnasts and other top women athletes. Abraham shows how the felt body becomes a repository of biographical experience and functions as a medium for identity formation (Abraham, 2006a; 2008). Moreover, Abraham has conducted concrete analyses of individual phenomena felt by the body, particularly pain (Abraham, 2006b). Among her findings, she has clearly demonstrated that the discursive context of high-performance sports contributes to athletes normalizing, or even glorifying, their experiences of pain, and describing them as pleasure gain. Degele (2006) has discovered that such strategies of normalization of pain also exist to a similar extent among recreational athletes.

Furthermore, perceptions of the felt body in sports are discussed in the sociology of sports from the viewpoint of non-verbal communication among the interacting athletes. In this case, sports is defined as a paradigmatic social field in which the actors' communication and interaction takes place wordlessly, pre-reflexively, intuitively, palpably. The most popular theoretical foundations for these studies are, first, Merleau-Ponty's concept of "intercorporeality" (Meyer and von Wedelstaedt, 2017) and, second, Schmitz' concept of "corporeal communication" (Gugutzer, 2012). These approaches are used empirically, for instance, to show that collective moods and atmospheres in sports can be produced through the bodily-affective interaction of the people and artifacts involved (Gugutzer, 2015; Meyer and von Wedelstaedt, 2018).

4.2 Medicine and the felt body

Studies about medically connoted phenomena related to the theory of the felt body are usually grounded in anthropology, following Plessner. The studies by Lindemann (2002) and Manzei (2003) are cases in point. Taking the issue of the (in)divisibility of the human body and the limits and possibilities of transferring body organs, the two researchers are concerned with the state of brain death, which is difficult to interpret. They systematically underpin their investigations with the felt body–physical body distinction. Focusing on this extreme state, both for the felt body and the physical body—in other words, the opaque state of consciousness of patients declared brain-dead—Lindemann and Manzei inquire how far this is only a physical body being kept alive or whether this is still a living, felt body. The answer to this question has consequences for the practice of transplantation, namely whether one should actually medically intervene in these brain-dead persons and remove their organs for transplantation into severely ill people with organ failure.

The high theoretical aspiration of these two works resides in finding an appropriate conception of the innate momentum and entanglement of the physical body and felt body that manifest in the process of healing or deterioration and cannot be intervened in themselves. Whereas Lindemann investigates how the emergence of the concept of brain death has shifted the social boundaries between the living and the dead, Manzei develops a critical anthropological study from a historical perspective. It reconstructs how body metaphors changed in medical knowledge and, following Plessner, conceives of the present-day body–technology relationship as a “technological eccentricity.” Manzei deserves credit for pointing out the historicity of what is generally understood by the terms “physical body” and “felt body.” That the felt body was regarded as a “composition of humors” right into the Middle Ages is a clear example of the fact that the meaning of this concept has changed over time, but it also shows that interpretations of what a felt body is, and can do, correspond to the medical understanding of how illnesses develop. In contrast to this medieval view, the emergence of modern medicine entailed an understanding of the human felt body as a physical body in which the various medical concepts from the end of the 18th century to the mid-20th century consistently used the machine metaphor as a central and systematic description of the human body (*ibid.*: 114).

Lindemann’s study, on the other hand, is a painstaking work both from a terminological and empirical viewpoint. It clearly illustrates that wiring up the patient is a “technical possibility for expression” that “enriches” the “expressivity of life” (see Lindemann, 2002: 233). This technology–body coupling does not, however, lead to a turn away from the patient herself but instead to a “technologically mediated orientation toward her” (*ibid.*: 233). Lindemann describes the patient’s body, first, as a supratemporal “classification unit” and, second, as an “expressive counterpart,” as a living patient whose (un)stable condition has to be revisited in constantly repeated encounters (*ibid.*: 236–284). While the first level presents an interpretation in terms of *a single* diagnosis, this is constantly controlled on the second level and may be open to

question if the (visual) inspection shows a different picture. Lindemann analyses several examples on this second level in minute detail as the complex embodied work of perception and interpretation done by professionals with the aid of technical possibilities of expression, collective discussion, and special examination procedures. Using this analysis, she tries to work out a conception that can be used to explain whether the patient is still conscious, that is, able to act expressively with the felt body, or whether he or she is “only” a reflexively reacting physical body. In doing this, Lindemann points out that directly accessible signs, the expressivity of the felt body, should be distinguished from indirectly accessible signs, from the consciousness of the felt body: the latter can only be deduced, it is subject to (error-prone) interpretative processes—and thus the patient in the study ultimately eludes the grasp of certainty, which she highlights by the term “ou-topical body” (Lindemann, 2002: 73–77).

The studies by Hitzler (2010; 2016; see also Grewe and Hitzler, 2017), drawing on Schütz, are conceived more in the framework of social phenomenology. They are devoted to a similarly mysterious condition known as the persistent vegetative state, in which the key question is how far these patients can still intentionally express reactions to their felt body and physical body, for instance, signs of pain. The special feature of Hitzler’s long-term study of an individual case is that he used confidential biographical knowledge about both the felt body and the physical body of the female patient. This gave him a window to different possibilities of interpreting the patient’s bodily movements than those available to the professional helpers. As a result, he was able to access and interpret physical- and felt-body patterns of the patient’s expressions and movements, patterns that were sedimented in her biographical history.

Extreme conditions such as brain death or the persistent vegetative state are predestined for theoretical investigations into the felt body, in cases where direct verbal communication with the patient is no longer possible and consequently only the (re)actions of the felt body and the physical body are available for interpretation. It is necessary to get a methodological grasp on the nature of these indications, whether they are ambiguous and thus uncertain or certain signs, and to explain this analytically, a process that again requires the terminological differentiation of the felt body and the physical body as the conceptual theoretical basis. The situation is similar for interpreting the process of healing (or deterioration) of a human body, another state that is not directly accessible. Health phenomena where the character of the illness is controversial, and which (so far) can only be objectified to a limited degree in terms of “reliable” medical data—such as obesity, various “body disorders,” or psychological and psychosomatic symptoms—are particularly suitable for such complex studies on the felt body (see Peter, 2006, on the meaning underlying the development of a “fat” body in childhood).

4.3 Media and the felt body

Contrary to the focus on the physical body, the felt body has hardly played a role in German sociological media research so far. This should seem surprising because media affect their users at the level of the felt body in diverse ways: the materiality and design of smartphones and laptops can be perceived aesthetically and in a tactile way, self-tracking apps influence and motivate their users, the virtual reality of the Internet offers sensual experiences (including extraordinary ones), media narration and images can excite or disgust the felt body, and media figures (stars, heroes) can inspire highly emotional parasocial relationships, and so on. This brief list attests to a range of research desiderata waiting to be addressed (and Hoffmann, 2017, already formulated them for the field of media socialization), but they can only be productively investigated if there is solid knowledge of the theory of the felt body (Hepp, MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION, this volume).

5 Conclusion: The Sociological Potential of the Distinction Between the Felt Body and the Physical Body

The present contribution has aimed to give an overview of research on the body in German-language sociology. We have argued for using the analytical potential of the conceptual distinction between the felt body and the physical body in a sociological context, a potential that is far from being exhausted. This distinction has its basis in the German language, whereas other languages have to find neologisms or adaptations, but all linguistic areas are facing a similar extent of systematic theoreticization in the sciences. Looking at France, where the tradition of phenomenology is alive and still producing new approaches, we can see how this “missing term” has been dealt with there since Merleau-Ponty’s day. Merleau-Ponty had no intention of uniting these two terms under a *single* term. Instead, he chose to redefine the nuances of the physical and the felt body, little by little, with adjectival phrases like “corps vivant,” “corps vécu,” “corps phénoménal,” and “corps propre.”

The following example illustrates that, in relation to this, English-speaking scientific communities face a linguistic problem, yet they have long been sensitized to this distinction. Although racial discrimination initially hooks into physical attributes such as skin and hair color, the social effects and consequences are not confined to the sphere of the physical body. The anguish people suffer is at its core more than just physical injury; verbal violence is not only inscribed in a body but also in its ways of reacting and responding, which are essentially grounded in the felt body. An understanding of the research that, for example, Sarah Ahmed, Sarah Pink, Amanda Coffey, and Loïc Wacquant are pursuing, follows up directly from our considerations and is mutually translatable and transferable.

The choice of terms and concepts for analyzing and discussing these effects and consequences in the individual national scientific communities largely depends on the philosophical traditions and the dominant theories in the different linguistic regions. Consequently, if we seek to productively link research with that of others internationally, this should not merely mean acknowledging their research results (which, incidentally, international sociology has so far largely failed to do in regard to German studies on the felt body) but also considering the similarities and differences of theoretical approaches on the metatheoretical level. In many Anglo-American theories, the physical body and the felt body are well-known phenomena but are rarely employed as theoretical concepts. For people interested in examining these types of felt-body reactions and responses in more detail—for example, in studying how violence is inscribed in the body or how linguistic imperatives lead to reactions of saying the unsayable, and so forth—there is a rich store of works on the phenomenology of the felt body in the linguistic area of continental Europe. We recommend making use of it.

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Gender

Paula-Irene Villa and Sabine Hark

Abstract: Research in the field of the sociology of gender includes theoretical, empirical, and practical studies and draws on the entire range of sociological methods and theories. This chapter reconstructs the more recent developments in the German-language sociology of gender along the lines of key issues—decentering, inequality and difference, intersectionality, care and precarization, and the body—and situates them in theoretical genealogies. Finally, we highlight current debates to outline avenues for future research.

Keywords: Gender, social theory, sexuality, social differences, care, intersectionality

1 Introduction

In 2019, forty years after the founding of the “Women’s Studies in Sociology” section in the German Sociological Association, gender studies are an integral part of sociological research and teaching. The sociology of gender includes theoretical, empirical, and practical (e.g., policy-oriented) approaches and draws on the entire range of sociological methods and theories. Being multidisciplinary by nature, sociological gender studies also bridges disciplinary boundaries. The sociology of gender is a constitutive element of the approximately 25 academic gender-studies programs (B.A./M.A.) at German universities, most of which take a multidisciplinary approach. Regardless of institution or location, all these programs basically list three aspects as their common denominator: apart from inter- and transdisciplinarity, these include “the ‘social category of gender’ as the label for their subject area and a critical stance (also towards scientific knowledge production)” (Oloff, Rozwandowicz, and Sackl-Sharif, 2018: 115; our emphasis). In the following, we will reconstruct the more recent developments in German-language sociology of gender along the lines of key issues: decentering, inequality and difference, intersectionality, care and precarization, and the body. Our closing outlook will also address current debates.

2 Decentering Gender

At first glance, the relatively pronounced sociological profile of multidisciplinary German-language gender studies seems in need of explanation since sociologists of gender had already raised doubts back in the 1990s as to whether “the gender dif-

Note: Translation from German, including all quotes from German literature, by Andrea Tönjes for *SocioTrans—Social Scientific Translation & Editing*.

ference does actually deserve—or still deserves—the status of a guiding difference” (Meuser, 1999: 151). The assumption was that the category of gender would become “obsolete” (Maihofer, 1995), as it was losing its “direct institutional basis” (Heintz and Nadai, 1998: 78). From today’s perspective, rather than heralding the end of sociological gender research, these positions were conveying a sociological insight: that we are dealing with empirical and structural asynchronicities between a gendered social structure, the institutionalized nature of gender relations, and the gender order on the one hand and the discursive-normative as well as individual praxeological level on the other. Angelika Wetterer (2003) referred to this as a shift in the “nexus between culture and structure,” for which she aptly coined the term “rhetorical modernization (289).” According to her, this structural distortion calls for including “various levels as well as various means of generating gender differences” in analysis.

In contrast to parts of the international research landscape, German-language sociology of gender of the 1970s and 1980s (which was then sociology of women and gender) was indeed characterized by its focus on studying the “relationality between gender groups” (Becker-Schmidt and Knapp, 2000) from a macrosociological and social-theory perspective. Over the course of 1990s, more emphasis was placed on issues such as internal differentiation among ‘women’ as a gender group (and later on, also among men and within other groups) and the relationship between gender and other categories of social inequality, while the focus was expanded by including the perspectives of microsociology, interaction theory, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and social constructionism. During the last decade, this has been complemented by an intense debate over the ‘decentering’ of gender in light of complex structures. Approaches drawing on poststructuralism and performativity theory have gained significance, owing particularly to the reception of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990). This is why today, subject, body, and identity as theoretical issues of *doing gender*—the interactive and practical construction of gender—have a greater influence on the field than macrosociological approaches, which have lost their paradigmatic prominence.

The volumes *Soziale Verortung der Geschlechter. Gesellschaftstheorie und feministische Kritik I* (2001; *Social Situatedness of the Genders. Social Theory and Feminist Critique I*) and *Achsen der Differenz. Gesellschaftstheorie und feministische Kritik II* (2003; *Axes of Difference. Social Theory and Feminist Critique II*), edited by Gudrun-Axeli Knapp and Angelika Wetterer, are exemplary of an approach that is still relevant in contemporary German-language sociology of gender: a combination of continuous (self-)reflection on analytical tools and analytical categories with a polyphonic conversation between the proponents of different perspectives and methods. The first volume (2001) had a socio-theoretical focus, as in Helga Krüger’s (2001) article on *Der Institutionenansatz in der Geschlechterforschung* (*The Institutional Approach in Gender Research*) or in Maria Mies’ (2001) text on *Hausfrauisierung, Globalisierung, Subsistenzperspektive* (*Housewifization, Globalization, Subsistence Perspective*). The articles in the second volume, *Achsen der Differenz* (2003), addressed positional differences among the gender group of ‘women’—for instance, the global connections between

gender relations and other forms of social structuration. Many of the volume's contributions came in response to the then-pressing question about "differences among women, that is, the social and cultural heterogeneity of the feminist reference subject" (Knapp and Wetterer, 2003: 8). We deem it proper to mention this here because the current buzzword *intersectionality* fails to acknowledge that addressing complex social structures (of difference and inequality) has a long tradition in German-language gender sociology and that these issues have been investigated in many and varied ways both in the German-speaking world and internationally.

3 Inequality and Difference

The pluralism of methods and theories that has characterized German-language sociology of gender over the past 20 years emerged in reaction to the aforementioned specific historical changes in society, namely, the disjunction of cultural and structural development. This forced scholars to re-confront the substantial question regarding the relationship "between difference and hierarchy within and between the genders" (Riegraf, 2009: 67). The reason for this is rooted in the nature of functionally differentiated, geographically mobile, post-traditional societies that discursively associate social positions with individual (in-)aptitude rather than with structures of inequality and seem to have no fixed social order (Schwinn, SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—THEORETICAL FOCUS, this volume). Societies of this kind render it increasingly difficult to make definite statements about the shape and structure of social conditions, dynamics, and inequalities, including those pertaining to gender relations. In her study *Soziale Ungleichheit und Geschlecht* (2000; *Social Inequality and Gender*), Karin Gottschall systematically reconstructed and compared the theoretical concepts underlying women's studies and feminist and sociological discourses in West Germany and stated that "today, social inequality in the Federal Republic [of Germany; our insertion] has many faces" (2000: 11). And indeed, phenomena such as changes in women's and men's economic-activity rates, the reorganization and dismantling of the welfare state, increasing migration (including economic migration), women's increasing participation in education and training, the pluralization of 'private' lifestyles and living arrangements, as well as political struggles over what counts as inequality in the first place indicate that we are dealing with historically changing, complex conditions (of inequality).

Scholars in the sociology of gender have expanded their theoretical and methodological toolbox—also in reaction to epistemological criticism from within and outside over the actual subject of the (partly feminist) discourse in their field. About whom, on behalf of whom, and to whom is the sociology of gender speaking? The field responded by engaging in an intense and still ongoing debate: Which social positions and lifeworlds are taken seriously and which ones are neglected? Whose social experiences are deemed empirically relevant and theoretically worthwhile? If it is true that social conditions and relationships are becoming more confusing also at the

global level and if, for instance, women of certain social strata and classes achieve their gains in equality by reallocating “housework to other women as precarious wage labor and shadow work” (Knapp, 2009: 316), analysis along the lines of gender sociology and a feminist critique of social conditions must focus on the “interferences between gender relations and other relations of power, hegemony, inequality, and difference in the context of globally changing conditions and balances of power” (Knapp, 2013: 108). In other words, gender needs to be researched in specific contexts and in conjunction with other structurally relevant differences such as class, sexuality, ‘race,’ age, or geopolitical position.

4 Intersectionality

The insight that the category of ‘gender’ alone *cannot* account for women’s living conditions was not new in German-language sociology of gender around the year 2000.¹ However, it was only in the wake of American jurist Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1989) considerations on the intersections of race and sex that the international and German-language sociology of gender alike increasingly began to focus on intersectional concepts that allow us to grasp the connections between multidimensional systems of division and domination and the various ways in which they are intertwined.

In the German-speaking academic world, the concept of intersectionality met an internationally oriented discourse that was debating issues of class, gender, and ethnicity from the angle of macrosociology and social theory (e.g., Lenz, 1995). In the 2000s, the intense reception among German-speaking sociologists of gender (see, Dölling and Kraus, 1997; Bock, Dölling, and Kraus, 2007) of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of inequality—especially with its simultaneous emphasis on a critique of domination and on everyday aesthetics—provided a major impetus that reoriented German-language sociology of gender toward multidimensional analyses. This proved highly productive and yielded concepts such as that of interferences (Müller, 2003), of interdependencies (Walgenbach et al., 2007), or that of overlapping- and crosscuttingness (*Überkreuzungen*) (Klinger and Knapp, 2008).

1 The ‘Bielefeld subsistence approach’ (Mies, Bennholdt, von Werh Hof) had addressed the interlaced nature of gendered and capitalist divisions of labor in a global perspective as early as the 1980s. Also in the 1980s, it was mainly Christina Thürmer-Rohr who introduced the concept of ‘complicity’ into the feminist debate in reaction to “defining all women as collective victims” (Thürmer-Rohr, 2004: 85), seeking to acknowledge the different positioning of women in relationships of power and subordination that are, at the same time, capitalist, colonial, and gendered. The nexus of ‘gender and class’ was highlighted most notably by Regina Becker-Schmidt and her Hanover colleagues (Becker-Schmidt et al., 1982; 1983; 1984; Becker-Schmidt, 1987) as well as by Ursula Beer (1984; 1990). Their analyses were fairly similar to comparable studies in the sociology of gender published in the English-speaking world around that time.

Intersectionality is a contested concept still today—and the debates are as interesting as they are symptomatic of the state of our society: Is intersectionality limited to making reference to diversity in its market-compatible form, with an eye to its potential for generating surplus? Is it (merely) about identity and subjective experience? Does this mean that race, class, gender, sexuality, and physical ability are individually obtainable markers of identity that call for optimization and render all of us ‘different’? Or does intersectionality offer a—more or less new—perspective for sociology to address, also critically, the historically evolved, institutionally established, and subjectively experienced structures of inequality? In short, is intersectionality more than a “buzzword” (Davis, 2013)?

The volume *Intersektionalität. Bewegungen und Verortungen eines vielschichtigen Konzepts (Intersectionality. Developments, and Situatedness of a Multi-Faceted Concept)*, edited by Helma Lutz, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar, and Linda Supik in 2013, elaborates on this question with the proper empirical, theoretical, and regional nuances. The book includes articles on topics such as masculinity in the context of economic precarization (Bereswill), sexuality as a dimension of intersectional social relations (Kosnick), or on the body as a dimension for intersectional sociology between specific practices and objectified structures (Villa). It also illustrates the extent to which the debate on intersectionality in German-language sociology has been shaped by the discipline’s macrosociological background, especially when compared to the US, where issues like representation, identity, and culture have played a more significant role in gender studies, also historically.

5 Critique of the Private: Care and Precarization

Just as intersectionality was not an entirely new concept in the early 2000s, the endeavor of rethinking privacy did not constitute a particularly unique desideratum in the sociology of gender—even though ‘the woman’ and her experiences of love, living, and family along with the routines and problems associated with these aspects of life had come under the scrutiny of sociology fairly late. Feminist and other new social movements addressed the political, historically evolved, normatively permeated, and media-mediated quality of the private sphere, family and love, sexuality and friendships, as well as tastes in music and fashion (see, e.g., Lenz, 2008). As a result of converging political and social-scientific attention, German-language sociology started addressing these issues in the 1970s. However, the discipline’s canonized mainstream has tended to reject this new field of study and relegate it to the realm of ‘particularity.’ Still today, much of German-language and international sociology share the assumption that ‘gender’ refers to the feminine and hence to the particular and, when in doubt, also constitutes a dispensable aspect of the general in the social.

Yet, according to Karin Jurczyk and Mechthild Oechsle’s volume *Das Private neu denken* (2008; *Rethinking the Private*), there were “good reasons (...) for reflecting on the private sphere anew” (2008: 8) at the end of the 2000s. These reasons were the

then “current changes” (ibid.: 26ff.) in the social fabric, which gave rise to a “new blurring and shifting of boundaries” (ibid.: 26) between public and private. The gendered spheres of work and family were significantly affected by the “structural changes in employment” (ibid.) in the form of a radical subjectification of labor, by the digitally catalyzed blurring of spatial and temporal boundaries, as well as by the work- and market-induced intensification of demands on mobility and flexibility. The “integration of women in gainful work” (Jurczyk and Oechsle, 2008: 28), which had already been established in the eastern part of Germany at the beginning of the 21st century and was also on the rise in the western part during this time, required reorganizing the private and public dimensions of the social: Do we need to rethink ‘family’ entirely in view of the increasing inclusion of women in employment and in light of digital lifeworlds? And do we therefore also need to reconceptualize and reinvestigate it from a sociological perspective? As is typical of the sociology of gender, the contributors to *Das Private neu denken* answer with a clear “yes, but” to the questions raised by the specific empirical constellations in which the inertia of traditions and innovation dynamics find expression. The strengths of this volume thus lie in the theoretical as well as empirical acknowledgement of the ambivalences and paradoxical nexus of gender relations. It investigates the (a-)synchronicity of inertia and persistence, the erosion of traditional interpretations and structures, as well as emerging new developments in the economy, politics, media, and so forth from a sociological perspective—for instance, by analyzing the routines of everyday life, domestic violence, household-related services, care relations, and so on. Exploring the changing gender arrangements between private and public, between market/gainful work and love/family has resulted in two strands of research, which have left a productive imprint on the field of gender sociology: one focuses on investigating care while the other analyzes the dynamics of precarization, for example, with regard to gainful work, the future, identity and belonging, gender, and institutions and markets.

The plethora of contributions on the dynamics of precarization offered by the sociology of gender is summarized in Mona Motakef’s introductory book *Prekarisierung* (2015; *Precarization*). This slim yet substantial volume is interesting not least because it successfully manages to ‘mainstream’ gender into sociology. Motakef uses the example of gender to demonstrate that precarization creates structurally induced uncertainty that permeates all social spheres and defines our present time not only in the Global South but also in the Global North. The book not only illustrates the general through the particular, it also argues that if we want to formulate general diagnoses with respect to social change, we cannot be silent about gender. This, of course, also holds true the other way around: if we want to research gender dynamics and constellations in a sociologically sound manner, we cannot disregard structural—that is, economic and socio-political—dynamics, which have always been ‘intersectional’ in the first place. “In a globally and historically extended perspective, the phase that has been labeled Fordist, during which the standard employment relationship and standard family were considered the norm, marks an exception, whereas precarious work and living conditions have always been and continue to be the rule in capitalist forms

of sociation” (Motakef, 2015: 10). Motakef also uses this insight to argue that the intersectional and (gender-)sociological gaze helps us recognize to what extent the research on precarization, for instance, is itself a “locus of struggles over hegemony in defining what has been, is, and will be precarious” (ibid.). This approach takes inequality, discrimination, identity, and the body as seriously as the ethical implications of precarization.

Bringing together sociological research on care and on gender in an intersectional perspective remains one of the busiest empirical ‘construction sites’ in gender studies (Pfau-Effinger/Grages, SOCIAL POLICY, this volume). Here, care is, roughly speaking, understood as attending to the needs of all that is alive, in other words, all activities required to tend to, preserve, restore, sustain, and enable living. An example of this is the special volume *Gender and Care* of the German-language journal *Gender* (Riegraf et al., 2011). It analyzes the ‘neglect’ and devaluation of care activities in capitalism from a structural and socially critical perspective, depicts the historically evolved feminization of this (reproduction) sphere (Becker-Schmidt, 2011: 9), interprets empirical findings on gendered “divisions of labor in families” (Flaake, 2011) by drawing on psychoanalysis, and analyzes “care networks between private support, social services, and welfare-state provisions” (Brückner, 2011) at the meso level. The issue of care has now become a key focus in German-language gender sociology and gender studies. This is well in line with international research in this field, although contributions from the English-speaking world in particular are more strongly informed by philosophical and ethical considerations (cf. Tronto, 1994, and later editions; for an overview, see Norlock, 2019).

Helma Lutz systematically expands the sociological perspective on gender and care in her book *Vom Weltmarkt in den Privathaushalt. Die neuen Dienstmädchen im Zeitalter der Globalisierung* (2007; *From the Global Market into the Private Household. New Housemaids in the Age of Globalization*) by also considering transnational linkages (including the dynamics of ethnification and racialization from an intersectional point of view). The volume presents the findings of a qualitative study on migrant ‘housemaids’ working in German households. They were asked about their identity as workers, their transnational conduct of life, and the networks they use to this end, as well as about their self- and social perception. What makes the study particularly instructive is that it interviewed not only the housemaids themselves but also their employers, who were members of the educated upper middle-class. The study is groundbreaking in reconstructing the negotiation processes taking place in the private sphere: work, relationships, intimacy, emotions, legal issues, money/economy, global connections, and so on are constantly (re-)negotiated in the detailed context of daily housework. The complex (i.e., intersectional) social positions (e.g., ethnicity) of the persons involved play a crucial role in this process, as they simultaneously construct these positions while engaging in these activities. The study is a brilliant demonstration of how one can explore the situational dynamics of construction processes in conjunction with complex global structures in order to derive rich sociological analyses (Weiß, GLOBALIZATION AND TRANSNATIONALIZATION, this volume).

6 Body Constructions

A fourth important topic area in German-language sociology of gender is the ontology of gender and the precarity of its scientific-biologicistic foundations (Villa, 2014). During the 1980s and 1990s, the vast insights gained from empirical work, for instance, by ethnomethodologists in the line of Goffman (cf. Gildemeister, 2010), were complemented by studies on gender employing a history- or sociology-of-science perspective and by studies from the natural sciences. This research was formative in understanding how strongly the nature of gender difference is in fact the result of continuous social processes of naturalization: as an “ongoing accomplishment” (West and Fenstermaker, 1995) and as acts of *doing gender* in everyday life, which feed on ideologically underpinned—evidently simplistic—notions of the biology of gender. Following this line of reasoning, the debate in the 1990s was marked by challenging the differentiation between sex and gender, both epistemologically and from a discourse-theory perspective. This was particularly in response to Butler’s work, which rendered reflexive the ontology of sex and was received controversially, for instance, from the perspective of the phenomenology of the felt body as discussed in the sociology of the body (Lindemann, 1993; Villa, 1999). In the 2000s, gender studies ‘normalized’ by empirically analyzing specific practices and constellations of constructing the body.

Nina Degele’s study *Sich schön machen. Zur Soziologie von Geschlecht und Schönheitshandeln* (2004, *Beautifying Oneself. The Sociology of Gender and Doing Beauty*) is paradigmatic of this German-language debate and exemplary in applying the (self-)reflexive program of a sociology of gender. This qualitative study addresses the everyday understanding of beauty practices, which sociology conceptualizes as *beautification*. Despite its relatively simple design based on group discussions, the study is quite complex as it selected the participating groups along the lines of various structural differences: sexuality, age, gender, and occupation were the relevant criteria of difference. What becomes obvious is that, rather than being a self-satisfying private pleasure (as the commonly prevailing narrative would make us believe), personal beautification actually represents an “ideology of doing beauty as a private act” (Degele, 2004: 90). Identifying subjective motives such as wellbeing, personal taste, self-determination, and inner satisfaction marks an intermediate step, not the end point, of this empirical reconstruction. Degele’s qualitative-hermeneutic approach provides an in-depth analysis of these narratives and not only reveals the extent to which embodying the “ideology of fun” (ibid.: 123) involves hard work on the part of those working in the beauty industry but also the great degree to which beautification is of significance to the work situation of those seeking it: in the world of work, body constructions are needed to accentuate masculinities and femininities effectively and, to the utmost possible extent, successfully—and in ways that are in line with the market and the social norms of competition and optimization. Ostensible individualized “beautification” (Degele, 2004: 118) is in fact socially normed “body-

fication,” and the daily practice of doing beauty invariably also implies doing gender through doing body. What the study further shows in an exemplary manner is that bodies are not extra-social, ahistorical entities but are shaped and rendered relevant in accordance with social imperatives that become efficacious, both literally and proverbially, behind people’s backs (Gugutzer/Peter, (FELT) BODY, SPORTS, MEDICINE, AND MEDIA, this volume). The less they are subjected to open debate, the more efficacious they are. What the study fails to consider systematically, however, is acting persons and thus agency and practice itself. Even though texts, such as empirical transcripts or sociological analyses, are not taken to represent the full empirical picture, it is nevertheless the proverbial text and not the acting bodies that are being studied. In this sense, too, Degele’s study is symptomatic of those strands of German-language sociology of gender that engage in empirical research on social constructions of gender by focusing on discourses, knowledge, and interpretations while turning a blind eye to the actual doing and the inherent logic therein.

This limitation has been reinforced by the extensive reception of the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who conceptualized bodies as an “embodiment” (Bourdieu, 2001: 65) of social orders of domination (ibid.: 30ff.), as a habitualized bodily *hexis*. In particular, he sociologized gendered bodies as a naturalizing somatization of discursive norms of gender difference. Binarities that manifest themselves in specific activities such as fetching water, doing housework, eating, and so forth are the normative texture of embodiment and become somatized also—and especially so—through sexuality. In the context of a binary gender order, the “phallic erection” (ibid.: 13) particularly “helps transmute the arbitrary of the social *nomos* into a necessity of nature (*physis*)” (ibid.). Such a close link between sexuality and politics has rarely been established even by feminist-activist authors—and sociologists of gender are definitely careful to avoid it. From a sociology-of-gender perspective, naturalization processes and their somatic side should rather be seen as multidimensional systems of mediation. The reason for this is that as plausible as Bourdieu’s analyses of the naturalization discourse and the resulting imperatives of social embodiment are, and as much as they accord with studies from the sociology and history of science on the ‘production’ of the modern gendered body, his fixation on this normative concept leads him to neglect the inherent logic of the somatic, of the felt body, and of the variety of bodily *practices* embedded therein. It is these practices from which gender, undoubtedly socially and historically constituted, draws its vitality. The study *Sexy Bodies* (Villa, 2011) seeks to discuss these different dimensions in their inherent logic and engage them in dialogue. Numerous studies in the sociology of gender have since tried to avoid reducing bodies—or more precisely, somatic and felt-body dynamics—to ‘discourse’ (as we can observe in some post-structuralist works) by drawing on the phenomenology of the felt body as well as on praxeological approaches in a differentiated manner. This specific accentuation has in turn contributed significantly to refining the post-structuralist concept of performativity employed by those working along the lines of Butler.

7 Outlook

Since being established in the late 18th century, bourgeois gender relations have undergone repeated transformations along legal, political, cultural, and material lines. The referential connection between the symbolic gender order and the gendered social fabric is different today from what it was during the early days of bourgeois, capitalist modernity. The fundamental, specifically modern form of gender relations, however, seems to have survived bourgeois society's various transformations. This applies particularly to the asymmetrical relationship between the two gender groups of men and women, to their being assigned, in principle, to two separate spheres in society (the private household and the world of work), as well as to the key parameters of modern gender relations: the gendered division of labor and androcentrism, masculine domination and heteronormativity. All this raises two fundamental questions that will continue to preoccupy sociological gender research for some time to come: How can we *today* conceptualize this figuration that is marked by asynchronicity? How does the ensemble of institutional arrangements, empirical practices, and normative programs associated with "organized modernity" (Wagner, 1995) amalgamate with that of contemporary late-modern society?

Generally speaking, the question is whether the twofold dynamics of male individualization and female familialization—for two centuries the driving forces of Western modernity—have not only become precarious but have actually been disrupted in the course of the transformation from a provisional to an activating welfare state and the associated rise of the *adult-worker* model. Have hitherto valid, conceptual dichotomies such as reproduction and transformation or change and persistence perhaps exhausted their potential for describing social gender dynamics? Do the organizational principles that once guided the gendered division of labor during the first two centuries of modernity no longer apply, or are they merely exposed to greater friction? How does the structural change in society correspond with processes of subjectification and the constitution of subjectivity, and with the emergence of agency and relationships? How gendered—or not—are, for example, "doing family" (Jurczyk, Lange, and Thiessen, 2014) and "doing care" (Zerle, 2011)? Recent studies on couples have revealed that, while patterns of gainful work are indeed changing significantly, traditional patterns of gendering still prevail in the private sphere (Koppetsch and Speck, 2015; Wimbauer, 2012). It is here that the everyday reality of partnership and housework brings the asynchronicities in the edifice of gender and society to light.

Moreover, the incorporation of social reproduction into value-added that coincides with the increasing commodification of female labor fundamentally changes the conditions under which people can care for themselves and for others. This structurally generated scarcity turns doing generativity and care into an ideologically and emotionally charged social conflict. In these debates, however—at least in those outside gender research and feminist politics—the structural context of gender and society remains largely hidden, to the benefit of individualized imperatives of self-

management ('work–life balance'). This, in turn, must be subjected to critical (as well as self-critical) scrutiny in gender sociology and gender studies since the vocabulary of market-oriented gender equality and diversity policies has indeed originated in the field of gender research ('gender mainstreaming').

In view of increasing transnational ties, we finally also need to identify the contemporary globalized manifestations of gender relations, including their racialized, heteronormative, and class-based articulations. Can we still today continue to conceive of gender relations—as a nexus between symbolic order and social fabric—within the confines of the nation state? How would we have to conceptualize them within the context of a world society instead?

To analyze current dynamics, the sociology of gender needs to thoroughly reflect on whether to understand these dynamics as 'shifts' or 'asynchronicities,' as 'contradictions' between economic structure and cultural lifestyle or as 'paradoxes' of capitalist ways of life. The choice of terminology is relevant not least with regard to how the sociology of gender will conceive of and investigate the somatic and affective integration of systemic imperatives, processes of gendered and gendering socialization, and the praxeology of gendering. In short, the sociology of gender too revolves around the fundamental question at the heart of sociology: what are the links between structure, action, and subjectivity?

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Globalization and Transnationalization

Anja Weiß

Abstract: Interest in globalization has gained considerable momentum since the 1980s and has prompted fundamental debates in the field of sociology. Nonetheless, sociology has remained nationally framed. Today, the notion that transborder phenomena and perspectives are valid is widely accepted. German-speaking authors have undertaken collective efforts towards more precise theories of globalization and transnationalism: Migration scholars, for instance, have proposed middle-range theories of transnational social space built on empirical research. The Luhmannian school of systems theory has translated a comprehensive theoretical program into research on the diffusion of global standards. Internationally prevalent theoretical approaches, such as postcolonial studies, have inspired research on a broad variety of topics ranging from the global division of labor to the cultural aspects of globalization. And finally, as far as methodology is concerned, country comparisons and qualitative case studies are the most common but are being complemented by innovative approaches.

Keywords: Transnationalization, globalization, theory of society, transnational social space, systems theory, field theory

1 Introduction

Sociology as a discipline was born during a time of nationalism and nation-state formation. Classic sociological theories in the Global North have thus presupposed that modern states shape societies as nations, which in turn lends legitimacy to collective decision-making within a national framework. In this vein, an idealized version of the modern welfare state informs much sociological research, a tendency that has been criticized as both Eurocentric (Quijano, 2000) and methodologically nationalist (Pries, 2008a).

Some theories, such as Wallerstein's world-systems analysis and postcolonial studies, have always seen the social world as global and relational. They remained on the margins of the discipline until the 1980s, a time when globalization became a buzzword in public discourse and when topics such as migration, cross-border production chains, and global ecological risk drew more general interest. The initial response was for public intellectuals such as Anthony Giddens, David Held, Saskia Sassen, Richard Sennett, Zygmunt Bauman, Martin Albrow, John Urry, and Manuel Castells to propose new takes on theories of society/-ies that centered on a loss of (spatial) structuration and variations or phases in modernization processes and that stressed the importance of networks, fluidity, and sociological imagination (Krossa, 2018).

In Germany, Ulrich Beck moved from a theory of risk embedded in the national welfare state to a theory of world risk society (Beck, 1999). As a staunch opponent of “methodological nationalism,” Beck introduced key proponents of the globalization literature to German audiences (Beck and Pöferl, 2010; Beck et al., 2003). He argued that the globalization of risk is a side-effect of modernization that would reflect back on institutions such as the nation state (Beck et al., 2013; cf. Lessenich, 2016). Beck believed this to have consequences for sociology and called for a distinctly sociological cosmopolitan method (Beck, 2014).

Despite these intense and fundamental debates, most sociological work (and administrative data sources) remained nationally framed and most professional sociologists did not feel compelled to translate the public debate on globalization into sociological theory and research. Even in comparative sociology, national path dependencies have mostly been constructed as isolated cases. Although more complex comparative strategies do exist, such as embedded comparison (Tilly, 1984), they remain exceptions (Eigmüller, EUROPE, this volume).

From today’s vantage point, we can see that change has occurred nevertheless. The notion that cross- and transborder phenomena and perspectives are both valid and necessary is widely accepted (Mahlert and Kron, forthcoming in 2020). For example, the biannual conferences of the German Sociological Association were focused on “transnational social forms” in 2010 and on “complex dynamics of global and local developments” in 2018; these invited several thousand German-speaking sociologists to make at least some sort of connection between their work and a transnational or global perspective.¹ Formerly marginal research fields such as migration studies have moved towards the core of the discipline, with textbooks (Faist et al., 2013 [Engl.]; 2014 [Germ.]; Nowicka, 2019) and original theoretical works contributing to and combining with recent theoretical developments such as Luhmannian systems theory, Bourdieuan field theory, and relational sociology as well as to new methods such as network analysis.

Since debates on globalization and transnationalization are international debates with the well-known hegemony of authors situated in US and British academia, German-speaking scholars are rarely at the core of these research fields. Nevertheless, certain individuals have made significant contributions in English and German, and some schools of thought relate to the larger field of German-language sociology in a way that gives English-language debates a distinct twist.

One important contribution of German-language sociology is theoretical endeavors to add precision to the terms *globalization* and *transnationalization*. Ludger Pries (2008a: 119–167) differentiates between seven types of cross-border phenomena. Four of these constellations use absolutist “container” notions of space, namely, internationalization, re-nationalization, supra-nationalization (e.g., the EU), and truly

¹ It is worth noting that the buzzword *globalization* appears in many publications that deal with entirely different subjects.

global phenomena, such as climate change, which affects regions all over the world. Pries uses relational concepts of space (Löw, SPACE. URBAN, RURAL, TERRITORIAL, this volume) to distinguish between three further socio-geographical constellations. *Glocalization* is the term that he suggests using if global phenomena achieve a distinctly local form and local forms universalize (cf. Robertson, 1992). Jazz, for example, originated in specific towns in the US, was later universalized, and then took on local qualities again in countries like Germany. The term *diaspora-internationalization* addresses spatial relations that extend across borders with a (virtual) center, such as Chinese emigrant networks. Consequently, Pries calls for more precision in using the term *transnationalization*: “transnational societal spaces can be understood as plural frames of reference that structure everyday practices, social positions, biographical employment projects and human identities, and that span locales above, between and beyond the contexts of national container societies” (Pries, 2005: 180). Transnationalization thus connects locales in different states, whereas global studies focus on macrosocial and globally expansive phenomena. The other constellations in Pries’ heuristic allow for new combinations and clarify the ways in which the nation-state frame has been modified.

Whereas migration scholars such as Pries have built on empirical findings in order to propose middle-range theories of transnational social space, the Luhmannian school of systems theory has translated a comprehensive theoretical program into research on the diffusion of global standards (section 2). Complementarily to this distinctly German-language scholarship, scholars situated in German-language academia have also contributed to the internationally hegemonic research paradigms by combining their interest in (intersectional) inequalities with studies of cultural hegemony. This research typically combines theoretical efforts with specific empirical interests, thereby contributing to a broad variety of topics ranging from migration studies and the global division of labor to the cultural aspects of globalization (section 3). In all of these schools the methods are different (section 4). Country comparisons and qualitative case studies are the most common but have been augmented by methodological innovation.

2 Systems Theory on World Society and the Emergence of Global Standards

When the German systems theorist Niklas Luhmann moved past Parsonian structural differentiation, he changed the foundation of his systems theory from action to communication. This move solved many theoretical problems and resulted in an elaborate and fascinating systems theory that has not been discussed much in the English-language sociological literature.² Since communication technologies had

² A small fraction of Luhmann’s work has been translated (1995; 2000; 2012/2013), but the central

gone global, the move towards communication also compelled Luhmann to give his theory a global scope, even though he himself did not have much interest in global studies (Luhmann, 1975; 2012/2013).³ The second and third generation of his school expanded in this direction and published extensively on world society (Heintz et al., 2005). They also established an Institute for World Society Studies in Bielefeld, Germany, thereby consolidating networks that reach as far as Latin America (Birle et al., 2012).

Compared to established globalization theories that tend to focus on politics, culture, or the political economy (Wallerstein), Luhmannian world-society theory considers multiple systems and their functionally differentiated logics. It does so with the help of an overarching and consistent systems-theoretical language. Historical processes are reinterpreted as the consecutive differentiation of functionally autonomous societal subsystems, such as religion, law, economy, politics, arts, science, intimacy, education, sports, and mass media (Stichweh, 2005: 163–177). This has enabled research on differentiated societal subsystems, which have set the stage for world society to emerge, for instance, in the form of world trade (Münch, 2011), world politics (Albert, 2016), world sports (Werron, 2010), and the globality of religion (Beyer, 2006; Petzke, 2014).

Luhmannians do not dispute that the economy is an important driver of globalization, but their theory emphasizes a constructivist approach to globalization processes. Most societal subsystems are seen as inherently universalizing owing to their dependence on symbolically generalized media such as money, power, or truth. In the last decade, Luhmannians have taken up arguments from neo-institutional world-polity theory (Holzer et al., 2014) in studying the diffusion of social forms, standards, and self-descriptions. Thus, the term *world society* itself is seen as creating its own reality (Heintz et al., 2005; Kastner, 2015). Drawing on a historical study on the emergence of world sports, Werron argues that the establishment of events, criteria, and publics that enable global comparison offers an explanation for the dynamics through which some societal systems globalize (Werron, 2007; 2010). Neo-institutionalism has also informed the research designs of scholars in Bielefeld, who in turn have undertaken research on the diffusion of German social policies to China (Leisering and Liu, 2010) or on the emergence and diffusion of direct cash transfers in the Global South (Leisering, 2019; Pfau-Effinger/Grages, SOCIAL POLICY, this volume).

The constructivism that Luhmannians share with neo-institutionalists yields a highly self-reflexive theory but also creates contradictions. First, it is difficult to address global inequalities within the scope of a communication-based differentiation

debates are published in German. For introductions, see the English-language publications cited here.

³ In consequence, Luhmann and several of his acolytes turned to outdated versions of modernization theory in addressing the Global South. Modernization theory is still pre-eminent in German sociology (Haller in collaboration with Anja Eder, 2016; Preyer, 1998), which might explain some of the reluctance of English-speaking audiences to read further.

theory. One strand of the debate attempts to replace a study of inequalities with a study of in- and exclusion (Dutra Torres, 2013; Farzin, 2006; Stichweh, 2005). A group of actor-centered differentiation theorists have also proposed the combination of theories of differentiation, inequality, and cultural hegemony (Schimank, 2015; Schwinn, 2004; Weiß, 2017; 2020) (Schimank, *SOCIETY*, this volume). A third argument emphasizes that, while Luhmann may have been skeptical of the continued significance of class stratification, his theory can help us understand the ambiguous position of migrants in relation to the nation state. In this reading, the reliance of the political system on territorial segmentation into nation states is seen as an exception to the rule of functional differentiation. By in- and excluding entire persons as citizens, the political system creates a threshold of inequality at national borders (Bommes, 1999; 2000; 2011).

This argument connects well with a second problem in the theory, that is, the continued relevance of the nation state in processes of globalization. Although Luhmann emphasized the primacy of functional differentiation, recent publications—both from the Luhmannian school and beyond—argue that national closure and globalization go hand in hand (Nowicka, 2019; Rieger and Leibfried, 2001; Werron, 2018). Thelen (2011: 24) maintains that the rapid expansion of communication technology in the 19th century enhanced national closure as a means to reduce the sudden globalization of competition. Only later did national entities start to compete with each other, thus enabling globalization processes and leading to the emergence and diffusion of international standards. Mahler (2018) has gone on to show that global standards can actually allow for local variation.

Finally, much like Wallerstein, Luhmann argues for a theory of world society in which the nation state should only matter as a means of secondary differentiation in the subsystem of politics, yet both have inspired empirical studies that take the nation state for granted and pursue country-comparative research (Bornschieer, 2002; Suter, 2010). We will come back to this point in the fourth section on methodology.

3 Economic Inequalities and Cultural Hegemony

A complementary body of theories is actor-centered and focuses on global and intersectional inequalities. In this area, German-speaking scholars have contributed to international debates, including those in the postcolonial and poststructuralist tradition. Key proponents in German academia represent a younger generation of scholars and include some immigrants from Eastern Europe. In studying European migration, Amelina (2017), for instance, argues for a “strong” version of the North American boundary approach, in which cultural distinctions take precedence over socially unequal relations. Cultural distinctions are also addressed through the lens of intersectional theory (Barglowski, 2019). These scholars share Luhmann’s radical constructivism, but they approach research on globalization and transnationalism from a different, critical angle. Rooted in the Bourdieuan Marxist tradition, Rehbein

and Souza (2014) have recently offered a critical reading in which they posit that the prevalent liberal-capitalist ideologies veil the fact that historical sociocultures continue to structure inequalities all over the world.

Other scholars have focused on the ways in which economic and cultural processes co-constitute global inequalities (Lenger and Schumacher, 2015). Boatcă (2015) stands out by explicitly connecting Wallersteinian Marxism with a postcolonial critique. She has revived another Bielefeld school—a 1970s feminist group that recalled Rosa Luxemburg’s argument that capitalism profits most from the exploitation of subsistence labor (Mies et al., 1988). In this reading, both the exploitation of coerced and underpaid reproductive labor in the Global South and the exploitation of women by men—in both the North and the South—serve to justify economic exploitation through cultural hegemony. Today these global relations of inequality are institutionalized in citizenship regimes, extraterritorial EU migration control (Hess and Karakayali, 2007), and a comprehensive governance of all kinds of cross-border mobility (Laube, 2013; Mau et al., 2012). Similar combinations of capitalism, hegemony, national regulation, and the global division of labor are discussed as part of regulation theory (Hartmann et al., 2009).

All of these theories are interested in global and transnational inequalities between social positions, and these positions are seen as both economically structured and culturally contested. This explains the attractiveness of Bourdieuan concepts. Some German-speaking authors have discussed the concept of habitus as being transnational (Dahinden, 2011; Girard and Bauder, 2007; Weiß, 2014). In this vein, although without explicit reference to Bourdieu, Mau (2007 [Germ.]; 2010 [Engl.]) showed that the degree of transnational social connections correlates with higher income and education for the German non-migrant population. In this same line of reasoning, but explicitly drawing on Bourdieu, Gerhards et al. (2016) looked at middle- and upper-class parents’ attempts to transnationalize the cultural capital of their children in an effort to give them access to transnational careers. The international hypothesis of a transnational capitalist class (Carroll, 2010) has been contested in Germany: Hartmann (2016) and Schneickert (2015; 2018) have found evidence that economic elites mostly live and act in their country of origin, even in the Global South. Other research has shown that transnational lifestyles and positions are more prevalent in the professions (Büttner and Mau, 2014) and amongst mid-level expatriate managers (Kreutzer and Roth, 2006; Mense-Petermann and Klemm, 2009).

Labor and industrial relations researchers have gone beyond a mere analysis of class positions as such by studying the national and transnational regulatory frames that govern these positions. German-language research offers insight into the peculiar position of an export economy strong in industrial production. Studies on the auto industry have focused on changing divisions of labor between connected production locations (Herrigel et al., 2017). Haipeter et al. (2019) studied multilevel and transnational industrial relations. Concerning IT-labor markets, Kämpf (2008) found that outsourcing had a negative impact on IT professionals situated in Germany. Mayer-Ahuja (2011) rejected simple dichotomies in which (high-skilled) employees in Ger-

many lose social protection as a result of outsourcing while employers exploit differences between regulatory regimes. She studied labor-utilization strategies in two software companies in Germany and India and discovered that these strategies responded not only to global divisions of labor but also to more local and transnational regulations. Her conclusion is that the global is not homogenous and the local does not maximize difference. Pries (2010) studied the emergence of global and transnational labor regulations. Others have looked at transnational standards in (labor) markets as well as transnational professional communities (Quack et al., 2018).

This “institutional turn” in studies of transnationalization calls for further conceptualization (Quack, 2009). With a research focus on citizenship, Faist (2000c) distinguished between migrant networks, circuits of exchange, and transnational communities. He prefers the term “trans-state” to “transnational” (Faist, 2000a; 2000b) since transnational communities are often held together by a shared ethnicity and national imagination as they cross “state” borders, thus becoming “trans-state” rather than “trans-national.” However, this convincing argument did not prevail.

Another conceptual debate concerns transnational chains of care. In this debate the emphasis on (migrant) labor has been expanded by considering reproductive labor, gender, and ethnic relations from an intersectional perspective (Hess, 2005; Karakayali, 2010; Lutz, 2006; Rerrich, 2006; Shinozaki, 2015). Connecting with feminist regulation theory (Aulenbacher et al., 2014), this literature finds that the incorporation of Northern women into gainful employment has changed the reproductive regime: as middle-class women could not convince their spouses to contribute to reproductive work, the ensuing gap is being closed by migrant women. Their often illegal employment then results in a shortage of care in their families of origin.

One of the English-language classics in this school of thought is Parreñas’ study of Filipina domestic workers in the United States. Parreñas’ concept of “contradictory class mobility” (Parreñas, 2001: 150) was replicated by Nieswand’s (2011) study of the status paradox that Ghanaian immigrants experience in Germany and Ghana. In both studies, class or status positions become ambiguous in relation to more than one nation state. Migrants with some degree of education are reduced to “unskilled” jobs in the service economy of the country of arrival. At the same time, global economic disparities enable them to establish a middle-class position for themselves and their families in the country of origin. Nieswand also found a negative impact on social order in Ghana when highly educated Ghanaians who stayed in the country are bested by less-educated emigrants working 3D (dirty, dangerous, and demanding) jobs abroad.

The combined analysis of country of arrival and country of origin is one of the most important achievements in empirical migration research (Pries, *MIGRATION*, this volume). Nowicka (2014) studied the labor-market integration and social self-positioning of Polish migrants in Great Britain. The Polish educational system produces a large number of university-educated young people whose education and income expectations do not match the demands and means offered in local labor markets. Many emigrated after EU accession. Working dead-end jobs in the United Kingdom, they

attempt to mitigate their relegation to these menial positions by touting the superiority of their Polish education. Scheel and Gutekunst (2019) studied how potential marriage migrants relate to family and migration regimes in North Africa and the EU. In order to marry in an Islamic state, for example, the bride must show that she is a virgin. Regulations in countries of origin thus train couples in strategic self-representation, which is also needed when interacting with an EU embassy awarding the coveted family reunification visa. Especially when Northern middle-aged women marry young African men, these couples submit intimate social media content as evidence to convince embassy officers that their love is genuine. Much like Nowicka, Scheel and Gutekunst argue that institutions in the countries of origin socialize potential migrants in a manner that impacts their migration trajectories and positionings in the country of arrival.

All of these studies examine cultural struggle through the lens of global inequality studies. This is most apparent in Wimmer's concept of "culture as compromise." By referencing implicit knowledge (Mannheim) or habitus (Bourdieu), Wimmer theorizes about culture in connection with migration scholarship. Rather than essentializing the implicit knowledge aspect of culture, Wimmer (2005: 32–33) instead follows a process perspective in which continuous symbolic negotiations result in unstable cultural compromise. Once achieved, cultural compromise also closes social groups to outsiders.

However, from the perspective of cultural sociologists, culture should not be reduced to critical readings of inequality and closure. Duscha et al. have argued that "every global process is also engaged in local action in every of its aspects. [...] global concepts are all but contested [...], they are in fact strengthened by the local claims of concretization" (2018: 3). Their view hearkens back to Beck's cosmopolitization claim that "the 'global other' is in our midst" (2014: 169) and is corroborated by studies of identities (Dürschmidt, 2013), the global justice versus global competition narratives (Schreiber, 2015), transnational media (Hepp et al., 2011), and global civil society movements (Beyeler, 2013; Brand et al., 2016; Herkenrath, 2011; Unrau, 2018).

4 Research Design and Methodologies

As mentioned above, globalization studies often opt for country comparisons, whereas transnational studies tend to be case oriented. A few quantitative and mixed-methods studies have explored innovative sampling and research designs. Wiesböck and Verwiebe (2017) replicated Massey's ethnosurvey (1987) for the larger Vienna-Bratislava region in which Hungarians, Slovaks, and Czechs commute to Austria. Guveli et al. (2017) sampled guest-worker emigrants and a contrast group of non-migrants in five Turkish provinces as well as the second and third generation in their families who now often reside in Western Europe. Dahinden (2009) identified four ideal types of (non-) migrants in a small Swiss town and described their characteristics with a quantitative descriptive network analysis. One of the four types are the locally established Swiss.

Even for them, Dahinden found that 13% of their social ties are transnational. Greschke (2009) is notable for the ethnographic study of a case in virtual space. She showed for a Latin American social-media website how virtual events and spaces intertwine with nationally framed and geographically situated practices.

Research designs of this kind contribute to a debate about the proper units of analysis in global and transnational research (Pries, 2008b). Internationally, the field concept is used for nationally framed topics (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012), in studies of transnationalization (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004), and for studying globalization (Go and Krause, 2016). German-language publications referenced Bourdieu earlier than generally was the case in the international debate in order to theorize societal entities that go beyond the nation state. Participants in a Bourdieuan field do not share generalized media of communication (which define Luhmann's systems) but rather an *illusio* that must be incorporated much like a habitus. As mentioned above, transnational habitus is a contested concept, which explains why Bongaerts (2008) expects habitus to globalize only in part and in very specific fields. Empirical research in this tradition does indeed prioritize specific fields, mostly politics and the economy, and those pursuing it often argue that members of an emerging transnational faction compete with their nationally oriented counterparts (Bernhard and Schmidt-Wellenburg, 2012; Bühlmann et al., 2013; Witte and Schmitz, 2017). A study by Buchholz (2008) showed that art is globalizing as North–South hierarchies continue to persist. This is because very few artists from peripheral countries were found to gain access to the art world even after staying in the North for extended periods of time and accumulating social capital there. To the extent that they are successful, their success comes at the price of selling their art as “ethnic.”

Another methodological option is a radical turn toward the local and the ways in which global phenomena are enacted in micro-social interaction (Berking, 2006; Knorr-Cetina, 2012). In an ethnographic study on consumption practices among Chinese students, Meinhof (2018) refuted notions of modern individuality and globalizing individualization. Instead he identified two divergent micro dispositives, the shopping mall and the market stall. Both suggest a specific type of shopping practice in which the global and local combine. Building on prevalent critiques of Eurocentric theorizing, Rehbein (2013) avoided the Scylla of definitive laws and the Charybdis of hyping hybridity by offering a kaleidoscopic dialectic built on Adorno's relational constellations and Wittgenstein's family resemblances, namely, the fact that every historical trajectory is different does not preclude a contextualized analysis of “resemblances.”

5 Towards Global and Transnational Studies

In the 1980s, research on “globalization” and “transnationalization” seemed to open new avenues for theory and empirical research. The enthusiasm of that time is long gone. It did, however, stimulate a wealth of innovation. Among German-speaking

authors after the turn of the millennium, we can discern a collective effort towards better and more precise theories of globalization and transnationalism. First, Beck and Luhmann were compelled to give their comprehensive theories a distinctly global twist. Later, more empirically minded migration scholars suggested middle-range heuristics or expanded on Bourdieuan field and capital terminologies. More recently, theorists have combined cultural hegemony and economic analyses. Transnational studies of labor and migration not only contribute to a better understanding of the continued relevance of nationalism and the nation state but also consider more than one national context at the same time.

As a general trend, empirical studies often focus on highly specific phenomena such as transnational (migratory) networks, the outsourcing of labor, or elite reproduction, whereas theoretical work tends to debate the theory of society (Römer, 2014). Frequent calls for “decentering” migration (Dahinden, 2016; Nieswand, 2016) or for transnationalizing sociology have not yet been answered by a comprehensive and convincing sociological approach to global and transnational studies. Rather, grand theories tend to focus on systems and forget agency or to give cultural hegemony and the positioning strategies of individual and collective agents primacy over an analysis of institutions. Combined theories do exist, though, and empirical research does offer elaborate, albeit case-study-based analyses of the ways in which globality is expressed and shaped by micro and meso situations. The next few decades might see the emergence of a paradigm that can theorize society beyond the nation state and that can guide comprehensive transnational research.

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Global South

Eva Gerharz and Gilberto Rescher

Abstract: The so-called Global South occupies a rather peripheral position in German-language sociology. This owes itself mainly to an idea, dating back to the early days of sociology, that upholds the binary between modern and traditional societies, with sociology being the field in charge of analyzing the supposedly modern and diversified societies that are to be found in the Global North. With the rise of debates on globalization, development sociology, the only subdiscipline that had been concerned with the other parts of the world, experienced a rather paradoxical decline. This article shows how sociological contributions that acknowledge the complexity of the Global South and attribute agency to social actors who are otherwise often socially marginalized on a global scale have provided novel and important perspectives on these regions over the last fifteen years. These contributions also testify to how these perspectives are compatible with theoretical and methodological insights from development sociology and have advanced classical approaches by relating them to the effort to create a global, decolonized sociology. The aim of such a sociology is to reinstate a more critical and encompassing analytical perspective towards the Global South that overcomes Eurocentric and modernist views.

Keywords: Development, translocality, decoloniality, comparison, knowledge systems

1 Introduction

Sociologists often see the Global South¹ as the opposite pole to the “Global North.” It is obvious that this view originates in the idea that the two regions represent traditional and modern societies, respectively. This imaginary has lain at the heart of German-language sociology since its inception and dovetails well with the idea of industrialization ushering in the age of modernity. Since the decolonization of Latin America, Africa, and most of Asia, the dichotomous imaginary of tradition versus modernity has been transferred from analyses of historical processes in Europe to other parts of the world. The modernization theories of the 1950s presented this mode of thought in an idealized way, and it underpins so-called *developmentalism*, which views the Global South’s major challenge to be catching up with the Global North’s state of development. Still today, this viewpoint continues to structure our worldview and define notions of progress and development.

¹ We use this term for pragmatic reasons, even though we are well aware that this concept has been criticized and is frequently seen by scholars from regions that have been subsumed under this term as an imposed Eurocentric dichotomy.

Over the last three decades, the sociology of globalization and world-society studies have sought to change this classical imaginary. Sociologists have discussed phenomena such as the concurrent erosion of borders, transnational and translocal entanglements, glocalization, and cosmopolitanism. International comparison has become a standard approach to theory-building, and big data has increased our knowledge of social inequalities on a global scale. Today, views like the modernist imaginary are met with the standard charge of being Eurocentric and have been questioned in many more ways. Additionally, sociology's tendency to locate modern society within the borders of a national society—an imaginary that has consolidated methodological nationalism—has been challenged in various ways. Still today, this viewpoint continues to structure our worldview and define notions of progress and development.

In the meantime, development sociology, the subdiscipline that used to be devoted to the study of the world outside Europe, has experienced a steady decline, particularly in Germany. At first glance, this is rather astonishing as this area of sociology has always engaged critically with modernist views (see Kößler, 1998). Development sociology has also conducted empirically grounded research on social structures as well as on processes of social, economic, and political change in African, Latin American, and Asian societies,² often in relation to global entanglements, and sometimes on the larger scale of their embeddedness in global economic and political systems. At the meso level, development sociology has investigated translocal connections and interfaces between knowledge systems in social configurations of all kinds, such as external interventions for the purpose of development (Bierschenk and Elwert, 1993). Always in close exchange with sociological knowledge production from all parts of the world, this body of scholarship has concentrated on relations of power and dominance, alternative views on political practice and social interaction, the social foundation of economic practices and structures, the transformation of gender orders, and on knowledge systems as the basis of interaction.

The marginal position of development sociology in German academia stands in sharp contrast to the fact that development research continues to be an internationally well-established field with significant prestige. Its minor status can only be explained by the observation that many issues that were once addressed exclusively by development sociology are now debated in the wider field of sociology and related disciplines. During the 2000s, this resulted in some decisive transformations. First, the aforementioned debate on globalization reinforced a further debate on the utility of sociological inquiry into particular, nationally defined societies and their transformation (Greve and Heintz, 2005; Beck, 1998) (Weiß, GLOBALIZATION AND TRANSNATIONALIZATION, this volume). Second, while the homogenizing and often stereotypical category known as the “Third World” has been subjected to fundamental criticism, systems of dependency and coloniality prevailed. Development sociologists,

2 After 1990, the so-called *transformation societies* were added to these global regions.

meanwhile, suffered from the repercussions of the debate over the “failure” of the grand development theories that attempted to explain developmental successes and shortcomings with the help of very general assumptions. Even as the teleological assumptions, overgeneralization, and lack of accuracy of these theories were being discussed, sociologists, among other scholars, questioned the utility of *development* as a theoretical construct. Extending this delegitimization of the concept of development to the entire subdiscipline does not seem justified, however, as development sociologists have often taken different approaches into account.³ A third transformation concerned critical perspectives on development as a hegemonic discourse. This debate, which produced the post-development school, not only questioned views of the world as being divided into parts that are more and others that are less developed but also sought to abandon the notion of development on grounds of its disputable analytical value, thereby targeting the core of development sociology as such (see Ziai, 2007).

Ironically, the epistemological framework of German-language development sociology has fostered a critical discussion of development in the Global South (Kößler, 1998; Goetze, 2002). Other branches of sociology have tended to ignore these critical engagements by arguing that a division of labor exists between sociology and social anthropology.⁴ A closer look at recent works in German-language development sociology reveals multiple ways in which scholarly engagement with the Global South has been reframed and revitalized. Important approaches have rethought modes of connectivity between (unequal) regions of the world by engaging with theories and methodologies on transnationality and translocality, linking these to empirically grounded perspectives on societal processes—in particular those found in the societies of the Global South.

Drawing on a selection of five sociological contributions, we will first examine the potential of empirically grounded research to analyze the negotiation of so-called Western concepts at the local level. We will outline how scholars who have advocated for transnational comparison have also argued for systematic and thorough reflection both in methodology and theory-building and for refraining from making generalizable claims. Patterns that emerge from this careful analysis of specific cases can then be related to other cases through “thought experiments.” From a postcolonial perspective, social actors are seen as being knowledgeable and capable of working towards a transformation of the social world—a premise that has been applied to the Global South particularly by scholars who seek to look beyond stereotypical orderings

³ The fall of the Iron Curtain also diverted attention away from the Global South, resulting in changing perspectives and priorities, including the reallocation of resources.

⁴ This line of argument was questioned when German-language sociology opened itself up to studies of globalization and world society and started to understand itself as contributing more to a “global sociology.” In the long run, however, early contributions to global and transnational research with a special focus on the Global South were largely ignored, and Eurocentric conceptions re-entered through the backdoor.

of social reality “from above.” In this vein, we will show how German-language sociological inquiry has contributed to our understanding of global social inequalities. As part of this effort, we will discuss two approaches that originate from different schools of thought. While one seeks to contribute a transnational perspective, the other makes an attempt to find a suitable theoretical framework to explain regional specifics and continuities. Finally, we will address decolonial perspectives that call for a thorough exploration of the power relations in which the relationship between researcher and research and unequal systems of knowledge production are embedded. We end by critically reflecting on positionality and discussing some of the implications that this might have for the future of a sociology of the Global South in the German-speaking world as well as its contribution to international discussions.

2 Translocal Comparisons

Since the 1980s, uneasiness over the transferability of Western concepts has prompted demands to observe “development under the microscope” (Neubert, 2001). Researching the interactions of everyday life and reconstructing the lived experience of groups or individuals in relation to larger processes and structures on the basis of empirically grounded mid-range theories has been the approach adopted by most sociologists involved in development research. The book *Negotiating Development in Muslim Societies: Gendered Spaces and Translocal Connections*, edited by Gudrun Lachenmann and Petra Dannecker (2008), responded to such demands for closer scrutiny by providing empirically grounded research on globalization. The volume presents findings from a research project, which also involved Salma Nageeb, Nadine Sieveking, and Anna Spiegel,⁵ that conducted three different case studies on the diverse ways in which women’s activists negotiate their positions and demands for readjusting the space of women in society. The activists constantly traverse the fine line between secularism and religion, Western and local ideals, change and tradition. Referring to Sudan, for example, Nageeb points out that women’s organizations have pursued their agendas in the context of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2004, which required them to negotiate the readjustment of political and social spaces amidst a complex actor constellation in which state, donor agencies, and religious institutions played a crucial role. In urban Malaysia, by contrast, female activists were confronted with an increasingly authoritarian state that was pursuing an Islamic development agenda. Spiegel analyses how women’s activists struggle for recognition of the definition of *discrimination* enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This was in stark opposition to the Malaysian government’s position that cultural differences justify a discrete

⁵ The project “Negotiating Development: Translocal Gendered Spaces in Muslim Societies” was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation from 2005–2008.

“Malaysian perspective,” thereby effectively relativizing claims for universality. In the case of Senegal, Sieveking notes that women’s groups distinguish between granting equality or granting rights by relating the debate on women’s rights and gender equality to a “moderate religious ethic.” The conceptual framework of these diverse case studies is clearly established: They investigate the ways in which global developmental ideas are appropriated in relation to religion, which is regarded as a powerful factor; but it is not the only dimension of local conditions under which women’s activists seek to renegotiate their room to maneuver.

Apart from deepening our knowledge on global–local negotiation, the book edited by Lachenmann and Dannecker demonstrates how one can compare data collected under the premises of qualitative social research while adequately acknowledging not just the specific conditions found in the field but by reflecting on the differences between the actors and the modes of interaction insofar as they relate to social, political, and cultural contexts that are constitutive of variations and similarities between actors, concepts, identities, and spaces. Or, as Lachenmann stresses, “comparison does not entail regarding one logic as against the other but rather the construction of meaning from situatedness” (27). The act of comparison thus requires thorough contextualization before, during, and after fieldwork to ensure the adequate portrayal of the different processes of constructing meaning. In their understanding of contextualization as a crucially important instrument of validation, the authors follow the paradigm of Schütz’s sociology of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). What is at stake is therefore not only a pragmatic approach centered on the analysis of particular social fields (such as activism) embedded in translocalized lifeworlds and actor constellations but the disentanglement of how global (supposedly Western) concepts of development are negotiated vis-à-vis potentially competing concepts such as the various interpretations of Islam and of local cultures.

This approach refrains from homogenizing and essentializing conceptions of what is “Western” versus what is “indigenous” and highlights the diversity of interpretations of politics, culture, and society. Processes of social change can be uncovered by elucidating the struggles for recognition, the negotiation over social and political space, and the contestations over meaning (see Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2005). Positions within the world are being shaped by entangled modernities and constantly adjusted through the interpretations of local activists who are pursuing social change by means of enlarging their spaces within local and national arenas. Quite evidently, power relations are central to this as they not only structure social interaction but can also be turned into a subject of negotiation. While acknowledging the existence of postcolonial hierarchies and inequalities, solid and empirically grounded counter-narratives can only be made visible when we listen to the people in the Global South or, in Sieveking’s words, recognize them as “knowledgeable social agents” instead of reducing them to being a “particularly vulnerable group” (169)—an act that reflects postcolonial thinking. Revealing the subjectivities of social actors and their embeddedness in social relations constitutes a necessary foundation for reconstructing social realities without which sociological inquiry into global processes would be in-

complete. The ways in which women's activists develop agency in interacting with institutions, discourses, and authorities, frequently traversing socio-spatial levels, leads to the constitution of translocal gendered spaces. This does not just imply that local interpretations of women's rights—or of development more generally—are subject to negotiation. It also illuminates how global development concepts are shaped by local experiences and thus become more differentiated. This contribution therefore provides a way out of the impasse described at the outset as it reveals how development continues to shape people's political and everyday worlds and how it is negotiated in translocal spaces by agents who, however "vulnerable" and "powerless" they might be, make use of their agency to challenge unequal power relations at various spatial and societal levels.

3 Beyond Categorical Thinking

Lachenmann and Dannecker's team questioned stereotypical categorizations of people living in the Global South as non-normative, objectified others.⁶ Sergio Costa is among the sociologists in Germany who have made an important contribution to reconceptualizing the subjectivity of the formerly colonized as hybrid actors, a notion by which he emphasizes the capability and agency of individuals in the Global South. In his book *Vom Nordatlantik zum 'Black Atlantic': Postkoloniale Konfigurationen und Paradoxien transnationaler Politik*⁷ (2007), he intends to reframe sociology by arguing that, due to globalization, Northern sociology has been forced to account for post-national constellations, thereby overcoming the institutionally consolidated sociological gaze on national societies. By referring to Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Jürgen Habermas as examples, Costa argues that the prevalence of a theoretical stance embedded in a Eurocentric and modernist worldview prevents sociologists from recognizing Southern social actors who are embracing their full agency.

To integrate social actors of the South, who actually represent a global majority, into sociological theory, Costa embarks on postcolonial epistemologies and criticizes the parochial character of ostensibly universal Western knowledge as being bound to specific national societies. He also questions teleological Western conceptions of modernity, which reduce societies in the Global South to underdeveloped copies of the West. Empirically, he substantiates his approach by showing how the longstanding national discourse on cultural heterogeneities in Brazil has been challenged. Constitutive of this national discourse is *mestiçagem* (miscegenation), which is predicated on the idea that colonial relations in Brazil had been less harsh than in other cases, thus painting a romanticized picture of a harmonious coexistence of European col-

⁶ For an overview, see Gerharz (2020).

⁷ *From North-Atlantic to "Black Atlantic": Post-Colonial Configurations and Paradoxes of Transnational Politics*; Costa applies Gilroy's idea to shift scholarly attention away from the North Atlantic to contexts like the Black Atlantic.

onizers, indigenous people, and *Afrodescendentes*. This trivialization of cruel power relations served as a founding myth for a Brazil in which all persons were supposedly equal and no racism existed, thereby characterizing the nation as a “racial democracy.” This discourse served the elites’ aim to maintain power and fell under increasing scrutiny when the black movement started to point out the racism and discrimination that existed in Brazilian society. Actors with *mestiçagem* background rediscovered and re-enacted their cultural heterogeneity, including what Costa calls tendencies of re-Africanization, which clearly demonstrated the ample agency of these hybrid social subjects. Such processes, however, are often controversial. As anti-racist thinkers try to challenge official ideas originally based on scientific racism, Brazilian sociology is confronted with the paradox of redefining the concept of race and racial studies’ insistence on determining a clear-cut and irrefutable pattern of racialized identities that juxtapose “blacks” and “whites” as antagonistic groups. To grasp the underlying complexity and diversity of such processes, Costa argues for shifting the perspective of sociology by abandoning earlier ideas of cultural hybridity as abnormal. In breaking with this normative view, hybrid social actors may be acknowledged as ‘normal,’ thereby attributing them with agency and subjectivity. This would cast them as actors in their own right instead of perpetuating prejudiced minorization and othering, which would in turn allow for a proper sociological theorization of such social settings. Therefore, the development of a critical perspective should be based on a thorough examination of concrete social processes and their backgrounds while also taking into account their embeddedness in a transnational context of agency.

4 Inequalities beyond the National Lens

Instead of focusing mainly on local social settings or hybrid actors, Thomas Faist reframes the so-called social question in a global setting shaped by cross-border migration, thus breaking with methodological nationalism and Europe-centered perspectives (Pries, *MIGRATION*, this volume). In his book *The Transnationalized Social Question: Migration and the Politics of Social Inequalities in the Twenty-First Century* (2018), Faist investigates intersecting fields of social inequalities and cross-border migration. He argues that from the 19th century onwards the social question was mainly discussed as a matter of class, whereas other categories were at best seen as lateral influences on the class position and the subsequent divides. Nowadays, however, social and cultural heterogeneities are more clearly perceived as fundamentally intersecting with class. Against this backdrop, the social question re-emerges mainly at the interstices between the Global North and South. Transnationalization has led to diverse manifestations of the social question in different localities while at the same time migration has shaped social inequalities. For example, most countries around the world have not adopted the European models of the welfare state. In most countries, cultural and collective rights, often referred to as the third generation of rights, are instead far more important. Hence, debating these rights in relation to the

social question is fundamentally more important than analyses of welfare systems that presume that the European models will expand globally.

Faist points out that transnationality forms part of diverse sets of heterogeneities and boundaries and as such is of special relevance to social inequalities. Therefore, transnational social fields are particularly appropriate to analyze the social question, which manifests itself in numerous facets. Departing from the assumption that any analysis of the social question requires one to investigate how cultural and collective rights relate to social inequalities, he discusses the idea of voice and exit as an illustrative debate that translates the social question to a global level. Whereas in earlier, less transnationalized settings, voice would have been the main strategy to address social inequalities, nowadays exit constitutes a viable option to resolve the social question. Though migration might be seen as an individual decision, it is frequently embedded in larger groups and communities and impacts the social question on a larger scale because of its magnitude. Moreover, Faist posits that the relationship between migration and social inequality needs to be embedded in the rival conceptions of development put forward by developmentalist states or by a neoliberal setting that attributes development to civil society actors. In both cases, diasporas can be potentially important political actors—either because they are often integrated into domestic politics or because they represent a political rival or threat to processes of nation-building and the consolidation of political power. With the help of such examples, it can be shown how such settings have to be analyzed in a manner that overcomes often subtle restrictions imposed by methodological nationalism. Furthermore, a perspective that neglects cross-border linkages, such as those comprised by transnational social spaces, entails the potential threat of dividing on a global scale a perceived homogenous North from a similarly homogenous South, thus creating the need to overcome this dichotomy, as linkages through transnational social spaces are empirically much more relevant given that “[t]he social life worlds of individuals [...] extend beyond state borders” (170).

Incidences of social inequalities in social protection can be analyzed along three characteristic dimensions. The first one relates to a lack of binding social rights and standards in cross-border migration processes themselves; for instance, International Labour Organization (ILO) norms or conventions on human and social rights are neither binding nor globally enacted. Faist maintains that “[i]t does not make sense to speak of transnational (social) citizenship” (122) because enforceable rights are locally or nationally bound. A transnational perspective helps to analyze how struggles at diverse sites are connected across borders. Second, despite the existence of such struggles and of (soft) global norms, inequalities in social protection are produced and reproduced in migration settings, such as in the case of the European Union. Here, social protection is conditioned by the enactment of diverse kinds of social boundaries, especially those related to national and racial ascriptions that are reproduced in transnational settings and thus recreate inequality. The third field accordingly concerns measures and practices of social security developed internally by (small) transnational communities to cope with their situation and a common lack of access

to national systems of social protection, thus stressing their collective agency in the face of precarious formal social security. On a broader scale, and turning to states in the Global South, the aforementioned aspect of development and diasporas in transnational settings have manifold political consequences. By referring to debates around the migration–development nexus, Faist shows how sending states try to transfer “responsibilities for problem-solving to migrants, individual actors, and diaspora as collective actors” (265) while also attempting to control their transnational agency. Hence, the social question has a very flexible and multifaceted character that will continue to be of major importance. Climate change, for example, will lead to the rise of a socio-natural question that can be expected to intensify the transnational social question.

The agency of migrants and especially the potential of their collectives is a central aspect of the transnational social question. In settings where their access to social security is restricted, often in a combination of formal and informal ways, migrants rely upon their social capital, bonds of reciprocity, solidarity, and so forth to create social security of their own. The Global South and the corresponding social actors can thus be analyzed by considering the diversity of specific contexts, social positions, and perspectives (or knowledge) that account for their agency. It is hence interesting to note that, although Faist adopts a different theoretical approach, he nevertheless comes to similar conclusions as the other works under discussion here.

5 African Inequalities

Like Faist, Dieter Neubert criticizes that notions of class have dominated debates on global inequalities. In his book *Inequality, Socio-Cultural Differentiation and Social Structures in Africa. Beyond Class* (2019), he develops a new framework for the analysis of social structure in Sub-Saharan Africa. In so doing, he examines recent approaches to global social inequalities and argues that these need to see global, national, and local inequalities as interrelated. With a few exceptions (Weiß, 2017; Boatcă, 2016), these ventures lack not just conceptual clarity but also rigor. One decisive shortcoming is the unidimensional character of the class concept: Following the Marxian tradition, “class” depends on people’s relation to the means of production. This, however, neither captures the complexities of how most people in Africa make a living nor does it do justice to the heterogeneity and volatility of their social positions. Moreover, “class” obscures the significance of social networks, which are of utmost significance in many African societies, as well as the question of how inequalities manifest themselves in predefined units of analysis, such as the household.

Given that the middle class is commonly seen as the new bearer of hope in developmentalist approaches, increasing the size of the middle class has turned into the ultimate goal of development. Neubert critically examines this debate and argues that instead of “middle class status” being merely a statistical category, it should draw our attention to those who are seizing opportunities to achieve upward social mobility.

This new paradigm breaks with classical developmentalist approaches, which viewed inequalities through the lens of poverty and “the poor” as a vulnerable homogeneous mass prone to a high level of risk and without much agency. Here, Neubert’s argument intersects with those proposed by the scholars named above because the absence of any attempts to grant agency to “the poor” can be read as a continuation of colonialism.

Another important thread in research on inequality concerns the socio-cultural elements of social differentiation. Ethnicity, religion, neo-traditional authorities, and patron–client relationships in Africa are characterized by multiplicity and multilayeredness. These relationships are related to social structure not just by ordering individuals by social status; they also provide protection for people who belong to lower strata and secure the positions of those occupying more powerful positions. With this focus on vertical interlinkages of societal dimensions, Neubert’s book highlights the complexities of patterns of inequality and differentiation. Feminist scholarship has revealed that social positioning adds to this complexity. Moreover, women’s economic activities are rendered invisible as they are often concentrated in subsistence production, unpaid housework, and also in the informal sector, including trade (Lachenmann, 1997). Contrary to conventional approaches, Neubert thus points to the limitations of predefined units of analysis, such as the household. He argues that households are areas of bargaining where it is not only the maximization of benefits that counts but also the welfare and social security of the family, norms, values, and the agency of individual actors.

Quite unlike Faist, who approaches social inequality through transnational connectivities, Neubert understands global social inequalities to be structured by global (exploitative) relations under post-colonial or, more recently, neoliberal conditions. In arguing for a thorough reconceptualization of inequalities while taking patterns of social change in different societal contexts into account, he reveals how individual and collective aspirations toward upward mobility are not only changing social structure but also determine how individual and collective action is embedded in social figurations and how such action responds to conditions set by the respective states as part of their social security and welfare. This shows how much the quest for individual and structural progress shapes the social reality of so-called developing societies. Yet upward mobility does not follow clearly defined trajectories. Rather, it is a dynamic process. Research on Africa has underscored that economic strategies cannot be understood independently of formal and informal social security. The Bielefeld School (see Evers et al., 1983) has shown how people who face situations of high insecurity react by diversifying and combining their modes of production. Neubert has extended this concept by integrating formal security and informal security arrangements. Given the limitations most states in the Global South face in their ability to establish welfare systems, informal arrangements are particularly relevant but often ignored. High degrees of uncertainty and vulnerability force people to integrate social relations into the “welfare mix,” which can also delimit social upward mobility because expectations of reciprocity are directed toward those who have

achieved a higher status. These obligations can turn into risks because they have the potential to constrain one's ability to secure a higher-status position.

By considering these different factors along with the complexities of social position and patterns of social security, Neubert's ultimate aim is to develop a new framework for the analysis of social structures. He points out that Stefan Hradil's (1987) concept of social situations corresponds with most of his proposals. Neubert seeks to expand on Hradil by categorizing and systematizing the variety of social situations according to clusters through identifying fields of needs (e.g., socio-economic needs, welfare and security needs, social needs) and dimensions of inequality (e.g., money, housing conditions, entitlements, political participation). This taxonomical process is then combined with the "subjective element" drawn from lifestyle and milieu studies. In highlighting how social positions and milieus relate to each other, Neubert makes a convincing case that moving beyond class is a necessity if we want to understand how people aspire and act toward (potential) upward mobility and how they strategize to maintain certain positions. In this way, he offers new vistas for development policies and analyses and certainly enriches our perspectives on the Global South with a nuanced and well-structured conceptual framework.

6 Decolonizing Sociology

However convincing Neubert's effort to transfer Hradil's theoretical concept from Germany to African contexts might be, this venture can become controversial if we take seriously the demands made by scholars who represent decolonial thinking. In German-language sociology, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez is one such scholar who takes the central theoretical arguments of a decolonial mode of thought that was mainly developed in the Americas and applies those arguments to European sociology. In her article "Decolonizing Postcolonial Rhetoric" (2010), she argues in favor of recognizing the epistemological contributions of "decolonial voices, subjugated knowledge" (49) present in "Black, Chicana and Third World feminist and queer theorists" since the 1980s in the USA. By critically examining the absence of their theory production from sociological curricula in general and even in fields like gender studies, she identifies this as an instance of a progressing underrepresentation of critical theory in sociology. Decolonial feminist-queer epistemology, she claims, is appropriate for understanding the complex and multidimensional character of post-colonial social settings, be it in the Global North or South, because it provides an analytical basis for applying a decolonial perspective to sociology.

Gutiérrez Rodríguez stresses that knowledge is always embodied and socially embedded. She emphasizes that the illusion of scientific objectivity embodied by a supposedly socially detached, universal, and objective academic resulted in a conception in which "Social Sciences are institutionally thought within the paradigm of European modernity" (50), thereby ignoring that paradigm's merger with coloniality, as demonstrated by decolonial scholars. Like Costa, she claims that scientific

knowledge has to be seen as being embedded in concrete historical, material, and social settings and therefore as locally bound, partial, and in a sense often parochial. Modernity, then, is immanently contradictory, and (sociological) knowledge production always takes place in “a field organized by different social antagonisms” (52). However, this latter diversity is frequently neglected, as are contributions by female scholars and/or scholars of color.

One of the by-products of an ontological stance that ignores the entanglement of modernity and coloniality is the aforementioned parochialism of classical sociological works, which carve out detailed complexities in European societies but disregard others as “primitive” and traditionalistic, thus reproducing the classical idea of a divide between “modern Western” and “traditional non-Western” societies. This has severe consequences for the conceptualization of the non-European “others” who populate the Global South or exist as minorities in the North and who, in striking concordance with colonial perspectives that reduce them to the status of things, are often seen as passive non-rational social objects instead of being acknowledged as fully capable social actors just as Western social subjects are. Hence a “predominant androcentric white European focus” (55) that was forged during the colonial era is still globally present. This is as true for the academic world in general as it is for European sociology in particular, which, for a long time, has based its paradigms on ideas of modernity and universality.

Whereas gender has been integrated into German-language sociological debates, decolonial perspectives are rarely considered and often even seen as non-scientific. This fails to acknowledge what they have to contribute to social theory. Decolonial approaches are rarely accepted in “core” disciplines such as sociology, which shield themselves through strict rules of exclusive disciplinarity. Even if such approaches are integrated, this exclusivity ensures that relevant critical questions are silenced by depoliticizing decolonial approaches and stripping them of any transformative potential in a global sense. This is perpetuated by unequal access to so-called high-impact journals and exacerbated further by a hegemony of the English language in the academic world along with a geographical core of academic institutions that privileges research from the same areas. This geographical and social situatedness of knowledge production is sustained by inequalities, global and local, that reflect the coloniality of power and of knowledge, as Aníbal Quijano (2000) has argued. Moreover, addressing the entanglements of social processes and formations instead of presupposing the exclusivity of the social within the framework of the nation helps us to understand the manifold facets of coloniality (cf. Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020). Taking heed of these facts in building sociological theory allows for a more pluriversal knowledge (Grosfoguel, 2011).

To stress an alternative, Gutiérrez Rodríguez resorts to border thinking. Border thinking unites Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of borderland—namely, *Nepantla*—and a decolonial perspective. She argues that experiences of being situated in-between and living amid the constant transgression of borders, thereby resulting in acute border consciousness, offers a way to eschew the coloniality of power by acknowledging

ambivalences and diversity instead of clear-cut categorizations and paradigms. It is a “transgressive and transversal movement in which contradictions are dissolved into myriad infinite series of differences” (61). This way of thinking ought to be transferred to academia to foster the ability “to grasp the complexity and fluidity of social phenomena in a modern/colonial world system” (62). Decolonial thinking should be connected to proper praxis and the quest for transformations of society instead of resulting in simple rhetoric or, worse, the exploitation of postcolonial critique as a vehicle to enhance academic career opportunities in a globalized academic market. As Gutiérrez Rodríguez states, “a critical analysis of society begins where understanding finds its limits, where the focus on discontinuities and multiple antagonisms complicates our view and drives us to interrogate the epistemic pillars of our scientific presuppositions” (49). Sociology should therefore transform itself in an appropriate manner.

7 Towards More Equitable Knowledge Production

German-speaking sociologists have contributed to the international debate on the Global South by generating knowledge about social structure, class, inequality, differentiation, and underlying knowledge systems (Schimank, *SOCIETY*, this volume). Much of this knowledge, however, has been generated in a highly unequal system. The scholarship discussed here applies concepts and pursues lines of thought that can be analytically useful in diverse settings worldwide, thus putting aside political aspirations to resist existing hierarchies. The focus of these scholars is much more on mitigating Eurocentric views and decentering sociology, as Gutiérrez Rodríguez has called for. The literature we have discussed in this article reveals that knowledge production can neither take place without contextualization nor be disentangled from the scholars’ subjectivities, as these subjectivities have been and continue to be shaped by knowledge systems that rest upon particular epistemological traditions.

Nonetheless, the approaches discussed here all bear legitimacy in their own right. Instead of playing these off against each other, we believe that scholars who represent different schools of thought need to enter into conversation with one another. Decolonial approaches, combined with a thorough analysis of embedded translocal and transnational spaces, consider actors’ social positions and their knowledge systems to enhance sociology’s reflexive capacity to deconstruct power relations and global hierarchies, irrespective of where scholars are spatially located. Thomas Faist, for example, has devoted a great deal of thought to the position of the scholar in the public sphere. He calls for scientists to critically analyze processes around the transnationalized social question and to vigorously introduce their findings into public debates. However, this should not come in the form of policy advice; rather, it should be scientific knowledge that is provided beyond the usual research–policy nexus in order to broadly inform such debates in a comprehensive manner. Lachenmann and Dannecker take this further by highlighting the need to create networks and coalitions

across spatial boundaries and bring together scholars from different parts of the world. Herein lies the potential to work towards a decolonization of knowledge within the globalized world.⁸

Our aim has been to show how research perspectives from development sociology have advanced towards a sociology of the Global South. We believe that a decolonial critique of knowledge hierarchies involves embedding social processes and formations in a broader global perspective. Transnational processes fostered by cross-border migration and translocal connections that exist at various sites throughout the world mesh well with the perspective on entanglements and the critical reflection of local embeddedness that is being put forward by development sociologists. Both postures typify the analytical capacity of sociology and the profound scrutiny it can provide in addressing such issues. They can be employed in tandem to forge a more comprehensive mode of thought and analytical approach in German-language sociology—one that, moreover, can leverage an epistemology that has already become well established in development sociology. This dovetails nicely with the idea of honoring empirical data that do not fit the mold as a way of questioning theoretical assumptions to further advance sociology. The central epistemological foundations of development sociology are highly compatible with theoretical approaches that incorporate the Global South and/or its social actors who are enmeshed in transnational contexts all over the globe. This also holds true for recognizing the agency of all actors and further integrating other elements, such as the aforementioned focus on knowledge systems and social interfaces, which allows one to better comprehend interactions and systems of meaning. The intended result of all this is to allow for a deeper understanding of alternate forms of agency and logics of interaction and thus, for instance, alternate ways of doing politics, resistance, socialization, economic activities, or social security. It is high time for German-language sociology to take these proposals seriously and to encourage critical reflection on the impact of power relations on sociological knowledge production.

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⁸ For a more detailed discussion, see Gerharz (2020).

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History of Sociology

Stephan Moebius

Abstract: This article deals with the developments, trends, and essence of research in studies on the history of sociology in the German-speaking world since 2000. It discusses studies on the methodology of the history of sociology, publications on the institutionalization of sociology, on early and modern classics, on national and transnational historiography, and on sociology in face of National Socialism. Although the history of sociology is only rudimentarily institutionalized, especially in Germany, and there are almost no chairs or specialist journals for the history of sociology, we can nevertheless discern a spirit of optimism among younger researchers in this field. At the same time, we still lack a productive exchange with other historiographic sciences.

Keywords: History of sociology, sociology in German-speaking countries, classics of sociology, methodology of the history of sociology

1 The Situation at the Outset

Research on the history of sociology has long remained in the shadows of German-language sociology, less in terms of the number of publications than a lack of institutionalization. In Switzerland and Germany in particular, the analysis of the history of sociology has failed to put down more than rudimentary institutional roots. If we consult the leading journals in sociology, only rarely do we find contributions that address the history of the discipline. There is also no German-language equivalent to the *Journal of Classical Sociology* or the *Journal of the History of the Behaviourial Sciences*. One of the few places for researchers interested in the history of sociology to publish in German-language journals has been the *Jahrbuch für Soziologiegeschichte*, which was first issued in the 1990s but has been published only sporadically since 2000. The *Soziologische Revue's* special issue *Soziologie 2000 (Sociology 2000)* also failed to include the history of sociology as a subject in its own right. The situation is similar when we look at university chairs. Unlike in Austria, there is no longer any chair at all explicitly devoted to research on the history of sociology after Karl-Siegbert Rehberg (Dresden) and Klaus Lichtblau (Frankfurt/M) retired. There is furthermore no section for the history of sociology in the professional bodies such as the Swiss Sociological Association (SGS), or the European Sociological Association (ESA)—in marked contrast to the American Sociological Association's (ASA) Section on the History of Sociology or the International Sociological Association's (ISA) Research

Note: Translation from German, including all quotes from German literature, by Stephan Elkins (*SocioTrans—Social Scientific Translation & Editing*).

Committee on the History of Sociology (RCHS). Only since autumn 2019 there is a section for the history of sociology in the German Sociological Association (GSA). Exceptions to this unsatisfactory picture of the institutionalized history of sociology in the German-speaking world are various archives (cf. Moebius and Ploder, 2017: 327ff.). Particularly worth mentioning are the *Sozialwissenschaftliche Archiv Konstanz* (SAK) and *Archiv für die Geschichte der Soziologie in Österreich* (AGSÖ).

Austria, and particularly sociology in Graz, are an outlier in this respect. For decades, Austrian sociology has shown a decided interest in research on the history of sociology and of science that has deliberately been expanded toward a separate branch of science in its own right. Moreover, the Austrian Association for Sociology (ÖGS) has long established a history-of-sociology section.

Perhaps it is on account of this favorable situation that Graz has emanated a spirit of optimism in recent years as to the future of research in the history of sociology. A sign of this optimism is, for instance, the three-volume *Handbuch zur Geschichte der Soziologie im deutschsprachigen Raum* (*Handbook on the History of Sociology in the German-Speaking World*; Moebius and Ploder, 2017; 2018; Holzhauser et al., 2019), which addresses the history of sociology in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland and provides an overview of the methodological toolbox for this research. This major project has picked up on previous research on the history of sociology in German-speaking countries, for instance, on the four-volume works of Friedrich Jonas (1968), Wolf Lepenies (1981), or the multi-volume *Geschichte der österreichischen Humanwissenschaften* (*The History of the Austrian Humanities*), edited by Karl Acham since 1999.¹ In recent years, Graz has furthermore been the origin of newly founded publication organs such as *Zyklus. Jahrbuch für Theorie und Geschichte der Soziologie* or the journal *Serendipities*.² For several years now, a spring school has regularly been conducted on the *Sociology and History of the Social and Cultural Sciences*.³ Recently, Graz has been at the center of reviving the debate on how and why we should pursue the study of the history of sociology (cf. Dayé and Moebius, 2015).

When speaking of the history of sociology, German-language sociology has distinguished, in line with Lothar Peter (2001: 11; cf. Moebius, 2004; 2017a), between *Soziologiegeschichte* (the study of the history of sociology as a specific discipline of sociology) and *Geschichte der Soziologie* (the historical processes of the discipline of sociology as such). *Soziologiegeschichte*, the study of the history of sociology, refers according to Peter to an independent strand of sociological research that is devoted to the history of sociology conceived as the “actual historical course of sociological theory building, research, and institutionalization as well as all other activities and

¹ Unfortunately, the book on sociology in the Habsburg Empire edited by Karl Acham (2020), which will fill a large gap in international research on sociology in Central Europe, was not yet published when the article was finished and therefore cannot be discussed here.

² See <http://www.springer.com/series/13108> and <http://serendipities.uni-graz.at/index.php/serendipities>

³ <https://doktoratsprogramm-geschichte-soziologie-sozialwissenschaften.uni-graz.at/#>

phenomena that are concerned with the relationship of sociology and society” (Peter, 2001: 11). *Geschichte der Soziologie* is the history of sociology proper—the historical processes of sociology, its actors, institutions, practices, findings, and social functions; they are thus the central objects of research in the field of *Soziologiegeschichte* (Peter, 2001: 11; cf. Moebius, 2004: 15f.).

2 Methodologies

Since the late 1990s, questions have increasingly been raised in the German-speaking world concerning the how and why of studying the history of sociology. A new development was to explicitly advocate for the application of genuine *sociological* theories and methods to the historiography of sociology (cf. Fleck, 1999). A broader debate on the ways and objectives of studying the history of sociology was waged in 2001 in the *Jahrbuch für Soziologiegeschichte 1997/1998*. Two essays stood out in particular: First, Lothar Peter’s contribution on “Why and How Do We Conduct the Study of the History of Sociology” provided the hitherto arguably most comprehensive and systematic methodology of research on the history of sociology (Peter, 2001; 2015, see also Moebius, 2004; 2006; 2017a). Compared to other methodological considerations, Peter’s piece explicitly included an analysis of the history of sociology’s impact on society as an object of research in its own right. Taking Wolf Lepenies’ introduction to the four-volume edition of *Geschichte der Soziologie* (1981; *The History of Sociology*) and Dirk Käsler’s (1984) study of early German sociology as his point of departure, Peter (2001; 2015) outlined a methodological research design geared specifically to history-of-sociology analyses. At the heart of Peter’s methodology is the analytical distinction of three major dimensions of research in the history of sociology: the *cognitive* dimension, the *social* dimension, and the dimension of its *history of impact and discourse*.⁴ The general framework for research on the history of sociology, or likewise the history of ideas, first of all involves contextualizing, by reference to historical reality and social history, the ideas, theories, methods, instruments, institutions, actors, and history of impact to be analyzed. In other words, the object of research must first be considered in the broader context of the societal (economic, social, political, and cultural) processes at the time of its emergence. This framing is to account for the fact that ideas do not surface in a historical and social void but are historically and socially situated or, rather, because of their “existential determination” (*Seinsverbundenheit*; Mannheim) are only possible at a specific point in time. Accordingly, a study on the history of sociology or of ideas would have to take contemporary society into consideration as an essential point of reference for the concrete relevance of sociological ideas. (Schimank, SOCIETY, this volume)

⁴ In the following I refer to Peter (2001; 2015).

The *cognitive dimension*, as the first level of analysis, therefore consists according to Peter in exposing the historical contexts of science and of ideas (i.e., contemporary paradigms, theories, methods, and discourses) that embed the development of and provide the backdrop to what constitutes sociological thinking. Investigation of the cognitive dimension is followed by examining the *social dimension*. In the social dimension, Peter distinguishes between the analysis of actors and the analysis of institutional processes. What such an analysis should demonstrate is how actors' biographical conditions affect intellectual content, without drawing a deterministic connection from a biography to any specific content. Methodically, we must therefore distinguish between the study of actor biographies and the study of their works, for analytically the actors' biographical moments are, according to Peter, not of interest for their own sake but in terms of their role in promoting the production of intellectual insights. This can then be followed up by analyses of milieus, networks, generations, and habitus. (Huinink/Hollstein, *LIFE COURSE*, this volume) The analyses of institutionalization can involve several levels: group formation, constellations, schools of thought, specialist journals, or professional organizations. Lastly, analyses at the level of the *history of impact and discourse* inquire how sociological knowledge enters into and is used in social discourse. Which position do theories, methods, and ideas occupy in sociological discourse, and what role do techniques and relations of power play? A discourse-historical analysis is also interested in potential developments in sociological thought that have not been realized or have been suppressed. (Hollstein/Kumkar, *QUALITATIVE METHODS*, this volume) Another dimension of Peter's methodology that is often neglected in the study of the history of sociology and closely tied to the history of discourse is sociology's history of impact, particularly its (intended or mostly contingent, non-anticipatable) impact on the future course of the discipline, neighboring disciplines, and society. Investigating the impact and imprint of sociology on discourse in society would merit a study of its own.

Even if Peter's methodology has only rarely been applied so far (cf. Moebius, 2006), it arguably sensitizes us toward dimensions of sociological research that we must definitely take into account and provides valuable orientation to historians of sociology. In addition, it offers a suitable point of departure for further discussions with other disciplines that employ historiographic methods as well as for refining and enriching it by drawing on methodological concepts from these other disciplines, the concept of intellectual history, for instance (cf. Moebius, 2017a). In any case, Peter's methodology, in my view, is unique within international discourse on the history of sociology in terms of its systematics and comprehensiveness.

A second major contribution in the *Jahrbuch für Soziologiegeschichte 1997/1998* toward a methodology of the history of sociology is by Martin Endreß (2001), who draws on the sociology of knowledge. Just as sociology in general reconstructs processes of attributing meaning, Endreß argues, the study of the history of sociology, too, must be conceived as a type of reflection informed by the sociology of knowledge. It is, however, Endreß' response to the question of "Why a history of sociology?" that makes reading this article particularly worthwhile. Endreß emphasizes the historicity

of the object of sociology itself: society with its social practices and orders. Since sociology starts from the tenet that its object is historically constituted, historical self-reflection is an indispensable part of doing sociological research (cf. Endreß, 2001: 65f.): “Sociology has a genuinely historical object inasmuch as it always involves the *reconstruction* of already completed processes of attributing and constituting meaning. [...] To the extent that the attribution of meaning is always preconstituted by past attributions and conceptions of meaning, but can never as a matter of principle be identical with the latter because of the temporal difference between construction and reconstruction, sociology’s point of reference is invariably the difference between attributions of meaning—the conception of meaning *ex ante* and the inquiry into it *ex post*” (Endreß, 2001: 65). Addressing this difference in a reflexive manner is, in Endreß’ reasoning, what defines sociology’s “disciplinary profile.” “Because of its constitutive reference to the past, sociology is structurally geared toward self-thematization [...]” (Endreß, 2001: 65). Apart from the self-reflexive and critical potential of research in the history of sociology, Endreß further stresses that the processual nature of society precludes that we could identify *a priori* the direction in which the “fluid” social is evolving and that we could thus *per definitionem* typify, without further ado, previous perspectives of the object as obsolete (Endreß, 2001: 66). In so doing, Endreß provides convincing reasons for a history of sociology that extend far beyond the once postulated need to develop the identity of the discipline (c.f. Lepenies, 1981).

The debate over ways and objectives, triggered in the early 2000s, experienced a revival more than a decade later as revised versions of the articles mentioned above were published anew in the context of international contributions on the ways and objectives of the history of sociology (cf. Dayé and Moebius, 2015).

3 Institutionalization

As Peter emphasized, institutionalization processes are a key field of analysis for a historiography of sociology. Processes of institutionalization include, for instance, the foundation of journals, professional organizations, or research institutes as well as the formation of schools of thought and intellectual circles. Only slowly has the history of sociology in the German-speaking world begun to study scholarly journals (cf. Moebius and Ploder, 2018: 919ff.; Moebius, 2017b). The same is true internationally, where—with the exception of the analyses of the Durkheimians’ *L’Année sociologique*—there is also little to be found. Yet the analysis of journals is a relevant endeavor, especially in regard to their gate-keeper and canonization function. Analyses of professional organizations are also rare; so far, this issue has been addressed only in isolated contributions (cf. Moebius and Ploder, 2018: 761ff.). Again the situation is similar internationally. Here one of the few exceptions is Jennifer Platt’s analyses of the British Sociological Association (2003) and the International Sociological Association (1998). As for Germany, there has been a DFG-funded research project ongoing since 2012, under the direction of Hans-Georg Soeffner, on the history

of the German Sociological Association, so that we can hope for a monography on the topic in the near future.

There is also much catching-up to do with respect to analyses of research institutions (cf. Moebius and Ploder, 2018: 995ff.). One of the most intensely studied institutes is the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, which is typically covered in analyses of the “Frankfurt School” (Wiggershaus, 2001; Albrecht et al., 1999; Ziege, 2009). A particularly well done, source-based study is Ariane Leendertz’s (2010) book on the history of the founding of the Max Planck Institute (MPI) for the Study of Societies in Cologne. She reconstructed the founding of the Cologne institute, which directly emerged from the Starnberg MPI for the Study of the Scientific-Technical World, directed by Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker and Jürgen Habermas, which was closed in 1981.

As for sociology’s institutionalization in terms of the formation of schools of thought, the internationally most prominent ones are arguably the Durkheim School, the Chicago School, and the Frankfurt School. Less well known than the Frankfurt School but just as pivotal for the institutionalization of the social sciences in West Germany after 1945 were the circle around Helmut Schelsky, the Cologne School around the former ISA president René König (cf. Moebius, 2015), as well as the Marburg School around Wolfgang Abendroth, Werner Hofmann, and Heinz Maus (cf. Peter, 2014). Only slowly are these schools, which were crucial for the course of the social sciences in Germany after 1945, beginning to draw attention (Moebius, 2018b) and being studied together with other sociological schools of thought that have formed in the Federal Republic, such as Philosophical Anthropology (Fischer, 2006), Explanatory Sociology (Maurer, 2017), the Constance School around Thomas Luckmann, sociology in Munich around Ulrich Beck, sociological gender research, or post-structural schools of thought (Fischer and Moebius, 2018).

4 Classics

Internationally, a traditional field of the history of sociology is the history of its classics. Particularly instructive are recent books from the USA: *Becoming Mead: The Social Process of Academic Knowledge* by Daniel Huebner (2014) or *The Frankfurt School in Exile* by Thomas Wheatland (2009). Thanks to intensive archival work, they provide new insights on the work and life of their protagonists. This applies as well to Wolf Lepenies’ (2010) portrayal of Auguste Comte, a good read that centers on Comte’s visual media strategies for spreading his positivist religion.

Both in France and the USA, we have been witnessing a lively study of Émile Durkheim and the Durkheim School for a few decades now. Special mention needs to be made of the following volumes published since 2000: the Durkheim biography by Marcel Fournier (2007), Edward Tyriakian’s (2009) Durkheim studies, and Jean-Francois Bert’s studies on Marcel Mauss (2012a; 2012b). In German-speaking countries, the Durkheim School long received little attention. This has changed since 2000

as the Durkheimians' political studies and studies of the theory of gift exchange began to attract increasing interest (cf. Moebius and Nungesser, 2014). As the attention devoted to the Durkheimians' collective knowledge production (cf. Moebius, 2006; 2012) has grown, Durkheim himself, in addition to Mauss, Robert Hertz, and Maurice Halbwachs, has once again moved to the center of attention. On the occasion of a conference in Berlin, Tanja Bogusz and Heike Delitz edited a collection of contributions from international Durkheim experts in 2013. Stéphane Baciocchi and Jean-Luis Fabiani (2013: 433–471) landed a coup by presenting notes, which they had discovered, taken by students attending Durkheim's lectures on pragmatism. These notes confirm Hans Joas' (1987) thesis that these lectures were primarily strategic ones in the academic field. Another interesting contribution in the context of the history of sociology is an article published by Lothar Peter in 2013. In his introduction to the German edition of Durkheim's *Sociology and Philosophy* (*Soziologie und Philosophie*, 1967), Adorno once suggested Durkheim's proximity to fascist ideologies. Peter examines Adorno's "tribunal" (Peter, 2013: 91) in detail and comes to the conclusion that it represents a "discourse-strategic discussion" of what the Frankfurt School conceived of as positivism. Peter sees the reason for Adorno's misreading of and polemic against Durkheim in the sociological controversy with the Durkheim expert René König in the 1960s in the context of what was called the positivism dispute (cf. Moebius, 2015: 72; Moebius, 2018a), which first and foremost revolved around the issue of whether science should be geared toward a critique of society.

As far as the sociological classics are concerned, there are a number of scholars that deserve mentioning for their efforts and contributions. Special mention needs to be made of Dirk Kaesler for his merits in this respect. Beginning in 1976, he edited the multiple-volume series *Klassiker der Soziologie* (*The Classics of Sociology*), published by Beck. Moreover, he deserves particular credit for his many publications on Max Weber. Kaesler's engagement with the history of sociology reached its peak right on time for Max Weber's 150th birthday: in 2014, the internationally reputed Weber expert published a 1,000-page Weber biography, which has since become the standard Weber reference, providing a plethora of informative details on Weber's life and work (cf. Kaesler, 2014). For any scholar seriously interested in Weber, there is no way past this comprehensive biography. The same holds true for Jürgen Kaube's (2014) brilliantly written Weber biography, which was published the same year and provides an entertaining account of Weber's life and work. Deserving of particular mention is Kaube's matter-of-fact treatment of Weber's psychic breakdown since he avoids becoming caught up in psycho-historical speculation and statements about Weber's sex life (cf. Radkau, 2005).

Aside from Weber, Karl Marx in particular is among the classics about whom a number of biographies have been written internationally over the past few years (Sperber, 2013; Stedman Jones, 2016). In Germany, too, the number of biographies and introductions increased in time for the Marx anniversary in 2018. Michael Quante and David P. Schweikhard (2016) edited a well-structured compendium, which could have offered a more comprehensive account of Marx's reception in sociology in particular.

A stylistically brilliant biography is Jürgen Neffe's *Marx. Der Unvollendete* (2017; *Marx. The Unfinished One*). The most detailed one is Michael Heinrich's *Karl Marx und die Geburt der modernen Gesellschaft* (2018; *Karl Marx and the Birth of Modern Society*). Heinrich's book is the first volume of a larger study on Marx's life and work, which works out with great care and precision the social and political conditions as well as the history of ideas that provide the context to his time. In addition to biographies, a host of new introductions have been published as well (cf. Henning, 2017; Fetscher, 2018; Nippel, 2018). However, most of them adopt a political-ideological view of Marx at the expense of a more detailed discussion of his political economy.

There is only one classic thinker that no one has yet dared to approach by means of a biography: Georg Simmel. This is so even though Simmel's multidisciplinary and multifarious work would lend itself particularly well to a biography informed by a sociology of knowledge.

In recent years, we can discern a trend towards publishing biographies of "modern" classics. This refers to those scholars who shaped the course of German sociology after World War II, such as Theodor W. Adorno (Müller-Doohm, 2003; Claussen, 2003; Jäger, 2003), Jürgen Habermas (Müller-Doohm, 2014), Helmuth Plessner (Dietze, 2006), and Ralf Dahrendorf (Meifort, 2017). Although each of these biographies provides some new facets to our understanding of the work and life of these sociologists, they mostly adhere to a rather traditional form of presenting their genre. By contrast, it would be interesting to apply the aforementioned methodologies to biographies as well, for instance, by thinking along the lines of a Bourdieuan sociology of the field or turning to habitus or constellation analyses.

Despite the large number of biographies that have been published in recent years, we still lack life histories of some of the German sociologists who played a major role in establishing sociology in post-war Germany, such as Helmut Schelsky or René König. In the case of König (1984), there is at least an autobiography, and his works have been published in twenty volumes, each with an informative afterword by the editors. These volumes have recalibrated our traditional image of König. Whereas he had long been seen as a protagonist of quantitative social research, this collection shows his open-minded and cosmopolitan understanding of sociology, abundance of interdisciplinary knowledge, comprehensive literacy, and emancipatory interest (cf. König, 1998). The number of publications on the publicly more visible Schelsky has been growing over the past five years (Gallus, 2013; Wöhrle, 2015). Particularly worth mentioning is the work of Gerhard Schäfer, who is internationally considered to be *the* expert on Schelsky. Thanks to his comprehensive research, he has published numerous articles that shed some new light on Schelsky's life and work. Schäfer analyzes Schelsky from the perspective of a sociology of the intellectual as the "star sociologist" of the 1950s (Schäfer, 2015) and traces, in a very knowledgeable and source-based manner, the development of Schelsky's thought and his engagement during the era of National Socialism (Schäfer, 2017). Schäfer's planned comprehensive history of Schelsky's oeuvre is something to look forward to.

Our preoccupation with older or modern classics is also being advanced by the series *Klassiker der Wissenssoziologie* (*Classics of the Sociology of Knowledge*) edited by Bernt Schnettler and published by UVK Verlag. This series includes books on Harold Garfinkel, Erving Goffman, Marcel Mauss, Maurice Halbwachs, Arnold Gehlen, and Robert E. Park as well as on Michel Foucault, who has become ever more prominent in sociology in the wake of the poststructural turn in German-language sociology since around 2000 (Stäehli, 2000; Moebius, 2003; Moebius and Wetzell, 2005; Moebius and Reckwitz, 2008).

5 National Historiography

As we can see, attention in the history of sociology is being increasingly directed toward individual facets of German-language sociology. An especially instructive book in this context is the collection of essays by M. Rainer Lepsius (2017), edited by his son Oliver Lepsius, which in itself comes close to representing a monographic history of sociology in Germany (Lepsius, 2017). Under the title *Soziologie und Soziologien* (*Sociology and Sociologies*), it compiles Lepsius' early contributions on the institutionalization of sociology in Germany. All of these essays are extremely knowledgeable and range from sociology in the interwar period to the 1990s. Lepsius writes brilliantly, argues clearly, and is *the* connoisseur of sociology in Germany. He was directly involved in establishing sociology in East Germany after 1990. The chapter on sociology in the GDR and the establishment of sociology in the new federal states provides an abundance of new information accordingly.

But what about a monography on the history of sociology in Germany that gives a comprehensive account spanning all these partial aspects? Is there a study comparable to Johan Heilbron's *French Sociology* (2015) or Albert H. Halsey's *A History of Sociology in Britain* (2004)? Monographies on sociology in individual countries are currently being published internationally in the series *Sociology Transformed*, edited by John Holmwood and Stephen Turner, for instance, on sociology in Austria, Denmark, Australia, and the USA. In 2020, the present author is planning to publish a book on sociology in Germany in this series. Apart from Peter Wagner's comparative study between countries, the only larger monographies on sociology in Germany that I am aware of are by Uta Gerhardt (2009) and the historian Paul Nolte (2000). Gerhardt has written *Soziologie im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert* (*Sociology in the 20th Century*) from a decidedly "Weberian-Parsonian angle" (Gerhardt, 2009: 20), which thus unfortunately neglects much other sociology. Especially the claim that the Weimar era witnessed few new developments in sociology (21) must be refuted in light of the work of Karl Mannheim, Max Scheler, Norbert Elias, Theodor Geiger, and others. The fact that Gerhardt largely ignores the 1970s and '80s because she sees them as being a "side-show to the 1960s" (21) seems to be untenable in view of the grand theories of the 1980s: Jürgen Habermas' *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981; *Theory of Communicative Action*, 1984 and 1987), Niklas Luhmann's *Soziale Systeme* (1984; *Social*

Systems, 1995), or Ulrich Beck's *Risikogesellschaft* (1986; *Risk Society*, 1992). Her normative Weber-Parsons lens restricts her critical view of the subject matter. Unlike the latter, Paul Nolte's excellent study *Die Ordnung der Gesellschaft* (2000; *The Order of Society*) succeeds in describing and illuminating in great detail and very knowledgeably the professional self-reflection and self-description of the German social sciences in all their facets from the German Empire until 1990 along contemporary categories of analyses such as mass, community, leveling, technology, and others. Nolte has an intimate knowledge of the affiliations and controversies among the protagonists, and his study is interesting methodologically as well: he is interested in the history of sociology as a "history of social conceptions of order" that must also inquire into the role of sociology in the "*Description and Self-Definition of West-German Society*" (thus the subtitle of Nolte's book).

Monika Boll's *Nachtprogramm* (2004; *Nightly Program*) offers another innovative perspective on the national historiography of sociology by inquiring into the media impact of sociological knowledge on and the transfer of this knowledge to society via radio programs. Her study throws new light on German sociology and the process of intellectual self-understanding in West Germany by analyzing the many facets of the efforts to establish a public sociology and the debates among the sociological protagonists of the 1950s and 1960s—namely, Adorno, Gehlen, Horkheimer, König, Plessner, and Schelsky—in the cultural programs on the radio.

6 Sociology During National Socialism

In the same way that the history of sociology exhibits a curious "war suppression" (cf. Joas and Knöbl, 2008), sociology long neglected the National Socialist dictatorship as well as the role of sociology during the National Socialist era. Since the Sociology Congress in Jena in 2008 at the latest, German sociology has witnessed a revived interest in the history of sociology during National Socialism (cf. v. Dyk and Schauer, 2015). As early as the 1970s, a few sociologists concerned with this issue—among them specifically Carsten Klingemann, Johannes Weyer, Otthein Rammstedt, Rainer M. Lepsius, Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, and Erhard Stölting—conducted a number of source-based studies that have deconstructed the hitherto widespread myth that there had been no sociology during NS rule. In close connection with this research and its authors, a new, ongoing debate erupted, beginning in 2000, which has found expression in individual studies and articles in the bulletin of the German Sociological Association. Particularly noteworthy in this debate is the volume on *Soziologie und Nationalsozialismus* (2014; *Sociology and National Socialism*) edited by Michaela Christ and Maja Suderland: it comprises sociological contributions that analyze society during NS rule as well as work on the role of sociology during and after the NS regime from a history-of-sociology perspective. Special mention needs to be made of the contribution by Henning Borggräfe and Sonja Schnitzler (2014). Their diligent research traces the history and discontinuation of the German Sociological Association (DGS) and refutes the myth that

discontinuing the DGS was a liberal or preemptive act to save German sociology, as Leopold von Wiese, DGS president after 1945, would have liked to have us believe. What the authors show instead is that it was the result of a rivalry and struggle between two camps that sought to curry favor with the National Socialist regime.

7 The History of Transnational Transfers

A hitherto largely neglected field in the study of the history of sociology has been the analysis of “histoires croisées” (Werner and Zimmermann, 2002), that is, transnational interrelations. We find the beginnings of such an analysis in studies of the history of the Frankfurt School (Wiggershaus, 2001), the Collège de Sociologie (Moebius, 2006), or in studies of transfers between German and French sociology (Gephart, 2005). An informative study devoted to such transfers is Christian Fleck’s *A Transatlantic History of the Social Sciences: Robber Barons, the Third Reich and the Invention of Empirical Social Research* (2011). His source-based research examines the role of the Rockefeller Foundation in the ascent of empirical social research not only in the USA but also in Germany and Austria. Fleck’s extensive study also comprises a collective biography of more than 800 German-speaking social scientists, both emigrants and “home-guards” (*Daheimgebliebene* as this group is unfortunately often referred to in trivializing fashion in German), as well as an analysis of the decline of the German-speaking university system and the ascent of its US-American counterpart in the 1930s and 1940s. All in all, Fleck has not only provided a study of the institutional and socio-economic conditions of the ascent of empirical social research that is rich in detail, underpinned by archival sources, and displays interpretive excellence but one that is also highly innovative in terms of its methods of collecting and using quantitative data—as far as the history of sociology is concerned.

8 Final Remarks

Since 2000, much has happened in the study of the history of sociology. As numerous activities show (Moebius and Ploder, 2017; 2018), especially young scholars currently exhibit renewed interest in the history of their discipline and its historical self-reflection. To some degree, this stands in contrast to the state of the history of sociology’s institutionalization. Although this history is being taught at many universities and the number of publications is growing, there remains a lack of journals and organizational structures; for instance, a DGS section devoted to the history of sociology is existing only since 2019. Despite all these other efforts, there is additionally the need to intensify contact with the historical sciences. In this vein, it has been lamented that, in its treatment of National Socialism, sociological research has rarely sought contact with historians (cf. Fleck, 2018), who, in contrast to sociologists, can look back on decades of expertise in research on National Socialism. Connecting with the historical

sciences (e.g., intellectual history) also in other areas could be pursued more actively, especially considering that sociology and the history of sociology could benefit the historical sciences as well or both could mutually support one another (cf. Moebius, 2017a). However, we should take special care that the study of the history of sociology does not morph into a matter of *l'art pour l'art*, thus losing touch, when looking back, with what is going on in contemporary society. “Insofar as the study of the history of sociology is able to shed light on the relationships between historical sociological reflection and actual developments in society and identify the aspects of power, interests, violence, and crisis immanent in these relationships, it will strengthen our capacity for critical sociological analysis of modern society in the present” (Peter, 2015: 142).

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Life Course

Johannes Huinink and Betina Hollstein

Abstract: Research into individual life courses can be considered a special means of investigating social change. This chapter reviews contributions to life-course research in German-language sociology with a focus on its development over the last two decades. We start with a brief overview of the early years of life-course research and sketch three strands of research that were original even by international standards. In the second section, we describe conceptual and methodical approaches to German-language life-course research along with important data collections that triggered a plethora of empirical life-course studies. Section three focuses on the primary fields of life-course research and provides examples of empirical contributions by quantitative studies. In section four, we address specific characteristics of biographical research in German-speaking countries that can fertilize life-course research. The chapter closes with some brief remarks about the challenges that life-course research faces in the future.

Keywords: Life course, biography, life history

About fifty years ago, various comprehensive approaches to a “life-course perspective” in sociology were developed. These built on a long history of social research on individual lives and biographies. A major motivation in this effort was to achieve a better understanding of the rapid social change in Western societies by investigating the relationship between changing patterns of individual lives and their societal environment. The conceptual efforts to establish a differentiated agenda of life-course research have been paralleled by the steady development of refined quantitative and qualitative methods of collecting and analyzing life-course data in social research (cf. Elder and Giele, 2009; Mayer, 2004; 2009). These efforts have yielded advances in longitudinal research not only on the macro but also on the micro level.

1 Early Life-Course Research in German-Language Sociology

In German-language sociology, the life-course approach was introduced in the late 1970s, and the work of German-speaking scholars in this field has gained recognition internationally ever since. As part of the German Science Foundation’s Collaborative Research Centre (CRC) 3, “*Microanalytic Foundations of Social Policy*,” Karl Ulrich

Note: We draw selectively upon Hollstein (2019) in sections four and five.

Mayer and his colleagues founded a quantitative research program (“German Life History Study”) that established and made use of a rich collection of quantitative retrospective life-course data at the Max Planck Institute of Human Development in Berlin (Mayer, 1990). At the Free University in Berlin, Martin Kohli published an early edited volume that introduced the life-course approach to German-language sociology (Kohli, 1978). In his own research, he studied the emergence of the “institutionalization of the modern life course” as a secular trend over the previous two centuries (Kohli, 1985). Together with his colleagues, he started a research program that collected and utilized primarily qualitative, biographical data on individual life courses. In the 1990s at the University of Bremen, the German Science Foundation’s CRC 186, “Status Passages and Risks in the *Life Course*,” integrated different approaches to the life-course perspective and primarily studied the impact of social policy, social institutions, and socio-psychological issues on the life course (Heinz et al., 2001). In the following, we will provide a short overview of how some of the aspects in these three strands developed as part of German-language life-course research—developments that were also original by international standards.

From a theoretical standpoint, German-language life-course research put a strong emphasis on the role of social structure and social institutions. Mayer and his team considered particular life-course regimes to be shaped by the social structure of a society (e.g., the labor market, education, social inequality) that itself is steadily changing as a result of the aggregated outcomes of individual life courses (Mayer and Blossfeld, 1990; Huinink, 1995; Huinink et al., 1995; Mayer, 2004). Another major force structuring the life course is the state (Mayer and Müller, 1986). With that in mind, life courses were conceptualized as complex, multidimensional, and “self-referential process[es]” with “endogenous causation” (Mayer and Huinink, 1990; Mayer, 2004: 166). Kohli considered the modern life course to be shaped by an interplay between modern institutions and the subjective construction of a coherent biography and to be structured by institutions that have evolved over the course of societal modernization and by a trend toward increasing individualization (in a relationship of mutual augmentation, or *Steigerungsverhältnis*). The tripartite life course itself could be perceived as an institution, that is to say, a normative sequence of phases (periods of preparation, “activity,” and retirement) that individuals typically go through during their lifetime. This institutional script was expected to undergo a future process of de-institutionalization in the wake of the assumed erosion of modern institutions. (Kohli, 1985; 1988; 2007). The Bremen CRC “Status Passages and Risks in the Life Course,” which was launched in 1988, produced new insight into the dynamics and societal conditions of major transitions in the life course (status passages, or *Statuspassagen*) by studying institutional and social influences with an emphasis on social policy and life-course policy (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999; Leisering, 2004; Weymann, 1996; 2004) as well as gendered life courses that follow gender-sensitive institutional pathways or arrangements (Krüger and Levy, 2001). Another aspect that has been emphasized is the role of personal agency and individual decisions in weakening the institutional structuration of individual life courses as part of the process of social

change. Noteworthy attempts have been made to fuse methodological concepts from sociology (the life course) with psychological concepts (the lifespan) and to combine quantitative with qualitative methods of analysis. This has strengthened the link to developmental and social psychology—already quite prominent in life-course research in the United States (Heinz, 2002; Diewald and Mayer, 2009).

Methodologically speaking, the German-language life-course tradition fertilized research in two different directions: a quantitative, socio-structural analysis of the life course and a qualitative, biographical analysis of the life course. Researchers in Mayer's group were among the pioneers in developing the quantitative approach of retrospective data collection (Brückner and Mayer, 1998) and longitudinal analysis of individual life courses in modern societies. These included event-history analysis (Blossfeld et al., 1989) and complementing macro-level, demographic cohort analysis with complex multi-level longitudinal designs (Blossfeld, 1989; Mayer and Huinink, 1990). Kohli and his group initiated a "German tradition" of qualitative biographical analysis, which they and others have elaborated into a unique biographical approach of analyzing individual narrative recordings (Bertaux and Kohli, 1984; Schütze, 1983; 2008; Rosenthal, 1993). Also worth mentioning is the German-language historical sciences' particular contribution to a different—but also qualitative—approach based on reported biographies to study historical change, namely, the oral-history approach (Niethammer, 1991). Moreover, some projects from the Bremen CRC 186 issued a strong plea for mixed-methods approaches to life-course analysis and successfully applied them (Kelle, 2008; Knappertsbusch/Langfeldt/Kelle, MIXED-METHODS AND MULTIMETHOD RESEARCH, this volume).

2 Life-Course Research after the Turn of the Century

It is very much to the credit of German-language life-course research that life-course-related and biographical analyses are now part of the canon of empirical research in the German-language social sciences. In particular, studies on demographic behavior (Höpflinger, DEMOGRAPHY AND AGING, this volume), social inequality (Otte/Boehle/Kunißen, SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—EMPIRICAL FOCUS, this volume), family (Konietzka/Feldhaus/Kreyenfeld/Trappe, FAMILY AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS, this volume), labor-market participation (Aulenbacher/Grubner, WORK AND LABOR, this volume), happiness, and health usually follow a life-course perspective.

Conceptually and methodologically, the tradition of German-language life-course research made a difference in the international arena and continues to do so today. Literature published by Mayer and members of his group (cf. Mayer and Huinink, 1990) offered an idea of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary model of the life course as a complex behavioral process, an idea that has recently been reaffirmed by Bernardi, Huinink, and Settersten (2019). Their model conceives of the individual life course as the outcome of a nonlinear process driven by interdependencies in three dimensions: time (past, present, and future), life domains (e.g., work and family), and process

levels (inner-individual, individual-behavioral, and supra-individual levels). These dimensions and the inherent interdependencies are themselves strongly dependent on each other. According to the authors, this model provides an adequate tool for analyzing all aspects of life-course dynamics and applies an interdisciplinary perspective that is assumed to be essential in advanced life-course research.

Kohli's approach initiated a growing body of life-course research that used the toolbox of biographical analysis. Hollstein took this further and not only showed how the analysis of qualitative, narrative-biographical interview data contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of life-course dynamics and enriches theory-building but also how such data can be integrated into a mixed-methods procedure (Hollstein, 2019).

The Bremen Research Centre 186 fostered the idea of research focusing more attention on individual agency, cultural and institutional conditions of gendered life courses, and the significance of social policy among other factors, thereby advocating the concept of life-course policy (Heinz et al., 2009; Pfau-Effinger/Grages, SOCIAL POLICY, this volume).

Methodically, German life-course researchers did not merely have a prominent role in the development of event-history analytical methods (Blossfeld et al., 2007). They also contributed considerably to the progress made in quantitative life-course research that used panel methods of "causal" analysis (Brüderl, Kratz, and Bauer, 2019) and the more "descriptive" methods of sequence analysis (Fasang and Raab, 2014; Raab et al., 2014; Barth/Blasius, QUANTITATIVE METHODS, this volume). Additionally, German-speaking scholars made major contributions to qualitative and biographical life-course research, which we will describe in more detail in section four.

In parallel to the conceptual developments and the advances in life-course data analysis, the life-course perspective has heavily influenced data collection in German-language sociology, specifically in regard to the design of quantitative, micro-level empirical surveys. Collecting at least some retrospective data as an empirical basis for life-course related studies has since become an obligatory part of cross-sectional surveys. The notion of a strong interdependence between different dimensions of the life course (life domains) and, even more so, the interplay between subjective attitudes, norms, and dispositions with overt action and its consequences (selection and adaptation) gave rise to long-term panel surveys that would allow for the reliable measurement of changing subjective indicators over time (Huinink et al., 2011). Early on, socio-economic panel studies collected primarily objective indicators like income and employment, and the recording of social-status indicators started as far back as the 1970s and 1980s in the U.S., Britain, and Germany. Since then, the questionnaires used by these panel surveys have come to include psychological indicators and subjective variables such as values, attitudes, and well-being.

In addition to the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), which has already been running for 35 years (Goebel et al., 2019), new panels have been established within the last two decades. These follow a life-course perspective and allow researchers to

combine information on the temporal development of objective and subjective indicators and study their mutual interdependence. Examples of major efforts in this regard are the German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS), which is primarily designed for educational research (Blossfeld and Roßbach, 2019); the German Family Panel (pairfam), which is primarily designed for family research (Huinink et al., 2011); and the German Twin Family Panel (TwinLife), which is primarily designed to illuminate how psychic and social resources mediate genetic and environmental contributions to individual development (Hahn et al., 2016). Many other panel studies that have emerged over the last two decades could also be mentioned (Höpflinger, *DEMOGRAPHY AND AGING*, this volume; Konietzka/Feldhaus/Kreyenfeld/Trappe, *FAMILY AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS*, this volume; Otte/Boehle/Kunißen, *SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—EMPIRICAL FOCUS*, this volume); however, they are all exclusively surveys that collect standardized data. Qualitative panel data collection is still quite rare (Keupp et al., 2002; Dimbath, 2003; Schütze, 2015; Vogl and Zartler, 2020).

3 The Main Fields of Life-Course Research in German-Language Sociology

An overview of the main fields of German-language life-course research is perforce very selective. However, it is possible to identify various topics on which German-language research has traditionally focused and continues to pursue.

First among these is the transition to adulthood (Konietzka, 2010). For instance, recent findings on the age at which individuals leave home in Germany showed that, contrary to widely shared expectations, this age increased only slightly in birth cohorts during the first three decades after World War II following a period of a steady decline (cf. Konietzka and Tatjes, 2018). This corresponds to the finding that cohabitation replaced early marriage in these birth cohorts to a considerable extent. Consequently, the age at which individuals started living together with a partner also rose only moderately compared to their age at marriage (Konietzka, 2010).

Second, and related to this area of research, are studies on demographic and family change (i.e., family formation and dissolution) (e.g., Kreyenfeld, 2010; Kreyenfeld and Trappe, 2020; Wagner et al., 2019; Wagner et al., 2015; Konietzka/Feldhaus/Kreyenfeld/Trappe, *FAMILY AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS*, this volume). In particular, a major issue of interest has been the strong interdependence between family dynamics, education, and work and how it determines the options that are available to women to reconcile family and work (cf. Aisenbrey and Fasang, 2017; Blossfeld and Drobnič, 2001; Kühn, 2004).

A third field of research can be drawn from the plethora of studies that have analyzed the inter- and intragenerational dynamics of education, one's occupational career, class membership, and social inequality (cf. Blossfeld and Roßbach, 2019; Fasang and Mayer, 2020; Grundmann, *EDUCATION AND SOCIALIZATION*, this vol-

ume). Some of these studies have revealed that the long-term upward trends in the mean educational and occupational status of German birth cohorts over the last century are far from being as stable as they have seemed to be. These studies have clearly determined the long-lasting impact of dramatic historical experiences on individual life courses (Becker and Blossfeld, 2017; Becker and Mayer, 2019). They have also found evidence of a weakening but still very strong transmission of social inequality from one generation to the next.

Fourth, and more recently, there has been a rapid expansion of research on spatial mobility over one's life course—mostly in relation to other life domains such as work, intimate partnerships, and family (cf. Huinink and Feldhaus, 2012; Kley, 2011; Wagner and Mulder, 2015). New findings from the analyses of job-related spatial mobility, for instance, have shown that long-distance commuting (albeit only for women) weakens the quality and stability of intimate partnerships. It also significantly delays family formation.

A fifth major field of life-course research in German-language sociology has dealt with living conditions and status transitions in later life (cf. Kohli and Künemund, 2005; Börsch-Supan, 2020; Höpflinger, *DEMOGRAPHY AND AGING*, this volume) and with intergenerational relationships (cf. Szydlik, 2016; Steinbach, 2012). These analyses have come to include more than just two familial generations, which has illuminated the role of grandparents and, for instance, shed new light on the “importance of the (grand-)paternal line in the intergenerational reproduction of relationship styles” (Hank et al., 2017: 134).

Sixth, international comparisons in regard to all areas of research mentioned here have yielded important insights into the logic of the societal conditions of life-course trajectories (cf. Mayer, 2004; Blossfeld, 2009). In the wake of German reunification, also studies on East German life courses—often in comparison to West Germany—have been conducted on many of these topics. They have shown the remarkable and enduring differences between East and West Germany. However, researchers have also observed rapid processes of assimilation with respect to the incidence and timing of major life-course transitions (cf. Diewald et al., 2006; Konietzka, 2010).

One can summarize this short overview by making three general observations. The first refers to whether the findings of this body of research support the assumption that the social change that has occurred over last five decades along with ongoing processes of globalization have led to a continuing de-standardization of life trajectories. To this there is no clear answer. In Germany at least, only moderate trends toward a de-standardization of the life course have been identified thus far (cf. Mills and Blossfeld, 2003; Scherger, 2007; Kohli, 2007; Wagner and Cifuentes, 2014). The second observation is that empirical life-course research is recognizing the fact that processes in one domain of the life course cannot be analyzed adequately without accounting for the complex interdependence with many other life domains (cf. Aisenbrey and Fang, 2017; Bernardi et al., 2019; Diewald, 2003). The third observation concerns the shift from retrospective data to panel data (cf. Brüderl et al., 2019). Analyses that use “objective” information on life events could easily be conducted using retrospective

data (quantitative or qualitative) and attain reliable results largely through the use of event-history or sequence analysis. When long-term panel data became available, this expanded the opportunities for quantitative life-course analysis considerably. Now, studies can use the kinds of information that previously could not be collected reliably in retrospective surveys because of severe and systematic recall errors. For instance, the availability of panel data substantially advanced the possibilities of investigating the dynamics of individual life courses. Examples of such progress include studies on the interdependence of behavioral intention and overt behavior across life domains. In other words, the intention to, say, have a(nother) child has effects on an individual's likelihood to be residentially mobile, although this also depends on the social status of the actors (Vidal et al., 2017). Another example is the analyses of the changes in well-being or life satisfaction over time. Panel data also allow—at least to a certain extent—one to account for self-selectivity and to avoid biased estimates in analyses investigating the effects of life-course experiences (cf. Schmiedeberg et al., 2017).

4 Biographical Analysis

Elaborate quantitative analyses can shed light on the movement, pathways, and patterns of action of individuals and groups over time and the institutional structure of the life course. Qualitative methods help to further understand aspects of the life course as a multidimensional behavioral process as well as the driving forces behind individual life courses. Individual agency in particular, including how much and what type of agency is involved in shaping individual life courses, is a core interest addressed by biographical analysis. How do people link and balance different spheres of life, such as family obligations and their careers (i.e., interdependencies between life domains)? How do social networks affect individuals' biographical decisions (i.e., interdependencies between micro- and meso-levels) (cf. Bernardi et al., 2019)? How do past experiences influence current perceptions, orientations, and actions, and how do individuals organize biographical transitions? Do they draw on long-term plans, or are they just muddling through (i.e., time-related interdependencies) (ibid.)?

Biographical research with reconstructive methods offers an elaborate methodological approach to address these questions, yet it is only recently—decades after their development—that texts describing these methods have been translated into English (cf. Breckner, 2015; Hollstein, 2019). Occasionally, these approaches have been labeled as the “German school” in biographical research (Bertaux and Kohli, 1984; Apitzsch and Inowlocki, 2000), and they have taken root internationally in the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on Biography and Society (RC38) (Breckner, 2015; cf. also Miller, 2005; Harrison, 2009). These reconstructive, sequential analytical approaches (e.g., Schütze, 1976, 2008; Oevermann et al., 1987; Rosenthal, 1993; 2006; Nohl, 2010; Hollstein/Kumkar, *QUALITATIVE METHODS*, this volume) have dominated biographical research in German-speaking countries, which itself is a

highly visible part of German-language sociology (cf. Lutz et al., 2018; Jost and Haas, 2019).¹

In sequential analytical approaches, researchers interpret the interview data sequentially (word for word, line by line) and take into account differences between communicative schemes of representing one's life and perception of the world (i.e., text types)—especially with regard to whether the interviewee does so in the form of a narration, a description, or an argumentation—as well as consider the interaction between interviewer and interviewee (e.g., Schütze, 2008). These elaborate interpretative techniques can serve several purposes in life-course research that cannot be addressed equally by means of quantitative or other qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews. This is because the sequential analysis of autobiographical narrative interviews makes it possible to distinguish between reported and experienced life history and to reconstruct tacit knowledge and the orientations that guide an individual's actions, which are partly unintentional or even unconscious (Rosenthal, 2006; Schütze, 2008; Nohl, 2010). In particular, autobiographical extempore narrations offer unique avenues to understanding biographical decision-making and the layers of biographical experiences and planning, to investigating the question of how individuals link different spheres of life, and to exploring different types of agency (Schütze, 2008; Hollstein, 2019).

Of course, the methodological status of an extempore narration about a person's life course is a matter of some debate. Some researchers state that biographical accounts are mostly representations of the interviewee's "structured self-images," something that has little to do with social reality (cf. Kohli, 1981; Schütze, 2008). Pierre Bourdieu (1986) even spoke provocatively of a "biographical illusion." Biographical researchers who work with sequential analysis would concede that autobiographical accounts do not simply mirror "social reality" (Rosenthal, 2006; Schütze, 2008). But they would also maintain that autobiographical extempore narrations in particular are neither fully invented, nor do they depend solely on external factors such as the interviewee's current situation. For example, by comparing passages from narrations with current interpretations documented in descriptive and argumentative parts of a biographical interview, the researcher is able to account for reinterpretations of experiences and events (Schütze, 2008: 171f.).

Reconstructive, sequential analytical methods (Hollstein/Kumkar, *QUALITATIVE METHODS*, this volume) have been used by several schools of biographical analysis: narration analysis as introduced by Fritz Schütze (2008), objective hermeneutics (Oevermann et al., 1987; Wernet, 2014), and the documentary method (Bohnsack, 2010, 2014; Nohl, 2010). For instance, by following Karl Mannheim and loosely referencing Bourdieu's habitus concept, Ralf Bohnsack has aimed to reconstruct the

¹ For instance, in the German Sociological Association, the working group on biographical research was founded in 1979 and became a regular section in 1986, long before the section on qualitative methods was established in 2003.

implicit (atheoretical, incorporated) knowledge of social actors and the orienting frames that guide their actions. This interest implies a change in analytical stance from asking *what* to asking *how*, from immanent or literal meaning to documentary meaning (Bohnsack, 2010): “It is the change from the question *what* social reality is in the perspective of actors, to the question *how* this reality is produced or accomplished in these actors’ everyday practice” (ibid.: 102; italics in the original). By distinguishing between explicit knowledge (i.e., subjective representations) and tacit knowledge or action orientations, which are partly unconscious, these methods provide a means to reconstruct different types of agency, how people relate to external circumstances through their actions, and the degree of autonomy they experience. Furthermore, it is possible to account for the genesis of such agency, or rather, “how an individual develops certain ways of reacting to difficult situations and experiences in the past” (Breckner and Rupp, 2002: 299; cf. also Wohlrab-Sahr, 2006). In his own seminal studies, Schütze reconstructed four types of elementary “biographical process structures” (2008) and how they change over the life course. “Biographic action schemes” are characterized by a high degree of autonomy, whereas “institutional expectation patterns” characterize institutionally shaped and normatively defined courses, such as career trajectories within an organization. In “trajectories of suffering,” people only react to overwhelming external events. “Transformations,” by contrast, refer to individuals actively dealing with biographical events that did not turn out as originally planned. Such elementary process structures, especially institutional expectation patterns and trajectories of suffering, are of particular interest for life-course research since they represent quite weak types of agency (if any at all) that have not received much attention in prior studies (cf. Settersten and Gannon, 2005; Wohlrab-Sahr, 2002).

5 Challenges Facing Life-Course Research in Germany (and Elsewhere)

Even though life-course research has reached maturity, it still faces challenges that must be overcome if further desirable progress is to be made in understanding the interplay between the individual life course, or biographies, and social change. One could summarize that overcoming these challenges involves above all the integration of different methodological approaches in life-course research on the basis of a sound theoretical underpinning, as proposed, for instance, by Bernardi, Huinink, and Settersten (2019).

Such integration of quantitative and qualitative analysis in the study of life courses was one major aim of the CRC 186 in Bremen. However, it came to a standstill sometime during the last decade. Besides the Bremen studies, there are only a few other examples that combine life-course and biographical data in German-language sociology (e.g., Mayer and Schulze, 2009; Scherger and Vogel, 2018). And even though

life-course research today accounts for large portions of empirical research in German sociology, it remains separated into two “camps,” namely, a quantitative and qualitative one. We assume that this divide has deepened still further in recent decades. Institutional and cognitive hurdles to productive exchange seem to be higher than ever. On the one hand, this comes down to the increasing specialization of both biographical and life-course research, which has made exchange more difficult between the two. On the other hand, there has been what one might call a “constructivist turn” in biographical research. We do see a difference here with respect to the international literature, where both paradigms have been combined in a rather descriptive but very illuminating approach (e.g., Laub and Sampson, 2003). In this regard, we see great potential in research designs that engage quantitative life-course research and qualitative biographical research in an intelligent dialogue and integrate more refined studies of one kind or the other, such as the reconstructive biographical approaches that are more prominent in German-language sociology.

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Media and Communication

Andreas Hepp

Abstract: German media sociology is in the process of developing from a sociology of mass communication to a sociology of a deeply mediated world. This corresponds with three more general themes of international media sociology: a rethinking of agency, a redefinition of social relations, and a rediscovery of order in light of the digital. The specificity of current German media sociology's work to make sense of the digital can perhaps be captured most concisely by stating that it is dominated by a relational, process-oriented way of thinking that broadly seeks to describe and critically evaluate the transformation of social construction by digital media and their infrastructures.

Keywords: Media sociology, mediatization, datafication, practice theory, assemblage, figuration

1 Introduction

Broadly speaking, media sociology can be understood as a field of the social sciences that deals with the role technologically based mediation plays in the construction of the social world (Silverstone, 2005). Until the end of the last century, this was synonymous with an investigation into mass media's implications for society from both an international (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013) and a German perspective (Sutter, 2013). But a lot has changed in recent years. If we talk about media today, we may still bring legacy mass media such as newspapers or television into the equation. However, for more and more people media means the various digital platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or Netflix that many of us now take for granted. Even when we talk about newspapers and television, we are no longer referring to these legacy media but to new digital arrangements instead.

Just as the phenomena of media sociology have leaned towards the digital, so too has media sociology shifted in the approaches it takes, which in turn requires innovative theoretical strategies to help make sense of a media environment in rapid flux that is characterized by a great variety of media. With these changes, however, media sociology as a field has entered vague territory. From an international perspective, Silvio Waisbord (2014; 2019) argued that no single coherent media sociology exists; rather, sociologists engage with issues of media and communications in different ways. As a consequence, he defined media sociology as "the study of media processes and phenomena anchored in classic and contemporary sociological questions and methods" (Waisbord, 2014: 7). If we take this understanding as a basis for this discussion, media sociology extends into the farther reaches of media and communication studies as a scientific discipline. This is also the case for media sociology in

Germany: both the German Communication Association (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Publizistik und Kommunikationswissenschaft, DGPK) and the German Sociological Association (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie; DGS) have specific divisions dedicated to media sociology.¹ If one considers the shift in media toward the digital, media sociology becomes even more complex as it veers into the realms of “digital sociology” (Lupton, 2015) and spans many other areas of German sociology such as the sociology of science and technology or social theory (Philipps, 2017). With an increased interest in digital communications and a data-rich society, the boundaries of German media sociology are therefore becoming even more indistinct than they already were.

In this light, it is fairly clear that an all-encompassing overview of the development of German media sociology over the last twenty years is simply not possible within the bounds of a single journal article. Therefore, the aim of this article is not to discuss either German media sociology’s contribution to the international analysis of the *public sphere* or how internationally widespread sociological concepts such as *cultural capital* or *social class* have been adopted by German media sociology.² The central thread running through what follows is German media sociology’s shift to the digital and its (possible) contribution to the international discussion in media sociology. While more traditional areas of media sociology remain, such as the “sociology of particular media” (Hoffmann and Winter, 2018) or the “sociology of the public sphere” (Gerhards, 2002), my main argument is that German media sociology is in the process of developing from a *sociology of mass communication* to a *sociology of a deeply mediatized world*. This corresponds with three more general themes of international media sociology that I have identified elsewhere (Hepp, 2020a). The first of these themes is a rethinking of agency; the second is a redefinition of social relations; and the third is a rediscovery of order in light of the digital. Across these three points, we can highlight three particular contributions that German media sociology has made to the international discussion: (1) its interest in relationality, (2) its orientation toward processes, and (3) its broad focus on questions of social construction.

In developing this kind of argument, it can be tempting to oversimplify and construct one-dimensional histories of the field. I am aware of the risks of avoiding, for example, the distinction between particular “theoretical schools” such as the sociology of knowledge (which has a tendency to focus on the individual, on subjective meaning, and on cognition; see Knoblauch, 2017) and systems theory (with its emphasis on society as an entity in its own right; Ziemann, 2012). Also, the demarcation between “German” and “international” (that is to say, English-language) media sociology is—when it comes to the digital—far vaguer than one might expect. “German” in this article mainly refers to media sociologists based in Germany, a large

¹ For more information, please see the academic associations’ websites: <https://www.dgpuk.de/en/index.html> and <https://soziologie.de/en/gsa> (accessed January 1, 2020).

² This is how more traditionally structured introductions, such as Hoffmann and Winter (2018), Jäckel (2005), and Sutter (2013), discuss German media sociology.

number of whom also publish in English. In addition, I write this article from a particular perspective, namely, that of a media sociologist who works at a research center for media and communications. Nevertheless, I believe that a broader discussion is worthwhile since it has the potential to lead to a better understanding of media sociology's general trajectory in Germany.³ In a best-case scenario, this may offer some insight into how German media sociology can contribute to the international discussion.⁴

2 From a Sociology of Mass Communication to a Sociology of a Deeply Mediatized World

As noted above, German media sociology has its origins in the sociology of mass communication. Mass media communicate to a “general audience,” with a spatial distance between “communicators” and “recipients” and a unidirectional mode of communicative flight from the former to the latter. The traditional sociology of mass media was concerned with a critical analysis of mass communication's social patterns at the levels of production (e.g., the institutional arrangements of media organizations or the social organization of the newsroom), content (e.g., ideologies, stereotypes, frames), and use (e.g., differences in media use by social class or the situated context of reception). In addition, key sociological frameworks were applied to mass media, such as those of “field” or “system,” and questions of social inequality were discussed in terms of concepts such as “social class” or “habitus.”

In contrast to mass media, digital media differ as a consequence of their software-based character and their embeddedness in new global infrastructures (Hepp, 2020b: 5; Waisbord, 2014: 6). When Sonia Livingstone questioned “the mediation of everything” (Livingstone, 2009: 1), she characterized a shift in which media can no longer be considered a separate “domain of society” (Lunt and Livingstone, 2016: 3) that affects other domains. Consequently, the emergence of “new” digital media and the digitalization of “old” legacy mass media required media sociology to take a completely different approach when analyzing the mediated construction of reality.

Various contributions from German sociology are implicitly or explicitly positioned within this broader international discussion. For example, from a systems-theory perspective, Armin Nassehi (2019) argued in his proposal for a theory of a digital society that digitalization should be seen against the backdrop of the simul-

3 I would like to thank Udo Göttlich, Jan Fuhse, Sigrid Kannengießer, Hubert Knoblauch, Friedrich Krotz, Wiebke Loosen, Peter Lunt, Christian Pentzold, Jeffrey Wimmer, and the ZeMKI Lab “Mediatization and Globalization” for their helpful comments on the first draft of this article.

4 This article only deals with media sociology in Germany. The reason for this focus is that the sociology of media in Germany has already taken on a multifaceted form that is subdivided between sociology on the one hand and media and communication studies on the other hand, which is different from the situation in Austria and Switzerland.

taneous complexity and pattern-like character of today's societies, which both become, in a novel way, observable through digital media. From a sociology-of-knowledge perspective, Hubert Knoblauch (2017) argued for a rethinking of social constructivism as *communicative* constructivism, that is to say, an approach to constructivism that places communication at the center of analysis and considers the transformation of society as a re-articulation of its communicative construction.

However, internationally, mediatization research is probably the most well-known contribution made by contemporary German media sociology (Ekström et al., 2016; Livingstone, 2009: 6–7; Lundby, 2014a). At its core, “mediatization” is first and foremost a “sensitising concept” (Jensen, 2013: 206, with reference to Blumer, 1954) that draws attention to the interrelations between changes in media and communications on the one hand and changes in culture and society on the other (Couldry and Hepp, 2013). Mediatization research is concerned with empirically identifying patterns of these interrelated transformations with the aim of gradually arriving at more general theories on the role of mediated communication for social and cultural change.

While the discussion on mediatization goes back much further in time (see, e.g., Schulz, 2004), an important boost to German mediatization research's focus on digital media was the establishment of the priority program “Mediatized Worlds” between 2010 and 2016.⁵ Priority programs are established by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG) on current and highly relevant research topics in order to promote research across different locations. Mediatized Worlds was in many ways an important catalyst for German media sociology. First, it spurred empirical research and theoretical discussion on mediatization and the digital through its ten to eleven projects per two-year funding period. Second, it brought scholars from media and communications together with scholars from sociology within a general media-sociological framework. And third, quite early on it placed an emphasis on the relation between questions of mediatization and datafication, that is, the role of data in digital communication. With the end of the priority program, mediatization research has continued in various guises, including the research network “Communicative Figurations” (see below).

Early studies into mediatization were more in line with media sociology's approach to legacy mass media, describing media as a discrete sphere that influences other social spheres through its “media logic” (Birkner, 2017). With the progression of digitalization, more attention began to be paid to the “media-saturated” (Lundby, 2014b: 3) character of social domains. Some scholars opened up the concept of media logic to address various kinds of logics, such as interaction logics, the logics of organizations, or of media's materiality (Thimm et al., 2018). Others abandoned the idea of media logic completely and focused more on media users' shifting practices and their entanglement with digital media (Krotz, 2017). Mediatization research then

⁵ For an overview, see Hepp and Krotz (2014) and Krotz et al. (2017). The old website for this program is still accessible: <http://www.mediatisiertewelten.de/en/home.html> (accessed January 1, 2020).

turned its gaze toward “synthetic situations” (Knorr Cetina, 2014) and the “intersituativity” (Hirschauer, 2014) of communication that emerge when digital media and computer-based data processing offer new spaces of interaction.

With almost all domains of society saturated by digital media and their infrastructures, we find ourselves living in an advanced stage of mediatization in which the ways society is recursively constructed constantly refer to those media and the arrangements that undergird them. We can call this stage of mediatization “deep mediatization” (Couldry and Hepp, 2017; Hepp, 2020b). In this context, the key task for media sociology is to develop appropriate concepts and analyses that articulate the consequences of media saturation and its related social transformations.

3 Rethinking Agency: Media Practice, Acting on Media and Datafication

As already mentioned in the introduction, we can see this development of appropriate concepts and analyses in German media sociology as being initially linked to a rethinking of agency in international media sociology. Here, as in the themes discussed in the following two sections, German media sociology’s particular “take” is to highlight relationality, to propose an orientation towards processes, and to broadly focus on questions of social construction.

Rethinking agency in relation to digital media’s widening out into every facet of everyday life is a more or less general focal point for international media sociology (Couldry, 2012). Rethinking agency here refers to a move beyond a traditional theory of action (Thomas and Krotz, 2008) by broadening the view on media-related action when the digital emerges. From its infancy, German (media) sociology was involved in this discussion since practice theory is firmly anchored in German sociological traditions (Reckwitz, 2002; Schmidt, 2012; Schatzki et al., 2001). Within this discussion, German media sociology paid special attention to the analysis of interrelated routines, that is, everyday activities as the foundations of ongoing processes of the social construction of reality (Foellmer et al., 2018; Gentzel, 2015; Pentzold, 2015). In today’s deeply mediatized societies, the contrast between practices of specific media use (e.g., “watching television”) and other social practices (e.g., “cooking”) becomes less distinct as an increasing number of our social practices also refer to media (e.g., “cooking with the help of YouTube tutorials”).

An approach rooted in practice theory characterizes many German media sociological studies that have followed the mediatization approach. Research by the aforementioned priority program, the Communicative Figurations research network, and other projects should be mentioned here. They have dealt with a range of topics including the mediatization of the home (Röser et al., 2019), community building across media generations (Hepp et al., 2017a), migration and diaspora (Greschke et al., 2017), political opinion formation and deliberation (Laube et al., 2017), the con-

struction of subjectivity and identity (Gentzel et al., 2019), play and gaming (Möll and Hitzler, 2014), business models and cultural production (Pfadenhauer and Grenz, 2012), the experience of mobility (Wimmer and Hartmann, 2013), commuting (Berg, 2017), communicative demarcation (Roitsch, 2020), grief (Offerhaus, 2016), memory and remembering (Lohmeier and Böhling, 2017), the experience of time (Görland, 2020), homelessness (Hartmann, 2014), work (Wimmer and Hartmann, 2016), and media reception in general (Göttlich et al., 2017).⁶ Precisely because of the broad adoption of a practice theory perspective, studies like these can be considered to be a shift towards the international “audience turn” in mediatization research (Schröder, 2017). The principal thread connecting them is to see media-related agency not only in relation to one single medium but to focus on the entire “media repertoire” (Hasebrink and Popp, 2006) and the relatedness of its constitutive media across which agency in times of deep mediatization develops.

When it comes to questions of agency, such an intense engagement with the deep mediatization of social practice is linked to two particular realignments: first, a re-orientation toward *acting on media*; second, a turn towards the agency of media technology. In essence, the term acting on media emphasizes the fact that “a wide range of actors [...] take an active part in the moulding of media organizations, infrastructures and technologies that are part of the fabric of everyday life” (Kannengießer and Kubitschko, 2017: 1). What is at issue here, then, is another form of agency—not that of practices with media but practices of shaping media and their infrastructures, thereby broadening the analysis of social movements nationally and internationally (Foellmer et al., 2018; Wimmer et al., 2018). Empirically, this expansion of a practice-theoretical perspective has been carried out in reference to various examples such as repair cafés (Kannengießer, 2019), the Chaos Computer Club (Kubitschko, 2018), the open-data movement (Baack, 2015), digital utopianism (Dickel and Schrape, 2017), and pioneer communities (Hepp, 2016).

A practice-theory-informed approach to mediatization is closely related to a turn toward datafication (in German: *Verdatung* or *Dataifizierung*), which queries the agency of technologies (Rammert, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION, this volume). This discussion was already ongoing in the aforementioned “Mediatized Worlds” program. The focus was on the “quantified listener” (Passoth et al., 2014), that is, the listener of digital music who, through his or her practices of media use, leaves behind digital traces that are then automatically processed to enable a new “numeric inclusion,” as can be observed in collectivities of taste (Wehner et al., 2017). Since then, researching datafication has emerged as an important sub-area in German media sociology, and various other studies have followed. These included the datafication of gambling (Möll, 2018), individual self-measurement (Zillien et al., 2015), and online stores

⁶ The list above can only cover a small part of the relevant studies and is by no means exhaustive. The anthologies by Hepp and Krotz (2014) and Hepp et al. (2018) provide an overview of further research in English.

(Grenz and Kirschner, 2016).⁷ This research has developed a close relationship to German sociology of science and technology, which has investigated the formation of new collectivities through platforms and data processing (Dolata and Schrape, 2015).

Theoretically, this research is again specifically concerned with questions of agency, namely, to what extent agency shifts to technical systems through data processing and how this is to be appropriately understood. A central reference point in this discussion is—drawing on Latour’s actor–network theory (1991)—the metaphorical “agency without actors” which “suggests that non-human entities do something unique which is not reducible to what human actors do with them” (Passoth et al., 2012: 3). Such questions have recently gained further attention in German media sociology as research on the automation of communication and communicative robots (e.g., bots, artificial companions) has begun to increase (Höflich, 2016; Hepp, 2020b: 79–84). The question here is no longer as simple as whether and how people can, for example, delegate their ability to act to technology. Rather, it is a question of how to adequately describe algorithm-based communication media when they become communicators themselves (Esposito, 2017; Pentzold and Bischof, 2019).

It is clear that the rethinking of agency in German media sociology is deeply embedded within the international discussion. That said, we can already see a particular interest in questions of relationality (e.g., the interrelatedness of different media in the individuals’ media repertoires across which media-related practices develop), a process perspective (e.g., by focusing on the “continuous flow” of everyday media practices), and a broad focus on questions of social construction (e.g., by discussing how this all relates to a making over of the communicative construction of society).

4 Redefining Social Relations: Networks, Assemblages and Figurations

With the development of digital media and infrastructures, an international discussion arose that sought to explore how social relations can be adequately described in the context of transforming communications. Three concepts in particular gained relevance: networks, assemblages, and figurations (Couldry and Hepp, 2017: 61–66, Hepp, 2020a). By considering the contribution of German media sociology to this discussion, we can attain an even deeper understanding of its particular interest in relationality, process, and social construction.

Network is, first of all, a structural metaphor to describe the relations between human actors within a social entity (e.g., a community, a group, the family) and the relations between such entities (Häußling, SOCIAL NETWORKS, this volume). The

⁷ A good, albeit German-language, overview of this research is provided in the volumes by Mämecke et al. (2018) and Houben and Prietlii (2018).

internet and digital media have given rise to an analytical perspective formed around the network concept to describe the complexities of both social and emerging structural relations (Castells, 2009). In such a perspective, society appears as nothing more than a large, complex aggregation of networks: “societies—like computer systems—have networked structures that provide opportunities and constraints, rules and procedures” (Rainie and Wellman, 2012: 7).

Such a turn towards the concept of the network has also been characteristic of German media sociology’s discussion over the last two decades (Stegbauer, 2008). However, a special feature can be identified here in relating network analysis to a “relational sociology” that rejects “the notion that one can posit discrete, pre-given units such as the individual or society as ultimate starting points of sociological analysis” (Emirbayer, 1997: 287). Instead, the focus is on the interrelations between entities, a perspective that held firm while the concept of the network was being addressed in the German context. As Roger Häußling (2010: 63) has argued, relational sociology is a theoretical perspective on network research that focuses on network structures and dynamics as interrelations. Specifically, the aim is not to describe networks as relations between individuals from the point of view of methodological individualism but to capture the relationality that is present in networks. Questions that arise then concern the structures of reciprocity and inequality in networks (Stegbauer, 2010) or how digital media alter the communicative conditions within and across networks (Fuhse, 2018). Starting from media-sociological network research, this kind of relational thinking has generally found its way into German media and communication studies, where, in dynamic “networked publics,” three relational modes of interaction are classified: “conflict,” “competition,” and “cooperation” (Neuberger, 2014).

For German media sociology, network is therefore understood less as a metaphor to describe the digital infrastructure of the internet than as an analytical concept to grasp the changing relational structures of society with digital media and their infrastructures. This even applies when the idea of network is adapted to system theory (Holzer and Fuhse, 2010: 321). In this sense, Dirk Baecker (2007) suggests what he refers to as the “next society” in which the functional systems—law, economics, politics, and so forth—are intertwined in new ways through networks based on digital media.

The idea of *assemblage* was introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to describe the ways in which “complexes of lines” of connection can be built into “territories” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004 [1980]: 587). In terminology that is closer to the social sciences, “social assemblage” refers to a “set of human bodies properly oriented (physically or psychologically) towards each other” (DeLanda, 2006: 12). In international research, various kinds of media-related assemblages have become the foci for media sociology. At this point, we can see a direct reference to actor–network theory and its redefinition of agency: objects must be considered to possess agency of their own that unfolds in an assemblage with humans and their actions (Latour, 2007).

Compared to the network concept, over a long period of time German media sociology's interest in the concept of assemblage was glaringly limited. One explanation for this might be the relative lack of institutionalized science and technology studies in Germany compared to the US and the UK (Bauer et al., 2017: 9). Therefore, whereas actor–network theory—as we have already seen—has been harnessed by German media sociology (Thielmann and Schüttpelz, 2013), the concept of assemblage has thus far not been approached with the same level of enthusiasm as it has enjoyed internationally. If it is used at all, it operates more as a metaphor to describe the entanglement of humans and technological artifacts in certain forms of practice—without further theoretical development of the original ideas.

By contrast, and supported by the aforementioned long tradition of relational sociology, the international field's adoption of the concept of *figuration* in recent years has been mostly stimulated by German media sociology. Figurations are constituted in “processes of interweaving” (Elias, 1978: 130) in which the practices of the people involved are interdependent on and oriented toward each other. A figuration—be it a family, group, organization, or the like—is constituted in the continuously changing pattern of interaction between all those involved, which also indicates the material objects and technologies that are entangled with the practices through which a figuration is articulated.

Such a figurational approach was strongly stimulated by German (media) sociology. Herbert Willems (2012), for example, presented a draft of a “synthetic sociology.” His aim was to describe the objective and relational positioning of actors in given figurations—a positioning that can change with digital media. In the Collaborative Research Centre “Re-Figuration of Space,”⁸ the term *figuration* is broadly understood as the figuration of society as a whole, whereby its spatial transformation is examined in detail (Knoblauch, 2017: 391–398; Knoblauch and Löw, 2017). It focuses on (deep) mediatization as a driving force in the reconfiguration of spatial structures, such as when digital media and their infrastructures support a spatial extension of “chains of interdependence” (Elias, 1978: 68). In the “Communicative Figurations” research network, we explore the re-figuration of public communication through new, pioneering forms of journalism, a change in the figuration of journalists and their audiences, and altered forms of public connection (Couldry and Hepp, 2017; Hepp et al., 2018; Hepp and Loosen, 2019).⁹ Over and above their particularities, such diverse studies come together in their use of (re-)figuration to describe the societal transformations associated with deep mediatization from a relational and process perspective. The concept of figuration integrates ideas from both network research (e.g., in the reconstruction of actor constellations) and assemblage research (e.g., in that the description of figurations always includes material technologies).

⁸ For further information about this CRC, see <https://sfb1265.de/en/> (accessed January 1, 2020).

⁹ For further information on this network, see <https://www.kommunikative-figurationen.de/en/> (accessed January 1, 2020).

5 Rediscovering Order: Digital Infrastructures and Data

Media sociology's turn toward concepts such as network, assemblage, and figuration provides us with powerful analytical resources for defining agency and social relations in times of deep mediatization, but, significantly, it also reflects changes in the social construction of order. Manuel Castells (2009: 42–47), for example, raises the question of a new order of the “network society.” With a closer focus on specific contexts, research on assemblages is also beginning to take an interest in questions of power and order (e.g., Beer, 2017), and the figurational approach explicitly aims to describe the shifting articulation of social order. In this way, the “classical” perspective of media sociology—analyzing “communication [...] [as] an integral part of the broad study of social organization and disorganization” (Katz, 2009: 168)—emerges once again. This occurs, however, within a new framework that is no longer (only) concerned with public opinion and mass communication but rather with the role that digital infrastructures and data play in the changing production of social order.

Generally speaking, we can define “social order” as relatively stable patterns of interdependences between not just individuals, groups, and institutions but also between the numerous types of relations involved in social life that all depend on larger stabilities of resource and infrastructure (Couldry and Hepp, 2017: 190). With deep mediatization, the establishment of order in and with media has fundamentally changed: It is no longer simply a question of how order is legitimized by mediated discourses. Digital media's role in the production of social order is much more far-reaching in that these media permit a new “microphysics” (Foucault, 1991: 26–29) of the production of order through their saturation of everyday life. The discussion on these new forms of creating order by means of digital media is taking place along the concepts of infrastructure and data and is currently cumulating into a critique of contemporary capitalism (Zuboff, 2019). Here, too, it is not simply a question of how media as mass media legitimize the economic order or advertise certain products; it is mainly about a globalized transformation of the microphysics of social order running in parallel with capitalism. German media sociology is close to the international discussion here but also sets its own emphasis.

When it comes to infrastructures, the priorities of German media sociology are twofold. First, digital infrastructure is not only conceived as a relationality but much more so as a process of “infrastructuring” (Knoblauch, 2017: 357–361). This means that infrastructures are understood not simply as a given but as materializations of continuous practice (Hepp, 2020b: 67–84). A second focus of German media sociology is its interest in the governance of infrastructures and processes of infrastructuring. Characteristic here is a broad and inclusive perspective on governance as processes of constructing an understanding of rules on how mediated communication should occur (Katzenbach, 2018). The discussion on the governance of digital infrastructures

meets again with the aforementioned work on “acting on media”: From the point of view of such a broad concept of governance, acting on media is nothing more than a contribution to the debate on the regulation of mediated communication whereby a special focus is placed on environmental issues concerning digital infrastructures (e.g., Kannengießer, 2019).

From this perspective, it is crucial for any reflection on today’s social order that these globalized infrastructures do not simply serve the functioning of these digital media. They form the basis of a comprehensive collection of data across the various networks, assemblages, and figurations in which digital media are used. In German media sociology, this has first of all been examined in particular regard to the discourses around big data (Puschmann and Burgess, 2014; Pentzold and Fischer, 2017). Other studies deal with digital infrastructures’ ordering power with a particular focus on social inequality (for an overview, see, e.g., the chapters in Houben and Prietlii, 2018). Overarching concepts in which this kind of research culminates are, for example “reflexive self-scientificization” (Zillien, 2020), which seeks to describe the ordering forces of data infrastructures on the conduct of life, or the “metric society” (Mau, 2019) to describe the transformation of societal self-observation and regulation.

The examples discussed so far make it clear that, when it comes to the transformation of social order at a time of deep mediatization, the far-reaching “infiltration” of capitalism into everyday life in the form of “surveillance capitalism” (Zuboff, 2019) or “data colonialism” (Couldry and Mejias, 2019)—internationally a very active discussion—is only *one* of the topics that German media sociology focuses on. There is also a great interest in other kinds of transformational societal ordering, such as changes in an individual’s way of life or changing social evaluation regimes. On a critical note, German media sociology can be said to be less interested in an analysis of digital capitalism; seen positively, it is trying to develop a broader critical view of the transformation of social order in society as a whole, an enterprise that also addresses processes of evaluation, control, and cultural ordering.

6 Conclusion: Where is German Media Sociology Heading?

My aim with this article was to make tangible recent developments in German media sociology. I have argued that with the changes in the media environment over recent decades, German media sociology—as media sociology in general—has evolved from a sociology of mass communication to a sociology of deeply mediatized societies. We can relate this overall orientation of German media sociology to the dominant themes of international media sociology when it comes to the digital: first, a rethinking of agency; second, a redefinition of social relations; and third, a rediscovering of order in relation to digital infrastructures and data.

If one compares this with international media sociology, it is not surprising that the topics dealt with in Germany are not so different. Many of the scholars quoted in this article are less “German” in the sense that their publications would refer to (solely) German-language discourse. Perhaps the sociology of media—driven by its own globalized subject area—is one of the most internationalized fields of German sociology. Nevertheless, some peculiarities of German media sociology stand out, and we can see them as its particular contribution to an international discussion.

First, there is a strong tendency towards relational thinking. This should not come as a surprise, since many of the classics relevant to German media sociology, such as Georg Simmel or Alfred Schütz, are regarded as pioneers of a relational sociology (Häußling, 2010: 64–67), that is, a sociology which focuses neither on the individual nor on the abstract whole but rather on interrelations between and the interdependencies of its constitutive parts. This relational thinking becomes manifest in specific adaptations of “network” in German media sociology, which are less driven by a methodological individualism and are more interested in networks as relational structures. German media sociology’s push toward the concept of figurations demonstrates this strand of relational thinking most broadly.

This brings us to the second point, namely, process-oriented thinking. The adoption of practice theory into media sociology represents this approach, in which different social entities are thought to be produced in the continuous act of “doing” (Pentzold, 2015: 236). Concepts such as figuration stand not only for a “relational” but also for a “process” sociology, in that figurations are also thought of as process-like dynamics. This corresponds to the broad interest in processes of re-figuration, that is, a structural transformation of the ongoing everyday making of figurations. Furthermore, materialities such as infrastructures are thought of in a process-oriented way, placing an emphasis on their dynamics.

Third, the strength of social-constructivist thinking is particularly striking in German media sociology, which is oriented less towards paradigms of poststructuralism and deconstruction and more toward the question of how the social world and society are constructed through technologically mediated communication. Certainly, attempts to guide media sociology in the direction of a “communicative constructivism” (Keller et al., 2013) are too narrowly conceived; however, for German media sociology, a unifying factor remains as a kind of anchor for a broadly understood constructivism that aims to include materialities in its observations and critically analyze how social reality is (co-)produced through digital media and their infrastructures.

In sum, the specificity of current German media sociology in its work to make sense of the digital can perhaps be captured concisely by stating that it is dominated by a relational, process-oriented way of thinking that broadly seeks to describe and critically evaluate the transformation of social construction by digital media and their infrastructures. It is to be hoped that, with just such an orientation, German media sociology will make many more empirical and theoretical contributions to the international discussion.

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Microsociology

Rainer Schützeichel

Abstract: The article deals with the foundations, history, and developments of microsociological research in German-language sociology. After discussing the complex differentiation between micro and macro, it presents research that currently dominates this field with the aim of highlighting the distinct profile of contemporary German-language microsociology. This specific profile can be seen in its pursuit of a relationist theory program. Across the various subject areas of microsociological research, traditional individualistic and collectivist paradigms are giving way to research that revolves around relational analyses, such as situation analyses, and en-activist theory programs.

Keywords: Microsociology, interaction, situation, micro-macro distinction

1 Introduction

The designation “microsociology” is ambiguous. In the context of the rise of the distinction between “micro” and “macro”¹ in the 1970s, this label was applied to a diverse array of interrelated topical, theoretical, and methodological questions and problems. (1) In the field of sociology, the expression “micro” denotes areas of investigation that in their social dimension or in their spatial or temporal extension are either (a) related to the context of action and experience of single individuals and actors, that is, deal with processes of socialization (as a social practice of interaction à la Grundmann, 2006), of identity formation, biographies and careers, or (b) analyze the social context of a small number of action units such as face-to-face interactions, groups, families, or personal relationships. Microsociological interaction and sequence analyses are thus distinguished from more highly aggregative units such as mesophenomena and societal macrophenomena. (2) This object-oriented designation is then transferred to the level of theoretical research programs and reserved for approaches with corresponding priorities. Such an application is currently found frequently in international sociology, in which the classical approaches of symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology are gathered together as “varieties of microsociology” (Benzecry and Winchester, 2017, see also Gibson and vom Lehn, 2018) but with which such theoretical developments as Collins’ microsociological approach are also classed (1981). However, this family of theories sometimes adopts a reserved attitude toward being classified as “microsociology” to the extent

¹ This orientation towards the distinction between macro and micro is not unique to sociology. In other areas of research in this period including economics, history, as well the natural sciences, these categories took over the function of fundamentally structuring their disciplines.

that this insinuates a research-pragmatic or methodological restriction to so-called microphenomena. In contrast to this, they often formulate a claim to universal competence in their discipline, a claim they justify methodologically by the fact that supposed macrophenomena result from the combinatorics of microphenomena or can be ascertained as relational interlinkages or networks of communicative or interactive units. (3) Thus the term “microsociology” can take on a third meaning, namely, a methodological one. This meaning of the term occurs in the following variants depending on the respective basic methodological orientation. (a) The expression “microsociology” stands for sociological approaches that deal with the analysis of the constructions of social and societal reality “from below,” of worlds of meaning, life-worlds, and everyday worlds. It thus encompasses approaches that can be attributed to interpretive, hermeneutical, phenomenological, or reconstructive social research. (b) Within the framework of explanatory sociology and in line with the methodological directives of methodological individualism, analytical microsociology is regarded—analogueously to the comparatively unified discipline of “microeconomics” understood as the analysis of the decisions of economic actors—as an explanatory foundation for sociological analyses. Its aim is to identify microfoundations of social phenomena (cf. Greve, Schnabel, and Schützeichel, 2008). The various fractions of micro-founded action theories also turn up here, although actual action-theoretical analyses tend to be conducted with the assistance of the distinction between structure and action rather than that between macro and micro. (c) And finally, recent times have seen the development of situation analyses, a comparatively eclectic direction of research that is still methodologically fluid in its orientation towards pragmatist as well as practice-theoretical approaches and serves to analyze the ongoing accomplishment of activities in specific situational constellations (cf. Schützeichel, 2019).

From this short survey, the conclusion can be drawn that one cannot speak of the unity of microsociology as either a subdiscipline of sociology or as a methodological or explanatory approach. In sociology, “micro” is by no means always equal to “micro.” It is not a proper field of research with its own objects of investigation. The relevance of “microsociology” and thus the legitimacy of the distinction between “micro” and “macro” is to be found in its order-giving function, that is to say, in its ability to roughly sort out objects of investigation, subdisciplines, theories, methodologies, and research clusters in implicit alignment with other sociologically relevant dichotomies such as “small” versus “large,” “action” versus “structure,” “event” versus “duration,” “element” versus “relation,” or “part” versus “whole.” In this order-giving role, however, the duality of “micro” and “macro” is highly successful.² This duality seems in a certain way to be indispensable considering how it enables, from a research-pragmatic view, to isolate fields of objects and to abstract

² Just one recent example that can be cited here is the *Handbook of Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Abrutyn, 2016), in which the duality of micro and macro serves not only to reformulate classical sociological problems but also—following a pioneering model (Alexander and Giesen, 1987)—to hunt for the “macro-micro links” in nearly all social phenomena and fields.

objects from their context and, from an explanatory view, to assert reductive relationships between phenomena, but precisely in order to also—in a contrary way, on a path “from reduction to linkage” (Alexander and Giesen, 1987)—postulate the famous links within the spheres of whatever is separated into “micro” and “macro.” This distinction becomes problematic when, in a reifying way, its ordering and orienting function is overlooked.

Since objects of study such as families and personal relationships, careers and biographies, and groups and networks, which by all accounts do belong to the more narrow thematic heart of microsociology, are taken up in other contributions to this volume (Konietzka/Feldhaus/Kreyenfeld/Trappe, *FAMILY AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS*, this volume; Huinink/Hollstein, *LIFE COURSE*, this volume; Häußling, *SOCIAL NETWORKS*, this volume), the following account will be restricted to two areas of research that have shifted into the thematic as well as methodological center of German-language microsociology: interaction and situation. In recent times, the by all means variably applied concept of “interaction” has served as a point of departure (cf. Dennis et al., 2013) for developing microsociological research in various dimensions (Ch. 3). But in addition to “interaction,” the concept of “situation” has also come increasingly to the fore. Situations are places of interactive production of social reality (Ch. 4). This will be followed by a brief look at convergences and divergences in German-language microsociology (Ch. 5). But first, the introductory chapter will discuss the particularities of German-language microsociological research (Ch. 2).

2 Microsociology in German-Language Sociology?

If one intends to address the particularities of German-language microsociology, it is important to start from the discrepancy between the breadth of research and its labeling. German-language microsociology is significantly more comprehensive than that which is explicitly designated by this term. To understand this, one must register the following disjuncture in the history of theory: The widespread international introduction of the micro-macro distinction that began in the 1970s served, and continues to serve, to make national research traditions comparable and to place them in a common frame of reference. In this way, specific research programs can now be viewed retrospectively as microsociological and made to correspond to comparable approaches. This applies, for example, to the research programs of Georg Simmel (cf. Bergmann, 2011) and Norbert Elias (cf. Dunning and Hughes, 2013), whose respective microsociological analyses of elementary “forms of interaction” and “social figurations” are now understood as early microsociological studies. At the same time, this fundamental distinction between macro and micro is also applied to the reception and classification of international developments. It was in this way that important studies in symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and conversation analysis as well as sociolinguistics were first gathered under the label of microsociology and made accessible to a German-speaking public (cf. Arbeitsgruppe Bielefelder Soziologen, 1973).

Yet the micro–macro distinction could not and cannot be used merely in order to generate comparabilities and correspondences in the context of the internationalization of sociology. Its adoption has also entailed losses. It has had the result that certain microsociological approaches that did not achieve wide resonance in international sociology in particular were forgotten, for example, Siegfried Kracauer's groundwork of sociology (Kracauer, 1922) and studies in the sociology of everyday life (Kracauer, 1930), but also the pioneering work of Herman Schmalenbach on the "sociological category of *Bund* [union]" (Schmalenbach, 1922), which has been neglected even in more recent times in the context of the analysis of community formation (Maffesoli, 1991; Hitzler, Honer, and Pfadenhauer, 2008).

The success of the distinction between micro and macro has also entailed considerable shifts in the disciplinary fabric of sociology. Predominantly it was American theoretical traditions that were viewed as the foundational theories of microsociology (cf. Bergmann and Hildenbrand, 2018). Corresponding German traditions, such as the theoretical formations of social phenomenology, now tended to be assigned to the camp of sociological theory or to the newer and equally successful sociology of knowledge, or else they had hardly any further impact in sociology. This applies, for example, to such subject areas and research questions as the analyses associated with the early phenomenology of Husserl, Scheler, and Stein on the conditions of the possibility of sociality and intersubjectivity. Indeed, their significance in current discussions of the foundations of social theory can hardly be overestimated, for instance, in studies of social cognition and empathy (cf. Schlicht, 2018), which are also highly relevant to sociology. Yet they are largely unknown in sociology or they have been carried on only in the version of their pragmatist kindred in the line of Cooley, Dewey, and Mead ("taking the role of the other").

These and other developments in the history of science and the history of theory have led to a situation in which there are good reasons for treating the label "microsociology" with some reserve when it is applied to the German-language traditions. They may also explain why this term is still not fully recognized and still lacks definitive contours. Macrosociology on the basis of rational choice can be practiced as "microsociology" in just the same way that a socialization study in the vein of Oevermann's genetic structuralism or an identity and interaction study in the tradition of Goffman can.

It may be considered a further indication of this diffuse situation that, in contrast to nearly every other subdiscipline of sociology, there is still no comprehensive handbook for the field of microsociology. Introductory works explicitly designated as microsociological are also few and far between. Under the title of microsociology, Schülein (1983) presents an interaction-analytical view of the fields of practice of action, which are distinguished from macrosociology as an analysis of abstract and generalized structures of action. Brüsemeister (2008) focuses his introduction on the connection between biography, learning, and suffering and addresses theoretical approaches such as symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and aspects of phenomenological sociology, but also considers the analysis of subjectification and of

the conditions of action in advanced modernity as a central task of microsociological analyses. In contrast, the monograph on *Microsociology* (2017) by Kai-Olaf Maiwald and Inken Sürig takes interaction as its starting point and develops a microsociological agenda—ranging from questions of socialization and perspective-taking, via the genesis of emotions, norms, and typifications, all the way to the institutionalization of structural features—framed by the problem of how interactions, understood as the paradigmatic case of the formation of social order, are possible. At the same time, interaction is regarded as the epicenter of socially relevant facts from which other social and societal phenomena can be extrapolated. This introduction also posits an explicit methodological understanding: microsociology deals with the social processes of structure formation in elementary interactive relationships. Thus, a concept of interaction is applied that is not exclusively aligned with the understanding of interaction as a “face-to-face relationship,” which still often prevails in German-language sociology, but instead presupposes a broader concept that refers to the breadth of co-action in social relationships. This microsociological perspective is supported by a special argument: interactions constitute not merely the elementary social facts and the irreducible unity of the social sphere; they are also the place where social reality is performed and created. In recent years, this emphasis on the interactive production—and on the interactively produced performance—of social reality under structural restrictions and given structural opportunities has become a brand essence of microsociology.

3 Microsociological Interaction Research

More recent interaction research has in common the idea that “interaction” is a fact that cannot be further reduced, that is, that it can—with a certain degree of caution—be described as emergent. “Interaction” thus represents an order *sui generis* in which actions, individuals, and artifacts are constituted in their meanings and functions (cf. Goffman, 1983; Tavory, 2016). However, it is controversial whether interactions represent a general or a specific social form among others. With regard to this question, we can distinguish a narrow and a broad concept (cf. Schützeichel, 2018a):

(a) The broad sense posits a conceptual congruence of interaction and social relations. This broad concept stands in the tradition of pragmatic sociology and symbolic interactionism, but also of Goffman’s dramaturgical sociology, which pits the concept of interaction against a view of social relations based on formal models of communication such as the classical sender–receiver model. In these traditions, interaction is regarded as an elementary social form that can be further subdivided by means of differentiating specific formats of action and communication. This broad concept is particularly useful for those approaches that regard interactions as a basis for the reduction of social phenomena. (b) The theoretical approaches that prefer a narrow concept [of interaction] set interactions apart from other forms of social relations, for example, by discussing interactions as oral communication (conversation

analysis and sociological or sociolinguistic conversation research), as social action in the mode of face-to-face relationships, or as simple social systems or communication subject to the condition of presence (systems theory) and by distinguishing them from other types or forms of communication, membership, or complexification.

In following the broad concept of interaction in particular, microsociological research has in recent years deepened and expanded in various ways and put the focus on specific dimensions of interactions. Interactions have been analyzed alternatively as embodied, affective, technologically mediatized, and as triadic relations:

(a) Embodied interaction: The fact that interactions are relationships of bodily resonance has been discussed in recent research under the keyword “embodied interaction.” In this respect, sociological research is closely connected to recent phenomenological studies, going by the name of “natural phenomenology,” that have been pursuing enactivist reformulations of phenomena that are also of significance for sociology (cf., e.g., Gallagher, 2017). Their findings are not only important for interaction research in the narrower sense—their relevance extends all the way to the foundations of the formulation of sociological theory because they challenge the internalist premises of many approaches, from classical social phenomenology and action theories to systems theory, which assume that consciousness or cognitive processes are constituted representationally in an internal field of consciousness (cf. Schützeichel, 2018b). By contrast, the concept of enactivism is linked to an antirepresentationalist program that traces behavior, cognitions, and affects in the broadest sense back to an organism’s active confrontation with its environments. Many fields and subdisciplines of sociology, from economic sociology and the sociology of religion to the sociology of knowledge and culture, depend—just like the sociological theories they are rooted in, ranging from phenomenology to the various action-theoretical and interactionist schools and systems theory—on the ultimately “Cartesian” notion that the meaningful construction of the (not only social) world is performed through some version of representational acts in the inner or communicated world of actors. In contrast, enactivist approaches emphasize that “sense-making” is performed in the context of an organism’s active engagement with its various environments and that these environments therefore play a constitutive role in “sense-making.” Recent interaction research therefore assumes that perceptions and cognitions themselves can be understood as “embodied action” in the sense of a prereflective being-toward-the-world rather than as representations of an object by a subject. A further important implication of this is the particular way it points out the prereflective and preconscious dimension of human experience of the world, and thus also of social interaction. This point has been teased out theoretically and empirically in studies on “intercorporality” or “intercorporeality.” (Deppermann and Streeck, 2018; Eberlein, 2016; Meyer, 2017; Meyer, Streeck, and Jordan, 2017; Meyer and von Wedelstaedt, 2017). The concept of “intercorporality” is linked to the early work of Merleau-Ponty. “Intercorporeality means a prereflective intertwining of lived and living bodies, in which my own is affected by the other’s body as much as his by mine, leading to an embodied communication” (Fuchs, 2017: 9). According to these analyses, the co-action or inter-

action of actors is grounded in intuitive and prereflective, embodied acts of experiencing and behavior, acts of bodily “compresence” that are not further individuable, for they rest on a constitutive referentiality of the acts of one to the acts of the other or to further actors. This originally shared field of resonance is the horizon—in an ontogenetic as well as phenomenological perspective—that enables the experiences of an “I” and of a “you” to crystallize. Contrary to many recent action-theoretical approaches, it thus not merely the dimension of “embodied action” that is highlighted so much as the fact that it too has its basis in lifeworld acts of “embodied interaction.” This conception of “practice as a shared accomplishment” has also been held up against the monological arguments of some practice theories (Brümmer and Alkemeyer, 2017). This kind of “shared accomplishment” has been impressively analyzed in the video-based analyses of sporting co-activities such as handball, basketball, and boxing as well as of artistic practices such as ballet (Müller, 2016) (cf. the contributions in Meyer and von Wedelstaedt, 2017, as well as Alkemeyer, 2011, and Alkemeyer and Michaeler, 2013). Intercorporality is a fact of all situations of co-action on condition of co-presence. They can be distinguished as symmetrical (hiking together), agonistic (competitions), complementary (acrobatics), or symbiotic (a mother breastfeeding a child). Intercorporeal interaction is performed in situations that are conceived as tactile “inter-kinaesthetic fields,” whereby “inter” not only refers to the dimension of physical interaction but also integrates material objects and artifacts as sensed and perceived things (Streeck, 2011). Intercorporality, inter-kinaestheticity, and enactivity are thus reciprocally referential dimensions of an interaction-research program that would also finally do away with the last remaining Cartesian assumptions underlying sociological research and theory formation. And yet intercorporality does not require the immediate co-presence of actors. In his analysis of digitalized interaction, Schmidl (2017) makes it clear that relations of intercorporality exist even when co-presence is mediated by media or technology. Fritz-Hoffmann (2018; see also Goodwin, 2017; Müller, 2010), in his study on touch in the everyday lives of disabled people, examined a mode of embodied interaction that has been rarely considered despite its deep lifeworld anchoring.

(b) It is not a long way from embodied interaction to affective interaction (Scheff, 1994). The affective or emotional dimension of interactions is currently another focus of microsociological interaction research. The questions of how emotions are formed in interactions and how emotions in turn shape interactive events play a central role here. The genesis of specific emotions in their respective social contexts depends on how one interprets the action situation, in particular on the attribution of positions of power and the availability of resources for action. Accordingly, the positional and socio-structural constitution of interaction situations is an important explanatory variable for the social genesis of emotions (cf. von Scheve, 2012; 2013). A different analytical foundation, and one that has been displaced to the discursive and cultural levels, is evinced by studies that, following so-called affect-control theory (Smith-Lovin and Heise, 2016; Heise, 2019), ascribe the genesis of emotions to the difference between culturally and linguistically institutionalized affective meanings on the one

hand and concrete, situational forms of action on the other. Thus, these microanalytical studies (Homer-Dixon et al., 2014; Schröder, 2012) show the dynamics of interaction that arise from the genesis of emotions from such affective semantic spaces. Conversely, emotions are responsible for the situational framing of interaction situations; they decisively shape the definition of the situation and thus the selection among available options for action. This is highlighted especially by analyses that examine collective feelings or, to use Durkheim's term, the "collective effervescence" in specific orders of interaction, such as those of soccer fans (Leistner and Schmidt-Lux, 2010 and 2012). In such affective-interactive dynamics, interactions also generate themselves in their own orders and formats, as analyses of forgiveness (Fücker and von Scheve, 2017) and humiliation (Schützeichel, 2018c) have shown. These studies show that interactions must be understood as affectively dimensioned and emotion-generating social relationships that not only pose a challenge in terms of identity management but also require the constant management of one's emotions.

(c) A third research cluster challenges, against the backdrop of a sociology of artifacts and technology, the notion that relations of interactivity can be reduced to human actors alone. In a technologized lifeworld, it is not merely that actions and interactions are intensively related to natural, artificial, and technological things and apparatuses; rather, as many microsociological, technographic analyses (Janda, 2018; Stubbe, 2017) have concluded, there is no way to avoid assigning them an action and interaction status and understanding them as integral components of social practice. Technology can be understood as an interaction partner, as Krummheuer's (2010) analysis of interaction with virtual agents shows or Pfadenhauer and Dukat's (2016; cf. also Pfadenhauer, 2014) analyses of the use of social robots in dementia care. In contrast to an older understanding of technologization based on phenomenological and systems-theoretical analyses as a process of reduction and routinization of possible courses of action and interaction, these microsociological analyses equally emphasize the innovative and uncertain aspects of technologization. The controversial issue in these studies is not the notion that technologies and technologization processes are to be understood as inter-agents, but rather the question of how and in what way conventional sociological concepts of action, interaction, and communication must be modified in order to account for the technologization of lifeworlds and social practices (cf. Muhle, 2013 and 2018; Rammert and Schubert, 2006; Rammert, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION, this volume). A likewise controversial issue is how to construe the "interactive relationship" between human and technological or artificial co-worlds. Here, too, as already mentioned in the survey of research on "embodied interaction," the concept of enactivism with its notion of "extended cognition" (cf. Rowlands, 2010) could be appropriate, thus serving as a bridge between these microsociological research clusters.

(d) At this point one further thematic orientation of microsociological interaction research must be briefly pointed out. Interactions are often triadic constellations. Although it is typically intuitively assumed that in interactions there are dyadic relations between ego and alter, this is by no means the rule. The constitutive and in-

teractive function of third actors in the constitution and reproduction of interactions is rarely considered (cf. Bedorf, Fischer, and Lindemann, 2010). To mention just one analysis, Heck (2016) uses the example of mediators, judges, and referees to demonstrate the conflict-transforming function of third parties in interactions. Sporting competitions, especially in their professionalized form, also constitute triadic events (cf. Müller, 2015).

4 Microsociological Situation Research

The microsociological studies mentioned so far all assume that interactions are always only situationally bound and located relationships. In more recent years, however, a methodological situationism has established itself in various research clusters in microsociology that brings the situational nature and situational emergence of interactions to the fore and, via this explicit situational reference, brings the emergent character of interactions and the comprehensive enactivist contexts of interactive action such as materialities, affects, and atmospheres to the fore, on the one hand, while it also places greater emphasis on the drawing of boundaries in, and of, interaction situations, on the other. In this field, the situational reference serves not only to anchor sociological research at the micro level but also to defend against the methods and explanatory models of variable-oriented sociology. Its range of concepts extends on one end from older notions of situations as empirical units of data collection or the depotentializing conception of situations as the mere “environment” of action to concepts on the other end that, with reference to John Dewey’s pragmatism, emphasize the relational, holistic properties of situations and their events and components (cf. Tavory, 2018). The latter concept of situation in this way serves to investigate the enactive connections of interactively generated actions with their material and symbolic contexts and to regard situations as synthetic situations (cf. Knorr-Cetina, 2009) in which social realities are performed. Situations are also regarded as temporal phenomena in which certain dynamics can unfold in accordance with their rhythms and self-organizing structures. For methodological reasons, the situations often chosen for this are extraordinary borderline situations that are not the routine substance of daily life (cf. Bergmann, 2013; Feith, 2018; Feith et al., 2020), such as situations of dire need, experiences of illness, or the dissolution of personal relationships.

In the following, we can consider only three research programs. In the more recent sociology of violence, methodological situationism has become an analytical cornerstone (cf. the papers in Bakonyi and Bliesemann de Guervara, 2012, as well as in Equit et al., 2016), whereby, however, a pragmatist understanding of situation is often superimposed with the rather objectivist concept of situation found in Randall Collins’s (1981, 2004, 2009, 2011; cf. also papers in Weininger, 2019) microsociology. The studies by Hartmann (2015) and Hoebel (2016) deal with the situational constellations in which acts of collective and interactive violence emerge and proceed. They draw attention to the situational contingency of such phenomena, but at the same time also

in a certain way to the fact that, in certain situational constellations, violence is normalized in spite of all normative regulations. The empirical analyses of the sociology of violence also draw attention to the vagueness of the concept of situation—where are the limits of situations, who defines what the given situation is, and who or what is part of it? And is not only what is given, but also what is possible, an integral part of situations? Accordingly, Sutterlüty (2015; 2017) speaks of considerable pitfalls inherent in the program of methodological situationism. But above all it is precisely in this research context that the social-theoretically significant question arises as to whether “macrosociological” structures are not simply presupposed or unnecessarily copied into microsociological analyses, and whether thus at least certain microsociological claims to reduction performatively contradict each other.

The various scenes and situations of public or urban space represent, alongside the analysis of violence, a second established object of microsociological research. Müller (2015 and 2017) for example analyzes situations that arise by way of specific objects of focus, such as street rubbish, or processes such as the stigmatization of people. Hüttermann (2018; cf. also Hüttermann and Minas, 2016) examines interaction processes between migrants and long-established residents in urban figurational spaces in his ethnographic analyses combining questions of interaction, migration, and urban sociology, which he understands as contributions to a general “sociologic” of social facts. The term “sociologic” is used to designate the ensembles of actions and interactions that drive the emergence and transformation of social facts, which is considered to be sociology’s definitive object of analysis. This sociologic represents a confluence of two sociological traditions in particular: Simmel’s sociology, whose “interactions” were, as is well known, transformed on their way through early American sociology into a semantics of “interaction,” and, as can easily be seen, Elias’ figurational sociology with its analytical focus on the constitution and shifting of power relations understood as dynamic relations of force and conflict. Both traditions and thus also Hüttermann set their analytical focus less on the relations between individual persons than on those between groups. Sociologic in this vein thus observes the formation of group cohesion in figurations, and the change of figurations in group constellations. Hüttermann is particularly interested in the shifts in the balance of power between the various groups in societies of immigrants that find themselves confronted with one another in the everyday life of urban figurational spaces, which range from encounters in trams to the pedestrian zones of inner cities—long-time residents and recent arrivals, police and street corner groups, established and outsiders, the various generations of immigrants, but also the representatives of the various functional roles that emerge in such figurational processes. The concept of interaction used by Hüttermann is at odds with the conventional distinction between microsociology and macrosociology. Interactions constitute the basic operations in figurations, regardless of whether they take place face-to-face or in temporally and spatially distanced constructs. Hüttermann’s conceptual approach shares the understanding of interaction that crystallized in the context of sociology’s influencing by

pragmatism, but it acquires its innovative character through its liaison with figurations and power dynamics as conceived by Elias' sociology.

The museum visit is another situational format that has been intensively investigated by microsociology. Ethnomethodologically based video analyses are used to analyze the interactive "construction" of museum or art objects in the choreography of bodily interactions in exhibition spaces (vom Lehn, 2006; 2013a; 2013b). In this choreography, the interactive organization of the gaze—that is, the perception of the perception of the gaze, of bodily expression, and of motor intercorporality—plays a decisive role. These analyses make use of a methodological technique that has considerably enriched sociological interaction research in recent years, namely, video analysis (vom Lehn, 2018; Tuma et al., 2013), which represents a common feature in the concert of the various methodological approaches dominating microsociology, such as situation analysis as understood by grounded theory (Clarke, 2012), hermeneutics of the sociology of knowledge, or ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (cf. also Hollstein/Kumkar, *QUALITATIVE METHODS*, this volume).

5 Convergences and Divergences

The foregoing discussion only sketches a narrow picture of German-language microsociology. There are many relevant and important questions and lines of research that could not be taken into account. These desiderata include, for example, the study of micrological politics in organizations and networks, termed "micropolitics" (cf. e.g. Fritsche, 2011), the microsociological studies of religion and religiosity subsumed under the title of "practiced religion" (cf. Schützeichel, 2018d), the analysis of personal relationships (cf. Lenz and Nestmann, 2009), and of networks. The important question of why interactions, compared to other social forms, are particularly prone to reproduce—but sometimes also to neutralize—social inequality and symbolic domination cannot be taken up here either. These lacunae are not only due to the fact that there is no uniform microsociology but also to the fact that each sociological sub-discipline or each theoretical approach has its own microsociology. As explained above, the expression "microsociology" does not refer to a well-delineated or definable subject area; its task is rather to create order.

But what is the specific signature of microsociology and in particular of situation and interaction research in contemporary German-language sociology? As already emphasized, it was precisely the increasing prevalence of the distinction between micro and macro in the second half of the last century that dismantled the analytical and methodological discrepancies compared to "mainstream" international research. Like the latter, the microsociology undertaken within German-language sociology is also organized in a multiparadigmatic way. It may contain more ongoing research programs than other traditions, including phenomenology in its various forms, ethnomethodology and the various fractions of symbolic interactionism, and programs from the traditions of discourse analysis and the sociology of knowledge as well as

philosophical anthropology. But they too are being carried out in the mode of serial isolation—at the same time, there are many microsociologies and varieties of interaction research that do not overlap in any significant way. Due to these tendencies, it is difficult to speak of a specifically German-language microsociology today. This can also be seen in the patterns of reception, in the way the reception of microsociology is paradigm-oriented instead of nationally oriented. This may distinguish microsociological research from macrosociological research, whose national cultures are currently passing down theoretical priorities that are only noted with reserve elsewhere, for example, systems theory in Germany, “cultural sociology” and mechanism-based historical sociology in the United States, and critical realism in Great Britain.

But despite these structural convergences and paradigmatic divergences, a common signature in German-language microsociology does become visible on the methodological level: Microsociological studies in their entire bandwidth—that is, encompassing not only interaction or situation but also biography, identity, and socialization—are relationally oriented. They thus place—in contrast to both individualist and collectivist methodologies—social relationships and relations in their different dimensions in the foreground and strive for sociological explanations that seek to establish the facts by means of factors immanent in relations, that is, by means of what is realized in performance. Thus, the old key question of sociology, of how social order is possible, is renegotiated. Social relations and in particular interactions in their various situational forms are regarded as the privileged forms in which social order is performed multimodally at different levels of reflexivity, explicitly and implicitly, reflectively and prereflectively, in regularities and rules, meaningfully and sensually, cognitively and affectively, dyadically and triadically. Therefore, interactions (in a broad sense) are also of special significance from the perspective of social theory. But this is also where we find one of the future challenges of interaction research. As a rule, respective research programs examine a mode of order formation in interactions in a prominent and singular way. Interactions themselves, however, are potentially multimodally structured; they can fall back on a multitude of modes. But how are “switches” between different modes organized within interactions themselves, and how do relationships of dominance arise between different modes? If one focuses on this research question, then the individualistically grounded “pattern variables” (Parsons, 1951), whose taxonomy of possible action orientations formulates an action-theoretical hinge between actions and social orders, could be augmented by a more comprehensive model of “interaction pattern variables,” which not only deals with the question of possible combinations and “switches” in multimodal interactions, but which could also act as a corrective to the danger—always lurking in interaction research—of restricting oneself to methodological situationism.

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Migration

Ludger Pries

Abstract: In the last two decades, the topic of migration has gained importance for society as a whole, for science, and especially for sociology.¹ Although Germany was in fact predominantly an immigration country throughout the 20th century, it was not until the turn of the 21st century that this was accepted in Germany's self-perception. This is also reflected in the sociology of migration. In addition to an increase in publications, there have been changes to its subject matter and paradigmatic frameworks. In comparison to classical immigration countries, the developments outlined can be interpreted as a "catch-up normalization" of self-perceptions and scientific concepts. In the following discussion, I focus on international migration; the broad, theoretically and empirically exacting field of integration research is considered only in passing, as are questions of domestic migration, "ethnic minorities," and racism. German-language scientific publications from the 2000s onwards and monographs published as early as the 1990s are taken into account, insofar as they were discussed in *Soziologische Revue* from 2000 onwards. For reasons of space, individual studies that were discussed in the aforementioned reviews of *Soziologische Revue* are not usually cited. Europe is of particular interest with regard to migration. In no other region of the world more than half a billion people can move, work, and settle freely across national borders. The various major refugee and migration movements after the Second World War, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, as a consequence of the wars in Yugoslavia, and more recently in the context of the wars in Iraq and Syria also make Europe one of the most interesting laboratories for migration research. The German-language sociology of migration has enormous potential in the European context. In order to understand the transition to the 21st century as the fundamental turning point it in fact is, the following section begins by outlining the initial situation up to the end of the 20th century. I then present the development of important topics in the 21st century.

Keywords: German-language migration sociology, transnational labor mobility, mechanisms of belonging, categorization, system integration, social integration

Note: Translation from German, including all quotes from German literature, by John Koster for *SocioTrans—Social Scientific Translation & Editing*.

1 This conclusion is the result of term searches in the online German dictionary *Digitales Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (DWDS; *Digital Dictionary of the German Language*) and in the German-language sociology journals (e.g., on *Google Scholar* and *Publish or Perish*). My thanks go to Martin Wittsieker and Rafael Bohlen for their support with the searches.

1 Sociological Migration Research in the Past and Present Century

In the German-speaking world, the topic of migration remained theoretically and empirically underdeveloped and constrained by nationalistic perspectives for the duration of the 20th century. For the German-speaking world, there has been no study of comparable sociological significance as *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1974) was for the USA (Pries, 2015). In the second half of the 20th century, neither the extensive immigration and emigration movements that began in the second half of the 19th century nor the beginnings of “migration sociology” (*Wanderungssoziologie*; e.g., Weber, 1984) and neither the real migration-related expulsions (forced labor, forced resettlement, “*Umvolkungen*” [ethnic repopulations], etc.) nor the migration research of the Nazi era were subjected to sociological reflection (Pries, 2014). Parallel to their counterfactual societal self-perceptions as non-immigration countries, migration was largely marginalized in German, Austrian, and Swiss sociology until the 1970s. Although about two-thirds of all people living in the FRG and the GDR after the Second World War had firsthand experience of forced migration (Bade, 2000: 297ff.), it was not a topic of the first sociology congresses after 1945.

Introductory and survey publications on migration sociology made recourse, in a kind of “zero-hour” mentality, to theories and empirical studies drawn almost exclusively from English-language migration sociology (Hoffmann-Nowotny, 1970; Albrecht, 1972). Until the 1980s, the field was dominated by predominantly static notions of nation-state societies, of their “morphology” and functional contexts. Under these circumstances, the sociological treatment of migration-related integration dynamics already had a critical potential. The dominant model was an assimilatory model according to which “immigrants” (*Zugewanderte*) became gradually more normal (Esser, 1999). Until the 2000s, many empirical studies were based on such an understanding of assimilation (Heckmann, 2015; Ohliger, 2007; Worbs, 2010), but it has increasingly been called into question in the context of the social upheavals since the 1990s.²

The implosion of real socialism, the Balkan Wars, and the eastward expansion of the European Union in the 1990s have led to complex migration movements. An “Immigration Commission” was set up in 2000, and a new citizenship law came into force the same year. The Immigration Act of 2005 largely redesigned integration and migration policy. In the same year, the new Microcensus Act meant that for the first time, data was collected on “migration background” (with a question about parents’ country of birth). While the proportion of people living in Germany who were not

² Cf., e.g., Münz et al., 1997; Pries, 1997; Bommers, 1999; Tränhardt, 2000; Bade, 2007; cf. on Austria Weiss, 2007; Latcheva and Herzog-Punzenberger, 2011; Reinprecht and Latcheva, 2016, and the other contributions to that volume; on the concept of segmented assimilation in the USA, see Portes and Zhou, 1993, and Xie and Greenman, 2005).

German citizens was about one-tenth of the total population, the proportion of people with a “migration background” was about one-fifth. This new method of counting contributed—among many other factors—to Germany’s increasing understanding of itself as an immigration country (Mehrländer and Schultze, 2001). The case was similar in Austria and Switzerland.

There have also been qualitative changes for science. Many studies were published with the aim of providing a comprehensive overview of migration and integration (Curre and Wunderlich, 2001; Gogolin and Nauck, 2000; Haller and Verwiebe, 2016; Mottier, 2000; Reinprecht and Latcheva, 2016; Treichler, 2002). Studies of youth dealt more comprehensively with experiences of migration (Weidacher, 2000). The reporting of academic foundations and federal and state ministries on the topics of “immigration” (*Zuwanderung*), integration, and migration policy grew enormously.³ Bös stated (2004: 159): “Two battles have thus been won: It no longer sounds strange to describe Germany as a country of immigration, and the sociology of migration is a recognized and growing branch of German sociology.” A decade later, Geisen summarized in an omnibus review: “While it has long been a marginal topic in the various disciplines, in the 21st century [...] migration research has become an increasingly important subject area, especially in sociology. Sociology [...] regards migration as a central constitutive condition of modern societies” (Geisen, 2015: 527f.). This can be illustrated with reference to various topics.

2 Internationalization of Labor Mobility

In its perspective on work, the predominant focus of migration sociology was for a long time the “guest workers” and their successor generations. This changed, on the one hand, with the massively increasing labor mobility within the EU, above all with the corresponding eastward expansions (Nowicka, 2007; Palenga, 2014; on Germans living in Russia, Strobl and Kühnel, 2000; on Switzerland, e.g., Mendy, 2014). On the other hand, transnational mobility within professions and organizations also came into view during the reporting period. Kreutzer (2007) reviewed six monographs and two edited volumes “on occupational mobility in intercultural workplaces.” This topic area makes it possible to combine classical migration research with occupational sociology, sociology of work, and organizational sociology and, in general, with

³ Cf. the reports published since 1991 by the Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration, the *Migrationsreport des bundesweiten Rates für Migration* published since 2000, the migration reports of the Federal Ministry of the Interior published since 2004, the annual reports of the Sachverständigenrat deutscher Stiftungen für Migration und Integration published since 2004, and the migration reports of the Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF) published since 2005; on Austria, cf. Fassmann and Stacher, 2003, where an annual *Integration Report* has been published since 2011; in Switzerland, an annual *Migration Report* has been published since 2007.

globalization and intercultural studies. Kreutzer (2007: 35) wrote: “High mobility does not produce ‘thick cosmopolitans’ who practice a deeper intercultural exchange, but a differentiation into special transnational, functional, organizational, and professional worlds.”

This conclusion is underscored by research in the now established field of transnational domestic and care work (e.g., Hess, 2005; Lutz, 2007; Haidinger, 2013; Larsen et al., 2009; Villa/Hark, GENDER, this volume). An essential question in the context of transnational labor mobility is the regulation of labor; although some approaches and initiatives have been diagnosed here, in general the societal regulation of cross-border mobility hardly keeps pace with the rate of its propagation (Mense-Petermann et al., 2013; Staples et al., 2013; Cyrus and Kip, 2015; Krings, 2015; Pries and Shinozaki, 2015; Klemm, 2019). Mobility has been examined within the framework of the new field of mobility studies as a practical resource of the self-employed (Dannecker and Cakir, 2016).

In Europe in particular, the increasing internationalization of work and employment is already being anticipated in higher education and training by corresponding measures such as the EU’s Erasmus program. Gerhards et al. (2016) investigated how, in the face of globalization and transnationalization, the educated middle classes in particular are pursuing transnational educational strategies to aid their children’s acquisition of multiple languages, foreign experience, and intercultural competence.

3 “Migration Background” and the Politics of Designation, Belonging, and Diversity

Since the turn of the century, research and debates on belonging and labeling have intensified (Poglia, 2000 offers a critical take on the Swiss context; Karstein/Wohlrab-Sahr, CULTURE, this volume). In Germany, some scholars have criticized the use of the official category “migration background” or even the term “integration” (Foroutan, 2014; Supik, 2014). Contrary to this, Treibel (2015) advocated for maintaining and expanding the concept of integration. The introduction of the category “migration background” (the country of birth of a person’s parents has been surveyed in Great Britain for decades, in Austria since 2008, and in Switzerland since 2003) allows for more nuanced assessments of, for example, discrimination and educational pathways, but can also be perceived as a new mechanism of exclusion (Aigner, 2013; Gresch and Kristen, 2011; Hentges et al., 2008; Pries, 2016: 162). Bielefeld (2004) opposed culturalist and essentialist reductions of “the foreign” (*des Fremden*) but considered the topic essential: “Foreigners and being foreign, the other and distinctness, difference, interculturality, and transnationality and thus also collective belonging and its changing meaning are keywords from which a new master narrative can be composed, the contours of which are still appropriately vague considering its subject” (ibid. 398; critically of Switzerland, Mottier, 2000, and the contributions in Cattacin

et al., 2016). Beck-Gernsheim (1999) emphasized that ethnic attributions are socially constructed and communicatively mediated and that, towards the end of the 20th century, the approach to ethnic categories had become more reflective; Mecheril (2003) and Broden and Mecheril (2007) discussed the problems of ethnic attributions to others and as self-attributions.

On the basis of 40 qualitative case studies, Honolka and Götz (1999) analyzed the complex structures of multiple identities. Drawing on a more classical theoretical concept of marginalization, Hämmig (2000) noted that second-generation immigrants in Switzerland still experienced structural, social, familial, and cultural tensions. The diagnosis offered by Muti (2001) views border demarcations within and among Turkish immigrant groups not as tending towards either unification or dissolution but rather as overlapping and differentiating, partly reactivated collective affiliations that always refer to the experience of othering by other immigrant or non-immigrant groups. Attia (2013) held that many studies with sociological pretensions (Heitmeyer, 2002; Stolz, 2000) remain at the level of essentially social-psychological studies of values, attitudes, and prejudices. They are “thus based on explanatory models that do not think of the discriminations and devaluations that are under investigation as social phenomena but trivialize them into attitudes and prejudices” (Attia, 2013: 4).

Genuinely sociological conceptions of xenophobia in the context of migration and integration developed only haltingly. Johler et al. (2007) took a comparative approach to studying the treatment of “foreigners” across Europe. An interesting advance in this direction is the model, based on Bourdieu’s capital theory, that conceives of racism as an independent “objective structural dimension of social space” located in the habitus (Weiß, 2001: 353) (cf. also Aydin, 2009; Yildiz, 2016). Schraml and Bös (2008), in their review of five monographs and five edited volumes, showed that “the other” and the meso level of networks and organizations that mediate it were systematically addressed in the more recent sociology of migration.

There has also been a significant further development with regard to the sophistication of gender perspectives in the study of migration (Han, 2003; Lutz, 2007; Mattes, 2005; Matthäi, 2005; Sackmann, 2005). Salzbrunn (2012) emphasized in her scientific “mapping” of the topic of diversity that, in discussions about multicultural, “parallel,” and “immigration” societies, migration sociology is systematically linked with general sociology and other subdisciplines: “It is no longer asked whether social cohesion is threatened by more diversity [...]. Rather, it is now assumed that social diversity exists as a fact and that the so-called ‘migrants’ have long been—legally, in everyday practice, and in many cases also through historical transformations—part of the societies that, by othering them with designations such as [...] ‘people with a migration background’ (Germany) miss the real interdependence, hybridization, and emergence of new cultural practices” (ibid.: 389).

4 Conceptual Conflations: Migration and Integration, Ethnicity and Gender

As long as migration is thought of as a single irreversible event or as a temporary “guest stay,” it can be conceptually separated from the process of integration. In the summary of the discussion of a study on *Migrants in German League Football*, Faist (2005: 38) accordingly criticized that “parts of the methodologically sophisticated German-language migration research and those on ethnic minorities still remain trapped in an—albeit modified—assimilation model that sees structural assimilation [...] as the decisive point of entry into majority societies.” In a literature review, Aigner (2013) cited the work of Esser and Heckmann as examples of classical integration concepts but was skeptical of their analytical separation of integration from migration: “The theoretical framework should be viewed more broadly than the current focus on ‘integration as a post-migration process’ suggests” (cf. also Kalter, 2008; Kleinschmidt, 2011; Löffler, 2011). Integration can take place plurilocally between the region of origin and the region of arrival. Migration is often a prolonged process of complex multi-level participation in economic, cultural, social, and political life.

Between the models of monistic assimilation and multicultural coexistence, integration was increasingly understood as the as equitable as possible participation of all people and social groups in shared social and societal life, as a process of mutual understanding and negotiation, and as an invitation to participate in all activities and areas considered important for society (SVR, 2010; Monz, 2001; Treibel, 2015). Giese (2002: 68) diagnosed a “gradual move away from normative concepts and sweeping labels.” Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, in particular, research on Islam has increased significantly. Reuter and Gamper (2007) presented a review of 12 studies on the topic. Recent research has shown that Islamic religious orientations and practices can contribute both to the entrenchment of traditional models of society and social roles and to emancipation, to the development of independent identities through intergenerational negotiations, as well as to divisive group formations.

Religious, ethnic, national, generational, and political demarcations are to be understood as dynamic and complex processes of negotiating self- and social attribution. For a long time, German-language migration sociology has been about, but not by and inclusive of, people with their own histories of migration. This has changed fundamentally in recent decades. “The proportion of researchers who are Muslims themselves or at least have a ‘migration background’ is conspicuously high. [...] It is quite significant that the public debate about ‘correct’ Islam reporting is being conducted by Muslims and migrants themselves” (Reuter and Gamper, 2007: 47; cf. Göle and Ammann, 2004; Kelek, 2002; Stauch, 2004; Ucar, 2010). Hafez (2014; cf. also Tezcan, 2015; on Switzerland, Berger and Berger, 2019) has contributed a review of two books on the subject of Islam, pointing out the dangers of essentializations.

Many multidimensional analyses of the connections between migration and integration are now available, for example, on Muslim youths (von Wensierski and

Lübcke, 2012; Weiss, 2007), on different groups of migrant female service workers (Lutz, 2007), and on the relationship between migration and gender among the female “guest workers” of the 1950s through the 1970s (Mattes, 2005). In introductory works, too, the themes of migration and integration are increasingly given equal weight and dealt with in their reciprocal relationships (Han, 2010; Oswald, 2007; Treibel, 2011; Schütze, 2008). Geisen (2015) held that the topic area of migration and integration has become more important in sociology but that there is still a lack of conceptual and theoretical developments that can be integrated into general theoretical conceptions of sociation. “Analyses rely primarily on established concepts such as national-ethnic-cultural multiple belonging, intersectionality, or the concept of masculine hegemony. [...] In contrast to this, the particular interdependences of entanglements and relationships in the context of migration need to be made visible in their complexity and ambivalence” (ibid.: 546).

5 Transnationalization, Development, and Refugee Studies

Transnationalization research has gained considerable influence since the 1990s (Weiß, GLOBALIZATION AND TRANSNATIONALIZATION, this volume). The spaces of human life are examined as relational networks of social practices, symbolic orders, and artifacts spanning various nationally constituted societies (Pries, 1997). Transnational migration understood as an ongoing event of migration with cross-border flows of communication, ideas, and resources is also significant in Europe. This generally does not mean that people migrate permanently between different national societies but that complex transnational (family and organizational) social networks exchange resources and information and that life strategies are developed transnationally (Pries and Sezgin, 2010; Cappai, 2005; Dahinden, 2005; Novicka, 2007; Pusch, 2013; Palenga, 2014; Vorheyer, 2016; Nedelcu and Wyss, 2015).

Zifonun (2009: 334) concluded a review by pointing out that all the publications raise questions about the “analytical relevance of reference spaces of migration and integration that lie beyond the nation state. The authors of the monographs and anthologies refer [...] to the significance of Europeanization, globalization, transnationalism, and world society.” In this context, the relationship between migration and development was also discussed anew (Faist, 2007/08; Schwenken, 2016; Gerharz/Rescher, GLOBAL SOUTH, this volume). Discussing a detailed monograph on the ethnicization of social inequality in the national and global context (Haller, 2015), Faist (2017: 16) criticized: “The drawing of borders that are of decisive importance for national politics also takes place beyond the nation state. Haller, however, constructs a dichotomy between a national and a global view of social inequalities.” This also brings new challenges for the sociology of migration and integration (ibid.: 19). Sterbling (2017), on the other hand, in his discussion of an anthology on the subject of

migration and social transformation, emphasized that the refugee movement of 2015 in particular, and the more national than European political reactions to it, have jolted “the decisive structural significance and powerful inertia of national conditions suddenly to the fore of politics” (ibid.: 458). This can be read as an argument for a multidimensional and multi-level analysis in migration studies (for an international comparison on youths with a migration background and their capacity for mobilization, cf. Loch, 2008).

Transnationalization research was also relevant to analyses at the meso level of migrant (self-)organization (mosque and cultural associations, for example). For a long time, such groups were treated as problematic to the extent they were discussed at all. This has changed since the 1990s as a growing number of empirical studies were undertaken, such as those that took a comparative approach in examining the migrant organizations of various national groups (Fijalkowki and Gillmeister, 1997; Thränhardt, 2000; Diehl, 2002; Hunger, 2002). The focus of these studies was on the integration functions of migrant organizations for the arrival society (Huth, 2003; Halm and Sauer, 2005). The studies were then extended conceptually by links to transnationalization research. In this way, they examined, for instance, the role of transnational organizations of migrants *in between* their regions of origin and arrival (Cappai, 2005; Dahinden, 2005; Pries and Sezgin, 2010; Waldrauch and Sohler, 2004).

Ceylan (2006) applied the concept of the “ethnic colony” in an attempt to capture organizational and institutional aspects of integration dynamics at the level of urban neighborhoods (cf. also Jagusch, 2011). Rauer (2008) analyzed constructions of what defines one’s own group and what defines ‘the others’ in Turkish migrant associations’ discourses on migration politics. Oltmer et al. (2012) examined from a historical perspective the political and social (organizational) relationships between “guest workers” countries of origin and arrival. In the Austrian context, several articles in Biffl and Rössl (2014) dealt with diaspora and transnational relations between countries of origin and countries of immigration. These studies and similar ones were also helpful in overcoming the second dualism, the one between research on migration and research on integration.

Since the refugee movement of 2015, German-language migration research has been inundated with the topic of flight and refugees. There were earlier predecessors, however, such as the important, pioneering studies by Rosenthal (2004) and Inhetveen (2010). Studies on the refugee movement of 2015 have incorporated and integrated transnational and organizational aspects along with many aspects dealt with in the previous sections and in border-regime research (Hess et al., 2016; Stoecklin et al., 2013; BIM, 2016; Gansbergen et al., 2016; Pries, 2016; Krause and Schmidt, 2018; Zajak and Gottschalk, 2018; Yildiz, 2016). In 2016, the Socio-Economic Panel was expanded to include a forward-looking study that initiated a survey and analysis of the flight and integration processes of about 4,500 refugees in Germany (Brücker et al., 2016; Brücker et al., 2018). It remains to be seen how sustainable the research and funding interests will be in the future.

6 Sociology of Migration: From the Margins to the Center of the Discipline

German-language sociology of migration has broadened considerably over the last two decades while also developing strong foundations at the institutional level (professorships and journals, for example). It has emancipated itself as an independent field, but it is also explicitly mindful of its manifold interrelationships with integration research. Contemporary sociology of migration takes into account forms as diverse as shuttle migration, repeated temporary migration, and transnational labor migration as well as more complex processes such as forced migration. The path dependence and cumulative causation of migration dynamics are also taken into consideration. Especially in Europe, with its dense networks of communication and transport, but also beyond it, migration creates transnational social spaces between regions of origin and arrival that put cross-border exchange processes (such as the departure and return of qualified people, remittances, transformed economic expectations, new political demands and gender-related claims to participation, wage competition and displacement from the labor market) on a permanent footing.

As the boundaries between voluntary (labor) migration and forced migration become more complex, mixed-migration flows and the interrelations between different types of migration are being explored. These can be influenced by political and legal frameworks, but they can only be controlled and directed to a limited extent. Migration dynamics essentially follow the logic of the migrants' collective action in their respective socio-spatial contexts and are refracted by their own and external politics of drawing boundaries (politically, ethnically, socially, legally, by the police, etc.). Today, international migration is to be understood as an open-ended process that remains fragile and revisable over multiple generations and leads, through reciprocal perceptions and designations of self and other among migrants and non-migrants, to various (economic, political, social, and cultural) forms of plurilocal inclusion and participation. Processes of migration can no longer be understood and explained without explicit reference to sociological concepts of social action, social order, and social change. And conversely, in the 21st century any analysis of society and social groups has to consider migration as a fundamental aspect. German-language sociology of migration has come a very long way in the last twenty years. Particularly in the areas of transnational labor mobility, the politics of naming and mechanisms of belonging, and transnationalization and refugee studies, it may prove to be of special interest for international research and discussion as well.

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Mixed-Methods and Multimethod Research

Felix Knappertsbusch, Bettina Langfeldt, and Udo Kelle

Abstract: Mixed-methods and multimethod approaches, i.e. the combination of multiple (qualitative and/or quantitative) techniques for data collection and analysis in a single research design, have developed into an established branch of empirical social research and methodology. We show that the German-speaking research landscape is no exception to this trend and provide an overview of the most widely received actors and approaches. Moreover, we argue that the German-language discourse on method integration retains a certain “qualitative” leaning, because most of its prominent authors hail from that tradition. We describe the research areas in which mixed approaches are currently most prevalent (health, education, and evaluation research), highlighting that these are mostly interdisciplinary and applied fields, while traditional core areas of sociology seem to be more reluctant to follow this trend. We conclude with a discussion of future directions for mixed and multimethod research, including its further institutionalization within professional organizations and teaching curricula, as well as building a stronger link between methodological discourse and empirical research practice.

Keywords: Mixed methods, multimethod research, triangulation, social research methodology

1 Introduction

A considerable number of well-known early empirical studies in the social sciences feature a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Popular examples include the *Marienthal* study (Jahoda et al., 1975) and *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al., 1950). Despite the success of these highly influential studies, method integration remained an uncommon practice in social research throughout most of the twentieth century. Instead, the discourse on methods was increasingly influenced by a methodological dualism that assumed that quantitative and qualitative research “paradigms” are based on incompatible epistemological premises (Guba and Lincoln, 1988). As a consequence, discussions about the ‘correct’ method of social research became more and more polarized during the 1960s and ’70s (Teddle and Tashakkori, 2009).

While quantitative researchers emphasize the benefits of precise measurement and quantification in order to attain generalizable, reliable, and value-free knowledge, qualitative researchers insist that the investigation of social interaction and meaning-making requires non-standardized, interpretive methods and reflexive participation of the observers. However, both types of research also have their specific weaknesses. Standardized approaches rely on extensive prior knowledge, which can

be highly problematic when investigating the flexible and differentiated interactions and institutions of modern societies (Langfeldt and Goltz, 2017). Moreover, quantitative research tends to be quite reductionist in how it operationalizes social phenomena, thus leading to issues of construct and ecological validity (Knappertsbusch, 2017). At the same time, the reconstruction of situated meaning through qualitative methods imposes severe restrictions on the number of observed cases, which can create issues of generalizability, while both the collection and the interpretation of qualitative data strongly depend on individual researchers' perspectives, which may impede an intersubjective understanding (Kelle, 2007).

In the mid-1980s, a group of mainly Anglophone social researchers began to focus on the possibilities of applying empirical research methods beyond the established qualitative/quantitative divide. By the late 1990s, these discussions had grown into a methodological movement that advocated the systematic combination of the different approaches (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011). Inspired by the influential monograph *Mixed Methodology* (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998), the term "mixed methods" became a widely accepted label for the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study.¹ Discussions in the developing mixed-methods community revolved around four key issues that still shape the discourse on method integration. In the earlier stages, researchers were very concerned with epistemology and philosophy of science, debating the extent to which combinations of qualitative and quantitative "paradigms" are possible at all (Caracelli and Greene, 1997). Authors then turned to questions of research design, developing several design typologies (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Practical implications of method combination, such as sampling (Collins and Onwuegbuzie, 2007) and data-analysis techniques (Bazeley, 2018), developed as a third core area of discussion. And finally, these practical considerations became tied to the issue of quality criteria for method integration (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006).

As we will show in this chapter, mixed-methods and multimethod research (MMMR) has consolidated into an established approach in German-speaking social research communities as well. Beginning with an outline of the most influential methodological contributions to the field in section 2, we argue that despite strong influences from the Anglophone literature, the German-language discourse retains a specific 'flavor' because most of its prominent authors hail from qualitative backgrounds. Section 3 describes three interdisciplinary research areas in which method integration is most frequently applied, including educational, health, and evaluation

¹ We use the term *multimethod research* to describe any combination of qualitative and/or quantitative methods, whereas the term *mixed methods* specifically refers to qualitative–quantitative combinations (Fetters and Molina-Azorin, 2017). However, acknowledging the inconsistent use of both terms, and the fuzziness of the qualitative/quantitative distinction, we also use the acronym MMMR (mixed-methods and multimethod research) to refer to the field of method integration generally (Hesse-Biber, 2015).

research. We conclude with a discussion of current trends and future developments in the German-language mixed-methods landscape.

2 Mapping the German-Language Methodological Discourse on MMR

The German-language MMR discourse can be very roughly divided into three arenas with overlapping fields and with a variety of actors who are active in more than one arena of discourse. One centers around the notion of triangulation and highlights the far-reaching implications of a pluralistic methodology beyond the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, with authors mostly sharing a qualitative background. A second is connected to international debates about mixed-methods designs and focuses on qualitative–quantitative combinations. It also refers to methodological, substantive theoretical, and epistemological perspectives by authors who avoid making strict commitments to a qualitative or quantitative tradition. A third focuses on multimethod approaches to the analysis of causal mechanisms via case-based or medium-N methods in the context of qualitative research (employing a notion of qualitative research that differs considerably from the interpretive tradition of German-language sociology). In addition to that, several more recent contributions have sought to mediate between these different discourses.

The triangulation metaphor was first applied to social-research methodology by Campbell and Fiske in the context of validation techniques for standardized methods. It gained a broader meaning in the works of Denzin in the 1970s, who described “methodological triangulation” as a strategy for combining different qualitative and/or quantitative research approaches to increase the validity as well as the breadth and depth of findings (Flick, 2004). While the concept has since lost much of its early significance in the Anglo-American debate (Morgan, 2019), it still is very common in the German-language discourse, especially among researchers with a qualitative methodological background. Flick presents a comprehensive account of the triangulation concept in his 2004 introduction (Flick, 2004), including the integration of data sources as well as investigator perspectives, theoretical approaches, and methods. He stresses that triangulation should be distinguished from a mere accumulation of different methods in that it is characterized by the effort to construct an integrated whole from several equal status perspectives (Flick, 2004: 20ff.). Flick acknowledges mixed methods as a sub-form of triangulation but criticizes the approach for primarily focusing on methods while neglecting other important aspects of integrated research such as investigator perspectives or substantive theory. This skepticism is most apparent in his more recent work, which argues for triangulation as an alternative to mixed methods (Flick, 2017). However, this critical assessment must also be read in the context of some MMR authors’ arguments for divesting of “triangulation” as an

unclear and outdated term for method integration (Fetters and Molina-Azorin, 2017; Morgan, 2019).

The triangulation metaphor also features prominently in Mayring's work, who is best known for his model of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2012; 2015). Mayring takes a more open stance towards the current MMMR discourse, describing triangulation not as an alternative to but rather as one possible mode of mixed methods that combines qualitative and quantitative methods in a concurrent design to gain a more nuanced, multifaceted picture of the research object (Mayring, 2001). A focus on content-analysis techniques can also be found in Kuckartz's work on method integration, which stems from a qualitative background. Following Max Weber's model of social-research methodology, he proposes a method for text analysis that combines hermeneutic and quantitative techniques (Kuckartz, 2012: 26ff.). In contrast to Mayring's approach, his framework for content analysis involves a rather skeptical position towards the triangulation concept (Kuckartz, 2014: 48f.), which he criticizes for not providing clear-cut guidelines for research practice. Instead, Kuckartz turns to Creswell's design-based mixed-methods approach to provide a basic framework. In his more recent work, Kuckartz has shifted his attention towards methods for integrated data analysis (Kuckartz, 2017). Building on common mixed-methods design typologies, he describes results-based, data-based, and sequence-based strategies for integrative data analysis (Kuckartz, 2017: 169ff.).

Another influential strand of MMMR discourse in Germany originated from the Special Research Area (SFB 186) "Status Passages and Risks in the Life Course." (Huinink/Hollstein, LIFE COURSE, this volume) These authors share a common interest in the methodology of qualitative research methods (Kelle, 1994; Kluge, 1999; Prein, 1996) that extends to the methodological groundwork of method integration (Erzberger and Prein, 1997; Kelle and Erzberger, 1999). They argue that prevailing debates around the concept of triangulation do not sufficiently take research practice into account and that the whole concept is too ambiguous to serve as a methodological basis for method integration. Instead of referring to abstract epistemological concepts and metaphors like triangulation, they maintain that researchers should be intensively relating methodological considerations to social theory. A central building block of this perspective is the "duality of structure" as described by Giddens (1984), which assumes a reciprocal relation between social structures and individual agency. If empirical research does not take this reciprocity into account systematically, researchers' interpretations of structural phenomena run the risk of misrepresenting their situated, practical meaning, while intensive analyses of localized practice are in danger of overgeneralizing their findings (Erzberger and Kelle, 2003: 473). Considering the complementary strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative methods, these authors view a combination of both approaches to be a promising prospect for developing and testing "middle range theories" and sociological macro-micro explanations (Kelle, 2007: 271ff.). (Schützeichel, MICROSOCIOLOGY, this volume)

The research network "Mixed Methods and Multimethod Social Research," initiated by a group of German-speaking MMMR scholars in 2018, has adopted a mediating

position between the opposing perspectives of triangulation and mixed-methods research.² It works to improve the quality and prevalence of MMMR, promotes interdisciplinary and international dialogue between researchers, and aims to increase the visibility and intensity of the MMMR debate. Burzan, as one of several associated members of this network, has proposed a framework for “methodologically pluralist research” (Burzan, 2016). While she criticizes mixed-methods researchers’ tendency to neglect theoretical and epistemological considerations, she also points to triangulation’s somewhat vague stance between validation and perspectivism. However, Burzan’s approach retains a close affinity to qualitative research traditions. This is apparent in her highlighting of the distinction between qualitative versus interpretive methods, the latter of which involves the reconstruction of highly case-specific meaning-making by applying hermeneutical methods (Burzan, 2016: 18). Two additional authors have taken a mediating position: Baur, whose work has mainly been on methods of social-process analysis (Baur and Ernst, 2011) and market sociology (Baur, 2011), has recently co-edited a special issue of the *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* (Baur et al., 2017) that offers a broad, inclusive overview of current German-language and Anglophone mixed-methods research. Hollstein, predominantly working in life-course research, has compiled a broad array of approaches in her co-edited volume *Mixed Methods Social Network Research* (Domínguez and Hollstein, 2014), with methods ranging from narrative document analysis, through surveys and ethnographies to computer simulations.

Somewhat detached from the mixed-methods discourse presented above, set-theoretic and case-study methods have developed into another important strand of multimethod research (Goertz, 2017). Originating mainly from the area of comparative political science, these approaches are increasingly applied in sociological research as well (Buche and Siewert, 2015). They mostly center around Ragin’s method of qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), which is often described as a “mixed method in itself” because it integrates a highly formalized method of comparison with detailed case-specific knowledge (Hollstein and Wagemann, 2014: 247ff.). Moreover, QCA can also be combined with other methods of causal analysis, such as case-based “process-tracing” (Schneider and Rohlfing, 2013), whereas some multimethod designs do not use QCA at all and employ combinations of case studies and statistical analysis or experiments instead (Goertz, 2017).

² The network is currently funded by the German Research Foundation (project no. 374277577). For more information, please visit <https://www.hsu-hh.de/methoden/en/mixed-methods-network>

3 Major Areas of MMMR Application in Social Research

The application of MMMR designs today is a widespread practice throughout various social-research disciplines (Truscott et al., 2010; Alise and Teddlie, 2010). However, not all of these applications also refer to the discourse of what Maxwell (2018) calls the “self-identified” mixed-methods community. MMMR concepts and terminology are currently most prominent in the fields of education, health and nursing, and evaluation research, which were also the main fields from which the mixed-methods movement originated in the 1980s and ’90s (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011: 20). We propose that the German-language MMMR landscape largely mirrors this pattern. This is not to say that MMMR does not play any significant role in more traditional areas of sociology. However, an overview of current German-language MMMR cannot ignore the fact that method integration is still mostly taking place in interdisciplinary and applied fields while sociological core areas remain strongly shaped by the qualitative/quantitative divide.

In *health research*, method integration is mainly motivated by the need to provide more detailed investigations of public-health phenomena as well as more valid assessments for evidence-based medicine (Kelle and Krones, 2010). The interest in mixed methods, however, often remains somewhat limited to the ostensibly ‘softer’ areas of nursing, counseling, and psychotherapy, which traditionally are closer to social-science methodology than life-science-oriented sub-fields. Overall, the MMMR discourse in health research seems to be strongly influenced by a quantitative perspective. This is evident in the dominance of quantitative core-components in the applied designs (quasi-experiments or randomized controlled trials), whereas studies with equally weighted qualitative and quantitative strands are often met with skepticism. This seems somewhat unfortunate, considering that health research involves a close integration of subject-oriented micro perspectives and the meso and macro levels of institutional settings and economic or political structures (Niederberger, 2018: 86). Hesitant adoption of MMMR approaches may also be due to the strictly formalized quality criteria in evidence-based health research, which do not accommodate method integration in their current form (Niederberger and Peter, 2018: 10). Hence, the further development of MMMR health research depends on the advancement of sophisticated and applicable quality criteria for method integration (Mayring, 2017).

Owing to its epistemological traditions ranging from philosophical pragmatism to early behavioral psychology (Schwippert, 2012: 101ff.), *educational research* has a long history of methodological pluralism. Systematic reviews estimate the prevalence of MMMR to be anywhere from 13% (Truscott et al., 2010) to 24% (Alise and Teddlie, 2010). German-language educational research is no exception to this trend, as can be seen from the high number of MMMR-related field-specific anthologies (Gläser-Zikuda et al., 2012; Hofmann et al., 2008; Ecarius and Miethe, 2011). This integrative methodological orientation is also a result of the discipline’s humanist traditions

being confronted by a growing demand for large-scale quantitative evaluations. Moreover, the objects of educational research often involve complex multilevel phenomena, which suggest the combination of different methods. Additionally, doing research with youth and children involves specific challenges for data collection, leading to an increased importance of observational and visual methods, which results in a growing demand for method integration (Seidel and Thiel, 2017). Despite ongoing quarrels between interpretivist and standardized approaches, this has led some researchers to claim that method integration constitutes the current “state of the art” in educational research (Schwippert, 2012: 110). However, this effect seems especially pronounced in areas with a strong focus on applied research, such as didactics (Kelle et al., 2019), whereas areas dedicated more to basic research tend to remain divided along the lines of the qualitative/quantitative distinction. (Grundmann, EDUCATION AND SOCIALIZATION, this volume)

Evaluation research, which is part of several fields of sociology, often involves a dual focus on assessing the impact of a given intervention as well as understanding the causal mechanisms behind it, which makes it a prime example of the productivity of method integration (Kelle, 2018). Whereas standardized and statistical approaches are particularly well suited for observing the regularity and strength of expected causal effects, qualitative methods are an indispensable tool for discovering unanticipated side effects and confounding factors. This potential of MMMR designs is acknowledged by the German Evaluation Society (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Evaluationsforschung; DeGEval), and method integration is a regular topic in the Association’s own journal, *Zeitschrift für Evaluation* (Mayring et al., 2016). Also, the DeGEval methods working group has been discussing applications of MMMR regularly since its founding in 2010 (Caspari and Polak, 2017). One of the growing research areas in which MMMR designs are used for evaluation purposes is international development assistance (Mayring et al., 2016: 17). Several good examples of a productive use of MMMR in this area can be found in the work of the German Institute for Development Evaluation (Deutsches Evaluierungsinstitut der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit; DEval). Research conducted by this government-funded organization regularly employs complex multiphase designs (Polak et al., 2017) while also highlighting the importance of an elaborate conceptual foundation. Despite their clear focus on evidence-based policy decisions, DEval researchers often devise a sophisticated “theory of change” as the groundwork for their empirical observation (Leppert et al., 2018: 21).

4 Conclusion

The MMMR movement has grown into an established branch of German-language social research. A slight departure from the Anglophone discourse is evident in the relatively strong influence of qualitative research perspectives, which is associated with a continuing significance of the triangulation concept. However, despite its qualitative leanings, MMMR is sometimes met with skepticism by qualitative re-

searchers who question its compatibility with interpretive methods ‘proper.’ At the same time, quantitative researchers tend to accept the idea of method integration more readily but often assume that it is something they have been doing anyway (e.g., in cognitive pretest interviews), which also amounts to an incomplete recognition of the ramifications of MMMR.

The overall trend of a growing MMMR discourse is reflected in the increasing number of German-language methods textbooks featuring qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches from a pluralistic perspective (Baur and Blasius, 2014; Flick, 2016). Even some standard textbooks with a traditionally quantitative orientation are now starting to systematically incorporate method integration (Döring and Bortz, 2016.). This development can be considered a small but important step towards more inclusive methods curricula in social-science study programs.

Even though MMMR has gained a more stable footing, however, the overall academic landscape is still shaped by qualitative and quantitative research traditions. MMMR methodologists and researchers remain a somewhat alien minority in many institutional environments, whereas qualitative and quantitative traditions largely carry on with their established routines. Hence, a stronger institutionalization of MMMR perspectives remains a central objective for future development, including better representation in professional organizations, on editorial boards, and on review committees.

MMMR is already a diverse and multidisciplinary research landscape and will likely branch out even further. There is nevertheless a substantial lack of systematic reviews that assess the prevalence and quality of MMMR today. An important aspect of future research will therefore be to increase the scope of a systematic, comparative “prevalence rates literature” (Alise and Teddlie, 2010). This also involves a fuller recognition of the limited reach of the current methodological MMMR discourse. Reviews show that a large proportion of studies using method integration do not label their work as MMMR at all, which suggests that considerable mutual learning opportunities still exist.

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Organization

Raimund Hasse

Abstract: German-language organizational sociology is diverse and closely related to international debates. Nonetheless, it has specific features. This article provides an overview over current contributions by identifying five main research areas: (1) formal structures, boundary work, and effects of best-management practices; (2) influences of the technological and institutional environment; (3) theoretical issues and organizational types; (4) new forms of organizing work; and (5) technology and innovation. It subsequently discusses important publications on each of these research areas and illustrates typical research approaches. Finally, it highlights two assets of German-language organizational sociology: first, its ambitious theoretical aspirations, as expressed in particular its combination of organizational and social theories; and second, its thematic interest in (new) technologies as well as in issues related to economic sociology.

Keywords: Organizations, formal structure, standards, organizational types, professionalization

Introduction

The subject of this article is developments in German-language organizational sociology over the last ten years. Its strict focus on organizational *sociology* comes with a rather severe limitation, as it excludes not only publications that are not scientific in the narrower sense—which in light of the proliferation of how-to books and best practices on organizational and management topics is indeed rather restrictive—but also organizational studies from the field of management and business studies. Although some contributions from this field are prescriptive in nature, stating how organizations *should* function and be designed (rather than examining how organizations *actually do* function and *are* designed), many of them do satisfy the quality standards of social-scientific research and feature careful theoretical work, sophisticated methods, and robust empirical results.

But what is organizational sociology? Drawing on insights from science theory, one could argue that organizational sociology is what is produced by those who are recognized as organizational sociologists. If we start from just such a perspective, a good way to begin this overview might be to identify current topics by looking at the events of the organizational sociology section of the German Sociological Association (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie (DGS)). Between 2011 and its 2018 spring conference, this section held nearly 20 events. Their agendas and calls for papers are

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easily accessible on the section's website or by consulting the DGS conference schedules. The topics of these conferences can be clustered as follows: (1) formal structures, boundary work, and effects of best-management practices; (2) impacts of technological and institutional environments; (3) theoretical issues and organizational types; (4) new forms of organizing work; and (5) technology and innovation.¹ In what follows, I will discuss these topics by mainly focusing on journal articles and monographs—and only marginally on textbooks and anthologies—that have made a contribution to these topics.

1 Formal Structures, Boundary Work, and Effects of Best-Management Practices

This cluster spans a very broad spectrum of contributions that all deal with individual organizations rather than organizational groups (such as fields, populations, or networks). One focus is on formal structures, which are a constitutive feature of all organizations. The fact that organizations cannot be reduced to formal structures, opens up opportunities to relate formal structures to core activities (in the sense of Meyer and Rowan, 1977), to facades and showcasing (“talk” in the sense of Brunsson, 1989), and to informality by and within organizations, as discussed by Victoria von Groddeck and Sylvia Wilz (2015). The focus on individual organizations also includes thematizing organizations' dealing with uncertainty and corresponding absorptive capacities (Apelt and Senge, 2015; Pongratz et al., 2014) as well as the question of how organi-

¹ The events were as follows for each cluster respectively: (1) *Organisationen im Chaos? (Organizations in Chaos?)* 2011; *Formalität und Informalität in Organisationen (Formality and Informality in Organizations)* 2012; *Grenzen der Organisation (Limits of Organization)* 2014; (2) *Einheit trotz Vielfalt? Identität und Kulturimporte in Organisationen (Unity Despite Diversity? Identity and Cultural Imports in Organizations)* 2012; *Auf dem Weg zur Standardorganisation? (On a Path towards a Standard Organization?)* 2014; *Organisation und Bewertung (Organization and Assessment)* 2018; (3) *Hochschule als Organisation (Institutions of Higher Education as Organizations)* 2011; *Quo vadis Organisationssoziologie? (Where is Organizational Sociology Headed?)* 2013; *Soziologie der Finanzmärkte (The Sociology of Financial Markets)* 2013; *Nonprofitorganisationen (Non-Profit Organizations)* 2015; *Praxistheorie in der Organisationssoziologie (Practice Theory in Organizational Sociology)* 2016; *Perspektiven des Neo-Institutionalismus (Perspectives of Neo-Institutionalism)* 2017; (4) *Vielfalt grenzüberschreitender Arbeitszusammenhänge (Diversity of Cross-Border Contexts of Work)* 2012; *Neue Bindung oder prekarisierende Kommodifizierung? (New Bond or Commodification toward Precarity?)* 2012; *Kreativ aus der Krise – Neue Formen des Organisierens (Creative Ways of Overcoming Crisis – New Forms of Organizing)* 2014; *Arbeit und Organisation 4.0? (Work and Organization 4.0?)* 2016; (5) *Innovationen ohne Ende? Organisationen in der Innovationsgesellschaft (Endless Innovation? Organizations in the Innovation Society)* 2015; *Wissen und Organisation im Spannungsfeld von Öffentlichkeit, Steuerung und Digitalisierung (Knowledge and Organization in a Field of Tension between the Public Sphere, Control, and Digitization)* 2016; *Digitalisierung und Reorganisation (Digitization and Reorganization)* 2017.

zations succeed in developing and maintaining an identity vis-à-vis their social environment (Herkle, 2011; Kirchner, 2012; Achermann, 2016).

A more specific question is how the application of best-management practices impacts the formal structure of organizations in light of the fact that it is not always clear whether these concepts are applied more for the aforementioned purpose of showcasing than as an attempt to structure internal processes. One may assume that the focus of best-management practices makes a difference here. In the case of socially desirable concerns, as in diversity management or compliance management, management concepts can have a comparatively strong external point of reference, as their application primarily serves the purpose of signaling conformity with social values or compliance with legal requirements. However, in cases of more technical and formalized procedures, such as the management of shareholder value or accounting in general, their application might mainly serve internal objectives of organizing work processes. But this is an open empirical question.

The study by Stephanie Bücherl (2014) is noteworthy in this context since it is interested in *controlling* as a form of organizational monitoring and design. Bücherl's case study begins by distinguishing between controlling as a rationalist paradigm in business administration and controlling as a sociological research object that has attracted attention since the end of the 1970s, both in empirical research and in critical reflections. Her empirical analysis distinguishes between functions, consequences, and the handling of these consequences—both purported and factual—as the three knowledge objectives of the study. Whereas her analysis of the discrepancy between purported and factual functions essentially derives from a neo-institutionalist pattern of interpretation, her treatment of the consequences draws on classical topics of organizational sociology such as dealing with uncertainty, information overload, micro-political maneuvers, and management's self-perception. When discussing how consequences are handled, Bücherl describes the ways in which controlling is amended and adapted to organizational reality. In sum, her study can serve as an example of how a concept that holds sway in business administration and management can become an object of a genuinely sociological investigation. Bücherl's study also clearly brings to the fore the specific characteristics and strengths of German-language organizational sociology: a rigorous scientific focus (as opposed to a solution-oriented perspective or the opposing perspective of so-called critical management studies) and an ambitious utilization of organizational theories. As result of such an approach, she adds scientific value beyond the specifics of the case analyzed.

2 Technological and Institutional Environments

This cluster considers studies on an organization's capacity for responsiveness to external conditions on the one hand, which in essence explains how an organization adapts to its technological or institutional environment and, particularly, to other organizations in a given field. On the other hand, it also deals with the specific con-

ditions of individual organizations that result from their active search for niches, which can be best explained along ecological lines of thinking. Such investigations often shed light on social developments that have increased the readiness to accept (comparative) assessments, conducted by external entities, in the form of evaluations, ratings, and rankings (Meier et al., 2016). Likewise, organizations are increasingly seeking external consultation, which has been the subject of numerous studies. Conceptually, two novelties characterize these investigations. First, they engage less in fundamental theoretical reflection on the functions and consequences of external consultation and focus more on empirical analyses of the consulting process itself. Second, these analyses have as their subject not necessarily business consultancy, a field that has been prospering since the 1990s, but consultancy services for organizations other than businesses, not least universities, for instance (Krücken and Serrano-Velarde, 2016; Seidenschnur et al., 2018).

In the context of a sociology that is generally reviving its interest in social values (and, to some degree, in positioning itself accordingly), the discussion about organizations' capacity for responsiveness towards normative expectations has likewise witnessed a tremendous boost (see also von Groddeck, 2011; Münch, 2016). In principle, organizations can be expected to rationalize how they make references to values—for example, by way of documentation and certification of usefulness—as can be observed in corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices (on the value of transparency specifically, see Ringel, 2017). Moreover, organizations seem to be particularly responsive to values that their social environment has cast in technical form (however, concerning the communicative processing of morality, see Besio, 2018).

Nadine Arnold (2017), in her empirical study on the historical development of the idea of fair trade in Switzerland, examines which organizations are involved in translating social values into a technical form and how this is done. Arnold details the differentiation of a highly complex field that consists of standard-setters, certifiers, and accreditation bodies that are able to send credible signals of an organization's commitment to social values and translate such references to values into added economic value. She describes how a new sector has emerged on this basis that—with all its pros and cons—has contributed significantly to the mainstreaming of fair trade as a social value. Decisive master trends, such as professionalization, formalization, the emergence of new organizations (or types thereof), as well as standardization processes form the institutional basis of this development (see also Arnold and Hasse, 2017, and, especially on the translation and interface functions of organizations, Nessel, 2016). Regardless of the fact that Arnold's empirical case concerns the specific conditions in Switzerland (including the duopolistic nature of the Swiss retail business), her study raises fundamental questions, which are also of significance to the debate on governance. Her study illustrates quite well how different coordination principles such as market, organization, and network are not so much alternatives to one another but exist in a mutually reinforcing relationship. Overall, Arnold makes it clear that standardization is a master trend of contemporary society that shapes (or

organizes, if you will) existing organizations and leads to the establishment of new organizations and types of organizations.

3 Theoretical Issues and Organizational Types

In more recent publications, theoretical contributions have served primarily to indicate one's standpoint (Apelt and Wilkesmann, 2015) or as introductions to the subject matter (Kühl, 2011; Tacke and Drepper, 2018). In addition, there have been remarkable attempts to contribute to the advancement of general theories of organization. One example is Thomas Matys' study (2011) in the vein of the sociology of domination, which makes explicit reference to classics such as Karl Marx and Max Weber. His historical study, on the United States, deals with a central theme of James Coleman, namely, the debate over the legal status of organizations.

Another example of theoretically oriented work is "*Operativität und Typik*" (*Operativity and Typology*) by Thomas Drepper (2017). Drawing on systems-theoretical and neo-institutionalist approaches, the author's main intention is to focus on organizations as entities that process meaning and to use this focus to explore issues concerning the typification of behavior, participants, and situations. The important aspect here is that, according to Drepper, typifications emerge from organizational sense-making and cannot be imposed from the outside. The primary starting point of his theoretical discussion is what he refers to as the post-rationalist "meta-narrative of recent organizational research" (2017: 5), which he draws on by reference to basic concepts such as cognition, semantics, diffusion, and translation. Drepper's most important achievement is that he succeeds in linking his extremely stringent concept of organization to current theoretical debates in organizational research; this extends to the debate around the materiality of organizations, which the author discusses under the rubric of "(self-)embodiments." In building his argument, he vividly draws on "the world out there"—which is the ultimate object of social-scientific research. That is to say, he always finds illustrative examples to underpin his reasoning, but this does not (yet) amount to turning organizational sense-making into an object of systematic and methodically controlled research, on the basis of which his propositions could be verified or falsified.

Drepper's focus on organizational sense-making and typification of organizations is important not least given the predictable tendency, owing to the growth of organizational sociology, toward differentiating between different types of organizations (see also Apelt and Tacke, 2012). In contrast to Drepper (2017), this trend is characterized by apodictic distinctions based on which attention is directed to problems that are unique to certain organizations, such as volunteer work in the case of non-profit organizations, and are absent in other types of organizations. Similar applies to universities, which, as professionally dominated organizations, combine research and educational tasks. Other organizations—such as associations or political parties—or those that represent more hybrid forms of different types of organizations are likewise

characterized by special features (Laux, 2016; Bohmann and Laux, 2017). Often, the approach of these studies is to work out the specifics of the type of organization in question and to identify differences to what is presumed to represent the standard model, with companies mostly being regarded as the norm in this day and age. Against this background, a study by Sven Kette deserves particular attention, as it aims to describe companies as a specific type of organization as well (Kette, 2018). The most important implication of this perspective is that there is no standard model or prototype of organization; companies, too, are a special kind of organization.

In addition to universities (von Wissel, 2015; Ruppert, 2017; Kleimann, 2016), hospitals have served as a preferred subject of an organizational sociology focused on individual types. The most important topics addressed here involve profession-related issues and the role of certain occupational groups (Wilkesmann et al., 2015; Bär and Starystach, 2017) as well as the impact of reforms, particularly with regard to the creation of new market situations and competitive conditions (Vogd, 2017; Messer and Reilley, 2015; Bode and Märker, 2012). German-language organizational research is furthermore interested in non-profit organizations and their associations (Kaegi, 2012). These include clubs and societies (Franzen and Botzen, 2011; Gibel, 2020), cultural organizations (Zschesche, 2015), and those committed to a social and/or environmental mission (Guggenheim, 2015). Social services represent yet another area of organization that has received special attention. This applies in particular to matters of organizational change (Evers, 2018) and to innovative professional concepts (Mayrhofer, 2012; 2014). Last but not least, highly informative empirical studies on (changed) forms of organization in a specific field—namely, child and youth protection—have also been put up for discussion by Ingo Bode and Hanno Turba (Bode and Turba, 2014) and Stefanie Büchner (2018).

4 New Forms of Organizing Work

Since organizational sociology in Germany was initially closely linked to the sociology of work and industrial sociology, from which it originated, a specific feature of German-language organizational sociology's approach has been its strong interest in issues of work and employment (Aulenbacher/Grubner, *WORK AND LABOR*, this volume). More recently, this interest has been extended to the occupational group of managers. Some studies have, for example, investigated the prevalence of part-time work among management (Hipp and Stuth, 2013), while others have analyzed management—understood as a social elite—from the angle of social stratification (Pohlmann et al., 2018). Yet a crucial question from an organizational-sociology point of view has only been touched upon in passing, namely, whether it makes a difference—for instance, with regard to management's readiness to adopt new best practices (e.g., shareholder value orientation)—if management positions are filled with technical experts such as engineers or rather with organizational experts such as those who hold a degree in business administration, or whether businesses are

managed by owners and, if so, of which generation (however, see Fiss and Zajac, 2004).

A remarkable study on the subject of work and organization has been provided by Yannick Kalff (2018). In focusing on *projects*, he zeros in on a current form of organization that is just as fundamental to science and research as it is to the realization of innovative endeavors and to much of the creative industries (for the latter, see also Nyfeler, 2019). According to Kalff, projects are a form of self-organization that requires the participants to shoulder the major burden of necessary organizational tasks. Under the title *Organisierendes Arbeiten (Working as Organizing)*, his study looks into what happens in projects, how participants coordinate with one another, and how they represent themselves to the outside world. While approaching projects from the perspectives of labor and organizational studies and incorporating issues of power and domination, Kalff also engages in conceptual work that intends to contribute to a post-Weberian organizational sociology (see also Hartz and Rätzer, 2013, who make special reference to critical management studies). His approach sensitizes us to the need for questioning established concepts of organizational sociology, the significance of which for organizational reality in the 21st century is undeniably not always clear. What is striking, however, is that, in this context, Kalff revisits work as a basic theoretical concept without reference to any current debates in organizational studies.

5 Technology and Innovation

Questions about possible applications and consequences of new technologies have been a key topic since the beginning of organizational research—initially with regard to the mechanization and automation of industrial production but for some time now primarily with regard to information and communication technologies and the challenges of digitization. New technologies not only open up possibilities for rationalization but also for surveillance and bureaucratization. At the same time, they create opportunities for companies to stage themselves as being modern and open-minded toward new technologies (Hertwig, 2014). Whereas the debate on innovation initially revolved around individual organizations and their readiness to explore or at least adopt innovations, today it centers more on issues of network-like associations between organizations, as can be observed in joint ventures and strategic alliances or in R&D collaborations (Rammert, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION, this volume). One aspect at the core of the debate has been best-management practices that derive from the Silicon Valley model and whose transferability to other sectors (low tech) or other regions (continental Europe) is being critically discussed (Hasse and Passarge, 2015). Attention has accordingly been directed to deviations from the model and specifically to matters of cooperation—which is often in the form of projects or organized via networks. After collaborations between the economy and science had been at the center of attention for a long time, there has for some time now been a shift away from examining collaboration between industry and science and more toward also con-

sidering the role of financial service providers and investors, as innovations require considerable capital while offering the prospect of risky but highly lucrative profits (Hirsch-Kreinsen, 2011; for Switzerland, see also Passarge and Hasse, 2013).

In many cases, the organizational sociology approach to innovation has drawn rather strongly on studies of technology, such as the more micro-sociological analyses of the processes of dealing with or producing innovations (Conrad, 2017; Staples, 2017). A second focal point in the area where technology research and organizational sociology overlap is in considering the extraordinary importance of innovations from a societal perspective (Rammert et al., 2016). Here, organizations are (co-)affected and (co-)causers in equal measure. The strong influence of technology studies and innovation research also manifests itself in the fundamental concept of path dependency. The basic idea here is that innovation trajectories and the further development of new technologies are shaped by their own history. Their respective history limits the realm of opportunity for innovations while at the same time offering starting points for their further, more or less incremental development (Meyer, 2016).

Hannah Mormann has adopted a different focus. Her topic is the consequences of the dissemination of technological innovations that are implemented to improve organizational processes (Mormann, 2016). Choosing the widespread use of SAP software as her empirical case, her study begins by reconstructing the emergence of SAP as the factual standard software and offers an essentially neo-institutionalist description of its spread. In particular, she is interested in issues concerning the implementation of the software in individual organizations. Mormann draws on an understanding of organizations strongly inspired by systems theory to examine the significance of the decision to use SAP as well as matters concerning the absorption of uncertainty. She further shows that the software is based on applying standardized conceptions of organizational processes to organizations of practically any kind and that these conceptions have repercussions on organizations that use SAP software since the technology under study not only depicts organizational processes, as the developers would have us believe, but also contributes to shaping them. What we see here is hence a type of development that has effects “behind the backs of the actors.”

6 Critique and Acknowledgment

Before highlighting the specific achievements in German-language organizational sociology, I would like to draw attention to subject areas that, at least in the recent past, have not received much attention. First, the nexus of organization and the individual plays only a marginal role. As a result, German-language organizational sociology is at risk of failing to keep up with major topics relevant to professional practice, such as human resources management, or important issues, such as burnout or work–life balance. One of the consequences is that strictly psychological perspectives are increasingly dominating the professional and social discourse (however, see Bröckling, 2007, for a notable exception).

Second, inequality research is comparatively rare. Of course, there is the important exception of gender discrimination (Hericks, 2011; Grulich, 2016; Ochsenfeld, 2012; Müller et al., 2013) and the related topic of diversity management (Frohnen, 2015; Schiederig, 2013). But apart from these, questions of social inequality and problems of discrimination according to ascriptive categories such as class background, age, and race (or, in German-speaking countries, ethnicity or simply citizenship or migration background) have not attracted much attention (however, see Lengfeld, 2007, and Wienold and Petzold, 2014; and for a systems-theoretical discussion, see Itschert, 2013).²

Third, there seems to be only little interest in new methodological challenges and opportunities, such as those that have emerged in connection with the debate on big-data analyses or in relation to questions of visualization. Although there are some German-speaking authors who have addressed these issues, their publications are, interestingly enough, largely aimed at an international audience (see Oberg et al., 2017; Höllner et al., 2017; Mützel, 2015). German-language organizational sociology has thus chiefly turned to the arsenal of established social-scientific methodology—and has documented this in the pertinent reference books (see Liebig et al., 2017; Köhl et al., 2009).

Fourth, almost completely absent are *theoretically* oriented research foci that build upon organizational variables and distinguish, for example, between organizations that are old (or new), large (or small), highly (or little) professionalized, or market- (or subsidy-) dependent, although this would offer excellent opportunities for making comparisons. On the one hand, this is an expression of high ambitions in terms of generalization when it comes to theory building. On the other, however, these theoretical ambitions correspond with a likewise observable specialization according to types of organizations, such as business organizations (companies) or research and educational organizations (universities).³ From the viewpoint of organizational sociology, this could be a problematic development because it suggests that differences in the functions or expected performance, on which the distinction between universities, hospitals, political parties, and companies is based, are more important than differences that derive from organizational characteristics (e.g., age, size, degree of pro-

² For a remarkable exception in organizational sociology, see Gomolla and Radtke (2002). Drawing on a broad spectrum of organizational theories, the authors argue that decision-making in schools systematically discriminates against students with a migration background—not on the basis of psychologically rooted prejudices and stereotypes but because selection decisions are geared toward organizational interests and environmental expectations, the consideration of which leads to institutional discrimination as an unintended side effect. Their research interest thus lies in showing how discrimination is embedded in organizations' everyday culture and in the professional culture of those working there (on the concept of institutional discrimination, see also Hasse and Schmidt, 2012).

³ Differentiation according to other context factors would be conceivable as well, for example, in terms of different social spaces in urban and rural areas or with regard to national arrangements, as have been highlighted in the diversity-of-capitalisms debate, but such differentiation is rare.

fessionalization). Additionally, this development could encourage a fragmentation of organizational sociology (e.g., between research on universities, hospitals, and associations), in which case the research field can be expected to lose sight of its common research object.

Against the backdrop of this critical account, I would like to wrap things up by turning to characteristic strengths of German-language organizational sociology. What stands out in particular is its theoretical aspirations, which have become manifest in two ways. For one, German-language organizational sociology is very strongly oriented toward theories of organization, primarily referring to the classic theories of organization from the 1960s to the 1980s. For another, German-language organizational sociology reliably draws on contemporary discussions in social theory, as currently witnessed not least in its reflections on variants of practice theory, actor–network theory, or the theory of Michel Foucault.

This twofold theoretical orientation presumably explains why German-language organizational sociology is particularly committed to systems-theoretical and neo-institutionalist approaches. Both approaches provide theories of society in which organizations are regarded as crucial drivers of social development, and both employ organizational theories that draw heavily on social conditions such as functional differentiation (systems theory) or rationalization (neo-institutionalism). Most studies highlighted in this article are committed to one of these two strands of theory, with some even operating in very ambitious and sophisticated ways at the intersection of both—which is arguably a unique selling point of German-language organizational sociology. We might therefore summarize that those who are interested in theoretically ambitious organizational sociology will find an extremely rich selection to choose from in the German-speaking scene.

Finally, among German-speaking organizational sociologists, we can identify a strong interest in new technologies and in topics closely related to economic sociology (Maurer, *ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY*, this volume). The latter is remarkable considering that new economic sociology, which enjoys considerable international prestige, had initially conspicuously neglected the topic of organizations in favor of more micro- or decidedly macro-sociological foci. That said, German-speaking organizational sociology also offers excellent starting points for embarking on the endeavor of more closely integrating economic sociology and organizational sociology—and perhaps even micro- and macro-sociological explanations.

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Political Sociology

Jörn Lamla

Abstract: By focusing on the difference between *politics* and *the political* as well as on current trends towards post-democracy, this paper attempts an assessment of German-language contributions to contemporary political sociology. Even though the subject is still searching for its native disciplinary territory and its disciplinary boundaries, scholars in German-speaking countries have only recently begun to engage with new approaches that have arisen from science and technology studies (STS) or other fields that have pursued innovative research and theories of the political. This argument is underpinned in some detail by comparing three contributions from German-speaking sociologists to the debate on post-democracy. Given the far-reaching events and transformations in recent history that have put politics in flux and exerted strain on democracy, political sociology has appeared to be rather hesitant to veer from its established ways of thinking and explore new territory.

Keywords: Politics, the political, democratic experimentalism, post-democracy, social movements

1 Introduction

Much work remains to be done in defining the boundaries of political sociology. In Germany, for instance, political subject matter is addressed in two disciplines: sociology and political science. Both have sections for political sociology in their professional organizations that claim to define its scope while pursuing different but overlapping research. Another point of contention arises from the much-debated relationship between science and politics, which is crucial for political sociology as a discipline. Positioning political sociology between science and politics has been an issue throughout its history in German-language sociology. Starting with Max Weber's scientific claim concerning value judgements (*Werturteilsfreiheitspostulat*) and the later dispute between the Frankfurt School of critical theory and the proponents of scientific positivism and continuing up to current debates on public sociology, the battle around facts and values in so-called evidence-based politics or the ongoing professional segmentation of sociology and its imminent separation into different methodological schools have had a particular bearing on political sociology. However, the work that has been done on determining the boundaries of political sociology has so far failed to yield sustainable solutions for these wider problems of the field's self-conception. The professional community of political sociologists is still much too disparate to form a coherent and guiding voice that would help to overcome these disciplinary crises.

The heterogeneity of sociological voices is impressively demonstrated by a recently published symposium in the journal *Soziologie* that addresses these identity and boundary questions of political sociology (Brichzin et al., 2019). Theses in this vein extend from the inevitability of political value judgements in sociological work and the need to reflect on them to a plea for scientific self-restriction and a concentration on evidence-based empirical research. Some contributions speak of an increased relevance of political sociology at a time when democracy is in crisis, whereas others see sociology itself as being in crisis because it has not been able to get a grasp on the ambiguous political changes driven by digitization, de- and re-nationalization, or climate change. However, the conclusions regularly exhibit the same pattern of argumentation, which ultimately results in the simple promotion of one's own favored approach as a solution to the problem, be it critical theory, social systems theory, political ethnography, actor–network theory, or the sociology of knowledge. Thus, the impression one gains when reading this collection is an absence of any real debate. However, without any clear focus and mutual point of reference, the search for boundaries becomes endless. Identifying a need for clarification is at most a starting point but does not provide any direction for a much-needed discussion.

One attempt to overcome this state of professional weakness and diffuseness—indicating a certain awareness of the problem in both disciplines—is the widespread publication of introductions and textbooks on political sociology in recent decades (Bottomore, 1981; Frevel, 1995; Böhnisch, 2006; Kießler, 2007; Rattinger, 2009; Kaina and Römmele, 2012; Holzer, 2015; Pickel, 2020). There is no lack of propositions as to how to define the field of political sociology. However, the topics found in the tables of contents differ significantly depending on the authors' affiliations with sociology or political science. The political scientists focus more on established political and democratic institutions like parties, elections, associations, movements, or citizenship. These institutions depend to some degree on, and therefore vary according to, social and cultural conditions such as value commitments, social status, knowledge, means of communication, and socialization, which therefore have to be taken into account. The sociologists, by contrast, are more inclined to look for the political in society through the lens of concepts such as power relations, societal or functional differentiation, or historical dynamics like gender struggles or post-colonialism. Another notable observation is the revival of the classics in the current German literature on political sociology, for example, the publication of an early manuscript on political sociology by Niklas Luhmann (2010), written in the 1960s, which starts with one of the aforementioned boundary issues—namely, the boundary between sociology and political science—and argues for a change in perspective towards systems theory. On the other hand, writings and lectures by Theodor W. Adorno (2019a; b) are frequently cited in order to understand current shifts towards populism and right-wing radicalism in the political landscape. Thus, political sociology seems to perpetuate disciplinary cleavages instead of overcoming them and providing new ways of thinking and re-searching the political. And the scope of work in political sociology seems broad

enough for everyone to find their own definition of what *political sociology* is actually about.

A way out of this unsatisfying situation in political sociology may be achieved by focusing on two issues, which are—in my view—specific to a *sociological* way of approaching the *matter* of politics. One issue concerns democracy, but not as an established set of institutions. Rather, political sociology should study the way democracy comes into being, how it is performed and renewed under societal conditions of strain and crisis. Thus, a starting point for a political sociology could be the ever-changing common issues of a society to which that society must react politically by improving—or better still, improvising—democracy in one direction or the other (e.g., by tending towards more inclusion or exclusion). The second issue is closely related to the first: political sociology must focus much more on researching *the political* than on researching *politics*. Politics—its routines, institutions, and conditions—is or should be mainly the remit of political scientists. The task of sociology, by contrast, might be sought in the realm of the political where we encounter, and can investigate, those struggles, practices, and discourses that lie outside the conventional understanding of politics and the state and which challenge the boundaries of this understanding. Thus, *the political* is the matter of *politics in flux* and therefore puts *democracy under strain*. Regarding this proposed sociology of the political, German scholars are not leading the debate. However, German-language political sociology has made some significant contributions that I would like to discuss in the following sections. After a short consideration of the historical context that has influenced a turn towards a “subpolitical” (Beck, 1993: 154–171) perspective, followed by an examination of other political boundary issues in the next section (2), the article will focus mainly on two strands of discussion: the diagnosis of post-democracy (3) and today’s theoretical innovations in researching the political (4).

2 Politics in Flux, Democracy Under Strain

Two decades ago, the Green Party assumed responsibility in the German federal government for the first time. With that, a historic transformation of the political landscape in Germany came to an end, one that had commenced with the strengthening of new social movements in the 1970s. Yet political sociologists disagree about the direction of this transformation. Some have highlighted the assimilation of the Greens into the institutions of liberal democracy, whereas others have pointed to the “greening” of the entire political landscape in recent decades. Here we must consider the influence of two major theoretical schools in Germany. Drawing on Niklas Luhmann’s (2000) theory of social systems, some of these scholars have highlighted the reproduction of an internal logic of the political system, which necessarily affects and shapes Green politics. Others have argued in line with Jürgen Habermas’s (1992) idea of a civil society, which translates and amplifies conflicts from the citizens’ lifeworlds. In this intellectual context, questions arose as to what extent protest

movements, subpolitical processes in society (e.g., the struggle for gender equality or the emergence of environmentally conscious lifestyles), and moral claims in public discourse have to be taken into account in the sociological analysis of the political landscape.

If we take this as a starting point for the discussion and recognition of German-language contributions to the debates on the political (as distinct from politics) and (post-)democracy, a unique German journal in the field of political sociology should be recognized: The *Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen* (*Social Movements Research Journal*; founded in 1988 under the name *Forschungsjournal Neue Soziale Bewegungen* (FJNSB) and renamed in 2011) has not just contributed to the current and future research on social and political movements (Kern, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, this volume). It has become a veritable institution of German-language political sociology and offers ample forum for debate. It not only couples the disciplines of sociology and political science but also closes the gap between theoretical debate and public discourse. Thus, it represents an early iteration of what is now called public sociology. Focusing on selected issues from different angles, it moves between conceptual elaboration and capturing new phenomena of political articulation in its analyses of democracy and civil society, always with a keen eye for upcoming political movements, practices, and challenges. While there are surely other important journals in German political sociology as well (e.g., *Leviathan – Berliner Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft* [*Leviathan – Berlin Journal for Social Sciences*]), no other journal has succeeded in such a difficult balancing act for over thirty years as the *Forschungsjournal* has. Since it publishes thoroughly curated but not peer-reviewed articles, some scholars may be inclined to ignore it under today's publishing regime. Yet the *Forschungsjournal* has often been the place where issues like post-democracy or emerging phenomena such as political consumption were broadly discussed for the first time among the German-language academic and political community (e.g., FJNSB, 4/2005; 4/2006; 2/2015).

Beyond social movements, the political transformation in Eastern Europe and the reunification of Germany have provided further reasons for disciplinary self-reflection. Since political sociology was not able to predict—or did not even reckon with—these developments, it was compelled to question its assumptions and conceptual frameworks. Indeed, the events of this political turn occurred three decades ago (Offe, 1994). However, they remind us not to think of states and democracy as stable and self-stabilizing systems but as political configurations that are constantly in flux and under varying degrees of strain. Thus, after a period of postwar prosperity and reorganization, the fundamental questions of democracy itself (Rödel, Frankenberg, and Dubiel, 1989) and its robustness and resilience (Rampp, Endreß, and Naumann, 2019) are now back on the agenda. Today, the dynamics of European political (dis)integration are more prominent when it comes to discussions about the reproduction of democracy and its social or societal conditions (Lahusen, 2019; Eigmüller, EUROPE, this volume). In particular, the spread of right-wing populism in Europe and other countries is today challenging political sociology's understanding of European as well

as national politics and political institutions. Scholars carry out research and seek explanations for these phenomena by investigating the social or class structure of society and, for instance, pointing to the uncertainty that stems from cultural trends towards singularity (Reckwitz, 2017: 394–423). It is not only theoretical approaches but also empirical research that has highlighted the impact of cultural conflict in times of increasing societal complexity and differentiation, whereas social deprivation has been determined to be a less important factor in these political polarizations (Lengfeld and Dilger, 2018: 196). Global interdependencies thus constantly challenge the existing boundaries and conventions of democracy. Other important examples of contemporary challenges are climate change and conflicts around ecological resources—now constant items on the political agenda as a result of the newly emerging Fridays for Future movement, global social inequality, and migration—as well as the high speed of digital transformation alongside newly evolving power relations, for instance, between states and Silicon Valley’s IT companies. Moreover, war, terror, and violence are once again prominent topics in a political sociology that is conducting research on democracy’s uncertain future.

This makes it clear that research on political shifts based on social movements, protest events, or new political practices and articulations (e.g., populism or the strategic use of social-media communication) as well as those driven by institutional contradictions (e.g., de-nationalization) or societal and material interdependencies is still in need of more theoretical elaboration. German-language (political) sociology is no longer in the lead in this regard. Luhmann’s theory of social systems and German critical theory are surely important contributions. However, they have increasingly become bogged down in scholastic exercises and inclined to take their theoretical assumptions as given facts without subjecting them to regular (also empirical) scrutiny in light of changing conditions. Innovations in political sociology, which came under the banners of the practice turn, the performative turn, the ontological turn, the material turn, or poststructuralism in a broader sense, all originated elsewhere. Certainly, there are sources of conceptual innovation in German-language sociology that should not be forgotten. While the theories and methods of interpretative sociology are well known and widely used in different areas, and while sociological research on all manner of politics and politicians began making use of such tools at an early stage, approaching the political with elaborate interpretative methods and concepts in political science only began in the 1990s (Nullmeier, 1997; Lamla, 2003), indicating a certain shift in how political sociology viewed its subject. The terms and definitions of the political had long been much too restrictive regarding the scope and variety of the phenomena under consideration. Having become aware of this, political sociologists in Germany started to deconstruct their narrow perspectives (Nassehi and Schroer, 2003). The well-known critique of methodological nationalism by Ulrich Beck (2003) was only one very prominent contribution to these wider discussions. What we can derive from these debates is that qualitative approaches ought to grasp the political by probing into its depths through analyzing the doing of politics

(at both the micro and macro level). And what these conceptual and methodological reflections have accomplished is to help widen the scope of political sociology.

The main challenge remains to combine the necessary theoretical innovations in research on democracy with continuing and focused debate within the discipline. Twenty years ago, a handful of German professors of political science and sociology from Marburg and Jena made a start in this direction by editing a book series titled *Studien zur Demokratieforschung* (*Studies in Democracy Research*; Berg-Schlosser and Giegel, 1999) that claimed to address these different changes and challenges concerning democracy. The series has produced approximately a dozen books in twenty years. One reason for this modest success, beyond limited resources of time and money, could be the lack of conceptual innovations and theoretical tools that was identified at the beginning of this paper. Once again it must be stated here that the most effective advances came from outside (German-language) political sociology. It was not only the international debate on post-democracy (Crouch, 2004; Rancière 1995; Wolin, 2001) and the associated French discussion on the political (e.g., Mouffe, 2005) that was influential in this regard. The theoretical debate—mainly within science and technology studies (STS) and post-colonial studies—on political ecologies and political ontologies (Latour, 1999; Blaser 2013) had an important impact as well. That said, the following sections of this paper take a closer look at the contributions that German-language political sociology has been able to make to the international developments in this field.

3 Varieties of Post-Democracy

One important explanation of why democracy is under enormous strain in the 21st century has been provided by Wolfgang Streeck. In his book *Gekaufte Zeit* (2013; published in English as *Buying Time*, 2014), this former director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies describes the continuity of a liberal project that aims to overcome the limitations that have arisen from the postwar framework of democratic capitalism. However, the crisis that such a market- and finance-driven transformation of society would inevitably induce has been actively postponed by excessive state indebtedness. While accepting the risk of future dependencies, huge societal investments in mass consumption and the wealth of the middle classes have been made to effectively buy the loyalties of consumers. Nevertheless, the deep structural contradiction of democratic capitalism could not be transcended within the neoliberal regime. This led to steadily heightened pressure to deregulate markets and a policy of pushing back against labor organizations. The result, he argues, has been to reduce democracy to a de-democratized constitutional state with superficial public entertainment of private citizen-consumers (Streeck, 2013: 28, 164). The neoliberal state has forced its citizens into increased economic dependencies by motivating them to increase private debt in order to finance its mandatory tax revenues (Streeck, 2013: 64). Although Streeck makes a general theoretical argument for societal creativity and

experimentalism in history at the outset (Streeck, 2013: 15), his diagnosis of post-democracy is disenchanting in this respect. For him, the disempowerment of mass democracy has been extraordinary successful. Capital, on the contrary, has been able to strengthen its position by rebuilding the political system into a network of contractual relations in which the law of the market and private property could rule without political restrictions. The result is a set of European political institutions in which national governments are externally forced (and empowered) to establish a regime of fiscal consolidation. Public debate and democratic decision-making are left behind in this version of post-democracy. But this does not mean that democratic procedures are left without any political function in this new post-democratic regime. Indeed, they may have to assume important new functions.

This argument is made by Ingolfur Blühdorn in his book *Simulative Demokratie. Neue Politik nach der postdemokratischen Wende* (2013; *Simulative Democracy. New Politics after the Post-Democratic Turn*). Streeck (2013: 215–223) paints a picture of a disorganized and powerless population in today's democracy and searches in some desperation for a strong social movement that might be able to react with popular outrage to their economic plight. Since no such movement appears to be in sight, he finally retreats to the remnants of the sovereign nation state and defends its remaining capacities to act collectively (Streeck, 2013: 255–256). In contrast to Streeck's version of democratic decline, Blühdorn elaborates on the active role of democracy in the production and stabilization of the regime of economic dependency and growth that he calls "post-ecologist" (Blühdorn, 2013: 244). He unmistakably builds on Luhmann's theory of social systems and the related understanding of sociological enlightenment (Blühdorn, 2013: 280). His explanation therefore draws less on the economically based power relations in a Marxian vein toward which Streeck has seemed to gravitate since his Adorno lectures in 2012. Rather, Blühdorn (2013: 182–183) sees the roots of this development in societal complexity resulting from functional differentiation and its systemic imperatives. Yet what was once an insuperable ideological theoretical difference between the two approaches no longer seems to be of any real significance: these two diagnoses of post-democracy are apposite even though Blühdorn provides an important addition to the discussion with his idea of simulative practices. These practices allow for experiencing democracy while legitimizing a far-reaching transformation that only serves to gut it of its very essence in the long run. In Blühdorn's version, post-democracy takes a more paradoxical form (2013: 158–166): consumer-citizens in late modernity increasingly accept and enforce the decline of politics that is driven by societal complexity while simultaneously strengthening the normative claims of democratic participation and self-government. The simulation of democratic symbols and practices therefore becomes crucial for stabilizing societal order. A typical expression of simulative democracy is the diversity of individualized styles of political or sustainable consumption (Blühdorn, 2013: 190–192) as well as the idea of liquid democracy. The Pirate Party (Bieber and Leggewie, 2012), which has espoused this idea, is in Blühdorn's perspective (2013: 169–170) the incarnation of the new kind of superficial politics—even though it was not very successful in this particular case.

Satisfied with simulations of democratic procedures and participation, the Western consumer-citizens—or citizen-consumers, if you will—would ultimately contribute to the democratic resilience and legitimation required to perpetuate a “politics of unsustainability” under democratic conditions (Blühdorn, 2013: 55).

However, the assumptions and theses of this second diagnosis of post-democracy require some closer examination. First, Blühdorn attributes strong normative claims to those who profess their commitment to democracy, especially the claim of being an autonomous political subject (Blühdorn, 2013: 127–129). Second, he states that contemporary citizens reinterpret their democratic values in line with a consumer-driven third modernity and in ways to create scope for the enjoyment of their unacknowledged privileges (Blühdorn, 2013: 48–53). In this way, he reconstructs the political practices and worldviews of citizens as being deeply contradictory: they believe in democratic ideals while they contribute to permanently undermining these ideals by consenting to the limited political opportunities and social involvements offered them in the consumer role. The core feature of post-democracy in this reading is precisely its ability to obscure this cognitive dissonance (Blühdorn, 2013: 125). It is this kind of functionality and problem-solving that simulative democracy fulfils.

Despite the opacity of this post-democratic setting, the author claims for himself the position of a dissociated observer who can see through the veil of this deception. Adopting this superior vantage point, he argues for the variability and ongoing change of political and democratic configurations throughout history. He denies having any normative intention beyond deconstructing the misleading normativity of democracy (e.g., Blühdorn, 2013: 47, 57). Yet, contrasting idealistic illusions of democracy (i.e., the view of the people and of the intellectuals who feed their beliefs in democracy with overblown expectations) with realism in analyzing the political system from the viewpoint of the outside observer amounts to omitting important nuances. His diagnosis identifies only one aspect of public and democratic creativity that is pragmatic in the narrow sense of adapting better to the reproductive needs of the societal system. This separation of the factual aspects of democracy from the normative ones provides a kind of fatalistic blueprint and entails a hidden normativity that must be disclosed. To strip democracy of any substantial influence on political decision-making by reducing it to a mere simulation game means severing the very connection that some theorists as well as many citizens still try to hold onto, even in the face of growing inconsistency and strained ideals. Instead of analyzing political creativity in this pragmatist (not pragmatic) respect, Blühdorn (2013: 140) dwells on the supposed claim to autonomy of all those who—despite Luhmann’s critique—still believe that some degree of true democracy does exist.

Beyond their important observations and thoughts, both versions of post-democracy paint a picture of historical closure and thus do not take their professed advocacy of democratic experimentalism (Lamla, 2013a) seriously. The reification of and cognitive fixation on power relations and systemic interdependencies is a problem of Marxism as well as the theory of social systems: with their unwavering focus on realpolitik, they both participate in the performative stabilization of the societal and

political order (Latour, 2005). Unsurprisingly, such a political sociology has nothing to offer those who are seriously searching for an alternative vision of future democracy. A different possibility here is to recall the pragmatist methodology of Dewey (1927) and Latour (1999). It is when we look from this angle that we can discern a third version of post-democratic diagnosis. With such an approach, it is possible to conceive of a development towards *consumer democracy* too. However, it is necessary to analyze this reconfiguration of democracy openly in order to recognize its different tendencies, its weaknesses, as well as its innovative propositions (Lamla, 2013b). Democratic experimentalism in a pragmatist sense means recognizing the ongoing changes of democratic state formation across history. Yet, with regard to the current strain on democracy, it is important not only to point to the decline of democratic institutions but also to construct hypotheses on the advent of new creative solutions for the government of societal interdependencies and their consequences. Interestingly, consumer democracy is already politicizing those entities that for Streeck seem to be losing sight of democracy, particularly the economy and its value chains (e.g., fair trade, sustainable investments). It is possible that this is all mere simulation. Yet, we cannot know if we do not subject such a post-democratic hypothesis to scrutiny.

In my book *Verbraucherdemokratie. Politische Soziologie der Konsumgesellschaft* (2013b; *Consumer Democracy. Political Sociology of the Consumer Society*), I attempt an outline of just such an examination. First, the book draws on older American and the newer French pragmatism to take a closer look at the public discourse on consumer democracy while analyzing its different propositions and justifications (Lamla, 2013b: 171). When one traces the various strands of critique (and affirmation) in consumer society's public discourse, the evidence ensuing from this exercise fails to plausibly support the diagnosis of a historical closure of democratic practices. At best, we might discern a post-democratic tendency in the increasing fragmentation of the public. Second, the late-modern consumer citizen is indeed a different subject compared to his/her civic or bourgeois forerunners. At the same time, the potential of the consumer citizen to gain some degree of political autonomy is easily underestimated since he/she may have a richer sensorium and more tactical knowledge and likewise greater capacities to learn and to reflect on his/her position in the economic networks of society. Much depends here on the dynamics of public influence. Although not guaranteed, shifting involvements from private to public political action are still possible and depend on the constellation of public issues and other conditions of democracy (Lamla, 2013b: 260–269). Third, my analysis reconstructs different dynamics in what has been called “cultural capitalism,” dynamics that may hinder such a re-politization of consumer society (Lamla, 2013b: 329). Thus, with regard to the different possible interchanges of culture and economy in a digitized consumer society, the technological options and conditions for governing the people by monitoring and manipulating their behavior are of crucial importance for the future path of democracy. An essential democratic condition can consequently be found in sustaining basic rights against these tendencies towards mass surveillance in its commodified as well as its administrative forms.

4 The Political Revisited

Patterns of consumer culture as well as other dispositions and political institutions certainly exhibit strong persistence. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the political should not be confounded with politics in its factual manifestations. Indiscriminately mixing politics and the political makes it difficult to detect important conditions of political change and democratic evolution. In this respect, the international discussions on this difference between politics and the political have significantly influenced the current debate in German-language political sociology. The critique of political hegemony in several approaches to the political from a post-structuralist theoretical perspective has been crucial in this regard. A thorough overview is provided in *Das Politische denken. Zeitgenössische Positionen* (2010; *Thinking the Political. Contemporary Positions*), an anthology edited by Ulrich Bröckling and Robert Feustel. Searching for the political momentum that is able to transcend a given order of politics, the authors summarize the works of Claude Lefort, Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, Etienne Balibar, Jacques Rancière, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Alain Badiou, Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Cornelius Castoriadis, Bruno Latour, and Jean Baudrillard. However, what seems to be a broad discussion without any German-language contribution turns out on closer inspection to be a compendium of thoughts from a theoretically and philosophically inspired, albeit narrow subcommunity of political sociology. It is of no minor import to try to systematize these approaches. The family resemblance of these theories, for instance, is discussed at length in a book on political difference written by Oliver Marchart, appropriately titled *Die politische Differenz* (2010). In most post-structuralist approaches, the political is conceptualized as a revolt of the underdogs against the hegemonic frames of political discourse and action. The political thus becomes a philosophical and sociological concept that is primarily directed against those social power relations and forms of domination that appear as second nature in a society despite their historical contingency. Beyond this basic orientation, the (predominantly French) approaches differ in where they see the sources with the potential to reopen the political space. Some focus on symbolic processes like societal imagination (e.g., Castoriadis) or the normative surplus inherent in the validity claims of human rights and other normative claims such as unconditioned recognition, hospitality, or fraternalism and the impossible community (e.g., Levinas, Derrida, Nancy, Blanchot). Other theorists of the political argue in line with the practice or performative turn and highlight the contemporary political situation or a political event in order to identify opportunities for political subjectification, civil disobedience, or the tactical articulation of suppressed groups (e.g., Deleuze and Guattari, Hardt and Negri). The concept of democracy itself combines these strands of discussion because it functions as an empty signifier (e.g., Lefort), which to some degree is suitable and helpful for building and sustaining a public consciousness of the contingencies of established power relations.

At the same time, there seems to be a hidden competition between these different approaches in terms of which one is able to offer the most radical conception of democracy (Lamla, 2016: 48). The bias of this whole school of thought's approach to democracy appears to lie in its obsession with social agonism and antagonism (Mouffe, 2005) and its constant search for a revolutionary subject who might articulate the unrepresented dimension of the political (Rancière, 1995); in this line of thinking, the political is still conceived of as a conflict between different social actors, collectives, or subjects. In his interesting contribution to this theoretical debate, Marchart (2010) places greater emphasis on the contradictions of the political, since it still must be constituted somehow. Awareness of the contingency of power relations in modernity is not just an opportunity for the articulation of political difference. Paradoxically, he maintains, it also requires that this state of uncertainty be overcome. This entails setting political difference into operation by establishing a constitutional foundation for society. Thus, his claim for post-foundationalism does not imply the absence of any political foundation (as theorists of political anarchy would probably argue) but an awareness of its provisional state. In his approach, he differentiates between two strands of foundational work: one highlighting the freedom of association in the line of thought of Hannah Arendt, the other stressing the dissociation that stems from political conflicts and antagonisms in the sense of Carl Schmitt (Marchardt, 2010: 32–42). Although he is quite attentive to the ambiguities of the political, Marchardt's (2010: 329–365) own ethical project of democracy still seems to be predominated by social power relations, which should be bounded by a generalized awareness of one's own foundational insufficiency and social interdependency. To conceptualize political difference more thoroughly, it could be necessary to widen the scope of analysis beyond social dimensions of power politics in order to detect other modes of historical and political contingency.

Such modes might be found in the changing issues, or in the association of different entities, that are bound together by matters of common concern (Latour, 2005). To broaden its discussion of the political, German-language political sociology could learn from the international discussions on political ecology, the material turn, and political ontology (Latour, 1999; Blaser, 2013). In these debates, political difference is not only identified in the social dimension of conflict between groups or human subjects. Rather it is seen as being present in relations between different kinds of actors or modes of existence (Latour, 2013; Harman, 2014; Laux, 2016). These approaches provide a richer analysis of problems of political articulation and negotiation, which allow the analyst to take technological rule-setting and ecological interventions into account. These analytical tools that stem from STS and related theoretical approaches promise new insights into current political constellations in the age of digitization and climate change. They are deeply rooted in anthropological and sociological methodologies and provide a thoroughly empirically grounded approach to the political that is very distant from those of political science or classical political theory. With reference to the fuzzy boundaries of the discipline that were identified at the outset, they help to specify a genuinely sociological way of doing

political sociology. To analyze a technological design process as a parliament of things (Latour, 1999), for instance, involves the symmetrical inclusion of voices other than politicians—for instance, professions such as economists, natural scientists, or even moralists—into the empirical reconstruction of politics. However, the relationship between science and politics indicated here is not simply an aspect of sociological analysis. This approach additionally provides guidelines as to how to bridge the gap between theory and political practice by offering tools for a mapping and public understanding of controversies (Venturini, 2010; Laser and Ochs, 2019).

Some German-language contributions to these questions and discussions have already been published in articles, books, and special issues (Gießmann et al., 2009; Lamla, 2016; Gertenbach et al., 2016; Gertenbach and Laux, 2019: 197–251; Vey et al., 2019). Compared to the early readings of Latour's political sociology (e.g., Lemke in Bröckling and Feustel, 2010: 273–293; Lindemann, 2009), which tend to oversimplify his arguments, later contributions have provided a quite sophisticated portrayal of his approach. They clearly show that the prior understanding of the postulate of symmetry—whereby all differences of power and competence are ignored, for instance—is just as misleading as the early criticism leveled at Latour for his equating of nonhuman with human actors. Contrary to this (sometimes very convenient) misunderstanding, the political needs to be conceptually and methodologically open to different kinds of actors and influences if it is to allow for an unbiased analysis of unequal power relations. Of course, such asymmetries do exist. To date, the literature has dealt predominantly with these kinds of theoretical or conceptual clarifications and explanations. However, an established school of empirical STS research is still lacking in German-language sociology. Political sociology could and should do more research in this direction, especially by studying material political issues and applying the recommended theoretical discussion to the political instead of just conceptually debating it. If this were to happen, the ever-shifting boundaries of the political would likely become a little more tangible.

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Qualitative Methods

Betina Hollstein and Nils C. Kumkar

Abstract: The article reviews the broad and diverse landscape of qualitative methods in sociology in German-speaking countries. Historically, the development of qualitative methods can be characterized by a strong focus on text-based, sequential analytical approaches such as objective hermeneutics, narrative analysis, and the documentary method. In the first section, we briefly sketch this development up to the turn of the century. In the second section, we describe the changes in the qualitative landscape after the millennium. Three major lines of development can be identified: First, qualitative approaches have become institutionalized and canonized and have been increasingly translated into English. Second, in conjunction with a heightened interest in theories of practice, constructivism, and post-structuralism, other methods have also gained ground in German-speaking countries, in particular ethnographic approaches, grounded theory, and discourse analysis, which has resulted in a much broader and diverse qualitative field. Third, this broader spectrum also encompasses the inclusion of new data types, specifically visual data and especially images and films. In the last section, we highlight current challenges and directions for future research.

Keywords: Data analysis, digitalization, methods, qualitative methods

Introduction

When we speak of qualitative methods, we are referring to a broad and heterogeneous research landscape that is not easy to capture in a comprehensive fashion. Among these methods are ethnographic approaches, different forms of observation, various interviewing techniques, and the collection of documents or archival data. At the same time, a host of methods are used for analysis that rest on various theoretical assumptions and methodological positions. Among them are symbolic interactionism, the sociology of knowledge, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and constructivism to name a few major approaches (Schützeichel, *MICROSOCIOLOGY*, this volume). In adhering to the “interpretive paradigm,” most of these approaches share some common ground despite many contentions: Their defining feature is the pivotal role assigned to the understanding of meaning (*Sinn-Verstehen*). Qualitative research aims to systematically reconstruct such meaning or, in other words, involves what in German has been coined as a methodically controlled understanding of the other (“*methodisch kontrolliertes Fremdverstehen*”; Arbeitsgruppe Bielefelder Soziologen, 1973). Qualitative approaches emphasize that making sense of action and meaning always relies on processes of interpretation and understanding.

In the following, we review qualitative methods in German-speaking countries, which is a particularly lively and innovative area of research. To better understand the latest developments in this field, we begin by briefly sketching its early years, which were shaped by a strong focus on text-based, sequential analytical methods. In the second section, we describe the changes in the qualitative landscape after the millennium—namely, canonization, a diversification of methods, and the inclusion of new kinds of data. In the final section, we highlight current challenges and directions for future research.

1 Early Development of Qualitative Methods in German-Speaking Countries

Until the 1970s, qualitative methods of empirical social research were applied almost exclusively in combination with quantitative methods in German-speaking countries. Examples of this are the seminal Marienthal study (Jahoda et al., 1933), Theodor W. Adorno and colleagues' investigations of the authoritarian personality (Adorno et al., 1950), or Hans Popitz'/Hans-Paul Bardt's et al. studies on workers' images of society conducted among the West German steel industry (1957). It was only in the 1970s that German-speaking sociologists started to discuss the theoretical foundations of the interpretive paradigm and qualitative methods on a broader basis, a phenomenon that was triggered by a working group of sociologists in Bielefeld who translated the major works of Aaron Cicourel, Herbert Blumer, and Harold Garfinkel (*Arbeitsgruppe Bielefelder Soziologen*, 1973). In the late 1970s and 1980s, creative efforts that drew on different theoretical traditions resulted in several innovative methods for collecting and analyzing qualitative data. These became the cornerstones of qualitative schools in German-language sociology.

Perhaps the most salient aspect of the qualitative methods developed during that period is the strong focus on a reconstructive analytical approach that interprets the transcripts of observations or interviews by proceeding by sequentially (i.e., word for word and line by line). In this way, reconstructive approaches, such as narrative analysis, objective hermeneutics, or the documentary method, enable researchers to distinguish between explicit knowledge (i.e., subjective representations) and tacit knowledge or action orientations that can be reconstructed as implicitly guiding and connecting the sequence of utterances. Furthermore, these methods allow one to account for the genesis of such action orientations to a certain extent (i.e., “how an individual develops certain ways of reacting to difficult situations and experiences in the past”) (Breckner and Rupp, 2002: 299; cf. also Wohlrab-Sahr, 2006).

For example, in drawing on basic distinctions made by linguistic theory, Fritz Schütze developed *narrative analysis*, which seeks to reconstruct so-called “elementary biographical process structures” (i.e., how people relate to external circumstances through their actions, such as “biographical action schemes” or “trajectories of

suffering”) and the sequence of such biographical process structures over the life course (Schütze, 2008). Central to this method is the distinction between different communicative schemes of representing past experiences and perceptions (i.e., extempore (impromptu) autobiographical narratives), in which individuals recount events in an unrestricted way on the one hand and offer descriptions and argumentations that are more strongly bound to social frames and the current situation on the other. To account for these differences, Schütze developed a specific method of data collection, the *narrative interview* (ibid.), which became a dominant means of collecting biographical data in German-speaking countries (Huinink/Hollstein, LIFE COURSE, this volume). The aim of this method is to primarily elicit (“trigger”) autobiographical stories with narrative stimuli, later followed by questions that prompt argumentations and evaluations. By comparing passages from extempore narratives with current interpretations documented in descriptions and argumentations, researchers are able to account for reinterpretations of experiences and events (Schütze, 2008: 171f.).

Objective hermeneutics, sometimes also called *structural hermeneutics*, was developed by Ulrich Oevermann and colleagues at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin (Oevermann et al., 1987 [1979]; cf. Garz and Kraimer, 1994; Wernet, 2014). It is perhaps the most elaborate sequential analytical method. Originally applied in a study on socialization and interaction processes in families, this method aims at reconstructing the inner logic and genesis of action and interaction systems. By drawing on structuralist thinking and George Herbert Mead’s writings, and in explicit opposition to the classic hermeneutic tradition, this method builds on the distinction between “subjective” (i.e., intended, conscious) meaning and so-called “latent” meaning that structures the subjects’ actions and interactions “behind their backs.”

Another strand of research that is particularly prominent in the German-speaking community is one that rests on the sociology of knowledge (Karstein/Wohlrab-Sahr, CULTURE, this volume). For example, the *documentary method*, a socio-genetic approach that follows the ideas set forth in Karl Mannheim’s work and was developed in the late 1980s by Ralf Bohnsack (2014a), builds on the distinction between explicit and implicit (atheoretical, incorporated) knowledge. This method aims to reconstruct the implicit knowledge of social actors and the orienting frames guiding their actions, (i.e., structures of meaning “beyond the literal or referential meaning content, but also beyond the communicative intentions of the interlocutors”) (ibid., 218). The documentary method focuses on collective orientation patterns and so-called “conjunctive experiences” that are shared by specific milieus or groups. To grasp these collective orientations, researchers typically employ non-directive *group discussions* with subjects who share a similar social background (cf. Loos and Schäffer, 2001).

Until the mid-1990s, text-based analytical methods clearly dominated the qualitative research landscape (cf. Garz and Kraimer, 1994; Hitzler and Honer, 1997). Whereas qualitative research is often associated with ethnography in the Anglo-Saxon world, ethnographic approaches were less visible and clearly subordinate in German-

speaking sociology at that time. However, ethnographic studies did exist (cf. Hirschauer and Amann, 1997), such as Karin Knorr-Cetina's ethnography on the "manufacture of knowledge" in U.S. scientific labs, a study quite significant in the establishment of so-called laboratory studies (1981); Roland Girtler's study on police work (1980); Bruno Hildenbrand's ethnography of families with schizophrenic family members (1983); or Jörg Bergmann's ethnomethodological study on gossiping as a discrete form of indiscretion (1987).

2 Major Developments after the Millennium

Since the turn of the century, several lines of development can be identified in German-speaking countries: Reconstructive approaches have become canonized and institutionalized. Apart from reconstructive methods, other methods have gained ground, in particular ethnographic approaches, grounded theory, and discourse analysis. This has resulted in a much broader and diverse qualitative landscape. Finally, this broader spectrum also encompasses the inclusion of new data types and areas of application, especially visual data such as images and films.

2.1 Canonization, institutionalization, and internationalization

In her article on the state of the Germanophone field of qualitative methods before 2000, Monika Wohlrab-Sahr concluded that a canonization of the different approaches was to be expected in the years that followed (Wohlrab-Sahr, 2000: 215), a prognosis that turned out to be true. Before 2000, familiarizing oneself with the different approaches often required one to personally join workshops and seminars held by the respective groups or to piece together their methodological development by working one's way through the chapters on methods in written reports on research projects, in collected volumes, and unpublished manuscripts (*ibid.*). Today, a number of textbooks and monographs is readily at hand. For example, the manual *Einführung in die Interpretationstechnik der objektiven Hermeneutik (Introduction to the Interpretation Technique of Objective Hermeneutics)* first published in 2000, provides the reader with an accessible beginner's guide to objective hermeneutics (Wernet, 2009). A compilation of major articles by Fritz Schütze (2016) is available, too. Ralf Bohnsack's *Praxeologische Wissenssoziologie (Praxeological Sociology of Knowledge)* (2017) offers a thorough discussion of the approach's theoretical development and its epistemological foundations.

At the same time, we can detect an increasing awareness of the commonalities of reconstructive and sequential analytical approaches. Bohnsack's *Rekonstruktive Sozialforschung (Reconstructive Social Research)*, first published in 1991 and now available in its ninth edition (2014b), introduces students and researchers to the general methodological stance of reconstructive social research, arguing for a theo-

retically consistent understanding of qualitative social research as reconstructive research. In a similar vein, the manual *Qualitative Sozialforschung (Qualitative Social Research)*, first published in 2008 (Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014), provides a practice-oriented and didactically sophisticated, systematic introduction to the different reconstructive approaches to qualitative social research, methods of data collection, and interpretation (cf. also Rosenthal, 2018; Strübing, 2013).

A large number of textbooks, monographs, and edited volumes on the collection and interpretation of specific types of data completes this picture—for example, on interviews (Helfferich, 2004), and more specifically, narrative interviews (Küsters, 2006), expert interviews (Bogner et al., 2002; Gläser and Laudel, 2010), problem-centered interviews (Witzel and Reiter, 2012), group discussions (Loos and Schäffer, 2001), focus groups (Kühn and Koschel, 2011), and ethnography (Dellwing and Prus, 2012; Breidenstein et al., 2013). In addition, peer-reviewed journals for qualitative methods channel and organize the lively discussion on the subject. Examples of these include the *Zeitschrift Qualitative Forschung (ZQF; Journal of Qualitative Research)*, *Sozialer Sinn (Social Meaning)*, and the multilingual, open-access *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung (FQS; Forum: Qualitative Social Research)*.

However, the Germanophone field of qualitative methods did not develop in isolation, of course. This was already true for its early phase before 2000; the reconstructive paradigm is inconceivable without the favorable reception of the writings of, for example, Harold Garfinkel, Aaron Cicourel, and Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Since 2000, the international interwovenness of the field has intensified—partially because younger scholars in particular are increasingly working and writing in English and because exchange students from all over the world study qualitative methods in German-speaking countries and vice versa, thus rendering the very definition of the ‘Germanophone’ field of qualitative methods somewhat problematic.¹

2.2 Diversification: “New” methods have gained a foothold

These processes of internationalization are bidirectional. While, on the one hand, translations and publications in different languages (mostly in English) made the methodological stance of Germanophone reconstructive research accessible to international discussion and a wider reception,² a host of ‘new’ methods that are in-

¹ At the very least, it does seem like a stretch to qualify the work of a Chinese social scientist, published in the English language, as ‘Germanophone qualitative social research’ simply because she uses the documentary method’s approach to the interpretation of films (Hao, 2016).

² For example, Schütze (2008) or Oevermann et al. (1987). See also the impressive list of foreign-language publications in the recently updated bibliographical list for the documentary method: <https://www.hsu-hh.de/systpaed/wp-content/uploads/sites/755/2020/01/LitdokMeth20-01-07.pdf>). A pioneering work was *Qualitative Methoden: Ein Handbuch* by Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardoff, and Ines Steinke (2000; translated into English in 2004).

creasingly used in German-speaking countries also attests to an increasing ‘import’ of methodological approaches developed in other international contexts. Qualitative approaches that were common in the Anglo-Saxon world, such as ethnographical approaches and grounded theory, gained a foothold in German-speaking countries, too. If qualitative methods in the German-speaking world were marked by a strong focus on text-based analysis and reconstructive methods up to the millennium, this has changed remarkably during the last two decades.

As mentioned above, *ethnographic methods* were never completely absent from Germanophone sociology before the turn of the century, but they were either limited to a few individual studies or merely used as an ancillary methodology for exploring and gaining ‘access’ to a field, which was then to be investigated using other methods. A heightened interest in practice theories and with it in *die Schweigsamkeit des Sozialen* (the reticence of the social; Hirschauer, 2001) has led to a productive and multifaceted engagement with ethnography over the last two decades.

These studies include works in the ethnomethodological tradition, such as Thomas Scheffer’s study on practices of granting asylum (2001) or the conversation-analytical studies by Christian Meyer, which have a strong focus on body language (2013). The latter vein encompasses studies on the relationship between the rhetorical practices of the Iroquois and their political organization, body language in sports, or interactions with dementia patients (Meyer, 2014).

Ethnographic studies also include the works of Stefan Hirschauer and Herbert Kalthoff, two former students of Knorr-Cetina, who employ a constructivist approach, for instance, when analyzing knowledge practices of risk-management strategies and calculation practices in banking (Kalthoff, 2011). In the research group on “un/doing differences,” funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), Hirschauer and his colleagues investigated practices of differentiation, that is, of “creation, overlap, and invalidation of cultural distinctions” (Hirschauer, 2014: 117) in various social contexts, such as the construction of gender in sports (Müller, 2014) or the grading practices of teachers in German high schools (Kalthoff, 2013; Karstein/Wohlrab-Sahr, *CULTURE*, this volume).

Building on Alfred Schütz’ and Thomas Luckmann’s sociology of knowledge, a distinct phenomenological approach has been institutionalized in German-speaking countries (Karstein/Wohlrab-Sahr, *CULTURE*, this volume) that encompasses different strands of ethnography. So-called *ethnographic lifeworld analysis* (Hitzler and Honer, 2015) is primarily concerned with the subjective experiences and bonding (*Vergemeinschaftung*) of social groups, such as the lifeworlds of youth cultures like punk, antifa, techno music, sport climbing, or veganism (Hitzler and Niederbacher, 2010). In contrast, *focused ethnography* (Knoblauch, 2005) aims at the detailed sequential analysis of certain social practices and communicative activities and is characterized by rather short visits in the field and the use of recordings that allow for intense analysis of such action (e.g., Microsoft PowerPoint presentations or commemoration rituals) (Knoblauch and Schnettler, 2012).

Besides ethnographic approaches, *grounded-theory methodology* has also experienced a considerable upswing in German-speaking countries in recent years in both its more pragmatic and its more constructivist variants. It needs to be mentioned in particular for its contributions to methodology and research practice (Strübing, 2004; Mey and Mruck, 2007; Equit and Hohage, 2016). *Qualitative content analysis* became more popular as well—a development that might have been accelerated by the advancements in qualitative data-analytical software tools (e.g., Kuckartz, 2018).³

Finally, *discourse analytical methods* that build on the (post-)structuralist work of Michel Foucault have gained tremendous momentum since the millennium. In recent years, a broad scene has established itself that has developed different variants of Foucault's discourse analysis (Keller et al., 2004; Diaz-Bone, 2006; Keller, 2007). As a specific German-language development, mention must also be made of the strand of discourse analysis linked to the sociology of knowledge that has been promoted in particular by Reiner Keller (Keller, 2007). In empirical studies, it is often combined with grounded-theory methodology. Topics range from discourses on garbage to human genetics and climate change (Keller et al., 2010).

2.3 New types of data: Visual sociology

In the last two decades, not only has the spectrum of methods expanded considerably but so have the types of data that are analyzed beyond the hitherto dominant focus on verbal data. One area in which differentiation and transfer to new data types is especially prominent is visual sociology (i.e., the analysis of visual data, especially images and films). This is also an area of innovation that developed in close contact with the international and chiefly Anglophone discourse: whereas the founding texts of the reconstructive methods sometimes took decades before they made their way into the international arena, the debate on the analysis of visual data was either already interwoven with the broader visual turn in sociological methods or at least translated for international collected volumes early on (e.g., Pauwels and Mannay, 2019; Knoblauch et al., 2008).

The central challenge that visual materials pose for reconstructive approaches is the synchronicity of the image (moving and still alike). All these approaches rely on sequential analytical methods for the interpretation of texts (be they interview transcripts, group discussions, conversations, or actual literary texts) to reconstruct meaning as it unfolds in time. This basic premise conflicts with the seemingly banal truth that an image is defined by the synchronicity of everything that is 'in its frame.' As Foucault writes, citing Condillac, "to my gaze 'the brightness is within the rose'; in my discourse, I cannot avoid it coming either before or after it" (Foucault, 1994: 82),

³ The software programs Atlas-ti, MaxQDA, and Feldpartitur (for the analysis of video data) have all been developed in Germany.

and this is true not only for the still but also for the moving image. While video records events and replays them in time, every ‘scene’ it depicts (or every still that it is frozen into) remains a composition of simultaneously existing elements.

This challenge is solved in various ways. Whereas hermeneutic approaches based on the sociology of knowledge (Raab, 2008) reestablish the principle of sequentiality by insisting on temporally structured processes of producing and especially reading an image, other methods proceed differently. For example, the documentary method, which builds on the science-of-arts approaches of Max Imdahl and Erwin Panofsky, interprets the meaning of the image through the (synchronous) compositional levels of planimetric composition, perspective projection, and scenic arrangement (Bohnsack, 2019), thereby putting special emphasis not so much on the processes of producing and reading but rather on the mimetic habitual aspect of experiencing the visual, the implicit understanding through (and not about) the image. Such a compositional (instead of sequential) approach proves especially well suited to understanding pictures as data whose special property is the synchronic unity of contradicting elements. In objective hermeneutics, by contrast, the question of whether compositional aspects are taken into account depends on the type of images (Oevermann, 2014). Two books that contain analyses of one particular picture—the famous photo of high-ranking members of the Obama administration sitting in the situation room at about the time when Bin Laden was killed—illustrate the different approaches (Kauppert and Leser, 2014; Przyborski and Haller, 2014). For instance, in his analysis, Oevermann eschews planimetric or other compositional aspects because he considers aesthetic composition to play only a minor role in photos of this kind (2014). He concentrates first and foremost on the immanent content of the photo and refers to any knowledge and context information beyond what is actually depicted (such as the names and status of the depicted persons) only at the very end of his analysis. In this analysis, his focus is on “making sense of what is observable” and the question of which other situations are portrayed in a similar way. These thought experiments result in rather surprising findings, such as that the *mise en scène* could also be a sports event, where people are engaged but not personally affected—which in light of the actual context (an execution) contributes to its downplaying and legitimization (*ibid.*). Other analyses that take into account the complex formal composition, perspective, and scenic choreography, such as the analysis by Aglaja Przyborski, which employs the documentary method (2014), or by Roswitha Breckner, which applies segment analysis (2014), reveal additional facets of the discrepancies between the factual status of the depicted actors and their position in the image (such as between Obama’s real-life status as POTUS and his rather insignificant position in the photograph itself), thus shedding light on a specific representation of political power.

Combining visual data with other documents can prove especially productive (Knappertsbusch/Langfeldt/Kelle, *MIXED-METHODS AND MULTIMETHOD RESEARCH*, this volume). For example, Kumkar (2018: especially 109–183) triangulates the documentary interpretation of the imagery used in propaganda from Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party with an interpretation of group discussions with activists. He

demonstrates that these methods can help to understand how images, via the simultaneity of contradictory elements, allow their recipients to have their cake and eat it too, so to speak. On the one hand, the images encourage the onlooker to identify with the implicated subject position by referring to their ‘negative’ emotions (like aggression), which are often repressed in the discourse of the respective groups. On the other hand, the images offer a symbolic relief from these negative emotions by transposing them into heroic postures (e.g., signing up for a greater cause).

Overall, visual sociology has become a lively and innovative part of qualitative methods with applications that draw on a wide spectrum of visual data and encompass political photos, advertisements, or fine art. For instance, everyday photography (e.g., Breckner, 2017; 2021; Müller, 2018) or genograms (Hildenbrand, 2004) have been used in biographical and family research. In addition, visual tools have been increasingly employed in data collections, such as in the qualitative analysis of personal and organizational social networks (e.g., Schönhuth et al., 2013; Häußling, *SOCIAL NETWORKS*, this volume).

Finally, the analysis of videos and films of different sorts has also become an area of broad interest in which reconstructive sequential analytical approaches have proven especially productive (e.g., Knoblauch et al., 2006; Kissmann, 2009; Knoblauch and Schnettler, 2012; Tuma et al., 2013).

3 Outlook: Qualitative Methods in the Digital Era

In general, the development of qualitative research methods in German-speaking sociology has been characterized by a strong orientation toward theory and a high level of methodological reflexivity (cf. e.g., Kalthoff et al., 2008; Hirschauer et al., 2018). The 1970s and 1980s saw the development of elaborate text-based sequential analytical methods. These included narrative analysis, objective hermeneutics, and the documentary method, which were almost exclusively applied in German-language qualitative research. This has changed since the millennium. Since then, sequential analytical methods—formerly restricted to German-language sociology—have been increasingly translated into English and have thus been made available to a wider audience. At the same time, a heightened interest in theories of practice, constructivism, and post-structuralism has contributed to methods such as ethnographic approaches, grounded theory, and discourse analysis gaining ground in German-speaking countries. These two trends have converged to create a broader and more internationalized qualitative landscape. This broader spectrum has also seen the inclusion of new data types, in particular visual data, such as images and films. In this regard, extensions of the heretofore text-based reconstructive methods to the analysis of images and films can be seen as a further specific contribution of the German-language research community.

The current challenges are related largely to the increasing digitalization of society. Although the digitalization of qualitative research itself has made important

advancements, with the most prominent probably being the development and widespread use of software programs such as Atlas/ti, MaxQDA, or Feldpartitur, discussion and methodological innovation with regard to the collection and interpretation of digitalized data has just started within the German-speaking qualitative community. This is especially true if compared with the discussion on big data, computational social sciences, and data mining that has been led by scholars in the quantitative realm (Barth/Blasius, *QUANTITATIVE METHODS*, this volume).

Empirical studies in substantive areas of research are increasingly tapping into virtual reality, digital (especially Internet) data, and the use of social media. Particular mention should be made of media and communication research (Hepp, *MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION*, this volume), the sociology of technology (Rammert, *TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION*, this volume), or network and migration research, such as Heike Greschke's ethnographic study on the everyday life and use of virtual space of migrants (2009).

However, methodological reflections on this special type of data and what it means for qualitative methods—particularly in terms of its specific analytical benefits—still remain a subordinate field of discussion. Notable exceptions in this regard are contributions on the use of asynchronous written online communication for qualitative inquiries (Schiek and Ullrich, 2017), the interpretation of Instagram posts (Schreiber and Kramer, 2016), YouTube videos (Geimer and Burckhardt, 2017), or photos on Facebook (Breckner, 2021), and more general discussions of virtual (Marotzki et al., 2014) or Internet data (Rammert and Schubert, 2006; Schirmer et al., 2015; Müller, 2018).

Since large amounts of digital data, especially on the Internet, are qualitative (textual or visual) data, methods specifically designed for the proper analysis of such data with the aim of understanding its meaning and demonstrating a high degree of sensitivity toward the context of its production and interpretation have much more potential than has been realized so far. In this context, ethnographic approaches and sequential analytical methods as developed in German-language sociology seem to be especially powerful tools to not only address and better understand digital traces and the limits of big data analysis but also to foster fruitful cooperation across fields and disciplines—for instance, between sociology and cognitive and computational sciences. There is a lot of work ahead to be sure, but there is also a strong foundation on which to build.

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Quantitative Methods

Alice Barth and Jörg Blasius

Abstract: Our article discusses recent developments in quantitative data collection and multivariate statistical analysis in quantitative social research. German-speaking authors have contributed heavily to the field of survey methodology and to discussions on the quality of data and the integration of survey data and digital trace data. We begin by discussing new developments in data collection. Afterwards we present a classification scheme for multivariate methods of analysis and discuss the state of the art in the most important areas, namely, regression, classification, clustering, and scaling. In terms of longitudinal data, we review recent contributions to the analysis of panel data, time series, event histories, and sequences. Further focal points are methods for the analysis of multilevel data and the opportunities and challenges arising from an increasing use of big data in the social sciences.

Keywords: Multivariate analysis methods, data collection, big data, longitudinal data

1 Overview

Quantitative social research applies statistical methods to analyse observable phenomena. Whereas in qualitative social research the process of data collection is usually intertwined with theory building and data analysis (Hollstein/Kumkar, QUALITATIVE METHODS, in this volume), in quantitative studies these steps are carried out successively. Upon completing the theoretical work of formulating hypotheses (or assumptions, depending on the epistemological framework) and operationalizing concepts, the quantitative researcher defines the population to be studied, chooses a sampling method, and—in survey research only—designs the questionnaire. These steps are followed by the actual fieldwork, in which interviews are conducted or data is collected from other sources, such as documents, observations, experiments, and websites. Before the start of data analysis, the data have to be cleaned, for example, by excluding records with too many missing values and checking for possible errors and inconsistencies.

Raw data in quantitative social research can be understood as a large table of numbers, often with hundreds of variables in columns and thousands of cases in rows. With the aid of quantitative statistical methods, one can summarize information in the dataset into tables, graphs, and meaningful numeric information to answer research questions. Data analysis usually starts with univariate and bivariate descriptions, followed by multivariate analyses.

In this review, we summarize recent contributions of authors from German-speaking countries on the topics of multivariate statistical methods and data collection in quantitative social research. In light of the large range and variety of quanti-

tative methods used in the social sciences, the review mainly aims to give an overview of publications that introduce and discuss multivariate quantitative methods by using examples from social science research. Advanced statistical discussions such as the development of pure algorithms are beyond our scope.

2 New Developments in Data Collection and Survey Methodology

Despite surveys having been one of the most important data sources in the quantitative social sciences for almost a century, the art of collecting high-quality survey data is still a thriving area of research. A general, comprehensive introduction is *The Sage Handbook of Survey Methodology*, edited by Wolf et al. (2016). It leads readers through the process of conducting a survey step by step: from the planning of surveys to sampling and measurement, data collection, and processing, through to assessing data quality. A main feature of the handbook is its broad perspective, not just focusing on methods but also emphasizing the relationship of social science surveys to their surrounding societies and current developments. Another recently published volume, edited by Engel et al. (2015), is more specialized in its focus on different survey methods and how to improve them. Their book *Improving Survey Methods* concentrates on different survey modes and related response effects, web surveys (including access panels), the measurement of sensitive questions, interviewer effects, and missing data. Contributors to both volumes are well-known international experts in their field.

Another good overview of methods in standardized surveys is the textbook *Survey Interviews* by Schnell (2019, second edition). Schnell summarizes the state of research in all relevant areas of survey methodology and thus provides a concise introduction for those who want to get acquainted with the process of planning and conducting surveys.

The problem of non-response bias, a perennial issue in survey methodology, is discussed in detail in a volume edited by Schupp and Wolf (2015). They have assembled a number of contributions that deal with recent research regarding (non-) response rates and determinants in well-known social science surveys, such as the European Social Survey (ESS), as well as nonresponse bias in different survey modes.

There are several recent books and articles that focus on methods of data collection. The volume edited by Häder, Häder, and Schmich (2019) on telephone interviews assembles new findings from all over Europe on coverage, sampling strategies, weighting, and error corrections when conducting interviews by landline and mobile phones. Another method that has been rapidly gaining currency over the last two decades is web surveys. Here, discussions revolve around the challenge of drawing representative samples for online surveys (Blom et al., 2016; Bosnjak et al., 2018), the implications of technical and design features that are unique to online surveys

(Meitinger, Braun, and Behr, 2018; Gummer, Roßmann, and Silber, 2018), and the increasing number of respondents who complete web surveys using mobile devices (Liebe et al., 2015; Struminskaya, Weyandt, and Bosnjak, 2015). The latter development also facilitates the use of new data sources, such as collecting data on geolocation, accelerometer, or browser history from smartphones via apps (Keusch et al., 2019). The collection of digital traces left by humans can also take place via websites, social media platforms, or sensors (see section 5 on big data for further discussion). Other alternatives to survey data are data produced by processes external to scientific research, such as administrative data (primarily collected by government entities) or transaction data. In particular, the integration of such data with socio-demographic characteristics or other information obtained by way of ‘classical’ surveys offers many possibilities for social science research (Stier et al., 2019).

Another important issue that has generated a large number of discussions in the international context is the quality of survey data (Menold and Wolbring, 2019). Data quality depends to a great extent on the behavior of respondents, interviewers, and survey institutes. With regard to respondents, suboptimal response behavior in quantitative surveys is frequently discussed under the term *satisficing*. Roßmann (2017) provides a comprehensive summary of the theory and state of research on satisficing while also presenting new modeling strategies based on an empirical study. The reader by Winker, Menold, and Porst (2013) focuses on interviewers’ deviations in surveys. Other recent contributions to this topic are Durrant and D’Arrigo (2014) on doorstep interactions and West et al. (2018) on conversational interviewing. A synthesis of the literature on interviewer effects is provided by West and Blom (2017). Blasius and Thiessen (2018) argue that interviewers’ falsifications are not a marginal problem at all; even surveys such as the ESS are affected to such an extent that some countries should be excluded from the analysis. The role of institutions in fabricating survey data has been analyzed by Blasius and Thiessen (2012, 2015) using the World Values Survey and data from the Program for International Student Assessment’s (PISA) 2009 survey.

3 Multivariate Data Analysis

Quantitative analyses usually start with the description of the data, giving the basic information on some univariate distributions and bivariate associations. For testing hypotheses and showing complex relationships between many variables, there are almost innumerable variants of multivariate methods available and numerous ways to classify them. In the following, we present a classification of multivariate methods in a cross-sectional perspective. The different methods are distinguished on three levels that are shown in Figure 1.

At the first level, there is the distinction between *function*—that is, working mainly with directly observed variables, such as age, gender, and educational level—and

		Function			
		<i>Regression</i>		<i>Classification</i>	
		$y \approx f(x)$		$g \approx f(x)$	
		Regression analysis		Logistic regression	
		Analysis of variance		Logit analysis	
Continuous		<i>Scaling</i>		<i>Clustering</i>	
		$x \rightarrow y_1, y_2, \dots$		$g \rightarrow y_1, y_2, \dots$	
		Factor analysis		Cluster analysis	
		Correspondence analysis		Latent class analysis	
		Structure			
				Categorical	

Figure 1: Overview of multivariate methods

structure, which indicates the integration of latent, not directly observable variables (e.g., the level of anomie or the intelligence quotient).

At the second level, a distinction is made as to whether the *dependent variable* is *categorically* (including dichotomous) or *continuously* scaled. Furthermore, categorically scaled variables are usually subdivided into ordered and unordered categorical variables (not shown in Figure 1). Figure 1 distinguishes four groups of procedures:

- The dependent variable is continuously scaled: in this case researchers usually apply different forms of regression analysis.
- The dependent variable is categorically scaled: most often applied in this case are forms of logistic regression analysis, sometimes multinomial logistic regression, and in the past discriminant analysis.
- The latent variable is continuously scaled: in this case scaling methods are applied, such as correspondence analysis, factor analysis, or its more sophisticated version, structural equation modeling (often just called SEM).
- The latent variable is categorically scaled: in this case clustering methods and forms of latent class analysis can be applied.

In each of these four groups, a distinction is made at the level of the independent variables between categorically or continuously scaled variables. Another level of distinction (not shown in Figure 1) concerns the question of causality—whether or not the assumption is made that independent characteristics influence dependent ones. To determine causal effects, panel data analysis or event history analysis are often applied. The aforementioned procedures can also be combined with other methods (e.g., when the factor scores from a scaling method are used in regression analysis).

Some recent books provide good overviews of different multivariate methods. Good introductions to various techniques are given in the *Handbuch sozialwissenschaftlicher Datenanalyse (Handbook of Social Science Data Analysis)*, edited by Wolf and Best (2010). The book consists of forty chapters with a comprehensive presentation of multivariate techniques of analysis. Its main focus is on the basics of data analysis, regression analysis methods for cross-sectional and longitudinal data, and scaling methods. Alongside the presentation of various regression methods, the book also discusses structural equation models, multilevel modeling, latent class analysis, longitudinal methods, multidimensional scaling, Rasch models, and multiple imputation. It also covers general topics such as data cleaning, missing values, weighting, and quality criteria. The chapters start with a general introduction, followed by a presentation of the mathematical-statistical basics. Subsequently, each method is illustrated by an example from the social sciences.

The textbook *Multivariate Analysemethoden (Multivariate Analysis Methods)* by Backhaus et al. (2018) is now in its fifteenth edition and is one of the most widely used introductions to multivariate data analysis in the German language. This volume covers nine basic methods of multivariate data analysis such as regression analysis and cluster analysis. Each chapter can be read independently; for each method, an example in SPSS is provided. A second volume entitled *Fortgeschrittene Multivariate Analysemethoden (Advanced Multivariate Analysis Methods)* by Backhaus, Erichson, and Weiber (2015) covers seven additional methods, such as nonlinear regression, multidimensional scaling, and correspondence analysis. Whereas the chapters in Wolf and Best (2010) are all written by different experts using different examples, the two volumes by Backhaus et al. are written by the same authors and consistently use the same small dataset that allows for a direct comparison of the various methods. Readers from the social sciences may not be overly interested in their example (purchasing patterns of spreadable fats), but the application-oriented form of presenting it makes it easy to transfer the methods' principles to questions and problems in the social sciences.

Since 2010, Matiaske and Spieß have been the executive editors of a new series called *Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschungsmethoden (Social Science Research Methods)*, which targets readers from the humanities, social sciences, and economics. Over roughly one hundred pages each, the contributions give an introduction to different statistical methods, but the books also treat the statistical foundations as well as their applications in various fields. To date fifteen books have been published, covering topics such as explorative and descriptive data analysis using R (Burkhardt and Sedlmeier, 2015) as well as multidimensional scaling (Borg, Groenen, and Mair, 2010).

3.1 Regression and classification

There are several variants of regression analysis. If the model mainly consists of manifest variables on the first level (left and right upper quadrant in Figure 1) and if

the dependent variable is continuously scaled, then we speak of regression approaches (left upper quadrant). If the dependent variable is manifest and categorically scaled, classification approaches are used (right upper quadrant). In case of a dichotomous dependent variable—for example, the question of voter participation in the last federal election (with the answer options “yes” and “no”)—the model of choice is often binary logistic regression, whereas a dependent variable with more than two categories necessitates multinomial logistic regression.

A good textbook for these methods is *Angewandte Regressionsanalyse: Theorie, Technik und Praxis (Applied Regression Analysis: Theory, Technique, and Practice)* by Urban and Mayerl (2018, fifth edition). This textbook explains the implementation and interpretation of classical and of logistic regression analysis. The book concentrates in particular on the conditions necessary for applying these methods; it also shows common misclassifications and misinterpretations. In addition, it discusses advanced methods such as power analysis, dummy variable regressions, and model estimates with moderator and mediator variables. The form of the presentation is practice-oriented; all procedures are explained using examples from the social sciences and are accompanied by instructions demonstrating how to conduct the analyses in SPSS.

The *Sage Handbook of Regression and Causal Inference*, edited by Best and Wolf (2014), also provides a good overview of regression and classification approaches in several chapters. The main focus is on regression analysis of cross-sectional and longitudinal data, with an emphasis on causal analysis. To understand the mathematical foundations that follow the overviews in most chapters, readers need a deep understanding of statistics and matrix notation. The chapters close with brief empirical examples from the ESS or the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP).

3.2 Clustering methods

Latent variables are not directly observed but computed on the basis of a set of manifest variables. Clustering methods imply a latent variable that is unordered categorical, thus classifying the data into several groups. The goal of cluster analysis is to assign each object to exactly one cluster; the clustering can be done by row (persons, institutions, etc.) or by column (variables, variable categories, etc.). The individual clusters should be as homogeneous as possible (i.e., the variance within the clusters should be minimal) while the clusters should differ as much as possible (i.e., the variance between the clusters should be maximal). In other words, cluster analysis serves to group a large number of objects (persons or variables) together. A good introduction to cluster analysis methods in the German language is provided by Bacher, Pöge, and Wenzig (2010, third edition).

Similar to cluster analysis, latent class analysis tries to identify previously unobserved groups based on patterns in a set of variables. In latent class analysis, the assignment to groups is probabilistic—thus, each object or person has a certain probability of belonging to a specific cluster. Latent class analysis is a model-based

procedure, allowing tests for the goodness of fit of the solution (in particular, the number of clusters) by a variety of fit indices mostly based on log-likelihood statistics. While there are chapters on this method in the reader by Wolf and Best (2010), the international discussion has almost exclusively been in English and has mostly been advanced by authors from the Netherlands and the US. Two current empirical applications by German-speaking authors are Barth and Trübner (2018) and Grunow, Beggall, and Buchler (2018), who use latent class analysis to assess different patterns of attitudes towards gender roles in Germany and Europe, respectively.

3.3 Scaling methods

Scaling methods are used in the case of continuously scaled latent variables (usually with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one). If the manifest variables are continuously scaled as well, factor analysis or principal component analysis can be applied. A classic example is the determination of intelligence quotients. The methods provide factor scores (i.e., all respondents receive values on the extracted latent variables). The resulting variables can be used for further analyses, for example, in regression models.

An advanced form of factor analysis is structural equation modeling, which enables the specification of causal effects between the manifest and latent variables as well as between latent variables. Very good and detailed introductions have been provided by Reinecke (2014, second edition) and Urban and Mayerl (2014). A practice-oriented introduction using Mplus has been provided by Kleinke, Schlüter, and Christ (2017, second edition) and an introduction using R by Steinmetz (2015, second edition). A current methodological application of structural equation modeling—adapted to multilevel data structures (see section 4)—is the assessment of measurement (non-) equivalence across groups, for example, in cross-cultural research (among others, Davidov et al., 2015, 2018).

In many cases, survey data may not even presume an ordinal data level (e.g., when assessing features of lifestyle or political preferences); in these cases, multiple correspondence analysis is the most appropriate instrument for scaling the data. An introduction into this method is given by Blasius (2001), and some recent research can be found in Blasius and Greenacre (2014) as well as in a special issue of the *Italian Journal of Applied Statistics*, edited by Balbi, Blasius, and Greenacre (2017).

4 Longitudinal Data

While the methods discussed up to this point are mainly used for the analysis of cross-sectional data, their general ideas can be extended to the analysis of longitudinal data such as panel data, event history data, time series data, and repeated cross-sectional data.

4.1 Panel data analysis

German-speaking countries have experienced a huge growth in large-scale social science panel surveys in recent years, including the GSOEP, the Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics (pairfam), and the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS). This has brought forth multiple discussions on the analysis of longitudinal data, both in terms of methods for assessing intra-individual change and causal relationships over time and in regard to measuring and controlling survey errors unique to panel data, such as panel attrition and conditioning.

A comprehensive introduction to the analysis of panel data for applied researchers is provided by Andreß, Golsch, and Schmidt (2013). The authors discuss data management and the modeling of continuous and categorical dependent variables, covering fixed and random effects models, models for change scores, impact functions, and event history models, with many application examples taken from academic research. Giesselmann and Windzio (2012) present an easily comprehensible textbook on regression models for the analysis of panel data that is particularly helpful in choosing between random effects, fixed effects, and hybrid models depending on the research question. Expanding the structural equation methodology to longitudinal data, latent growth curve models have gained in popularity in the last decades. Reinecke (2012) discusses the backgrounds, model specification, and estimation of latent growth curve models using examples and applying the MPlus software.

There are many significant contributions from German-speaking social scientists concerning the application of panel data to empirical problems. Reinecke (2013) among many others discusses variants of growth curve and growth mixture models, especially with regard to criminological panel data; Gangl and Ziefle (2009) assess wage penalties for motherhood in Great Britain, Germany, and the United States using fixed effects regression; and Schlüter, Schmidt, and Wagner (2008) use a latent autoregressive cross-lagged design to investigate the causal order of perceived group threat and outgroup derogation.

Another important area of research concerns the components of survey errors in panel studies. First, there is panel conditioning: Substantial responses as well as response behavior may be altered dependent on participation in earlier waves, but the conditions of occurrence and the magnitude of this effect are still widely unknown. Bergmann (2015) provides a detailed review of the state of research and derives hypotheses on the mode of action as well as the effects of panel conditioning from the cognitive sciences. His empirical evidence points to non-negligible effects of panel participation on attitudes, knowledge structures, and response behavior. Linking administrative and panel survey data, Bach and Eckman (2019) demonstrate that survey participation affects respondents' actual labor market behavior: Compared to those not participating in the survey, panel respondents are more likely to take up federal labor market programs such as training or education courses.

Second, panel studies may suffer from attrition. As a result of non-contact, refusal, relocations, or other reasons, respondents drop out of the sample over time. Analogous to panel conditioning, the vital question is whether panel attrition is selective and may, as a consequence, introduce bias in substantive results. The magnitude and patterns of attrition differ between panel studies and countries (Behr, Bellgardt, and Rendtel, 2005). As panel data provide information on respondents from earlier waves, the application of longitudinal weights and the statistical modeling of selective dropouts have proven to be effective measures to reduce bias in estimates (Rendtel and Harms, 2009).

4.2 Event history and sequence analysis

Another type of longitudinal data are event history data. These data are collected historically on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, for example, the month in which familial or occupational status changes. Methods for analyzing patterns of events over time include event history analysis (sometimes referred to as survival analysis) and sequence analysis. Whereas in event history analysis the main objectives are to estimate the probability of specific transitions or durations and to investigate causal relationships, sequence analysis is directed at exploring, classifying, and comparing different trajectory patterns. Blossfeld, Rohwer, and Schneider (2019, second edition) have provided an introduction to conducting event history analysis using Stata. In step-by-step instructions with many examples, the book covers the entire research process from data collection to the analyses of the event history data and the interpretation of the results. Its focus is mainly on parametric methods. A good overview of recent developments in sequence analysis can be found in Brzinsky-Fay and Kohler (2010) as well as in Aisenbrey and Fasang (2010). Among German social scientists, the most prominent area of application of both event history and sequence analysis is life course research, assessing, for example, the relation between unemployment and fertility in different socio-economic groups (Kreyenfeld and Andersson, 2014) or changes in the division of housework in married couples (Grunow, Schulz, and Blossfeld, 2012).

4.3 Time series analysis

Another type of longitudinal data are time series data: long (at least thirty to forty measurement occasions), ordered data measured at equally spaced points in time, for example, unemployment data, economic data, or election data. Although the majority of publications come from economics, there is an increasing number of social scientists working with this kind of data. While there are a number of textbooks on time series analysis that require advanced mathematical skills, Thome (2005) designed his textbook as an application-oriented introduction for (advanced) students, teachers,

and research practitioners, requiring only basic knowledge of descriptive and inferential statistics. The book starts with the classical methods of breaking down time series into different components (such as trend and cycle). In the second step, the time series are interpreted as stochastic processes, which can be modeled in the context of the Box–Jenkins approach; these are the so-called autoregressive integrated moving average (ARIMA) models. Finally, time series models are expanded so that they can also identify and represent causal relationships. The respective process steps are explained using examples from research practice. A concise and application-oriented introduction to time series analysis using R is provided by Schlittgen and Sattarhoff (2020). The examples used mostly stem from the field of economics, but the book is helpful as an overview and a guide to practitioners from the social sciences as well.

5 Multilevel Data

When data are organized in a hierarchical structure (e.g., pupils nested in school classes, their teachers nested in schools, their schools nested in counties, and counties nested in countries), multilevel modeling can—and often should—be applied. Langer (2009, second edition) has written a textbook on multilevel analysis that provides examples from empirical education research, in particular the PISA studies. Alongside a historical introduction to modeling in context analysis, the book discusses the analysis of panel data as a multilevel structure (individuals nested in time points) and gives detailed instructions for the empirical application of multilevel models using SPSS and the freeware MLR.

A concise introduction in the form of a journal article is provided by Steenbergen and Jones (2002) in the *American Journal of Political Science*. It discusses the logic and the statistical background of the general two-level linear multilevel model and some submodels and gives an example of assessing support for the European Union using a three-level model (individuals, political parties, and countries). Two recent special issues of the *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* discuss the theory and methodology of multilevel analyses in regional contexts (Friedrichs and Nonnenmacher, 2014) and in cross-national comparative research (Andreß, Fetchenhauer, and Meulemann, 2019). They both provide a wide range of empirical examples. An article by Schmidt-Catran and Fairbrother (2015) addresses common misspecifications in multilevel models for the investigation of longitudinal comparative survey data.

6 Big Data

The significance of big data for social science research has been one of the most discussed subjects in the last decade, with a strong annual increase in the last five years. In general, data are considered “big” when they are digitally available and exceed the capacities of conventional analysis software owing to their large volume

and complexity. Recent volumes on big data in social science research share the goals of introducing methods for analysis, providing examples of best practice, and discussing implications of big data for social science research in general. As such, they all provide introductions to the subject of big data, albeit with different priorities.

The *Handbook of Big Data*, edited by Bühlmann et al. (2016), largely focuses on analysis techniques for large-scale datasets. In twenty-four chapters, various authors from the fields of mathematics, statistics, social sciences, and computer science discuss how datasets that challenge traditional methods of analysis by their sheer size can be explored, visualized, and analyzed using efficient algorithms, graphs, and machine-learning approaches. Particularly readers with a background in statistics will profit from learning how familiar methods such as regression analysis, structural equation modeling, algorithms based on singular value decomposition, and various other estimation methods can be adapted to sparse and complex datasets.

The volume *Computational Social Science. Die Analyse von Big Data*, edited by Behnke et al. (2018), provides a large number of examples of social science research with big data. The handbook compiles a series of case studies using big data in political science, epistemological reflections, and introductions to various analysis methods and software. The main focus of the book is on text mining and analysis of textual data, for example, sentiment analysis of users' evaluations of politicians in online media, the classification of parliamentary discourse, or the use of Twitter data in political communication research.

Finally, *Computational Social Science in the Age of Big Data*, edited by Stuetzer, Welker, and Egger (2018), has a large focus on aspects of the research process such as approaches to data collection, technical implementation, and data storage. Further, the volume presents epistemological perspectives and case studies on big data, and a tutorial section provides hands-on manuals for learning analytics and geospatial analysis of social media data.

One variant of big data is digital, automatically collected process data. In the context of web surveys, "collateral data" such as timestamps, keystrokes, or mouse clicks are discussed using the term *paradata*. In the compendium *Improving Surveys with Paradata* (2013), editor Kreuter notes in her preface that "paradata are a key feature of the 'big data' revolution for survey researchers and survey methodologists." The volume presents a comprehensive overview of the uses of paradata, including survey error investigation, paradata-driven adaptations, studying and improving the response process, modeling strategies for different kinds of paradata, and the investigation of paradata quality. Although not all survey paradata amount to big data in terms of volume, their often complex and unstructured nature poses similar challenges to analysis.

In addition, there is a wide range of substantial applications of big data research by social scientists from German-speaking countries. Just to mention a few examples: Schmitz et al. (2009) combine data on e-mail contacts with a survey to assess indicated and revealed mate preferences in online dating; Wagner et al. (2016) assess

gender biases in Wikipedia; and Weller et al. (2014) edited a volume on *Twitter and Society*.

The growing popularity of big data in social science research has also sparked controversial discussions on the potential and limitations of analysis. For example, Jungherr et al. (2017) argue that Twitter data are valid for the measurement of the temporal dynamics of attention toward politics but regard attempts to infer public opinion or even election results from Twitter as highly questionable. Besides the realization that big data is not yet to replace “traditional” representative polls and social surveys entirely, such controversies also point to the importance of decisions concerning sampling, cleaning, and processing the data and to the need for transparently documenting the research process. In addition, analyses using big data raise vital questions of data protection, privacy, and informed consent (Kreuter et al., 2018; Mühlichen, 2018).

7 Summary: Contributions of Authors from German-Speaking Countries

Scientific discussions of quantitative methods mainly take place in international journals. This being the case, there is no specific discussion of quantitative methods in *German*, yet there have been important contributions to these debates by authors based in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. In particular, German-speaking countries have a longstanding tradition of research on structural equation modeling and various methods for the analysis of longitudinal data. The wealth of large-scale social science surveys and the location of GESIS, Europe’s largest infrastructure institute for the social sciences, in Mannheim and Cologne means that many leading experts in the area of survey methodology are based in these countries. In addition, German-speaking authors figure prominently as editors of introductory volumes to the analysis of big data in the social sciences and as authors of works that present methodologically innovative, substantial applications of research with big data.

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Religion

Matthias Koenig

Abstract: This essay discusses recent trends in the German-language sociology of religion. It traces how strong theoretical roots and intensive empirical scrutiny of East-West differences after German reunification have produced distinctive contributions to the international debate about secularization theory and its long-held assumptions about religious decline, privatization, and differentiation. Their result has been a deliberate move towards middle-range theories that analyze contextually situated processes of religious transformation across a wide range of modern societies. The essay also reviews novel trends in empirical research emerging from dialogue and competition with neighboring disciplinary fields (e.g., migration studies) and discusses novel attempts to theorize cultural processes of sacralization and discursive formations of religion that, jointly, have pushed the field even more beyond the secularization debate. In conclusion, the essay suggests some directions in which the sociology of religion might be moving – in Germany and elsewhere.

Keywords: Church, migration, religion, sociology of religion, secularization

1 Introduction

As elsewhere in Europe, the sociology of religion in German-speaking countries has gone through several phases since the postwar period (see Koenig and Wolf, 2013; Pollack, 2015). In the first phase (the 1950s and 1960s), scholarship was largely conducted within Catholic or Protestant research institutions and prioritized empirical research on determinants of religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices in industrial society. Famously criticized for its narrow focus on “church sociology” (*Kirchensoziologie*) and its practical-theological interests, it was superseded by a second, “neo-classical” phase (the 1970s and 1980s). Sociologists of Christianity situated church sociology’s empirical findings within broader cultural histories of Protestantism (Joachim Matthes, Trutz Rendtorff) and Catholicism (Karl Gabriel, Franz-Xaver Kaufmann). A thriving exegetical literature explored the founding figures of the German sociology of religion, the historical-critical edition of Max Weber’s monumental sociology of religion being its primary achievement. Social theorists, in turn, interpreted the fate of religion in modernity through secularization narratives, with these being conceived in terms of communicative rationalization (Jürgen Habermas) or functional differentiation (Niklas Luhmann). In the third phase (from the 1990s onward), the quasi-paradigmatic status that secularization theory enjoyed within the field has come under attack in light of vigorous public controversies over a putative resurgence of religion, rising fundamentalism, and the challenges of religious diversity. The secularization debate has entailed intense conceptual battles over substantial versus

functional definitions of religion that undergird different accounts of religious transformation in modernity. At the same time, it has also raised the standards of empirical evidence in quantitative as well as qualitative research that is invoked to bolster theories of religious transformation. Indeed, long a rather marginal subfield, the sociology of religion has become thoroughly institutionalized and professionalized in this third phase. Universities have established specialized chairs and have created collaborative research centers for the sociology of religion, while scholars have pursued diversified research agendas within their own section of the German Sociological Association (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie, DGS) and have consolidated their knowledge by compiling major handbooks (e.g., Pollack et al., 2018). The field has entered into closer dialogue—and into new competition—with neighboring disciplines from anthropology to history and political science, where religion has gained renewed attention as an object of study as well, and it has become thoroughly internationalized in terms of collaborative networks and publication strategies.

This essay discusses recent trends in the German-language sociology of religion by reviewing major publications since 2005.¹ It starts by identifying some distinctive contributions to the secularization debate before exploring novel trends in empirical research (e.g., migration and religion) and theory building (e.g., Hans Joas or Wolfgang Eßbach) that jointly have pushed the field beyond that debate. In conclusion, the essay suggests some directions in which the sociology of religion might be moving after its third phase.

2 Distinctive Contributions to the Secularization Debate

The secularization debate in the international sociology of religion has critically scrutinized long-held assumptions that modernity would inevitably lead to the decline of religious beliefs, to the privatization of religious practices, and to an increased functional differentiation of religion from politics and other social systems (Casanova, 1994). German-language sociology of religion has discussed these three assumptions from distinctive perspectives, given its strong theoretical roots and its intense empirical engagement with East–West differences after German unification in 1990.

First, when criticizing the assumption of *religious decline*, German-speaking sociologists of religion have drawn less on the new religious economics, so prominent in

¹ This essay covers only monographs and journal articles while excluding edited volumes and book chapters. Given its purpose of providing an international audience with insight into trends in the German-language sociology of religion, it predominantly focuses on monographs and articles published in the German language—except for those authors who, while being institutionally based in Austria, Germany, or Switzerland, publish almost exclusively in English. The essay selectively draws upon and considerably updates Koenig and Wolf (2013). The author thanks Ines Michalowski and the editors of this special issue for helpful comments and suggestions.

North America (for an exception, see Kern and Pruisken, 2018), and more on Luckmann's phenomenological theory of "invisible religion." According to that theory, modernity entails not only the decline of institutional religion but also the rise of highly individualized religiosity that selectively draws from a mass-cultural storehouse of meaning. To detect traces of invisible religion in contemporary culture, sociologists of religion have studied biographies, communicative genres, and media discourses by using advanced methods of qualitative or interpretative social research. The most prominent proponent of this line of research, Hubert Knoblauch (2009), has advanced a non-binary, processual concept of transcendence to discern the rise of (modern) popular religion. Facilitated by educational expansion and new technologies of communication, he argues, popular religion comprises various phenomena—New Age beliefs, esotericism, occultism, pilgrimage, Pentecostalism, and so forth—that all share a subjectivist spirituality and blur the boundaries between religion and non-religion, the private and the public.

By contrast, quantitative researchers have tended to defend secularization theory's assumption about modernity's inherent incompatibility with religious beliefs (e.g., Pollack, 2009: 19–149; Pickel, 2010; Meulemann, 2015; 2019). Cross-national and national surveys, including some unique datasets such as the church membership surveys regularly conducted by the Protestant Church in Germany (*Kirchenmitgliedschaftsuntersuchung [KMU]*, since 1972) or, more recently, the Bertelsmann Foundation's cross-national population surveys (*Religionsmonitor*, since 2007), have indeed consistently documented decreasing church affiliation, beliefs, and practices alongside increasing religious indifference, thus indicating a massive decline of institutional religion. Moreover, these surveys have allowed researchers to assess the theory of invisible religion by including some—albeit arguably rather crude—measures of subjective spirituality and diffuse religiosity (see, notably, Siegers, 2012). While observable at moderate levels, subjectivist spirituality and diffuse religiosity do not seem to compensate for the decline of institutional religion as posited by individualization theorists; if anything, or so these scholars argue, they prevail among the institutionally affiliated (Pollack, 2009). Incidentally, proponents of the secularization thesis have found even less evidence for the North American market model and its prediction of supply-side-driven religious vitality. Comparisons across various Western and Eastern European countries do not indicate any strong positive effects of religious plurality and religious deregulation on rates of religious participation (Pickel, 2010).

Interestingly, critics and proponents of the assumption of religious decline have tended to agree in their description of persistent religious differences between East and West Germany. Unlike in the West, where three-quarters of the population are still nominally Christian, less than one-third of East Germans have any religious affiliation. Crucially, unlike in other post-communist societies (e.g., Poland, Russia), there have been no signs of religious revitalization in the former German Democratic Republic since the fall of the Iron Curtain. Some studies attribute East Germany's unusually rapid and sustained religious decline to a combination of socio-structural modernization, political suppression, and socialization patterns observable across cohorts

and over time (Pollack, 2009: 253; Lois, 2011; Müller, 2013). Others highlight cultural repertoires of secularity generated by the socialist state in its sustained conflict with the churches over membership, worldviews, and moral education. For instance, Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and her collaborators, drawing on intergenerational biographical interviews, have documented how secularity, initially enforced by the state and party apparatus, has become deeply entrenched in ordinary people's subjective structures of meaning (Wohlrab-Sahr et al., 2009; see also Schmidt-Lux, 2008; Karstein, 2013). What the literature on secularization in East and West Germany illustrates is that sociologists of religion disagree less on the description of religious decline than on the underlying analytical frameworks of its interpretation and explanation.

Second, when critically scrutinizing secularization theory's assumption about the *privatization* of religious (and spiritual) practices, German-speaking sociologists of religion have been less interested in religious influences upon social movements, party politics, or media debates as compared to the international literature on public religion. Instead, they have contributed to mapping meso-level transformations of religion beyond the private sphere. In refining the classical typology of church, sect, and mystic as formulated by Weber and Troeltsch and drawing on recent institutionalist theories in organizational sociology, Volkhard Krech and others have detected novel social forms of religious communication emerging inside as well as outside the Christian churches (Krech et al., 2013). They argue, for instance, that the Protestant Church in Germany, in times of neoliberal governmentality, has sought to counter declining membership and shrinking finances by streamlining parishes and establishing urban churches tailored to rather disparate consumer demands (Schlammelcher, 2013). They also show that new spiritualities, initially pursued in small countercultural communities, have become re-embedded in formal membership organizations and markets (Hero, 2010). Turning beyond the European context, scholars have also studied the organizational structures and interactive patterns that underlie the rise of growth-oriented megachurches in the United States (Kern and Schimank, 2013). Taken together, these studies attest to the variability of modern religions' social forms as well as to their adaptability to rapidly changing social environments.

Third, when discussing the thesis of *functional differentiation* between religion and other social systems, arguably the paradigmatic core of secularization theory, German-language sociology of religion has taken some steps toward conceptual revision, albeit hesitantly. To be sure, given its theoretical legacies, notions of functional differentiation have probably enjoyed greater prominence in German-language sociology than in any other scholarly traditions (Schimank, SOCIETY, this volume). Indeed, conceptual refinements of Weber's autonomous value spheres and of Luhmann's autopoietic systems still abound (e.g., Tyrell, 2014), sometimes being creatively combined with Bourdieu's theory of social fields. Assessing the driving *forces* of functional differentiation, a leading research center on religion and politics at the University of Münster with the aim of promoting intense collaboration of sociologists and historians, has traced episodes of church–state separation from the investiture conflict through the confessional age and the revolutionary period up to

the contemporary era (e.g., Pollack, 2016). Turning to global forces of functional differentiations, authors have traced the emergence of a global system of “world religions” by studying missionary organizations, their statistical and historical knowledge production, their proselytizing activities, and the interreligious encounters prompted by the latter (Petzke, 2013). Assessing the *consequences* of functional differentiation, sociologists of religion have scrutinized the semantic adaptation of religious traditions, such as pre-Vatican II German Catholicism, to what they perceive to be increasingly autonomous “worldly” spheres (Breuer, 2012). They have also maintained that functional differentiation has intensified conflict and competition between religious and other social systems (Pollack, 2016; see also Meulemann, 2019). In their comparative study of religious transformations in Western and Eastern Europe, the US, Brazil, and South Korea, Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta prominently argue that differentiation necessarily leads to religions’ decreased social significance and religious vitality is limited to those modern contexts where *dedifferentiation* allows religions to fulfill other, *non-religious* functions (Pollack and Rosta, 2015).

However, engagement with historical and comparative research has led some sociologists of religion to revise the thesis of functional differentiation more thoroughly. Even defenders of secularization theory have recently called for action-theoretical explanations of how religious, political, and other actors precisely negotiate the boundaries of the religious system while acknowledging that cultural contexts considerably shape those negotiations and the resulting religious transformations (Pollack, 2016; see also Höllinger, 2007). Outspoken critics of secularization theory, in turn, have drawn on Eisenstadt’s notions of Axial Age civilizations and multiple modernities to detect how deep-seated traditions have left their imprint upon collective identities, political center formation, and macro patterns of structural differentiation (Spohn, 2008; Schwinn, 2013). A leading research center at the University of Leipzig has recently embarked on an ambitious research agenda on “multiple secularities” to study cultural meanings, pragmatic problems, and guiding ideas (e.g., freedom, tolerance, progress, rationality) that underlie different modes of distinguishing between religious and non-religious spheres both within and beyond the West (Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, 2012).

In sum, German-language sociology of religion has scrutinized long-held assumptions about religious decline, privatization, and differentiation from distinctive perspectives, thus making important contributions to the international debate over secularization theory. However, after more than two decades, it seems that this debate has passed its zenith (this was pointed out early on by Krech, 2011). Its staunchest defenders have moved away from sweeping evolutionary narratives, and its fiercest critics equally refrain from sweeping diagnoses of religious revival. Instead, echoing broader trends in sociology, the field has moved towards middle-range theories that analyze contextually situated processes of religious transformation across a wide range of modern societies. Some scholars even align themselves with analytical sociology’s emphasis on causal mechanisms and formal modeling, for instance, when explaining how competition between religious and secular institutions shapes indi-

viduals' religiosity (see, notably, Stolz, 2013). While emerging directly from the field's central debate over secularization, these research agendas seem to be pushing the sociology of religion in novel directions. Yet, if secularization used to be *the* central theme of the sociology of religion (Meulemann, 2019: xix), what precisely comes after the secularization debate?

3 New Developments Beyond the Secularization Debate

Research agendas pushing German-language sociology of religion beyond the secularization debate are most evident at the field's fringes. *Empirical* research agendas emerging from dialogue and competition with neighboring disciplinary fields have unintentionally reoriented sociologists of religion towards novel themes and questions. At the same time, *theoretical* research agendas emerging from broader trends in social theory have intentionally sought to reopen the field's intellectual horizon. As the following discussion shows, both trends have accelerated the paradigmatic demise of secularization theory—without, however, any new field-organizing debate yet being in sight.

First, empirical research agendas emerging at the intersection with other disciplines have expanded the range of substantive themes and questions addressed by sociologists of religion. The most obvious case in point is the thriving literature on religion and migration (Pries, *MIGRATION*, this volume). Across European countries, public debates over religious diversity and the visibility of Islam have led migration scholars to study religious aspects of immigrant incorporation. In the German-language literature, work in this vein has predominantly focused on the sizeable Muslim populations (ranging between 6 and 7% in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland) that has resulted from guest-worker migration in the postwar period and from refugee migration in the post-Cold War period. Analyzing their incorporation into secularizing Christian majority societies from the disciplinary perspective of migration studies, scholars have relied on distinctive analytical frameworks, data, and methods. Survey-based studies among the first and second generation have drawn on classical, new, or segmented assimilation theories. They have scrutinized group-specific determinants of migrants' religious identities, beliefs, and practices (e.g., Diehl and Koenig, 2009) and have analyzed their impact upon interethnic social ties (e.g., Ohlendorf, 2015; Leszczensky, 2018) and intermarriage (Carol, 2016), upon educational achievement (e.g., Ohlendorf et al., 2017), or upon labor-market access (e.g., Koopmans, 2016). Survey-based studies on Islamophobia, antisemitism, and attitudes toward religious diversity have engaged with social-psychological identity theory to account for perceptions of cultural and economic threat among the majority population (e.g., Helbling, 2014; Pollack et al., 2014). Discourse analyses have relied on theories of symbolic boundaries or postcolonial studies to decipher public (and scholarly)

stereotypes of religious alterity and their implications for public policies, such as governmental attempts to forge a domesticized Islam in Germany (e.g., Tezcan, 2012). Institutional analyses, finally, have engaged with the burgeoning literature on citizenship and multiculturalism to understand how historical legacies, party politics, and transnational human-rights discourses affect the governance of religious diversity (Koenig, 2007; Joppke, 2013; Reuter, 2014; Carol et al., 2015). They have scrutinized, for instance, how Austria, Germany, and Switzerland have accommodated newcomer religions in their characteristic corporatist regimes of church–state cooperation while navigating Muslim claims of recognition and the opposition these claims provoke among the majority population (Dolezal et al., 2011). Recent contributions to the literature have also highlighted how public organizations (hospitals, military, prisons, schools) and urban settings modify national models of governing religious diversity (Michalowski, 2015; Nagel, 2019). As all these examples amply attest, dialogue with migration studies has pushed sociologists of religion far beyond the secularization debate to analyze reconfigurations of religious boundaries and their accompanying political contestations in contexts of increased international mobility.

Quite similar developments have occurred at the intersection of the sociology of religion with other disciplinary fields. For instance, scholars have taken inspiration from gender and sexuality studies to study, across a range of cultural contexts within and beyond Europe, how religious practices that have long shaped patriarchal gender roles have changed in conjunction with egalitarian attitudes (e.g., Winkel, 2009) or in response to new biopolitical challenges (e.g., Burchardt, 2015). They have drawn on the comparative welfare-regime literature to study how confessional traditions and socio-political cleavages have structured social policies across European countries (e.g., Manow, 2008), and they have engaged with media studies to reconstruct religious backgrounds of professional journalists (e.g., Gärtner et al., 2012). In more quantitatively oriented research fields, scholars who rely on increasingly sophisticated techniques of panel and multilevel analyses have included religiosity variables on the right-hand side of the regression equation to assess their context-specific impact upon social capital (Traunmüller, 2012), educational inequalities (Helbig and Schneider, 2014; Schneider and Dohrmann, 2015), national identifications (Schnabel and Grötsch, 2015), or moral behavior (Siegers, 2019). All these lines of empirical research, by cataloguing micro-level mechanisms that link religion with highly salient social outcomes, have not only added to the analytical toolkit of the sociology of religion but have also moved the field unintentionally beyond the secularization debate. Incidentally, they have also intensified the field's interaction with various public-policy fields where demand for expertise on contemporary challenges of religious diversity has grown considerably over the past decades.

Second, theoretical contributors who are attentive to contemporary philosophical debates over religion in a secular age have attempted to broaden intellectual horizons of the sociology of religion by intentionally moving beyond the conventional secularization debate. The most prominent example in this respect is Hans Joas' theory of religion, which synthesizes his decade-long work on pragmatism, creative action, and

value genesis while building on intense intellectual exchanges with Eisenstadt, Belah, and Taylor pursued at the Max-Weber-Kolleg in Erfurt. His theory of religion presents itself as an alternative to teleological narratives of disenchantment and secularization that he regards as widespread in the sociology of religion ever since Weber advanced his universal history of rationalization (Joas, 2017). He has therefore designed his theory to capture contingent and context-dependent processes of sacralization and their complex interplay with the formation of social power. His theory operates at two levels of analysis. At the level of formal anthropology, Joas starts from the premise that all humans have “experiences of self-transcendence,” which enthusiastically expand—or destructively violate—routinely held boundaries of the self. These experiences necessarily prompt the attribution of qualities of sacredness (Joas, 2017: 434). Such sacralization processes, however, vary by their forms of cultural articulation. Whereas pre-reflexive articulations of the sacred rely on situational elements so prominently studied by Durkheim, reflexive forms generate abstract or transcendent ideals. At the level of macro-historical narrative, Joas traces the interplay of the sacred with political power from archaic societies to the modern era. Some power configurations facilitated the pre-reflexive sacralization of particular collectivities, kings or nations, whereas others prompted a reflexive sacralization and moral universalism, notably during the Axial Age. A modern version of such reflexive sacralization is the sacralization of personhood that has underpinned the emergence of social movements and legal institutions of human rights in modernity as studied in an earlier volume of his (Joas, 2011). Fruitfully combining Durkheimian thought with theoretical insights of James, Royce, Troeltsch, and Weber, Joas has forged powerful conceptual tools for studying large-scale cultural processes of sacralization, even though his ambitious research agenda still awaits full execution through detailed historical-sociological analysis.

Discourse-theoretical approaches have gained traction in German-language sociology of religion as well, leading scholars to examine critically the European genealogy of the very category of “religion” (pointed out early on by Matthes, 2005). The most prominent contribution in this respect has been Wolfgang Eßbach’s two-volume historical sociology of religion (Eßbach, 2014; 2019). Criticizing scholars’ longstanding focus on confessional religion, their fixation on the religion/secular binary, and their reliance on evolutionary thought, he advances a discourse-analytical approach that includes all phenomena to which ego or alter attribute “religious” qualities. Treating intellectual discourses as indicative of broader cultural currents, Eßbach shows how epochal experiences induced by what he calls European modernity’s four structural elements gave rise to distinctive types of religion. First, starting in the sixteenth century, the rise of territorial states coincided with the emergence of dogmatically and ritually separated confessional religions (*Bekennnisreligion*) and resulted in devastating religious wars, whose traumatic experiences, in turn, prompted the invention of “rational religion” during the English, French, and German Enlightenment. Experiences with democratic revolutions in the second epoch produced the two rather enthusiastic types of art religion (*Kunstreligion*) and national religion (*Nationalreligion*).

Whereas the former articulated intense individual experiences of beauty as in Idealism and Romanticism, the latter sacralized the territory, history, and destiny of national collectivities. The third structural element, the unleashing of market forces, generated knowledge-based religion (*Wissenschaftsreligion*) that ranged from atheistic naturalism to positivist conceptions of science as religion and to various worldviews competing within a new religious market. The fourth structural element, the lifeworld's penetration by technologies, gave rise to various procedural religions (*Verfahrensreligion*) that promised inspiration through "primitive" cultures, imaginations of wholeness, or the orthopraxis of controlling body and soul. Eßbach's typology sensitizes us to the variety of religious discourses that reflect modernity's major epochal experiences while perceptively analyzing their cumulative layering, their mutual critique, their creative combinations, and their repercussions in contemporary debates over religion. However, his multifaceted and lavishly detailed historical narrative still awaits fuller theorization to explain how experience-based attributions of sacred qualities relate to discursive constructions of "religion." In a way, his historical sociology echoes what other social theorists such as Taylor have described as the proliferation of religious (and non-religious) options in a secular age (see Koenig, 2011).

The stark differences between Joas' pragmatist theory of religion and Eßbach's historical sociology of religion notwithstanding, both contributions capture socio-cultural processes of religious transformation other than those foregrounded in the secularization debate. Expanding the conceptual scope of the sociology of religion, they both scrutinize, albeit from very different vantage points, individual or collective experiences related to things deemed sacred and their cultural and discursive articulation. Incidentally, they both also revitalize the field's serious engagement with the history of religion, so prominently pursued by Weber and his contemporaries. While remaining somewhat detached from the array of micro-level mechanisms scrutinized in the aforementioned empirical lines of research, they enjoin the latter in pushing the sociology of religion beyond its third phase.

4 Conclusion

As this review of the German-language contribution to the secularization debate and recent empirical and theoretical developments beyond that debate has shown, the sociology of religion seems to be moving into a new phase. What are the prospects for the field in German-language academia as elsewhere?

First, sociologists of religion will profitably continue their dialogue and competition with other disciplines and further expand their range of substantive research questions beyond the secularization debate. In a global age, scholars as well as citizens and policymakers are urgently called to understand precisely how different modes of religious diversity are linked with social inequalities, political cleavages, and even violent conflict. Sociologists of religion should take up that challenge in close

collaboration with neighboring fields and do so by using the best possible quantitative and qualitative methods available in the discipline, with mixed-method approaches being a particularly prominent area of innovation.

Second, sociologists of religion will continue to benefit from the comparative research that has become more prevalent within and beyond the secularization debate. Whether capitalizing on large-scale macro-quantitative datasets or leveraging in-depth case studies, comparative research has helped specify scope conditions for theoretical propositions about religious transformations. The widening of cross-cultural comparative perspectives beyond the European or Western context has proven particularly stimulating for reconsidering explicit or implicit assumptions in the sociology of religion—as emerging research on multiple secularities has shown. Likewise, it is increasingly clear that explaining local and national transformations of religion requires one to scrutinize the global dynamics of cultural diffusion and institutionalization more thoroughly.

Third, sociologists of religion will profit from further enlarging their analytical toolkit of micro-level mechanisms and macro-level social processes of religious transformations, with some taken from the secularization debate and others from the novel empirical and theoretical contributions discussed in this article. The recent focus on middle-range theories, which avoid teleological narratives and philosophical speculation about religion's fate in modernity, resonates fully with broader international trends such as the rise of analytical sociology and critical realism. However, how to use empirically robust mechanisms and processes as building blocks for more general theories of religious transformation requires further theoretical and methodological advances.

In sum, the German-language—and indeed international—sociology of religion seems to be moving through an interregnum without any paradigmatic center yet in sight that could replace the field's prior focus on secularization. Whereas such phases are particularly germane to empirical and theoretical innovation in the short term, the question remains how the field will meet the challenge posed by its centrifugal forces in the long term.

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Science and Higher Education

Anna Kosmützky and Georg Krücken

Abstract: Science and higher education in Germany have undergone profound changes over the last 20 years. Here one might think of New Public Management reforms, the Bologna Process, or the Excellence Initiative. At the same time, basic tenets of the German system, such as the strong role of the professoriate, the absence of tuition fees, and the diversified structure of public research institutions have remained unchanged. This makes Germany an intriguing case for sociological research. Following a macro–meso–micro logic, we present the major findings of that research, highlighting theoretical contributions, empirical findings, and methodological innovations, as well as future perspectives on the study of change and continuity of science and higher education in Germany.

Keywords: Higher-education system, science system, knowledge production, governance, political reform

1 Introduction

Research on higher-education and science topics typically follows cycles of social discourse and public debate, for example, periods of major reforms and rapid transformations or times of perceived crises. The past 20 years have been one such period of perceived crises and far-reaching reforms. Roughly two decades ago, the institutional role of the university, the organization of higher-education institutions, as well as their knowledge production no longer seemed to suit the knowledge society of the post-industrial age. In Germany, such crisis diagnostics became visible, for example, in a special issue of the sociological journal *Leviathan* in 2001 titled *Die Krise der Universitäten* (*The Crisis of the Universities*). Its editors argued that, although the problems of contemporary universities consist of many small crises (e.g., too much responsibility, insufficient funding, and a growing gap between disciplines as well as the quality of institutions), these were not unconnected but rather amassed into one large crisis that called existing university structures into question (Stölting and Schimank, 2001). As a result, at the end of the 20th century, the German system was seen as having fallen behind international higher-education and science-policy discourse. In response to these crisis diagnostics and after years of delay, the German higher-education system was swamped with diverse programs for simultaneous reforms at the end of the 1990s (Schimank and Lange, 2009). As in many other European countries, the public university model in Germany was revised, and the universities' governance regimes pushed toward a much more competition-driven and managerial framework. Simultaneously, the Bologna reform greatly affected the German system, which contributed to the ongoing internationalization of German higher education. Partly owing

to these reforms, but also to pertinent historical features, one could witness an increasing international interest in science and higher education in Germany in recent years. The so-called Excellence Initiative (known today as the Excellence Strategy) in research, the absence of tuition fees despite the rapid rise in the student population, the diversified structure of public research institutions, and the priority given to internationalization across all levels of the system have once again made the German system relevant and fascinating to an international audience. At the same time, unintended consequences, such as the bureaucratization brought about by the Bologna Process in Germany or the critical effects of the increasing stratification as a consequence of the Excellence Initiative, continue to be widely discussed (for an extensive overview of the main characteristics of the German system, see Hüther and Krücken, 2018).

Both crisis diagnostics and the supposed cure in the form of managerial reform spurred the sociological study of developments and phenomena in higher education and science. The interplay of change and continuity as well as their specifics is the common ground among the sociological studies that we discuss in the following. But the studies also have another analytical perspective in common. Albeit to different degrees, they all focus on the relationship between the production of scientific knowledge and its production sites. As universities are (still) the most important loci of science production in Germany (Powell and Dusdal, 2017), they are of particular interest in this context. We see this dual focus on the production of science and on higher-education and research institutions, in which knowledge production takes place, as a particular strength of German sociological research on science and higher education. In the international research context, the two perspectives are typically treated separately (Krücken, 2012; Hamann et al., 2018). Recent initiatives, such as the establishment of the “Working Group ‘Science and Higher Education Studies’”¹ or joint funding initiatives for higher-education and science research of the *Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF; Federal Ministry of Education and Research)*,² give reason to hope that this unique characteristic of sociological science and higher-education research in Germany will be further institutionalized.

Our overview of prolific sociological perspectives on science and higher education follows the macro–meso–micro logic. We begin with macrosociological perspectives on change and continuity in the configuration of the higher-education and science system, move on to studies on change and continuity in the organization and governance of higher education, then follow this with studies on change and continuity in the practice of scientific knowledge production. The contributions that we consider are based on empirical research, except for one primarily conceptual con-

¹ The working group is part of the “Sociology of Science and Technology” section of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie (DGS; German Sociological Association)*; see: <https://akwiho.wordpress.com/for-english-readers/>

² The funding initiatives and their results can be found on the corresponding web portal launched by the BMBF. See: <https://www.wihoforschung.de/en/index.php>

tribution, which we discuss at the end of our review. This latter text merits particular attention as it makes an important contribution to the theoretical foundation of future empirical research on change and continuity in higher education and science.

2 Change and Continuity in the Configuration of the Higher-Education and Science System

Die Stunde der Wahrheit? Vom Verhältnis der Wissenschaft zu Politik, Wirtschaft und Medien in der Wissensgesellschaft (2001; *The Moment of Truth? On the Relationship of Science to Politics, the Economy, and Media in the Knowledge Society*) by Peter Weingart sheds light on the waning distance and closer coupling between science and politics, the economy, and the media, and analyzes their interdependencies as the core characteristic of scientific knowledge production in the knowledge society. In his fundamental view of society, Weingart applies differentiation theory (an undogmatic use of Luhmann's systems theory) and, accordingly, views science as well as the other societal spheres (politics, the economy, and the media) as functionally differentiated but interdependent systems. In international discourse, such a theoretical and macro-sociological perspective that stems from a general theory of society is both rare and fruitful. Empirically, this plays out as follows. While institutional and operational interdependence between science and politics, the economy, and the media have led many scholars to diagnose a "hybridization" of science and the other spheres or a "blurring of boundaries" between them (as diagnosed, e.g., in the triple-helix model by Leydesdorff and Etzkowitz, 1996; the mode-2 type of research by Gibbons et al., 1994; or the penetration of societal spheres by Nowotny et al., 2001), two simultaneous and paradoxical processes form the nucleus of Weingart's diagnosis: the "politicization," "commercialization," and "mediatization" of science and a scientification of politics, the economy, and the media. The result of these paradoxical developments is an increasing loss of distance between science, politics, the economy, and the media, though not a full blurring of system boundaries. Whereas the latter offers hope that these systems might be able to rebalance their proximity–distance relationship, the waning distance and closer coupling of the systems first and foremost entails some destructive side-effects. For one, the increased use of scientific expertise by policymakers for solving problems or legitimizing decisions does not increase the degree of certainty but in fact erodes political legitimacy. Similarly, the more application-oriented and thus the more useful science is to industry and economic exploitation, the less autonomy science has, resulting in a decreasing number of groundbreaking discoveries and, ultimately, a decreasing usefulness of science overall. The more science is oriented toward the media in order to receive public attention, the more it is subject to the communicative selection criteria of the media system, thereby decreasing its exceptional status as a knowledge-producing enterprise and thus its public appreciation. This in turn leads to another set of paradoxical developments.

Despite the loss of authority of scientific expertise, policymakers do not concede their reliance on existing advisory arrangements, and the manifold new communication channels of the digital world popularize scientific results and scientists themselves more than ever before. Notwithstanding a potential loss of innovative capacity, industry favors mode-2 research over mode-1 forms of knowledge production.

Although published in 2001, Weingart's analysis has not lost any of its timeliness and its explanatory richness. The strength of this book is that it simultaneously illuminates the social macro structures of the modern knowledge society and, drawing on numerous studies and original research, also focuses on the motives and strategies of the actors who work across the boundaries between science, business, politics, and the media and thus help foster the mutual dependencies and interactions between these spheres. At the same time, these actors have a vested interest in a well-functioning science system to which they can refer and that they can use to legitimize their own tasks and achievements. In contrast to diagnoses based on mode 2, triple helix, and other models, it helps to explain why the boundaries of science do not merely dissolve, even though its edges may become fuzzy. Only the chapter on mediatization would need some updating. More recent developments such as digitalization, the power of (academic) social networks, and the alternative measures of scientific outputs that they provide were not yet covered at that time. It is a pity that the book has not been translated into English to make it available to an international audience—though different parts of Weingart's analysis have been published in the form of international articles (e.g., Weingart, 1998; 1999; 2002).

Hardly any change in German higher education has aroused as much interest at the international level as Germany's Excellence Strategy. As far back as 2000, the German federal government considered establishing "elite" universities. This was implemented in particular by launching the Excellence Initiative, which identifies high-performing universities and aims to raise their performance even further by supplying considerable additional funding. The initial idea of elite universities was eventually dropped, however.

The German Excellence Strategy is an ambitious program that began in 2006 and lasted in its present form until the end of 2018. In the summer of 2016, it was decided to extend the program until at least 2032. From 2006 through 2017, a total of 4.6 billion euros were invested in high-quality research to strengthen the international visibility and competitiveness of German universities and the German higher-education system as a whole. For the German higher-education system, the Excellence Initiative has been particularly important for two reasons. First, by identifying high performers at the institutional level, it marks a considerable departure from the hitherto underlying idea that all German universities are equal. Second, the Excellence Initiative has certainly contributed to the increased international visibility of the German system and corresponding reform initiatives. Since the 1990s, the German higher-education system could mainly be seen as a "recipient" of reform initiatives that emerged from other national higher-education systems. As a "sender," the German Excellence Ini-

tiative has influenced a range of European and Asian nations and triggered a broad international wave of comparable reforms.

Still, the Excellence Initiative remains highly controversial in Germany. For instance, a memorandum from 2016 that sharply criticizes the initiative for fostering managerial strategies in universities, externally inducing research competition, and giving rise to inequalities, was signed by about 2,000 academics within a few days. The internationally well-known sociologist Richard Münch became its most outspoken critic in Germany. In his book *Die akademische Elite. Zur sozialen Konstruktion wissenschaftlicher Exzellenz* (*The Academic Elite. On the Social Construction of Scientific Excellence*) from 2007 as well as in a number of articles and in a subsequent book in English (Münch, 2014), he criticizes what he—following in particular Pierre Bourdieu’s work on the academic field—calls the creation of a new academic elite, both among academics and, more importantly, among universities. According to Münch, despite the rhetoric around excellence and the academic peer review underlying funding decisions, a self-reinforcing power cartel has emerged that favors larger universities over smaller ones, technical universities over non-technical ones, and natural sciences over the humanities. This is partly due to the selection criteria: third-party funding through the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG; German Research Foundation) is of central importance, hence triggering the well-known Matthew effect in science, where, according to Robert K. Merton, reputation becomes self-reinforcing. As Münch shows with detailed statistical analyses, the same effect holds true for resources for conducting research. As a consequence, he views the entire process as flawed and contrary to the “illusio” (Bourdieu) of those who see strictly meritocratic principles at work here. The skewed distribution of resources in the Excellence Initiative is rather the result of past merits, debatable selection criteria, and arbitrary decisions. In addition, a highly problematic dynamic of large-scale and path-dependent research is set off, in which individual and small-group research are similarly downplayed as risky and uncertain endeavors.

3 Change and Continuity in the Organization and Governance of Higher Education and Science

Changes in the organization and governance of higher-education institutions is another related topic that has received a great deal of attention within the sociological research community studying science and higher education. The topic has become important because we are currently witnessing the transformation of the university into an organizational actor (i.e., an integrated, goal-oriented, and competitive entity) in the context of which academic missions are carried out by means of increased reliance on the organization itself and not solely by the academic community and its members. By referring to the international research literature on higher education, organization, and science studies in different national systems, we can observe the

shift from a loosely coupled, decentralized expert organization to a strategically acting, managed organization (see, e.g., Paradeise and Thoenig, 2013; Berman and Paradeise, 2016; Bleiklie, Enders, and Lepori, 2017; Musselin, 2017; Hütter and Krücken, 2018). Most of these and related accounts draw on more recent developments in higher education, whereas a careful analysis of recent decades is hard to find. This is where Frank Meier's book *Die Universität als Akteur* (2009; *The University as Actor*) comes in. In this theoretically ambitious piece of work, Meier draws on a variety of sociological resources, most importantly on the neo-institutional work by John Meyer and colleagues on actorhood, but also on Niklas Luhmann's sociological systems theory, governmentality studies by Michel Foucault and those inspired by him, as well as sociological theories of action. Such a broad conceptual framing that draws on different American and European strands of sociological theorizing is of great value and highly inspiring. Building on these concepts, Meier asks whether or not universities can be perceived as actors. Empirically, he broadly analyzes higher-education discourse in Germany from 1945 until the early 2000s. According to Meier, there is no simple shift from understanding the university as a loosely coupled expert system to the concept of the university as an integrated, strategically acting entity. Clark Kerr, the former president of the University of California system, has anecdotally described the struggle for parking lots on campus as the only commonality of university professors within their institution. Instead, Meier delineates four concepts of the university in German higher-education discourse that, despite their overlap, can be observed in a temporal order. It starts with the university as an institution, that is, a broad and encompassing concept of *Die deutsche Universität* (the German university), the identity of which dates back to the early ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt and which can equally be applied to all German universities. Two other powerful concepts emerged in the 1960s and 1970s: first, the university as a bureaucratic corporation and, second, the university as a work organization whose structure resembles that of a business firm. However, while the latter especially is an important predecessor for the current understanding of the university as an actor, that concept only emerged in the 1980s with the rise of the fourth model, the competitive university. Here institutional autonomy, self-control, and responsibility are salient features that were lacking in the previous three models. Consequently, the model of the competitive university has been influential throughout the ensuing decades until today. More recent trends such as the increasing societal embeddedness through diversity, service learning, and academic outreach have not resulted in a new model but are instead carried out by the university as a strategically acting, managed organization, for which its self-perception as being embedded in multiple competitions is of key importance. The process of turning the university into an organizational actor has been briefly reconstructed in English in Krücken and Meier (2006).

Against the backdrop of the increasing actorhood of German universities, Otto Hütter's book *Von der Kollegialität zur Hierarchie? Eine Analyse des New Managerialism in den Landeshochschulgesetzen* (2009; *From Collegiality to Hierarchy? An Analysis of New Managerialism in State Laws on Higher Education*) is equally relevant

for understanding changes in the German higher-education and science system (for some important results in English, see Hüther and Krücken, 2018: chapter 4). The book's focus is on German higher-education laws and how they changed between 1998 and 2008 after the 1998 national *Hochschulrahmengesetz* (Framework Act for Higher Education) allowed the sixteen federal states to pursue their own paths with regard to formal organizational structures of their respective public universities. Dealing with higher-education laws from a sociological perspective is highly illuminating for current international research and discourse. By focusing on legal regulations, Hüther examines a missing link, so to speak, as many sociological analyses by and large either focus on broader societal discourses or concrete practices at the organizational level of universities. This allows one to further embed the German case in international debates on university governance. Comparative analyses have shown that universities in Europe have gained increasing formal autonomy in decision-making vis-à-vis the state as well as the academic community, thus following a trend towards deregulation and converting higher-education governance into a form of “steering from a distance.” Although Germany is considered to be a latecomer with regard to New Public Management (NPM) reforms in higher education, NPM reforms were nevertheless adopted as well.

Hüther's examination of the sixteen state laws over one decade is based on a meticulous empirical analysis of the power and influence of ministries of education and science, boards of governors, higher-education leadership (presidents or deans), and academic bodies in which professors hold the majority. The influence of these actors and entities on formal decision-making was measured by focusing on the responsibility for key structural and personnel decisions in universities. Structural decisions include, for example, target and performance agreements, structure and development plans, and budget allocation processes; personnel decisions involve, among other things, the election of members to the board of governors and university leadership positions. As a result, one can see that higher-education institutions have by and large been gaining formal autonomy since the end of the 1990s. In part, this includes rights that they had not enjoyed for centuries. A number of states now allow higher-education institutions to appoint professors themselves, whereas traditionally the respective ministries for education and research of the states made these appointments. The strengthening of managerial self-governance is closely connected to the reduction in formal regulation by state authorities. The new competencies and freedoms for universities have not been transferred to academic decision-making bodies but have been achieved instead by shifting decision-making rights from the state and academic bodies to presidents and deans. However, the shifts have not come uniformly. There is still a huge variance among states, the autonomy of higher-education institutions can also be narrowed through state guidance and related new instruments (e.g., target agreements between the state and universities), and—particularly when compared to other countries—academic decision-making bodies still play an important role in German higher-education governance. It will be very interesting to observe the trends depicted by Hüther in the coming years and from an interna-

tional comparative perspective. With his book, Hüther has developed the analytical tools to do this. In addition, one could go a step further by also including changes in actual decision-making processes at universities and, following the seminal paper in organizational sociology by Meyer and Rowan (1977), focus on the supposedly loose coupling between formal and activity structures in university organizations.

Given Münch's critical appraisal of the Excellence Initiative discussed above, one can assume that those who traditionally are not at the center of the science system and its institutional structures are not only in a disadvantaged position but will lose further ground owing to the self-reinforcing mechanism of the allocation of resources and reputation. Women in academia are an interesting case in point as they have traditionally been in a disadvantaged position on the one hand, while, on the other, the German higher-education and science system has also been subject to numerous initiatives to foster the participation of women in academia, in particular in higher-level positions where the number remains remarkably small, even by international standards. The Excellence Initiative also aims to create equal opportunities for men and women, which makes this a highly relevant subject for sociological analysis. The monograph by Anita Engels et al., *Bestenauswahl und Ungleichheit. Eine soziologische Analyse zu Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftlern in der Exzellenzinitiative* (2015; *Meritocracy and Inequality. A Sociological Analysis on Female and Male Scientists in the Excellence Initiative*), sheds light on this subject. Their book employs a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods and gives particular importance to organizational case studies. It thus complements the empirical focus on discourses (Meier) and laws (Hüther) in a very important way, as this book enables us to see whether discursive and formal changes are accompanied by changes at the actual level of organizational practices. The particular value of the book lies in combining the analysis of broader societal changes concerning gender with related organizational responses and individual career trajectories. The diligent analysis shows the reformulation of gender issues that came with the Excellence Initiative. For instance, a documented concept to promote gender equality is a necessary requirement for any application to the Excellence Strategy. In its wake, gender equality is no longer framed in terms of equality of opportunity, justice, or fairness but rather in terms of competition, namely, the competitive advantage for the individual university and the overall university system if all talents can be mobilized. Previously, responsibility for gender issues in universities lay in the hands of equal opportunity or women's commissioners, who were by and large rather detached from university leadership. With the Excellence Initiative, equal opportunities have become a strategic and competitive issue for the entire university, including its leadership and management, and have hence become part of broader human resources and organizational development (for a similar argument on the trajectory of equal opportunity in American corporations, see Dobbin, 2009). Of particular interest is that a variety of measures, such as flexible time arrangements, provision of childcare, and dual-career options, were developed at the organizational level in order to take the private lives of (future) members into account. This indicates a huge cultural shift as German universities are historically

shaped by the ethos of “science as a vocation” (Max Weber), which is at odds with extra-academic orientations of its members. Following the case studies by Engels et al., the changes, including those in the number of women among the professoriate, are visible and certainly more than mere window dressing for the funding environment. Nevertheless, the entire issue requires further critical monitoring, and it seems like only a matter of time before other dimensions of equal opportunities—such as social background and migration status in particular—will complement the current focus on establishing gender equality in the German higher-education system.

4 Change and Continuity of Research Practices

Two books by Marc Torca and Cristina Besio add to the discussion about scientific knowledge production with a perspective on changes in research practice and a focus on a phenomenon that is central to today’s organization of research: the rise of research projects. Conducting research today means to design, launch, and carry out research projects. Whether it is a PhD thesis, an article, a book, a project proper based on third-party funding, or even a large-scale collaborative research consortium, we think about scientific knowledge production in terms of projects as a specific organizational and social form with defined goals and tasks, a limited duration, and short-term planning and resources. Besio and Torca both show that, today, projects are a central form of organizing research; research in project form has become the standard model of research, institutionalized across all disciplines, research objects, and types of research.

Besio’s book *Forschungsprojekte. Zum Organisationswandel in der Wissenschaft* (2009; *Research Projects. On Organizational Change in Science*) places special emphasis on the relationship between projects and organizations—that is, universities and research institutes—and analyzes the extent to which research projects are changing scientific knowledge production. Her analysis is conceptually based on Luhmann’s organization theory. Torca’s book *Die Projektförmigkeit der Forschung* (2009; *Research as Projects*) analyzes the mode of operation of projects in everyday research practice, and his approach is based on a combination of Luhmann’s semantic analysis and Overmann’s interpretation pattern analysis. The theoretical perspectives of both authors allow them to focus on the nature of research projects and distinguish them from much of the international literature. There are plenty of studies on the growing size of research projects and their characteristics, their increasingly internationally oriented and collaborative character, as well as the growing competition for funding. However, not much has been written on the impact of the project form on scientific knowledge production and the organizations that produce scientific knowledge.

Both books examine the significance and development of research projects from a historical perspective and trace their roots back to the industrial laboratories of the 19th century. For the 20th century, they emphasize the interrelatedness of the spread of

research projects and research funding. The emergence of national research-funding organizations is particularly important for the institutionalization of project-based research. Both authors investigate the German case using the example of the DFG's creation in the 1920s. Project-based funding brought about a shift in the assessment and evaluation of research—from an assessment of a researcher's past achievements to the evaluation of project proposals. Such proposals need to point out the relevance as well as the feasibility of the research in advance to be granted funding. Also, the emergence of "Big Science" in the 1960s (historical examples include major space projects and the Manhattan Project in which science, industry, and politics were closely interrelated) further facilitated the institutionalization of the project form, beginning in the natural sciences and engineering, and spreading to the social sciences and humanities. Torca goes back even further in time and shows that the semantic precursors of the project form date back to the figure of the "project maker" and the activity of "project making" in the 15th century but disappeared with the emergence of modern sciences in the 19th century.

In their empirical parts, the books are complementary. Besio focuses in her empirical analysis (based on interviews) on the functions, opportunities, and risks of research projects. Projects have advantages at the level of the organization of research because they provide a structure that can have an "unburdening effect" on the research process by defining a fixed duration, allocating a specified amount of resources, and clearly distributing responsibilities. Moreover, they have the further advantage that they facilitate risk-taking in research because of having a foreseeable end and therefore temporally limiting that risk. But they can also create pressure with regard to success and time. Another potential downside is that projects might lead to a fragmentation of the research. Besio's conclusion is that benefits and drawbacks of the project form are strongly dependent on the characteristics of the individual projects and those of the organizations in which they are embedded. Different forms have different advantages and disadvantages. In his empirical analysis (based on interviews and participant observation), Torca depicts the project form as a paradoxical treatment of the structural openness of research. While it aims at the creation of factual, temporal, and social expectability, research itself is characterized by its openness, inconclusiveness, and its preference for the failure of initial expectations (i.e., trial and error as a means of generating knowledge). Research and the project form are thus subject to different expectations, which are in tension with each other. Nevertheless, the project form has developed into a generalized and autonomous structure of the research practice that makes scientific knowledge production both more controllable and more flexible.

With academic freedom under siege in even the most unexpected countries, German academia may well consider itself lucky that the principle is enshrined in the national constitution. The first 20 articles of that document are regarded as inviolable and are subject to a so-called "eternity clause," which implies that the underlying principles may never be changed. Article five states that "[a]rts and sciences, research and teaching shall be free" (article 5.3 *Grundgesetz* [Basic Law]). This was a response to

the traumatic experience of Nazi Germany. After World War II, this autonomy was exclusively defined as an individual right, to be protected against the state and the university as an organization. The managerial higher-education reforms of the past 20 years, however, have put this notion of autonomy within academia and science into question. The new organizational autonomy of higher-education and research institutions has the potential to influence the individual autonomy of academics. Thus, we would like to mention a special issue of the journal *Theoretische Soziologie (Journal for Theoretical Sociology)* edited by Franzen et al. that moves the autonomy of science into the limelight of sociological debate. The issue is titled *Autonomie revisited. Beiträge zu einem umstrittenen Grundbegriff in Wissenschaft, Kunst und Politik (Autonomy Revisited. Contributions to a Controversial Basic Concept in Science, Art, and Politics)*, and the extensive thought it gives to the autonomy of science with reference to the autonomy of arts and politics is particularly valuable. It contains a variety of contributions on autonomy in the three societal spheres of science, art, and politics, which unfortunately cannot all be addressed here individually. Instead we will highlight the volume's structuring arguments.

The editors of the volume emphasize an important difference in how we conceive of autonomy itself. They distinguish between the use of the concept of autonomy in sociological theories (autonomy as a concept) and the discursive and normative use of autonomy in social practice (autonomy as a value) and posit that the way autonomy is employed and how it is conceptually defined remains unclear in many debates. They point out that autonomy is not a static concept but is subject to change and also serves to describe change, which, as the editors argue, explains the lasting popularity of the concept as well as the fact that autonomy often becomes the battlefield of normative convictions. On this basis, the aim of the contributions collected in the anthology is, first, to reopen the discussion of autonomy and, second, to ask whether sociology needs the concept of autonomy, and if so, what it might look like. From the editors' sociological perspective, autonomy can be seen as a "hinge" between the social micro, meso, and macro levels that connects interactions and mutual conditions between the different levels. The contributions on autonomy in arts and politics note that there are great similarities in all three societal spheres, namely, the assumption that activities in all three must be autonomous in order to be truly socially relevant. At the same time, the contributions show that autonomy is not simply a synonym for independence and self-referentiality, nor is the loss of autonomy a synonym for the further differentiation of social spheres. Rather, paradoxical dynamics and autonomy conflicts are present in all three societal spheres. Such paradoxical dynamics in science and higher education permeate the managerial higher-education reforms. The attempt to shift control from state authorities to higher-education institutions and to establish more organizational autonomy has at the same time brought about a greater demand for accountability and evaluation on the organizational as well as on the individual level, which might have an impact on the autonomy of universities and their members. The special issue offers numerous conceptual suggestions for the analysis of this tension, but research on its empirical impact and consequences is still largely lacking.

5 A Conceptual Contribution on Scientific Production Communities

Finally, we would like to discuss the book *Wissenschaftliche Produktionsgemeinschaften. Die soziale Ordnung der Forschung* (2006; *Scientific Production Communities: The Social Order of Research*) by Jochen Gläser, which is a conceptual contribution to the field. It raises two fundamental questions that have been addressed by the sociology of science from its beginnings and have been answered in various ways in distinct traditions of thought (for example, by Merton, Fleck, Polanyi, and Latour): “How does social order in scientific communities emerge, and how is it maintained? What kinds of social mechanisms allow scientists, who are only imperfectly informed about each other’s work, to produce scientific knowledge together?” (ibid.: 11). Gläser traces the functionalist, institutionalist, and constructivist classics and argues that the established models failed because they neither provided satisfactory answers nor established a program for research. Accordingly, Gläser develops an integrative concept and explanatory model for collective scientific knowledge production that answers both questions, which he calls “scientific production communities.” The model builds on the concept of norm-based communities as a means of creating social order and on Mayntz and Scharpf’s actor-centered institutionalism research. Specifically, Gläser focuses on the concept of collective production systems, which are “social orders that solve a specific problem: they order the actions of a collective in such a way that its members can produce goods together” (ibid.: 56–57).³ Throughout the book, he draws on these conceptual resources by analyzing how scientific production communities emerge and operate. He identifies the conditions for their emergence and operation as the existence of a common object of investigation, a collective identity and corresponding individual identities, established and legitimized practices, related standards and systems of regulation, and a corresponding public communication (ibid.: 259). On the basis of these conditions, Gläser describes the functioning of scientific production communities as follows: “Production is based on *autonomous decisions by producers* about which necessary contributions they can make and how to go about producing them. These decisions are *based on the community’s common knowledge base*, which is simultaneously the object of investigation, a means of work, and a collective product. New contributions to the community’s knowledge base are *offered publicly* and included in the knowledge base by being used in further knowledge production. This *use in subsequent production processes* is also the most important form of *quality control* for produced knowledge. *Rules and standards* for local knowledge production practices increase the contributions’ reliability and compatibility. *Peer review harmonizes individual perspectives with the mainstream community* and thus improves individual contributions’ usability. Membership in such

³ All translations from German sources are our own.

a collective production system is facilitated by the *orientation of the individual production to the community's knowledge base*" (ibid.: 263, emphasis in the original). Gläser's conceptual elaboration is quite valuable for future empirical research on change and continuity (and beyond) in higher education and science. Without explicitly referring to his book, these considerations form a conceptual building block in the authority-relations research program that Gläser has developed with his colleagues (see, e.g., Whitley and Gläser, 2007).

6 Conclusion

To conclude our review, we would like to stress that both the German science and higher-education system as well as the sociological thinking about it have adapted and changed considerably over the last two decades while pertinent historical features are still of paramount importance. This has, on the one hand, led to the combination of new and international trends (e.g., New Public Management), in a rather incremental fashion, with the more traditional features of "the" German university. On the other hand, the strong and assertive role of sociology as a discipline in the analysis of such processes has been retained, too, whereas more inter- or transdisciplinary research seems to be dominant in the international sphere. We have presented some of the results of these efforts above in an attempt to shed light on recent systemic trends and their sociological analysis.

Beyond the achievements of sociological research on the German science and higher-education system, we would like to highlight three systemic changes that deserve further attention. First, more analyses are needed of the interplay between globalization trends in science and higher education and their relationship vis-à-vis the national and organizational levels. From a sociological perspective, these levels and their related processes are closely connected but at the same time display their own logics and specificities. Second, the increasing competition within science and higher education needs closer scrutiny. Again, different levels of analysis and related processes have to be taken into account, which might reinforce or contradict each other. In this context, sociology has a lot to offer, in particular when bridging the gap between studies on science and higher education and economic sociology and the sociology of valuation. Third, digitalization as a pervasive societal feature, which is increasingly shaping science and higher education, requires further sociological reflection. For example, what will university teaching look like in the era of digitalization, and how will this affect research and related collaborations? Processes and developments like these are creating a demand for new methods as well as opportunities for methodological innovation. Big data and machine learning still play too small a role in current sociological research. Combining new methods for the analysis of big data with qualitative interpretative methods could open new and exciting avenues for the sociology of higher education and science in the 21st century.

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Social Inequalities—Empirical Focus

Gunnar Otte, Mara Boehle, and Katharina Kunißen

Abstract: Social inequalities constitute one of the largest research fields of sociology in the German-speaking countries. This field has been successfully institutionalized and internationalized in recent decades. Today, it rests on a rich data infrastructure and a large body of cumulative research. The article traces this advancement in terms of shifting theoretical paradigms, methodological innovations, and the establishment of the current data infrastructure. It particularly highlights recent developments in four core areas of inequality research: educational inequality and returns on education; employment and the labor market; income, wealth, and poverty; and social mobility.

Keywords: Social inequality, social stratification, social change, data infrastructure, Germany

1 Introduction

Ever since sociology emerged as a scientific endeavor in the era of industrialization (the “social question”), social inequalities have been at the heart of the discipline. In the German-speaking countries, as in many others, inequality research is one of the largest and most advanced fields of sociology. For this and other reasons, reviewing the publication output since the turn of the millennium is anything but an easy task. First, inequality research is constituted of, or is related to, several subfields of research, such as education, work/labor, social policy, health/aging, demography, the life course, family, migration/ethnicity, and gender. The demarcation of the field is therefore blurry and the relevant literature vast. Second, one of the most striking developments over the last two decades is the internationalization of inequality research. Many eminent scholars from the German-speaking countries are well known to an international audience through conferences and English-language journals. This raises the question of what represents inequality research among the German-speaking countries: Is it research done by scholars residing *in* these countries or by the scientific community working *on* these countries? For our review, we define Germany, Austria, and parts of Switzerland as the German-language area. The substantial exchange of scientific personnel and sociological discourse between these countries justifies an overall review. However, these countries’ structures of inequality are, alongside several commonalities, shaped by national pathways in culture, politics, the welfare state, and the economy. For our survey of the literature, we have attempted to consider the sociological community that publishes on social inequalities in the German-language area, but we have placed special emphasis on empirical findings from Germany as the most populous country. A third observation, closely connected to

the internationalization of this field, is the trend towards research being increasingly produced cumulatively within standardized paradigms by teams (instead of single authors) and in journals (instead of books). Altogether, when we took stock of the research on social inequalities in the German-speaking countries, we found ourselves mapping a broad field with vague boundaries that is heavily internationalized and shows a specifically national orientation only in parts.

Blurred boundaries notwithstanding, there is broad consensus in German-language textbooks on what constitutes the core of social-inequality research (e.g., Bacher et al., 2019; Huinink and Schröder, 2019; Klein, 2016; Rössel, 2009; Schwinn, *SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—THEORETICAL FOCUS*, this volume). Following this literature, we define social inequalities as the unequal distribution of valued resources, opportunities, and positions among the members of a population in a given space and time. Because educational qualifications, monetary resources, and labor-market positions are key for an individual's life chances in modern societies, most scholars agree that educational inequalities, labor-market structures, social-mobility processes, as well as income, wealth, and poverty distributions are at the heart of inequality research. Our main focus is therefore devoted to these topics (sections 4 to 7).

To map the field, we chose three strategies beyond our own personal knowledge.¹ We began by compiling the themes of the biannual meetings of the Social Inequality section of the German Sociological Association (DGS) from 2000 to 2018. This gave us an overview of the major discourses in German-language inequality research. We also used Google Scholar to determine the number of citations of all current members of the DGS Social Inequality section in order to identify influential scholars and publications. We broadened the coverage by searching for sociologists who reside in Austria or Switzerland or mainly publish in English. Third, we identified all articles on social inequalities that were published in the most influential German sociology journals, the *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie (KZfSS)* and the *Zeitschrift für Soziologie (ZfS)*, from 2000 to 2018. On the basis of the abstracts, these papers were coded by their main topics.² Table 1 is a condensed representation that indicates the changing importance of research themes over time, with the shaded topics being the ones that appeared to gain in importance.

In the 1990s, inequality research in Germany was dominated by two major debates: the transformation of East German society after reunification in 1990 (Krause and Ostner, 2010) and the thesis of a dissolution of class society, which was inspired by Beck's individualization thesis (Beck, 1992), Bourdieu's notion of lifestyles (Bourdieu, 1984), and models of socio-cultural milieus (Schulze, 1992). While German

¹ We thank Viktoria Bading for her helpful research assistance. We also benefited from comments by Dave Balzer, Johannes Giesecke, Steffen Schindler, and the journal editors.

² Papers were coded primarily by dimensions, not determinants of inequality. For example, female labor-market participation was assigned to the "employment and labor market" dimension. Only if a paper analyzed the multiplicity of inequalities from a gender perspective was it assigned to "gender and inequality," a category that we later subsumed under "other."

inequality research could be characterized as somewhat exceptional at the end of the millennium, as our predecessors noted in their review twenty years ago (Allmendinger and Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2000), this diagnosis no longer holds true in light of the trends toward internationalization mentioned above. As Table 1 indicates, several shifts in research foci have taken place.³ General debates on theories, models, and methods of inequality research as well as articles on cultural inequalities, still prominent in the early 2000s, have since lost ground. Educational inequalities (from preschool to tertiary education) have become by far the most important research focus: 66 out of 302 papers are devoted to this topic (Grundmann, EDUCATION AND SOCIALIZATION, this volume). Income inequality and poverty, health inequalities, as well as bodily and political aspects of inequality have also gained momentum, albeit not to the same degree in terms of absolute numbers.

Table 1: Number of papers on social-inequality topics in KZfSS and ZfS, 2000–2018

	2000–2005	2006–2011	2012–2018	Total
Methods and data of inequality research	9	1	3	13
Theories and explanations of inequality	6	5	1	12
Models of social stratification	4	1	1	6
Trend diagnoses of inequality	2	3	1	6
Educational inequalities	8	25	33	66
Transitions from school to work	4	1	3	8
Education (other)	0	1	0	1
Employment and labor market	8	10	8	26
Labor-market segregation	2	1	2	5
Specific occupational fields	3	1	1	5
Housework	0	2	1	3
Unemployment	6	2	0	8
Atypical employment	2	1	4	7
Income inequality	5	3	13	21
Poverty and precariousness	1	4	6	11
Material inequalities (other)	3	4	0	7
Social mobility (intergenerational)	2	1	3	6
Social mobility (career)	5	5	5	15
Spatial inequalities, residential segregation	2	1	3	6
Health inequalities, mortality	3	3	7	13
Bodily aspects of inequality	0	4	4	8
Cultural inequalities (values, lifestyles)	7	5	3	15
Attitudes towards inequality	4	2	5	11
Political aspects of inequality	0	3	6	9

³ These trends might be affected by a scholarly selectivity in the turn to publishing in English-language journals. We lack systematic data on this, but we have the impression that most scholars with a strong international publication record also made sizable contributions to the German flagship journals.

Table 1: Number of papers on social-inequality topics in KZfSS and ZfS, 2000–2018 (*Fortsetzung*)

	2000–2005	2006–2011	2012–2018	Total
Family issues/fertility and inequality	2	1	3	6
Other topics	3	1	4	8
Total	91	91	120	302

Before we move on to research on education, employment, income, and social mobility (sections 4–7), we discuss general developments in theoretical research paradigms (section 2), data sources, and methodologies (section 3).

2 Theoretical Research Paradigms

While sociological inequality discourses were dominated by macro approaches from neo-Marxism, structural-functionalism, or modernization theory far into the 1980s, they have been increasingly replaced by models that emphasize the micro foundations of macro-social phenomena. As a general framework, the explanatory macro–micro model coined by Coleman (1986) and popularized by Esser (1993) is employed by important parts of inequality research (Schneider, *SOCIAL THEORY*, this volume). In this model, collective phenomena are explained by reference to individual actors who are embedded in social contexts and make behavioral decisions. Varieties of rational-action theory are used to account for processes at the micro level. For example, educational choices are explained in terms of the costs, benefits, and probabilities of success, which are assumed to differ by social origin (Stocké, 2010). Apart from that, cultural processes, like socialization, social norms, stereotypes, and homophily, are frequent alternatives to explain individual action and interaction (Grunow et al., 2007; Kaiser and Diewald, 2014; Lorenz et al., 2016). At the meso level, social closure is regarded as one of the core mechanisms in the production of inequalities (Diewald and Faist, 2011), one that has experienced a theoretical revival (Groß, 2012; Haupt, 2012). Although collective phenomena, such as educational inequality, are devised as explananda, the micro-sociological turn has shifted attention to individual life chances. Without doubt, life chances are a valuable research focus, but inequality research has somewhat lost sight of genuine collective phenomena. For example, it has rarely addressed which social institutions promote an integrated or segregated society and which types and levels of inequality nurture social conflicts and political change (Nachtwey, 2016).

A major conceptual shift that has underlain a growing body of research since the 1990s is the analysis of inequalities from a life-course perspective (Mayer, 2009; Huinink/Hollstein, *LIFE COURSE*, this volume). While typical research papers were previously occupied with describing and explaining inequalities between social categories, a life-course approach investigates how transitions between stages or epi-

sodes in an individual's life (e.g., from school to work, out of unemployment, or into poverty) come about and how preceding events shape later life chances. This approach renders causal claims on the influence of social contexts, events, opportunities, and resources much more convincing.

The lively discussion of the 1990s on models of social structure has markedly faded. Among social-class models, the Goldthorpe (EGP) scheme, or variants like the European Socioeconomic Classification (ESeC), are the most popular. The class scheme developed by Oesch (2006) is also gaining importance. Bourdieu's social-space approach and his notion of cultural capital is still influential even though a consensus on the adequate operationalization has not been reached. Apart from this, social stratification is often measured in gradational terms, for example, by income, educational qualifications, or socioeconomic status. Models of social milieus or lifestyles have not become widely accepted as many of their promises (e.g., superior explanatory power) have not been kept. One of the few measurement approaches, Otte's (2005) "conduct of life" typology, has been adopted in applied research but less so in foundational research. The general trend is to abandon single "master concepts" of inequality and to use multivariate explanatory models instead. This trend is also reflected in the intersectionality paradigm, which is widely discussed in qualitative research (Meyer, 2017; Karstein/Wohlrab-Sahr, *CULTURE*, this volume; Villa/Hark, *GENDER*, this volume).

3 Data Infrastructure and Methodological Innovations

The continued growth of the data infrastructure is a success story for inequality research in the German-speaking countries.⁴ In Germany, the biennial general social survey (ALLBUS) with its repeated cross-sectional design can be used to monitor long-term trends of social inequalities since 1980. Data from the German micro-census is available for similar purposes (Hundenborn and Enderer, 2019). In general, the collaboration between those producing official statistics and those conducting academic research is improving continuously. Several research datacenters have been set up over the last two decades and provide such unique data as the "Linked Employer–Employee Data of the Institute of Employment Research" (LIAB), which merges administrative individual-level data with surveys of organizations.⁵

⁴ Many of these data can be accessed via the GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences and its data archive (<https://www.gesis.org/en/home>). For Switzerland, see <https://forscenter.ch>; for Austria, see <https://aussda.at/en>.

⁵ Founded in 2004, the German Data Forum (RatSWD), an advisory council to the German federal government, gives an overview of all research datacenters at <https://www.ratswd.de/en/data-infrastructure/rdc>.

While the macro–micro paradigm outlined above ideally requires multilevel data, such as those from the European Social Survey (ESS), the life-course perspective calls for panel data. The proliferation of panel studies is indeed impressive. The German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), established in 1984 and currently comprising about 15,000 households with 30,000 persons, can be considered the flagship in this field (Goebel et al., 2019). Since 1999, the Swiss Household Panel (SHP) has fulfilled a similar function in Switzerland. With its multicohort sequence design, the German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) is even more complex (Blossfeld et al., 2019). It has run since 2009 and has followed more than 60,000 target persons from six starting cohorts over time, ranging from newborns and kindergarteners through fifth-grade, ninth-grade, and college students up to adults. Another study relevant to inequality and poverty research is the Panel Study Labour Market and Social Security (PASS). It focuses on the dynamics of receiving welfare benefits and comprises household samples of welfare recipients as well as members of the general population with an overrepresentation of low-income households (Trappmann et al., 2013). Other panel studies, such as the Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics (pairfam; Huinink et al., 2011) or the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE; Börsch-Supan et al., 2013), provide valuable data for inequality research as well. The German Twin Family Panel (TwinLife) deserves special mention as it follows more than 4,000 families with monozygotic or dizygotic twin children to investigate genetic and environmental influences on behaviors (Mönkediek et al., 2019).

The trend towards panel data comes along with a heightened awareness of the presuppositions of causal claims that are widespread in inequality research (Barth/Blasius, *QUANTITATIVE METHODS*, this volume). For a long time, cross-sectional data were used unduly to draw such conclusions. The problem is that relevant variables are frequently missing to control for individuals' selection into social contexts and biographical states that are assumed to exert causal influences. Guided by the counterfactual approach to causality, some scholars have suggested analytical designs to attenuate this problem of unobserved heterogeneity and to approximate the ideal of randomized experiments (Gangl, 2010; Legewie, 2012). The fixed-effects paradigm of panel regression is seen as particularly well suited for causal inference because it controls for time-constant unit-level influences (for an overview of applications, see Giesselmann and Windzio, 2014). In addition, experimental designs are increasingly used in causal analysis (Keuschnigg and Wolbring, 2015). Field experiments have become popular to detect discrimination in labor and housing markets. By way of example, ethnic discrimination can be found in the rental housing market, but its extent is reduced when more information is disclosed about ethnic minority applicants, which suggests that statistical discrimination is at work here (Auspurg et al., 2017b, 2019). Factorial survey designs integrate experimental elements into surveys. For instance, when asked to rate a set of fictitious employee vignettes, respondents in one study considered lower earnings for female employees to be fair—an answer that would hardly be expected to a direct question about attitudes toward equal pay

(Auspurg et al., 2017a). Finally, natural experiments are used to evaluate the impact of institutional reforms. The temporary introduction of (rather low) tuition fees in some German federal states, for example, has been shown to have no detrimental effect on access to higher education (Helbig et al., 2012).

Inequality research is dominated by quantitative approaches. Qualitative studies, by contrast, are often published in books rather than journals, thus making them less visible (Burzan and Schad, 2018). These studies mostly use interview methods and typically focus on perceptions, interpretations, and evaluations of personal living conditions, especially among precarious groups (e.g., Bahl and Staab, 2015; Gefken et al., 2015). They also explore processes of identity formation and symbolic boundary construction (e.g., Sachweh, 2013; Bosancic, 2014; Hollstein/Kumkar, *QUALITATIVE METHODS*, this volume) and show how inequalities are reproduced in everyday practices (for an overview, see Behrmann et al., 2018). Some examples of qualitative panel data collection do exist. For instance, Grimm et al. (2013) investigated how personal identity formation was shaped by labor-market insecurities over a five-year span.

4 Educational Inequality and Returns on Education

The most striking development in German-language inequality research is the upsurge in research on educational inequality (Grundmann, *EDUCATION AND SOCIALIZATION*, this volume). Although this field is marked by a strong prior research tradition with important contributions from Germany and Switzerland (e.g., Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993; Shavit and Müller, 1998; Buchmann and Kriesi, 2011), the recent upswing can be traced back to the first PISA study in 2000 and the ensuing “*PISA-Schock*.” Not only did German students perform below the OECD average, their test scores were determined more strongly by social origin than in any other of the 32 participating countries (Deutsches PISA-Konsortium, 2001). Since then, each new PISA wave has been received critically by the general public. The transdisciplinary field of empirical educational research and panel surveys such as NEPS have profited from calls for more evidence-based research and extensive funding.

The German-speaking countries have witnessed a pronounced educational expansion since World War II, with particular boosts for upper-secondary education in the 1970s and 2000s and for tertiary education in the 1980s and 2000s (Becker and Hadjar, 2013). Compared to most other Western countries, enrollment in higher education is still low because of the well-developed dual system of vocational education, which provides an attractive alternative to an academic education. While inequalities in the completion of advanced-track upper-secondary education (*Abitur*) associated with social class have been moderately reduced over the last four decades, access to the university system has become more socially selective among those who have acquired such an entrance certificate (Breen et al., 2009; Lörz and Schindler, 2011; Neugebauer et al., 2016).

The profound effects of social origin on educational success are attributed to the strong stratification of the school systems in the German-speaking countries (Müller and Kogan, 2010). Decisions to enter one of the hierarchical secondary-school tracks must be made very early—in Germany, this is usually at the end of the fourth grade. Because educational decision-making is so important, much research focuses on “secondary effects” (Boudon, 1974), which are comparatively large in Germany (Neugebauer et al., 2013). Worth mentioning is Stocké’s (2007) attempt to measure the parameters of the well-known Breen–Goldthorpe model of educational decision-making (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997). Drawing on rational-action theories, some scholars argue that inequalities of educational opportunity are reduced when parental freedom of choice of a secondary-school track is restricted by teachers’ recommendations. Because German federalism grants considerable leeway for educational institution-building, there is variation in the binding nature of teachers’ recommendations between the federal states. Evidence on this hypothesis is mixed. Whereas Dollmann (2011) used a pre- and post-reform survey of pupils in Cologne to show that mandatory recommendations attenuate the effects of social origins on the probability of a student attending a higher-secondary track, other studies based on a large set of federal states and their transition regulations did not confirm that hypothesis (Büchler, 2016; Roth and Siebert, 2015).

Boudon’s (1974) model also points to the “primary effects” of cognitive ability varying between children of different origin. In Germany, a Turkish migration background is associated with serious disadvantages in an individual’s life chances. In a series of papers, Becker demonstrated that children in general benefit from high-quality preschool learning environments and that those with a Turkish migration background improve their German vocabulary particularly well when they attend preschool for a longer period (e.g., Becker, 2010).

The German-speaking countries are known for a strong link between the educational system and the labor market: General and vocational educational credentials are highly valued by employers (Shavit and Müller, 1998). Against this backdrop, the ongoing educational expansion has sparked a lively debate on the inflation of educational credentials and an overeducation of graduates. Although there is, in fact, a growing shortage of skilled personnel in various trades and care occupations, recent studies have shown that, by and large, the returns on education have remained stable with regard to income and class positions (Klein, 2011; Piopiunik et al., 2017). Still, because many families feel that the value of upper-secondary and university degrees has diminished, new distinctions have arisen. We can witness a trend towards private schooling (Jungbauer-Gans et al., 2012) and a renewed interest in ancient languages (Sawert, 2016) along with investments in transnational human capital in the form of school or academic years abroad (Gerhards et al., 2017), the enduring appeal of prestigious fields of study, such as medicine and law (Reimer and Pollak, 2010), and a trend toward the doctoral degree as a new status marker (Jaksztat and Lörz, 2018). Moreover, students from privileged social classes benefit more from alternative paths

to higher education, which are meant to correct initial failure in pursuing the standard pathway (Buchholz and Pratter, 2017).

5 Employment and the Labor Market

While educational credentials are equally important in the German, Austrian, and Swiss labor markets, some peculiarities must be considered in each of these countries. In Germany, the process of establishing homogenous living conditions has posed a prolonged challenge since reunification. Whereas the former GDR observed a full-employment policy with comprehensive state-run childcare, the West German employment system was built on the male-breadwinner model. In the face of demographic change, economic strains, and egalitarian cultural ideologies, this model increasingly clashed with reality. New policies put a stronger emphasis on activating the unemployed and removing obstacles for women (Dingeldey, 2007; Hipp et al., 2015). Several reforms in the 2000s, especially the Hartz reforms, emphasized individual responsibility for safeguarding against life risks and incentivized labor-market participation (Eichhorst and Marx, 2019).⁶

It is challenging to disentangle the effects of these macro-level processes. For instance, the flexibilization of labor, indicated by an increase in atypical employment, such as part-time work and temporary contracts, can be traced to the Hartz reforms but also to the long-term growth of female labor-market participation (Giesecke and Groß, 2003; Pfau-Effinger/Grages, SOCIAL POLICY, this volume). These trends have reinforced a dual labor market: standard employees with privileged and relatively safe positions are pitted against those in atypical and precarious employment (Eichhorst and Marx, 2011; Ochsenfeld, 2018; Aulenbacher/Grubner, WORK AND LABOR, this volume). Flexible labor comes with new risks, such as in-work poverty. Precarious employment has grown over the last decades, and the insecurities associated with it are more pronounced in East Germany and among migrants and women (Brady and Biegert, 2018).

The group affected most by severe risks such as poverty is the economically inactive part of the population. Compared to other European countries, unemployment in Germany has decreased considerably since the early 2000s, and the 2007–08 financial crisis had only a marginal impact on the labor market. Although unemployment is quite low in general, it is higher in East Germany and hits hardest individuals with low levels of educational attainment and without vocational qualifications (Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2018). From a life-course perspective, Gangl (2006) showed the enduring “scarring effects” of unemployment on earnings trajectories.

⁶ From 2003 to 2006, a bundle of reforms, which had been developed by an expert committee chaired by Peter Hartz, were put into effect in Germany. The reforms alleviated temporary work and minor employment (“mini jobs”) and lumped together the former unemployment assistance and social welfare.

Care work is another reason for individuals not being part of the active labor force (Villa/Hark, *GENDER*, this volume). Such responsibilities traditionally fell to women in the German-speaking countries. In recent decades, the housewife model has been replaced by female part-time (and full-time) work. This new model reduces women's dependency on their husbands' income. However, women are now vulnerable to the risks associated with atypical employment (Böhnke et al., 2015). Many mothers work part-time after childbirth, and this often comes with wage penalties on top of a persistently high gender wage gap (Gangl and Ziefle, 2015). The majority of women lack enough disposable income to secure their livelihood on their own (Trappe et al., 2015). As a stronger inclusion of women into the labor market is not without controversy still today, contradictory policies coexist. German family policies both encourage women to assume care responsibilities by offering financial benefits and promote female labor-market participation at the same time (Lohmann and Zagel, 2016). These issues are further complicated by the heritage of two formerly distinct welfare systems. After reunification, the GDR childcare infrastructure as well as cultural foundations supporting a greater inclusion of women in the workforce have persisted in East Germany, resulting in higher female employment rates and lower wage inequalities in the East than in the West (Rosenfeld et al., 2004; Matysiak and Steinmetz, 2008).

Two related issues that have attracted much attention during the last two decades are the gender pay gap and the underrepresentation of women in high occupational positions (Gartner and Hinz, 2009). Two mechanisms are particularly important to explain these phenomena (Ochsenfeld, 2012). First, there is a considerable and enduring amount of occupational gender segregation (Busch, 2013; Hausmann et al., 2015). As occupational choices have their roots in gender-specific preferences toward school subjects, fields of study, and vocational education, and as men tend to pursue better-remunerated occupations, the process of preference formation is an important research topic. Second, female careers are hampered primarily at the point of family formation: The household division of labor starts to traditionalize, which means that women shoulder the larger part of care commitments and have to content themselves with part-time work (Grunow et al., 2007).

6 Income, Wealth, and Poverty

Although Germany has a below-average level of income inequality by international standards, income inequality and poverty have increased considerably in recent decades. The proportion of people affected by income poverty is currently around 16 percent (BMAS, 2017). Since 2000, an almost continuous increase in income inequality and poverty has been reported, both for West and East Germany. Not only has the number of poorer households grown steadily—they have also become even poorer. At the other end of the income distribution, the trend is for wealthy households to become even wealthier (Haupt and Nollmann, 2017). This polarization can be attributed to inequalities in labor incomes and the rise of a low-wage sector, reforms of

the tax and social-transfer system, the heightened educational expansion, changes in the household structure (in particular the rising share of single-parent households), and increased low-skill immigration (Biewen and Juhász, 2012; Grabka and Goebel, 2018).

The Hartz reforms were intended to increase employment and to reduce poverty. However, despite positive labor-market performance, poverty did not fall (Pfau-Effinger/Grages, *SOCIAL POLICY*, this volume). On the contrary, the expansion of the low-wage sector led to an increasing share of in-work poverty (Brülle et al., 2019; Lohmann, 2009). Panel studies identify life-course events such as divorce, birth of a third child, unemployment, death of the household's breadwinner, disability, and ill health as gateways to poverty (Andreß et al., 2003; Kohler et al., 2012). There are strong correlations between poverty and social class (Groh-Samberg, 2004). Poverty does not seem to be confined to temporary episodes in individual life courses but rather ossifies at the bottom of society (Groh-Samberg, 2009).

The main groups at risk of poverty in Germany are single parents and individuals with a migration background. Single parents have only recently begun to receive more research attention (Boehle, 2019; Hübgen, 2018). Together with increasing employment in the low-wage sector, the pronounced poverty of single parents is a major reason why poverty is currently further rising. As single parents are almost exclusively mothers (around 90 percent), their poverty results from employment patterns, such as part-time work, that are typical of a traditional division of labor. Individuals with a migration background have a heightened risk of poverty due to deficits in general and vocational education, unemployment or low-wage employment, and having a family with many children (Giesecke et al., 2017).

Poverty research in Germany has devoted a great deal of thought to conceptual issues (Hauser, 2012). Intensive efforts were made to establish a multidimensional concept of poverty, which comprises various elements of a person's "standard of living" (Andreß, 2008) or a multitude of "conditions of life" (Voges et al., 2003). Because of their complexity of measurement, however, these approaches have not been able to replace the resource-based concept of relative income poverty, which dominates in research and social reporting. Nevertheless, a consensus has been reached that poverty is a multi-layered phenomenon and that the relative-income indicator is a suitable proxy for deficiencies in various areas of life.

Some scholars have proposed new concepts such as exclusion and precarity. The social-exclusion concept no longer delimits the poor and the non-poor in a vertical logic but treats individuals as included in—or excluded from—various realms of society (Kronauer, 2002). Those affected by exclusion have been referred to as the "superfluous" (Bude, 1998). While the notion of exclusion has not proven very fruitful for empirical research, the concept of precarity has exerted greater influence. It accounts for employment insecurities and suggests that they reach well into the middle classes (Castel and Dörre, 2009).

Affluence and wealth have long been neglected in inequality research, partially owing to data limitations. More recently, several studies have suggested "Matthew

effects” of cumulated social inequality. That is to say, those who are privileged in terms of education, income, and class tend to inherit and accumulate larger amounts of wealth, with real estate being the most important component (Frick and Grabka, 2009; Skopek et al., 2012; Szydlík, 2016).

7 Social Mobility

Studying social mobility means bringing together educational inequalities, educational returns, access to class positions, and labor-market careers in the “OED triangle” (i.e., origin–education–destination). Although Germany is among the least “open” European societies, the association between the classes of origin and destination has weakened in West Germany, particularly for the cohorts born after World War II. The main drivers of this process are the reduction in educational inequalities and the expansion of education as such, whereas the returns on education have remained rather stable and processes of direct inheritance are of minor importance (Pollak and Müller, 2020). Social immobility is notably strong at the top and the bottom of the class hierarchy, even across three generations (Hertel and Groh-Samberg, 2014). As a result of the radical political and economic restructuring after reunification, East Germany experienced much higher mobility rates in the 1990s and has adapted to the West German pattern ever since.

Career mobility is widespread—but within rather narrow confines, which are determined by one’s educational qualifications and first occupational position (Hillmert, 2011; Stawarz, 2013). Over the life course, inequalities in occupational prestige do not increase much among men, but they do increase among women, mainly because some careers stagnate due to longer periods of parental leave and part-time work while others continue without interruption. Contrary to what the individualization thesis would suggest, occupational biographies have become more stable rather than fluid in the succession of birth cohorts (Mayer et al., 2010).

By extending the OED framework to the offspring of labor migrants from Southern Europe and Turkey to Germany, Kalter et al. (2007) showed that structural assimilation takes place in generational succession. Migrant children, often originating from lower-class families, have benefitted from the weakening link between social origin and educational success. Qualitative studies portray the steadfast beliefs in success along with the cumbersome habitus transformations that go along with the upward mobility of these children (Raiser, 2007; El-Mafaalani, 2012). Deficits in human capital and language skills are the main determinants for persistent ethnic disadvantages in the labor market (Granato and Kalter, 2001; Kalter, 2006), but evidence of discrimination can also be found (Weichselbaumer, 2016).

8 Conclusion and Prospects

Social-inequality research has been successfully institutionalized in the German-language area. This process has several cornerstones: a large scholarly community with many professorships, important research centers, and valuable access to official statistics; a high-quality data infrastructure; the establishment of social-reporting systems;⁷ assessments of the robustness of results in cumulative research; as well as middle-range theories and social mechanisms as explanatory tools. These cornerstones, in principle, suffice to derive evidence-based policy recommendations (e.g., Gebel and Giesecke, 2016). However, many researchers are cautious about engaging in political consultancy, and sociologists are less successful in this profession than economists.

Current inequality research seems a bit unbalanced in favor of educational inequalities, and sociologists should pay attention to other enduring but somewhat neglected themes, such as unemployment and residential segregation (Teltemann et al., 2015). Interestingly, our survey of major German journals revealed a few topics that seem to be gaining in importance. Demographic change and societal aging have begun to draw attention to health inequalities as a field of study (Lampert et al., 2016; Hoffmann et al., 2018). Disability is an important determinant of inequality that will attract more research interest with the data of the first survey on inclusion of people with special needs that is currently underway in Germany. Studies on bodily attributes and their discriminatory effects have to date mostly dealt with physical attractiveness (Dunkake et al., 2012; Schunck, 2016) and weight issues (Bozoyan, 2014). The implications of income polarization for social discontent and political attitudes have attracted more scholarly interest with the rise of right-wing populist parties (Burzan and Berger, 2010; Mau, 2012; Lengfeld and Dilger, 2018). Furthermore, the debate about the shrinking middle class and fears of social decline has brought to light some shortfalls of research: For example, there is no clear-cut answer as to how to demarcate the “middle class.” Nevertheless, this debate points the way toward the fruitful study on the interlinkages between social inequalities and macro-level outcomes.

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⁷ In Germany, official social reports are continuously published on education, poverty/wealth, occupational health and safety, migration, family, health, and the inclusion of persons with special needs.

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Social Inequalities—Theoretical Focus

Thomas Schwinn

Abstract: The sociology of inequality over the past few decades has been characterized by its fragmentation into an assembly of small-scale aspects of inequality and by a disjointed perspective that breaks up the modern history of inequality into several phases. This is the result of shortcomings in previous theory-building. This contribution presents new theoretical approaches that have been developed in the past years: a micro-sociological or action-theoretical one, a macro-sociological one, and some strategies—at a meso level of abstraction—that allow us to identify mechanisms of social inequality. The article will highlight the limitations and opportunities of these recent approaches, especially by clarifying the question of what characterizes the basic constellation of social inequalities in the current era.

Keywords: Social inequality, sociological theory, class, race, capitalism, constellations of inequality

1 A Rediscovered Issue

The history of the theory and analysis of social inequality in German-language sociology has not followed a continuous path of knowledge accumulation but has instead evolved to the beat of newly emerging approaches, often initiated by individual researchers. A case in point is the German debates on the theory of social stratification over the past few decades, which we would fail to understand properly without considering the stimulus provided by Ulrich Beck's 1983 article *Jenseits von Klasse und Stand (Beyond Class and Estate)*, which shifted the major frontlines of debate and research in this field. Beck's article argued that the general increase in wealth in postwar society has resulted in class and estate being a less rigid determinant of people's social position than before. Self-chosen (political) affiliations must be given greater weight.

Ideas, too, play a crucial role in setting the course in this respect, and they explain why academic discourse in different countries differs in the way it addresses social inequality.¹ Although Ulrich Beck was one of the most frequently cited authors in Germany, he was largely absent from Anglo-Saxon discourse before the turn of the

Note: Translation from German by Stephan Elkins (*SocioTrans—Social Scientific Translation & Editing*).

1 Haller (2006) traces, in a sociology-of-knowledge perspective and on the basis of the specific conditions in individual societies, why certain theories and ideas in regard to social inequality do not fall on fertile ground everywhere.

millennium and only thereafter was his work cautiously taken up and often viewed critically (Allmendinger and Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2000: 267; Atkinson, 2007; Schröder, 2010: 99)

Long before Beck, German postwar sociology began diagnosing new social inequalities. In rapid succession there was the leveled middle-class society in the 1950s; the renaissance of class society in the 1960s and 1970s; individualization, event society, and the end of class society in the 1980s and 1990s; re-stratification and the erosion of the middle classes, persistent poverty of the bottom third of society, and the emergence of a group of the superfluous since the new millennium. These attention cycles in the sociology of inequality have proven to be much more fast-paced than the actual, much more persistent structures of social stratification (Geißler, 1998: 229; Kreckel, 2004: IX; Rössel, 2005: 82f.; Mayer, 2006: 1337; Diewald and Faist, 2011: 94). Sociology has yet to find the proper balance between empirical continuity and theoretical discontinuity. Sociologists have been eager to proclaim paradigm shifts that are supposed to indicate the dawn of fundamentally new eras. We would, however, be mistaken to perceive theoretical and methodological innovations as simply reflecting actual social and historical change.

Around the turn of the millennium, articles taking stock of the sociology of inequality created the impression that German sociology of the 1980s and '90s had lost sight of the issue of social inequality. Titles such as *Auf der Suche nach der verlorengegangenen Ungleichheit* (*Searching for Lost Inequality*; Allmendinger and Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2000) or *Das mehrfache Ende der Klassengesellschaft* (*The Repeated End of Class Society*; Geißler, 1998; see also Wehler, 2013: 7ff.) expressed concern that something had gone fundamentally wrong in the wake of Beck's article. Geißler countered this development by *Refusing to Say Farewell to Class and Estate* (*Kein Abschied von Klasse und Schicht*; Geißler, 1996) to put the trade back on the right track.² These debates of the 1980s and '90s lost their significance after the turn of the millennium. Reviving them takes special anniversaries: *Individualisierungen. Ein Vierteljahrhundert 'Jenseits von Stand und Klasse?'* (*Individualizations. A Quarter-Century since 'Beyond Estate and Class?'*; Berger and Hitzler, 2010).

With Bourdieu and Beck, two hardly reconcilable theories underpinning such research faced each other (Berger, 2006: 73f.). Whereas Bourdieu views lifestyles and milieus as an expression of class positions, Beck's individualization thesis is an attack on class theory. The lifestyle and milieu approaches to which the two theories gave rise began to lose significance again as general models of social inequality as early as the late 1990s. Assessments of this body of work have taken a critical view of the self-proclaimed theoretical and empirical aspirations of milieu and lifestyle research

² This debate resembled the one in the 1950s and '60s when Helmut Schelsky's (1979 [1954]) 'leveled middle-class society' thesis, which received much attention at the time, met fierce criticism from Ralf Dahrendorf (1968: 137ff.), for instance, who refuted the idea of leveling tendencies and emphasized the significance of vertical stratification and the concept of social class.

(Hermann, 2004; Otte, 2005; Rössel, 2006).³ It has failed to live up to its claim to replace traditional conceptions of social stratification.

All in all, the German sociology of inequality after the turn of the millennium has changed from what it had been during the two decades before. The realignment of German research on social inequality since 2000 has to do with levels of social inequality rising once again, in the face of which sociology has rediscovered one of its core issues. In addition to monographies and collections, social inequality has also regained significance in journals.

2 Attention Lost

Although we can observe heightened interest among sociologists in the increase of social inequality, only in a few instances has research devoted to empirically measuring wealth and income disparities originated in sociology itself (Nollmann, 2006; Haupt and Nollmann, 2017). The data and their interpretation has largely been provided by economists (for Germany, see Fratzscher, 2016; for the international debate, see Atkinson, 2015; Stiglitz, 2015; Milanović, 2016; Piketty, 2014; Hickel, 2017). This is not a particular shortcoming of German sociology but one shared by U.S. sociology as well. “The takeoff in earnings inequality is one of the most spectacular social developments in the recent history of the United States. Although an appropriately massive literature on the takeoff has developed among social scientists, this literature is dominated by economists, and largely ignored by sociologists. [...] The unanticipated effect of this [...] was to lock sociologists out of one of the key social science literatures in the past quarter century and marginalize the discipline yet further.”⁴ When it comes to many of the issues related to social inequality, it is often the voices of economists that are heard in the media.

A distinctive feature of sociological research on inequality over the past two decades has been the proliferation of ever more aspects and dimensions of social inequality (Otte/Boehle/Kunißen, *SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—EMPIRICAL FOCUS*, this volume). Gender, ethnicity, religion, health, region, city, housing markets, crime, age, and others have been discovered as factors affecting inequality. All of these dimen-

³ On the few later works on the milieu concept, see the two collections by Bremer and Lange-Vester (2006) and Isenböck et al. (2014).

⁴ Weeden et al., 2007: 702f.; similar DiPrete, 2007; Wehler, 2013: 60ff.; a large number of economists are represented in the German-language collection by Müller and Scherer, 2003 as well. More recent stock-taking (Killewald et al., 2017; Korom, 2017) has come to a more optimistic verdict on sociology’s research efforts in this respect, yet without concluding that these efforts have narrowed the gap between inequality research in economics and sociology. Berger (2014: 14) would like to “re-adjust” the relationship between inequality research in sociology and in economics. Piketty (2014: 41) demands that economists open up toward the social sciences and “get over its childish passion for mathematics and for purely theoretical and often highly ideological speculation.”

sions of inequality have given rise to research fields and stocks of knowledge that have been canonized in collections and handbooks, rendering it an increasingly difficult task to become fully knowledgeable and make a competent assessment of the field. The probes of the various research approaches delve into ever new and more minute details. In one of the most advanced areas, the sociology of education, this has led to turning over every stone along the life course to identify prerequisites and consequences of education that are relevant to inequality, beginning with prenatal conditions up until very old age. The drivers behind this “‘obsession with small differences’ account” (Grusky and Ku, 2008: 26) are the dynamics of equality norms and the advancement of statistical empirical methods. “The continuing diffusion of egalitarian values renders any departures from equality, no matter how small, as problematic and newsworthy. By this logic, even increasingly small intergroup differences will attract much attention, especially because ever more powerful models and statistical methods now make it possible to tease them out” (ibid.).

This development does indeed deliver meaningful and useful knowledge that was previously unavailable. Yet what is missing is a theoretical framework that ties things together. We know more and more about less and less—and about things that hardly anyone is interested in beyond the limited context of the respective research itself. The dynamics of equality values and the issue of justice propels research on inequality. Since values know no inherent stop mechanism, this research dynamic becomes boundless, lacks measure, and thus fails to live up to its task of delivering theoretically founded criteria. In essence, sociology has focused on describing inequalities and the mechanisms of their production but has rarely addressed the issue of why social inequality represents a problem (Jencks, 2002; Mayer, 2006: 1336, 1349; Mau and Schöneck, 2015: 9ff; Hradil, 2015: 518). Turning to the value of equality as the sole factor that sets and defines the “problem” falls too short. What has yet to be tackled is to take analytical stock of the positive and negative consequences of different levels of inequality and equality.

3 Current Theoretical Strategies: Micro Foundation, Macro Sociology, and Mechanisms

We lack a clear understanding of what needs to be done to develop a theoretical framework and what it is supposed to accomplish. Quite a few sociologists employ a language rich in metaphors. The various aspects of inequality become “pieces of a puzzle” that, put together, yield the “big picture” (Zerger, 2002: 105; Mau, 2012: 11f.). Or they resort to the image of the blind men and the elephant (Mayer, 2006: 1350). Each one touches and feels a different part of the elephant’s body, and yet it is the same elephant. These approaches suppose some idea of a coherent whole, which is abandoned by others who employ the metaphor of a “toolbox” (Rössel, 2009: 360; Weischer, 2011: 481). In his assessment and criticism of inequality research, Geißler (1998)

oscillates between both of these ideas, a concept of the whole versus an unsorted assembly of concepts. For instance, he repeatedly draws on a terminology of the “overall picture,” “overall structure” or “dominant structure,” or the “overall diagnosis” that must be able to distinguish between “the essential and the non-essential” or between “surface” and “deep structure” (Geißler, 1998: 210, 212, 216, 219, 227) and resignedly arrives at the conclusion that the partialization of research perspectives is an expression of the complexity of modern society, which renders vain any attempt to develop a convincing concept of the whole (Geißler, 1998: 230).

Of course, the sociology of social inequality has always relied heavily on the development of sociological theory in general. Some authors even deny that inequality is an issue that can claim the status of a standalone theory in its own right (Eder, 2001; Berger, 2004; Giegel, 2004: 113; Nullmeier, 2015: 285). Even if one is not inclined to go this far (Schwinn, 2007: 7ff.; Schroer, 2010: 305ff.), one can still see that there is no one single *theorist* proper of social inequality.⁵ Social inequality is not a fundamental theoretical concept. Weber derives it from the concept of closure and power, Dahrendorf from the conceptual triad of domination, norm, and sanction. And the debate surrounding the functionalist theory of stratification is inconceivable without Talcott Parsons’ systems theory. The issue of inequality is and always has been embedded in general sociological theory. This holds true for the past two decades as well.

We can identify three approaches that can roughly be characterized as micro-, macro-, and meso-oriented. One line of theory-building has chosen the *micro-macro problem of action theory* as its point of departure (Schneider, SOCIAL THEORY, this volume). Jörg Rössel (2005; see also Erlinghagen and Hank, 2013: 19ff.) has developed this line of thought on social inequality by drawing on rational-choice theory. Taking the criticism of macro-social structural laws into consideration, he searches for an action-theoretical or micro-sociological foundation for a theory of social inequality. This involves translating the macro-sociological concept of class into resources and conditions of action, the concept of lifestyles into cultural preferences, and the concept of milieu into social relations or networks of relationships (Rössel, 2005: 13ff.). In line with the “micro-macro link” (Alexander et al., 1987; Coleman, 1987), the basic concepts of action theory must then be translated back to the macro-sociological level to explain structures of social inequality. Rössel’s work is the currently most ambitious approach in this line of theorizing and has indeed yielded convincing insights (see also Weingartner, 2019). This applies much less to the majority of empirical research on inequality, which typically adopts a few rational-choice assumptions and usually gets stuck at the micro-sociological level of analysis. What is missing is to translate microsociology back to the macro level. There is a lack of any discernible theory-building (Reitz, 2015: 13f.). This development has deprived the sociology of education, one of the most advanced areas of research in our discipline, of its institutional di-

⁵ In Germany, the one theorist who comes closest to this is Reinhard Kreckel.

mension. “With the focus on individual decisions, we lose sight of an education system’s normative embeddedness and embeddedness in society as a whole—that is, its structure, principles of organization, and processes of selection as part of the institutional configuration of models of society and economy. [...] It is inquired into *how* it [the framework of institutional and normative conditions; TS] takes effect, not, however, *why* it exists”⁶ (Solga and Becker, 2012: 16; Grundmann, EDUCATION AND SOCIALIZATION, this volume).

An alternative proposal for theory development takes the *macro-sociological level* as its starting point. Both Grusky (2008) and Solga et al. (2009) lead off their collections of seminal texts on social inequality with the functionalist theory of stratification, a theory that never really gained traction in Germany. The conflict-theoretical tradition of thought, from Karl Marx through Max Weber to Ralf Dahrendorf, set other premises. This applies to Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory as well, although in a different way. His version of systems theory, and not that of Talcott Parsons, has made a major imprint on German sociology over the past decades. And Luhmann broke with a fundamental idea underpinning the American version of systems theory: the idea that stratification serves a function in the reproduction of modern society. Luhmann’s provocative claim that social inequality no longer constitutes a dominant structural axis in modern societies has given rise to a new line of research that revolves around determining the relationship of social inequality and differentiated social orders (Schwinn, 2004; 2007; 2019; Schimank, 2013; 2015; Itschert, 2013; Schroer, 2010). The works of important authors to whom research on inequality makes reference, such as Weber and Bourdieu, also contain a theory of differentiated institutions relevant to such research, but this aspect of their work has not been considered in this context (on Bourdieu, see Nassehi and Nollmann, 2004; Kieserling, 2008). With a few exceptions (Rössel, 2011; Knapp, 2013; Weiß, 2017), this discussion on the relationship of differentiation theory and the theory of social inequality has largely failed to have an effect on researchers in the field of inequality. For instance, Solga et al.’s (2009) collection of classical and current texts on social inequality makes no reference at all to this ongoing debate. In the same vein, when speaking of the “structure” of today’s societies⁷, popular German-language textbooks on social stratification refer to the structure of social inequality. What is lacking is a systematic analysis of the differentiated institutional arrangements in which the structures of inequality are embedded.

A third approach opts for *medium-level theory-building*. Here we can distinguish different varieties. Some are inspired by the theoretical work on clarifying *social mechanisms* (Hedström and Swedberg, 1998) and hence search for the mechanisms that generate social inequalities (Tilly, 1998; Diewald and Faist, 2011; Therborn, 2013: 48ff.). Examples of such mechanisms are exclusion, the hoarding of opportunities,

⁶ All quotes from German sources have been translated by Stephan Elkins.

⁷ In German, the branch of sociology that studies social stratification is referred to as *Sozialstrukturanalyse* (which literally translates to *socio-structural analysis*).

hierarchization, and exploitation. Some of these authors (Diewald and Faist, 2011: 93, 99) explicitly distance themselves from “grand theory,” which they perceive as frequently being “too far away from the concrete processes of producing inequality.” What they are hoping for is cumulative advances in our understanding of inequality by clarifying the interactions between several mechanisms, which they expect could be incorporated into an integrated model. The precise clarification of processes of creating and reproducing social inequality certainly yields fruitful insights. However, like all middle-range theories, these too have their limitations. So far, they have not made significant advances toward achieving their self-proclaimed goal of relating the various dimensions and mechanisms of social inequality and sorting out their precise relationship.

The pioneer of this line of research, Charles Tilly (1998), sought to develop this approach by demonstrating the interaction between several categories of social inequality. Another research direction has been working its way through the same basic problematic, although it has not explicitly made reference to this “mechanistic understanding” of social inequality: the so-called *intersectionality approach*. Over the last two decades, it has been widely adopted and pursued with great intensity in women’s studies and gender research in German-language sociology (Klinger et al., 2007; Winker and Degele, 2009; Hess et al., 2011; Bereswill et al., 2015; Meyer, 2017).⁸ This approach, too, traces the mechanisms of generating and reproducing inequality and how they interact across several dimensions of inequality, in particular, gender, class, and race or ethnicity (Villa/Hark, GENDER, this volume). In this line of research, in sharp contrast to Diewald and Faist, the call for “grand theory” is becoming ever louder (Klinger et al., 2007; Müller, 2011; Aulenbacher and Riegraf, 2012; Knapp, 2013; Weischer, 2013; Collins, 2015), as its advocates have come across all kinds of interrelations, reinforcements, mitigations, and neutralizations while lacking a theoretical framework that systematically conceptualizes these interrelations in a satisfactory manner. “Intersectionality,” they argue, has largely remained a “metaphor” so far. As for the aspects of inequality thought to be crucial, the proposals range anywhere from three to more than a dozen dimensions.

Another version of a middle-range theory that falls under the label of “*doing differences/inequalities*” draws on symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology (Behrmann et al., 2018; Hirschauer, 2014). Social inequality, or so goes the reasoning, is not a purely objective fact of socio-economic conditions but must be conceived of as being socially constructed.⁹ Like the social-mechanism approach, this line of research takes the manifold social differences and heterogeneity found in society as its point of departure (Hollstein/Kumkar, QUALITATIVE METHODS, this volume). As opposed to the causal-mechanistic understanding of the former, however, the latter emphasizes

⁸ Historical scholarship has seized on sociological research on intersectionality and is exploring this perspective in regard to premodern relations of inequality (see Bähr and Kühnel, 2018).

⁹ For the American debate, see Wimmer, 2008; Lamont et al., 2014.

actors' cultural interpretations, which are supposed to shed light on the black box of "mechanisms of social inequality". And on a critical note directed at intersectionality studies, claiming that they are unable to distinguish between mere differences and social inequalities, the social-constructivist approach seeks to illuminate how differences are generated and which ones translate into social inequalities and which ones do not (Hirschauer, 2014: 175ff.). Yet, it is self-critically conceded that social-constructivist studies tend to remain at the micro level and have yet to forge the link to the macro level (Behrmann et al., 2018: Vf., 22).

4 Constellations of Inequality

Do these three new theoretical strands provide a remedy for the diagnosed tendencies toward fragmentation and the rapid succession of claims positing a paradigm shift in inequality research? To clarify the relationship between the theory of inequality and empirical evidence in matters of inequality, it is useful to consider a discussion that, starting from the observation of increasing social inequality over the past few decades, addresses the question of how to interpret this phase against the backdrop of the development of the 20th century overall. The key thesis at the heart of Thomas Piketty's (2014) bestseller, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, is that modern capitalism by its very nature intensifies social inequality.¹⁰ Under conditions of a normal, fairly low level of economic growth, wealth grew faster than income from labor. Piketty has countered a long-held and widespread belief in economics that the dominant trend in markets is not for prosperity to trickle down but to trickle up. The concentration of wealth at the top and not its broad distribution among the entire population is the much more prominent feature of capitalism. The only means to alleviate social inequality in capitalism, Piketty argues, are major catastrophes and severe economic crises, such as the ones in the period from 1914 to 1945, which resulted in the destruction of wealth. This assumed continuous trend of capitalism faces the older cycle theory by the Nobel laureate Simon Kuznets, which has recently been modified by Branko Milanović (2016). According to this theory, social inequality increased substantially during industrialization until the early 20th century, was reduced by the two world wars and during the phase of prosperity from the 1950s to the 1970s, and has increased again since the 1980s.

Hartmut Kaelble (2017) has made convincing amendments to the two positions. He has implicitly confirmed the widely accepted insight among sociological theorists that there are no macro-level laws and that no such laws govern the relationship between capitalism and social inequality either. Economic development does not inevitably result in greater inequality; it can reduce inequality as well. Kaelble (2017:

¹⁰ The contributions in Bude and Staab (2016) address the issue of capitalism from a somewhat different perspective.

170ff.) distinguishes two types of inequality regimes since World War II. Each of these regimes is characterized by different constellations of economic, political, and cultural factors and conditions.¹¹ The period from the 1950s to the 1970s was marked by reducing disparities in income and wealth while perpetuating disparities in education as well as a lack of social mobility. Declining economic inequality went hand in hand with a socially immobile society. From the 1980s onward, a new regime of inequality was gradually established. As the wealth and income gap increased, so did opportunities for education and social mobility.¹² This cannot be explained by reference to economic factors alone. The political framework is a relevant factor as well (Kaelble, 2017: 173; Haupt and Nollmann, 2017; Therborn, 2013, 125ff.; Wehler, 2013). The expansion of the welfare state based on what in today's view appears as an unusually high taxation of wealth and income along with labor-friendly policies and strong unions were political conditions characteristic of the first inequality regime—conditions that turned in the opposite direction during the second regime, involving cutbacks in social services, the lowering of taxes on wealth, the deterioration of working conditions, market deregulation, and the weakening of unions through deindustrialization and tertiarization.¹³

The perception of social inequality has changed as well. What is notable considering increasing economic inequality since the 1980s is the rather low level of social protest against this development. Income and wealth disparities became more acceptable in light of increased individual opportunities for upward mobility, improved conditions in education, healthcare, housing, and greater individual choice in matters of consumption and one's own individual lifestyle. At the same time, dimensions of social inequality relevant to enhancing social recognition and reducing discrimination have run counter to the increase in economic inequality; cases in point being advancements in equal opportunities for women, homosexuals, and people with special needs as well as a greater awareness of issues related to ethnicity (Therborn, 2013: 103ff.). The "Tocqueville paradox" (Geißler, 1998: 218; Hradil, 2015: 516), which has been employed to explain this, is not at all convincing in this context. Tocqueville assumed that reducing and alleviating previously dominant inequalities would not pacify social relations but rather sensitize people to remaining inequalities and move forms of inequality to the center of public attention that had previously not been an issue. The election of the first Afro-American president in the United States, the first female chancellor, and first homosexual vice-chancellor in Germany occurred during a time marked by a sharp increase in economic inequality. According to

11 This perspective is also central to what has been coined "regulation theory", which has emerged from Marxist debates (cf. Atzmüller et al., 2013).

12 For the social mobility rates of specific countries and the lower chances of upward mobility in Germany compared to other European countries, see Pollak, 2010.

13 The broad interest in the middle class must be seen in this context (Vogel, 2009; Burzan and Berger, 2010; Heinze, 2011; Mau, 2012; Burkhardt et al., 2013; Koppetsch, 2013; Schimank et al., 2014; for the international debate, see Therborn, 2013: 178ff.; Milanović, 2017: 179ff.).

Therborn (2013: 143f.), the two dimensions of inequality, redistribution and recognition, exhibit a crucial difference: inequality in the distribution of resources is a zero-sum game, whereas granting previously discriminated groups more or equal rights does not necessarily diminish the life chances and income opportunities of privileged social strata. Although issues of recognition and distribution are not completely separate from one another, they are not identical either (Fraser, 2001; Wimbauer, 2012).

What follows from these insights for the aforementioned strategies of contemporary theory-building? Hartmut Kaelble presents his results without providing a theoretical frame of reference (Hradil, 2018: 649). His mere listing of “factors” fails to qualify as a theoretical framework. It makes sense to draw on the three theoretical approaches above to interpret and explain the results. However, none of the three approaches alone is capable of fully explaining the development and change of constellations of inequality. Mechanisms that generate social inequality are certainly useful elements of such an explanation, but it is not possible to get a grasp on these macro constellations and how they change by considering the middle-range level alone, that is, by inferring inductively from the interplay between several mechanisms, as it were. Understanding such macro constellations requires a macro-sociological theoretical framework such as the one used to conceptualize the relationship between differentiation theory and the theory of inequality, as the inequality regimes that Kaelble has distinguished are characterized by a different layout of or interplay between the differentiated social orders (i.e., between the economy, political system, educational system, the welfare state, and so forth).

In re-attaining macro sociological competence, I see an important desideratum of sociological research on inequality that has become lost in the many granular details (Schimank, SOCIETY, this volume). At the level of macro sociology alone, however, it is not possible to deduce specific constellations of inequality and their change or transition to different ones. This requires action-theoretical complementation. Tracing macro-micro-macro sequences, as the first approach introduced in the third section of this contribution suggests, enables us to identify, in particular, actors’ scope within the bounds of structural corridors. The transition from the constellation of inequality of the postwar era to the current one and its reproduction since the 1970s cannot be explained without reference to the privileged strata’s and influential elite’s strategies of pursuing their interests, which are the drivers of the neoliberal hegemonial project (Streeck, 2015: 96f.; Groh-Samberg, 2014: 383f.). Beyer and Trampusch (2018) have traced the potential and missed opportunities during and after the financial crisis in 2008. Actors cannot conjure up new social conditions at will; the given structural conditions provide the scope that actors must make use of accordingly.

The concept of constellation or inequality regime to some degree posits a frame of reference for the manifold issues of inequality. To draw once more on the metaphor of the blind men and the elephant or that of the puzzle, the basic constellation provides necessary clues as to what kind of configuration of order we are faced with; and we can approach it from various perspectives. It indicates what the frame and the basic

structure of the picture look like, according to which we must organize the individual pieces of the puzzle.

This analytical perspective also facilitates dealing with the stated need to determine the relationship between continuity and discontinuity. In the modern history of inequality, we can distinguish different periods, each of which is characterized by a certain constellation. These periods exhibit a certain inner stability and continuity that cannot be disrupted and changed at will and at any time. The reasons for reducing social inequality from the 1950s to the 1970s were “unique and unrepeatable” (Kaelble, 2017: 173). Although previous patterns of inequality do persist, they are gradually being superseded by and transformed into a changed constellation of inequality.

5 Social Change and “Theoretical Innovation”

In light of globalized tendencies toward social inequality, Ulrich Beck once again called for a change in the foundations underpinning society and our scientific categories (Beck and Poferl, 2010: 16). He believed that our established concepts are unable to grasp these developments (Beck and Poferl, 2010: 19) and diagnosed a failure of sociology, which has focused too strongly on the nation state.¹⁴ As is well-known, according to Kuhn, paradigm shifts devalue previous terms and concepts. The process of knowledge production must begin completely anew; the simple transfer of knowledge from the previous situation to the new one is not possible.¹⁵ In view of globalization, there is reason to doubt that this adequately describes the challenge. It is an open question whether social and historical change requires methodological innovations and new theoretical beginnings. There is much to suggest that, to get a grasp on tendencies toward the globalization of social inequality, sociology must adapt its traditional concepts for the analysis of inequality. Anja Weiß, who otherwise advocates a fresh paradigmatic start, recommends applying established concepts to the new social realities. “Drawing on Weber, an argument can in fact be made that market conditions transnationalize if markets, in which people realize their opportunities, *also* operate across borders or if the professions, which are the basis for exploiting one’s opportunities in markets, are subject to transnational standardization” (Weiß, 2016: 97). Martin Heidenreich (2006: 8) has made the case that the analysis of the Europeanization of social inequality should be guided by the classical categories,

¹⁴ See also Heidenreich, 2006; Berger and Weiß, 2008; Bayer et al., 2008; Weiß, 2017.

¹⁵ This drama is performed with various casts of characters and combinations of roles: Sociological theory’s gender, global, and/or colonial blindness is to be remedied by various alternative offerings to reassign the role of privileged knowledge position. Seen from the history of theory, these heterodox currents have indeed enriched the orthodox canon but have not revolutionized or replaced it. This will eventually be the fate of the so-called postcolonial studies as well. A postcolonial critique of the theory of inequality has been presented by Boatca (2016).

proposed by Geiger (1932): the distribution of power between social orders, the distribution of power in social orders, and the mentality of members of different strata. What is called for is not so much a paradigm shift but the transfer and adaptation of concepts (Schwinn, 2019: 159ff.).

This conceptual strategy is further supported if we bring to mind the constellation effects of the global dimension of social inequality (Weiß, GLOBALIZATION AND TRANSNATIONALIZATION, this volume). Recommendations to switch from what has been termed “methodological nationalism” to “methodological transnationalism” are not backed by the majority of empirical studies. Globalization notwithstanding, national entities are not losing their significance in structuring social inequality (Fligstein, 2000; Blossfeld, 2001; Müller and Scherer, 2003; Heidenreich, 2006: 14f.; Nollmann, 2006; Atkinson, 2007: 712f.; DiPrete, 2007; Verwiebe, 2010: 33; Therborn, 2013: 173; Wagner, 2016; Kaelble, 2017: 170, 177). The effects of global forces do not follow a uniform trend but are rather refracted by the nation states’ institutional frameworks.¹⁶ We can therefore expect different developments at the national level. The major body of findings suggests that institutional regimes that alleviate social inequality “were dismantled and weakened to the greatest degree in countries where they were previously only weakly developed. There can therefore be no talk of a leveling of disparities between countries; rather these disparities have increased even further” (Müller and Scherer, 2003: 25). In regard to Europe, Kaelble (2017: 170, 177) objects to the widespread thesis that inequality *between countries* has declined over the past few decades, whereas inequality *within countries* has increased. Although Italy, Spain, and Portugal have managed to close the gap considerably to the northern EU countries, a new division between northern and southeastern EU countries has emerged instead. The disparities to the Balkan countries and to Eastern Europe (Romania, Ukraine, Russia, etc.) are growing, as opposed to the trend in many Southeast Asian countries. These developments cannot be explained by drawing on a simple continuity or discontinuity thesis.

6 Conclusion

Sociology has an especially close relationship with the issue of social inequality. The issue is highly value-laden and for this reason receives extraordinary public attention. Its scholarly treatment is closely tied to the relevance and attention cycles of the lifeworld. This yields a problem for our discipline: Analysis typically implies criticism. An independent academic perspective can only be achieved by means of theory. Social inequality exists only via reference to values, by making value-based assessments of

¹⁶ Weiß’s analyses (2017) expand on this in useful ways. She does not claim the end of the nation state but explores how other, new contexts that are relevant to inequality relate to the national context.

differences. Values, however, are not analysis. Reference to values only gains academic significance via a theoretical frame of reference, for instance, the question of how much equality is possible at all and what the consequences of different levels of inequality are. In recent decades, the sociological analysis of inequality has neglected the task of theoretically reflecting on its issue of concern and has thus lost its public voice. Merely tracing the values of the lifeworld empirically, by collecting data, renders the sociology of inequality uninteresting to the public. Sociological enlightenment is only possible when adopting a distanced stance toward the subject matter. It is to be hoped that our discipline will regain this distance. And the only way to do so is by turning to theory.

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Social Movements

Thomas Kern

Abstract: This study discusses the development of social-movement research in the German-speaking world over the past two decades. The second part focuses on how different theories of society have conceptualized social movements. It asks whether there have been any new developments since the theory of new social movements lost its hegemony? This question is explored by considering three contributions from Niklas Luhmann, Jürgen Gerhards, and Ulrich Beck. The third part deals with the long-term transformation of social-cleavage structures and their analysis. In the fourth part, the study shifts its attention to the rise of the extreme right and the environmental movement. Most researchers would agree that recent public discourse in German-speaking countries has mostly been shaped by the spread of these two movements.

Keywords: Social Movement, protest, theory of society, extreme right, environmentalism

1 Introduction

Social-movement research in German-speaking countries has a lively history. In the 1980s, the discourse about social protests was closely connected to the theory of society (Schimank, *SOCIETY*, this volume). Social-movement studies during that period could hardly be described as an independent sociological research area. The discussion in Germany and other European countries was dominated by the so-called theory of new social movements, which referred in particular to the peace, women's, and environmental movements (Offe, 1985; Rucht, 1994). Research was primarily focused on their "cultural significance" (Weber, 1949). It was assumed that these protest movements showed "where the reproduction of order does not succeed" (Eder, 2015: 31) and—in the tradition of Marxist class theory—that they reflected a comprehensive shift of modern societies' fundamental contradictory relations from labor and economy to identity and culture (Touraine, 1985: 774).

At that time, social-movement scholars in the United States were discussing entirely different questions. After the demise of the collective-behavior tradition, the focus of research shifted to the micro-level structures of protest mobilization. Under the maxim of "from structure to action" (Klandermans, Kriesi, and Tarrow, 1988), a new generation of researchers not only anticipated "new explanatory advantages but also [articulated; my insertion] a normative claim: bringing the actor back in as something which is good in itself" (Eder, 2015: 35). Instead of exploring the "why" of social movements, their research emphasized the "how." The ensuing debate was increasingly dominated by the "conceptual triad" (Rucht, 2014: 70) of resource mo-

bilization, framing, and political opportunity structures as central approaches of movement research.

Since then, American and European perspectives have moved substantially closer together. Especially in Germany, the narrow focus on new social movements has been replaced by a broader view that integrates a wider range of micro-, meso-, and macro-sociological perspectives. The field of movement research has become more professionalized and has consequently emancipated itself from the theory of society. The discussion is now more internationalized and has opened itself up to inspiration from other scientific disciplines. At the same time, its theoretical approaches and empirical methods have become more diverse, systematic, and ambitious (Rucht, 2014: 85).

In view of this vast plurality, an exhausting appraisal of movement research would exceed the scope of this review. The diversity of approaches, topics, and methods that have guided the study of social protest over the past two decades cannot be forced into a single scheme. With this in mind, the following review does not claim to present a body of research that is fully representative of the German-language social sciences.

In its second section, this review sheds light on how different theories of society have conceptualized social movements. Have there been any new developments since the theory of new social movements lost its hegemony? The discussion will focus on three contributions, from Niklas Luhmann, Jürgen Gerhards, and Ulrich Beck. The third section deals with the long-term transformation of social-cleavage structures and their analysis. In the fourth section, I will shift my attention to the rise of the extreme right and the environmental movement. Most researchers would agree that the recent public discourse in German-speaking countries has mostly been shaped by the expansion of these two movements.

2 Protest Movements in a “Society without a Center”

Even after the decline of new-social-movement theory, most studies have attributed the rise in the number of protest movements more or less explicitly to the structural strains of capitalism. In this respect, their perspective on social change does not deviate much from the interpretation of movement activists who blame capitalism for their grievances. Without denying the prominence of economic tensions, a common critique of this theoretical perspective maintains that it systematically ignores “the diverse range of contexts out of which movements emerge and the very different types of conditions which prevail within those contexts” (Crossley, 2002: 51). Consequently, some authors have followed up on more recent developments in differentiation theory, which—at least in Germany—has been strongly influenced by the legacy of Niklas Luhmann (Gerhards, 2001; Kern, 2008; Kern, 2016). His theoretical perspective explains the emergence of protest movements through basic structural tensions in the

functional subsystems of modern society. Accordingly, capitalism is a powerful source of strain, but there are also other institutional contexts from which conflicts may arise. Although his approach remains marginal, it still offers great potential for social-movement research (Eder, 2015: 41–43).

Niklas Luhmann's ambivalent attitude toward social movements earned him a reputation as a conservative thinker. The great complexity of his theory and his general disinterest in empirical research were perhaps further reasons why his work was so reluctantly received by movement scholars in Germany. Luhmann (*Theory of Society*; 2013) maintained that protest movements are a distinctive type of social system with unique traits. He stressed that they often depend on formal organizations—as resource-mobilization theories have pointed out—but, in contrast, social movements “do not organize decisions but motives, commitments, ties. They seek to bring into [...] [society; my insertion] what an organization presupposes and mostly has to pay for: membership motivation” (Luhmann, 2013: 155). Therefore, formal organizations (Hasse, ORGANIZATION, this volume) must be clearly distinguished from social movements as a concept. The former are important to the latter only to the extent that they solve “residual problems” related, for example, to resource mobilization and strategic communication with outside actors. A further significant difference between these concepts is based on the fact that movements “have no control over the process of their own change” (Luhmann, 2013: 156).

Luhmann also distinguished sharply between interaction systems (based on face-to-face communication; Schützeichel, MICROSOCIOLOGY, this volume) and social movements. On the one hand, face-to-face interactions—such as protest rallies, marches, or vigils—are indispensable elements of social movements. On the other hand, social movements are far more than face-to-face communication because participants at rallies or demonstrations are not only coordinated by an organization in the background but also rely on a comprehensive framework of issues, practices, and repertoires that exceeds the narrow social, temporal, and spatial boundaries of face-to-face interactions.

Luhmann stressed that the dynamic of social movements is shaped by specific structural features of protest communication in that protesters attempt to exert political influence outside the established regime of political decision-making. In doing so, they draw a distinct boundary between the periphery, which they claim to represent, and the center of society: “The center is expected to listen and take the protest into account” (Luhmann, 2013: 157). However, as functionally differentiated societies have no center, social movements usually emerge in more centrally organized subsystems, such as politics or religion. Protesters often create the impression that they represent the whole of society vis-à-vis its political and economic elites. Therefore, Luhmann conceived of social movements as a response to the “relative unresponsiveness” (Luhmann, 2013: 159) of functional subsystems. For this reason, he also described protest movements as an immune system that “observe[s] modern society on the basis of its consequences” (Luhmann, 2013: 161), in particular how functional

subsystems constrain an individual's life chances. Here, Luhmann observed one of the major (positive) functions of social movements in modern society.

In its details, Luhmann's perspective on social movements exceeds the traditional differentiation-theoretical perspectives of Smelser and Parsons in four respects. First, it overcomes the old structural functionalism's negative image of protest movements as an expression of social anomie, which is dysfunctional for society. Second, his theoretical framework allows for a clear conceptual distinction between social movements on the one hand and other forms of coordinated action (e.g., formal organizations and face-to-face interactions) on the other. Such conceptual clarity is helpful when making full use of new findings from other research fields for the analysis of social movements. Third, his differentiation theory identifies promising entry points for the heuristic search for structures and conditions that stimulate (and explain) protests (Kern, 2007). Fourth, Luhmann's framework provides a sound basis for further systematic investigations into the consequences of social movements.

In his explorative study *Der Aufstand des Publikums (Rebellion of the Citizens)*, Gerhards (2001) further elaborates on Luhmann's theory of society. Although Gerhards expresses some fundamental concerns about Luhmann's systems theory, he regards it as a promising framework for the integration of findings from various sociological areas, such as research on organizations, professions, and social movements. Gerhards follows Luhmann's assumption that modern society consists of about a dozen subsystems, including politics, economy, religion, law, science, art, and education. These subsystems are functionally specialized in the sense that each makes a specific contribution to the reproduction of society: for instance, the political system produces collectively binding decisions, the economic system produces goods and services, and the religious system provides salvation goods. Historically, the emergence of functional subsystems was closely linked to an increasing professionalization of "producer roles" that provide goods or services (in a broad sense) for complementary "consumer roles," including incumbents and citizens in the political system, suppliers and consumers in the economic system, and pastors and laypeople in the religious system (Stichweh, 2005).

Gerhards (2001: 165) emphasizes that, in most functional subsystems, professional roles are tied to formal organizations, such as companies, schools, and political parties. Professions and organizations are central to the stability of modern society because they perpetuate the production of goods, services, and other performances in the functional subsystems. Thus, professional roles are usually more exclusive and difficult to access. Occupants must usually establish their formal qualifications with some form of certificate. In contrast, their complementary consumer roles are more inclusive. In general, modern society is built on the premise (and promise) that everyone should have access at least to the basic performances of the functional subsystems (although the empirical reality is often quite different).

Gerhards' explorative analysis concentrates on changes in the relative distribution of power between producer and consumer roles. He investigates these processes in six functional subsystems between the 1960s and the late 1990s: healthcare, law, politics,

economy, education, and art. Accordingly, in the political system, for example, the self-image of security agencies increasingly shifted from state police to civilian police. In the public art sector, the so-called alternative culture increasingly challenged the conventional tastes of highbrow culture. He stresses that these changes were often initiated and supported by protest movements that used the social infrastructure of the functional subsystems for their mobilization. The undeniable strength of his approach rests on its ability to empirically identify specific cleavages and tensions in various functional subsystems that stimulate protest mobilization. It is regrettable that Gerhards did not elaborate further on this approach in subsequent years.

Although Ulrich Beck sometimes even sharply distanced himself from Luhmann's system theory, both scholars' conclusions were surprisingly similar regarding the interpretation of social movements. In his 2009 book *Weltrisikogesellschaft (World at Risk)*, Beck maintains that the traditional institutions of representative will formation in modern nation states are increasingly bypassed by so-called "subpolitical" alliances between sometimes distinctly different actors, such as political parties, corporations, media platforms, and NGOs. He labels this process "subpolitics" because "it sets politics free by changing the rules and boundaries of the political so that global politics becomes more amenable to new goals, issues and interdependencies" (Beck, 2009: 95).

Beck links the global rise of subpolitics to a fundamental transition of society from linear to reflexive modernization. Accordingly, linear modernization generally equates rationalization, economic growth, and technological innovations with social progress. However, the more society advances on the path of progress, the more it is confronted with the undesirable side effects of successful linear modernization, such as pollution, extinction of species, climate change, and nuclear risks. Consequently, the negative effects of linear modernization increasingly shift to the center of political discourse. This is where the latter concept—reflexive modernization—comes into play: it implies the continual modernization of already modern societies.

As a result, the public becomes more and more sensitized to the consequences of political and economic decisions regardless of whether a new technological or political program is actually dangerous. It is only important that the program is *perceived* as dangerous. Beck illustrates this in the case of climate change and the new subpolitics of terror: public discourse becomes increasingly important for the political definition of risks, and persuasiveness turns into a primary source of power. Consequently, Beck sees a growing discrepancy between political and communicative power: while the decisions of professional elites from politics, economy, or science often have far-reaching consequences for third parties, their cultural legitimacy is in decline.

Although Beck perceives the influence of social movements in this context as rather limited, he still regards them as an important counterweight to the professional elite's propensity for social closure and the monopolization of power. However, while the personal costs of participation in social protests constantly decrease (at least in Western democracies), it appears that the complexity of problems overstrains public

attention. By shifting subpolitics to the center of his analysis, Beck comes—despite all other differences—to similar conclusions as Luhmann and Gerhards: modern society has lost its center. The political process becomes not only more open but also more contentious and more unpredictable.

3 Long-Term Analysis of Social Cleavages

How has the social-movement sector in Germany changed over the past several decades? Even though a rapidly growing number of studies on individual movements is available today—the handbook by Rucht and Roth *Die soziale Bewegung in Deutschland seit 1945* (*The Social Movement in Germany since 1945*; 2008a) offers an excellent overview—little is known about the development of the movement sector as a whole. This is mainly due to the fact that the field of movement research is still “strongly oriented towards the monographic presentation of individual cases” (Rucht, 2014: 86). The intrinsic value of these contributions is not in question. However, to advance theory on the transformation of cleavage structures in modern societies, we would need more comparative research on “different movements or movement types in the same or in different cultural areas” (Rucht, 2014: 86).

The example-based analysis of individual movements often only paints a rough picture of social-cleavage structures and neglects important interaction effects between movements since the course of protests often depends strongly on cooperative and competitive relationships inside the protest sector, for instance, between movements and countermovements (Klandermans, 2013; Rucht, 2007). There is also a lack of comparative analyses of different types of protest and movement types. Finally, there is also a lack of longitudinal comparative analyses of protests. Without an appropriate examination of the temporal patterns of conflict dynamics, however, we cannot examine the change in social-cleavage structures.

An established methodical approach to closing this research gap in empirical terms is the comparative “protest event analysis” (Koopmans and Rucht, 2002). Koopmans and Statham (2010) have since extended this technique to the method of “claims analysis,” which examines the change in broader discursive opportunity structures beyond mere protests. Recent studies imply that access to new data (“big data”) and the development of new methods (“computational social sciences”) in connection with the increasing digitalization of public life will offer a range of innovative perspectives for long-term analyses of changing cleavage structures (Hutter, 2019; Zhang and Pan, 2019). (Barth/Blasius, QUANTITATIVE METHODS, this volume; Hollstein/Kumkar, QUALITATIVE METHODS, this volume) However, this development is still in its infancy.

The potential of longitudinal analyses of protest events has been outlined in a study on the transformation of the movement sector in Germany. It was presented by Rucht and Roth (2008b) in their handbook as a summary analysis on the basis of event data from the PRODAT project, which was conducted at the *Wissenschaftszentrum*

Berlin (WZB; Berlin Social Science Center). Their study indicates that the diversity of protest topics has grown considerably and that protest repertoires have expanded. In addition, a rising share of the population conceives of protests as a legitimate form of political activism, and the share of violent protests has also increased significantly, especially among right-wing protest groups. Further important developments include a remarkable expansion of movement organizations, increasingly dense protest networks, and a general tendency toward enriching protests with performative elements of popular culture.

These findings confirm that Germany has become a “movement society” (Rucht and Neidhardt, 2002: 7). Despite all possible differences with the three previously discussed approaches (i.e., Luhmann, Gerhards, Beck), the authors conclude that movements strongly contribute to the reproduction of modern society by shifting (former) non-issues to the center of public discourse and challenging conventional and dominant perspectives on well-known problems (Rucht and Roth, 2008b: 656–657): In the 1950s and 1960s, social movements criticized the remilitarization of West Germany and denounced the insufficient prosecution of Nazi collaborators. In the 1970s and 1980s, the environmental and new women’s movements addressed “genuinely new topics” (Rucht and Roth, 2008b: 657) that shaped public discourse. In the 1990s, identity politics—in particular, anti-migrant protests and respective counter-mobilizations—dominated the public agenda. The last great protest wave mentioned in the book is related to the “discovery of transnational politics” (Rucht and Roth, 2008b: 657) by alter-globalization movements around the millennium.

The authors demonstrate that shifting non-issues to the center of public discourse has not been the only accomplishment of social movements in Germany. They point to tangible policy effects, such as the legal recognition of homosexuals, gender mainstreaming, green-energy politics, and welfare-state reforms. In many policy fields, social movements have helped to improve the conditions of social participation for ordinary citizens. They have also contributed considerably to pushing back the authoritarian culture of everyday life in postwar West Germany. On this basis, the movement sector has not only grown but has also become a stable institutional element of political culture.

4 Two Opposing Movements

All available evidence suggests that the movement sector in German-speaking countries has gained in vitality and has become more complex over the past two decades:

“The movement sector is teeming with both progressive and reactionary actors; in addition to a pragmatic politics of interests, which also makes use of protest, there are increasing numbers of mobilizations that once again embody the desire for nationalist greatness and authoritarian leadership. Many aspects of the situation are contradictory. Although the protest scene has always been colorful and multi-faceted, it has rarely ever been as cleft as it is today” (Roth and Rucht, 2019: 99).

Aside from the growing importance of social media for mobilizing collective action (Dolata, 2017; Dolata and Schrape, 2018; Hepp, *MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION*, this volume), probably the most important changes have been the enormous expansion of the extreme right, contrasted on the left by a strong increase in the importance of the environmental movement. Capitalism-critical and anti-capitalist movements have likewise recorded a strong increase; and some major waves of protest were initiated by the peace movement (Rucht, 2016). However, the cultural, social, and political impact of these mobilizations has far been exceeded by the growth of the first two movements.

4.1 The extreme right

After reunification, the domestic political agenda in Germany was influenced by a continuing wave of protests against asylum seekers, who were mainly escaping the war in the former Yugoslavia. This development elicited an intense debate among researchers about the extent to which the extreme right meets the criterion of a social movement at all (Koopmans and Rucht, 1996). One reason for this dispute was that no general definition of social movements had been established by that point. Furthermore, some scholars wanted to reserve the term exclusively for pro-democratic, participatory, and progressive movements (Butterwegge, 1993).

In the meantime, this situation has changed fundamentally (Rucht, 2017). The extreme right has now firmly established itself as a major object of movement research. The ideological core of the movement is the idea of an ethnically and culturally homogenous national community whose unity is threatened by modern pluralism, liberalism, globalization, democracy, immigration, and Islamization. In contrast, activists often mobilize romantic notions of nation, patriotism, nature, order, home, and family (Häusler, 2017; Langebach and Raabe, 2017). At the core of their collective identity is their “self-image as a legitimate resistance movement” (Schedler, 2017: 303) against a corrupt political, economic, and cultural elite that has a damaging effect on the unity and wellbeing of the people. Around this ideological core, a broad alliance of groups from the populist and new right-wing scene has evolved over the past two decades, which follow up on these ideas. They have been met with broad approval among parts of the population.

In some widely acclaimed works, Kriesi et al. (Kriesi et al., 2008; Kriesi, 2001) have interpreted the rise of the extreme right as an expression of right-wing protectionism against the negative consequences of globalization:

“The new radical right is clearly defensive on the socio-cultural dimension. At the same time, it is populist in so far as its instrumentalization of feelings of anxiety and disappointment is concerned along with its appeal to the man in the street and his supposed common sense. It builds on the losers’ [of globalization; my insertion] fears of the removal of national borders and on their strong belief in simple solutions” (Kriesi, 2001: 35).

A number of small, radical parties such as the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD; National Democratic Party of Germany) along with local right-wing comradeships constitute the ideological core of the right-wing movement. Up until today, these groups' neo-Nazi worldview embodies the most radical expression of right-wing ideology (Schedler, 2017). Building on strategically well-prepared demonstrations and a strong presence in the social media (Nam, 2017), the extreme right has penetrated deep into the center of political conservatism. However, this should not conceal the fact that the propensity to violence and hate crimes have also increased significantly throughout the scene.

Around the ideological core of neo-Nazism, a somewhat more moderate spectrum of New Right activism evolved in the 1960s and 1970s (Langebach and Raabe, 2017; Virchow, 2017). In contrast to the “old” right, which at that time was still strongly revisionist in its National Socialist orientation, the New Right was more open to influences from popular culture and tried to address a broader and younger public. Its basic goal has been a cultural revolution from the right. Perhaps the most recent movement in this field is the French-born Identitarian movement (Virchow, 2015), which currently exerts a considerable influence on society and politics, especially in Austria (Schedler, 2017).

This intellectual and political spectrum forms the ideological basis of the currently much-discussed phenomenon of right-wing populism in German-speaking countries. Although the debate has mostly focused on successful mobilization campaigns of right-wing political parties such as the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD; Alternative for Germany), the topic also plays a crucial role in movement research. In an attempt at conceptual clarification, Rucht (2017) defines right-wing populism as a political and moral attitude located between political conservatism and the extreme right. For Priester (2011; 2017), however, it is less an attitude and more a specific form of public communication that combines a “thin ideology” with strong tendencies towards personalization, moralization, and orientation towards the past: “It is not so much the content that matters [...] but rather the approach: the polarization between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Priester, 2017: 534). Thus, a typical feature of social movements seems to penetrate ever deeper into the center of politics. Kriesi considers this a clear confirmation of the “movement society” hypothesis (Rucht and Neidhardt, 2002): “Professionalization and institutionalization are changing the social movement into an instrument of conventional politics and social movement organizations become rather like interest groups” (Kriesi, 2014: 371).

From the viewpoint of protest research, no movement in Germany embodies right-wing populism as successfully as the *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (PEGIDA; Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident) with their “Monday Demonstrations,” which they have been organizing weekly in Dresden since 2014 (Daphi et al., 2015; Nam, 2017; Vorländer, Herold, and Schäller, 2018). At its height, PEGIDA mobilized up to 20,000 citizens every week. As the name of the group suggests, protests are directed against the Islamization of the West that its followers fear—a fear that has been triggered by refugees. Although the movement has

at times succeeded in expanding beyond Dresden, it has basically remained a local phenomenon in eastern Germany.

4.2 Environmental movement

Most movement scholars would agree that the environmental movement has exerted great influence on the political development of German-speaking countries. Important campaigns of the past include protests against the rail-node construction project Stuttgart 21, coal-fired power plants, and nuclear energy, as well as gatherings like Fridays for Future. In the German-speaking countries, it appears that environmental groups are able to mobilize tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of people for their concerns frequently and seemingly without effort. In light of its political and social relevance, it is even more surprising that comparatively few sociological and political studies have addressed this movement. Only recently has the protest wave of the Fridays for Future movement seemingly revived research interest (Sommer et al., 2019).

Previous research on the environmental movement has focused mainly on its societal institutionalization. (Engels, ENVIRONMENT, this volume) Roose (2003), for example, addressed the reasons for the movement's (then) surprisingly small influence on EU environmental policy. Kern (2010) looked into the interactions between national and global levels in the development of environmental activism in South Korea. In another study, he highlighted the movement's crucial influence on the transformation of the electricity market in Germany (Kern, 2014). However, while interest in the environmental movement has been relatively modest in sociology and political science over the past twenty years, the subject has received far greater attention in the historical sciences. In a remarkably comprehensive book-length study, Radkau (2011) examines the global rise of the environmental movement since the 18th century. Another book of his is dedicated to the relationship between society and nature over time (Radkau, 2012). In his study on the development of environmental policy in West Germany up until 1980, Engels explores "how the problem of endangered nature in the Federal Republic of Germany [...] was dealt with" (Engels, 2006: 19). He shows how the rise of the environmental movement in the 1970s was favored by changes both in the mass media and in politics. A more recent study deals with environmental policy in the GDR but also dedicates a chapter to the environmental movement (Möller, 2019). The author comes to the conclusion that environmental activism in the GDR was not only limited to church opposition groups but was also supported by government-related organizations.

In his study about the emergence of green politics in West Germany, Pettenkofer (*Die Entstehung der grünen Politik (The Emergence of Green Politics)*; 2014) connects the historical analysis of social movements with a genuine perspective from cultural sociology. He examines the emergence of new value commitments and their impact on the social-movement sector in Germany. As this book stands out among sociological

studies on the environmental movement for its innovative approach, it is worth being described in greater detail. The author sharply criticizes conventional social-movement theories, which assume that protest participation depends on rational cost-benefit calculations. Were this model true, he argues, activists would never support collective action linked to protest issues that are “newly, not, or only weakly institutionalized” (Pettenkofer, 2014: 15) due to their high probability of failure (see also Kern, 2009). Hence, the study’s focal theoretical question is how non-institutionalized and “initially improbable actions” (Pettenkofer, 2014: 23) are sustainably maintained in the face of unfavorable opportunity structures.

Pettenkofer’s theoretical approach is based on two trains of thought. First, he elaborates the similarities between radical political movements and Max Weber’s account of religious sects. Radical movements and sects not only reject the existing social order but also have an increased demand for indicators confirming that their conduct of life actually complies with their ethical standards. Thus, their radical activism serves themselves and others as proof of their commitment. Under certain circumstances, it is possible that a group’s striving for self-perfection triggers a self-enforcing dynamic of attempts to outpace others. A possible outcome of this is the institutionalization of a field of competing “communities of virtuosos” (Pettenkofer, 2014: 24).

Second, the author follows Durkheim, who maintained that new “improbable forms of collective action [...] are stabilized” by shared moments of euphoric experiences that are so dramatic for the participants that they “fundamentally change their perception of the world and themselves” (Pettenkofer, 2014: 27). Durkheim considered such experiences part of a “sacralization process” (Joas, 2013) that stimulates the formation of new collective identities. In particular, strong experiences of violence—for example, police brutality—can radically change the development of a social movement. The collective memory of such experiences has the power not only to create new value commitments but also to stabilize the order of a protest field by providing a cultural template for future protests. Other studies have come to similar conclusions (Kern, 2009).

These two cultural mechanisms—based on Weber’s and Durkheim’s sociology of religion—constitute the theoretical background against which Pettenkofer develops his historical analysis of the environmental movement in Germany. Accordingly, the roots of contemporary environmentalism date back to the student movement in the late 1960s. The first critical event of this period was the dissociation of the *Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund* (SDS; German Student Union) from the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD; Social Democratic Party), whose leadership attempted to shift the party from the left margin to the country’s political center. Pettenkofer’s account of this sequence is mostly based on Weber’s analysis of the fundamental conflict between “church” and “sect” as two types of religious association that both rely on the same tradition (Pettenkofer, 2014: 46). The schism between the SPD and the SDS triggered a chain of divisions that led to the formation of a new field of radical left-wing groups.

In the early 1970s, many of these groups participated in a protest movement against a planned nuclear plant in Wyhl in southwestern Germany. Initially, the protests were mostly driven by anti-capitalist sentiments. The participants had no specific environmental agenda. However, environmental ideas increasingly inched their way to the center when a growing number of local civic groups, including farmers and professionals from the tourism sector, joined the movement (Pettenkofer, 2014: 140–44). The unexpected success of this grassroots mobilization had a strong euphoriant effect on the participants that further strengthened not only the movement but also its environmental orientation (Pettenkofer, 2014: 337).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the opposition to nuclear power became a central goal of a growing number of protest organizations. The author describes the new ideology of these organizations as a “comprehensive apocalyptic cosmology” according to which “more or less everything points to the possibility of [...] nuclear annihilation” (Pettenkofer, 2014: 289). The environmental movement left behind the tradition of class struggles and constructed a completely new frame with the “cosmological generalization [...] of nuclear power” (Pettenkofer, 2014: 337) as its outcome.

Pettenkofer’s study provides a convincing historical analysis of the environmental discourse in Germany. One small flaw is perhaps the author’s emphasis on the singularity of his historical case despite the fact that the environmental movement also took off under entirely different historical and cultural conditions in many other countries during the same period. Furthermore, the author’s frequent critique of established social-movement theories partly overshoots the mark. Although he provides a plausible explanation of radical activism on the basis of Weber and Durkheim, the question of why the new cosmology of the environmental movement became so popular still remains.

5 Perspectives on the Study of Social Movements

What follows from this review of the study of social movements in the German-speaking world? Over the past two decades, the study of social movements has made great progress in terms of theoretical and methodological approaches. It has also benefited from its professionalization, specialization, and, subsequently, its emancipation from broader discussions in sociological theory. At the same time, it also appears that the mainstream of movement research in the German-speaking world (and beyond) is more and more narrowly focused on the political relevance of social movements. Only a few studies have addressed the broader changes in social-cleavage structures and, in particular, the plurality of cultural and institutional conditions that affect the mobilization of individual waves of protests as well as the transformation of the movement sector as a whole in an increasingly differentiated society. Against this background, the studies described in this review have substantiated that the relationship between protest movements and societal change remains an issue. Understanding not only the “cultural significance” (Weber, 1949) of social movements but

also the diverse range of institutional contexts and conditions from which movements emerge calls for an extensive exchange with sociological theories of society. This is an ongoing challenge for social-movement research as well as an invitation to a continual and fruitful dialogue.

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Social Networks

Roger Häußling

Abstract: This article outlines network research in German-speaking countries since the turn of the millennium. After briefly clarifying what is meant by network research in this context, it provides a short retrospective of German-language sociology's contributions to network research in the previous century. It then focuses on the socio-political activities of sociological network research in German-speaking countries over the past 20 years. German-language network research exhibits two unique features in international comparison: a far-reaching debate on qualitative methods in network research (Section 4) and a theoretical debate on what has been coined *relational sociology* (Section 5). The article goes on to outline the contributions of network research to special sociologies in Section 6. Section 7 deals with the applications and developments of special methods of network research. The article ends with an outlook on the future of network research.

Keywords: Social network research, relational sociology, qualitative methods in network research, mixed methods, bimodal network analyses, computational social science

1 Preliminary Remarks

The present paper is limited to a discussion of those network approaches in German-language sociology that rely on formal methods of network analysis. This strand of network research differs from approaches that use the network concept only metaphorically and without analyzing network structures and relational dynamics at the methodological-empirical level.¹ Formal network analysis offers a broad spectrum of methods to explore networks in their structure and dynamics. Since the so-called Harvard breakthrough at the latest—which advocates for the methodical consolidation of network research (see below)—it has become clear that this is not only a method-driven and empirical research direction but one that also inspires theorems and theoretical concepts. This applies even to the major work of Harrison White (1992), which is largely of a theoretical nature but has subsequently sparked a wide range of empirical and methodological research. A special feature of network research can be seen in the fact that it closely interlinks empirical research and theory in a new way: the development of theory in network research always focuses on how theory can be operationalized empirically, and, vice versa, methodological developments as well as

¹ These approaches, which will not be discussed here, include actor-network theory (see, e.g., Latour, 1988; Callon, 1986; Law, 1987), large parts of sociological innovation research (see, e.g., Geels, 2002), and governance research.

empirical findings often trigger theory development. Its understanding of theory is also unique. The type of theory-building that network research pursues is less to develop a theory of a single mold than theory modules that can be connected with each other and with concepts from other theories (such as rational choice or systems theory; see Section 5).

2 German-Language Sociology and Network Research in the 20th Century—A Brief Retrospective

From a historical perspective, German-language sociology has many roots in modern network research. Some of the predecessors who come to mind here are Georg Simmel's sociology (1908), which reflects a mode of thinking in terms of reciprocal action, Leopold von Wiese's (1933) theory of relationships, or Norbert Elias' sociology of figuration (1970).² As far as further developing these roots toward formal network research is concerned, World War II marked a decisive break in German-language sociology. Interestingly, Simmel's relational thinking was continued in the USA. Other theoretical traditions converged there, in particular Anglo-Saxon social anthropology (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952; Warner, 1937; Barnes, 1954; Bott, 1957) and Jacob L. Moreno's (1936) sociometry. However, the decisive step forward, the "Harvard breakthrough", took place in the 1970s in the wake of a further method of empirical network analysis: block-model analysis (White, Boorman, and Breiger, 1976). This method made it possible to perform more abstract calculations of social networks than before, such as role patterns and position analysis. Accordingly, it might come as no surprise that a first wave of attention directed toward modern network research came to German-speaking countries via the USA in the second half of the 1970s.³ In this respect, particular mention must be made of the German Research Foundation's research group *Analysis of Social Networks* (1977–1981), in which nearly all important sociological protagonists of network research at the time and in subsequent years collaborated (see, e.g., Laumann and Pappi, 1976; Hubert Feger, Hans J. Hummell, Franz Urban

² An even earlier root could of course be found in Karl Marx, for whom society does not consist of individuals but of the sum of relationships that he calls social conditions (cf. Marx, 1976: 188). Alfred Schütz should also be mentioned (alongside Simmel, von Wiese, and Elias), who in his proto-sociology distinguishes between different forms of relationships (cf. Schütz and Luckmann, 1975: 90–124). Furthermore, the other protagonists of so-called formal sociology—besides von Wiese—shall be mentioned as well: Ferdinand Tönnies (1912), Alfred Vierkandt (1928), Theodor Litt (1926), and Johann Plenge (1930).

³ Little attention was paid to the early attempts to reintroduce network research into German-language sociology by Jiri Nehnevajsa (1955; 1962), Renate Mayntz (1967), Hans Lenk (1964; 1969), Rolf Ziegler (1972), or Hans J. Hummell (1972).

Pappi, Edward O. Laumann, Wolfgang Sodeur, and Rolf Ziegler).⁴ We must also not forget Dorothea Jansen, who not only wrote one of the first German-language introductions to network research (Jansen, 1999) but also made important contributions to network-analytical approaches in governance research (Jansen and Schubert, 1995). Nevertheless, in comparison with its triumphal march through America in the 1980s and 1990s, network research in German-speaking countries was limited to a small group of sociologists during this period.

3 Science Policy Activities Since the Turn of the Millennium

This once rather marginal status of network research in German-language sociology has changed considerably. Since the turn of the millennium, network research in German-speaking countries has been an extraordinary success story. There are several reasons for this. First, a theoretical and cultural turn within network research has taken place—initiated by the work of the probably most important individual scholar in this field: Harrison C. White (1992). In the wake of White’s work, network research captured the attention of sociologists interested in theory building as well as in qualitative social research. In other words, the circle of interested scholars became much wider.

A second reason for the wider dissemination of network research is that a new generation of network researchers proved very successful in institutionally promoting network research at the level of science policy. Among the individuals to be mentioned here are (in alphabetical order) Rainer Diaz-Bone, Jana Diesner, Martin Diewald, Roger Häussling, Marina Hennig, Betina Hollstein, Boris Holzer, Lothar Krempel, Per Kropp, Christian Stegbauer, and Florian Straus. Some of the above were appointed to professorships and were able to establish network analysis and network theory in research and teaching at their places of work. In this context, it is particularly worth mentioning that the research cluster of excellence *Social Dependencies and Social Networks* was conducted at the University of Trier, with the significant participation of sociologists. The group of researchers assembled there, have also established an annual summer school where the methods of network analysis can be learned. The establishment of the *Network Research* working group in 2009 and the *Sociological Network Research* section of the German Sociological Association (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie; DGS) in 2010—initiated mainly by Christian Stegbauer and the author of this article—was at least of equal importance. From then on, network research had the same status within the discipline as, for example, the subject areas of “modelling and simulation” or “social indicators,” both of which had already been

⁴ The list would have to be supplemented by these names: Peter Kappelhoff (1984) and Michael Schenk (1983).

granted the status of sections within the DGS much earlier. Right from the start, these network initiatives attracted a great deal of attention, as a network conference with more than 100 active participants in Frankfurt in September 2007 showed early on. This conference can be seen as a kick-off event that was followed by further conferences in short intervals thereafter. In addition, a book series entitled *Network Research* was launched by Springer VS, in which 20 volumes have been published so far.

Although sociology can be understood as a leading discipline in the context of network research, the latter is in fact an interdisciplinary field of research which more and more disciplines are joining. The spectrum is impressive: it ranges from history, ethnology, geography, consumer research, and rehabilitation research to physics and computer science—to name but a few. This was one of the reasons why a further initiative was formed in recent years in parallel to the DGS activities mentioned above, which resulted in the founding of the German Society for Network Research e.V. (DGNet) in Darmstadt in December 2016. The interdisciplinary orientation of DGNet follows the example of other international scientific communities of network research. Both, the worldwide network research umbrella organization, International Network for Social Network Analysis (INSNA), and the European Conference of Social Networks (EUSN) are interdisciplinary organizations. In 2013, Betina Hollstein brought the INSNA's international symposium, the SUNBELT Conference, to Hamburg. And Marina Hennig did the same for the corresponding symposium of the EUSN, held at the University of Mainz in 2017.

If one compares the possibilities of exchange and cooperation among network researchers in German-speaking countries at the beginning of the new millennium with the possibilities that exist today, it is no overstatement to say that they are poles apart. These increasing possibilities are also reflected in the publication activities in this area: Meanwhile, there are excellent introductions to network research also in German such as Trappmann, Hummell, and Sodeur, 2011; Krempel, 2005; Hollstein and Straus, 2006; Heidler, 2006; Holzer, 2006; Stegbauer, 2010; Fuhse and Mützel, 2010; Stegbauer and Häußling, 2010; Hennig, Brandes, Pfeffer and Mergel, 2012; Weyer, 2014; and Holzer and Stegbauer, 2018. Only Harrison White's *Identity and Control* (1992; 2008), probably the most important theoretical work of the past 100 years in the field of network research, still awaits being translated into German. Due to the fact that it is a very sophisticated book with passages that are almost incomprehensible even to native speakers, a careful translation would lead to it receiving much broader attention among German-speaking sociologists.

As indicated above, this work by White has also provided important stimuli for network research in German-speaking countries. Two debates in particular are of outstanding importance for the German-speaking reception of his work: one has revolved around qualitative research methods in network research and involved a "cultural turn," and the other has been a theoretical discussion ignited by White's work. (Hollstein/Kumkar, QUALITATIVE METHODS, this volume)

4 The Debate on Qualitative Methods in Network Research

The debate on the possibilities of a greater integration of qualitative methods into network research, which attracted international attention in the community of network researchers, was driven primarily by Betina Hollstein. Her anthology *Qualitative Netzwerkanalyse (Qualitative Network Analysis)*, edited together with Florian Straus, is still regarded as a key publication in the field (Hollstein and Straus, 2006). While there has been a more intense international discussion on how to integrate qualitative methods into formal network analyses, the debate among German-speaking researchers has always focused on whether there can be completely independent qualitative research designs in network research and how these can be realized methodologically. There have been a number of attempts to do so that have applied thoroughly innovative approaches to their research settings. One of the most important of these is the qualitative method of network mapping (e.g., Straus, 2002). According to Hollstein, the use of non-standardized observation and interview techniques intends to provide insights into the progression of individual action in actors' network contexts. This is precisely where Hollstein sees the possibility of methodically uncovering the interrelations between network structures and actors with the help of qualitative methods of analysis. In an insightful critique, Rainer Diaz-Bone (2008) pointed out that the term "qualitative network analysis" is misleading. On the one hand, an essential root of network research itself lies in qualitative research. On the other, the qualitative approaches presented in the anthology do not change the fact that the analysis of the network structure itself is still left to standardized methods. In response to this criticism, Hollstein has extended her methodological approach toward a mixed-methods approach that now triangulates qualitative with quantitative methods. Here, too, she has published a well-received English-language anthology together with Silvia Dominguez (2014). (Knappertsbusch/Langfeldt/Kelle, MIXED-METHODS AND MULTIMETHOD RESEARCH, this volume; Barth/Blasius, QUANTITATIVE METHODS, this volume)

5 The Theoretical Debate on Relational Sociology

In addition to the aforementioned activities to embed qualitative methods more firmly in network research, the debate on network theory has also been an important focus in German-language network research. White's work (1992; 2008) has been the central driving force. His elaboration of an abstract terminology (such as identity and control), which can be applied to various levels of social aggregation, is of fundamental importance. The idea of self-similarity is fundamental: process patterns are repeated in small as well as large networks. At least as important is that White introduces cultural aspects to network research by including such terms as "story," "catnets,"

“netdom,” “rethorics,” “styles,” and “cultural ambiguity”. This is also the key step towards a “relational sociology” (Emirbayer, 1997). It takes as its starting point neither individual actors and their desires, needs, and decision-making nor normatively underpinned structures, expectations, or given social framework conditions but rather *relational patterns*, that is, relationships, network structures, and network dynamics. Relational sociology thus sees itself as a consistent interpreter of the theoretical implications resulting from the focus on relations, positions, network structures, and dynamics and applying the methods of network analysis in analyzing them. However, this does not mean that network methods are only used within this paradigm. Rather, other theoretical positions, such as methodological individualism or systems theory, also make use of network methods in order to extend their prevailing focus—be it on individuals and their decisions or on systems and their operations—to relational aspects. Only when relational constellations and processes become the starting point of argumentation can one speak of a paradigm of relational sociology. (Schneider, SOCIAL THEORY, this volume)

The anthology *Relational Sociology* by Jan Fuhse and Sophie Mützel (2010) summarizes the German-language debate in a concise form. It presents at least four theoretical perspectives: (1) The first of these links White’s theory to considerations from science and technology studies, actor-network theory in particular (cf. Mützel, 2009; Laux, 2010). Mützel argues that some conceptual similarities have turned into methodological points of convergence in data analysis. In this respect, economic sociology provides a particularly suitable field for achieving a productive link between the two approaches. Her PhD thesis on the relocation of the German capital from Bonn to Berlin, in which she traces the networks, the logics, and the emergence of capital-city journalism, also attracted attention (cf. Mützel, 2002). (2) Three representatives of the second strand of relational sociology are Jan Fuhse, Boris Holzer, and Athanasios Karafillidis, who have their theoretical roots in Luhmannian systems theory (see also Holzer and Schmidt, 2009; Holzer and Fuhse, 2010). With different emphases, all three explore the possibilities of making White’s thinking fruitful for systems theory. Fuhse’s research focus is on culture and communication (cf. Fuhse, 2015; Fuhse and Stegbauer, 2011) and political sociology (cf. Fuhse, 2004). Boris Holzer’s (2010) research is devoted to political sociology as well as modern American economic sociology. Drawing on Dirk Baecker and Spencer-Brown, Karafillidis (2010) works on a relational sociology of forms. (3) Per Kropp (2008) represents a third strand. He shows that methodological individualism can also be connected to relational sociology. (4) Representing the fourth perspective, Marco Schmitt, Christian Stegbauer, and the author of this article investigate a further development of the theoretical foundations of relational sociology without integrating other major sociological theories, but do so in the vein of a relational paradigm à la Emirbayer and White. Drawing on the sociological founders of relational thought (Simmel, von Wiese), Christian Stegbauer (2002) deals with questions of reciprocity as forms of mutuality. His current theoretical concerns revolve around deriving a micro foundation of culture from relational constellations (cf. Stegbauer, 2016). In his doctoral thesis, Marco Schmitt (2009) investi-

gates the phenomenon of memory from a relation-sociological perspective. My own research pursues a relational theory of the interface, which especially focuses on the coupling of heterogeneous processes that follow different processual logics (cf. Häußling, 2008; 2009).

Besides the aforementioned two particularly prominent debates in German-speaking countries on qualitative methods and on relational sociology, there has been a large amount of exciting, empirically oriented network research that I will present in an overview below. This research can be further differentiated into genuine network research contributions to special sociologies on the one hand and contributions that are more strongly geared toward developing and applying specific methods of network analysis on the other.⁵

6 Network Research Contributions to Special Sociologies

Over the past two decades, network research in German-speaking countries has focused on a number of special sociologies: media sociology (cf., e.g., Stegbauer, 2001; 2009; 2018), economic sociology (cf., e.g., Hillmann and Aven, 2011; Krenn, 2012; Heiberger and Riebling, 2016a), the sociology of work (cf., e.g., Sattler and Diewald, 2010; Lutter, 2013; Ellwardt, Steglich, and Wittek, 2012), organizational sociology (cf., e.g., Häußling, 2015; Hasse, ORGANIZATION, this volume), gerontology (cf., e.g., Ellwardt, Aartsen, and van Tilburg, 2017; Höpflinger, DEMOGRAPHY AND AGING, this volume), migration research (cf., e.g., Gamper, 2011; Herz, 2014; 2015; Windzio, 2018), and science and technology studies (cf., e.g., Heidler, 2011; Helbing and Grund, 2013; Weyer, 2014; Edelmann, Moody, and Light, 2017; Ahrweiler, 2017; Häußling, 2008; 2009). Dealing with all of these studies individually would go beyond the scope of this overview article. For this reason, it will be limited to examining four focal points in more detail.

(1) While the Internet research was still young, Christian Stegbauer (2001) engaged in structural analyses of Internet-based communication platforms from the perspective of media sociology (Hepp, MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION, this volume). His study on Wikipedia in particular has attracted much attention (cf. Stegbauer, 2009). This study focuses on a positional analysis of the actors around Wikipedia. Using block-model analyses, Stegbauer showed that Wikipedia has a fixed positional structure—the positions of the administrator, the vandals, and the vandal hunters, among others, which mutually stabilize each other. According to Stegbauer (2018), events can trigger a wave of indignation that can involve both individuals and institutions and can incite a self-reinforcing discourse of rage in Internet forums that operates with crude images of the world and their ostensible enemies. Because user data in the field

⁵ Not all of the following sociologists can be clearly categorized under these two rubrics.

of social media are traces of people's actions and often have a relational structure, such data equips network researchers with a constantly growing stream of activity for their studies. However, this data also raises new questions of data validity and reliability as well as ethical questions with regard to research designs and the handling of the results.

(2) Work done in U.S. economic sociology has also sparked increased interest in network approaches and the inclusion of network analytical methods in economic sociological research in German-speaking countries in recent years. (Maurer, *ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY*, this volume) Henning Hillmann (2008) studied multiple networks of mercantile and political elites before the English Civil War. According to Hillmann, an effective mediation of alliances between interest groups requires political mediators who are equally connected among these different networks. The success of mediation depends on the mediators' structural positions between the groups and the diversity of relations within their personal networks. Raphael Heiberger analyzed the influence of culture, networks, and institutional rules on stock prices. Together with Jan Riebling, Heiberger investigated the networks of scientists in economics (cf. Heiberger and Riebling, 2016a). Karoline Krenn (2012) examined the structure of networks involving the personnel of German-speaking companies at the beginning of the 20th century, particularly with regard to the role of banks. On the basis of empirical material, Krenn traced the interdependencies of these companies through multiple appointments to supervisory boards and reconstructed the formation process of the so-called Deutschland AG.

(3) An important area of German-language network research is migration research. (Pries, *MIGRATION*, this volume) Using exponential random graph models, Windzio (2018) analyzed the networks of global migration. Furthermore, he examined the multiplex networks of immigrant children and their integration into social networks in comparison to the integration behavior of their parents (cf. Windzio, 2015). Using a new methodological approach of non-recursive analysis, Windzio demonstrated how connections in one network dimension influence connections in another. Andreas Herz (2014; 2015) also conducted a network analysis of social communities of migrants with a focus on identifying structures of transnational social support. Herz showed that it is less structural aspects—as most studies in this field postulate—than relationship aspects of personal communities that are an important constituent in providing everyday help to migrants. Such network-analytical migration research can be expected to increase in number and importance in the coming years, especially in light of the issue's socio-political explosiveness in German-speaking countries.

(4) In his research on science, Richard Heidler (2011) investigated the structure and dynamics of the science network of astrophysics. (Kosmützky/Krücken, *SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION*, this volume) To do so, he developed an integrated theory of scientific networks that includes both the level of individual researchers and that of structural factors (e.g., the reputation of researchers) as well as the macrostructure of scientific cooperation networks and applied these to the network of the worldwide elite of astrophysicists. With a dual focus on how social networks and cultural

meanings interact and how scientific ideas and debates develop, Achim Edelmann, James Moody, and Ryan Light analyzed the field of biomedical research (cf. Edelmann, Moody and Light, 2017). In technology research—innovation research to be more precise—Petra Ahrweiler (2017), Johannes Weyer (2014), and Thomas Grund in collaboration with the physicist Dirk Helbing (Helbing and Grund, 2013) explored the extent to which multi-agent simulation of networks can explain the diffusion of new things. (Rammert, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION, this volume)

7 Application and Development of Specific Methods of Network Analysis

The overview of simulation methods at the end of the previous section provides a transition to the contributions that I would like to deal with now, which focus on applying and further developing specific methods of network analysis. Christoph Stadtfeld investigated the dynamics of social networks with the aim of developing and implementing specific theories and methods (cf., e.g., Stadtfeld, Hollway, and Block, 2017). The identification of similar structural principles and dynamics also plays a prominent role in what has been called “small-world research.” Sebastian Schnettler (2013) is one sociologist who has effectively pursued this line of research. The modelling of network dynamics and the simulation of network progressions represent two important areas of network research that promise enormous potential for development. But even seemingly well-proven methods, such as egocentric network analysis, have been a subject of methodological reflections among German-speaking sociologists (Wolf, 2006; Gamper and Herz, 2019). The analysis of personal networks has also been an important research focus, for instance, of Sören Petermann (2014). He is concerned with the effects of socio-spatial context conditions on social well-being and social coexistence, in particular, trust-based exchange in personal networks and the causes and effects of this form of social capital. Questions of social capital play an increasingly important role in research on social media and echo chambers, an area in which much work still needs to be done.

As the object of network research has theoretical implications in terms of complexity, it is by no means trivial how networks are visualized. In particular, the representation of large, unimaginable networks becomes a problem since each form of representation suggests or excludes specific possibilities of interpreting the network. Lothar Krempel’s (2005) book on this topic is still regarded as the key work in this field. In her doctoral thesis, Katja Mayer (2011) investigated the visualization strategies of networks in different scientific disciplines in terms of a sociological approach to science. The anthology by Michael Schönhuth, Markus Gamper, Michael Kronenwett, and Martin Stark (2013) focuses on the use of visual methods in the process of data collection and, in this respect, specifically on the software programs VennMaker and EgoNet.QF. This branch of discussion on the visualization of networks is also partic-

ularly pronounced in German-speaking countries—especially with regard to its range of practical survey and evaluation tools, research reports on the use of visualization tools, and theoretical-epistemological questions.

As network research, along with data mining and machine learning, is one of the most prominent procedures in big-data analyses, it is not surprising that network researchers have written a large number of articles on computational social science and digital sociology in recent years (e.g., Mützel, 2015; Heiberger and Riebling, 2016b; Krenn, 2017; Häußling, 2019a). As part of the Swiss national research program *Big Data*, Sophie Mützel is carrying out the research project *Facing Big Data: Methods and Skills Needed for a 21st Century Sociology*. The project investigates the far-reaching changes in data and methods, caused by digitization, in the three fields of sociology, data journalism, and data sciences. There is a considerable gap between the methods, skills and tools used and those needed (Mützel, 2015). Henning Laux and Marco Schmitt (2018) have conducted an exemplary network-driven big-data analysis of the Twitter hashtag #Bautzen. In autumn 2016, a violent clash between refugees and far-right supporters occurred in the German city of Bautzen. Drawing on Bruno Latour's modes of existence, Laux and Schmitt's essay investigates how the event was discussed in the digital public. In my own research, I consider a relational sociology of datafication in the digital sphere conceptually by treating data as interfaces between algorithmic and social processes (cf. Häußling, 2019a; 2019b). I differentiate between five forms of coupling via data, which enables a more appropriate analysis of the manifold phenomena in the digital sphere. In the field of computational social science (CSS), it is to be hoped that the interdisciplinary entanglement between the social sciences and computer science proves successful, so that methodologically rich and theoretically founded big-data analyses will lead to completely new research designs and insights. CSS is currently very informatics-oriented in German-speaking countries. Here, social science network research could serve as an important corrective since cooperation between the social sciences and computer science has already been successful in this area.

8 Outlook

German-language sociological network research never had as many participants and never was as diverse as it is today. The conditions are therefore extremely favorable for a promising future. As the outline above has hopefully shown, network research is being conducted in a number of special sociologies, but by no means in all of them. In this respect, it can be assumed that network research approaches will find their way into other special sociologies in the future. Coupled with relational thinking, network research can be expected to give new impetuses to these special sociologies, as the focus will be directed toward relations, network structures, and dynamics that can hardly be researched in any other way. For example, the identification of actor constellations, positional structures, and/or possible structural holes can yield insights

that remain hidden when using survey research methods; or bimodal network analyses can identify connections between occasional structures and actor networks that the participants are neither aware of nor can be triangulated by other methods. With regard to theory building, too, a great deal can be expected in the future. This is because it is not yet possible to speak of a coherent and complete theoretical edifice. In other words, there is still a lot to do here. The development of methods on the other hand has always been a major driving force behind the development of network research. In addition to the development of specific methods for relational constellations, the advancement of mixed-method approaches will play a central role in the future. In particular, sociological network research will play a key role in the constitution and design of computational social science and digital sociology. A crucial challenge in this context will be for sociologists to meet computer scientists on equal footing and to define the research agenda in close cooperation with them. Hopefully, other German-speaking network researchers will also be involved in introducing genuinely sociological topics into these emerging disciplines.

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Social Policy

Birgit Pfau-Effinger and Christopher Grages

Abstract: During the last two decades, comparative social-policy research has improved our understanding of the causes, processes, dynamics, and consequences of change in social policies. It has also broadened the horizon of sociological theory and research. It has shown that understanding the nature and generosity of welfare-state policies is crucial for explaining the cross-national differences in social structures as well as the effects of social-policy reforms on social inequality, poverty risks, social cleavages, and social cohesion. This review of the development of social-policy research focuses on theory and research in the field, with its primary emphasis being on sociological social-policy research in German-speaking countries.

Keywords: Welfare-state reforms, social policy, social inequality, social cohesion, welfare culture

1 Introduction

The main aim of this review is to show how sociology in German-speaking countries has contributed to theory and research in the international study of social policy. The concept of *social policy* refers to the areas of public policy that are directed towards the provision of social security and social services to citizens. According to Franz-Xaver Kaufmann (1997), governments take an explicitly “social” responsibility for the welfare of their citizens on the basis of distinct national social objectives and the aims and principles of social provision. The concept of *welfare-state policies* is also used to characterize these aspects of state policies (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Social policies are various kinds of state intervention in market conditions with the aim of influencing the societal distribution of resources and the resulting social stratification. It has been argued that these policies are a fundamental component of democracy and the functioning of market economies (Esping-Andersen, 1990). On the basis of the work of T.H. Marshall (2000 [1950]), it is common to conceptualize the institutionalized relationship between the state and the citizen as “social citizenship.”

Since social policies are part of the macro level of society, the primary focus of social-policy research is on cross-national or cross-regional differences and on historical change in social policies (Obinger et al., 2013). Sociologists mainly contribute to this by theories and research on the trends and social consequences of social policies. They also analyze the cultural, socio-structural, and demographic factors that can explain these changes. Sociological theory and research have shown that the degree of redistribution of financial resources by welfare states and their generosity towards those who are temporarily not employed (sick, disabled, unemployed, and retired persons as well as those who care for family members) are crucial for explaining the

degree of inequality, poverty, and social cohesion in a society. It seems that generous welfare states that take an inclusive approach to social citizenship create the most favorable conditions for a more egalitarian social structure along with greater social inclusion and social cohesion (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Particularly important to research on the relationship between welfare-state policies and social structures was Gösta Esping-Andersen's *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990). According to his "welfare regime" approach, it is possible to distinguish between different ideal types of welfare regimes: the liberal, conservative, and social-democratic (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The main criteria for the construction of this typology are (a) the degree of generosity in granting social rights related to social security, which is indicated by the extent of "de-commodification"; (b) the ways in which welfare-state policies affect the structures of social inequality; and (c) the relative weight of the state, the market, and the family in the provision of social services. According to this approach (Esping-Andersen, 1990), the social-democratic welfare regime is ideal-typically based on a high degree of de-commodification, supports egalitarian social structures, and assigns the state the role of the main welfare provider. The liberal type has a low degree of de-commodification, encourages social polarization, and positions the market as the main provider of welfare. The conservative welfare regime, by contrast, has a medium degree of de-commodification by linking social security to paid employment, fosters hierarchically segmented stratification, and renders the family the main provider of welfare. Some authors have suggested extending this typology to include a Mediterranean (Ferrera, 1996) and Central-Eastern European (Fenger, 2007) type of welfare regime.

In recent years, mainly driven by German-language sociology, attempts have been made to link Esping-Andersen's welfare-regime typology (1990, 1999) to Hall and Soskice's (2001) "varieties of capitalism" approach (Ebbinghaus and Manow, 2001; Iversen, 2005; Korpi, 2006; Fleckenstein and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011; Paster, 2019) or to integrate both typologies (Schröder, 2009; 2013). The basic postulate of the connected approaches is that different institutional areas of market economies and welfare states can complement, reinforce, and support one another if they follow a common logic (Etzerodt and Eriksen, 2017; Hall and Gingerich, 2009; Schröder, 2019). In addition to functional complementarity, common political origins have also been discussed as explanatory factors for institutional interrelations, especially in the welfare-state discourse (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2011). More recently, a new classification model for differentiating "welfare democracies" was introduced that classifies welfare states on the basis of their political orders and explains differences in the context of longer economic and political trajectories (Manow, Palier, and Schwandner, 2018).

Feminist theory and research on the welfare state have contributed to this debate by broadening the theoretical framework for the analysis and classification of social policies to account for the integration of welfare-state policies towards childcare and long-term care for the elderly (LTC policies for short), with concepts like the "care regimes" approach (Daly and Lewis, 2000; Ostner and Lewis, 1995; Villa/Hark, GENDER, this volume).

Herbert Obinger and Manfred G. Schmidt have recently published a German-language *Handbuch Sozialpolitik (Social-Policy Handbook)* that includes contributions from many welfare-state researchers in German-speaking countries (Obinger and Schmidt, 2019). Some of the salient focal points of these contributions are theories of social policies, challenges related to social policies, and research on the different fields of social policies. A comprehensive overview and discussion of social-policy research in Germany and its perspectives is provided by the book *Wohlfahrtspolitik im 21. Jahrhundert (Welfare Politics in the 21st Century)*, edited by an interdisciplinary team of welfare-state researchers. This volume discusses a wide variety of topics that pertain to theory and research in social-policy studies and includes a section that reviews the role of sociology in welfare-state research in Germany (Busemeyer et al., 2013). According to the main conclusions of their review, the field of social-policy research in Germany had long been largely composed of small research units and rather fragmented. There was also a lack of state support for scientific research and teaching in the field. In view of the great significance of this field in social science and to society at large, the authors recommended that public policies should strengthen social-policy research in Germany.

In recent years, public support for welfare-state research in Germany has been strengthened as part of a program of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (*Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales*; BMAS) that supported the establishment of several new professorships in social-policy research. Also, two new publicly funded research centers with an emphasis on social-policy analysis were recently established. These are the Collaborative Research Centre “Global Dynamics of Social Policy” at the University of Bremen, funded by the German Research Foundation (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*; DFG), and the Cluster of Excellence on “The Politics of Inequality” at the University of Konstanz under the framework of the Excellence Initiative of the German Government and the Federal States. Sociologists are included in the interdisciplinary collaboration in all of these activities.

The present article first gives an overview of general trends in comparative social-policy research on welfare-state reforms within the last two decades (section 2). In section 3, the article highlights three selected strands of theory and research on social policies of the last two decades to which sociologists in German-speaking countries have made substantial contributions. The article’s fourth section closes with some reflections on the perspectives of sociological research on social policies. All of the sections examine how German-language sociology has contributed to the wider debate.

2 Overview of General Trends in Comparative Welfare-State Research

At the close of the 20th century, the welfare states of the affluent Western societies were confronted with new challenges that were caused in part by exogenous processes, including globalization, EU integration, and the transformation of the Central and Eastern European societies from Socialism to Capitalism, as well as endogenous processes that involved cultural, social, demographic, and economic change within European societies (Alber and Standing, 2000; Kaufmann, 2003; Offe, 1996; 2019; Pierson, 2001). There has been much theorizing and research on the direction and nature of these reforms and their causes.

The directions of changes in social policies in the last two decades have not been without their controversy. Whereas some scholars identified a competitive “race to the bottom” associated with retrenchments in expensive welfare protection (Alber and Standing, 2000; Castles, 2004; Korpi, 2003; Scharpf, 1999), others argued that exogenous pressures had been met with an expansion of welfare that would function as a social buffer (Rieger and Leibfried, 2003).

This debate has resulted in a broad consensus that the development of social policy has been contradictory. Many researchers now argue that welfare-state reforms in many countries have weakened the role of the state in the provision of social security on account of marketization and privatization as well as cuts in social benefits and the curtailment of social rights. This rollback has primarily related to unemployment policies and pension policies, and particularly so in Germany (Barbier and Knuth, 2011; Betzelt, 2011; Bridgen and Meyer, 2014; Ebbinghaus, 2015; Frericks, 2010), whereas reform in the areas of family and long-term care (LTC) policy has been characterized by an expansion of social rights and public infrastructure and a strengthening of the role of the state (Ostner and Mätzke, 2010; Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen, 2011). Sociologists in German-speaking countries have tended to focus on the “conservative” type of welfare regime in Esping-Andersen’s typology, which is the dominant form of welfare provision in Germany. This welfare-state model typically comes with a considerable degree of poverty and social inequality, the reason being that this type of social-security system is closely tied to the employment system in that people’s eligibility for social benefits and the amount that they can expect to receive depends on the length of their paid employment and their previous income (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Offe, 1996).

German-speaking sociologists have also made substantial contributions to the debate about different “care regimes.” Here Germany has been seen as a typical example of a “familialistic” care regime, whereby the state places the primary responsibility for childcare and LTC on the family (Leitner, 2003; Ostner and Lewis, 1995). With regard to specific trends in welfare-state policies, German-speaking social-policy researchers have shown that a weakening of social rights related to social security and the extension of social rights and infrastructure in childcare and LTC policies reflect

the general ambiguity of welfare-state development (Bridgen and Meyer, 2014; Eggers; Grages, and Pfau-Effinger, 2020; Fleckenstein, 2011; Nullmeier, 2004; Ostner and Mätzke, 2010; Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen, 2011).

As for the causes of this development, many scholars have emphasized the impact of exogenous pressure on the welfare state as a result of the global expansion of trade, an increase in the flow of investments and new technologies, as well as the internationalization of labor markets. These scholars often assume that such pressure creates convergence among nation states because their experiencing similar pressures brings about corresponding developments (Castles, 2004; Huber and Stephens, 2001). An opposing argument contests the influence of external pressure and focuses more closely on endogenous dynamics in welfare-state development. This perspective emphasizes more the path dependence of welfare reforms on the basis of institutional, structural, and cultural differences, which lead to a persistence of differences despite exogenous pressure (Brady, Beckfield, and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2005; Pierson, 2001). However, researchers have made an argument that welfare-state reforms based on endogenous factors can also lead to fundamental social-policy change. A good example is the German family-policy reform of the mid-2000s, which was a path-breaking shift from a conservative male-breadwinner-oriented policy towards a policy with a more gender-egalitarian orientation. With these policies, the German welfare state reacted to demographic change, the increase in female employment, and the broader cultural change towards a more gender-egalitarian family model (Fleckenstein, 2011; Ostner and Mätzke, 2010; Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen, 2011).

In the theoretical discussion about factors that influence social-policy change, the role of cultural ideas has also been examined (Fleckenstein, 2011; Kaufmann, 2003; Pfau-Effinger, 2005a; b). Kaufmann (1991) introduced the term *welfare culture* to describe cultural ideas that are related to social policies. Such cultural ideas include, for example, cultural values related to social solidarity, to the criteria of people's "deservingness" of receiving social benefits, to the role of the state and the market in the provision of welfare, and to the role of the state and the family in the provision of childcare and care for the elderly (Pfau-Effinger, 2005a).

For a long time, the main focus of welfare-state research was on the national welfare state, and theory and research were characterized by "methodological nationalism" (Busemeyer et al., 2013). Within the last two decades, social-policy analyses have started to include a global dimension (Deacon, Hulse, and Stubbs, 1997; Deacon, 2010; Kaasch and Stubbs, 2014). The chief issues of examination include the role of international and supranational actors such as NGOs, the EU, and social movements, as well as the global diffusion of social policies. The ideational foundation of global social policy can be traced back to the early 1940s; it has been shown that such policies were closely linked to the development of international organizations like the UN, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the World Health Organization (WHO) (Kaufmann, 2003).

3 The Contribution of Sociology to the Main Strands of Social-Policy Research

The following section discusses the contribution of sociological theory and research to the analysis of some defining trends in the development of social policies that have played a particularly important role in the evolution of social inequality, poverty, and social cohesion, with its main focus being on sociology in German-speaking countries.

These strands of research include sociological research on social-policy trends and the social consequences of

- retrenchment, privatization, and marketization;
- familialization and de-familialization in care-related policies; and
- the globalization of social policies.

3.1 Retrenchment, privatization, and marketization

It has been shown that retrenchment and support for the privatization and marketization of social security and social services have been major trends in welfare-state reforms since the 1990s. The term *retrenchment* refers to cuts in social benefits and services, which have been especially strong in Germany with regard to unemployment benefits and pensions. The term *marketization* concerns the construction of social security and social services as goods that are traded in (quasi)-markets that are shaped by welfare-state policies, whereas the term *privatization* concerns the outsourcing of public tasks and a strengthening of the role of for-profit providers (Allan and Scruggs, 2004; Bode, 2012; Nullmeier, 2004; Schimank and Volkmann, 2017; Starke, 2008). German authors (Ebbinghaus, 2015; Frericks, 2010) have emphasized that privatization and marketization are two different trends that should be analyzed separately, although both trends have been politically promoted simultaneously. Privatization, and principally the strengthening of for-profit providers, played an important role in pension reforms (for example, private pensions schemes such as *Riester-Rente*). Unemployment policies were restructured on the basis of “activation policies” that sought to strengthen the connection between the willingness of the unemployed to return to the labor market and their eligibility for unemployment benefits, while the effectiveness of these policies was reinforced by additionally cutting unemployment benefits. Privatization and marketization were also strongly promoted in policies towards long-term care (Bode, 2012; Theobald et al., 2017). The concept of the social citizen was reinterpreted in this context as the “self-responsible” social citizen who acts like a “consumer” in welfare markets (Eggers, Grages, and Pfau-Effinger, 2019; Frericks and Höppner, 2019; Gilbert, 2002; Rostgaard, 2011; Vabø, 2006).

German social-policy researchers have shown that the retrenchments in the social-security system, chiefly with regard to pensions and unemployment benefits, was particularly strong in the conservative German welfare state (Barbier and Knuth, 2011;

Betzelt, 2011; Bridgen and Meyer, 2014; Ebbinghaus, 2018). In addition, the principle of “self-reliance” of social citizens on the basis of weakening state support was considerably strengthened in pension policy and unemployment policy (Eggers, Grages, and Pfau-Effinger, 2019; Frericks and Höppner, 2019). An argument has been made that this trend has resulted in a transformation of the German welfare state into a mix of the “conservative” and “liberal” types of welfare regime (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2014; Nullmeier, 2004).

Many researchers agree that welfare states have reacted to financial problems and demographic aging through the processes of retrenchment, privatization, and marketization. However, such cost-cutting and free-market approaches were not the only possible strategy to welfare reforms. Researchers pointed out that alternative options were available, and these generally involved an increase in social contributions or taxes and in public debt. Many European welfare states have chosen such a path (Bonoli and Palier, 2007; Ebbinghaus, 2015) and have implemented changes that have affected the life-course norms governing social citizenship (Frericks, Harvey, and Maier, 2010). It has also been argued that neoliberal ideas, which were largely introduced into the discourse by the OECD and the World Bank, contribute substantially to the explanation of why the governments of many welfare states, including several Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, preferred a strategy of privatization and marketization, even if this entailed a paradigm shift in their political aims (Ebbinghaus, 2015; Allan and Scruggs, 2004; Butterwegge, Lösch, and Ptak, 2017). Furthermore, social-investment ideas also played an important role in the implementation of labor-market activation policies that aimed to prevent educational dropout, (long-term) unemployment, and early labor-market exit (Dingeldey, 2011; Esping-Andersen et al., 2002).

Sociological research found that welfare-state reforms based on the retrenchment, privatization, and marketization of social security and social services have been a driving force behind the weakening of social cohesion and the increase in social inequality, poverty, and economic uncertainty in most affluent countries over the last two decades (Palier and Martin, 2010; Butterwegge, 2012; Hinrichs and Jessoula, 2012; Koos and Sachweh, 2017). As a consequence of such reforms, social cleavages were also exacerbated (Clasen, 2011; Emmenegger, Häusermann, Palier, and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2012; Groh-Samberg, Hurch, and Waitkus, 2018; Lessenich, 2008), albeit to different degrees in various types of welfare regimes (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2014). Social-policy researchers in German-speaking countries have shown that the conservative German welfare state is a good example of a policy that has contributed to the widening of various kinds of social cleavages. Among such cleavages are the one between the majority of employed people and several kinds of socially excluded or marginalized social groups, including new social groups of immigrants without legal status (Böhnke, 2008, 2010; Dingeldey, 2015; Lessenich, 2008), and socio-structural polarization as a consequence of the shrinking of the middle classes (Burzan and Berger, 2010; Frericks, Harvey, and Maier, 2010). Another argument has been made that, besides social policies, labor-market policies have further contributed to growing

inequality on the basis of processes of “dualization”—that is, a widening and deepening of insider–outsider divides in labor markets or the creation of new ones (Emmenegger et al., 2012; Eichhorst and Marx, 2012; Eichhorst, Marx, and Tobsch, 2015; Palier, 2010).

According to the findings of empirical research, retrenchment and policies that encourage the privatization and marketization of social services often lead to social inequality in the availability of these services and in the quality of the services themselves (Bode, 2012; Vabø, 2006). Other studies have demonstrated that the privatization and marketization of social services have problematic consequences for the working conditions of professional care workers and their job satisfaction (Kröger, 2011; Theobald, 2011) as well as for the use of informal family care (Da Roit and Le Bihan, 2011). Altogether, the results of these studies have shown that working conditions and job satisfaction have generally suffered from the trend toward “marketization” and that market principles are only compatible to a limited extent with the underlying logics of the provision of public and familial care.

3.2 Extension of family policies and long-term care policies

With the introduction of new childcare and long-term care policies since the 1990s, many welfare states have supplanted their old conservative care policies that still supported the male breadwinner model of the family (Ostner and Lewis, 1995) with new care policies that support a dual-breadwinner family model, mainly through extra-familial care services. As part of these reforms, many welfare states have introduced new social rights related to care (Knijn and Kremer, 1997) and extended their infrastructure of publicly funded provision for childcare (Daly and Ferragina, 2017; Kreimer et al., 2011) as well as LTC (Ranci and Pavolini, 2013). This trend was partially connected to a conceptual shift from the citizen as family member to the citizen as an individual, even if the concept of the citizen as family member is still relevant in many welfare states (Frericks and Höppner, 2019). However, European welfare states still differ substantially in terms of the degree to which they support extra-familial LTC and public daycare for children under the age of three (Bahle, 2017; Eggers, Grages, and Pfau-Effinger, 2018).

German sociologists have made substantial contributions to the theoretical debate about theoretical concepts for the analysis of family policies and care policies, such as the concept of *de-familialization/familialization* that is very common in the classification of family policies and long-term care policies according to their influence on gender inequality. Some of their contributions have involved suggestions on how to develop the concept further (Eggers, Grages, and Pfau-Effinger, 2018) or addressed changes in the life-course norms of social citizenship (Frericks, Harvey, and Maier, 2010; Gottschall, 2019; Leitner, 2003; Lohmann and Zagel, 2016). They have also shown that Germany is a good example of a paradigm shift from a “familializing”

towards a “de-familializing” childcare policy (Fleckenstein, 2011; Ostner and Mätzke, 2010; Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen, 2011).

More recently, the correlation between welfare-state policies towards childcare and long-term care and the employment of migrants in private households has become a major issue in the debate (Lutz and Pallenga-Möllenbeck, 2011; Theobald, 2011). Some sociologists have emphasized that the LTC policies of the German welfare state offer a good example of a policy field in which gaps in the public provision and financing of LTC are filled in part by migrant carers who serve as low-wage workers in private households.

The reform of welfare-state policies toward childcare and long-term care since the 1990s has been to some degree a reaction to the increase in female employment and demographic changes. The principal aims of these reforms were to support women’s integration into the labor market and to reduce the risk of care-related poverty for the elderly and parents engaged in care-taking (Leitner, Ostner, and Schratzenstaller, 2004; Leitner, 2013; Ostner and Mätzke, 2010; Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen, 2011). German sociologists and social scientists have shown that a shift towards a more egalitarian “gender culture” (Pfau-Effinger, 1998) has also contributed to this paradigm change in family policies (Fleckenstein, 2011; Ferragini and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2015; Pfau-Effinger, 2005a, b). Comparative research has further found evidence that the reforms were partly associated with a shift in the concept of the welfare state from its role in financing social security towards its role in preventing social risks by investing in human capital as part of the concept of the *social investment state*. The European Union adopted this concept in the context of the Lisbon Strategy (Allmendinger and Nikolai, 2010; Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2015; Morel, Palier, and Palme, 2013; Naumann, 2014).

The consequences of the reforms of family and long-term care policies from the perspective of women’s labor-market integration and gender equality has been another important topic to which German sociologists have made a substantial contribution (Gottschall, 2019; Gottschall and Dingeldey, 2016; Grunow and Evertsson, 2019; Konietzka/Feldhaus/Kreyenfeld/Trappe, FAMILY AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS, this volume). Many authors have argued that family policies that support public daycare for children have a positive effect on women’s and men’s ability to reconcile family and employment. This argument has been contested. A comprehensive study of the relationship between work–family policies and labor-market outcomes by Brady, Blome, and Kmec (2019) found that work–family policies are not associated with labor-market outcomes for women or mothers. Jensen et al. (2017) concluded on the basis of a comparative study of Europe and Asia that cultural differences rather than differences in family policies are what explain cross-national differences in the rate of part-time employment among mothers of small children. Other recent research has also analyzed the caring behavior of fathers in the context of parental-leave policies (Aunkofer et al., 2019; Reimer, 2019).

Eggers et al. (2019) conducted a cross-national comparative study in which they have argued that a combination of very generous familial and extra-familial care

policies has considerable potential to promote gender equality and that this approach is particularly common in LTC policies in Nordic welfare states.

3.3 Research on global social-policy trends

For a long time, traditional welfare-state research was mainly focused on the nation state. However, social-policy analysis has always included a global dimension (Barr, 2001; Deacon, Hulse, and Stubbs, 1997), and German sociologists have contributed heavily to this debate as well (Kaasch and Stubbs, 2014; Leisering, 2019). With the establishment of the new DFG Collaborative Research Centre on “Global Dynamics of Social Policy” at the University of Bremen in 2017, in which a large team of social scientists collaborate, this strand of social-policy research has recently gained further importance in Germany. Core research fields that have arisen from this perspective encompass the emergence of social policy and welfare programs in non-Western countries that follow or adopt international or global models. It has been shown that distinct social policies have increasingly also been developed and implemented in the developing and emerging countries of the Global South (Gerharz/Rescher, *GLOBAL SOUTH*, this volume). There they often take different forms than in the affluent societies of traditional welfare states. The welfare states of developing countries are rather limited because of low governmental tax revenues and weak state authority (Hort and Kuhnle, 2000; Kaasch, Sumarto, and Wilmsen, 2018; Kim, 2008; Kwon, 2014; Leisering and Liu, 2010).

Research has found regional associations of governments to be the leading actors in the development of social policies in the Global South; these include entities like MERCOSUR in South America, ASEAN in Southeast Asia, or ECOWAS in West Africa (Deacon et al., 2009; Yeates, 2009). One of sociology’s more important contributions to research on global social policy, and an area of research in which German-speaking sociologists have also participated, lies in the emphasis on global cultural models and ideas that spread and diffuse through international organizations and shape the emergence and development of social policy (Hasse, 2003, Berten and Leisering, 2017; Davy, Davy, and Leisering, 2013; Gliszczynski and Leisering, 2016; Leisering, 2019). This perspective is closely connected to the world-polity approach of John W. Meyer (2009).

However, since a responsible global welfare state—in the traditional sense of the co-presence and combination of the social as a state objective with an institutional social sector (Kaufmann, 1997)—does not exist, the scope of reinforcing and implementing global social policy is limited. Deacon, Hulse, and Stubbs (1997) delineated three types of interventions or measures of social policy: provision, redistribution, and regulation. At the global level, the instruments and measures for provision and redistribution are lacking; the focus of global social policy therefore lies in regulation and soft coordination. The most prominent forms of regulation are the proceedings before international courts or the dispute settlement procedures of the WTO. Soft

coordination is reflected in the human-rights cases of the United Nations and the Council of Europe (or the EU's method of open coordination). The ILO also uses such methods as these for monitoring and enforcing its conventions and plays an equally important role in providing actors with the tools to meet international standards. Even softer coordination takes place in the form of international conferences and international target declarations. These procedures can be effective if they are able to create public awareness and define mandatory objectives (Strang and Chang, 1993).

Unlike the ambivalent developments in social policy and the wider trend towards retrenchment in social security in the traditional welfare states, countries in the Global South have generally experienced a large expansion of social policy within the last two decades (Barrientos, 2013). With regard to the outcome of such policies in these countries and regions, sociologists are mainly interested in the role of social policy in the mitigation of poverty, which is often predicated on the steady expansion of the beneficiaries (traditionally often limited to members of the military and public administration) of labor rights, social security, and healthcare, as well as more recently social cash transfers (Leisering, 2019). Some researchers have emphasized the importance of inclusive growth in reducing poverty by fostering redistribution and minimizing inequality in developing countries of the Global South along with social investment as a plausible alternative to neoliberal retrenchment in global social-policy dynamics (Busemeyer and Garritzmann, 2019; Deeming and Smyth, 2018; Schmid, 2018).

4 Conclusion

Over the last twenty years, sociological research on the causes and consequences of changes in the welfare state and the development of theoretical approaches and concepts have improved our understanding of the complex interrelationships between the development of welfare-state policies and the development of social structures and cultures, and sociologists in German-speaking countries have made fundamental contributions to this field of study. This is mainly with respect to the following issues:

- Theory and research have shown that welfare-state policies play an important role in explaining cross-national differences in social inequality, poverty, and social cohesion. They have also made a case that strong and generous welfare states that take a comprehensive approach to social citizenship create the most favorable conditions for more egalitarian social structures, social inclusion, and social cohesion. Sociological theory and research have led to a better and more nuanced understanding of this relationship.
- The theories and research on the role of welfare-state policies in the work–family relationship and gender inequality, and about the effects of welfare-state change on this relationship, have led to an improvement of theoretical concepts and research in the field.

- New research on the globalization of social policies offers important insight into the effect of transnational diffusion of social policies and migration on social outcomes.

Sociologists in German-speaking countries have contributed to the development of theory and research in the sociology of social policy in manifold ways. A particular merit of their contribution is that they have evaluated theoretical assumptions related to the causes, consequences, and directions of welfare-state change with a specific focus on Germany, which has generally represented the conservative type of welfare regime in Esping-Andersen's typology (1990) and the familialistic care regime in the classical typology of care regimes (Lewis, 1992). It has been shown that the German welfare state has changed in an equivocal way as result of the welfare-state reforms, with a weakening of social rights in the social security systems and an extension of social rights and infrastructure in terms of policies towards childcare and LTC. With regard to the classification of welfare states, the German welfare state still exhibits substantial features of the conservative welfare regime, but these are combined with features of the liberal and social democratic types. Also, it has been partly transformed from a predominantly familializing care regime towards a care regime with de-familializing features, mainly in its childcare policies.

However, we argue that sociological theory and research on social policies too often treat the institutional settings of social policy as coherent units. We suggest that both in theory building and empirical research, researchers should take into account the complex interrelations between different policies and political institutions and consider that their impact on social inequality and social cohesion might result from policies and institutions interacting in incoherent or even contradictory ways. There is also a need for extended theory building and research on the relationship between the design and generosity of welfare states and the social groups that are primarily affected by social marginalization and exclusion. Additionally, more research is called for on the ways in which vulnerable groups deal with current welfare-state policies and how it is possible to explain cross-national differences in this regard.

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Social Problems

Günter Albrecht

Abstract: A review of the German-language literature on social problems is confronted with the major difficulty that social problems are analyzed by many special sociologies (e.g., the sociology of deviant behavior and social control) without any explicit reference to the category of “social problems.” The present review will deal with this by concentrating on those publications that use the concept of “social problems” as developed in the controversies between structural functionalists (e.g., Robert Merton) on the one hand and symbolic interactionists (e.g., Herbert Blumer, Malcom Spector, John L. Kitsuse) and radical constructionists on the other. In German-language sociology, the latter approaches gained prevalence and have marginalized the “objectivist” position. Recent publications have been dedicated to analyses of “doing social problems.” It is, however, not always obvious how these analyses differ from the traditional labeling approach. Just as in the international literature, its German-language counterparts offer only few examples of internationally comparative studies of social problems and their constitution, even though such analyses would allow us to identify which conditions are relevant to the career of social problems.

Keywords: Theory of social problems, structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, constructivism, social movements, career of social problems

1 Introduction

Reviewing the literature for trends in the sociology of social problems in German-speaking countries faces major difficulties as the concept of “social problems” is ubiquitous in everyday language; the term is applied to all kinds of things that somehow seem to be “problematic.” To minimize these difficulties, the following article begins by outlining what a sociology of social problems could be. For this purpose, let us recall an earlier debate of what such a sociology might be—one that was conducted from exactly this perspective in American sociology between the “classical” structural-functionalist position of Robert K. Merton and the advocates of symbolic interactionism. This debate, in which symbolic interactionists massively attacked Merton’s position, not only triggered a complete reorientation of the sociology of social problems at the time but can also serve to demonstrate the significance that the process involved in constituting social problems has gained (2). After eluci-

Note: Translation from German by Stephan Elkins (*SocioTrans—Social Science Translation & Editing*).

Dedication: For my lovely wife, Irmgard, for her 75th birthday and to express my gratitude for our being together for 60 years through times both good and not so good.

dating this point, I will introduce examples of such processes (3) and shed light on the significance of these processes for society's handling of social problems (4). I will close by briefly mentioning some desiderata (5).

2 The Controversy between “Objectivistic” Tradition and Constructivism

Beginning in the 1970s, interactionists criticized the long-dominant structural-functionalist view of “social problems” for its “objectivistic” position on the grounds that it was unable to provide precise criteria to determine when a condition deemed “problematic” qualifies as a “social problem.” For Merton (1971; 1976), the existence of a social problem required that there be a “significant discrepancy between social standards and social actuality” (Merton, 1971: 799), and for such a discrepancy (*latent* social problem) to become a *manifest* social problem, experts—scientists, that is—had to identify and call out that discrepancy. Yet, aside from the objection that, in complex societies, there were no universally shared values, the critics further objected that discrepancies between the ideal and the real world were ubiquitous and the objectivistic position failed to specify criteria for determining which of those many discrepancies between the ideal and the real could claim *significance* over those that could not. Moreover, they argued that the objectivists would regularly maintain that, in some circumstances, problematic conditions also served positive social functions. But how can we decide whether a condition constitutes a social problem if it also contributes to the solution of some other potential or “real” problem?

As a symbolic interactionist, Blumer (1971) insisted that no condition comes with an inherent *objective* quality by its very nature but that its meaning is negotiated and attributed in concrete social interactions. In this view, social problems are not objectively discernable deficiencies but rather results of collective action that are the outcome of the activities of various groups of actors, each with its specific perspective, interests, values, resources, and so on, and it is thus these activities that constitute a condition as a social problem.¹ Kitsuse and Spector (1973: 415) phrased this accordingly: “Thus, we define social problems as *the activities of groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions.*” Authors in this line of thought maintained that that there was *no* connection between certain social conditions and the changes thereof on the one hand and the processes of problematizing a condition and it being constituted as a social problem on the other, yet in making their argument they obviously employed tautological reasoning (see Albrecht, 1990: 15). This assertion drew the criticism of “ontological gerrymandering” (Woolgar and

¹ See Spector and Kitsuse (1973; 1977); Kitsuse and Spector (1973). Good introductions to the constructivist “theory” of social problems are Albrecht (1977; 1990; 2001), Best (2003a; b; 2004; 2006; 2013), and Loseke (2003a; b). For a very different position, see Manis (1974a; b).

Pawluch, 1985). This was because, to verify social problems, they would have to prove that the conditions deemed “problematic” had not changed, yet nevertheless now constituted a social problem on account of “claimsmaking activities”; in essence, this amounts to arguing that the respective condition possesses some sort of *objectively* identifiable quality that can be separated from such claims, which is in blatant contradiction to their fundamental methodological position.

Contextual constructivists see a way out of this dilemma by considering the *context* of problematization and the objectivistic reference to that context as a significant part of the analysis, as the constructed nature of objectivistic assumptions and claims can be verified in terms of its appropriateness on the basis of knowledge that is considered *evidently* valid (Best, 1989: 247). Best (1995: 6f.), however, contends that this maneuver does not blur the difference between objectivistic and constructivist positions, which is a viewpoint that I would not necessarily support.

Even though German-language scholarship has provided some good studies that have attempted to elaborate the different versions of a constructivist sociology of social problems and their relationship to objectivistic approaches² as well as show their limitations and methodological problems,³ there is still a need for additional clarification. Despite all warnings of a too restrictive narrowing of the sociology of social problems (Haferkamp, 1987; Albrecht, 2001), the constructivist position has largely prevailed in the German-speaking world. Schetsche (2000; 2001; 2008) in particular has systematically fleshed out this approach in textbook fashion. Regrettably, the controversies among German-language scholarship since the turn of the century have not yielded any systematic advancement and addition of further theoretical perspectives. The only comprehensive study from the pen of a German-speaking author that addresses the key issues and controversies in sufficient detail and makes inspiring suggestions for further theoretical and empirical research is a text by Groenemeyer (2012). Groenemeyer makes perfectly clear that neither an objectivistic nor a radical-constructivist position alone can provide satisfactory solutions. The literature has mostly concentrated on analyzing the processes of the constitution of social problems. It is to these studies that we will now turn.

3 Selected Analyses of the Constitution of Social Problems

Studies committed to a constructivist position are frequently closely associated with theories of social movements, since such movements play a key role in establishing a

² Particular mention needs to be made of the works of Schmidt (1999; 2000) and Hasse and Schmidt (2010), who have presented a lucid elaboration of the theoretical and methodological peculiarities of different versions of constructivism.

³ See, e.g., Albrecht (1990; 2001), Peters (2001), and Groenemeyer (2001; 2012).

condition as a “social problem” and in the various phases involved in the attempt to solve the problem. As the sociology of social movements will be discussed in another contribution to this volume (Kern, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, this volume), I will limit myself to a few thoughts on what the theory of resource mobilization has to say about the successful establishment of a social problem. In this view, the choice of *diagnostic frame* is a crucial determinant of problem construction, and prognostic and motivational frames most certainly play a major role in the recruitment and motivation of actors, without whom successful problematization can hardly be achieved.⁴ Unfortunately, empirical analyses that explicitly draw on theories of social movements to explain the constitution or transformation of established constructs of problems are few and far between in the German-speaking academic world, although Karstedt (1999), in an excellent overview, has made a strong case for the fruitfulness of such a perspective.⁵

The number of German-language publications that analyze the constitution of social problems is rather low compared to the number of US publications. For reasons of space, I will limit the following review to a small selection of issues that have been problematized or, in some significant way, re-problematized in the recent past. The latest as well as currently ongoing processes of problematization and “established” social problems must unfortunately be omitted from consideration.⁶

A critical aspect in the examination of such discourses that potentially lead to the constitution of a social problem is that it is ultimately not possible to justify a compelling selection criterion as to which disciplines, organizations, or even groups of people participating in such a discourse need to be included in this kind of analysis. For the majority of the problems mentioned below, it is obvious that disciplines such as economics, educational science, law, psychology, and above all medicine are at the heart of early steps of problematization, whereas sociology’s role is frequently the analysis of the activities of other disciplines rather than problematization activities of its own. This role has the advantage of being able to adopt a distanced stance that is beneficial to the scientific quality of the endeavor, yet it can also make sociology vulnerable to accusations of irrelevance. In adopting this distanced stance, sociology additionally runs the risk of implicitly betraying its own diagnostic abilities. One of the consequences of the involvement of so many disciplines in problematizing an issue is

⁴ See Benford and Snow (2000) and Snow (2003). See Jasper (2011) on the relevance of emotions for social movements and Amenta and Poletta (2019) on the cultural impact of social movements as preconditions for new mobilization processes.

⁵ The analysis of discourses among social movements that have been involved in the debates around abortion in the USA and Germany (e.g., by Ferree et al. [2002]) unfortunately did not inspire more than a few similar comparative studies in German-speaking countries. Here mention must be made of Sylvia Wieseler’s studies (2004; 2008), informed by social-movement theory, on how society deals with breast cancer. Her internationally comparative perspective and use of the concept of framing has yielded detailed, in-depth analyses.

⁶ On numerous established social problems, see the contributions in Albrecht and Groenemeyer (2012).

the huge volume of literature and the large number of documents that must be considered as being part of the discourse. Another aspect that we must bear in mind is that it is typically not scholars who initiate a process of problematization but rather *those affected* as well as “moral entrepreneurs” and media representatives, whose utterances are difficult to collect to any comprehensive degree no matter what kind of empirical research methodology is used because they can show up in an endless variety of texts and sources.

The issue of *abortion* is one of many examples that illustrates that the constitution of a problem cannot be properly understood as a static phenomenon but must be viewed dynamically. The decriminalization of abortion under certain conditions in many societies has been met with considerable morally and/or religiously motivated resistance (see, e.g., Ferree et al., 2002; Rucht, 1991; Spieker, 2000) and has triggered social movements pro and contra liberalization. Liberalization has sparked new problematization that has crystallized around the so-called *post-abortion syndrome* (see Lee, 2001), which the opponents of abortion claim to be a real and widespread phenomenon, whereas “neutral” experts doubt this. Yet the latter could not prevent the issue from becoming virulent in political discourse in the USA.⁷ Advocates of legal liberalization see a first step toward a “re-problematization” of abortion in Germany (a) in the continued, if not even intensified, criminalization of “abortion advertising” by physicians who perform them and (b) in the Federal Ministry of Health intending to provide funding for research on the post-abortion syndrome in Germany.

Another example of the great significance that medicine and its specific perspective has in constituting certain conditions as social problems is what has been labeled the *deficiency disease of menopause*. It is one of many examples of a “medicalization of social problems” (see Conrad, 2007). Medicalization can have significant, yet ambivalent, consequences for dealing with such problems. In the case of “alcohol dependency,” medicalization has the effect of mitigating moral condemnation, whereas defining menopause as a medical problem might well serve the expansion of professional domains by “pathologizing” a “natural” condition and thus creating new “business opportunities” (see Kolip, 2000).

The major role of experts in processes of problem constitution is likewise illustrated in the “career” of what has been labeled *attention deficit hyperactivity disorder* (ADHD), the diagnosis and treatment of which is still subject to controversy among experts⁸ while public attention has waned despite parents and teachers continuing to perceive problems of this kind in a large number of children. The discourse almost turns belligerent when it comes to ADHD medication therapy. Critics emphasize the existence of substantial long-term side-effects, and some accuse parents who accept such treatment of failing their children. Among the public mind and in parts of the

⁷ See Major et al. (2009), Robinson et al. (2009), and Dadlez and Andrews (2009) for the USA, and Rohde and Woopen (2007) for Germany.

⁸ On the career of “hyperkinetic disorder,” see Conrad and Potter (2000), who critically discuss the medicalization of the phenomenon.

“expert” community, we encounter ideas on this issue that other discourse participants refute as myths.⁹

Another issue that has drawn exorbitant public attention in recent decades has been *burnout syndrome*. In the process of its constitution as a social problem, a question that played a major role was to what extent the dominant (medical) conceptualization of the phenomenon and its ultimately structural causes (excessive demands in the workplace and competitive pressure toward self-optimization) were being individualized and medicalized.¹⁰ This case clearly illustrates the great significance to society of the outcome of this “struggle in the public arena” over how the issue is conceptualized.

Schmidt (1999; 2012) provided an analysis of how psychiatry constructs “pathological gambling” as a social problem, a construct that often fails to distinguish between *addictive* and *non-addictive* or *legal* and *illegal* gambling, which are both important distinctions for public problematization. So far, public interest in the subject has been relatively low, presumably because the majority of the population has personal experience with gambling and underestimates its risks,¹¹ but perhaps also because the direct and indirect social costs of other problems of addiction (e.g., alcohol or tobacco consumption) are forty to fifty times higher.¹² It seems likely that the potential explosiveness of the problem will soon be discovered since gambling via the Internet can be expected to render “pathological gambling” increasingly less controllable.

Originating in a joke made by a psychiatrist, so-called *Internet addiction* drew huge international attention (see the overview in Dalal and Basu, 2016) and soon triggered a wave of concern in German-speaking countries.¹³ The reason for this concern was that this phenomenon is seen to have alarming consequences seemingly across all age groups but particularly so for children and youths, as it is a space for engaging in violent computer games, gambling, consumption of pornography, and harassment outside the reach of the usual mechanisms of social control. Especially problematic are computer games since many parents seem to be helpless in the face of their children spending nearly their entire leisure time playing these games, leaving little to no time for homework or socializing with peers. Apart from the consumption of

⁹ See Brown (2018).

¹⁰ See Kaschka, Korczak, and Broich (2011), Neckel and Wagner (2013a; b), Maslach et al. (2001), Kury (2013), Heinemann and Heinemann (2013; 2016), Vogelmann (2013), and Pfiffner and Weber (2008).

¹¹ On the prevalence of gambling addiction in Germany, see Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung (2016); on its risks and associated problems, see Hayer (2012), Petry et al. (2013), and Schmidt (2001).

¹² See Becker (2011: 43ff.) on these social costs, Kleibrink and Köster (2017) on the market for gambling in Germany and on new, problematic kinds of gambling, and Gebhardt and Korte (2018) on the complex legal issues involved.

¹³ Among many others, see Hahn and Jerusalem (2001), Walter and Schetsche (2003), te Wildt (2015), Petersen et al. (2009), Wölfling et al. (2013), and Braun (2014).

problematic content, the *addiction* to being permanently *online* and spending most of one's time on the Internet is another serious problem. In light of this phenomenon's obvious problematic potential for society, it is astonishing that sociology has hitherto devoted rather little attention to its social problematization (for an exception, see Braun, 2014).

Finally, I would like to address two conditions whose constitution as a social problem has faltered or been "stifled" (so far at least). Serious legal and medical concerns have been raised against *male* circumcision for religious reasons.¹⁴ Yet a ruling by a Cologne court that criminalized the practice of circumcision kicked up a storm of outrage, which soon resulted in the legalization of male circumcision. Much more successful was—when measured by the yardstick of public opposition and in terms of jurisprudence—the problematization of *female* circumcision (more precisely, genital mutilation), which obviously serves the purpose of sexual repression of women and involves severe physical and mental distress.¹⁵ So far, successful problematization of this matter seems to have been limited to Western societies, some of which accept women seeking refuge from the threat of genital mutilation as grounds for asylum. This issue raises the question of what the chances are for the global diffusion of recognizing genital mutilation as a social problem in light of massive differences between societies in terms of religion, culture, and social stratification.

It can further be shown that, with the exception of a few Western societies, attempts to problematize slaughter according to Jewish or Muslim rites have also failed for similar reasons.

It is the nature of the beast that constructivist case studies tend to shift attention from issues that are only marginally or no longer contested as being social problems to phenomena that are either completely new or sporadic, ephemeral, or perhaps not even "real" issues. The criterion of selection is typically (the often very short-term) public interest, especially that of the mass media, which is guided by an issue's news value and not by its sociological or societal "relevance."¹⁶ The spectacular displaces the relevant. It is likewise true, however, that many an issue that initially appears to be irrelevant or bizarre soon becomes a focal point of societal debate and controversy, whereas another state of affairs that was once generally seen as much more severe is viewed as being "normal" after some time has passed.

¹⁴ On the discussion of male circumcision in Germany, see Klein (2013). See also Mack (2015), Mehta (2000), Kreß (2014a; b), Siggelkow (2015), and Jens (2013), who have addressed the ethical and legal issues that this involves from an oppositional perspective.

¹⁵ See Asefaw (2008), Boddy (1998), Boyle et al. (2001), Herrmann (2000), Kölling (2008), Mende (2011), Okroi (2001), and Peller (2002).

¹⁶ Examples are studies on razor blades in Halloween goodies (Best and Horiuchi, 1985) or satanism (Jenkins and Maier-Katin, 1992; Schmied-Knittel, 2008).

4 Society's Dealing with Social Problems at the Micro-Social Level: Doing Social Problems

There are good reasons not to neglect dealing with “established” social problems. For one, no government can afford to ignore social problems in the long run. For another, we must ask how institutions deal with social problems as part of their daily business, how they “shape” them for organizational processing. Let us begin with the second topic; the first will be addressed in section 4 under desiderata.

The German-language literature offers interesting contributions on what in the USA has been called “doing social problems.”¹⁷ Groenemeyer (2010a) analyzed the relationships between actors’ work on conceptualizing problems and the activities of the agencies that are involved in dealing with or providing solutions to problematic conditions. This “social-problem work” depends on factors such as the structures of institutions, the professional self-conception of the actors operating within those structures, the expectations of the addressees of intervention or prevention policies, and the situational circumstances in which the interactions with clients, customers, or patients take place.¹⁸ Case studies¹⁹ have shown how work to address the problem of “disability” can lead to the organizational reification of disability (Wetzel, 2012), how social problems in the field of social pedagogy transform these problems in specific ways, and how changing conceptions of providing help alters the ways social problems are dealt with in social work. Similar is true for work with the homeless, medical rehabilitation, work with right-wing extremists, the policing of street subcultures, crime prevention, and ethnic discrimination in service organizations as a result of a specific understanding of a problem.

For sociologists, less pleasing is that the once successful push for a sociological perspective in dealing with mental illness is being marginalized by biological psychiatry, which is once again gaining the upper hand (see Groenemeyer, 2008; Kilian, 2008; 2012; and Dellwing, 2008).

In light of the problems of inclusion in schools that are being discussed in German-speaking countries, work devoted to the issues of diversity and inclusion deserves attention as well. Work that needs to be mentioned here is that of Groenemeyer (2014a), who analyzed the problematization of disability, Wansing (2014), who explored ambivalences in the concept of disability, Krell (2014), who discussed the concept of diversity, and Waldschmidt (2014), who investigated the power of distinc-

¹⁷ See, for instance, Best (2008) and Loseke (2003a; b).

¹⁸ On the concept of “social-problem work,” see Schmidt (2008), and on its relation to neo-institutionalism’s concept of work, Hasse and Schmidt (2010).

¹⁹ The case studies referred to in the following are all from the aforementioned collection by Groenemeyer (2010a).

tion that becomes manifest in affixing the label of disability and likewise causes social inequality.²⁰

However, the critical observer faces the question of to what extent these recent studies on doing social problems extend beyond the insights already gained from the burgeoning research in the field of deviant behavior and social control that was inspired in Germany by Fritz Sack, who introduced the labeling approach into German sociology.

Unfortunately, there are only few fruitful studies of doing social problems from an internationally comparative perspective.²¹

5 Desiderata

As the constitution of social problems is a result of controversial discourses in different “arenas,” we cannot assume that the discourse participants who lose in this struggle will accept the prevailing conception, especially since the ensuing attempts at remedying the problem can spark a new dynamic—and these attempts will in all likelihood be undertaken, even in cases in which the problem, according to Nedelmann (1986 a; b), is *unsolvable* in principle in contemporary societies (Schimank, SOCIETY, this volume). Given highly institutionalized conflicts, attempts at solving a problem will oftentimes cause *new* problems and conflicts in other areas. In the face of the obvious cumulation of crisis situations in recent times, governments must, however, attempt to maintain or gain flexibility, be it by *redefining goals* or by *reinterpreting* problems. The latter amounts to altering the cultural milieu of social problems. Conceivable are changes in the degree of differentiation of a social problem, for instance, by breaking it down into subspects that can be assigned different levels of relevance and that can be addressed to different degrees. A second option would be a strategically well-considered selection of or emphasis on certain norms and values that can be claimed as being violated by a problematic condition so as to create a specific “moral milieu” as an environment in which the relevant discourses are to take place. The third option is to modify the *intensity of value-ladenness*. The situation becomes critical for a politics of mastering problems when an issue offers only few possibilities for differentiation, is raised as an issue in a tightly integrated moral milieu, and when the issue is highly value laden.

Unfortunately, there is little work that has systematically applied these insightful theoretical considerations to the analysis of how society as a whole handles social

²⁰ See also the works of Wacker (2014), Schulz (2014), and Schäfers (2014), all of which discuss specific aspects of disability and inclusion.

²¹ A laudable exception is the comparative analysis of dealing with problems of substance abuse. See Pearson (2009); Duprez and Groenemeyer (2009) provide a review of the findings.

problems.²² Research would be desirable that examines selected social problems in an internationally comparative perspective to determine whether similar problematic conditions follow significantly different trajectories depending on whether governmental attempts to solve these problems make varying use of the aforementioned options.²³ We could expect significant insights from research on what Mauss (1975) once called “*aborted*” *social problems*, that is, “problems” that have failed—at least so far—to become established as such.

New social problems do not start their “careers” in all societies, or even in all regions of the same country, at the same time. Problematization begins in some regions or societies and, under some circumstances, gradually diffuses to other regions, countries, or cultural regions. In this respect, globalization is of particular significance. In many societies, globalization has not only caused economic transformations and, in their wake, classical social problems (e.g., unemployment as a result of moving jobs from long-established industrial countries to developing countries) but also furthered conditions that can boost the *diffusion* of social problems. The evolving global cultural economy is substantially changing the preconditions for the global diffusion of social problems (for the complex relations between globalization and social movements as a source of social problems, see Almeida and Chase-Dunn, 2018; Weiß, GLOBALIZATION AND TRANSNATIONALIZATION, this volume).

Research on the diffusion of social problems is still in its nascent stages and even in the Anglo-American parts of the world has largely been limited to examining diffusion between no more than *two* societies. However, what we do have, if nothing else, are the *theoretical* ideas of Joel Best, informed by general diffusion research.²⁴ Best names four prerequisites for the diffusion of a social problem: (a) that a *specific* (sic!) *condition* is given, (b) that this condition is deemed *problematic*, (c) that it exhibits specific features, and (d) that it requires that certain measures be taken to master the problem (Best, 2001b). It is obvious that the first two conditions are generally only satisfied when the receiving group or society shares social circumstances and cultural patterns (values, standards, etc.) with the “model society” or there is at least some degree of accordance in this regard. Sharing a common language or familiarity with the language of the other certainly plays an important role as well.²⁵ The third prerequisite is extremely complex, as actors may frequently agree that a certain condition is “problematic” while they may strongly disagree on which *aspects* make it so, what

22 An outstanding study that draws explicitly on Nedelmann’s theoretical approach in order to examine the complex of Germany’s Hartz IV legislation (a highly controversial piece of legislation in the 1990s to restructure the German system of unemployment and welfare benefits) and the ensuing problems of defining unemployment and neediness has been provided by Ratzka (2010).

23 The excellent review by Groenemeyer et al. (2012) illustrates how fruitful systematic stock-taking of the “politics of social problems” could be.

24 Examples of this research can be found in the collection edited by Best (2001a).

25 This is a condition that makes it much more likely, for instance, that there is diffusion from the Anglo-Saxon cultural regions to German-speaking countries than vice versa.

the *causes* are, and what *consequences* are to be expected. The same is true for the fourth prerequisite, the *measures* to be adopted for solving the problem. In this regard, cultural values, established policy styles, institutionalized structures, interest dispositions, rivalries, and so on all play a substantial role as well.

The fundamental significance of information streams requires no particular mention in light of the tremendous increase in the possibilities of communication, even though many an authoritarian government attempts to keep tight control of these flows of information.

What has hitherto been woefully neglected is research on the extent to which communication in social networks plays a significant role in the constitution of social problems and society's efforts to address them. So far, the focus of attention has been on *legacy* media, even though it is obvious that much discourse these days takes place in other media—and, moreover, this discourse is difficult to capture by the usual methodological means. (Hepp, MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION, this volume)

It would be desirable that radical constructivism, contextual constructivism, and interactionistically refined objectivistic approaches continue to coexist as rivals in theory building and research.²⁶ Limiting the task of sociology (in the vein of radical constructivism) to examining communication from a process-analytical perspective, investigating the rules according to which communication unfolds from a structure-analytical perspective, and reconstructing a historical semantic from an evolution-theoretical perspective while remaining disinterested in the question whether the theory built on these insights is also actually *correct* (Luhmann, 1986: 74) would amount to radically abandoning the critical function of sociology. If we bear Kitsuse and Spector's definition of social problems in mind as "activities of groups making assertions of grievances and claims to some putative conditions" (1973: 415) and recall the images of drowning refugees in the Mediterranean, it does not seem sufficient to restrict our scientific analysis to the semantic analysis of the discourses that revolve around this issue while losing sight of the suffering and the causes of this catastrophe, as both that suffering and the causes thereof most certainly have some relation to the semantics of the discourse participants.

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²⁶ For a current overview of the sociology of social problems, see the review by Helge Peters in *Soziologische Revue* (2019).

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Social Theory

Wolfgang Ludwig Schneider

Abstract: In the last two decades, social theory in German-language sociology saw the rise of a number of “umbrella enterprises” such as analytical sociology, relational sociology, or practice theory that are not part of universalistic grand theories but extract basic assumptions about the structure of social reality from a plurality of approaches and combine them into competing integrative programs. The present article outlines the most significant of these umbrella enterprises and key aspects that they have defined in the discussion on social theory in German-speaking countries. Moreover, it deals with the question of how the larger of these enterprises in particular manage to present themselves as uniform approaches despite their many internal differences.

Keywords: Analytical sociology, explanatory sociology, Weber paradigm, relational sociology, practice theory, communicative constructivism

1 On the Dominance of Umbrella Enterprises in Social Theory

In the last twenty years, independent social-theory enterprises that are no longer embedded within specific universalist grand theories such as those of Parsons, Luhmann, or Bourdieu pushed themselves to the forefront of German theoretical debates.¹ Instead these enterprises focus on the basic elements and structures of the social without connecting them to more specific assumptions about particular forms of social order and appear as “umbrella enterprises” that extract social-theoretical assumptions from various theories and integrate them in a comprehensive research program. A number of these social-theory umbrella enterprises have struck a significant chord with German-speaking researchers. The *analytical sociology* proclaimed by Peter Hedström and Richard Swedberg, for instance, which aims to uncover causally explanatory social mechanisms, was sympathetically received in German sociology by exponents of a rational-action theory that defines itself as *explanatory sociology*. Likewise, the *practice turn* proclaimed by Theodore Schatzki, Karin Knorr-Cetina, and Eike von Savigny was taken up in German sociology early on by Andreas Reckwitz and

Note: Translation from German, including all quotes from German literature, by John Koster for *SocioTrans—Social Scientific Translation & Editing*.

¹ “Enterprises” does not refer here to organizations but to more fluid social constellations that know nothing of membership roles and are instead ordered according to center and periphery, resembling social movements in many respects.

has since been broadly influential. Further enterprises of this type include *relational sociology*, which picks up from Harrison White and Mustafa Emirbayer and displays selective affinities to Luhmann's systems theory; the *Weber paradigm*, which has emanated from Heidelberg; and the *communicative constructivism* propagated by Hubert Knoblauch, Rainer Keller, and Jo Reichertz—whereby the latter two enterprises are on a smaller scale and anchored primarily in the German-language context. By defining relevant topics, these newcomers in the field of social theory have had a lasting influence on the more recent German-language discussion and have also given exponents of other approaches cause to position themselves in response.

2 Key Aspects of Social Theory Defined by Recent Umbrella Enterprises

Analytical sociology (AS) was christened as a social-theory umbrella enterprise with the publication of a conference anthology by Hedström and Swedberg (1998) and codified by Hedström's monograph *Dissecting the Social: On the Principles of Analytical Sociology* (2005). Hedström describes the aim of AS the causal explanation of social phenomena by “theories of the middle range” (Merton) with the help of *social mechanisms* and supported by a foundation in action theory (cf. Hedström, 2005: 8f.). Social mechanisms presuppose a “causal agent,” as Hedström and Swedberg (1998a: 11) note with reference to Bhaskar (1978). They assume that “the elementary ‘causal agents’ are always individual actors” (ibid.), thus committing AS to methodological individualism. As far as the mechanistic explanation of macro-social structures is concerned, this means they cannot be explained by direct reference to other macro-social structures (Ma1→Ma2); rather, explanation must always proceed by way of the micro-social level of individual actors. According to this approach, actors appear in their action to be (1) influenced by a macro-social constellation Ma1, which (2) shapes their motivation to perform specific actions in a way that can be explained by action theory, the aggregation of which then (3) generates a macro-social constellation Ma2. This model of explanation, which has become known as the “Coleman boat,” forms the common basis of analytical and explanatory sociology. In Esser's account (1993), the explanatory steps of this model operate under the well-known titles (1) the “logic of the situation,” (2) the “logic of selection,” and (3) the “logic of aggregation.”

In German-language sociology, the up-and-coming AS program was greeted by representatives of the older explanatory sociology (ES) as an ally, although their different emphases were freely acknowledged. The most important difference pertains to the theory of action applied at the micro level. Whereas Hedström takes as his basis the so-called DBO theory—which posits that actors choose a particular action on the basis of their desires (D), beliefs (B), and perceived opportunities (O) but does not assume utility maximization in the sense of rational-choice theory (RC)—ES insists that a theory of rational action (however modified, expanded, or inclusive of variable levels

of rationality) must serve as the foundation (cf., among others, Esser, 2001; 2010; Maurer, 2010; Maurer and Schmid, 2010; Schmid, 2011; 2017; Kroneberg, 2011; Opp, 2013). In this vein, Esser's *model of frame selection* (MFS) can be considered one of the most fully developed approaches (cf. Esser, 2001; Kroneberg, 2011: Ch. 5). It is set out as an integrative action theory that purports to explain not only rationally calculated (i.e., purposive-rational) action but also other forms, such as automatic-spontaneous and value-rational action in accordance with the principle of utility maximization.²

Furthermore, in ES the foundational action-theoretical component is assigned the function of rescuing the concept of deductive-nomological explanation by displacing the nomological foundation from the macro level—at which it has not yet been possible to identify generally valid laws—to the micro level and employing action theory to formulate a universally valid law of selection (cf. Esser, 1993: 94ff.; Maurer and Schmid, 2010: 40ff.; Kalter and Kroneberg, 2014: 97).

Rather than strive for an action theory that can serve as a generally valid basis of explanation, Hedström looks at the micro level for specific action-formation mechanisms that form the desires, beliefs, and opportunities of actors and can link them in various ways. Thus, wishful thinking, sour-grapes syndrome, and the adoption of others' beliefs in states of insecurity are treated as mechanisms at work on the level of individual actors, but without asking to what extent they derive from an overarching theory of action.³ From the perspective of ES, the criticism is that without a general anchoring in action theory, the assumed action-formation mechanisms must in the end be introduced as ad hoc hypotheses (cf. Maurer, 2010: 176ff., esp. 180).

If AS puts less emphasis on the detailed analysis and unified theoretical grounding of action-formation mechanisms, this is because its primary interest is to uncover the *transformational mechanisms* that explain the macro-social effects that are generated from the combination of a plurality of individual actions.⁴ Kalter and Kroneberg (2014: 103) see this shift of emphasis from the modeling of bridge hypotheses and the fleshing out of action-theoretical assumptions to the development of more complex models of aggregation/transformation as one of the significant impulses AS provides for ES. Kalter and Kroneberg (2014: 102f.) hold ES' primary fixation on working out a general theory of action responsible for the fact that its mechanism-based explanations still make relatively seldom use of formal generative models to explain the micro→macro transformation in a mechanistic way. AS is in turn criticized from the perspective of ES for proceeding too selectively with the reconstruction of this transformational step by favoring (empirically calibrated) agent-based com-

2 On the discussion of Esser's integrative enterprise in comparison to Luhmann and Weber, cf. Greshoff and Schimank, 2006.

3 In this regard, Schimank (2000; 2010; further developed in Kron, 2005: Ch. 8 and in Schimank, 2011) proceeds in a similar way in distinguishing four different actor models (homo oeconomicus, homo sociologicus, emotional man, identity asserter) and conceives the question of which of these models should be seen as adequate in a given action context as an *empirical* one.

4 This is equally true of Schimank.

puter simulation models to the neglect of other possibilities of modeling, such as game theory, decision theory, market models, laboratory experiments, network analysis, and so forth (Kalter and Kroneberg, 2014: 108), and concentrating above all on the modeling of coordination problems (Schmid, 2017: 418f.).

A number of questions remain controversial in analytical and explanatory sociology: How precisely are we to define social mechanism? What ought an action-theoretical explanation of macro-social phenomena look like? Is a reductive explanation that extends all the way down to the level of individual action always possible? Must we perhaps, and if so to what extent, start from the premise of emergent social structures that cannot be traced back to individual action?⁵ In light of these open questions, the inflationary use of the concept of mechanism suggests a greater degree of agreement than in fact exists. It should nonetheless be noted that the shared goal of developing causal explanations on the basis of social mechanisms, and the acceptance of the Coleman boat as a schematic foundation for distinguishing and relating various explanatory problems and types of mechanisms, provide a basis for routing disparate positions into a *coordinated disagreement*. Although the remaining differences cannot be dissolved in this way, they can be ordered by relating the various positions to a series of basic problems that are predefined by the micro-macro schema. Thus, the Coleman boat functions as a *semantic coordinating mechanism* for structuring debates within AS and ES. It furthermore serves to set this discourse apart from outside positions that do not appear to aspire to the deep mechanistic explanation of macro-social facts in the sense of methodological individualism, such as Luhmann's systems theory or the practice theories. Finally, deployed as a *metatheoretical* schema, the Coleman boat enables a determination of how other positions—under the aspect of selective agreement and difference—stand in relation to AS and/or ES, which can be seen in two further recent approaches that have established themselves as social-theory umbrella enterprises in German-language sociology since the turn of the millennium: the *Weber paradigm* and *relational sociology*, the latter of which is derived from network analysis.

The *Weber paradigm* canonized by Schluchter conceives of itself as a further development of the Weberian research program that revolves around the understanding and causal explanation of human action (cf. Albert et al., 2003; Schluchter, 2003; Albert et al., 2006; Albert, 2009). From this perspective, the macro-micro schema, with its linking of methodological individualism and multilevel analysis, appears in principle well suited to adequately reconstruct Weber's research practice (cf. Schluchter, 2003: 60ff.). As compared to rational choice or explanatory sociology, the following differences or emphases do, however, need to be highlighted: (1) The Weberian action types function as the action-theoretical foundation. (2) Rather than a

⁵ For discussion of the emergence problem, which cannot be dealt with here, cf. Greve and Schnabel, 2011, and Lindner and Mader, 2017. The ontological, methodological, and metatheoretical aspects of the micro-macro model of sociological explanation are furthermore laid out comprehensively in Greve, Schnabel, and Schützeichel, 2008.

monistic concept of rationality, it is assumed—in accord with the distinction between a purposive-rational orientation towards success and a value-rational orientation towards the immanent value of an action—that there are two different forms of action rationality. (3) The action types as well as the more specific hypotheses for interpreting human action do not have the status of law-like hypotheses but of ideal types in Weber’s sense. (4) Particular emphasis is placed on worldviews and ideas, their socio-structural anchoring at the level of classes and estates, their role as a basis for the societal differentiation of spheres of value and orders of life, as well as how they impact the formation of personality types.⁶

Relational sociology (RS) has evolved from the analysis of social networks into a fully-fledged approach in social theory.⁷ Discussed in American sociology as early as the 1990s,⁸ a broader engagement with it did not begin in German-language sociology until well after the turn of the millennium.⁹

The reception of RS in German was initially based above all on Harrison White’s (1992) theoretical approach. Only very recently did the conception proposed by Mustafa Emirbayer also come to the fore, whose 1997 *Manifesto for a Relational Sociology* conceives of RS as an umbrella enterprise.¹⁰ The question of the extent to which the role of networks can be represented within the Coleman micro-macro schema is assessed in varying ways in the German-language literature. Similar to Emirbayer (1997: 295f.), and with explicit reference to Weyer (2000), Trezzini (2010: 196f.) interprets networks as the “mesoanalytic link” between the micro level of the actor and the socio-structural macro level. But when it is hypothesized, in the sense of a radical relationism, that actors are formed by relationships and that therefore the (minimally dyadic) relationships represent the foundational level compared to actors, one can ask to what extent this can be properly apprehended by the micro-macro schema’s subdivision into levels (cf. Schmitt, 2017: 83). This immediately gives rise to the further question of the elementary processual unit through which social relationships reproduce themselves and thereby simultaneously define actors in a certain way. Intentional actions are explicitly rejected as a candidate for this role (cf. Abbott, 2007: 6f.); the concepts of interaction and transaction that are commonly used instead are analytically still insufficiently defined. Here, Fuhse (2009) identifies a conceptual lacuna in RS and shows, focusing on White’s network theory, that Luhmann’s concept

6 As an implementation of the differentiation-theoretical program as delineated here, cf. Schwinn, 2001.

7 In this respect, cf. the detailed account in Häußling, SOCIAL NETWORKS, this volume.

8 Cf. esp. White, 1992; Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994; Emirbayer, 1997.

9 Cf. Holzer and Schmidt, 2009; Fuhse, Lindemann and Band, 2012; Fuhse and Mützel, 2010; Schmitt and Fuhse, 2015; Löwenstein and Emirbayer, 2017. For more comprehensive accounts of network research overall, cf. Holzer, 2006; Stegbauer and Häußling, 2010; Holzer and Stegbauer, 2019.

10 For an anthology containing this manifesto as well as further essays by Emirbayer and two co-authors in German translation, see Löwenstein and Emirbayer, 2017; for a comparison of White and Emirbayer, see in that volume Schmitt, 2017.

of communication and the notion of the attribution of communication as action is suited to fill the gap.¹¹ The question of whether networks are to be understood as the basic structural form of sociality, or as just one specific form among others in which the social is ordered, is answered differently. White chooses the first position; Luhmann (1995) and others who draw on his systems theory the latter (cf. Holzer and Schmidt, 2009a: 235). A further question concerns the entities to which actions can be attributed. “Actors” (or in White’s formulation, “identities”) cannot simply be equated to human individuals. The question of what can be considered an entity capable of action is not one that is answered by the scientific observer but is itself decided by social attribution. This question also marks a docking point at which, in the German-language discussion, connections are drawn between RS and other theoretical approaches such as neoinstitutionalism, which deals with the cultural construction of social agency and names individuals, organizations, and nation states as acting entities (cf. Meyer and Jepperson, 2000), and likewise between RS and systems theory, which applies the concept of *social address* and emphasizes the evolutionary variability of the entities to which the ability to participate in communication is socially attributed (cf. Fuchs, 1996; 1997).¹²

An intensive engagement with RS and the concept of network can be observed in the context of Luhmannian systems theory (cf. esp. Holzer and Schmidt, 2009; Bommers and Tacke, 2011). As is well known, systems theory replaces the micro-macro division with the division into the system-building levels of interaction, organization, and society, which has recently once again become an object of discussion and has elicited suggestions for expansion (cf. Heintz and Tyrell, 2015). Against this background, the question arises of the extent to which networks should be grasped as an autonomous kind of social system. This question has been answered in different ways within systems theory. In one widely received essay, Veronika Tacke (2000) analyzed networks as an autonomous type of social structure that reproduces through the communication of reciprocal expectations of achievement between individuals as social addresses. In a later essay co-authored with Michael Bommers, she took this

11 On linking Luhmann’s concept of communication with White’s network theory, cf. White, Fuhse, Thiemann and Buchholz (2007: 545). See also Schützeichel (2012), who bemoans RS’ lack of a time-theoretical foundation and recommends the concept of action as elementary temporal unit, as formulated by Luhmann prior to the “autopoietic turn,” as suitable for addressing this problem.

12 Gesa Lindemann (2012) places this problem at the center of her theory of the social world’s contingent borders, which she adopts from Plessner (cf. among others Lindemann, 2009 and 2010). According to this theory, which she characterizes as “relationist,” the question of whether an entity in general is recognized as a social person and thus as a potential participant in communication depends on rules for the attribution of person status. For Lindemann, the social validity of these rules is necessarily tied to an at least triadic constellation, for which reason the triad (and not the dyad) ought to be considered the elementary form of sociality. Joachim Fischer ascribes a similarly fundamental meaning to the “figure of the third.” On this and other attempts to attribute to the figure of the third a more or less central role in social theory, cf. the two volumes by Bedorf, Fischer and Lindemann (2010) as well as Esslinger, Schlechtriemen, Schweitzer and Zons (2010).

position even further, arguing that networks are their own type of system (cf. Bommers and Tacke, 2006). However, whether networks can be defined as social systems is controversial. Diverging from Bommers and Tacke, Holzer (2006: 97, 104) remarks with reference to White that networks have no boundaries and that it therefore does not make sense to conceptualize them as social systems. Irrespective of how this question is decided, it is assumed that the role of networks varies according to the form of social differentiation (cf. Holzer, 2011; Schneider and Kusche, 2011: 173f.). In particular, the relationship between networks and functional systems has been investigated in greater detail (cf. Bommers and Tacke, 2011). There is broad agreement that networks under modern conditions ought to be analyzed as social entities that establish themselves within or between functional systems and/or organizations. Under certain conditions, they reproduce as “parasites” (in the meaning proposed by Serres, 1981) of these systems (cf. Luhmann, 1995; Japp, 2011; Tacke, 2011; Schneider and Kusche, 2011; Schneider, 2015).

As conveyed by way of Pierre Bourdieu (cf. Emirbayer, 1997: 304; Hillebrandt, 2009: 113ff.; Mützel and Fuhse, 2010: 10), RS maintains connections to a further umbrella enterprise that has expanded significantly in the last two decades and is therefore considered especially successful: the *practice theories* (PT). In an essay that has had a lasting influence on the German-language debates concerning practice theory, Andreas Reckwitz (2003) brought together an array of “foundational elements of a theory of social practices” in a “programmatic synthesis” (ibid.: 284), which he sees embodied in various theories that for him constitute “the field of practice theories” (ibid.: 282). The notion of practice thereby functions as a foundational concept to which all other concepts are traced back. Practices consist of a “routinized ‘nexus of doings and sayings’ (Schatzki) [...] held together by an implicit understanding” (Reckwitz, 2003: 290; see also 294). They are based primarily on collectively shared implicit knowledge and practical abilities that are expressed in behaviors that include the use of artifacts,¹³ which function as parts of practices. Practices are guided not by “professed intentionality” but by “knowledge-dependent routinization,” and yet they are interpretable and open to creative transformation; they are not oriented towards “discrete ‘purposes’ or ‘interests’” but formed by “socially conventionalized, implicit motive/emotive complexes” that are inherent to the practices themselves and “into which individual actors ‘enlist’ and which they may subsequently redefine as ‘individual interests.’” Likewise, the “normativity” of action” is supposed to be understood primarily as an alignment with the implicit normative criteria of socially appropriate behavior, which must be distinguished from the “explicit as well as formalized catalogs of norms” that also exist (ibid.: 293f.). Discourses (in Foucault’s sense) should not be opposed to practice but analyzed as discursive practices in their own right (ibid.: 298). The figure of the subject is “praxeologically dissolved in historically specific

¹³ Here the discussion ties in with the embodiment and materiality of action and with the agency of artifacts in the sense of Latour’s actor-network theory.

practice complexes”; subjects “exist only within the performance of social practices” (ibid.: 296). Macro-social contexts such as institutions, organizations, social fields, or functional systems are to be analyzed as larger complexes of associated and mutually aligned practices (ibid.: 295); the micro-macro distinction (Schützeichel, MICROSOCIOLOGY, this volume) is not to be understood as a difference of levels but should be reformulated as a distinction merely in magnitude between practices and practice bundles (cf. Schatzki, 2016: 38f.). The concept of practice is thereby totalized; all other concepts are traced back to it and all social contexts ultimately subsumed under it.

The methods of practice sociology include ethnographic, ethnomethodological, and discourse-analytic procedures (cf. Schäfer and Daniel, 2015: 40, 52), which are, however, closely tied to individual approaches and the particular questions they pose; compared to the intense *theoretical* debate about practice theory, the desideratum of a basic general discussion of the *methods specific to practice theory* is bemoaned, also in recent times, as still unfulfilled (ibid.: 40). Pragmatism and the newer pragmatic theory of creative action advanced by Joas (1996) are seen as related approaches.¹⁴

The diversity of authors and positions that are subsumed under the label of “practice theories” raises the question of the extent to which it can be considered a uniform social-theory enterprise. This question has only recently come clearly to the fore with the progressive establishment of the praxeological approach. This can be seen with exemplary clarity in an anthology edited by Schäfer (2016). The theoretical contributions to this volume assume a plurality of practice-theory approaches; they interpret their differences, however, as *internal* differences within a *uniform* research program.¹⁵ Several authors explicitly pose the question of the unity of practice theory and answer it almost unanimously by means of a forced dissociation from the outside combined with the promise to dismantle the one-sidedness and the false dichotomies of non-practice-theoretical approaches.¹⁶

14 Cf. Reckwitz, 2003: 283, fn. 2; Schäfer, 2012: 28f. It should also be noted that while Joas’ action theory is mentioned and cited again and again, it is seldom used as a fundamental theoretical foundation; cf., for example, the volume edited by Göttlich and Kurt (2012) on *Kreativität und Improvisation (Creativity and Improvisation)*, in which, despite numerous mentions of Joas (1996), only Göttlich’s essay on media-effects research takes up his action theory in this way.

15 In a 2004 anthology edited by Hörning and Reuter, this is not yet the case. The question of the extent to which a clearly delimitable practice theory or a corresponding family of theories exists, and/or how its outer limits should be drawn, does not appear to have been answered decisively in most of the volume’s theoretical essays, which discuss different possibilities and restrictions of combining a practice-analytic perspective with other theoretical perspectives.

16 In his introduction, Schäfer (2016a) writes that practice theory is a “heterogeneous but nonetheless definable theoretical movement” (ibid.: 9), whose achievement consists generally “of overcoming established social-theoretical dichotomies” (ibid.: 14). Hirschauer (2016: 45) remarks: “It is true that animosity towards rationalistic action theories is part of the brand essence of all practice theory—everyone agrees what action *is not*—but, beyond that, the paths diverge very quickly, especially those of poststructuralism and praxeological microsociology.” Alkemeyer and Buschmann (2016) find: “A unifying bond that brings these heterogeneous approaches together is determined first and foremost *negatively*: practice theories are directed against objectivistic (collectivist, holistic, structuralist) as well

The practice theories face an integration problem also from the additional turns that followed the turn to practice. Following the general strategy of dismantling dichotomies, they are likewise internalized in that the newer turns (such as the material turn, the body turn, the spatial turn, the iconic turn, the emotional turn, etc.) are defined as mere shifts of attention to particular, previously neglected dimensions of social life (Kaldewey and Schatzki, 2015: 117) and therefore as turns within the practice turn (Reckwitz, 2016: 165f.).

Greater demands are placed on the praxeological dissolution of opposite pairs when their poles are associated with the positions of canonized authors of practice-theoretical works. As it then becomes necessary to address open contradictions, this endangers the premise of the unity of the practice theories. If neither of the conflicting positions is to be excluded, possibilities must be sought for producing compatibility. An exemplary case of this can be seen in the question—which is a particularly meaningful one for the practice theories—of the relationship between the hypothesis that social practices are primarily routinized and reproductive, as attributed to Bourdieu, and the emphasis put by Judith Butler on their capacity for subversion and innovation.¹⁷ Reckwitz (2004) dissolves this conflict by pointing to the difference between the contextualized practices that Bourdieu and Butler investigated. He thus deems that both are right, locates the mistake in the overhasty universalization of context-specific practices, and derives from this the conclusion that practice theory needs to be “as *thin* as possible in its general conceptual requirements” in order to be “*strong*” (ibid.: 52). To be sure, contradictions can in this way be harmonized or preemptively avoided. But thinning out the social ontology recognized by practice theorists simultaneously weakens its unity as a social theory, for it shrinks the number of shared social-theoretical premises.

In the course of the surge in social-theory umbrella enterprises, exponents of the hermeneutics of the sociology of knowledge, of the social-constructivist sociology of knowledge that draws on Schütz, Berger, and Luckmann, and of the knowledge-sociological discourse analysis following Foucault have merged into such an enterprise under the name of “communicative constructivism” while at the same time professing their proximity to practice theory (cf. Keller, Knoblauch and Reichertz, 2012; Reichertz and Tuma, 2017: 18ff.; Knoblauch, 2017: 224ff.). In contrast to practice theory, they of course do not view practices but rather communicative action as the “core of social theory” (Knoblauch, 2017: 14); whereby communicative action does not necessarily have to be put into language but is defined as bodily action oriented toward others, that is to say as “operational action” (*Wirkhandeln*), which enables “the reference to the materialities and resources of action” (Knoblauch and Tuma, 2016: 231). Emphasis

as subjectivistic (individualistic, atomistic, intentionalistic) explanations of the social” (ibid.: 116). Schulz-Schaeffer (2017: 290) in his discussion of this volume is markedly critical of this pattern of schematic and forced dissociation by means of distancing oneself from positions that no one (any longer) defends.

¹⁷ Cf. Schäfer’s (2013) detailed treatment of this question.

is placed on the notion that communicative constructivism is therefore also in a position to comprehend the materiality and corporeality, the routinization and performativity of the social (cf. Knoblauch and Tuma, 2016: 229). To mark a clear difference to practice theory, the latter is characterized as a “subjectless, indeed antisubjectivist theory,” a trait it supposedly shares with Luhmann’s systems theory; it thus perceives actors only as unreflective “executors of a practice” (Knoblauch and Tuma, 2016: 230). Exponents of communicative constructivism see decisive advantages over practice theory in their integration of actors as reflective subjects and in their ability to “explain processes of routinization, habitualization, and institutionalization”—which practice theory considers central—“by drawing on their own theoretical apparatus” (Knoblauch and Tuma, 2016: 231). A further advantage consists in communicative constructivism’s close relationship to the hermeneutics of the sociology of knowledge and to discourse analysis, which enables it to establish a more direct link between social theory and methodically controlled empiricism. Its disadvantage is that it is not nearly as widely spread. The aforementioned emphasis on far-reaching agreement with practice theory, which almost resembles an offer of accession or fusion, could be a suitable means of helping compensate for this handicap.

3 Conclusion and Outlook

As we saw at the beginning of this essay, it was only in the recent past that social theory distinguished itself as an *independent type of theory* and established itself in a number of umbrella enterprises, each claiming a plurality of authors (some of them posthumously) to be its intellectual partners, despite manifold differences between their respective theoretical positions. It can be surmised that these enterprises satisfy a need for institutions of disciplinary integration that has been generated not only as a result of growth and its attendant increase in the heterogeneity of the social and cultural sciences but also by altered patterns of communication, cooperation, and career.

If research is increasingly conducted in the form of third-party-funded projects under the umbrella of large research associations and publications are addressed to the largest possible international audience, then having that research couched in demanding grand theories with copious theory-specific terms and assumptions becomes a hindrance to communication and cooperation. If, furthermore, scholarly careers are no longer viable on the basis of longstanding master-student relationships, academic discipleship, and the building of academic schools and their expansion by patronage but instead require shifting employment and the cultivation of one’s own “employability” in view of the hardly predictable academic job market, then the conditions for close attachment to individual theoretical enterprises and their exponents—no longer supported by structures of academic socialization and career strategies—cease to apply. What is then needed are theoretical (and/or methodological) contexts of orientation that would allow researchers to gear their own specific

scientific work towards wider-reaching nexuses of communication and cooperation. Social-theory vocabularies satisfy this need in a way that enables researchers to combine openness towards diverse object-related theories with a highly generalized social-theoretical profile. At the same time, the creation of an umbrella enterprise defines a new field for conceptual analyses and comparative studies dedicated to the scholars associated with this enterprise, thereby providing an uncharted territory for innovative theoretical research that is waiting to be occupied by a new generation of ambitious PhD students spearheading the new theoretical movement. It therefore seems probable that the trend towards social-theory umbrella enterprises will continue—and will simultaneously continue to exert a certain pressure that promotes structural isomorphism as well as the incorporation of individual or smaller collective enterprises.

This development comes at a price. Larger social-theory umbrella enterprises see themselves confronted with the problem of integrating internal heterogeneity and must prove themselves by how they solve it. As sketched above, analytical and explanatory sociology make use of the Coleman boat as a semantic mechanism that allows them to transpose internal differences into relationships of complementarity or coordinated disagreement and further utilize it to determine possibilities for selective combination with other enterprises such as the Weber paradigm and network analysis. Relational sociology and network research structure the problem of integration by drawing on the concept of the network and its distinction between knots and edges, which can be interpreted and theoretically contextualized in diverse ways and comes with a specific toolset of methods for the analysis of social networks. By comparison, the vocabulary of the practice theories, according to the current state of debate, appears less suited to serving as an instrument for the transformation of a number of divergent positions into a coordinated disagreement. Also, there is still a lack of specifically practice-theoretical methods that could compensate for this. The strategy observed here—of dissolving contradictions between various canonized authors by thinning out social-theoretical propositions that claim universal validity—is no doubt suited to preventing schisms within the practice-theoretical enterprise. But it simultaneously exacerbates the problem of theoretical integration, which is then dealt with in a compensatory way by schematically setting practice theory apart from other positions.

If one asks from an international perspective which particular highlights of German-language social theory could make an engagement with it appear worthwhile, then the answer will differ according to the theoretical enterprise. For analytical sociology, one can point to the particular efforts of explanatory sociology to develop a uniform action theory as the microfoundation for an action-theoretical explanation of social macrostructures. As regards the Weber paradigm, which does not share the action-theoretical basis of analytical and explanatory sociology but does in principle share their micro-macro model, what should be noted is above all its analysis of the social significance of worldviews and ideas, of their formative impact on actors, and of their social-structural anchoring at the level of classes and estates as well as their role

in societal processes of differentiation. In the German-language context, exponents of relational sociology encounter in Luhmannian systems theory a theoretical design that in essential respects bears an elective affinity to their own, offering selective opportunities for honing their conceptual precision and formulating theoretical hypotheses about how the structure and meaning of networks varies according to the form of societal differentiation. As far as German-language practice theory goes, at the moment I find it particularly interesting to observe how the virulent problem of integrating internal heterogeneity is being addressed and handled, as it is a problem whose solution could be of central importance to the further development of the practice-theory umbrella enterprise. Communicative constructivism, a smaller enterprise that is close to the practice theories in essential points, offers the advantage of greater homogeneity and direct methodological tethering to the hermeneutics of the sociology of knowledge and discourse analysis, such that here one can observe directly which form of methodically controlled empiricism is appropriate to this version of social theory.

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Society

Uwe Schimank

Abstract: This article reviews significant contributions of German-language sociology to international debates about the nature and future of contemporary society from the four basic perspectives of modern Western sociological theories of society: functional differentiation, capitalism, inequalities, and culture. Special attention is paid to the diagnosis of today's and potential future problem areas of society, in particular problems of societal integration and individual life chances.

Keywords: Society, modern society, Western society, functional differentiation, social inequality, culture of modernity, capitalism, societal integration, life chances

1 Introduction

What have been significant contributions of German-language sociology to international debates about the nature and future of contemporary society? And what might have been such contributions had they been written and published in English so that interested colleagues all over the world would have had a chance to read and discuss them? Taking these questions as my point of departure, I will direct attention to a selection of theoretically ambitious pieces of work from German-language sociology. I will only incidentally address the genre of diagnoses of our time, which often end in oversimplified one-sided speculations that lack theoretical precision. I will also not consider works from historical sociology since this field of study is not very well developed in German-speaking sociology.

From the sociological classics until today, sociology has elaborated four basic perspectives on modern Western societies, each highlighting a different essential feature: functional differentiation, capitalism, inequality, and culture (Schimank, 2013). Each of these perspectives consists of a considerable spectrum of theoretical options, which show enough similarity, however, to be treated as one. I will examine each of these perspectives and highlight important studies from German-language sociology since the millennium while paying special attention to the diagnosis of today's and potential future problem areas of society, in particular problems of societal integration and of individual life chances (Schimank and Volkmann, 2019).

2 Functional Differentiation

Theories of social differentiation have the longest tradition as a genuine sociological perspective on modern society. Theorists in this vein range from Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, and Georg Simmel to Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann, in-

cluding those, such as Karl Marx and Max Weber, who did not explicitly employ the “differentiation” terminology (Schimank, 1996; 2015). Since the 1950s, differentiation theory has often been equated with systems theory, either of the Parsonsian or later of the Luhmannian variety. But this is misleading because there have also been actor-theoretical variants based on Weber or on other kinds of action theories. Even so, in international debates the demise of Parsonsian systems theory, beginning in the 1970s, nearly marked the end of differentiation theory as an important perspective on modern society. “Neo-functionalism” attempts to fuse Parsons with action theory (Alexander and Colomy, 1990) did not attract much attention; only recently has Seth Abrutyn (2009; 2016) made another attempt to propagate a renewed structural-functionalist approach to societal differentiation. In German sociology, by contrast, the Luhmannian tradition of thinking about modernity in terms of a functionally differentiated societal order is still very much alive—whether in line with his systems-theoretical approach or in opposing action-theoretical approaches. Here we have a unique selling point of German-language sociology.

Theories of societal differentiation picture Western modernity as the emergence of about a dozen sub-systems or “value spheres” (Weber, 1919: 27–28) of society such as politics, education, science, intimate relations, or journalism, each of which produces a distinct, functionally specific contribution to the reproduction of society as the social setting for individual human beings’ conduct of life (Schimank, 2013: 37–75). German-language sociology has discussed in detail over the past twenty years Niklas Luhmann’s (1997) outstanding but highly controversial systems-theoretical conceptualization of functional differentiation as autopoietically operating sub-systemic communication chains. Among the most important recent topics inspired by Luhmann’s ideas, two shall be mentioned. First, the exclusion of larger parts of the population from the various services delivered by sub-systems such as the economy, health care, education, the legal system, and the social welfare provision through the political system has become an issue—in particular, the cumulative exclusion of citizens from more and more societal spheres, usually starting with unemployment or serious health problems (Stichweh, 2005; Farzin, 2006). A second issue has been the global extension of ever more societal sub-systems. This is the result of a long historical process that has picked up speed since the 19th century and has finally entered into public awareness with the globalization push in recent decades; today, we can no longer deny the existence of very strong global interdependencies (Weiß, GLOBALIZATION AND TRANSNATIONALIZATION, this volume). In the Luhmannian tradition, this fact is interpreted as the emergence of a “world society” (Stichweh, 2000).

Both issues are related with regard to the question raised by Luhmann (1997: 632) himself as to whether functional differentiation is really the constitutive form of modern world society or if only its highly developed Western regions are functionally differentiated whereas the rest of the world, especially the Global South, is primarily structured along the lines of inclusion and exclusion (Holzer, 2007; Holzinger, 2017). In other words, one could suspect that the blessings of functional differentiation are just a “luxury” enjoyed by some of the most affluent parts of the world that will be

denied to all others forever. It is surely not by accident that this realization of exclusion in the Global South, with all its human misery, has been an important impetus for proposing a “critical systems theory” (Amstutz and Fischer-Lescano, 2013; Scherr, 2015) that takes a normative stand against these and other social problems from the standpoint of human rights and emancipation—a moralizing intervention into politics that Luhmann himself certainly would have rejected as not being the business proper of social science, as he did in his famous debate with Jürgen Habermas in the 1970s (Füllsack, 2010).

Luhmann’s views still dominate the German debates on differentiation theory. There is a lively discussion among his followers, accompanied by comments on other theoretical approaches, notably by André Kieserling (2004) and Armin Nassehi (2006). The Luhmannian tradition has engaged in a few attempts to understand the contemporary challenges of modern society. Recently, Nassehi (2018) interpreted the growth of right-wing populism in many countries from this perspective—a somewhat unusual approach to this phenomenon, which is ordinarily treated as originating from capitalism, growing inequalities, and cultural tensions. Furthermore, Dirk Baecker (2018) has taken up Luhmann’s notion that societal evolution from its earliest beginnings has always been driven by radical innovations of communication technologies and puts forward the idea that the “digital revolution” over the last thirty years is about to generate a “society 4.0,” following the three former types of society characterized, in turn, by segmentary, stratificatory, and functional differentiation, which were shaped by oral, written, and printed communication, respectively.

In a parallel effort, and often inspired by critical reflection on the Luhmannian tradition, German-language sociology has elaborated alternative conceptions of functional differentiation. To begin with, Thomas Schwinn (2001) has continued the Weberian legacy, following Wolfgang Schluchter’s (1979) close reading of Weber but relating it much more to current debates on theories of society. Like Schluchter, Schwinn articulates a strict Weberian position against Luhmann’s system theory.¹ He (Schwinn, 1998; 2004; 2007; 2019) relates differentiation theory to the three other perspectives on modern society (i.e., capitalism, inequalities, and culture). In so doing, he pays most attention to the connection between social inequality and the differentiation of “value spheres” while treating the connection with cultural ideas and with capitalism more like a taken-for-granted ingredient. What is lacking in his highly reflective theory-building is the application of theoretical concepts to an analysis of contemporary societal problems. Schwinn’s (2006; 2009) involvement in the “multiple modernities” debate is typical: a careful discussion of conceptual questions without mentioning that urgent problems of growing cultural conflicts are lurking behind

¹ Inherent to this position is to eliminate the term “society” altogether. This is reflected in the title of Schwinn’s 2001 book *Differenzierung ohne Gesellschaft (Differentiation without Society)*. To avoid suggesting an overall “self-active” unity by employing the notion of society, Schwinn prefers to speak of an ensemble of “value spheres.” Also see Schwinn (2011) on “strong” and “weak” concepts of society.

them—conflicts that his sophisticated concepts could easily address without recourse to simplifications such as Samuel Huntington’s (1996) “clash of civilizations.”

Joachim Renn (2006; 2010) devotes his attention to another key topic of differentiation theory. How is system integration in modern society achieved even though each of its sub-systems, as Luhmann states, does not understand the language of the others? For example, politics is all about power, whereas science is all about truth. But both sub-systems intersect with one another: political decisions are based more and more on scientific advice and legitimation, and science, to maintain its autonomy, needs financing by the state to avoid becoming dependent upon the economy. Therefore, both sub-systems are tied to each other in complicated relations of translation: without giving up the worldview of the sub-system to which they belong, actors must be able to understand the concerns of other sub-systems and to integrate them into their own. This requires more than what Luhmann refers to as the mutual observation of structurally coupled but self-referentially closed systems. Drawing on a pragmatist theory of action, Renn explicates the various kinds and patterns of systems integration as translations that can never be more than workable approximations; and this is not a limitation but a functional requirement because being able to completely understand the original intentions of actors from a different sub-system would imply that the boundary between both systems had vanished, which would amount to nothing less than an elimination of functional differentiation. Although Renn shows how demanding and difficult this balance between understanding and distancing is, this integration work between different societal spheres is usually accomplished without much friction. Despite some fears that were articulated in the 18th and 19th centuries, modern society did not collapse as a consequence of institutionalizing a “polytheism” of “value spheres” (Weber, 1919: 27–28) that are in conflict with each other. Instead, problems of system integration have been handled without triggering serious crises between, for example, politics and science or religion and the legal sphere—with one exception that I will deal with in the next section under the heading of “capitalism.”

Another original approach to functional differentiation has been proposed by Gesa Lindemann (2018). Her main thesis is that the functional—she speaks of “horizontal”—differentiation of modernity involves inherent dynamics of “chronic self-endangerment,” in particular powerful forces of politicization or economization. Keeping such dynamics from destroying society as a whole calls for a plurality of social movements that serve as counterforces that supply modern society with what Lindemann calls a “structurally required critique.” A major drawback of this arrangement, however, to which Lindemann draws special attention, is that not only state power but also social movements must inevitably resort to violence in these struggles over the shaping of “horizontal” differentiation. Thus, societal order and progress, specifically with regard to establishing human rights and extending them to all human beings and the wider range of areas to which those rights apply (e.g., the right to housing, a basic income, sustainable environmental conditions), again and again rests on bloodshed; and this will remain so in the future.

Still other contributions to an actor-based theory of functional differentiation can be found in German-language sociology that use variants of rational choice (Esser, 2000: 64–79; Kroneberg, 2011), actor-centered institutionalism (Schimank, 2005; 2006), or Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social fields (Nassehi and Nollmann, 2004; Bongaerts, 2008) as their theoretical foundations (for an overview, see Schwinn et al., 2011). What characterizes debates in German-speaking countries on the functional differentiation of modernity is highly refined theoretical arguments combined with a pluralism of systems- and actor-theoretical approaches, which are involved in lively discussions with each other. However, these theoretical strengths come with a neglect of empirical work, which is very unfortunate because the rich repertoire of theoretical concepts could offer manifold heuristic devices for interesting empirical studies—be it qualitative case studies (see Zahner, 2006, as an exemplary analysis of a transformation of the arts sphere) or standardized representative studies (see Burzan et al., 2008, on the inclusion of the population in the various societal spheres).

3 Capitalism

I now turn to a second theoretical perspective that, to the present day, has been perceived as the main opponent to differentiation theory. Functional differentiation according to Parsons and Luhmann proposes a view of modernity that aims to correct what they claim to be a one-sided Marxist insistence on the predominance of economic concerns throughout society. When the heyday of “neo-Marxism” came to an end in German-language sociology, as elsewhere, in the late 1970s, “capitalism” became almost a “non-word” in theoretical reflections on contemporary society, and Luhmann’s verdict that Marxism with its perception of the economy as the dominant societal sphere was part of an antiquated “old-European” tradition of social thinking prevailed for more than twenty years.

However, since the turn of the millennium, a return to thinking about contemporary society in terms of capitalism can be observed worldwide and within German-language sociology as well. It is one discussion thread of “new economic sociology” (Maurer, *ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY*, this volume). On the one hand, the renewed interest in the capitalist nature of modernity has revived more or less orthodox Marxist views. From a theoretical point of view, however, this is the less interesting side of the coin because it is the less innovative one. Klaus Dörre (2011; 2012)—to mention just one very inspiring author—applies, in an undogmatic theoretical approach, traditional Marxist concepts such as Rosa Luxemburg’s “*Landnahme*”² to contemporary empirical phenomena. With regard to an empirical understanding of the present situation, such

² Literally translated this would be “land grabbing”—land grabbing in the metaphorical sense of subordinating not only the whole globe but also ever more aspects of the conduct of life to capitalist imperatives.

studies are quite useful, but they are not meant to open up really new theoretical perspectives on capitalism. The same is true of Stephan Lessenich's (2016) diagnosis of Western modernity as societies of "externalization" whose internal social and systems integration depends critically on the Global South as a cheap supplier of raw materials and labor and a place for disposing of ecological risks. This is certainly truer today than it ever was and needs to be carefully studied as an important empirical phenomenon. But the theoretical scenarios to do so were already introduced by Wladimir Ilyich Lenin and Luxemburg about a hundred years ago.

Three theoretically more innovative views that depart from narrow Marxist premises shall be mentioned here. To begin with, Jens Beckert (2016) suggests a profound new interpretation of the essence of capitalism by investigating its temporal regime. Capitalism rests on a future-oriented kind of action: entrepreneurs and investors who take risks for the opportunity to reap profits and consumers who day-dream of a better life, whereby these consumer dreams are the moving targets of entrepreneurial risk-taking. How do economic actors cope with the unresolvable uncertainties of the future in general and under capitalist conditions in particular? Beckert approaches the basic practices within capitalist economy (loans, investments, innovations, and consumption among others) from this temporal perspective and argues that the deeply disquieting potential of their inherent uncertainties can only be handled, and never completely, by resorting to "fictional expectations"—imagination of future states of the world ranging from individual and small-scale expectations about the benefits of a new car to collective large-scale expectations such as five-year prospects of the financial market or economic theories such as Keynesianism. Only in this way, by hiding from themselves the high risks they are taking day by day, can economic actors—whether investors or consumers—endure their situation and function as carriers of the capitalist societal order and drivers of its dynamics. In the final end, capitalism rests on self-delusion and runs into crises not only for the reasons many others have already pointed out before; the much more profound crisis of capitalism comes about whenever the actors realize this self-delusion as such and have to face the abyss of uncertainty.

In a more historical perspective, Christoph Deutschmann (2008; 2009) offers answers to the questions of how capitalism, for more than two hundred years up to the present day, has produced a magnitude of economic growth previously unheard of, and what the future of this "growth miracle" might be. He proposes a sociological reading of Joseph Schumpeter's idea of entrepreneurs as "creative destroyers"—with certain similarities to Beckert's temporal analysis of economic risk-taking—and sees this basic mechanism of capitalist growth embedded in a rich context of economic, political, legal, scientific, technical, educational, and other factors, including gender arrangements and cultural determinants such as Weber's Protestant ethic. This is a much broader horizon than we are provided with by the internationally very prominent "varieties of capitalism" perspective (Hall and Soskice, 2001). Deutschmann's theoretical model leads him to a quite skeptical outlook on the future prospects of capitalist society. In his opinion, the middle classes in particular have largely lost their

entrepreneurial spirit—and opportunities to live up to it as well—as a logical consequence of the last sixty years of capitalist dynamics. Thus, capitalism—at least in the Western countries—has deprived itself of its major driving force.

From a political-economy perspective, Wolfgang Streeck (2013) analyses—in a shorter time frame but with a similar conclusion—the “delayed crisis of democratic capitalism” in Western Europe and North America since the 1970s. The “forced marriage” of capitalism with democracy in the “golden age” between the early 1950s and the mid-1970s, when economic prospects were good and stable, union power was strong, and the welfare state was generous, has since been dissolved by the capital side. This has mainly been a consequence of capital’s increased exit options in a globalized and financialized economy, resulting in a loss of job security for many employees and the welfare state piling up debts despite reductions in benefits and services, thereby morphing into a “consolidation state” whose main interest must be geared toward still finding buyers for government bonds on the international financial market to avoid state bankruptcy. In the course of this development, the various strategies to maintain the solvency of the state without losing democratic legitimacy, especially from the middle classes, have been exhausted, which has led Streeck to diagnose a deepening societal crisis that has long since begun.

For quite some time now, Beckert has been one of the internationally leading proponents of “new economic sociology.” Streeck is an internationally highly visible political economist who is strongly involved in political debates. His contributions, like Deutschmann’s, are good examples of the kind of historical sociology related to a debate that was prominently advanced some years ago in the international social science scene by Immanuel Wallerstein et al. (2013) in a book that raised the question *Does Capitalism Have a Future?* Thus, the perspective on modernity as a capitalist society has benefited significantly from German-language sociology and could benefit even more, as with regard to differentiation theory, if more work were published in or translated into English.

4 Culture

A third perspective on modernity directs our attention to its cultural features. Ever since Weber identified the Protestant ethic as the source of capitalist entrepreneurship, sociologists have traced modernity’s origin and dynamics to cultural determinants. In the last few decades, the social sciences have witnessed a “cultural turn” that has further reinforced this focus on cultural factors (Reckwitz, 2000) and entailed an enormous proliferation of cultural aspects that have come into view, leading to a virtual explosion in the understandings of what culture means and how it works. Interestingly, this has not resulted in the revival of an “idealistic” interpretation of modernity that neglects “material” factors such as capitalism or inequalities; on the contrary, many cultural approaches seek to combine their cultural perspective with one of the two other perspectives that emphasize capitalism or inequalities. Some-

times this boils down to simplistic “materialist” causation in which culture is little more than a derivation of economic interests; in other cases, culture is conceptualized as a causal factor in its own right that is interrelated with “material” factors.

Here, I am only interested in the society-wide manifestations and dynamics of culture (for a more general overview: Karstein/Wohlrab-Sahr, *CULTURE*, this volume). Prominent proponents of the cultural perspective share a view of downward causation from culture to individual life chances and the individual conduct of life. The most comprehensive account of modern culture as a force shaping subjectivity has been given by Andreas Reckwitz (2006; 2012; 2017) in an impressive series of studies, starting from the “bourgeois subject” of the late 18th century to sketching the contemporary “aesthetic-economic double subject” and its future prospects. With regard to recent developments, Reckwitz combines diagnoses of the “entrepreneurial self” (Bröckling, 2007) that claim a strong capitalist determination of the formation of subjectivity in modernity with studies that insist on a desire for “self-realization” and post-materialist value changes. Today’s capitalism indeed performs the conjuring trick of instrumentalizing anti-capitalist sentiments as an affirmative force of “creative destruction” as has already been shown by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005). However, it can be asked whether this subjugation really is the whole story or whether there are subversive individual or collective potentials. Sometimes the cultural perspective tends to neglect what “resistance studies” depict as the other side of the coin (Courpasson and Vallas, 2016).

Despite capitalism’s surprising ability to integrate opposing forces, there is a limit to its willingness to communicate. According to Reckwitz (2017) as well as Cornelia Koppetsch (2019), a new cleavage has emerged between the “new” academic and the “old” non-academic middle classes, with the former being “cosmopolitan” and individualistic proponents of a “good opening” (Klapp, 1978) of national societies toward globalizing forces against their “bad closing” in the form of ethnocentrism and conformism, whereas the latter stick to a “good closing” against a “bad opening” of an unlimited “multiculturalism” and an economic and social-policy race to the bottom. At this point, questions of the conduct of life raise issues of social integration and direct our attention toward destructive cultural conflicts. The very similar approaches of Reckwitz and Koppetsch combine the cultural perspective not only with theories of capitalism but also with findings on social inequalities and, in this way, offer a revealing explanation of recent right-wing populism in Western Europe and North America.

Hartmut Rosa (2006) adds a different but complementary view that points to another problematic dynamic of modern culture. Like Beckert, he focuses on the temporal culture of modernity, which he sees as characterized by an ongoing acceleration of action in all societal spheres, driven by technological, economic, and political forces. From the individual conduct of life through organizational service production by firms, universities, hospitals, or churches to political decision-making, everything is accelerating ever faster, with ever shorter deadlines attached to all issues. This acceleration is the temporal manifestation of a dynamics of increase—rising

aspirations as well as expectations—that can be observed in all societal spheres. For actors, these dynamics turn out to be temporal, social, and informational complexities of action, particularly in regard to decision-making. Scarcity of time—at the center of Rosa’s attention—is often accompanied by conflicts or mutual uncertainties of expectations and by incomplete information or information overload so that actors cannot engage in long-term planning but must fall back on “muddling through,” improvisation, and waiting for better times (Schimank, 2019).

In addition to this “bounded rationality” of action, individuals have another problem with growing societal complexity. Rosa (2016) diagnoses that more and more individuals in contemporary society suffer from a loss of resonance: The world around them does not respond to them—at least not in a manner that they experience as a meaningful confirmation of their identity. Instead, alienation from societal spheres and organizations as well as the roles one has to play is growing as is alienation from nature and intimate partners—the two major sources of identity confirmation that have been emphasized since the Romantic period. On the one hand, this is just another version of an old topos of cultural criticism that has been around since the late 18th century. On the other, Rosa presents evidence that today’s situation involves new aspects—for example, the “always on” mentality in the use of new media, which denies people the refuges that they once had.

I will leave it at that with these prominent contributions. Both Reckwitz and Rosa exemplify a tendency within the cultural perspective to assume “cultural depth” (Lizardo, 2016: 112–115): a deep shaping of peoples’ mindsets by cultural forces. In the extreme case, culture is understood as an inescapable mental prison, as language is in Whorfian linguistics. This inclination is often reinforced by an empirical approach via discourse analysis. But a discourse, such as the one vividly presented in Bröckling et al.’s “glossary of the present” (2004) only displays hegemonic ways of thinking; whether this “talk” (Brunsson, 1989) actually shapes and represents “action” is an empirical question. Hence, without denying the power of cultural socialization, I would argue that an understanding of culture as a “toolkit” that actors make use of in their own—sometimes quite creative—ways (Swidler, 1986) might be analytically appropriate to shift the balance towards individual agency, in accordance with a number of recent approaches within the “cultural turn.”

5 Inequalities

The fourth perspective on modernity, often associated first and foremost with sociology, depicts modern society as a constellation of relative better-offs and worse-offs with regard to income, educational credentials, social capital, and social prestige. Pertinent discussions within German-language sociology on empirical facts and theoretical approaches are documented in the contributions by Gunnar Otte, Mara Boehle, Katharina Kunißen (SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—EMPIRICAL FOCUS), and Tho-

mas Schwinn (SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—THEORETICAL FOCUS) in this volume. I will therefore add only three brief comments here.

The first is a strong reminder of the “political sociology of social inequalities” advocated in the early 1990s by Reinhard Kreckel (1992) and later reiterated by Eva Barlösius (2004). This call for providing more than mere descriptions of changing social inequalities did not strike much of a chord in German-language sociology. But without studies of the political struggles over social inequalities, we fail to understand their nature and process dynamics. One approach to a causal reconstruction of process dynamics is to uncover underlying social mechanisms. Inspired by the works of Charles Tilly and Göran Therborn, among others, Martin Diewald and Thomas Faist (2011) proposed a mechanism-based conceptualization of social inequalities, which has, however, remained an abstract plea that has yet to be translated into empirical research.

Second, when contemplating social inequality, an argument can be made that we must go beyond national inequalities and consider their global dimension (Weiß, GLOBALIZATION AND TRANSNATIONALIZATION, this volume). Among German-speaking sociologists, Manuela Boatca (2015) and Anja Weiß (2017) have embarked in this direction, but much work remains to be done. As with regard to the systems-theoretical concept of a functionally differentiated “world society,” a question for further reflection is whether the global perspective should replace the “national container model” of society or whether both of these spatial scales merit analytical attention because some aspects of inequalities can or even must still be studied at the national level, whereas others require one to focus on the global level, and still others can only be comprehended appropriately by a combination of both.

Third, as mentioned above, the perspective on social inequality has to be combined with elements from theories of capitalism on the one hand and from theories of the culture of modernity on the other to draw a more accurate picture of current “entangled” inequalities, one that must include right-wing populism as an important contemporary phenomenon (Schimank, 2018). The general increase in income and standards of living during the “golden age” from the 1950s until the mid-1970s pushed economic inequalities to the background, making room for inequalities resulting from “spoiled identities” (Goffman, 1963) to move to the forefront since the late 1960s, beginning with the gender issue and soon other issues such as ethnicity, sexual or religious orientation, or disabilities. The associated value shift towards “post-materialism” (Inglehart, 1977) propelled all these culturally coded inequalities to the top of the agenda of “identity politics.” Today, however, economic inequalities have returned in the wake of globalized capitalism while the continued preoccupation with the aforementioned cultural inequalities strongly competes for public and political attention. Furthermore, many manifestations of “identity politics” are not just about respect for diverse ways of life but are blended with opposition to economic discrimination. As a result, we are confronted with complex entanglements of economic and cultural inequalities.

6 Conclusion

To summarize my brief inspection of the four basic perspectives on modern society, all of them have indeed profited from the work of German-speaking authors. German-speaking scholars, including myself, should make stronger efforts to introduce their ideas into international debates. This is not to say that we should abstain from publishing and discussing theory in the German language. But what are perceived to be substantial new insights should be translated into English without delay so that they can be shared and critically assessed by the global sociological community. Sometimes the ensuing international debates might show that such contributions are not quite as original as they seem within the horizon of German-language sociology; but in many cases, it will turn out that sociological theory in general and theories of society in particular are major strengths of German-language sociology.

Besides this proposal to internationalize, I would like to formulate three more aims for future work on theories of society. The first is to increase efforts to construct an analytical framework that integrates all four perspectives into a unified model of modern society. As I noted at several points above, such work has already begun: at the interface of differentiation theory and theories of social inequality (Schimank, 1998; see also Schwinn, *SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—THEORETICAL FOCUS*, this volume); in the reconstruction of theories of capitalism as an integral part of differentiation theory (Schimank, 2009; 2015a); in attempts to use a combination of theories of inequality, capitalism, functional differentiation, and the culture of modernity to understand today's entangled inequalities at the Western national as well as the global level (Münch, 2009; 2011); and finally in a recent discussion among German-speaking sociologists about a proposal of mine that all four perspectives should be combined to provide us with a richer and more sophisticated framework than each of the perspectives could offer on its own (Schimank, 2015b; 2016). This discussion will be continued, and many further reflections and applications to empirical phenomena will be needed until it can be decided whether and to what extent the proposed model works successfully.

Second, a parallel attempt should be made to strengthen the connections between theories of society and historical sociology. Despite a few notable exceptions, historical sociology is rather weakly established within German-language sociology so that the first step must be a more open-minded reception of studies from this field by those working on theories of modern society. Both perspectives—precisely because they have opposite analytical starting points—can profit considerably from each other by making the tension between them productive. What the four general perspectives on modern society can learn from historical sociology is the manifold aspects of concrete historical formations of certain national societies and the global relations between them. The models of functional differentiation, capitalism, the culture of modernity, and modern social inequalities are deliberately very abstract and, as a consequence, neglect most features of concrete societies. Historical sociology can

inform the application of these models to specific societies; moreover, it can show the limits beyond which the models no longer help but skew our understanding of empirical phenomena. Conversely, general theories of modern society can be used by historical sociology as heuristic devices that shed interesting and fruitful light on their empirical cases. Even if the general models were refuted as inadequate in the end, they would have served their purpose as initial points of reference with which to engage in an inspiring debate.

Finally, mention must be made of a recently much-debated limitation of most theories of society devised by sociology in general and German-language sociology in particular. These are theoretical perspectives whose “contexts of discovery” were and still are Western societies—mostly the four countries Germany, France, Great Britain, and, dominating attention more and more, the United States. If we bear in mind basic insights from the sociology of knowledge, it would be miraculous if these origins had not shaped these perspectives to some extent. This implies that their applicability, especially to non-Western parts of the world, might well be limited (Holzinger, 2017); in the extreme case, these perspectives could be totally misconceived and produce fatal misunderstandings of societies in the Global South in particular (Gerharz/Rescher, *GLOBAL SOUTH*, this volume). In addition to this potential cognitive bias, these perspectives might also contain an ideological bias that makes the West a role model for the “rest,” as modernization theory did during the “golden age” and a few authors indeed still do today. Post-colonial studies, among others, have highlighted these two quite probable weaknesses of our theories of modern society. Against these “Eurocentric” perspectives—a term alluding to their 19th-century origin—post-colonial studies have put “provincializing Europe” on the agenda (Chakrabarty, 2000; Conrad et al., 2013). This debate has just started in German-language sociology (Boatca, 2015; Gutierrez Rodriguez et al., 2016; Holzinger, 2019). It is surely a necessary reminder of the need for critical self-reflection in Western sociology, although the consequences to be drawn from it are not yet clear. The problem with post-colonial studies is that so far they have articulated a very plausible general program of investigation but have not yet delivered many specific demonstrations of in which respects and to what extent certain key concepts of Western sociological thought and Western theories of society display bias. Lacking such demonstrations, we still do not know whether these concepts can be repaired or modified or whether they have to be substituted by new ones—and if so, how “neutral” these new ones can possibly be. It might turn out that we will not find – at least not in the near future—a sociological vocabulary that does justice to social facts all over the globe. In this case, we may have to deal with a number of vocabularies—perhaps one for each of the “multiple modernities”—and must manage to translate them into the vocabulary of the other if we seek to engage in any productive sociological exchange.

These are big problems on the way towards a global theory of modern society. With regard to the theoretical perspectives discussed in this article, we are on the safe side if we limit their use to Western societies until we have further clarified whether and to what extent they can be applied to other contexts.

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Space. Urban, Rural, Territorial

Martina Löw

Abstract: Starting from a relational concept of space, Martina Löw discusses findings in spatial sociology on the basis of modernity's foremost spatial types—namely, the city and the territory—and fundamental relational opposites (urban–rural; time–space; territory–fluid space). She gives an overview of current sociological debates in Germany with a special focus on the sociology of knowledge. The article considers research on the intrinsic logic of cities as well as recent concepts dealing with the dynamization of spatial relations. One major hypothesis is that the constitution of space today is characterized by a network of interdependencies formed by processes of translocalization and polycontextuality, overwriting or undermining traditional territorial spatial structures, which remain nonetheless relevant.

Keywords: Communicative action, place, city, space, social change

1 Introduction

Space is constitutive for social processes. In the twentieth century, sociologists have been continually engaged with the consequences for sociological theory-building as well as empirical investigation that would necessarily result from this proposition (initially Simmel, 1997 [orig. 1903]; or Durkheim, 1915; later, e.g., Lefebvre, 1991 [orig. 1974] and Giddens, 1984). However, compared with time or the physical body, space has played a subordinate role in the sociologies of many societies or in “international” sociological debates.¹ Within German-language sociology, this peripheralization of spatial theory has shifted substantially during the 21st century.²

Space is generally understood as a relational arrangement of living beings and social goods in places (Löw, 2016; orig. in German 2001). Space is produced through the placing³ of social goods and through acts of synthesis (goods and people are amalgamated to spaces by way of processes of perception, imagination, and memory). The following contribution begins by presenting areas of inquiry in spatial sociology

Note: Translation from German, including all quotes from German literature, by David Haney for *SocioTrans—Social Scientific Translation & Editing*.

1 An exception is French sociology in the twentieth century (see, e.g., Bourdieu, 1977; Lefebvre, 1991; Rémy and Voye, 1981; Foucault, 1991 [orig. 1975]; on French sociology, also Delitz, 2017; Löw, 2018).

2 Further development of this essay was supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) in connection with the Collaborative Research Center 1265, *Re-Figuration von Räumen*.

3 In the original German version, the English-language neologism “spacing” is used for this placement practice rather than the German word “räumen,” for the latter has too strong of an association with “to empty” or “to vacate.”

in the context of typical spaces in modern society, specifically city and territory along with central relationships (urban–rural, space–time) (section 2). Drawing on this, it then introduces essential debates in spatial theory. These debates attest to the strong tradition of the sociology of knowledge within German-language sociology (section 3). The essay concludes by providing a brief outlook on the future of spatial sociology (section 4).

2 Areas of Inquiry in Spatial Sociology

2.1 Urban and rural spaces

The areas of inquiry in urban sociology and, in particular, the question concerning the development or reinforcement of social inequality through spatial structurations constitute a central research area in spatial sociology. Segregation, gentrification, neighborhoods, as well as urban–rural relationships are important spatial arrangements with serious consequences for the formation of social inequality. However, the spatial perspective is also relevant for analyzing cultural differences, for instance, according to ethnicity/race, gender, or sexuality.

Segregation refers to spatial structures that have developed such that “various social groups primarily live in certain zones within a city” (Hannemann, 2019: 53). Research on residential segregation focuses on investigating the inequitable distribution of groups of people according to residential districts. Häußermann and Siebel (2004) differentiate between forced and voluntary segregation. Segregation becomes problematic for residents when they feel that they have been forced. For example, this is the case when “ethnic colonies” (Ceylan, 2006) are formed in cities not because they are based upon the desire for spatial proximity to other immigrants from the same country of origin but rather because they develop as homogenous neighborhoods as a result of people finding dwelling spaces exclusively through these ethnically-based networks.

Above all the processes of gentrification reinforce segregation, meaning that renewal measures and/or changes in ownership in popular, often central urban districts entail increasing rents and force the departure of poorer segments of the population from these quarters (Breckner, 2010). However, this process by no means occurs in the same manner in all cities (Hoerning, 2016, on Brazilian cities). In the case of Berlin, for example, we find but little evidence of displacement towards the city’s periphery. Rather, residents often remain in the same urban district but move to poorer-quality or smaller apartments to avoid paying higher rent. Whenever the supply of economical apartments in a district is exhausted, Berlin residents have so far still been able to find housing in other districts that are equivalent in character to their last place of residence (Bernt and Förste, 2018). Comparable courses of action are no longer an option in many other cities such as Hamburg and Munich (Breckner, 2010).

In general, it can be shown that, in terms of income, homogenous districts have a negative effect on lower-income populations, whereas a heterogenous composition has a positive effect. Rabold and Beier (2013), for example, investigated the influence of neighborhood role models within urban districts in Hanover. They demonstrated that, in poorer urban districts with high potential for conflict, the probability that youth consider violence acceptable rises by a factor of 14. Jürgen Friedrichs (2014) showed that, in many German cities, the majority of households classified as poor are found in urban districts that are not categorized as poor (i.e., less than 20% receive social-welfare benefits). This has positive effects insofar as it can be demonstrated that people from lower-income groups in these socially mixed districts are more frequently employed and develop fewer chronic illnesses than in comparable groups in poor urban districts. However, Talja Blokland (2008) warned against overvaluing such results since the proximity of resource-poor and resource-rich households does not necessarily lead to the development of mutual networks, let alone to the dissolution of class boundaries. Nina Schuster (2010) also showed that urban districts in Berlin with predominately poor populations can nevertheless be very culturally heterogenous—in terms of their ethnic composition, for instance, but also and above all through the encounters between the LGBT subculture and migrant cultures.

Since the spatial perspective considers placements alongside one another (just as the temporal perspective examines them one after another), it is unsurprising that spatial sociology treats relations between urban and rural areas as well as among cities as important areas of investigation.

Urban–rural comparisons are difficult in this respect since we are witnessing an increasing urbanization of society as a whole, so that urban and rural lifestyles are becoming more similar. What was once called a village is today often located on the fringes of a metropolitan area, providing a family location for commuters that is better described as a suburban area than a rural one (Frank, 2003). Nevertheless, on the level of lifestyles there certainly are recognizable differences between urban and rural areas in German-speaking countries. Considered within the terms of milieu analyses, there exist “the conventionalists in the tradition of the *petite bourgeoisie*, and family-oriented homebodies often living in precarious social conditions, typically in small towns and villages” (Otte and Baur, 2008: 110). According to Annette Spellerberg as well (2014), traditional and home-oriented lifestyles tend to be more prevalent in rural areas. Urbanization has an inherent tendency towards the centralization of cities, which cannot incorporate every place. Peripheral areas in particular suffer from weak economic structures and demographic change, significantly reducing opportunities for participation among the remaining population (Beetz, 2008).

Cities are increasingly being investigated through the lens of differentiated social formations and constructs of meaning (Berking and Schwenk, 2011; Löw, 2013). In work carried out under the heading of the “intrinsic logic of cities,” *intrinsic logic* is understood as a heuristic. In this sense, intrinsic logic is not meant as a characteristic of a city that can be located, maintained, and cultivated; rather, the authors operate under the assumption that this intrinsic logic represents a perspective that is useful for

politics, planning, and science in order to understand how cities shape life in a specific way, that is, how they influence ideas, constructions of reality, practices, or emotions (Frank et al., 2014). Among the many intrinsic-logic studies of cities, only one example shall be included here: When comparing how two middle-sized German cities react to problems (e.g., heavy traffic) given similar economic conditions, one of these cities (Frankfurt am Main) can be seen to habitually engage in discursively framing the problem as an “opportunity,” as a means of demonstrating the capacity to effectively take action. By contrast, when the other city (Dortmund) is faced with the same problem, the assurance is routinely given that “it is better to deal with problems stoically because fixating on final solutions is generally to no avail” (Großmann, 2014: 67). Cities systematically differ from each other through their problem-solving strategies, time orientations, as well as through their emotional structures, for example (for a summary, cf. Löw, 2013; Frank et al., 2013). The question of intrinsic logic juxtaposes research on spatial structures that separate according to class or ethnicity with research on inclusion: shared experiences or collectively reproduced patterns of interpretation in cities and urban districts.

2.2 Territory and flow

In accordance with international research (e.g., Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 1982), spatial research in German-speaking countries also assumes a fundamental change in the spatial organization of the social during the establishment of modernity. With the change in imperial organizations, which also includes the adaptation of multiethnic empires to the “model of homogenizing nation-states starting in the 1860s” (von Hirschhausen and Leonhard, 2011: 402) and the extensive realization of an exclusionary conception of the territorial space of the state, modernity shows a tendency towards homogenizing its spaces (Lindemann, 2014: 152; Knoblauch and Löw, 2017). In addition to ethnic homogenization, this further ranges from the production of homogenous zones (children’s playgrounds, pedestrian areas, historic urban cores, recreation zones, etc.) to the concept, familiar to every individual, that space may be described as a “container.”

Against the background of the far-reaching globalization and digitalization of almost all areas of life, for many authors the question now arises as to how the social logic of territoriality—which, as the dominant logic, provided the structure for modernity up until the 1970s—is being overwritten, overlaid, transformed, or simply threatened in its dominant role by stronger network-like and more fluid socio-spatial logics.⁴ Another subject being debated is what consequences these developments will have for action in late-modern society.

⁴ Manuel Castells (1996) provided an important impetus for this debate. He described a rupture with modern, hierarchically organized society through the implementation of a “space of flows” starting in

Andreas Reckwitz, for example, speaks of a “fundamental transformation of spatial structures” (2017: 8). Since the 1970s and ’80s “the interchangeable spaces of classical modernity” (ibid.) have been transformed, and in their place now appear “recognizable individual places, each with its own atmosphere” (ibid.). In classical modernity, space is “extensive and serial, as identical structures spread through it beyond local contexts, generating series of the same kind” (ibid.: 39). Classical modernity, he argues, transforms a container model of space into social reality. Activities are assigned to spaces. By contrast, today he sees singularized spaces being created “in which physical objects are arranged and bestowed with meaning and perceptual possibilities, such that they [...] are experienced as an inherent complexity with a specifically composed spatial density” (ibid.: 60f.). This spatial-structural conversion also appears at the level of cities. Classical modernity was already an urbanized society, but since the 1980s cities have come into focus as political centers. Cities distinguish themselves through their cultural uniqueness (or at least try to do so).

Hubert Knoblauch (2020) begins with the assumption that society today is formed through two “logics” simultaneously and in a thoroughly conflictual fashion. “The first logic of modernity is what we call a centralized figuration, which distinguishes itself by the differentiation of institutional specialized ‘systems.’ The second logic which becomes visible in communication society goes beyond postmodernity and refers to another figuration, which is characterized by relations and stands for the model of the network” (Knoblauch, 2020: 269). Translated into spatial terms, this means that territorial spatial forms (such as the nation-state, zone, camp, etc.) slide next to/over/under more fluid, more explicitly relational spatial forms such as networks, layers, clouds, channels, and so on (Löw, 2018). The concept of re-figuration is appropriate, Knoblauch continues, to avoid merely contrasting the two systems of order and to emphasize “that we are not concerned with a new ‘epoch,’ an epochal boundary, or even a threshold” (Knoblauch, 2020: 273). To the contrary, the primary characteristic of a late-modern society is rather that the principles of translocalization, networking, and communicativization and the principles of centralization may superimpose or oppose one another, at times in a conflictual, at other times in a mutually dependent manner. The principle of territorialization does not disappear, as demonstrated by increasingly fortified borders (Löw and Weidenhaus, 2017; Schönwald et al., 2018), but the de-hierarchization, networking, and permeability of borders meets hierarchization, centralization, and closure.

One hypothesis is that the constitution of space today, alongside territorial spatial structure and overwriting or undermining it, is also characterized by interdependent webs formed through translocalization and polycontexturalization (see Knoblauch and Löw, 2017). Translocalization means the embedding of social units such as fam-

the 1980s, which decisively transformed communication structures and thus brought about an enormous increase in the complexity of social relationships.

illies, neighborhoods, or religious communities in circulation and in this way simultaneously anchoring them in multiple places. Transnational linkages of places and circulation increases an awareness of the relatedness of each place to multiple others and thus overall an awareness that local conditions cannot be taken for granted. Polycontextualization recognizes that spatial contexts of different scales and dimensions and on different levels must be made relevant at the same time. According to this hypothesis, this means that spaces become more meaningful figures more quickly and increasingly through simultaneous connections to various systems, fields, institutions, or rulesets as well as to the different spatial scales (global, supranational, national, urban, local) of society.

In general, beginning in the 1970s, an increase in worldwide networking and exchange was initially postulated through the concept of globalization. Subsequently, pluri-local connections between places were investigated under the heading of transnationalization (Weiß, 2017) and probed for spatial concentrations of communication (in contrast to the idea of a uniform flow) (Mau, 2010; Weiß, GLOBALIZATION AND TRANSNATIONALIZATION, this volume). It has been emphasized that globalization as the compression of the world through the interconnection of places results in “glocalization,” implying an increasing significance of the local (Berking, 2006). According to Pries (2008) as well, this development has established a new transnational practice of permanent and continuous communication across a multitude of places. These changes also affect the subjective orientation of the actors, their spatial knowledge, and even their identity. For instance, socialization into an environment that is experienced as homogenous will increasingly be replaced by experiences of insularization (Zeihner and Zeihner, 1994; Reutlinger, 2004: 122). This transformation of subjective spatial orientation described as insularization will be reinforced through digitalization processes. This experience also transforms orientational knowledge, for example. The map will tend to be replaced with navigation systems. Under the current heading of smartification, localization practices are complemented (Schulz-Schaeffer and Lettkemann, 2018) by more sophisticated practices of asserting control by systematically linking mass data (from Amazon to the Smart City) (Baur, 2009).

2.3 Space and time

Even a cursory examination of the dynamic of change shows that the reorganization of spaces is not comprehensible without including a temporal perspective. Heike Delitz formulates this in reference to the philosophy of Henri Bergson as follows: “The social consists of constant change; precisely for this reason, collectives must consolidate themselves as the specific society that they are; they must institutionally establish themselves and categorize and position their subjects temporally and spatially” (2017: 75). They create a spatial and temporal order, which finds its individual expression through biography and habitat. In his book *Soziale Raumzeit (Social Spacetime)*, (2015), Gunter Weidenhaus explains that humans interrelate constitutive forms of habitat and

life history through biographical narratives. Weidenhaus reconstructed three types of life historicity: the linear type, the cyclical type, and the episodic type. In the context of this process of biographizing, he thus concludes that humans construct a historical life structure by setting the past, present, and future within a specific relationship. This relational determination follows one of the three aforementioned models. The author argues that this differs according to how a person exists spatially in the world, how the person positions habitats in relation to one another, whether and where the person determines his or her place therein, if the person establishes a concept of a center, and what roles borders, discretionary power, and identity-based linkages play within these.

The crux of the matter is that, if we examine the constitution of spaces in a time sample and the constitution of historicity in a spatial sample, then we find that linear biographizing is associated with a concentric constitution of space, episodic biographizing with a network-like constitution of space, and cyclical biographizing with an insular constitution of space. Should the suspicion be confirmed on closer examination that this close linkage of space and time cannot only be corroborated at the biographical level but also be shown to affect the social level, then this will give rise to entirely new perspectives. For example, this raises the question of whether differentiated spatial constructions—in political conflicts, among classes and ethnicities, between men and women, or by politics compared to economics—are also associated with varying conceptions of history, which, when taken into consideration, would open up new options for action (in this respect, see also Wehrheim, 2009, on spatial order and constructions of otherness).

3 Spatial Theory as the Basis for Spatial Sociology

Most recently, it has been primarily phenomenological, social-constructivist/communicative-constructivist, or even praxeological concepts that have incorporated the topic of space into the fundamental theories of German-language sociology (Schneider, *SOCIAL THEORY*, this volume). The critical initial thesis here is that spaces are socially constructed while they are at the same time constitutive of the social. This dual role of being both socially constructed and an inevitable precondition for social action is a feature that space shares with the felt body/physical body, for instance.

If we take this dual role seriously, then it follows that sociological theories must fundamentally grasp the spatial forms of ordering the social in such a way that spatial structures of action can also be understood independently of the era or of the respective culture or its specific local expression. When we analyze the fundamental forms of spatial action, this requires determining the specific spatial production of different (modern) societies (e.g., forms of segregation or urban–rural configurations). What is at issue in current debates within German-language spatial sociology is therefore the formulation of fundamental statements on the role of space for social action as well as the designation on this basis of the specifics of social spatial

structures, in particular in modernity (or more precisely, in the different modernities). The most important theoretical contributions can be summarized as follows.

Gesa Lindemann (e.g., 2014 and 2017) focuses on the question of how social actors' relationships with their environment are spatially composed (Gugutzer/Peter, (FELT) BODY, SPORTS, MEDICINE, AND MEDIA, this volume). To this end, she draws on Plessner's theory of eccentric positionality (Plessner, 2019, orig. 1928) and phenomenological approaches to the felt body from Schmitz (1964–1980). The “felt-body self” is oriented towards other “felt-body selves” as well as towards the material realities of the environment via the felt body (centric positionality) (Lindemann, 2017: 12ff.). That is, its perception of its environment is mediated by its perception of its surroundings in relation to its own state. It experiences that it is affected by other felt-body selves and adjusts its behavior accordingly.

Eccentric positionality now recognizes the reflexivity of this felt body–environment relationship. Lindemann discusses the felt-body self, and not the subject, in order to emphasize that the environment and the individual's own state are not perceived in a detached manner but are experienced as being affected by events. From this felt-body focus, the result for sociology is that sociation can be analyzed “as a situated spatial-temporally structured performance of felt-body environmental references” (Lindemann: 2017: 12). Considered in phenomenological terms, the felt body is different from the physical body and is the starting point for all local orientation (see also Merleau-Ponty, 1965). The concept of the physical body is used to denote the detached view (e.g., of science or medicine). It is three-dimensional in extent, and its position can be determined by location and on the basis of distances. Lindemann (2017: 14) sees the physical body as being located in a three-dimensionally defined container space. The felt body, by contrast, is here and now; its positioning is not always clear (e.g., as when waking up in the morning).

Considered from the standpoint of the felt body, there is (according to Lindemann or Schmitz) a surrounding space in the sense of an unstructured expanse (so-called extensive space). This is the actors' fundamental spatial reference. Directional space is to be distinguished from this. Moving outward from its center, the felt body orders this space particularly through structurations such as right/left, above/under, or in front/behind. Physical action is oriented via this structuration, with the relationship between the felt-body self to the material environment being ordered in this way.

In the process, humans also experience their own felt body as being spatial. While the body as a whole can be tactilely perceived, the felt body is only perceptible in insular spatial locations (neck pain, upset stomach, etc.). In accordance with bodily sensations, spatial experience or communication with others also changes. While directional space is experienced beginning with the felt body, the physical body is positioned within what is called locational space (*Ortsraum*), defined through length, breadth, depth, and angular dimensions. References to the felt-body experience of directional space are irrelevant here, which is why Lindemann also speaks of “digital space” when referring to thoroughly structured locational space (Lindemann, 2014: 148). Dimensionally gauged space—dependent on seemingly objective observation, in

which the physical body appears as positioned in an exact location—became established as the normative ideal only in the transition to modernity (Lindemann, 2017: 26).

If we want to answer the question, “in which spatial-temporal structures can which actors encounter or affect one another, and how?” (Lindemann, 2017: 28f.), then it is not only practical self-orientation through gestures, movements, and so on that are relevant but also the reflexivity of the felt body–environment relationships (eccentric positionality). Here, Lindemann speaks of a “triadic structure of reflexivity” (ibid.: 27). Through the experience of affect through the words, gestures, or glances of others, the circumstances of the relationship are reflected upon in consideration of the perspective of the other. Spatial action also occurs in relation to others, including the non-human other, by taking their perspective into account. Space, according to Christian Fritz-Hoffmann (2017), becomes “socially resonant space” on the basis of the relational dynamic. It is constitutive of all forms of communication and influences these so very effectively because we not only see the factors exerting this influence but also hear or smell them (see also Breidenstein, 2004).

Three other authors who in the past few years have decisively shaped the debate on space, namely, Silke Steets (e.g., 2015), Gabriela Christmann (e.g., 2016a; b), and Hubert Knoblauch (2020), agree with Gesa Lindemann’s thesis that space can neither be understood exclusively as forming within the human (as a form of perception, cognitive act of association, etc.) nor as simply being a given reality in the world (which also excludes conceiving of space pragmatically as a reciprocal relationship between an existing spatial form and its subjective perception). Rather, the spatial being-in-the-world of humans with its concomitant relations constitutes the starting point for the spatial-theorizing of these authors as well.

In his conception of communicative constructivism, Hubert Knoblauch explains the absolute necessity of comprehending action itself as also being spatial, by referring to the finger-pointing of children. When the child is about nine months old, it begins to point at people and things, acting in a manner characterized by reciprocity. This is to say, through pointing it assumes that an other would also have the same experience were that other to occupy the same position. Moreover, pointing not only refers to the location of the person pointing but is also fundamentally oriented towards the position of the other to whom something is shown, such that the other can read from the pointing where and what is being indicated. The space that is by necessity opened up through the finger-pointing is therefore based upon bodily movement, the location of the person pointing, the location of the other, and the assumed reciprocity. For Knoblauch, pointing is only an example used to demonstrate how communicative action forms space,⁵ since this movement not only opens up a space

⁵ In the tradition of Max Weber, Knoblauch conceives of action as those acts of human doing or omission to which the actor attaches subjective meaning. Specification of such action as communicative action accounts for the fact that it is embodied as well as it is social in that it is reciprocally directed toward an other (and that its meaning derives from this relation). Knoblauch emphasizes that

between the participating bodies of the actors but also extends it towards a third (that which is being pointed to). Through the indicative gesture, social reality is set in a spatial relationship.

Knoblauch starts (as do Steets and Christmann; see below) with the spatial concept developed by Löw (2016, orig. 2001)—a concept of space in the sense of a relational arrangement of living beings and social goods in places, which differentiates between spacing and acts of synthesis—in order to understand space in terms of relational action. However, in his theory of communicative action, Knoblauch develops the ego–world relationship into a triad. Spatial synthesis is not only an act of perception, imagination, and remembrance but also a form of communication. “Communicative action (...) proceeds from a triadic relation enabled by reciprocity. It is not the subject that is the primary reference point, rather the subject in a relation with the other. Space is not simply constituted in a dual relation between subject and object, or even between subjects” (Knoblauch, 2020: 209) but also from objectifications such as the pointing finger. Space emerges as an arrangement that “is formed in a social, or at least a socially constituted, relation, which is working, effecting, and affecting an objectivation or an objectification” (Knoblauch, 2020: 209). Following in the social-constructivist tradition (e.g., Berger and Luckmann, 1966), Knoblauch takes objectifications to (still) be fluid, processual phenomena linked to the physical body, such as gestures. Objectivations are reifications, which appear as if they were independent of the actions that produced them.

This elaboration demonstrates that we must take the spatial operations of acting subjects into account in erecting buildings, constructing objects, or positioning social goods and people (spacing).⁶ Spacing is not only to be understood as a relationship between humans and the object world (or also between objects, or between humans). According to Knoblauch, in its fundamental form, spacing is a triadic relationship through which the actions of the subjects (and their positions or places) remain dynamically related to one another.

Silke Steets (2015), who also works from a sociology-of-knowledge perspective on issues related to architecture and thus the construction of space, emphasizes that sociology was long only interested in immaterial objectivations (such as speech, roles, forms of knowledge). At the same time, the concept can also be transferred onto material objects, spaces, borders, and places. In her book, *Der Sinnhafte Aufbau der gebauten Welt (Meaning in the Construction of the Built World)*, Steets expands upon the theoretical foundations of the sociology of knowledge to include the role of ma-

action is communicative for the additional reason that it becomes socially effective as mutually realized interaction between actors through objectifications. In other words, to move a stone or to press a red button is communicative because something is caused to happen that is observable as an effect in the shared environment of both subjects and thus appears meaningful.

⁶ When Knoblauch speaks of subjects, then in the sense of entities endowed with the capacity for subjectivity or for creating meaning. Processes of subjectification form as part of a reciprocal relationship, which is also a spatial relationship.

teriality. She applies the terminology of externalization, objectification, and internalization (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) in order to demonstrate, first, that the material world is produced through collective action; second, that humans are faced with this (tangible) world of physical objects; and third, that the meaning of tangibility must enter into the subjective consciousness to become part of reality. Steets' core argument is that buildings (also meaning spaces) may be comprehended as "material objectifications," which, analogous to immaterial objectifications, represent an essential component of social reality.

Gabriela Christmann points out that a communicative exchange about spaces is inevitable in all societies (2016a: 7). However, particularly in modern, functionally differentiated societies it can be observed "that spatial conceptions and planned spatial designs are largely dealt with in a communicative manner, and indeed often among wider publics" (ibid.). She presents a method of "communicative space (re) construction" for discussion. Here she proposes (similarly to Knoblauch and Steets) to grasp space through both the relation between subjects and through their relationship to objectifications, objectifications, and their arrangements (Christmann, 2013). Subjects internalize spatial conceptions in ways that are influenced by their life history and cultural background (in an act of synthesis). These subjective interpretations of spatial reality are externalized through spatial action, that is, in occupying, designing, or communicating about spaces (spacing). It is precisely in communicative processes that subjective spatial interpretations congeal into collective conceptions of space. That is, space invariably becomes relevant as a nexus of interpretation and design (ibid.: 158f.) and, as a knowledge construct, is an object of investigation for the social sciences. The concept of spatial (re)construction as a tool for sociological analysis is intended to bring to the fore the processually generated meanings of spaces, which cannot be attributed to objectifications or subjective conceptions alone and can also always be changed (Christmann, 2016b: 90). This concerns everyday concepts (when we speak of ground, space, earth, landscape, or nature etc.; see also Henkel, 2017), structures perceived as typical (see Delitz, 2018), arrangements and changes to them (built structures, infrastructures, the planning of these; see Bartmanski and Fuller, 2018), as well as memories, habits, ruptures, and customs (see Frank, 2016).

The great significance of the sociology of knowledge within German-language spatial sociology entails a perspective that sees repetition and legitimation as the primary means of consolidating spatial arrangements. To the extent that it involves the body, the formation of spatial structures occurs as habitualization; in the material dimension, this formation takes place as the institutionalization of objectifications. Examples are the typical seating order around a negotiating table, the typical organization of rooms in a dwelling, or the typical securing of a national border, whereby the specific sensory character and design of these objectifications are also perfectly capable of directing the felt bodies.

This perspective on sensuousness and thus on affects as well as on the corporeality of spatial action is also adopted by Andreas Reckwitz, who approaches spaces from a praxeological perspective. Praxeological perspectives take "doing" as their

starting point, which is understood in sociological terms as a models of practices emerging from repetition: “Yet these activities are not primarily considered as discrete and intentional acts by individual agents, but rather as recurring, spreading, and evolving patterns of practices which carry their agents and are at the same time carried (out) by them” (Reckwitz, 2012: 248). Through this perspective on doing, the human physical body emerges as the material anchoring for practices (on gendered bodily practices and space, see in particular Schuster, 2010, as well as Ruhne, 2003; Frank, 2003). Reckwitz expands the perspective focused on the material aspects of doing (see Schatzki, 1996) by starting with the assumption that every social practice is characterized by an “artefact-space structuration” (Reckwitz, 2012: 249; see also Müller and Reichmann, 2015). Artifacts are not experienced individually but only in spatial contexts. Doing is spatially embedded. At the same time, artifacts (and physical bodies) are components of each practice, which implies that social practices must be assumed to have a spatial dimension: “space depends on bodily movements as well as on the production, interpretation and usage of artefacts. But these artefacts can, once produced, form relatively stable and persistent spatial frameworks, for instance as architecture or as cultivated landscape” (Reckwitz, 2012: 252). Economic, political, pedagogical, and private practices are associated with corresponding spaces. They are formed from artifacts, and because artifacts are especially emotionally charged, according to Reckwitz, spaces are also strongly affect-laden.

Christmann, Knoblauch, Reckwitz, and Steets all agree that space in essence exhibits three dimensions: the social dimension of the relation, the material-bodily dimension of the objectivation or the artifact, and the subjective dimension, which Christmann conceives more strongly in terms of the conception of space and the three others more in sensory terms as experience, affect, and reference. In none of these approaches is space used as a metaphor but rather as a theoretical concept consistently directed towards the question of “where in the world” (Löw and Weidenhaus, 2017).

4 Outlook

The action-theoretical perspective in the widest sense (here also including a praxeological and a phenomenological approach) that is being formulated in German-language spatial sociology makes it possible to understand social processes and the social actors themselves in spatial terms. This avoids juxtaposing individuals on the one side with spaces on the other. Instead, spaces are generated through relational (inter)action between things and living beings. Spaces become cities with their own intrinsic logic, evolving territories, segregated urban spaces, and so forth. Spaces emerge through action that integrates things and physical bodies. Just which spatial arrangements are reproduced, habituated, and institutionalized through routinized action will always remain a question to be explained empirically.

Formulating and discussing theories of space, or of spatial action, will occupy sociology for some time to come. It is after all not only a matter of mere elaboration but rather, as Reckwitz correctly stated, it “demands us to rethink our general conceptual framework for analysing the social and to overcome the defects of classical social theory” (2012: 242). There is a great amount of empirical evidence showing that the spatial order of the social (e.g., transformation of the “territory” paradigm, digitalization, changes in the urban–rural relationship) has fundamentally changed in recent decades. The major open research question for spatial sociology is which new spatial arrangements this development has brought about (approaches here are, e.g., the network: Castells, 1996; territorialization as movement: Schroer, 2017: 142; fluid spaces: Law and Mol, 2001; etc.). Little research has so far been done on how change occurs and with what consequences (for whom and where).

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Technology and Innovation

Werner Rammert

Abstract: This essay reviews the German-language literature on technology and innovation and maps the main developments in this fragmented field from a sociological perspective. It focuses on selected topics, turns, and advances since 2000 and relates them to the international debates in the social studies of science and technology. The first topic that this paper addresses is the debate on how to conceptualize technology when it is viewed as part of and not external to society. I sketch the changes from early means–end approaches to actual forms/media concepts of technicization and social-material constellations. The second issue is the question of human agency and the responses to the provocations that ensue from artificial intelligence and actor–network theory. A third point of discussion is the turns to micro studies and to more comprehensive perspectives on socio-technological transformations. Two discursive shifts in technology and innovations studies demonstrate the latest advances towards a broad and integrated theoretical framework: one from the assessment of specific technologies to the governance of distributed innovation processes, another from a narrow economic concept of innovation to a sociological one that extends to all types of innovations in society.

Keywords: Technology, agency, innovation, social change, micro/macro

1 Mission Impossible: Pinning Down the State of the Art in a Fluid and Fragmented Field

The sociology of technology is a relatively young specialty compared to the older fields of language, knowledge, or work. It emerged in the late 1970s as a small specialty—particularly so in the German-speaking countries—with its own distinct view of its subject matter, which includes techniques of doing, all types of concrete technologies, and the modes of making, diffusing, and using them. It conceives of techniques and technologies as particular kinds of social action and as artifacts that are embedded in the socio-material dynamics of society, but not as universal natural effects or external factors on society. It all began when technology—along with its uses in everyday life as well as the dynamics of its development—was first defined as a “social process,” when technological change was no longer seen as a ‘natural’ trajectory but was viewed as contingent “historical-social projects of technicization,” and machineries were analyzed as “socio-technical systems” (see Ropohl, 1979; Jokisch, 1982; Rammert, 1983; Joerges, 1988; Weingart, 1989).

The sociology of technology originated as a special part of the international “social studies of science and technology” (STS). Both fields have similar beginnings

and concerns but different national profiles.¹ Each started with a critique—whether of the ideologies of a unified and universal science (Kuhn), of autonomous technology (Winner), or of neutral technological progress (Marcuse; Noble). And both rediscovered the scholars who pioneered the study of technological and social change, like Marx, Ogburn, Gilfillan, Mumford, Giedeon, and Leroi-Gourhan. More importantly, both fields seriously engaged in empirical studies to demonstrate how the production of scientific knowledge, the construction of technological artifacts, and the trajectories of technological innovation are interwoven with economic, political, and cultural influences in history and society. Finally, the two share the vision of a public actively involved in the discourse on technology and risk assessment and of democratic control of innovation processes in the future.

These commonalities notwithstanding, the social-scientific study of technology exhibits distinct national profiles: In German-speaking countries, the research and academic debates on technology were more strongly affiliated with sociological approaches than in other countries. Theory-building was concentrated in sociology and took place as a more “disciplined reflexivity” (Weick, 1999) than in the highly heterogeneous and rapidly growing international STS community. The reception of work in the technology field has been asymmetrical: whereas German-speaking scholars read and review nearly all English-written contributions, most of the English-publishing scholars are excluded from taking account of the ones written in German.

To address this gap, this essay will map the landscape of research mainly from a sociological perspective and provide a review of the German-language literature. It will focus on selected topics, turns, and advances since 2000 and relate them to the broader international STS debates. It will begin by sketching the main developments in both fields before that time (section 2). The review will then concentrate on four central topics of the sociological debate: the concepts, constellations, and courses of technology and of innovation (section 3). It will close with some conclusions and remarks on the prospects of the field (section 4).

¹ See the early comparative report on the state of the art in European countries (Cronberg and Sörensens, 1995), which includes a national report on Germany by the author (*ibid.*: 161–238), and the reviews in the introductions to the four consecutive editions of the *Handbook of STS* (Felt et al., 2017: 4–13).

2 A Turn in the Perspective on the Relation between Technology and Society: From ‘Social Consequences’ to the ‘Social Constitution’ of Technologies and Beyond

Early on, the social sciences, including history, economics, and sociology, treated the problem of technology mainly in terms of its impacts on society (Schimank, SOCIETY, this volume). They asked general questions such as: What types of technologies have which effects on the transformation of societies? Do different technical modes of working, warfare, or communication produce epochal changes of societies, for instance, to feudal, urban, industrial, national, or imperial ones? Do certain kinds of technologies—‘small’ versus ‘big,’ ‘Western’ versus ‘convivial’ (Illich), ‘male’ versus ‘female,’ ‘authoritarian’ versus ‘democratic’ (de Solla Pool, Jungk)—have different implications for society? Early empirical research asked more precisely about the social consequences of particular technologies, such as the stirrup and the plough, the car and the airplane, or telecommunication and other media (White, Ogburn, McLuhan). It distinguished between intended and side effects; between economic, political, and cultural consequences; and between degrees of impact that range from compulsion to pressure and drift. These slightly differing perspectives on technology’s impact on society are often subsumed under the umbrella term of “technological determinism.”

Since the 1980s, the opposite perspective gained traction: What do we know about society’s impact on technology? And more specifically, what about the social formation of different kinds of technologies and their courses of development? The processual and pluralistic approaches of “social constructivism” replaced the structural and monistic views of orthodox Marxist economic or technocratic determinism. Some approaches emphasized the “social shaping” of technologies by organized interests, broader institutional settings, and, later, social processes of consumption (MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1985; Sørensen and Williams, 2002). Others analyzed the “social construction of artefacts and technological systems”: they reconstructed the “interpretative flexibility” of technological solutions at the outset and the “rhetorical closure” between different social groups in the course of practical tests (Pinch and Bijker, 1987). Still others, particularly in Germany, developed a genealogical approach of *Technikgenese* (the generation and emergence of a technology). This approach conceived of the social dynamics of technological developments with an eye to two aspects: in the short run, as a variety of visionary and strategical “projects of technization” that were pushed and negotiated by social actors in arenas of conflict, and in the long run, as the result of the structural selection by the institutional orders of markets, power asymmetries, and cultural values (Dierkes et al., 1992; Rammert, 1993; 2002; Weyer et al., 1997).

The 1980s and '90s were also a period of an institutional consolidation of the field. The international “Society for Social Studies of Science” (4S) was established as early as 1975; it was only in 1995, however, that it began editing the serial *Handbooks of Science and Technology Studies* and renamed the series to include ‘technology’ in its title. The founding of the “European Association for the Study of Science and Technology” (EASST) followed in 1981. In Germany and Austria, the German-speaking community established particular sections in their respective national societies of sociology (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie [DGS]; Österreichische Gesellschaft für Soziologie [ÖGS]). Between 1982 and 1999, the German *Technik und Gesellschaft* yearbooks developed into the main platform of the sociology of technology at that time. Early topics were, for instance, the materiality of social structures; the construction or the emergence of new technologies (genetic engineering, electric cars, artificial intelligence); social movements and alternative technologies; computers, media, and society; and the processes, products, and politics of innovation.

During these foundational times, a third perspective on the relation of technology and society emerged, inspired primarily by a radical symmetrical anthropology, ethnographies of human–machine configurations, and social theories of technopragmatism. Its representatives questioned modern society’s distinctions between nature and culture or technology and society. The advocates of these approaches asked how these distinctions are co-produced and by what kind of collective interagency. They detected things and technologies as the missing masses of social life that stabilize and frame social interactions. They described them as actants or agents inscribed and embodied in human–machine configurations. Some see them as immutable mobiles, others as boundary objects that enact and ensure connections between heterogeneous entities. The subjects of the work conducted in this perspective are the making of and the relations within and between these socio-technical constellations of distributed agencies and neither the social consequences nor the social construction of technologies alone.

Over the past twenty years, this perspective—and especially its most radical enactment, “actor–network theory” (ANT)—has become the mainstream in interdisciplinary and international research on science and technology. What is more, this theoretical turn has grown into a serious challenge to social theory and sociology. The sociology of technology in particular could ill afford to ignore this approach. In the following overview, we will learn how German-speaking scholars of this specialty have treated ANT as an opponent and strong sparring partner in their arena of debate.

3 Topics, Turns, and Advances in the Sociology of Technology and Innovation since 2000

As a new perspective emerges, core topics change, theoretical concepts are revised or replaced, and—after a period of research and review—patient observers can identify

some advances. New approaches, such as ANT, ethnographies, neo-institutionalism, or techno-pragmatism, and the rise and use of new technologies, such as the computer, artificial intelligence, and the Internet infrastructure have played this role of disrupter and shifted the topics of debate. The first shift concerns the debate on how to conceptualize technology when it is seen as a constitutive part of society and a genuine subject matter of sociology. The second shift pertains to the question of agency and the different responses to the challenges posed by ANT. The third shift in topics involves the divide between micro and macro approaches and the question of how to link them in a comprehensive theoretical framework. The fourth shift consists of two discursive shifts, one from technology assessment to the governance of innovation and another from a narrow economic and technological concept of innovation to a sociological approach based on the idea of innovation being a ubiquitous and a multi-referential phenomenon in society.

3.1 The conceptualization debate on technology: From ‘instrumentality’ and ‘materiality’ to ‘technicization’ and ‘media’ constellations

Before the 1970s, technology was largely a subject that had been excluded from sociological theorizing. One could rarely find categories that referred to technology in sociological dictionaries or handbooks. When ‘technical progress’ or ‘technological change’ were sometimes mentioned, they were treated as an ideological term or as a transforming force from outside society similar to technological revolutions, mechanization, or automation.

At the same time, students of the sociology of technology and STS in German-speaking countries had started to overcome this exclusion, thus leading to a gradual change in how technology was viewed. Technology gained the status of a genuine social fact, either as material artefacts with projected uses or as integral parts of society’s technostructure, and was no longer treated as nothing more than ‘ideology’ or a kind of ‘instrumental rationality’ (Habermas) that is related to external material conditions. Scholars now analyzed varieties of technology as socially instituted constellations and as cultural objectifications; technologies were no longer viewed as logical products of the natural sciences or as socially neutral engineering options.

Once this theoretical turn from technology outside to technology inside society had more or less been accepted, another debate arose around the question of how to conceptualize technological practices, processes, and products as social ones. The ‘social structure’ view emphasized the material aspect and the institutional character of installed technologies. The corresponding empirical studies demonstrated how economic interests, political norms, and cultural values were incorporated in the systems of infrastructure and expertise. The ‘social action’ view, by contrast, stressed the symbolic aspect and the practices of sense-making during the design and use of

technologies. The corresponding historical and ethnographic studies reconstructed the meaning in the making of technology or in situations of technologies-in-interaction. This debate between an ‘objectivation’ and an ‘enactment’ approach resulted in the concept of technology as a “duality” of resources and routines (Schulz-Schaeffer, 2000).

A third debate sought to adopt a more comprehensive view of technologies in order to overcome the dichotomy of ‘materiality’ and ‘sociality.’ Technology studies came to realize that one could no longer plausibly reduce materiality to concrete things or physical objects alone. A wide spectrum of ‘stuff’ was included: biofacts (such as the OncoMouse or the genetically modified tomato), symbolic artefacts (such as computer software or the cursor on the screen), and technologies that addressed the human body and the mind (such as training or nudging). Additionally, the insight was growing that sociality could not be restricted to human social action, relations, and forms of association: sense-making, communication, and institutions of society are affected by bodies, mediated by artificial things, and interwoven with biospheres. What were the conceptual answers to these challenges?

In the international debates, many scholars turned to holistic concepts and metaphors to melt both aspects into an amalgam, like ‘machinery,’ ‘assemblages,’ ‘things,’ and ‘cyborgs.’ The German-speaking sociologists of technology developed more elaborate answers as they had to justify their theorization towards their critical sociological community. One early answer was the new socio-pragmatic concept of *technicization*. Analytically, technicization distinguishes between the two aspects of (a) doing technology by developing the particular social and symbolic form of effective and reliable relations between dismembered and recombined elements (“schemata of technicization”) and (b) molding them into stuff (“material media”) such as bodies, things, or symbols that make a difference (Rammert, 2001: 271ff.; Heider, 1926). This approach translated the holistic or radical symmetrical philosophies into an analytical concept of socio-material constellations. It furthermore introduced a shift from an instrumental means–end to a relational form/media concept of technology.

Other scholars have used variants of the constellation concept to study small socio-technical ensembles and micro configurations of human–technology interactivity, while yet others have applied it to analyze large technological systems and macro constellations of sectoral or infrastructural systems. This concept overcomes the confluences of the social and technical systems vocabularies (e.g., those that speak of “socio-technical systems”) as well as the gap between overly abstract metaphorical concepts (“assemblages,” “actants,” “modes of existence”) and the “irreductions” (Latour) of unlimited empirical descriptions. It advances the opportunities for systematic comparisons between different cases and constellations.

3.2 The human–nonhuman agency debate: From ‘interactivity’ with computers to ‘collective constellations of distributed agency’

Three provocations of the sociological discipline triggered a debate on the role of technologies and their interrelation with social actors and collectivities: (1) the provocation of face-to-interface interaction with computers, (2) the provocation of artificial agents and societies in artificial intelligence (AI), and (3) the provocation of general symmetry in the actor–network methodology.

(1) The *first* provocation began in the 1980s when philosophers and computer scientists discussed the question, “What can or cannot computers do?” They did it mainly under the aspect of human thinking and individual intelligence. Social scientists entered the debate much later and less visibly. Nevertheless, the belated German-language contributions played a major role in shifting the question of what distinguishes humans from computers from a focus on cognition to behavior, from knowledge to interaction, and from technological concepts of communication to sociological ones (Esposito, 1993; Heintz, 1995; Baecker, 1995; Rammert et al., 1998). They changed the common view of the computer from it being a ‘machine’ that transforms symbols to it being a ‘medium of communication’ that also circulates and edits texts, pictures, and sounds. The more that the face-to-interface relation changed from instrumental use to symbolized and visualized interactivity, the more the computer has in turn been addressed as an “interactive partner” (Geser, 1989) and its use conceptualized as “mediatized interaction” (Faßler, 1996).

(2) The *second* provocation occurred when computer scientists started to program software packages that explicitly operated as ‘agents’ endowed with ‘belief, desire, and intention’ components and began to design the computer and Internet architecture to resemble ‘artificial societies’ or ‘open social systems’ to be enacted by cooperating agents. Three groups of computer and social scientists pioneered this new kind of close interdisciplinary and co-constructive activities. A British group concentrated its research on an agent-based simulation of *Artificial Societies* (Gilbert and Conte). A Californian group contributed concepts of new social interactionism to the project of “Social Computational Systems” (Hewitt, Star, Suchman). From 1999–2005, a German group established a national research and development program with the promising title *Socionics* (thus the title of the book by Malsch, 1998). The first aim of this research endeavor was to translate sociological theories (Mead, Parsons, Luhmann, Giddens, Esser) into formal concepts that could be tested in computer runs. This endeavor clearly failed. It did very little in terms of advancing general sociological theory-building, yet it did augment our knowledge about the transfer of concepts (Schulz-Schaeffer, 2002). However, in regard to its second aim, which was to develop and test agent-based information systems using sociological concepts, the project has yielded significant advances in the sociology of technology: it introduced the concept of gradual agency and the theory of distributed agency in hybrid constellations (Ram-

mert, 2012) and has influenced research and engineering programs on human–technology interaction and smart systems ever since.

(3) The *third* provocation confronted sociology with the rule-breaking methodology of a ‘general symmetry’ between human and nonhuman entities that act or between associations of people and things (Latour, Callon, Law). Many sociologists responded to the ANT attack by strictly defending the constitutive tenets upon which sociology rests. Some were nonetheless motivated to rethink exclusive human agency or the role of interactivities with and between natural beings and artificial agents, whereas the STS students with their generally looser ties to the discipline were propelled to engage in rampant research of every *thing* (see Schulz-Schaeffer, 2008; Lindemann, 2011; Roßler, 2016).

In the German-language sociology of technology, the contested agency debate took a slightly different course. This community had problematized the instrumental, consequential, or materialistic-external views of technology early on. It had already demonstrated in a continuous stream of empirical research how ‘high technologies’ became more communicative, how they changed from mechanical engineering to physical-cybernetic systems, how machines were turned into media, and—particularly in the Socionics program—how parts such as software agents displayed activities with ever higher grades of competence and autonomy within a limited domain.

Thus, the former debate on “whether computers can think” was replaced by a new one on “whether machines can act” (Rammert and Schulz-Schaeffer, 2002). If one follows the orthodox position that only humans are able to think, to act intelligently or consciously and with intention, then the debates about “autonomous technology” or “technologies-in-action” (Rammert, 2003) would be predetermined and meaningless by definition. Were one to follow the unorthodox principle of a ‘general symmetry’ to treat everyone and everything as an “actant”—insofar as any entity can intervene in an action and can be the subject in a sentence—then one would give up all the advances in disciplinary vocabularies and by theory-driven empirical research. One significant outcome of this debate, and a constructive answer to the dilemma, was a sociological theory of “hybrid” and “distributed agencies” and the concept of “gradual agency.” This theoretical approach rejects the overemphasized dogma that only humans have or show mindful agency as well as the opposite one of a “flat” concept of operational agency.

The theory of distributed agency is based on both the empirical observations of interactivities and the practical and normative attribution of meaningful agency (Schulz-Schaeffer, 2007). In contrast to ANT, it distinguishes between different levels of agency and different grades of control and autonomy between human and non-human agents in constellations of collective agency, for instance, in surgery rooms (Schubert, 2011), social-media communities (Lettkemann and Schulz-Schaeffer, 2020), and autonomous driving. The theory of distributed agency was empirically tested in simulation experiments with hybrid disposition systems in a hospital (Meister et al., 2007) and—even more impressively because of the intention to falsify it—in an experiment with an autonomous car-driving system (Fink and Weyer, 2014). It has been

referenced and contested by further studies, grounded in ethnomethodology, conversational analysis, or communication theory (Krummheuer, 2010; Muhle, 2016; Matsuzaki and Lindemann, 2016), on human–computer interaction with avatars, robots, and other embodied conversational agents.

3.3 The missing micro–macro debate: From ‘technographic’ case studies to varieties of ‘socio-technical transformations’

In the early days of critical technology studies, one of the advancements was the shift in theorizing from macro to more middle-ranged concepts, from the logics of capital, class conflict, or worldview to particular institutional designs, organized interests, or cultural framings. Later on, in the wake of the pioneering laboratory studies, a broad stream of research followed this route down to the micro level, where “human–machine reconfigurations” (Suchman, 2007), the “mangle of practice” between materiality and sociality (Pickering, 1993), or “heterogenous networks” of people and technical objects could be observed (Latour, 1992). Most of these approaches share a preference for ethnographic or genealogical case studies and the methodological view that societies’ macro structures can be detected in micro situations because they are produced, reassembled, performed, and reproduced locally. (Schützeichel, *MICROSOCIOLOGY*, this volume) These approaches differ in two respects: first, in terms of the human and nonhuman forces deemed relevant and, second, in regard to how one can infer more durable macro structures from individual micro cases.

An edited German-language volume assembled some of the seminal positions and new research papers under the unifying label *Technography* and pushed the discussion “towards a micro sociology of technology” (Rammert and Schubert, 2006). It presents Latour’s ethnography of the autonomous traffic project named ARAMIS; Hutchins’ ethnography of a critical navigation situation, Preda’s genealogical study on the transformation of the trading floor by new information media; and Heath, Luff, and Knoblauch’s workplace studies on technology in action. It has expanded the fields of research by exploring the possibilities of “videography,” “webnography,” and “interactivity experiments.” The book connects the diverse fields and differing approaches by means of two propositions: first, to focus ethnographic studies on technologies and media “in action and interaction” and, second, to offer a shared analytical platform for the study of “distributed agencies” in socio-technical constellations.

The relevant agentic forces are neither single human actors nor particular technical instruments only, neither human collectives (such as teams or social groups) nor technological systems (such as physical or cybernetic ones) alone. It is rather the “socio-technical ensemble”—composed of heterogeneous entities—that produces and reproduces the relevant style and structure of action in a field. In contrast to ANT, these technographic studies show that it makes a difference how the relations are

incorporated in bodies and technologies and how they are enacted in particular situations of risk and of testing (Schubert, 2017; Pothast, 2017).

How do the different approaches scale up from micro to macro structures? Most sociologists studying technology did not follow Latour's radical concept of a flat world inhabited by actants endowed with agency of all kinds. They criticized the failure to reflect the role of the observer in this limitless land, the gap between its analytical vocabulary and empirical narrations, and the failure to account for interaction processes between entities (Schulz-Schaeffer, 2008; Lindemann, 2011). Although some of them share Latour's idea to follow human and nonhuman actors through society and describe the force of the growing assembly of entities (Latour, 1983), they have approached the problem of upscaling differently, namely, by drawing on multi-sited ethnography (Knorr-Cetina and Brugger, 2002) or by reconstructing multi-level processes of the construction, diffusion, and governance of discourses, structures, and regimes (see Kalthoff et al., 2008; Voß et al., 2006; Knoblauch, 2013).

Another German collection titled *Society and the Power of Technology* criticized the foci on micro constellations and on the generative aspect of new technologies; instead, the editors wanted "to bring technology back in" as an influential factor and pleaded for more research on its socio-economic and institutional consequences (Dolata and Werle, 2007). The book presents some approaches that share the concepts of 'technostructures' and 'socio-technical systems' on the macro level of society's infrastructures or sectors and on the meso level of firms or networks of organizations. These concepts conceive of the different types of technologies as well as their various areas of use, implementation, and public regulation as results of distinct and interdependent institutionalization processes (Bender, 2005). The analytical and gradual concept of "sector-specific transformations" then allows the analyst to diagnose different kinds of technology-driven changes according to the match or mismatch of two central factors: the "transformative capacity of technologies" and the "social capacity of adaption" (Dolata, 2013).

A steady stream of sectoral or infrastructure studies—from the biotech to the information and communication sector, from the music industry to the finance system—demonstrated the analytical utility of this transformational approach and its high potential for learning by comparisons. It has certainly been strongly influenced by Hall and Soskice's paradigmatic comparative socio-economic "varieties of capitalism" approach, an influence that is reflected in its attempt to describe and explain varieties of "socio-technical transformations." What it has accomplished is to advance our understanding of the influential role of a "technological profile" of emergent technologies in the different paths of transition that the particular areas and industries are undergoing and the role of social movements therein (Dolata and Schrape, 2013).

An obvious shortcoming is the lack of debate between these two methodological movements so far. Even though each claims to reveal the full range of the socio-technical dynamics driving a technological development, each has specific limitations. Representatives of the first movement start by analyzing the interactivities, relationships, and frames in a situation between people (e.g., researchers, brokers,

surgeons, or software engineers) and objects (e.g., bacteria, instruments, screens, or computer programs). They then expand the range by conducting multi-sited ethnographic studies that follow the actors, things, and symbols in the field and theorize about the observed rules and micro structures in order to draw diagnostic conclusions about the cultural and structural changes in one or more fields of society. What they risk neglecting, however, is the emergence of self-producing orders and the intensified differentiation between the institutional spheres and regimes that this entails.

Representatives of the second movement begin their investigations by analyzing the interdependencies, structural features, and instituted orders between institutional spheres (politics, the economy, science and technology, and so on) and between collective actors (movements, organizations, heterogeneous networks). They do so usually at the national level of a society and employ international comparisons to understand varieties of institutional orders and the mechanism of structural changes. The risk here is to overemphasize the stability of institutions and underestimate the creative doing or destructive undoing of institutions (Meyer and Schubert, 2007).

Over the last two decades, there have been attempts to develop more comprehensive approaches with the potential to integrate both movements. These approaches have shifted the focus of research from the development of technologies to the complete and complex processes of socio-technical innovation. These shifts shall be discussed in the following section.

3.4 The expanded innovation debate: ‘From technology assessment’ to the governance of ‘the innovations of society’

In recent decades, we have witnessed two significant shifts in the topics of and approaches to research on technology and innovation. The first shift—from technology to innovation—is one of research interest. It signals a conceptual and institutional change from a narrow view of technological development or technology assessment to a wider view that considers the management and governance of the entire innovation process. The second shift—from economic to social innovation and beyond—is one of definition. It has opened a debate between social scientists on how to conceptualize the various phenomena of innovation in economy and society. Both shifts have enhanced the relevance of sociological approaches and expanded the scope and scale of technology and innovation studies.

What are indicators of the *shift of interest from technology to innovation*? As early as the mid-20th century, one could observe an emerging political and public interest in technological changes, their risks, and their specific impacts on society and demands for monitoring, assessing, and governing them. The concept of technology assessment (TA) and the institutionalization of regular reports for government and parliaments answered to these demands. The subject matter of these reports were the intended and non-intended consequences of particular technologies, such as cars, airplanes, skyscrapers, telephones, and many more, in all areas of life and all social domains.

Over the last two decades, the focus of this kind of research and the political interest in policy advice shifted from exclusively concentrating on monitoring and assessing the consequences of a technology to a ‘constructive’, ‘participative,’ and ‘integrated’ TA. Since the millennium, the German Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS) in Karlsruhe and the German federal government have widened their joint program of TA toward a combined “innovation and technology analysis” (Grunwald, 2010). Advances in sociological research on the development of new technologies redirected attention from individual technologies and their consequences to more complex constellations and longer innovation trajectories. This shift has even entailed an institutional change from a bureaucratic ‘office’ of TA to a network form of organization that opened up the iterative assessment process to allow for a plurality of approaches, public participation, and political governance procedures (see Bora et al., 2005). Finally, the contested TA vocabulary, which had been too closely affiliated with a technocratic form of political consultation and an engineering style of evaluation, was replaced by a more promising framing of TA in the context of an approach centered on innovation and “pragmatic innovation management” (Bogner, forthcoming) and a turn from merely assessing the present to shaping it by projecting scenarios of the socio-technical future (Lösch et al., 2019). This shift paved the way for a paradigmatic turn from ‘ruly’ technology and unlimited technological progress to rule-breaking innovation and the reflexive creation of novelties.

The second shift broke with two traditions in technology and innovation research: the predominance of an economic definition and explanation of innovation and the habit of most inquirers to restrict the topic to technological innovations.

Before the millennium, the economy of innovation and the sociology of technological change exhibited parallel developments: both dissented from mainstream economics and sociology, and both widened the scope and scale of their research. Marxist and neo-classical economic approaches still claim today that profit-seeking “rational choices of technology and markets” explain technological development, whereas the neo-Schumpeterian ones contradict and argue that in the long run “routines and evolutionary mechanism” are of greater importance. Path-dependency approaches add that “history and critical incidents” also matter, whereas neo-Marxists insist that “class conflict and power” are the critical forces. Social constructivists, however, emphasize the role of sense-making and negotiation processes between social groups and demonstrate that “visionary projects and cultural interpretations” are crucial factors. Neo-institutionalist policy approaches, finally, maintain that “institutional settings and actor-constellations” are decisive variables (see more explicitly Rammert, 2016).

After the millennium, these critical encounters between the various schools led to a few interdisciplinary enterprises with the aim of developing a more expanded and integrated framework. In 2002, the Volkswagen Foundation launched a program on innovation research that intended to build bridges between economics, law, history, and sociology and sought to overcome the fragmentation of this multifaceted research field. This endeavor yielded a considerable number of unique German-language

contributions. Some early books collected and thoroughly reviewed the internationally leading approaches (Braun-Thürmann, 2005; Aderhold and John, 2005; Blättel-Mink, 2006). Several empirical field studies analyzed the effects of a growing diversity of paradigms, social tempi, or cultures on the course of innovations. One of these studies showed that the epistemic diversity in the wide field of ubiquitous computing facilitated the successive technological reconfiguration of the IT infrastructure towards the “smart home” and its adaptation to “gerontological” requirements (Peine, 2006); another study argued that the synchronization of the different tempi in the economy, science, and politics plays a critical role in the success and failure of “virtual reality” (Rollwagen, 2008); a third one illustrated, in the case of a regional network of innovation, how the fragmentation of different professional cultures could be bridged by an incidental act of cooperation and not only by fostering optimal conditions and providing sufficient resources (Manger, 2009). The idea of transferring approaches from human-life-course research to the technological sphere has led to the new genre of *innovation biographies*. Work in this vein has reconstructed how varying constellations influenced the development of wind energy (Bruns et al., 2007) and electronic microscopy (Lettkemann, 2016) and spelled out the concept of “the multiple identity of technology” (Lenzen, 2020).

Other studies analyzed how path dependency and path creation affect the course of innovations (Windeler, 2003; Sydow et al., 2012). These books and projects are only a small selection from a growing body of mainly sociological research on technology and innovation. Yet in spite of their expanded scope and scale, they remain biased towards new technologies, products and processes, or technosciences.

This shift made its greatest leap when researchers started to expand the innovation zone from economic to social innovation and finally to innovations of society. The international discussion extended the subject from innovative ‘entrepreneurs’ and ‘firms’ to ‘national systems,’ ‘arenas,’ and ‘networks’ of innovations (Hage et al., 2000). One early German paper on “social innovation” (Zapf, 1989), however, paved the way toward a more radical turn from an *economic* to a *sociological* concept of innovation. This sociological concept of innovation included all areas of society and referred to social, political, public-administrative, educational, and other instances of innovations at the social-structural level, thereby following Ogburn’s idea of paralleling technical and ‘social inventions.’ Since the last decade, a growing number of researchers have further elaborated this concept of social innovation and proposed new research programs.

What are the shared observations and indicators among these approaches that attest to a change in society’s relationship to innovation? What differences do we observe in the theoretical debates around innovation phenomena?

The observation of an expansion of the innovation zone is widely shared, as indicated by the broad acceptance of the notion of “*ubiquitous innovating*” (Braun-Thürmann, 2005: 10ff.). Concepts of political, social, cultural, and sustainable innovation reference this spread of innovation activities in society. There is, however, a heated discussion over whether this phenomenon indicates an imperial expansion of

economic criteria of innovation or a liberal expansion of the concept of innovation towards social innovation with different codes of evaluation (Rammert, 2010). Many approaches in innovation studies also share the empirical insight that the objects of innovation include a wider spectrum of new practices, symbolic artifacts, and institutional reforms beyond the usual types of market-oriented product and process innovations.² In this context, however, there is another ongoing debate over the issue of normative bias. One group has applied an analytical-normative interpretation of social innovation that distinguishes between dominant ‘technical’ and neglected ‘social’ innovation and has been infused with positive views of social bottom-up movements and local communities (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2010; critically Schubert, 2017). This group intended to raise public awareness of social innovations and emphasize their significance compared to the dominant technological ones. In accordance with this orientation, the advocates of this approach have posited a shift toward a “post-industrial innovation paradigm” (Howaldt and Jacobsen, 2010) and have leveraged it to criticize the technology bias in national and European funding and policy programs to support innovation (see the 2011 “Vienna Declaration” by Hochgerner, Braun, Howaldt, and others).

Another group developed the more comprehensive theoretical-analytical framework of *reflexive innovation* and the thesis of a fundamental change towards a “post-Schumpeterian innovation regime” (Rammert, 2000). This approach combines three theoretical perspectives: the eminent role of *discourses* that define, communicate, and justify what counts as an innovation; the necessary grounding of recombinatory *doings and practices* that co-produce deviant and disruptive changes in fragmented fields of innovation; and the inter-institutional processes of creating new or disrupting established paths of innovation at the societal level (Rammert et al., 2018; Jungmann and Windeler, 2020).

A third approach has adopted an even wider view than this previous group of authors. One of its most prominent proponents, Andreas Reckwitz, has diagnosed the formation of an aesthetic capitalist society that implicates a fundamental shift in the “social regime of the new” from the disposition of perennial improvement to the ‘dispositif’ of creativity as an aesthetic stimulus (Reckwitz, 2017).

Finally, the debate itself has broadened to include the question of what the driving forces and the change mechanisms are that are reconfiguring the relationship between innovation and societal transformations. Some see at work here the “reciprocally reflected communicative construction of the new” and its objectivation into independent discourses (Knoblauch, 2018). Others emphasize the indeterminacy or irritational potential of newness and a shift towards a creative “experience economy” (Hutter, 2018; Hutter and Farias, 2017). And yet others identify as the critical locus of

² See, for instance, the kindergarten, Germany’s feed-in tariff law for renewable energy, the architecture of the Internet, or the social-security system as examples of the open range of innovation, from conceptual to architectural to infrastructural.

“reflexive innovation” the inter-organizational level of “organizational fields” under the structural influences of capitalist economization, industrialization, and rationalization (Windeler, 2018; Meyer, 2016). Another group of scholars bases its theorizing on the creative practices and distributed processes of doing innovation for its own sake; they diagnose a shift from the established functionally oriented differentiation of societal domains to a kind of “fragmental regime” of ubiquitous and multi-referential innovation (Rammert, 2006; Passoth and Rammert, 2018; Lindemann, 2019).

4 Final Remarks: Conclusions and Prospects

There remain many more topics, texts, and theoretical positions that would merit being included in this review.³ While perhaps not doing justice to all of them, the selected debates should nonetheless provide an exemplary impression of important developments and advances in the sociology of technology and innovation in the German-speaking world.

Two features were responsible for the advances in the German-language scholarship reviewed here: the intensive exchange with neighboring fields and the translation of the diverse experiences into a sociological framework. The critical reception of philosophies of technology and the constructive cooperation with computer scientists inspired the turn from a hard and closed concept of technology to a gradual and multi-relational one. The provocations of artificial intelligence and of a symmetrical anthropology were accepted but translated into a genuine sociological concept of collective distributed agency. Ethnographies of work and science and anthropologies of human–technology configurations stimulated adopting a micro-sociological view to explore situations of technologies in action, interactivity, and socio-technical constellations, whereas the socio-economics of institutional change triggered the comparative studies of economic sectors and technological transformations. Finally, the economy of innovation and the political debate on disruptive or responsible innovations prompted the German-speaking sociological community in particular to redefine the economic and technological concept of innovation and to develop an integrated framework for the comparative study of diverse cases and individual courses of societal innovation.

What can we expect for the future development of the research field? Two challenges currently dominate public discourse: the coronavirus crisis and the digital transformation of society. They raise questions concerning the close entanglements of human bodies with nature, medical technologies, and bio-politics⁴ on one side and the overwhelming role of symbol-processing technologies in the emergence of a

³ For further information, see Häußling, 2014; Lengsdorf and Wieser, 2014; Bauer et al., 2017; Schubert and Schulz-Schaeffer, 2019, and Blättel-Mink et al., 2020.

⁴ See the ERC grant to Thomas Lemke: *Suspended Life: Exploring Cryopreservation Practices in Contemporary Societies* (2020).

“society 4.0”⁵ on the other (Baecker, 2018; Maasen and Passoth, 2020). The sociology of technology is intellectually well prepared to address these issues. The processual concept of technicization has already incorporated the technologies of bodies and behavior (Gugutzer/Peter, (FELT) BODY. SPORTS, MEDICINE, AND MEDIA, this volume) as well as the technologies of symbols and symbolic media (Hepp, MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION, this volume). Whether this potential comes to fruition, however, will be a matter of organizing and funding heterogeneous cooperation between disciplines and theoretical approaches in the future. We should not miss out on the opportunity to overcome the looming risk of a continued or even deepening fragmentation of the field.

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⁵ See the ERC grant to Elena Esposito: The Future of Prediction: The Social Consequences of Algorithmic Forecast in Insurance, Medicine and Policing, Nassehi (2020), and the contributions by Lindemann, Passoth/Rammert, and Philipps to the Symposium on Nassehi’s “Muster,” *Soziologische Revue*, 43 (3), 2020, 301–327.

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Work and Labor

Brigitte Aulenbacher and Johanna Grubner


Abstract: This article reflects on the combination of theory-based empirical analysis and empirically grounded theoretization that is characteristic of the German-language sociology of work and industrial sociology. It discusses three central strands of research on the modification of paid work associated with the transformation of capitalism: first, the topics of flexibilization, boundary blurring, subjectivation, and precarization; second, performance policies and the demands and claims in paid work; and third, the discourse around the digitalization of work. In doing so, the article describes developments within the German-language sociology of work and industrial sociology and portrays its contributions and relevance to a broader discussion of the consolidation and transformation of paid work in capitalist societies.


Keywords: Flexibilization, boundary blurring, subjectivation, precarization of labor, performance and performance policy, digitalization of labor

1 Introduction

The sociology of work and industrial sociology are at the center of German-language research on the transformation of paid work (Böhle et al., 2018; Hirsch-Kreinsen and Minssen, 2017). The core and defining concern of this research is paid work in the context of rationalization. By means of theory-based empirical research, it examines capitalism and society by reflecting on their contemporary and prospective development (Huchler, 2008). Just as in the international discussion, it understands the societal developments of the last five decades as a transformation from Fordism through post-Fordism to finance capitalism, whereby the shifts in the organization of paid work serve as an indicator of the direction and scope of these changes (Dörre et al., 2018). This article highlights three veins of research: on the flexibilization of work, on the blurring of its boundaries, its subjectivation, and its precarization (section 2); on performance and performance policies (section 3); and on digitalization (section 4). This is followed by a conclusion (section 5).

Note: Translation from German, including all quotes from German literature, by John Koster for *SocioTrans—Social Scientific Translation & Editing*.

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2 Flexibilization, Boundary Blurring, Subjectivation, and Precarization of Paid Work

Diagnoses of the transformation of paid work often begin their historical narrative with the transformation of the Fordist triad—of standard employment, the male breadwinner model, and the Keynesian welfare state—to finance capitalism’s arrangement of deregulated employment, the adult worker model, and the workfare state (with a focus on the first of these pillars, the employment system). The topics of flexibilization, boundary blurring, subjectivation, and precarization address modes of the societalization (*Vergesellschaftung*) of work that touch on the organization of paid work and notions of “contemporary [*zeitgemäß*] labor power” (Atzmüller et al., 2015) as well as the associated relationship between “work and life” (Jürgens, 2006). While the discussion on the flexibilization, boundary blurring, and subjectivation of work is primarily concerned with new modes of rationalization, precarization is addressed above all as a new mode of domination.

With regard to the first vein of research mentioned above, Oskar Negt (2001: 334f.), speaking in the tradition of critical theory, discusses how, with the flexibilization of working time, a new “social character” of the “universally available,” “universally functioning” human being (Negt, 2001: 334f.) is emerging that would appear to meet the demands made on individuals by the “total marketization of society” (Negt, 2001: 335). G. Günter Voß and Hans-Jürgen Pongratz (1998: 131), with their ideal type (in Weber’s sense) of the “entreplooyee” (*Arbeitskraftunternehmer*) brought a “new basic form of the commodity of labor power” into the discussion. They argue that “self-control,” “self-economization,” and “self-rationalization” (Pongratz and Voß, 2004: 7ff.) constitute modes of self-societalization (*Selbstvergesellschaftung*) by which the “entreplooyees” maintain the salability of their labor power on a daily as well as life-long basis while dealing individually with the demands emerging from the transformations in paid work, ways of life, and the welfare state. Finally, under the auspices of “digital capitalism,” there is talk of a transition to “contingent labor power,” which is “formally [a form of] independent [self-employment] and not bound by directives” but rather primarily dependent on the market (Nachtwey and Staab, 2016: 86; our insertions). That which is addressed here at the level of social figures turns up again in the empirically based debate, also with regard to trends in the organization of paid work.

Dieter Sauer (2007: 318) sees the 1990s as a period that brought about a turn toward an economically induced, socially ambivalent “flexibilization mode” (Kratzer et al., 2003: 13) that took hold in the forms of paid work previously regulated in the standard employment relationship as well as other forms of paid work (Apitzsch et al., 2015). Core elements included the “individualization of working time,” the “marketization of labor input per unit of time,” and the “self-organization of working time” (Kratzer et al., 2003: 26f.). These were followed, in the course of the digital transformation of work, by the highly flexible forms of work of the platform economy (Bauer and Gegenhuber, 2017; Hirsch-Kreinsen et al., 2018). The conceptual pair of “boundary

blurring” and “subjectivation of labor” further characterizes the objective and subjective sides of the rationalizing mode’s grasp on labor power. Whereas Fordism regulated the organization of work and social life normatively and institutionally, the boundary blurring aims at the “systematic reduction or dynamization of the regulating [...] structures of work” (Kleemann and Voß, 2018: 34), whereby the setting of boundaries between work and life has also become, in a changed manner and for new classes of employees, an “act of construction” in its own right (Jurczyk et al., 2009). The novel quality of boundary blurring and subjectivation as modes of rationalization consists in the fact that they are geared toward involving the whole person, toward exploiting all of a subject’s potentialities (Moldaschl, 2018: 381). According to Frank Kleemann, Ingo Matuschek, and G. Günter Voß (2002: 62), this takes place in a “double subjectivation process” that is, in the way these potentialities are (supposed to be) mobilized for paid work, in itself contradictory: it appears “as a fulfillment of demands and as an imposition, as an offer of autonomy and as compulsion” (Moldaschl, 2018: 380) when it comes to employees’ interests regarding the content of work, the rationalizing organization of work, the individualization of the negotiation of working conditions, and overexertion.

Even if these trends towards marketization, rationalization, and individualization in the course of the finance-capitalist societalization of work are not disputed, a social and temporal diagnosis that primarily takes the standard employment relationship, and thus the formerly privileged employment situation of the non-immigrant male middle classes, as its conceptual starting point, can capture societal developments only in part. Less light is shed on what is happening beyond the areas rationalized in this way, and on how one is related to the other. This includes trends such as the simultaneous “refeudalization” of work, as Sighard Neckel (2016) calls the emergence of forms of work that originate in the finance-capitalist societalization of work but seem to fall short of modern principles in their design. Live-in care, for example, in which migrant women live in the households of those they care for, has garnered significant attention as one such “backstage” of the adult worker society (Lutz, 2018; Aulenbacher/Lutz/Schwiter, 2021). Further studies being carried out on social reproduction show that the new modes of rationalization, especially with regard to their notions of universal availability, favor the traditional male life script as one freed from house and care work (Lohr and Nickel, 2005; Rau, 2010). Finally, Kerstin Jürgens (2006: 204) has used the concept of “reproductive agency” to show that the conservation of “labor power and life-force” (*Arbeits- und Lebenskraft*) can lead to “the self-willed setting of boundaries” (Jürgens, 2006: 241) in relation to job-related demands, whereby concerns for self-care and welfare also enter into the debate on gainful employment (Heiden and Jürgens, 2013).

Approaches in the Foucauldian tradition place a different emphasis by examining the notion of the subject itself. Ulrich Bröckling (2002a; b), for example, speaks of the emergence of the “entrepreneurial self,” which—by means of gender-variable “interpellations” (in Althusser’s sense)—becomes a “subject in the gerundive—not to be discovered, but to be produced” (Bröckling, 2007: 47), whereby the heteronomous

call to self-optimization appears as self-determination. For Alexandra Rau (2010: 178ff.), the finance-capitalist phase of the societalization of work marks the transition from homo economicus to “homo psychologicus” insofar as “in subjectivated working conditions the logic of capital combines with ‘psychopolitics’” and makes people susceptible to being instrumentalized (Rau, 2010: 303). The thesis of the subjects’ total accessibility is radicalized in view of the demand to work on oneself, yet without imputing a frictionless assimilation, since “psychopolitical” work as “individual struggle” also generates resistant potentialities (Rau, 2010: 306).

Precarization refers to a mode of domination that is based on insecurity in Bourdieu’s sense and that endangers social integration and cohesion in Castel’s sense (Bourdieu, 1998; Castel and Dörre, 2009). In labor studies, Klaus Dörre has shown by way of the development of his *Landnahme* (land grab) theorem (2009) how finance-capitalist accumulation dynamics lead to the precarization of employment relationships and are accompanied by forms of “discriminatory precarity” (Dörre, 2011: 97ff.), which are dealt with subjectively in different ways. The main issue here is how those affected cope with precarity in everyday life and over the course of their lifetime and how this ties in with encompassing activation policies by the welfare state (Dörre et al., 2015), the approval of right-wing populist parties (Dörre, 2019), and more. Mona Motakef’s (2015: 134ff.) review of precarization research further shows that new configurations are emerging in paid and unpaid work tied to class, gender, and ethnic inequalities. Precarious female breadwinners (Klenner, 2009; Völker, 2012) are just one of many examples in view of which people are gearing their everyday actions towards the “de-precarization” not only of employment but also of living conditions and towards the creation of scope for action. Precarity comes into view as a pervasive phenomenon in the lives of working people, manifesting itself at society’s edges as an existential insecurity, and at its center as a mode of unsettling and disciplining those whose livelihoods are still secure. Yet it also provokes resistance. (Villa/Hark, GENDER, this volume)

3 Performance and Performance Policy, Demands and Claims in Paid Work

In debates in the sociology of work and industrial sociology, it is (again) coming increasingly to the fore that modern capitalist societies are, according to their own claims, meritocratic, performance-based societies. Performance and the performance principle have, according to Wolfgang Menz’s (2017: 191ff.) reconstruction of their Fordist and post-Fordist history, always been contentious and at times even seemed to have lost their legitimacy. In this respect, finance capitalism is an inherently contradictory formation: on the one hand, to an increasing degree, the wealthy can elude meritocracy because they draw their wealth from sources such as returns, inheritances, and so forth, which are only very loosely aligned with performance and even

then only to a very limited extent (Neckel, 2016). On the other hand, labor and welfare-state studies show that performance and performance policies, and performance-based justice with them, have (again) gained in significance ahead of participatory and needs-based justice. Correspondingly, they are (also again) being researched more intensively, partly in continuation of previously surveyed research and partly with borrowings from Marx, Foucault, Weber, theories of recognition and justice, French pragmatism, and North American institutional logic perspectives, among others (Atzmüller et al., 2015; Atzmüller, 2019; Aulenbacher et al., 2017; Dröge et al., 2008; Flecker et al., 2014b; Menz, 2009; Rau, 2010). They are of interest not least with regard to their legitimacy, since the Fordist “notion of performance based on expenditure or labor power” (Menz, 2017: 196) has increasingly undergone a “realignment to market and success variables.” According to this research, this could violate persistent notions of performance-based justice—especially with regard to personal attributions of performance based on ability and activity—and call the “legitimacy of the market regime” (Menz, 2009) into question; but it could also lead to new market-aligned notions of performance (Menz, 2017: 196). The winner-takes-all principles found in crowd sourcing and crowd work are forms of performance in which only the result achieved in competition counts, not the work performed (Bauer and Gegenhuber, 2017).

The interest in performance policy is based on its key function for the implementation of revised modes of societalized work (*vergesellschaftete Arbeit*). In the words of Menz (2009: 170), performance policy aims “at the production of activity in a certain form.” It is about “generating, maintaining, and reproducing the desired performance and orientation of the employees” and at the same time “about the active performance of employees in everyday work as well as their technologies of self-formation and self-adaptation according to their own notions of a job well done” (Menz, 2009: 171). In particular, the studies by Roland Atzmüller (2019) and Klaus Dörre et al. (2015) on labor-market activation policies show that this double grip on the ability and willingness to perform—albeit in different institutional contexts and associated with different attributions, imputations, impositions, and sometimes stigmatizations—also plays a role in the unemployed’s integration into employment. In both cases, performance policy proves to be directly linked to competition as well as to social distinctions, inequalities, and divisions (Atzmüller et al., 2015). It therefore also provokes criticism, conveyed not least of all by firsthand accounts of injustice and lack of recognition. This explains why questions of recognition and justice, partly in the wake of French pragmatism and partly in the wake of theories of recognition, are important to the debate on performance and performance policies in German-language labor studies (Aulenbacher et al., 2017; Flecker et al., 2014b).

The conceptual pair of “demands” and “claims” has gained acceptance in studies of performance and performance policy. Unlike desires, claims are to be seen—according to Stefanie Hürtgen and Stephan Voswinkel (2014: 40ff.), who first introduced the concept into the discussion—as normatively anchored, which means that their fulfillment is sought legitimately. Correspondingly, claims—such as those to recog-

nition and justice, meaningfulness and content of work, equality and autonomy, among others—are considered in terms of how they relate to the demands that employees see put on themselves (Aulenbacher et al., 2017; Dammayr, 2019; Dörre et al., 2018; Flecker et al., 2014b; Hürtgen and Voswinkel, 2014; Kratzer et al., 2015; Nickel and Heilmann, 2013; Nies, 2015). It is thus evident how performance, performance-based justice, and performance policies become the object of everyday work-related disputes and negotiations.

Klaus Dörre and Tine Haubner (2018: 97), for example, speak of a “generalization of the competitive principle,” which, with regard to the redistribution of labor and the disciplining of employees, triggers a “widespread sensation of being treated unfairly and the critique of capitalism articulated by the so-called ‘employment-oriented middle’ [...] of society” (Dörre and Haubner, 2018: 104). This “middle” is the focus of studies that deal with performance, recognition, and justice in areas of skilled and professional labor in which criticism of market-driven rationalization has been evident for some time (Aulenbacher et al., 2017; Flecker et al., 2014b). Jörg Flecker, Franz Schultheis, and Berthold Vogel (2014a: 335) have noted, for example, that among civil servants, “feelings of fairness and notions of justice are tied to various dimensions: to questions of material distribution, social and professional recognition, and to questions of the common good” and that related claims are not being met under the auspices of finance capitalism (also Kratzer et al., 2015: 45ff., from a Weberian perspective). Nick Kratzer, Wolfgang Menz, Knut Tullius, and Harald Wolf (2015: 48ff.) use the expression “claims to justice and rationality” to refer, with regard to industry and services, to a whole set of expectations—related to performance, care, self-realization, participation, and so forth on the one hand and to the “technical-functional,” “bureaucratic,” and “economic rationality” of work organization on the other—that can conflict with the demands placed on employees. Maria Dammayr (2019: 48ff.) uses the example of care work to show that “market” and “professional logics” conflict in such a way that employees can only live up to their own and their profession’s ethical standards by violating their need for self-care if they try to meet the demands of employers and are obliged to compensate for organizational deficits by overexertion. A similar situation is evident in other services as well as in science, partly in association with labor conflicts that revolve around worker demands for and claims to good jobs in the broadest sense (Artus et al., 2017; Aulenbacher et al., 2016; Völker and Amacker, 2015). (Maurer, *ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY*, this volume)

4 Digitalization of Work

The phenomenon of digitalization has been at the fore of the public and scientific discussion about work for some time. It is regarded as an appropriate point of departure for addressing the future transformation of capitalism, considering its potential impact on all areas of production and all segments of the labor market (Nachtwey and Staab, 2016: 63). Nevertheless, developments cannot be predicted. The

fact that business models and value chains are subject to constant transformation, new providers and services are emerging, and the division of labor is changing lead Sabine Pfeiffer and Anne Suphan (2015: 10; 2018) to conclude that “simple deductive prognoses about interactions between humans and technology do not go far enough.” The industry 4.0 narrative is thus seen critically because at the moment no fourth industrial revolution is in view, neither as the “causal consequence of a level of technological development that has actually been reached” (Pfeiffer, 2015: 6; Urban, 2019) nor as a “disruptive replacement of the old order” (Kohlrausch et al., 2019: 11f.). Instead, there is talk of “a dynamically changing agency divided between humans and technology and their interlinkage in complex process configurations” (Hirsch-Kreinsen, 2018: 18). This line of reasoning emphasizes that constellations of power and negotiations of interests have a decisive influence on the process and direction of the digital societalization of work (Rammert, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION, this volume). This applies to labor policy, in the context of which industry 4.0 is seen as a powerful “professional agenda-building” for the further deregulation of work (Pfeiffer, 2015: 6), as well as to the integration of goals such as equal opportunity and ecological sustainability among others (Kutzner and Schnier, 2017; Schröder and Urban, 2018). Researchers in the fields of the sociology of work and industrial sociology are carrying out a careful impact assessment, while they are engaged in a debate on the social shaping of digital technologies and a social-theoretical discussion of digitalization. (Hepp, MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION, this volume)

In the first of the aforementioned veins of research, there is significant debate about the substitutability of human labor by technology. Katharina Dengler and Britta Matthes (2015) thus conclude that occupations in industrial production have a high substitutability potential, whereas those in social and cultural services have a lower one. The findings of studies focusing on qualification point in a similar direction: “Low-skilled workers will be more affected than highly skilled workers; work performed in offices, in processing and in sales, and in machine maintenance and control is more easily automated than work involving instructional, developmental, social, or organizational tasks” (Jürgens et al., 2017: 23f.). However, it should not be overlooked that even routine activities always involve partial aspects—such as experiential knowledge, among others—that cannot be technologically substituted and that new areas of activity are emerging in precarious segments as well (Hirsch-Kreinsen, 2018; Butollo and Sevigiani, 2018). As for the question of whether digitalization may result in social polarization, the research presents a different picture. Polarization has become apparent between the unemployed and holders of highly skilled positions (Staab and Prediger, 2019) but also between highly and minimally qualified positions (acatech, 2016; Hirsch-Kreinsen, 2016; Hirsch-Kreinsen, 2018). In general, “qualification is a prerequisite for continuous employment in a digitalized world of work” (Jürgens et. al., 2017: 24), which favors those who hold a privileged position and have the corresponding resources at their disposal. Finally, the discourse addresses the lines of distinction between the core and peripheral workforce that are associated with forms of work in the platform economy, outsourcing, and minimal protections for

workers' rights and the right of codetermination in employment relationships (Butollo and Sevigani, 2018: 145; Kurz et al., 2019; Hirsch-Kreinsen, 2018; Nachtwey and Staab, 2016). According to Martin Krzywdzinski (2019), an increase in outsourcing models and crowd work can be seen on the periphery of companies, even if one cannot speak of "de-corporatization" (*Entbetrieblichung*) in sectors like the automotive industry. In the course of this development, it is not least the digital peripheral workforces who find themselves subjected to new forms of surveillance (Kuhlmann and Schumann, 2015; Hirsch-Kreinsen, 2018), which Oliver Nachtwey and Philipp Staab (2016: 80) have dubbed "digital Taylorism" in view of how "apps and algorithms" are now taking over the role of heterogenous monitoring and control that was once performed by the assembly line.

The second vein of research sees digitalization as a rationalization process, but it also asks whether there is any scope for emancipatory action in regard to labor policy (Kuhlmann and Schumann, 2015; Meyer et al., 2019). Hans-Jürgen Urban (2019: 297ff.) brings a Polanyian perspective to bear on the question, systematizing areas of conflict in the "digital transformation" such as social status, time, health, qualification, influence, data, and employment. Asking whether the potential for rationalization is getting the help it needs to prevail, or whether, on the contrary, emancipatory demands can succeed, he pits precarious against secure employment, economically induced time flexibility against sovereignty over one's own time according to one's own work and life interests, control against participation, and so on. Further studies show that, in addition to formalized conflict management, and notwithstanding new mechanisms of control, "new spaces of leeway for informality" (Kleemann and Krzywdzinski, 2018: 6) are also emerging along with a partly self-interested, partly resistant use of digital technologies by employees (Carstensen, 2017). Florian Butollo and Sebastian Sevigani (2018: 253ff.) also see digitalization as rationalization on a new scale, but they ask more pointedly, from a Marxian perspective, how digitalization is changing not only the societal organization of (paid and unpaid) work, the division of labor, the significance of knowledge work, and structures in space and time but also property relations, for example, in a "rentier economy" (sharing economy). They also see this as linked to conceivable changes to distribution, such as the formation of a "welfare state 4.0" or the introduction of a universal basic income (Butollo and Sevigani, 2018: 263ff.). In their view, the direction in which digitalization will transform capitalism will be decided, locally, nationally, and globally, in conflicts over capitalist "land grabs," the distribution of the "surplus product," and other conflicts in which actors find themselves—notwithstanding the aforementioned as well as further lines of social distinction and division—as well as in new forms of organizing work.

5 Conclusion

In both the German-language and the international debate, there has been talk of a transformation of capitalism for some time, with researchers observing both the crisis-ridden consolidation of finance capitalism as well as the critique of its conditions in various forms. Accordingly, diagnoses of current and future developments range anywhere between the further consolidation of capitalism and the emergence of a post-capitalist formation. In presenting selections from the diagnostic of the contemporary and prospective transformation of paid work, this essay has aimed to highlight the combination of theory-based empirical analysis and empirically grounded theorization that is characteristic of German-language sociology of work and industrial sociology. The latter has contributed to the analysis of capitalism by taking up topics of substantial significance. This has been addressed by the diagnosis of new social figures that reflect shifts in the relationship between the economy and politics, and the market and the state. The sociology of work has further contributed by reinvestigating capitalism as a meritocracy. It has thereby scrutinized a principle that has become deeply ingrained in the life of society and the implications of which are uncertain with regard to the digital transformation of work and its assumed impact on property relations, forms of ownership, and the welfare state. At the same time, the sociology of work has broken down the ‘big’ questions of societal development with regard to paid work into the analysis of the ‘small’ questions of its organization, design, distribution, and negotiation, thus providing the evidence and insights needed to articulate empirically satisfying theoretical propositions about the transformation of society. In this respect, there is an elective affinity between German-language sociology of work and industrial sociology, with its diagnostics of contemporary and prospective societal change, and the analysis of capitalism. (Otte/Boehle/Kunißen, SOCIAL INEQUALITIES—EMPIRICAL FOCUS, this volume)

This affinity also involves the theoretical discussion. What could only be hinted at here is evident to a remarkable degree in research in the sociology of work and industrial sociology: that German-language scholarship is current with the international theory discussion. Conversant in Foucault, Polanyi, Marx, Weber, French pragmatism, North American neo-institutionalism, theories of justice and recognition, and many other theoretical paradigms and at the same time building on its empirical research, the German-language sociology of work and industrial sociology is also contributing to the ongoing development of the international discussion. Examples include the concept of “psychopolitics” (Rau, 2010), the *Landnahme* theorem (Dörre, 2009), and the “perspective of institutional logics” (Dammayr, 2019), among many other contributions.

If, to address a final point, handbooks and encyclopedias represent the state of research in a subdiscipline, their most recent editions allow us to note two features of German-language sociology of work and industrial sociology (Böhle et al., 2018; Hirsch-Kreinsen and Minssen, 2017): its consistent focus on the study of paid work

(a perspective that has its roots in the discipline's own history and scientific historiography) and its selective openness to the analysis of forms of work to which it previously paid little attention, such as unpaid domestic work, self-employment, economic subsistence, volunteer work, and self-care and care for others. In the German-speaking countries and internationally, there is a tradition of studying such forms, especially in gender studies, family, care, and welfare-state research. Even if some research in the sociology of work and industrial sociology is now also opening up to these neighboring veins of research, we are still dealing with highly differentiated and specialized bodies of knowledge. As the transformation of capitalism extends not only to paid work but to all forms of work, it is essential that our perspectives expand beyond the boundaries of the subdisciplines—and interdisciplinary studies would be a welcome contribution to this end.

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List of Contributors

Albrecht, Günter, em. Prof. Dr., Department of Sociology, University of Bielefeld

E-Mail: guenter.albrecht@uni-bielefeld.de

Fields of Research: Deviant behavior and social control, migration, theory of social problems, psychiatric sociology

Aulenbacher, Brigitte, Prof. Dr., Institute for Sociology, Johannes Kepler University of Linz

E-Mail: Brigitte.Aulenbacher@jku.at

Fields of Research: Social theory, analysis of capitalism, labor, care, and gender studies, public sociology

Barth, Alice, Dr., Research Associate, Institute for Political Science and Sociology, University of Bonn

E-Mail: alice.barth@uni-bonn.de

Fields of Research: Multivariate data analysis, attitude research, empirical social research, lifestyle analysis

Blasius, Jörg, Prof. Dr., Institute for Political Science and Sociology, University of Bonn

E-Mail: jblasius@uni-bonn.de

Fields of Research: Empirical social research, lifestyle analysis, applied statistics, especially correspondence analysis, urban research

Boehle, Mara, Dr., Research Associate, Institute for Sociology, Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz

E-Mail: boehle@uni-mainz.de

Fields of Research: Social inequality and stratification, poverty, family and gender

Eigmüller, Monika, Prof. Dr., Institute for Social Sciences and Theology, Europe-University of Flensburg

E-Mail: monika.eigmueller@uni-flensburg.de

Fields of Research: Sociology of European integration, sociology of borders, sociology of social policy

Engels, Anita, Prof. Dr., Department of Social Sciences, University of Hamburg

E-Mail: anita.engels@uni-hamburg.de

Fields of Research: Environmental sociology, economic sociology, climate change

Feldhaus, Michael, Prof. Dr., Institute for Social Sciences, Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg

E-Mail: Michael.feldhaus@uol.de

Fields of Research: Life course research, family sociology, sociology of childhood and adolescence

Gerharz, Eva, Prof. Dr., Department for Social and Cultural-Sciences, Fulda University of Applied Sciences

E-Mail: eva.gerharz@sk.hs-fulda.de

Fields of Research: Globalisation, development, social movements, migration

Grages, Christopher, Dr., Department for Economic and Social Sciences, University of Hamburg
E-Mail: Christopher.Grages@uni-hamburg.de
Fields of Research: Comparative welfare state research, sociology of labor markets, neo-institutionalism

Grubner, Johanna, M.A., Institute for Sociology, Johannes Kepler University of Linz
E-Mail: johanna.grubner@jku.at
Fields of Research: Critical social research, feminist theory and gender studies, research on higher education

Grundmann, Matthias, Prof. Dr., Institute for Sociology, University of Münster
E-Mail: matthias.grundmann@uni-muenster.de
Fields of Research: Socialisation and education research, social ecology, community research

Gugutzer, Robert, Prof. Dr., Institute for Sports Sciences, Goethe University of Frankfurt am Main
E-Mail: gugutzer@sport.uni-frankfurt.de
Fields of Research: Sociology of the body, sociology of sport, neophenomenological sociology

Häußling, Roger, Prof. Dr., Institute for Sociology, RWTH Aachen University
E-Mail: rhaeussling@soziologie.rwth-aachen.de
Fields of Research: Social network research, sociology of technology and innovation, sociology of organisation

Hark, Sabine, Prof. Dr., Department for Humanities- and Educational Sciences, Technical University of Berlin
E-Mail: sabine.hark@tu-berlin.de
Fields of Research: Higher education research, sociology of science, feminist theory

Hasse, Raimund, Prof. Dr., Department for Culture and Social Sciences, University of Luzern
E-Mail: Raimund.Hasse@unilu.ch
Fields of Research: Organizational research, neo-institutionalism, economic sociology

Hepp, Andreas, Prof. Dr., Culture Sciences (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7292-4147>), University of Bremen
E-Mail: ahepp@uni-bremen.de
Fields of Research: Media Sociology, deep mediatization, datafication and pioneer communities

Höpflinger, François, Prof. Dr., Centre for Gerontology, University of Zurich
E-Mail: fhoepf@soziologie.uzh.ch
Fields of Research: Demography, sociology of aging, intergenerational relationships

Hollstein, Betina, Prof. Dr., SOCIUM – Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy, University of Bremen
E-Mail: betina.hollstein@uni-bremen.de
Fields of Research: Life course, social networks, qualitative methods

Huinink, Johannes, Prof. Dr., SOCIUM – Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy, University of Bremen
E-Mail: huinink@uni-bremen.de
Fields of Research: Social stratification, life course, family demography

Karstein, Uta, Dr., Institute for Cultural Sciences, University of Leipzig
E-Mail: karstein@uni-leipzig.de
Fields of Research: Sociology of religion, cultural sociology, sociology of art.

Kelle, Udo, Prof. Dr., Department for Humanities- and Social Sciences, Helmut Schmidt University of Hamburg
E-Mail: kelle@hsu-hh.de
Fields of Research: Methodology of social research, life course research, sociology of religion

Kern, Thomas, Prof. Dr., Department for Social- and Economic Sciences, University of Bamberg
E-Mail: thomas.kern@uni-bamberg.de
Fields of Research: Sociological theory, political sociology, sociology of religion

Knappertsbusch, Felix, Dr., Department for Humanities- and Social Sciences, Helmut Schmidt University of Hamburg
E-Mail: knapperf@hsu-hh.de
Fields of Research: Methodology of social research, research on prejudice and discrimination, critical theory and sociology of critique

Koenig, Matthias, Prof. Dr., Max-Weber-Institute for Sociology, University of Heidelberg
E-Mail: matthias.koenig@mwi.uni-heidelberg.de
Fields of Research: Migration, sociology of religion, sociological theory

Konietzka, Dirk, Prof. Dr., Institute for Sociology, TU Braunschweig
E-Mail: d.konietzka@tu-bs.de
Fields of Research: Life course research, family sociology, social stratification

Kosmützky, Anna, Prof. Dr., LCSS Leibniz Center for Science and Society, Leibniz University of Hannover
E-Mail: anna.kosmuetzky@lcss.uni-hannover.de
Fields of Research: Higher education research, sociology of science, organization studies

Kreyenfeld, Michaela, Prof. Dr., Hertie School Berlin
E-Mail: kreyenfeld@hertie-school.org
Fields of Research: Life course research, family sociology, family demography

Krücken, Georg, Prof. Dr., International Centre for Higher Education Research Kassel, University of Kassel
E-Mail: kruecken@incher.uni-kassel.de
Fields of Research: Higher education research, sociology of science, organization studies

Kumkar, Nils C., Dr., SOCIUM – Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy, University of Bremen
E-Mail: kumkar@uni-bremen.de
Fields of Research: Qualitative methods, sociological theory, political sociology

Kunißen, Katharina, M.A., Institute for Sociology, Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz
E-Mail: katharina.kunissen@uni-mainz.de
Fields of Research: Social inequality and stratification, social policy, sociology of culture

Lamla, Jörn, Prof. Dr., Department for Social Sciences, University of Kassel

E-Mail: lamla@uni-kassel.de

Fields of Research: Sociological theory, digital transformation, and consumer democracy

Langfeldt, Bettina, Prof. Dr., Department for Social Sciences, University of Kassel

E-Mail: b.langfeldt@uni-kassel.de

Fields of Research: Methods and methodology of social research, empirical research on higher education, sociology of work

Löw, Martina, Prof. Dr., Institute for Sociology, Technical University of Berlin

E-Mail: martina.loew@tu-berlin.de

Fields of Research: Sociology of architecture and planning, urban sociology, sociological theory

Maurer, Andrea, Prof. Dr., University of Trier

E-Mail: andrea.maurer@uni-trier.de

Fields of Research: Economic sociology, sociological theories, new institutionalism

Moebius, Stephan, Prof. Dr. habil., Institute for Sociology, University of Graz

E-Mail: stephan.moebius@uni-graz.at

Fields of Research: History of sociology, cultural sociology, sociological theory

Otte, Gunnar, Prof. Dr., Institute for Sociology, Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz

E-Mail: gunnar.otte@uni-mainz.de

Fields of Research: Social inequality and stratification, sociology of culture, sociology of art

Peter, Claudia, Prof. Dr., University of Frankfurt am Main

E-Mail: c.peter@soz.uni-frankfurt.de

Fields of Research: Sociology of medicine, sociology of the (felt) body, phenomenological sociology

Pfau-Effinger, Birgit, Prof. Dr., Department for Economic and Social Sciences, University of Hamburg

E-Mail: pfau-effinger@uni-hamburg.de

Fields of Research: Relationship between culture and institutions, comparative welfare state research, gender, work and care

Pries, Ludger, Prof. Dr., Department for Social Science, Ruhr-University of Bochum

E-Mail: ludger.pries@rub.de

Fields of Research: Transnationalisation, migration, work and organization

Rammert, Werner, Prof. Dr., Institute for Sociology, Technical University of Berlin

E-Mail: werner.rammert@tu-berlin.de

Fields of Research: Sociology of technology (STS), innovation studies, social theory

Rescher, Gilberto, Dr., Center for Latin American Studies, University of Hamburg

E-Mail: gilberto.rescher@uni-hamburg.de

Fields of Research: (Local) politics, migration, southern sociology, development

Schimank, Uwe, Prof. Dr., SOCIUM – Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy, University of Bremen

E-Mail: uwe.schimank@uni-bremen.de

Fields of Research: Sociological theory, organizational sociology, science studies

Schneider, Wolfgang Ludwig, Prof. Dr., Institute for Social Sciences, University of Osnabrück
E-Mail: wolfgang.ludwig.schneider@uni-osnabrueck.de
Fields of Research: Systems theory, social differentiation, methodology and sociology of the social sciences

Schützeichel, Rainer, Prof. Dr., Department for Sociology, University of Bielefeld
E-Mail: rainer.schützeichel@uni-bielefeld.de
Fields of Research: Sociological theory, historical sociology, economic sociology

Schwinn, Thomas, Prof. Dr., Max-Weber-Institute for Sociology, University of Heidelberg
E-Mail: thomas.schwinn@mwi.uni-heidelberg.de
Fields of Research: Sociological theory, research on differentiation and inequality, sociology of religion

Trappe, Heike, Prof. Dr., Institute for Sociology and Demography, University of Rostock
E-Mail: heike.trappe@uni-rostock.de
Fields of Research: Life course research, family sociology, family demography

Villa, Paula-Irene, Prof. Dr., Institute for Sociology, Ludwig-Maximilians University of München
E-Mail: paula.villa@lmu.de
Fields of Research: Biopolitics, embodiment, care, popular cultures, social and gender theory

Weiß, Anja, Prof. Dr., Institute for Sociology, University of Duisburg-Essen
E-Mail: anja.weiss@uni-due.de
Fields of Research: Theory of society, global inequalities, highly skilled migration and professional knowledge, transnational research design

Wohlrab-Sahr, Monika, Prof. Dr., Institute for Cultural Sciences, University of Leipzig
E-Mail: wohlrab@uni-leipzig.de
Fields of Research: Sociology of religion, cultural sociology, qualitative methods

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