

GERMAN SOCIOLOGY AFTER REUNIFICATION

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Abstract: Since the 1990s German sociology is confronted with a loss of its "supremacy of interpretation" of societal trends and processes to other academic disciplines, like biology or anthropology. This may be surprising, if one compares the situation in the 1960s and 1970s, where Sociology in Germany was a leading science, analyzing the problems and contradictions of German society and was important for the academic and intellectual socialization of a generation of young students and scholars. The aim of this article is to give a brief overview about contemporary German sociology, describe the current situation of Sociology in Germany and to give an answer for its actual problems and loss of influence.

Key Words: German sociology, history of sociology, critical theory

Özet: 1990lı yıllardan itibaren, Alman sosyolojisi toplumsal olayların yorumlama yeteneğini ve üstünlüğünü biyoloji ya da antropoloji gibi akademik disiplinlere karşı kaybetme riskiyle karşı karşıyadır. Bu belki şaşırtabilir, çünkü 1960li ve 1970li yıllarında Almanya'daki sosyoloji Alman toplumun sorunlarını ve çelişkilerini analiz eden ve aynı anda bir neslin akademik ve entelektüel sosyalizasyonu için önemli rol oynamış öncü bir bilimdi. Bu makalenin amacı Alman sosyolojisinin güncel durumunu tasvir etmek, onun güncel sorunlarını ve toplumsal etkisinin kaybının altında yatan nedenlerini anlamak.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Alman sosyolojisi, sosyoloji tarihi, eleştirel teori.

In 1989 Ulrich Beck, editor of the journal *Soziale Welt*, asked prominent German sociologists about the state of current sociology in Germany. The result was negative and could be summarized as the end of (German) sociology. The range of critique was from the anomie of sociology (Dahrendorf), the decline of sociological method (Esser) or the rise of feuilletonistic sociology (Meyer).¹ Twenty years later the critique has not changed. This may be confusing, if you compare these statements with the facts in Germany. Never before have so many students studied sociology, the research conditions were so good and the options for publications were so extensive. But on the other side German sociology has lost his appeal for the public. Unlike in the 1970s and 1980s German sociologist are no more spokesmen of societal debates. Sociology in Germany has lost his supremacy of interpretation of societal trends and processes to other academic disciplines, like biology or anthropology. But if German Sociology is not part of any debate, one must ask about the value of sociology, because sociology as a science of society owes its importance to the discovery of the "Gesellschaft" as a contradiction to "Gemeinschaft". Germany isn't the leading nation in international sociology, like in the 1920s and 1930s. With some exceptions, like *Ulrich Beck* and *Jürgen Habermas*, the majority of German sociologists are unknown in the international scientific community. What has happened to German sociology, which was once a leading science of society and international discourse?

The purpose of this article is to analyze and position the state (*Standortbestimmung*) of contemporary German sociology after the Reunification of the two Germanys in 1990. Therefore the article consists of four parts. The first part summarizes the debate on a specific "Germaness" of German sociology, with a focus on the seminal work of Meja et al.² The second part is a very brief overview about the development of German sociology after the Second World War until the 1990s, its reestablishment and academic battles between different ideological and methodological schools. In the next part the article tries to analyze the development of German sociology in the 1990s and 2000s and introduces some important contemporary sociologist. The last section gives an answer to the question, why sociology has lost his importance for German society. The general purpose of this article is to open the actual debates

¹ Ulrich Beck, *Einleitung*, *Soziale Welt*, 40, 1989, s: 1-2.

² Volker Meja vd, *Modern German Sociology*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

in current German sociology to a non German speaking academic public. It is also hoped that this brief overview about contemporary German sociology and its problems gives other scholars an opportunity to compare the current situation in Germany with the situation of other national sociologies.

The Essence of German Sociology

Today, German sociology is an established autonomous discipline, with a high degree of differentiation, specialization, and professionalization. It is also well integrated into the network of international social scientific discourse.³ But while there was a specific “German sociology” in the twenties and thirties, with a focus on hermeneutics, phenomenology and early critical theory, it is a difficult task to identify major trends of contemporary sociology in Germany. There is also the question, if the search for specific features of a national sociology is justified. For *Dirk Käsler* this question is against the universal character of science. If the answer for a scientific question is researched by scientific methods, then the answer is and must be universal valid, regardless of the nationality of the scientist. But he also realized the fact, that a scientist is part of a specific national scientific milieu, with a specific scientific socialization.⁴

Nevertheless there was always the attempt to analyze distinctive attributes of sociology in Germany. *Raymond Aron's* “La sociologie allemande contemporaine” can be seen as a classical document of this quest. Aron described German sociology before the Second World War by two features. First of all German sociology was embedded in a tradition of German humanities. It had some “spiritual character” with a focus on understanding (*Verstehen*) human phenomena. As a second attribute Aron referred to the interest in methodology and the need for a discussion of methodology.⁵

While Aron tried to give his French coeval a picture of early German sociology, the seminal work of *Volker Meja, Dieter Misgeld and Nico Stehr* was an attempt to mediate between German and American sociology and to give American

³ Hans Peter Müller, The „Distinctiveness“ of Modern German Sociology: A Contemporary Myth?, *Contemporary Sociology* 18, 989, s: 319 - 322.

⁴ Dirk Käsler, „Deutsche“ Soziologie“ oder Soziologie im deutschsprachigem Europa?, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 15, 1990, s: 8.

⁵ Raymon Aron, *La sociologie allemande contemporaine*, Paris : PUF Presses Universitaires de France, 1936.

sociologist an understanding of contemporary German sociology.⁶ They presented a seminal work with twenty one articles by famous representatives of contemporary German sociology, who have already received wide attention in the United States. In their introduction Meja et al. characterized German sociology by three distinct features: “the importance of theory”, the critique of contemporary (German) society” and the existence of a “critical self-reflection” of sociology, sometimes taking “the form of inhibiting self- doubt and scrupulousness, of an obsessive preoccupation with oneself”.⁷ For the authors these features were the trademarks of “German-ness” of sociology in Germany, which was also recognized by American sociologist. On the other side the authors limited the theoretical landscape on two axes, because the problem of “rationalization” and the role of science and technology for the development of a “rational society” were the generic themes of German sociology. For Meja et al., Western rationality, Weber’s main concern, connects to a conservative strand of counter enlightenment thought, with *Heidegger, Jünger, Gehlen, Schelsky* and *Luhman* as its representatives and to a critical strand of Enlightenment, represented by *Adorno, Horkheimer, and Habermas*.⁸

Hans Peter Müller criticized Meja et al. for trying to maintain a myth of a distinct German sociology in the United States. By relaying primarily on already visible German sociologist and who are read in the English speaking world, because of their “German-ness” Meja et al. contributed to a non existing myth.⁹ Müller also objected to the narrow picture of the theoretical landscape in German sociology on two ideological axes. The theoretical landscape in German sociology had become much more pluralistic, less ideological, more abstract and technical and less philosophical. Theoretical approaches ranged from individualistic theories (*Opp, Vanberg, Wippler, Lindberg*), neo-Darwinist evolutionary theory (*Giesen, Schmidt*), neo-Parsonian theory (*Münch*), and symbolic interactionism (*Joas*).¹⁰

For Müller contemporary German sociology is described by four characteristics. First of all is the above mentioned non dogmatic pluralism of sociological

⁶ Volker Meja vd, *Modern German Sociology*.

⁷ Meja vd, *Modern German Sociology*, s: 3.

⁸ *ibid.* s: 5.

⁹ Müller, The „Distinctiveness“ of Modern German Sociology: A Contemporary Myth?, s: 321.

¹⁰ *ibid.* s: 321.

theory. Second the fact, that contemporary social scientists begin with object of research and not with the theory, but without rejecting theory. Rather carrying pure empiricism or building theory, the aim of today's research is to analyze the object of research but with integrating theory, methodology, and empirical analyzes. The connection of theory and empiricism is the next feature of contemporary German sociology.¹¹ The most influential sociologists have devoted their energy to the connection of theory and empirical research, and try to capture the middle ground between branches usually standing apart. For examples *Peter Flora* had a vast research program on the development of the welfare state, while *Wolfgang Zapf* had conducted research on life chances.¹² Finally Müller et al. mentioned the multiplicity of issues and research problems. The question about the research topic is no more determined by a general theory, but through an understanding of theory, which integrates situation dependent master trends - like the socio structural effects of neo liberalism and globalization, civil society and the new understanding of the relationship between state and society - and problem sensitive approaches.¹³

German Sociology After the Second World War to the 1990s¹⁴

The period of National Socialism (1933 - 45) was a dark period for German history in general, but it was also a dark era for German sociology.¹⁵ German sociology was discredited, because no seriously sociological research was practiced under the rule of the Nazi regime. Many sociologists emigrated, especially with Jewish background or socialist and Marxist orientation, who had an influence on the reputation of German sociology during the Pre-Nazi Weimar period (1919 – 1933). Some other scientist chose an “inner emigration” trying to endure intellectually the Nazi system, without adapting to Nazism, like

¹¹ Hans Peter Müller vd, *Deutsche Soziologie im Umbruch*, Hans Peter Müller (hzt.) *Gesellschaftsbilder im Umbruch – Soziologische Perspektiven in Deutschland*, Opladen, Leske & Buderich, 2001, s: 23.

¹² Müller, The „Distinctiveness“ of Modern German Sociology: A Contemporary Myth?, s: 321.

¹³ Hans Peter Müller vd, *Deutsche Soziologie im Umbruch*, s: 24. Hermann Korte, *Einführung in die Geschichte der Soziologie*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006, s: 188.

¹⁴ For a description of the development of sociology in the German Democratic Republic, see: Hansgünter Meyer, *Sociological Research in the GDR (DDR)*, *Soziologie Special Edition* 3, 1994, s: 33-51.

¹⁵ For an in-depth description of German sociology during National Socialism: Don J. Hager, *German Sociology under Hitler, 1933-1941*, *Social Forces*, 28: 1 / 4, 1949, s: 6 -19; Jan Spurr, *La Sociologie Allemande et le Fascisme, Histoire Sanglante de la raison instrumentale et de l'expertise sociologique*, *Cahiers internationaux de Sociologie*, Vol. CVII, 1999, s : 289-312.

Alfred Weber.¹⁶ The academic and intellectual infrastructure, like the German Sociological Society (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie), which was founded in 1909 by famous German sociologists like *Tönnies*, *Sombart*, *Simmel*, and of *Max Weber*, was dissolved and replaced by a new association of “Deutsche Soziologie” in 1934 under the Chair of *Hans Freyer*. German sociology after 1933 was brutally stalled by the Nazi regime.¹⁷

So after the end of the National Socialist dictatorship, German sociology was faced the difficult task of building up a new sociology in Germany, which could connect on his international former reputation before 1933. The return of the emigrants, like *von Wiese*, *König*, *Adorno*, etc., must be assured and the academic infrastructure must be build up. With the help of the occupying forces, especially the Americans who had a strove for the reconstitution of sociology in postwar West Germany, the German Society for Sociology was re-founded in 1946, with *Lepold von Wiese* a his chairman. In the same year was the first postwar 8th *German Sociologist Conference* (Deutscher Soziologentag) – the seventh was held in 1930- in Frankfurt.¹⁸

While the participants of the first postwar *Soziologentag* were all on conservative and liberal strand, the return of the emigrants changed the composition of German sociologist. These emigrants, who were influenced by American sociology during their emigration, had a significant influence on the establishing of sociology in post-war West Germany. Institutionalization and the social organization of German sociology were influenced by the university structures and the extraordinary stature of these few powerful men.¹⁹ The return of the emigrants was also connected with the expansion of the chairs for sociology. While in 1955 there were 12 chairs of sociology, in 1960 the number was 25 and ten years later 69, with 900 academic positions.²⁰ German sociology in the twenties and thirties was perhaps very leading in the international

¹⁶ Dirk Käsler, From Republic of Scholars to Jamboree of Academic Sociologist - The German Sociological Society, 1909 – 99, *International Sociology*, Vol. 17(2), June 2002, s: 165. Volker Kruse: *Geschichte der Soziologie*, Opladen: UTB, 2006, s: 209.

¹⁷ Erwin K. Scheuch, Von der Deutschen Soziologie zur Soziologie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 15 Jahrgang, Nummer 1, 1990, s: 39.

¹⁸ Käsler, *From Republic of Scholars to Jamboree of Academic Sociologist*, s: 166.

¹⁹ Günther Lütschen, *25 Years of German Sociology after World War II: Institutionalization and Theory*, *Soziologie special Edition* 3, 1994, s: 19. Erwin K. Scheuch, *Von der Deutschen Soziologie zur Soziologie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, s: 42. Hans Peter Müller vd, *Deutsche Soziologie im Umbruch*, s: 16.

²⁰ Scheuch, *Von der Deutschen Soziologie zur Soziologie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, s: 44.

academic arena, but didn't develop any major schools. On the contrary in the 1950s three major schools developed, which influenced German sociology for the next 25 years. In Cologne re-emigrant *Rene König* succeeded Leopold von Wiese as professor and editor of the influential *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*. Together with his assistances (like *Erwin K. Scheuch*) he tried to establish the fundament for an empirical sociology and its methodology.²¹ Also within the activities of the UNESCO Institute for Social Research, Cologne became an international recognized center for research methodology.²² Another School was dominated by *Helmut Schelsky*. Located in Hamburg, Münster and Dortmund, the sociologists of these schools were more interested in an applied and more descriptive understanding of their research. Schelsky and his colleagues criticized the increasing importance of empirical social research and the American influence in German sociology. *Helmuth Plessener* interpreted these activities as "the upraise of the craftsmen in science". Despite these cleavage between these two schools, König and Schelsky agreed upon the UNESCO meeting in Paris to establish a "scientific labor division". Schelsky from Hamburg and Münster addressed sociology's position within Germany, while König set out to lead sociology back into international sociological community and to establish a reputable standard of methodology.²³ The third major school was the Frankfurt school, represented by *Max Horkheimer* and *Theodor W. Adorno*, and later by their disciples *Jürgen Habermass*, *Herbert Marcuse*, *Claus Offe*, etc., at the *Institute for Social Research* (Institut für Sozialforschung), and their *critical theory*. The *Institute* was first established in 1923s, but was closed by the national socialist in 1933, and then reopened after the war in 1951. It was and is today involved in empirical research but completed by qualitative methods, like in Adorno's seminal work *Authoritarian Personality*.²⁴ While the Cologne School was

²¹ For a description of the development of empirical social research in West Germany, Christel Hopf and Walter Müller, *On the Development of Empirical Research in the Federal Republic of Germany*, *Soziologie Special Edition*, 3, 1994, s: 52 – 80. Hermann Korte, *Einführung in die Geschichte der Soziologie*, s: 195. Christoph Weischer, *Das Unternehmen 'Empirische Sozialforschung' - Strukturen, Praktiken und Leitbilder der Sozialforschung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Oldenburg: Oldenburger Wissenschaftsverlag, 2004.

²² Lüschen, *25 Years of German Sociology after World War II*, s: 17. Scheuch, *Von der Deutschen Soziologie zur Soziologie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, s: 42.

²³ Lüschen, *25 Years of German Sociology after World War II*, s: 20.

²⁴ *ibid.* s: 17.

interested in establishing an empirical sociology and the Hamburg/ Münster/ Dortmund School tried to establish an applied social research, the Frankfurt School, especially Adorno and later Habermas, tried to analyze and criticize post-war German society and to advance the emancipation of the individual in social structure by interpreting Marxist ideas with their own ideas. It is obvious that the Frankfurt school had an influence on the students' riots in 1968, which was personated in the person of *Herbert Marcuse*, whose work heavily influenced the intellectual discourse in the late 1960s and the 1970s.²⁵

One important representative of German sociology must be mentioned, who wasn't part of any of the three major schools, *Ralf Dahrendorf*. He received in 1959 a distinguished award for his article "*Out of Utopia*" in *AJS* and his "attack" on the inability of functionalism to deal with social change. This article and his later published magnum opus *Social class and Class Conflict*, had been seen as the beginning of conflict theory in modern international sociology and provided a third way between Marxist sociology and structural functionalism.²⁶ With his work *Homo sociologicus*, he introduced and established the concept of social role models and the problem of roles in German sociology.²⁷

In the 1960s and 1970s post-war German sociology was dominated by the academic conflicts between these three schools. The schools even had different curricula for the *Diplom*, the licentiate degree, in sociology, which were only partially compatible and they had all their own research institutes and organs of publication, like *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* in Cologne, *Soziale Welt* in Münster and *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in Frankfurt. Because of lasting personal and academic conflicts between these three paradigmatic camps, trouble was inevitable, which manifested in special academic disputes, carried out at special conferences, rather on the general *Soziologentage* of the DGS. The escalating of the conflicts troubled even the work of the DGS.²⁸ The main topic of these quarrels centred on further state of sociology, and was accompanied by a discussion of a value free sociology

²⁵ *ibid.* s: 28. Volker Kruse: *Geschichte der Soziologie*, Opladen: s: 257 – 290.

²⁶ *ibid.* s: 18. Jean-Marie Vincent, *Les Metamorphoses de la Sociologie Allemande Apres 1945*, Cahiers internationaux de Sociologie, Vol CVII, 1999, s: 267. Hermann Korte, *Einführung in die Geschichte der Soziologie*, s: 196 – 199.

²⁷ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Homo Sociologicus*, 16. Aufl., Wiesbaden, VS Verlag. für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006.

²⁸ Käsler, *From Republic of Scholars to Jamboree of Academic Sociologist*, s: 167.

linked to “objectivity” and opposed to “subjectivity”.²⁹ So the gap was between the empirical- analytical Cologne School and the neo-marxist Frankfurt School.

During an internal workshop of the DGS in 1960 a discussion started which was known as the positivism dispute (*Positivismusstreit*) between the *Karl Popper* and *Theodor W. Adorno*, which was continued later by *Hans Albert* and *Jürgen Habermas* during the 15th *Soziologentag* in 1964.³⁰ A major clash of theoretical, methodological positions and about the position of sociology in the public occurred 1968 during the 16th *Soziologentag* entitled “Late Capitalism or Industrial Society” (*Spätkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft*).³¹ With this title the DGS (re-) captured the attention of the public audience and the media and it was the 16th *Soziologentag*, which marked a significant turn in the development of German sociology.³² The Cologne School tried to stem against the destruction of objective sociology and defended a pure sociology, while the Frankfurt School wanted to establish a grand design of Marxism, when they tried to analyse the meaning of modern times, society and power. They criticized empirical research for preparing the ground for capitalist exploitation, but the basic criticism of the Frankfurt School was against capitalist system in general. Contrary to König, Adorno, since 1963 chairman of the *DGS*, took exception to the separation of social philosophy and sociology. The result of this quarrel was a gap between an academic and bourgeoisie and Marxist critical, or “conservative” and “progressive”, sociology.³³

Another major quarrel in the 1970s and 1980s was between *Jürgen Habermas* and *Niklas Luhman* about the nature of sociology and its theoretical makeup. Should sociology become an emancipatory theory of society based on actions (Habermas) or social technology (Luhman) based on communication. It was a clash between two hegemonic predominant strands of social thought, Habermas “theory of communication” and Luhman’s autopoietic theory of “social

²⁹ *ibid.* s: 168.

³⁰ Jean-Marie Vincent, *Les Metamorphoses de la Sociologie Allemande Apres 1945*, s: 270. Theodor W. Adorno, vd., *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, Heinemann London 1976 and Harper Torchbook 1976.

³¹ Theodor W. Adorno, (hzrl.): *Spätkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft. Verhandlungen des 16. Deutschen Soziologentages*. Stuttgart: Enke Verlag, 1969.

³² Käsler, *From Republic of Scholars to Jamboree of Academic Sociologist*, s: 168.

³³ Lüschen, *25 Years of German Sociology after World War II*, s: 22. Hans Peter Müller vd, *Deutsche Soziologie im Umbruch*, s: 18. Jean-Marie Vincent, *Les Metamorphoses de la Sociologie Allemande Apres 1945*, s: 270. Hermann Korte, *Einführung in die Geschichte der Soziologie*, s: 212 -214.

systems". Luhman was attacked by Habermas, because in his eyes Luhman's systems theory would function as a "technological expert-commendation" for those in power, and he labelled him as a conservative social technologist. For Habermas the problem of social systems was preservation, and he asked who in social systems decided which interests of preservation are implemented. Luhman replied that the purpose of social systems was not the preservation of the system as a rigid entity, but the preservation of the reproduction function of a system. The conflict between the two adversaries was decided by the public. Habermas theoretical influence began to shrink in the 1980s and 1990s, because of the lack of his theory to empirical research and the change of the intellectual climate. On the other side Luhman's impact on the theoretical discourse and on empirical research constantly grew until his death in 1998.³⁴

But despite these academic quarrels German sociology in the 1970s and 1980s developed. Major trends were the differentiation of scientific research in sociological theory and empirical research, and specialisation of the researchers and the development of specific "hyphen - sociologies" for specific research areas.³⁵ And despite the hegemonic dominance of Habermas and Luhman, a younger generation of researchers looked across the borders and opened up the theoretical landscape of German sociology, like Neo-Parsoniansim (Richard Münch), structuration theory (Müller) and rational choice theory (Hartmund Esser, Karl Dieter Opp). So the 1980s was for German sociology an internationalization of theoretical discourse due to the corporation between German and American schools.³⁶

On the other side the reveal of the empirical research was done in this period, with the traditional centres of empirical research in Cologne (*Max Plank Institute of Societal Research*) and Mannheim (*Mannheim Centre for European Social Research*). German empirical research became a well established discipline with a high degree of differentiation, specialization,

³⁴ Lütschen, 25 Years of German Sociology after World War II, s: 22. Müller vd, *Deutsche Soziologie im Umbruch*, s: 19. Hans-Peter Müller, German Sociology at the Beginning of the 90s, *Schweizer Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol 3, 1992, S: 752 -753.

³⁵ Müller vd, *Deutsche Soziologie im Umbruch*, s: 19.

³⁶ Müller, German Sociology at the Beginning of the 90s, s: 755.

professionalization and internationalization, with focus on the empirical work on welfare states, stratification and social systems.³⁷

German Social Theory after Reunification (1990)

In the last two decades Germany was involved in a double agenda. On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall fall, which started the end of communisms and the crumble of the different communist east European regimes between 1989 and 1991. Finally after 40 years the two Germanys merged into one democratic nation. On the other side Germany was in the middle of the European Unification. In the 1990s and 2000s the former six founding nations of the European Communities doubled to the 12 and than 26 nations of the European Union. In 1992 the Maastricht Treaty settled a prospect of unification of Europe in terms of single currency and joint citizenship.

In these dramatic events, German sociologists attempt was to analyze the forces behind these processes of change. Many projects was initiated to document the rapid change after 1989, like the *Komission für sozialen und politischen Wandel* (Commission for social and political change), which commissioned hundreds of small projects about the democratization of East Germany from 1990 to 1994.³⁸ In this context many German sociologist focused their interest on the change in Germany, Eastern Europe and Europe. For example former Marxist *Claus Offe* focused on the problem of societal transition in Eastern Europe, from a sociological “rational choice” point of view. He was sensitive and critical about the Eastern European velvet revolutions, because he doubted that the transition to a market economy, the establishment of a constitutional government, and the definition of a national identity couldn’t solve simultaneously. He also had second thoughts whatever the populations in Eastern Europe had the patience to establish a civil society.³⁹ *Stephan Leibfried* was concerned about the European Unification. He surmised that a United European State could be real. As a welfare state researcher, he stresses that not only an economically and politically, but also an united European “welfare state” should be a viable entity,

³⁷ Müller, *German Sociology at the Beginning of the 90s*, s: 756. Hopf and Müller, *On the Development of Empirical Research in the Federal Republic of Germany*, s: 57 - 60.

³⁸ Uta Gerhardt, *German Sociology*, Continium International Publishing Group, 1998, s:xxiv.

³⁹ Gerhardt, *German Sociology*, s: xxvi.

with the perspective of an “enlightened Social Europe”. While he canvassed existing welfare regimes and castigated each for faults left unsolved, he was convinced that an optimal European welfare regime was possible.⁴⁰

Beside these analyses of the political and social changes in the beginning of the early 1990s, the theoretical landscape of German sociology developed along three theoretical schools, a development which has began in the 1980s and asserted themselves against the hegemonic predominance of Habermas and Luhman. One represent of German rational choice sociology was and is *Hartmut Esser* from Mannheim, who was influenced by Karl Poppers critical rationalism. In earlier years he was mainly active in the field of migration sociology. In his introductory work "Sociology - General Principles" and his later published six volume work "Sociology, Special Principles" Esser introduced his theory of rational decision-making (rational choice) of micro founded methodology in the social sciences. According to Esser, the task of sociology was not the correct description of social processes and systems. In fact, 'explanation' of social events means to detect and analyze relevant phenomena as a result of certain causal factors. For this task Esser used his “Model of sociological explanation” (*Modell der soziologischen Erklärung*, MSE), an enhancement of the ideas of David C. McClelland, James Samuel Coleman, Siegwart Lindenberg.⁴¹ The special feature of the model is that it is valid for all social structures (up to the World Society), by explaining this not in their historical, but in their typical manifestations. Not the actors, but the dynamics of the interaction of multiple actors and actions in the social structure, which enable them to interact in specific interaction frames, are central to the explanation. Esser`s goal is the explanation of regularities of such dynamics. A part of the explanation was the regularly explanation of the choice of action of individual actors, which maintained the dynamic of such social structures.⁴² According to Esser the fundament of everyday human reproduction is the production of resources and their distribution. Therefore all social situations have substantive strategic structures as a basis. The orientation is always on the resources of others. Thus Actors act in a successive reciprocal relationship. The

⁴⁰ Gerhardt, *German Sociology*, s: xxvi.

⁴¹ Hartmut Eser, *Soziologie. Allgemeine Grundlagen*, 2., durchgesehene Auflage, Frankfurt/ Main: Campus 1996.

⁴² Rainer Greshoff, Uwe Schimank, *Hartmut Esser*. In: Dirk Kaesler (hhr.): *Aktuelle Theorien der Soziologie*. München: Beck Verlag, 2005, S. 232.

consequences of action are associated with expectations and evaluations in regard to the decisions of others. Such an action is a "social action", an action in which the actors orientate themselves on the actions of others.⁴³ From social action, three structures develop: 1) Certain forms of social production and distribution practices of resources 2) These structures are institutionally anchored on the obligations and norms. Thus, formal constitutions and social rules for the conduct of actors in social situations develop. 3) There are structural situations - cultural framings. Actors form mental models ("frames") as collectively valid descriptions of each situation, which are marked by certain symbols.⁴⁴

Despite these actual analyses of German society and the change of East Germany, there was a development of new theoretical stands, which started in the 1980s and developed further in the 1990s and 2000s. One representative of these developments was *Richard Münch*, who is regarded as the most 'American' German sociologist. In the 1980s and early 1990s he was initially a fairly orthodox representative of *Talcott Parsons* structure functionalist system theory. Münch had a crucial role to defend Parsons System Theory in Germany against competitive actor centered approaches and against Luhman system theory in the 1980s. In his work "Theory of Action" (1982) Münch tries a reconstruction of the theories of Talcott Parsons, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, whereas Parsons "AGIL schema" acts for him as a frame of reference. The central argument in his work was that functional differentiations in autonomous systems are not a "fundamental design of the modern age", but "a secondary operation, the emphasis on the integrative core of the modern order rather obscured." Parsons was criticized by his adversaries, that he neglects the micro level of individual action to the macro level of societal norms and structures. Münch on the other side defended Parsons by emphasizing the "coexistence of individual autonomy and social order" as "the central idea of modernity."⁴⁵

In the late 1990s Münch turned from theoretical and historical sociology, and more to contemporary empirical diagnosis. In two works on "communication society" (1992, 1995), he emphasized the intensification of global

⁴³ Ibid, S. 233.

⁴⁴ Ibid. s: 234.

⁴⁵ Richard Münch, *Theorie des Handelns. Zur Rekonstruktion der Beiträge von Talcott Parsons, Emile Durkheim und Max Weber*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1982, s:182.

communication flows and their importance for the development of modernity, the central sector in ongoing, dialectical self-criticism for failing to fulfill its own promise-provides. Unlike Habermas, Münch sees modernity not only as an "unfinished" but also as "a project which is not to accomplish". Attempts to explain modernity as a "reality" resulted in totalitarianism, where communism had been such a project. At the same time Richard Münch accords a rebuff to theories of post-modernism, because he sees them as failed attempts to transform society by normative aspects, who promote a retreat into inwardness.⁴⁶ Münch wrote also a comprehensive three volume text book about social theory.⁴⁷

Between Neo Parsionism and Rational Choice theory, the influence of structuration theory and research on German sociology was also important. A number of scholars in different sociological fields were attracted by the early works of *Pierre Bourdieu's* "Distinction" and *Anthony Giddens* "Class Structure".⁴⁸ Theoretically the work on structuration created a possibility to bridge the gap between the action theory and systems theory. But it also fit into the debate on the end of class society, the pluralization of lifestyles and the process of individualization.⁴⁹ *Rainer Geißler* must be mentioned as one representative of German structuration research. His main research area has been the study of social inequality and social structure analysis, with the special focus of the comparison of East and West Germany. In addition, he explored the ethnic minorities in comparison with Germany and Canada. *Stefan Hradil's*, an other important representative of structuration theory, research areas are social stratification, social inequality, social environments and lifestyles, singles, and the future development of modern societies. Both have also written a textbook for students about the German social structure.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Richard Münch, *Dynamik der Kommunikationsgesellschaft*. Frankfurt/ Main Suhrkamp, 1995.

⁴⁷ Richard Münch, *Soziologische Theorie. Bd 1: Grundlegung durch die Klassiker*. Frankfurt/ Main: Campus, 2002, *ibid. Soziologische Theorie. Bd 2: Handlungstheorie*. Frankfurt/ Main: Campus, 2003; *ibid. Soziologische Theorie. Bd 3: Gesellschaftstheorie*. Frankfurt/ Main: Campus, 2004.

⁴⁸ Anthony Giddens, *Die Klassenstruktur fortschrittlicher Industriegesellschaften*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 1979. Pierre Bourdieu, *Der feine Unterschied*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 1982.

⁴⁹ Hans-Peter Müller, *German Sociology at the Beginning of the 90s*, s: 754.

⁵⁰ Stefan, Hradil, *Die Sozialstruktur Deutschlands im internationalen Vergleich*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006. Rainer Geißler, *Die Sozialstruktur Deutschlands. Zur gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung mit einer Bilanz zur Vereinigung*; Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 4., überarbeitete und aktualisierte Auflage, 2006.

One who was beyond these development was *Ulrich Beck*, the most known German sociologist in the international scientific community and one of the very few social scientist, having an influence on public debates in Germany. Beck currently studies modernization, ecological problems, individualization, and globalization. Recently he has also embarked on exploring the changing conditions of work in a world of increasing global capitalism, declining influence of unions, flexibilisation of labor processes, and cosmopolitanism. Albeit his writings often take the form of feuilletonistic essays, Beck has contributed a number of new words in German sociology, including "risk society", "reflexive modernization", and together with *Anthony Giddens* "second modernity". The term "Risk society" emerged during the 1990s and described a society that is organized in response to risk. The term's popularity during the 1990s was both as a consequence of its links to trends in thinking about wider modernity, and also to its links to popular discourse, in particular the growing environmental concerns during the period. Ulrich Beck defines it a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself.⁵¹ Beck has argued that older forms of class structure - based mainly on the accumulation of wealth - atrophy in a modern, risk society, in which people occupy social risk positions that are achieved through risk aversion. "In some of their dimensions these follow the inequalities of class and strata positions, but they bring fundamentally different distribution logic into play".⁵² Beck contends that widespread risks contain a 'boomerang effect', in that individuals producing risks will also be exposed to them. This argument suggests that wealthy individuals whose capital is largely responsible for creating pollution will also have to suffer when, for example, the contaminants seep into the water supply. This argument may seem oversimplified, as wealthy people may have the ability to mitigate risk more easily by, for example, buying bottled water. Beck, however, has argued that the distribution of this sort of risk is the result of knowledge, rather than wealth. Whilst the wealthy person may have access to resources that enable him or her to avert risk, this would not even be an option were the person unaware that the risk even existed.⁵³ In his actual writings he speaks of a world risk society. One aspect of this illustrates the

⁵¹ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. New Delhi: Sage, 1992, s: 21.

⁵² Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society*, s: 21.

⁵³ Beck, *Risk Society*, s: 23.

cosmopolitan consciousness of the common threat of terrorism. Beck argues to put new priorities in political economy. Full employment due of full automation is no longer attainable, national solutions are unrealistic; "neo-liberal medicine" seems not to function. Instead, the state must have guarantee a basic income and thus allow more civic work. Such a solution is only feasible at European level, with common trans-national economic and social standards. In order to curb the power of transnational corporations Beck pleads for the establishment of Trans-National States.⁵⁴

Reflexive modernization therefore is a process of modernization that is characteristic of risk society whereby progress is achieved through reorganization and reform. Science and technology as it is used for the purpose of reflexive modernization is less concerned with expanding the resource base, but rather with re-evaluating that which is already being used by society. There is a constant flow of information between science and industry, and progress is achieved through the resulting reforms and adaptations. Examples of reflexive modernization that have recently gained political momentum are sustainability and the precautionary principle. Some have argued that perhaps 'reflexive Modernization' has been re-framed and is just an expanded term that connects to the Marxian materialist conception of history - or "Historical Materialism".⁵⁵

Second modernity is Beck's term for the period after modernity. Re-modernity is a renaissance of modernity through realization that we cannot control all risks. Politics, science, religion—these were all systems that promised us that they could protect us from the risks we face in our lives. In second modernity we realize that these systems are part of the problem, not the solution, if there even is one. Finally realising that this is the case, we can reassess the situation and try to come up with solutions that incorporate the ideas about our inability to find permanent, perfect solutions. The "solution" according to Beck, though, is a "cosmopolitan realpolitik" in which we recognize this dilemma.⁵⁶

Beck's works and theorems of individualization, reflexive modernity, etc. were hotly and fervidly debated in the sociological circles. But despite of his comprehensive work, his reputation in the international scientific community,

⁵⁴ Ulrich Beck, *Weltrisikogesellschaft*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp 2007.

⁵⁵ Ulrich Beck et al. *Reflexive Modernisierung*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 1996.

⁵⁶ Ulrich Beck, *Was ist Globalisierung?*, Frankfurt/Main:Suhrkamp, 1997.

his membership on the *Commission for Future of Saxony and Bavaria*, and his awards for his live time work with international prizes, Beck's work was never acknowledged by German sociologists. The majority of German sociologists maintain a collective "Beck Bashing", because they had their reservations with his work. His adversaries argued that his work mostly reflexes his own political and personal biases and that it is about political philosophy, but not concrete empirical sociology, where some known societal facts are provided with some new buzzword.⁵⁷ But even his greatest critics must confess that Ulrich Beck is one of the few white hopes of German sociology, what was acknowledged by the fact, that he was awarded with the price of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie* in 2004.⁵⁸

The Lost of Public "Discourse Supremeness"

In the last two decades a social processes of change has taken place, which can be summarized by globalization, Europeanization and individualization. The victory of capitalism over socialism in 1989 has challenged all social achievements of the last decades. Social rights are now too expensive and inefficient. The previously tamed capitalism shows with globalization his true face, which can be summarized by unemployment, dependency and poverty. Europeanization and the realization of the four fundamental freedoms - goods, services, capital and work - creates an economic domestic market, but also reduces the transaction cost for the economic change and implements some economic dynamics. But this economic Europe isn't accompanied by a political and social Europe, which is able to set a democratic identity and collective conciseness for some common European social standards. With individualization comes differentiation of life courses and the urge to fit the life biography on the requirements of the market economy. This is accompanied by the understanding that social and emotional security of the past has gone and that the solidarity of the generations is on trial. But the paradox on all these developments is the expectation, that the national state, who loses his power

⁵⁷ Volker Stork, *Die „Zweite Moderne“ – ein Markenartikel? Zur Antiquiertheit und Negativität der Gesellschaftsutopie von Ulrich Beck*, Opladen: UVK-Verl.-Ges, 2001.

⁵⁸ Robald Hinzler, *Ulrich Beck*, Dirck Kaesler (Ed.) *Aktuelle Theorien der Soziologie – Von Shmuel N. Eisenstadt bis zur Postmoderne*, München: Beck, s: 271.

and sovereignty to other international institutions, should correct the external cost of these developments.⁵⁹

Is German sociology able to give some solid answers to these societal questions? One must accept that during the last two decades sociology in Germany lost his importance for the public, despite the intellectual and scientific developments and successes of German sociology and despite of the person of Ulrich Beck or Jürgen Habermas. Compared with the 1970s and 1980s, it has no influence on the public and on politics and is faced with a subtle loss of significance. It has lost his “interpretive supremacy” of societal developments and changes to other scientific disciplines like economics, biology, anthropology, cultural, and political science.⁶⁰

What are the reasons for the crisis of German sociology at the beginning of the 21st century? As in the case of social scientific interpretation, there is never one explanation. Some have to do with the theoretical development of sociology in general and others with the development of the academic situation of sociology in Germany.

First of all one should remember that German sociology is integrated in the theoretical turns of international sociological discourse. While in the 1970s and 1980s the intellectual discussion was dominated by the discrepancy between Luhman`s system theory and Habermas action theory, the micro sociological turn in international sociology has also affected German sociology.⁶¹ The dominance of the two social theories was replaced by other micro sociological paradigms, like the rational choice theory of Hartmut Esser. But the problem of such theories is, that they aren`t able to give a solid analyze of society. For example the focus of rational choice theories lies on the economic approach, with a specific utility function of actions, where the individual auteur is treated only as a point of reference for different considerations of utility. Society is then not an entity of collective representation and social reciprocity, but an

⁵⁹ Müller, Soziologie in der Eremitage - Skizze einer Standortbestimmung, s: 46 - 48. Hans Bude, Wo steht die Soziologische Theorie heute?, Hans Peter Müller (hhr.) *Gesellschaftsbilder im Umbruch – Soziologische Perspektiven in Deutschland*, Opladen: Leske & Buderich, 2001, s: 73 - 78.

⁶⁰ Hans Peter Müller, Soziologie in der Eremitage - Skizze einer Standortbestimmung, Hans Peter Müller, (hhr.) *Gesellschaftsbilder im Umbruch – Soziologische Perspektiven in Deutschland*, Opladen: Leske & Buderich, 2001, s: 39.

⁶¹ Müller, Soziologie in der Eremitage - Skizze einer Standortbestimmung, s: 41.

accumulation of markets for employment, marriage, knowledge, and faith.⁶² So one must ask, if micro sociological theories, with their focus on daily interactions between individuals, are able to give solid answers to social, economic and political transformations to which people are committed. Because the insight that a phone call builds up a whole society, is not very adjuvant for the understanding of actual societal conflicts.⁶³

On the other side German sociology and especially social theory has lost its holistic normative paradigm. Sociological knowledge no longer assumes a consistent and integrative form of the social, but an individualization of the actions and paths of lives. The changes form a normative to a more systematic and individual sociological understanding of sociology, has also affected sociological sensitivity. While the normative approach, represented by the influential Frankfurt School, asked about the reference of value of an action and the allocation of rights and duties in a specific organization, the new approach asks about daily decision making processes of individuals.⁶⁴ Because of this individualistic turn, social theory is not able to perform concrete answers for the societal changes and processes of contemporary (German) society. Sociology has lost its ability to analyze societal crisis, because it lacks on solid empirical in formations. A normative sociology, which tries to give answers to actual problems, becomes more and more to social philosophy, without empirical relevance.⁶⁵ A social philosophy which is maybe discussed in the opinion pages of the daily newspapers, but has no influence on policy and on the societal discourse. But a sociology, which has lost his ability to analyze society and the changes within society, is confronted with the lost of legitimacy. Sociology became a science of modernity because it was able to identify the term of society or "Gesellschaft". German sociology is not without any interesting discussions in German sociology. But these discussions are held in specific journals, excluding the public, compared with the historian quarrel in the 1960 or the positivism controversy, where the discussions were led in daily news papers, and a much bigger part of the German public was involved. And

⁶² Bude, *Wo steht die Soziologische Theorie heute?*, s: 69.

⁶³ Bude, *Wo steht die Soziologische Theorie heute?*, s: 66.

⁶⁴ Bude, *Wo steht die Soziologische Theorie heute?*, s: 68.

⁶⁵ Bude, *Wo steht die Soziologische Theorie heute?*, s: 66.

because of these developments, German sociology loses its “supremeness of interpretation” and is confronted with an “insecurity of interpretation”

But besides these external influences, German sociology is also affected by internal developments. One is the separation of social theory and empirical social research, while the last one has began to dominate the bulk of contemporary sociological research. Compared with the 1960s and 1970s, empirical research is today without a grand theoretical background, while social theory lacks of a solid empirical base. Even there are some noble exceptions like *Peter Flora* from the *Mannheim Centrum for European Social Research* in Mannheim and *Renate Mayntz* form the *Max Planck Institute for Societal Research* in Cologne, the two leading centers of German empirical research, and other younger scholars, who tries to combine empirical research with a solid theoretical background, the bigger part of empirical research gets by with social theory.⁶⁶

On the other side German sociology has made some internal changes. The further development of German sociology as a science implicates its fragmentation and specialization. While in the past there was only few “schools” of “sociological all-rounder”, sociology today has been transformed to a “sociology of hymen”, which produces today specialist of specific research area.⁶⁷ For example the DGS counts 34 special sections of research, like sociology of childhood, social policy or sociology of Eastern- and Middle-eastern Europe. This has also to do with internal informal rules of the German academic business, which forces young social scientists to narrow their research interests and to become specialists in an area.⁶⁸ So one must ask, if the training of specialist, with a very narrow perception of society, is useful to understand central contemporary societal developments.

At the same time there is also a personal change in German sociology, 60 percent of all professors will be retired. But that doesn't mean that the emeriti will leave the university or the research and make way for younger scholars. Mostly they will fill leading positions in research institutes and continue as

⁶⁶ Bude, *Wo steht die Soziologische Theorie heute?*, s: 69.

⁶⁷ Müller vd, *Deutsche Soziologie im Umbruch*, s: 15.

⁶⁸ Renate Mayntz, *Eine sozialwissenschaftliche Karriere im Fächerspagat*, Hans Martin Bolte, Friedhelm Neidhardt (hzr.): *Soziologie als Beruf. Erinnerungen westdeutscher Hochschulprofessoren der Nachkriegsgeneration*, Baden- Baden: Nomos, s: 292.

managing directors or senior researchers. Or will furthermore teach as honorary professors at universities. By contrast the majority of the junior scientist between 30 and 45 is engaged with teaching obligations and administrative tasks. So they have no time for academic research, or to develop new ideas. The only way is to leave the country, to find better research opportunities, but this option is realized by few scientists. Sometimes a residence in a foreign country is accompanied with problems, when the scientist wants to return back to Germany.⁶⁹ German universities also lack on specific positions for young researchers, who can take responsibility in early years. The attempt to establish junior professor or tenure positions in Germany has not become widely accepted. Young researchers who have defended their postdoctoral lecture qualification, the *Habilitation*, are still confronted with the fact, that they must leave their "home university" and work in less paid private lecture positions, without a chance to become a professor. So the majority of the young academics try to adjust the miserable situation on the German universities, sometimes without any security for their academic and financial future. But in such a system and situation, German sociology isn't able to produce new ideas and distinguished academics, because the important positions are still occupied by the old one.⁷⁰

Conclusion

If we draw a picture of contemporary German sociology, the result wouldn't be very pleasant. On the one side, there is the remarkable development of German sociology after the end of Second World War. During the national socialist dictatorship, German sociology ceased to exist. Only with efforts of the re-emigrants and the founding fathers of post-war sociology, like von Wiese, König, etc., sociology in Germany could recover his former reputation. The development is astonishing. Until the End of 1980s, German sociology was a leading science for analysing social and societal problems. Theories like the Marxist critical theory had an enormous influence on the imagination and academic socialization of a generation of students. Post-war German sociology has afforded very important sociologists, who had a significant influence in the

⁶⁹ For description of the situation and problems of returnees, see Ludger Pries, *Die Transnationalisierung der sozialen Welt und die deutsche Soziologie*, *Soziale Welt* 50, 1999, s: 383 – 394,

⁷⁰ Müller, *Soziologie in der Eremitage - Skizze einer Standortbestimmung*, s: 42.

international scientific community, like Ralf Dahrendorf, Niklas Luhman, Jürgen Habermas or Ulrich Beck. Never before have so many young students studied sociology, which has developed to an established science, with outstanding research institutes and universities.

But despite these outstanding developments, German sociology has lost its leading role as a science of analyzing the problems and changes of German society. It is justified to say, that sociology in Germany is in danger to become a second rank science of meaninglessness. There are a plenty of reasons for this development. On the one hand, Sociology in general experienced a theoretical transformation, like the micro sociological turn. It doesn't develop normative grand theories and leading paradigms anymore, with the ability to analyse society and give answers to social problems, which has developed due to the political and economic changes in the 1990s. On the other hand, German sociology has internal problems. The diseases are its fragmentation, the separation between social theory and empirical research, the inability of the universities to produce sociological all-rounder, and internal debates which has no effect on the public or policy makers.

So what is the future of German sociology? It is a matter of fact that sociology as an academic discipline will continue. But will it be sociology with influence on public debates? Or will sociology accept the role of a professional university discipline, which is politically not important and not dangerous, and where the central questions and problems are discussed by other disciplines? The biggest challenge for sociology comes form the natural sciences and especially biology and its sub disciplines like population genetics, nanotechnology, molecular biology or artificial intelligence, which consumes a lot of research grants and attracts public interest.

First of all, the situation is not so pessimistic. The fact that today nobody has any expectations to German sociology can be an advantage. Sociology has the chance to come up against the actual problems of society with a new generation of scientist. What is needed is a new generation of young (or old) sociologist, who are ready to interfere in public debates. The critical theory in the 1960s was successful, because they had understood the problems of the young generation and the contradictions of their era. So sociology in Germany has the advantage to "surprise" society.