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Taking Stock: German Unification as Reflected in the Social Sciences

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Abstract

In the discussion of the sociological and political science research on the unification of Germany the positions range from the view that intra-German transformation has been successful on the whole and that it has begun to stabilize to contentions that eastern Germany has been colonized by western German actors and that Germany's unification has failed. Between these two poles lie arguments calling attention to newly emerging differences between eastern and western Germany. Critically reviewing assessments of German unification, I come to four conclusions. First, the social science discussion about the topic is divided into two debates. One of them is centered on the controversy between the modernisation thesis and assertions by skeptics and critics. The other debate is focused on the problems of controling intra-German transformation. Second, the discussion is largely isolated from research on transformation underway in eastern and central Europe at large. Third, the evaluation of the process, impacts, and perspectives of German unification is affected by the theoretical position of the researchers and the methodological design of their studies. Fourth, the future development of social science research on German unification is being determined by two trends, internationalization and regionalization.

Introduction

Since 1990 political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, and economists have submitted their annual interim assessments of German unification. Amid this year's many anniversaries of signal historical events, it seems more relevant than ever to know how internal unification is fairing, how the living conditions have changed in eastern and western Germany, how German citizens are feeling, whether the pent-up feelings of East Germans have been relieved, what the causes are for the sudden stirrings of nostalgia on both sides, what the financial situation looks like, and so forth. As the scholarly articles on the unification of eastern and western Germany proliferate, it is becoming ever more difficult to keep track of them all. What overall picture does one get from the social science discussion of German unification? All in all, what is the appraisal of the course, impacts, and perspectives of the unification process? Is there something approaching consensus on how it is regarded? In this article I try to answer these three questions by taking stock of selected theses that sociologists and political scientists have put forward in their research on Germany's unification. I assess the interim assessments themselves but only peripherally examine the many individual empirical results.

The discussions about the state of German unification have produced no major theoretical innovations. Participants have usually taken up existing theories in the inventory of transformation research. They have not done so for lack of time or creativity but for the significant explanatory potential that some transformation theories possess. In the years immediately after the shift of regime in eastern Germany, approaches based on modernization theory and agency theory came to dominate so much that they still mold the social science discussion about German unification. For this reason I first outline two currents of this research and then reconstruct the two present social science debates about intra-German transformation.

I. Transformation Research between System and Actor

Given the collapse of the socialist regime in eastern and central Europe, the challenges facing transformation research were enormous. To some observers the absence of fundamental, theoretical innovations since that time thus seems all the more amazing (Mayntz, 1994; Pollack, 1996b). Certainly, no one has been expecting a fully detailed theory of transition from socialist to capitalist society. Rather, the amazement is tinged with skepticism about whether traditional transformation research is capable of providing the descriptive and explanatory potential that is so sorely needed.

Transformation research runs the gamut from macrosociological systems theories to microsociological agency theories (see Beyme, 1994a; Kollmorgen, 1996; Reissig, 1994). The concepts based on systems theory include classical approaches of modernization as well as more recent patterns of argumentation along the lines of Luhmann. The epistemological interest behind approaches based on systems theory in transformation research centers especially on the structural conditions surrounding the collapse of a system and on the macroperspectives of the transformation that begins thereafter. The opposite pole consists of microanalytical agency theories, which embrace analytical concepts of rational choice and descriptive typologies of actors or processes (Beyme, 1994a, p. 88). This research is focused primarily on ideal-type phases of transformation and on the strategic action of individual or collective actors.

Approaches Based on Systems Theory: Modernization Theory

The theoretical paradigm of modernization unites concepts revolving around ”theoretical aspects of structure, function, differentiation, and evolution” (Zapf, 1994, p. 300). A fundamental thesis is that the stability of a social system largely depends on its degree of functional differentiation. Evolutionary universals are regarded as a structural advantage that enhances the efficiency and, ultimately, the long-term survival of a system. In transformation research, epistemological interest is initially concentrated most of all on the fall of the eastern European socialist regimes. According to the conventional pattern of explanation, the nomenklatura prevented the functional differentiation of society, and the resulting lack of modernization eventually eroded performance, contributed to undermining the legitimacy of the political system, and finally caused the regimes to collapse (Geissler, 1993; Zapf, 1991).

Proponents of a more recent systems theory have modified this thesis in two ways. They maintain that the ideologically motivated obstruction of social change vastly inflated the costs of maintaining the system and finally led to bankruptcy (see Sandschneider, 1994). They also argue that the dominance of the political system or political code was the main dysfunction in eastern European societies under socialist (Pollack, 1990).

Researchers who analyze the transformation process in terms of modernization theory build on the interpretation that a lack of modernization caused the collapse of socialist societies. They characterize the transformation as a process of catch-up modernization whose ”recognized objective is the adoption, creation, and incorporation of modern institutions of democracy, the market economy, and the due process of law” (Zapf, 1994, p. 301; see Geissler, 1993; Zapf, 1991). This thesis is flanked by the concept of ongoing modernization ”in the dual sense of steady direction and structural improvement” (Zapf, 1991, p. 35; see Zapf, 1996).

Criticism of this position focuses mostly on the universalism of the modernization paradigm, which is said to give an unhistorical and ethnocentric perspective (Reissig, 1994; Wehling, 1992; see Berger, 1996). Opponents of the paradigm also fault it for its evolutionary determinism, pointing out that transformation is not a one-way street to modernism and that outcome of social changes is actually undetermined. In terms of agency theory, the main weakness of the modernization paradigm is that conceptions rooted in systems theory do not take account of individual and collective actors, a blind spot that amounts to underestimating the degree to which the course of transformation can be affected by the action that they choose to take (Merkel, 1994).

Concepts Based on Agency Theory

In approaches based on agency theory, transformations are viewed as indeterminate processes, as a ”transition from a specific authoritarian system to a nonspecific ‘something else’” (Bos, 1994, p. 84; O’Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). The course and, hence, the result of transformation processes is a function of the action taken by the collective actors involved. According to this theoretical perspective, that group usually consists only of the political elites, whose strategic action is guided by calculations of costs and benefits. Aside from typologies of actors and the concept of rational choice, the theoretical repertoire of agency-based approaches includes phase models (Bos, 1994). In these models, the transformation process is broken down into such phases as liberalization, democratization, and consolidation (O’Donnell & Schmitter, 1986), with interactions taking place between the actors in each phase. Alternative outcomes of these strategic games are conceivable,

depending on the strategies and alliances involved. In each new phase the direction of social development reverts to being undecided (Przeworski, 1991).

Critics of agency theory find it problematic that analyses based on it are confined to processes of democratization. Relevant effects of privatization are usually ignored (Srubar, 1994). Such tunnel vision restricts the perspective to the political elites, an effect that critics are also quick to point out. The mass movements, which did a great deal to topple the German Democratic Republic (GDR) (Zapf, 1991) are not conceived of as actors but rather as the incidental background noise of strategic action that was taken by the political actors. Exception is also taken to the fact that a rational-choice model is posited. Such an assumption is particularly problematic in crises. It is pointed out that the necessary information is not complete or accessible at no cost. In addition, time pressure prevents the information that is available from being evaluated appropriately and the alternatives from being weighed (Lehmbruch, 1996; Reissig, 1994). Another target of criticism is the aggregation of individuals into collective actors, a practice that blurs the heterogeneity of the individual preferences. Lastly, criticism is leveled at the fact that the maneuvering room of actors is determined only by their preferences, with structures of social conflict and institutional and international contexts being relegated to secondary roles only (Lehmbruch, 1996).

Transformation Research: The Two Debates about Unification

In transformation research there is no ”royal road” along one of the two major theories (Merkel, 1994, pp. 321-326; see Kollmorgen, 1996). Both paradigms have their special explanatory potential and shortcomings. For that reason some authors assert that combining systems theory and agency theory could be promising for transformation research (Merkel, 1994; Srubar, 1994), with structuralist concepts mediating between the system and the actor.

Among the structuralist approaches are class theories, whose proponents emphasize that class and governmental structures characterizing the societies of origin affect the course of transformation processes (Moore, 1969; Rueschemeyer, Huber-Stephens, & Stephens, 1992). In another current of thought, the international context is stressed as a salient factor of social development. According to these authors, the success of the transition to democracy depends largely on major international events, global trends and cycles, and specific constellations of power (Schmitter, 1985). In the structuralist approaches it is generally thought likely that certain corridors of social development exist but that the course of transformation processes is indeterminate within them.

These structuralist concepts are felt to be capable of functioning as bridges between modernization theory and agency theory primarily because they stress the limitation of the maneuvering room available to individual or collective actors. Merkel argues for an approach in which ”logics of functional subsystems, systemic demands of transformation, social and power structures, institutions, and the international context are understood as constraints on the strategic action taken by political actors, with each constraint needing to be spelled out individually” (Merkel, 1994, pp. 325-326).

The hopes of arriving at a viable, integrative concept have thus far not been met either for research on eastern Europe or for unification research. In social science debates about German unification, the focus on systems continues side by side with that on actors. One track is occupied by the controversy between the advocates of modernization theory and their critics; along the other track there is a moderate convergence between concepts based on agency theory and concepts of an institutionalist nature.

II. The Modernization Debate

The debate about modernization is proceeding as a controversy between supporters and critics of the assertion that eastern Germany has successfully almost caught up on modernization. Scholars in the former group maintain that unification has proceeded successfully thus far because the transfer of institutions was completed quickly and efficiently, the adaptation of living standards has come a long way, the gains of unification outweigh the losses, and the transformation process has begun to stabilize (Zapf & Habich, 1994, 1996).

The rejoinders differ considerably in their theoretical orientation and degree of radical divergence. First, it is charged that living conditions have not reached parity yet and will not do so in the foreseeable future (Biedenkopf, 1994; Miegel, 1994; Riedmüller, 1994). Second, it is pointed out that catch-up modernization in eastern Germany will not be successful in the long run if it remains unidimensional. Critics hold that the negative modernization effects observable in western industrialized societies call instead for ”a change in the rules of the game” and that such a change is manageable only by means of ”reflexive” (Beck, 1994) or ”double” (Klein, 1994) modernization. That is, eastern Germany should not simply adopt western German institutions wholesale but should also improve upon them. Further objections to ”catch-up” modernization focus both on the discrepancy between the modernized world of systems and the life world of eastern Germans (Kupferberg, 1994; Lepsius, 1991; Offe, 1991; Woderich, 1992a, 1996) and on

new differences that are claimed to be emerging between eastern and western Germany (Fach, 1995; Geissler, 1995). The following pages are devoted to presenting the key theses in this dispute:

- The transformation of eastern Germany has begun to stabilize
- A new gap has opened between eastern and western Germany
- It is necessary for eastern Germans to take their own path
- Double modernization is imperative
- Institutional transfer has failed
- The life world is persistent (socialization thesis)
- Eastern Germans are compensating for perceived western German deprecation of their life experience
- Eastern Germans have a subjective head start in modernization

The Thesis that the Transformation of eastern Germany Has Begun to Stabilize

”Five years after unification, German-German transformation is beginning to stabilize (Zapf & Habich, 1995, p. 137). Some of the dramatic processes of social change that have accompanied eastern Germany’s efforts to catch up on modernization have ended or are proceeding much more slowly than they did in the initial years. Zapf and Habich point to a number of empirical results substantiating this thesis. The scale of migration from eastern to western Germany has shrunk drastically, and the decline in the number of births, marriages, and divorces has halted in eastern Germany. The transfer of western institutions has been completed. On the whole, the majority of eastern Germans view the results of unification positively (Zapf & Habich, 1996).

The authors offer three explanations of how the people managed to deal with the shock of the change they went through. At the level of the individual, the events that have been experienced since the regime shift has been positive as a whole. Second, most eastern German households have registered a significant absolute increase in their quality of life. Third, these processes of comparison are generally yielding favorable results in the relative sense as well (Zapf & Habich, 1995).

Zapf (1995) named four criteria for investigating social change: pace, depth, consistency of direction, and controllability. For the most part, German transformation has been rated positively on the first three criteria. Rose, Zapf, Seifert, and Page (1993), Wiesenthal (1995a), and Zapf and Habich (1995) have stressed the privileged status enjoyed by eastern Germany compared to other societies undergoing transformation in eastern and central Europe. According to these authors, the greatest advantage for eastern Germany has been

the speed of change. No other country has modernized as quickly as former East Germany. The rapid pace of change has been made possible by the mode of transformation, in which the transfer of western institutions to eastern Germany was accompanied by massive funding to cushion the economic and social impacts of the changes. Rose et al. (1993) emphasized that there was a ”ready-made state” for eastern Germany to adopt. In their view, the region has therefore been spared the great uncertainties of having to build a state based on the due process of law while simultaneously having to create ”the institutions necessary for a modern market economy” (Rose et al., 1993, pp. 24). The privileged status of eastern Germany is also evident when one compares living conditions in eastern and central European societies undergoing transition (Seifert & Rose, 1994; Spéder, Schultz, & Habich, 1996).

As concerns the fourth criterion, controllability, transformation in eastern Germany has been seen more skeptically. In explanation, Zapf and Habich (1995, p. 155) have pointed to the social and economic impacts of institutional transfer, ”some of which were completely unforeseen and uncontrollable.” They have added that united Germany has ”definite problems of direction both in terms of her new international role and the ongoing development of her basic institutions themselves” (Zapf & Habich, 1995, pp. 346-347). In this view the process of modernization is not following any kind of evolutionary determinism; it is a ”struggle being fought by reformers and innovators against inertia and resistance” a struggle from which ”a ‘long-wave’ pattern is increasingly emerging as a trend” (Zapf & Habich, 1996, p. 14).

A key argument of the thesis that the transformation is beginning to stabilize is that the transfer of the western German institutional order is bringing about a reduction in the difference between eastern Germany and the Länder of former West Germany. These processes have been studied in a number of empirical analyses of social structure (Andress, 1996; Bertram, Hradil, & Kleinhenz, 1995; Diewald & Mayer, 1996), welfare development (Glatzer & Noll, 1995; Zapf & Habich, 1996), values and attitudes (Bertram, 1995; Bürklin, 1995; Häder & Häder, 1995; Klages & Gensicke, 1993), and political culture (Niedermayer & Beyme, 1994).

Bürklin (1995) came to positive results in his interim assessment of politicocultural change. According to him, democratic attitudes have increasingly spread since the regime shift, but change has not been confined to eastern Germany. Bürklin has asserted that there are several retroeffects that specifically eastern German attitudes have had on the political culture of unified Germany. They pertain to social equality, the role of the state, and religion’s place in society. Regional peculiarities and traditions that are still present, said Bürklin (1995), can continue to exist and can contribute to a ”self-assertive narrowing of differences between the two parts of Germany” (p. 21).

The Thesis that a New Gap Has Opened between Eastern and Western Germany

The pointed thesis that eastern Germany has largely succeeded in catching up on modernization has been amended, refuted, and sharply contradicted many times. True, the assessment that the lives of eastern Germans has improved on the whole since German unification and that the gains outweigh the losses overall has been confirmed by other studies. However, some authors call attention to phenomena indicating a new divergence between eastern and western Germany that is difficult to reconcile with the thesis that transformation has began to stabilize.

Geissler (1995), too, found that living conditions in eastern Germany have improved and, hence, have approached the quality of life enjoyed in western Germany. But his analyses of sociostructural change showed that the divergence cited above was superimposed upon this development. He asserted that an ”uncertainty differential” had arisen (Geissler, 1995, p. 126). Moreover, he maintained that eastern and western Germany were entering a new ”regional distribution conflict” that was accompanied in eastern Germany by aspects of economic, cultural, political, and social degradation (Geissler, 1995, pp. 132-134). Geissler identified at least four phenomena that are exacerbating the conflict. First, western Germans are wont to legitimate Intra-German east-west inequality in meritocratic terms. Second, eastern Germans view the social and economic impacts of German unification as a consequence of unification policy rather than of the abortive economic and social policies of the bygone GDR regime. Third, the standards of eastern Germans have been oriented solely to those of western Germans, not those of their former socialist brothers. Fourth, eastern Germans have overestimated western German solidarity, a miscalculation that has resulted not least from the ”internal estrangement” between eastern and western Germans (Geissler, 1995, pp. 135-137). Geissler has argued that the feeling of ”national community and solidarity” and ”multiple factorization of conflict into its constituent facets” in Germany’s institutional structure are to be considered phenomena that mute conflicts (Geissler, 1995, p. 137).

Newly arising differences between eastern and western Germany have been observed by means of sociostructural analyses and studies on political and cultural attitudes. Fach has resolutely rejected Bürklin’s thesis that the political attitudes of eastern and western Germans are converging. Quite the contrary, there has been ”re-estrangement” (*Wiederentfremdung*) (Fach, 1995, p. 25). The author based his reasoning on three phenomena observed among eastern Germans: ”preinstitutional (*vorpolitisch*) practices motivated by solidarity,” ”instrumental compliance” with the state, and ”calculated incompatibility” with the political system (Fach, 1995, pp. 25-28). Fach perceives a widening difference between the mentalities of eastern and western Germans. In western Germany, according to him, the ”democratic credo [has developed] from output orientation to system support.” In eastern Germany ”system support . . . was perceptible for one crazy moment at most, and an aloof output orientation has shimmered through more and more clearly ever since” (Fach,

1995, p. 29). Despite all the common aspects found by researchers analyzing the mentalities of eastern and western Germans, they come to the conclusion that the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) is still a long way from internal unification (Kaase, 1996).

The improvements in eastern German living conditions have not been ignored by Winkler (1995), who has noted that new alternatives, such as broader consumer choice, freedom to travel, and the new possibilities for participating in society as one wishes, have been largely accepted by eastern Germans and regarded as a gain. According to Winkler, however, the rating of individual areas of life is mixed, with most gains being perceived in personal freedom and living standards. By contrast, a sense of loss dominates where employment, the social safety net, and personal safety are concerned (Winkler, 1995, p. 23). These experiences are having definite impacts on the individual's expectations of the future. The hope is for further improvement in leisure, housing, education, health, and the environment. The majority of persons interviewed, however, expressed fear that conditions would worsen in employment, the social safety net, personal safety, and living with children (Winkler, 1995, p. 22). Given this empirical study, Winkler has come to a rather skeptical evaluation of German unification. The growing criticism that eastern Germans are voicing about the process of unification has resulted, says Winkler, from the negative social impacts of unification. It is still a very open question "what the citizens of the new German *Länder* actually feel and assess to be progress" (Winkler, 1995, p. 47).

The Thesis that It Is Necessary for Eastern Germans to Take Their Own Path

Whereas proponents of the thesis that the transformation is becoming stabilized assert that differences in the living standards within eastern and western Germany are narrowing, other authors maintain that the gap is nowhere close to being closed. The glass is not half full, but half empty. Their criticism culminates in the demand for eastern Germany to take its own stand on development. The idea that eastern Germany can catch up with the West in a "headlong chase" is an illusion in the opinion of Riedmüller (1994), according to whom eastern Germany "objectively has no chance to eliminate the lag in modernization between it and western countries within a generation or the foreseeable future" (p. 16; see Nolte, Sitte, & Wagner, 1995; Wegner, 1996). The alternative to modernization theory's "tunnel vision" of convergence in living standards could lie in greater regional independence. In this view, eastern German interests could be pursued with "regional self-assertion" more successfully than has been the case thus far. As stated by the author, however, the downside of this alternative is the comparatively high transfer costs involved and the ensuing increase in the inclination to leave the region (Riedmüller, 1994, p. 16).

Saxony's Minister-President, Kurt Biedenkopf (1994), addressed this thesis, taking the position that "chasing to catch-up" is neither promising nor reasonable to demand. In his view, the question is whether rapid convergence is even desirable given the social, cultural, and economic costs that can be expected. Biedenkopf has argued instead that Germany's new *Länder* need to find their "own way." The political objective should be to scale back the goal of reaching western German standards and to develop a different "mix of economic and noneconomic objectives" (Biedenkopf, 1994, p. 65). In his view, sensitive consideration of eastern German potential can facilitate improvement in living conditions even without an increase in output, but "viable structures must be preserved and expanded where possible" (Biedenkopf, 1994, p. 65).

As described by Miegel (1995, p. 8), no decision has been made yet on whether living conditions in eastern Germany are to be brought up to western German standards or whether Germany's new *Länder* are to determine for themselves what they need. As he put it, the convergence of eastern and western Germany, should this option be pursued, must not be confined to economic and social aspects but must embrace the entire "human dimension" (Miegel, 1994, p. 7). In Miegel's estimation, much more would thereby by asked of those receiving transfers than from those giving them. The former would have to forfeit part of their identity. Miegel (1994, p. 7) urges in this context that policy "respect the inclination to preserve identity."

The Thesis that Double Modernization Is Imperative

Advocates of this position neither point to new inequalities between eastern and western Germany nor call for eastern Germany to take a special path of its own. They take exception in general to the path being taken toward modernization. Their criticism is aimed primarily at the thought of embedding eastern Germany's catch-up modernization in the concept of ongoing modernization applied to Germany as a whole. They are especially critical of the associated principle that the direction remain consistent. Klein is persuaded that the approach of unidimensional modernization falls short (Brie & Klein, 1992; Klein, 1994). In his opinion, transformation can be successful only if it takes place as a process of double modernization. For that process to be possible, it is necessary to view the eastern German transformation as "the temporal synchronization and interference of entirely different processes of social upheaval" (Klein, 1994, p. 36). To Klein, double modernization means "catching up on establishing the freely evolving basic institutions of capitalist modernism while also seeking to change them profoundly" (Klein, 1994, pp. 40-41).

The scenario centers on the global hazards that are coalescing into a crises of civilization. Klein (1994, pp. 36-39) mentions the ”recent high-tech phase of the technological revolution,” which has intensified competition; the ”crisis of Fordism” as expressed by weak growth, mass unemployment, and the crisis in the world of work and the welfare state; the ”struggles for a new constellation of hegemony”; and the impacts of the transformation in neighboring eastern and central European societies whose political and economic experience is closely akin to that in eastern Germany. It is understandable that not all problematic dimensions have been addressed, but the author finds it ominous ”that insufficient light has been cast upon them . . . in the relevant discourses of the various groups of elites and that policy is therefore suffering from great shortcomings in strategy” (Klein, 1994, p. 39).

In his most recent publication, Klein (1996) has focused his argumentation on the ”crisis of Fordism,” saying that the demise of socialism has exacerbated the crisis of capitalist societies. In his view it is necessary to compensate especially for those integrative, reform-promoting effects that the existence of state socialism used to encourage in capitalist modernism (Klein, 1996, p. 365). He has recommended an entire catalogue of reforms ranging from ”efforts to make a transition to a new logic of development that preserves civilization” to the use of ”post-Fordism’s opportunities for growth” and ”decisive democratization of the entire society” (Klein, 1996, pp. 36-37). Klein himself, however, is more or less pessimistic about the chances of seeing these reform projects succeed in the foreseeable future.

The Thesis that Institutional Transfer Has Failed

The adherents of this position maintain that the transfer of western German institutions to eastern Germany has failed and infer from this viewpoint that explanations based on modernization theory need to be revised in general (see Müller, 1995). They concede that modernization theory did briefly become the preferred pattern for interpreting the unification process but that the course of the transformation has shown the ”optimism of modernization theory” to have been inappropriate (Müller, 1995, p. 15). The socialist legacy, as seen from this perspective, has not only distinctly complicated but virtually blocked the planned process of market-induced modernization. It follows that liberalization of economic and political life has therefore been unable to free endogenous potential for development, so the economic and political departure has stalled in the societies being transformed in central and eastern Europe, including eastern Germany.

The observers supporting this position contend that the course of the transformation in eastern Germany, taking place as it did within the framework of German unification, was bound to prove itself to be a privileged, special path. It is true that the restructuring of eastern Germany from a planned economy into a free-enterprise system was accompanied by the introduction of West German labor law, the West German social safety net, and start-up funding. Compared to the situation in the other societies undergoing transformation, these arrangements were undoubtedly privileges. According to Müller, however, the salient point is not the fact that transfers were made but rather the question of whether it was possible for that aid to be effective. ”Was East German society, for lack of a civil infrastructure and an established entrepreneurial class, at all capable of adopting the media of indirect control and the behavior demanded in developed capitalist societies?” (Müller, 1995, p. 23). Was it not necessary to reckon with ”habitual resistance, fatalistic passivity, and a welfare mentality?” (Müller, 1995, p. 24). The issue is certainly debatable (see the next thesis). More important in this context, though, is the question of why Müller has insisted on a revision of modernization theory. He has maintained that there is an ”amazing affinity between the political and the theoretical pattern” of modernization theory (Müller, 1995, p. 33). Müller reasons that the shortcomings of the political procedure should be compared to the weaknesses of the theoretical model. Proponents of modernization research, he said, should therefore reinstate the interdisciplinarity of the classical approach, give up the illusion of self-organizing markets, and reformulate transformational topics through interdisciplinary discourse.

The Thesis that the Life World Is Persistent (Socialization Thesis)

The thesis of the life world’s persistence can be read as a critique rooted in agency theory and aimed at the notion that institutional transfer from western too eastern Germany has proceeded largely without problems. Early on, Lepsius (1991) pointed out the discrepancy between the institutions transferred from the West and the biographical experiences of East Germans: ”First, these institutions exist in relative isolation from the individual life experience and biographical identity of [East Germans], especially insofar as the latter had been shaped by the vastly different institutional system of the East German state” (p. 73). Offe (1991) was considerably more skeptical. He feared that ”the West German institutional ships that have advanced into GDR waters will run aground” (p. 79).

Woderich (19921, 1992b, 1996) has stressed the significance that the life world has for the course of eastern German transformation. ”Life-world ‘knowledge’ (thinking, having an opinion, believing) provides many patterns of interpretation and action, resources that can be activated or shut down, reformatted, and formed into new figures of behavior or

action, depending on the challenges arising from the system" (Woderich, 1992a, p. 58). Life worlds are formed through social and cultural history and can therefore only change relatively slowly. In phases of accelerated social change, a discrepancy arises between the systems world and the life world. The life world that formed in the era of the GDR appears obsolete to observers today, particularly because the "persistence" of that life world is becoming apparent. This obstinacy is expressed in resistance to change, and the author suspects that "established ways of appraising, perceiving, and interpreting the societal world" lie behind it (Woderich, 19921, p. 58). The "dual identity" of the eastern Germans and their characteristic value orientations and mentalities are phenomena of this kind. The thesis that the life world is persistent becomes especially relevant when one emphasizes that willingness to change is essential if the transformation is to succeed. "Must the population not have quite a large degree of willingness to change in order to absorb such a dramatic transformation of the system and behave creatively toward it?" (Kupferberg, 1994, p. 46). As long as the life world's patterns of interpretation and action fail to meet the demands of a modern systems world, there will be little 'development' or 'modernization'" (Kupferberg, 1994, p. 55).

The paths of transformation taken by very different societal groups such as teachers and self-employed individuals have been tracked in a number of empirical studies (Koch, Thomas, & Woderich, 1993). In those dealing with the "patterns of action and interpretation of teachers," Koch, Schröter, and Woderich (1994) investigated the discrepancy between the life world and the systems world as an "arena of tension between external and internal school reform" (p. 14). The authors came to the conclusion that it is "counterproductive for something new, no matter what its nature, to be juxtaposed with something old that has been discredited, for new school structures to be introduced without their compatibility being considered" (Koch, Schröter, & Woderich, 1994, p. 70).

On the whole, the extraordinary skepticism of earlier articles such as Offe's can no longer be sustained. All in all, the institutions that have been transferred are functioning surprisingly well. The thesis of the life world's persistence has regained relevance as an explanation for an observed slump in the mood in eastern Germany. Initially euphoric about the free market and democracy, eastern Germans would now rate them lower than shortly after the regime shift. According to the explanation that has meanwhile become customary, this change indicates a revitalization of the socialist life world.

The Thesis that Eastern Germans Are Compensating for Perceived Western German Deprecation of Their Life Experience

Pollack (1996a) has doubted that the Eastern Germans' increasing skepticism about the western German institutional system is to be attributed to socialization in the GDR. If the life world had been influenced as profoundly as some authors presume, a stable and consistent society would have been necessary. The GDR, however, was anything but stable and consistent. The ever greater distance between the citizenry and the GDR's leading organ, the Socialist Unity Party (SED), led instead to people's ever greater turn to western values. Pollack's reasoning picks up the motif of eastern Germany's past having been discredited. The change in the attitudes of united Germany's new citizens is attributable to the consequences of unification. However, those attitudes are not necessarily an expression of negative experience that eastern Germans have had with the new institutions but more "a direct result of the perceived disdain of the GDR's past and the contempt that former East German citizens have encountered" (Pollack, 1996a, p. 16). This disdain has led Pollack back to "communicational misunderstandings." According to him, they have generated among eastern Germans the feeling of being "second-class citizens." The poorer rating of western institutions is thus intended to compensate for the degradation that eastern Germans have felt at the hands of western Germans. The author has stated that "the eastern Germans are in the process of building up a special culture with a strong need to set themselves apart from western Germany, a special eastern German consciousness based on different values" Pollack, 1996a, p. 16). In Pollack's opinion, only the rapid convergence of living conditions can reverse this trend.

Pollack is not alone in this interpretation. A German politician, Wolfgang Thierse, has written that East Germans have become strangers in their own country (Thierse, 1994). According to him, there are aspects of "obstinate self-assertion, of efforts to reject the devaluation of what they had achieved in their lives and to defend their biographies" (p. 52). It is true that this nostalgia and the growing rejection of everything western German—even just simply western—is "annoying," but "how else is one to defend oneself against this consuming feeling of inferiority?" (Thierse, 1994, pp. 52-53). This argument figures also in Wiesenthal's explanation of the "dissatisfaction syndrome" he has observed in eastern Germany. "Wounded self-esteem" is the cause for the "collective opposition" by eastern Germans (Wiesenthal, 1996b, p. 54).

The compensation thesis contrasts starkly with the position taken by adherents of modernization theory, according to whom the transfer of institutions to eastern Germany has brought eastern and western Germany closer together than they used to be. In general, this may have been possible according to Wiesenthal, but the opposite was achieved in the course of German unification. The "linear transfer of institutions not only raised unrealistic expectations but also threw away opportunities for innovation and experimentation" (Wiesenthal, 1996b, p. 54). In eastern Germany, this neglect of eastern German experience

comes across to Wiesenthal not only as a forfeiture of endogenous development potential but also as deprecation. The consequence in his eyes is the deepening alienation between eastern and western Germany, estrangement that is presently manifested in the observed rejection of western German institutions.

The Thesis that Eastern Germans Have a Subjective Head Start in Modernization

This thesis is directed against the view that everything of eastern German origin slows or completely blocks modernization. It builds on the discussion about shortcomings and head starts in modernization in eastern Germany shortly after the regime shift. Whereas at that time objective dimensions such as the ”lag in the service sector” and the ”head start in equal rights for women” were examined (Geissler, 1992; Berger, 1991), some authors today are interested in subjective factors (Hradil, 1996; Sahner, 1996). Modernization, they have said, is surely wanting in a number of subjective ways in eastern Germany. Research on milieu and life style is said to show that traditional milieus exist on a larger scale there than in western German Länder (see Vester, Homann, & Zierke, 1995) and that domestic and more modest life styles are more common in eastern than in western Germany (see Spellerberg, 1996). What is ”typically German,” such as the pressure to conform, inwardness, and a patriarchal concept of the state, are expressed more often in eastern than in western Germany. According to Hradil (1996), these aspects add up to a ”picture of a clear disparity between eastern and western German thinking about modernization” (p. 67). He has asserted that this disparity is highly problematic because it jeopardizes the success of the modernization process.

However, Hradil (1996) has also noted peculiarly eastern phenomena that seem suited to filling the voids in the life world of western modernism. These voids include ”lack of cohesion, public spirit, sense of community, subjective meaning, secondary virtues, personal identity, and integrity” (p. 70). He has maintained that compensatory structures emerged very slowly in western Germany. By contrast, some of these patterns still exist in eastern Germany. Community spirit, the ability that eastern Germans have to cope with chaos, the web of economic connections, private networks, functioning neighborhoods, and regional feelings of cohesion are all significant in Hradil’s eyes (1996, pp. 74-75). These kinds of unique features could well prove to be an engine for the modernization of eastern Germany if they are given due consideration.

Interim Result I: The Modernization Debate

A characteristic of the modernization debate is the more or less explicit confrontation between the thesis of modernization and opposing theses, whose positions range from skeptical to critical. This constellation has profound implications for the thematic slant of the discussion, the theoretical perspective of the contributions to it, the evaluation criteria for evaluation, and, hence, ultimately for the evaluation of German unification.

The most sophisticated evaluation of the course, impacts, and perspectives of German unification has been formulated in terms of the modernization thesis. Judgment is based on several explicit criteria: depth, consistency of direction, speed, and controllability of social change—and is supported by international comparisons. On the whole, the authors accepting modernization theory come to a positive assessment expressed in the conclusion that eastern Germany has been taking its own privileged path. The judgments in most of the other theses are much more critical. They relate primarily to discrete aspects of unification, such as the convergence of living conditions (Biedenkopf, 1994; Riedmüller, 1994) or the discrepancy between the western German institutional system and the eastern German life world (Woderich, 1992a). In most cases the evaluation criteria are not clearly spelled out, and except for Müller (1995), Klein (1996), and a few others, authors still look only at eastern Germany. References to international transformation research are rare. The problem therein is that the focus on eastern Germany has narrowed the perspective in certain cases. Some authors, for example, have reported a change of mood in eastern Germany, even an eastern German "syndrome of discontent" (Pollack, 1996b; Wiesenthal, 1996b). As shown by empirical analyses of eastern and western Germany, however, the decline in satisfaction, expectations of the future, and ratings of the system is a phenomenon found throughout Germany (Bulmahn & Mau, 1996). This fact cannot be explained in terms of socialization and compensation based narrowly on eastern Germany.

A number of arguments are explicitly aimed at the thesis of catch-up modernization. In Müller (1995), for example, evaluations of actual social developments are diffusely blended with critiques of theory. Furthermore, the predominant, critical stance on the position taken in modernization theory thematically narrows the debate. The action taken by collective actors and the real process of institutional transfer in the various segments of society are given only superficial treatment. More attention is devoted to these problems in the second major track of discussion in the social sciences, which is summarized in the following pages.

III. Between Agency Theories and Neoinstitutionalist Concepts

The major topic of this debate is the controllability of intra-German transformation. It surfaces repeatedly when the prerequisites, process, and impacts of institutional transfer are analyzed. The collective actors, their structure, their interests and strategies, and the consequences of the action they take are considered salient. The theses all share the assumption that the direction of social change is determined by the decisions of the dominant actors. Depending on the approach, preferences play a larger or smaller role in decision-making. Lehmbruch (1994), for instance, has maintained that the reasoning behind action is greatly restricted by extreme complexity, time pressure, the urgency of the decisions to be made, lack of information, and so on. According to him, this unfavorable decision-making context compels the actors to resort to traditional institutional solutions that subsequently trigger inherent, uncontainable dynamics (Lehmbruch, 1994).

Unintended impacts of action and the ensuing, complex path dependencies are emphasized in similar concepts (Seibel, 1995). To authors of other studies, the adverse decision-making situation is not why German unification has largely failed in their eyes. The failure of unification is attributed instead to the successful pursuit of interests dear to western German actors. Their efforts to preserve the status quo (Landfried, 1995) and their intentions to colonize eastern Germany (Dümcke & Vilmar, 1995) have been said to be the central problem of German unification. The key theses of this debate are that:

- the course of transformation has had its own dynamics,
- undercomplexity has been the desired architecture of transformation,
- political action has had unintended economic impacts,
- opportunities for reform have been missed,
- the intention was to colonize eastern Germany, and
- eastern Germany has been a privileged, special case.

The Thesis that the Course of Transformation Has Had Its Own Dynamics

Lehmbruch (1994) distinguished between two phases of transformation, a control phase and a phase of inherent dynamics. In the first phase, the key decisions were ”made in a highly centralized and personalized decision-making system” (p. 21). He maintained that the actors have been able to acquire their capacity to act only by means of extreme simplification, specifically by resorting to regulation. The transformation scenario worked out by the decision-making community is said to have been ”institutionally underdetailed” (Lehmbruch, 1994, p. 24; see Nolte, Sitte, & Wagner, 1995). The central explanatory hypothesis of this neoinstitutionalist approach is that ”former West Germany, faced with the challenges of unification, resorted to the strategic repertoire it had built earlier” (Lehmbruch, 1996, p. 119). The decisions taken in connection with the economic and currency union between the two parts of Germany in 1990 made it possible to define only the general direction of social change in eastern Germany, not the many different institutional options that can lead to those objectives.

As a result, the chance to exercise strategic control over change was largely lost in the second phase of transformation. The pronounced segmentation of policy fields and the diversity of the particularist interests among western German actors reinforced the tendency of the transformation process to be propelled by its inherent dynamics. Western German actors were able to fully develop their own interests fully in the framework of an exogenous transformation, particularly in markets subject to relatively heavy regulation by the state. In this context Lehmbruch (1994) cited the developments in the fields of health, education, and media policy. The dominance of western German corporate actors entailed a number of irrationalities. ”The exogenous structural change that western Germany carried out in the former GDR was intended to prevent institutions from surviving in eastern Germany that could later have had boomerang transformational effects on western German structures” (Lehmbruch, 1994, p. 33). By contrast, in such sectors as agriculture, where exposure to market forces was comparatively great, a tendency toward endogenous transformation developed. In such spheres, it was possible for new institutional solutions to emerge, some of which are having an effect on western German realities. According to Lehmbruch (1994, p. 27), the results of transformation have been only suboptimal on the whole. The main cause for that outcome, in his eyes, has been an institutionally underdetailed transformation scenario. He continued, however, that there were two restrictions on the logic of action in the transformation process: the dominance of western German actors in a ”sectorially segmented decision-making system” and the ”particularism of the interests pursued by nongovernmental participants from the western German networks of actors” (Lehmbruch, 1994, p. 29).

The Thesis that Undercomplexity Is the Desired Architecture of Transformation

In a critique of the transformation process, Landfried (1995) took the appraisal of an institutionally underdetailed transformation scenario to its extreme, speaking of an ”architecture of undercomplexity” (p. 31). The political class of the FRG, in her words, had ”tried to control [the course of German unification] with undercomplex concepts” (p. 31). As she put it, the undercomplexity is revealed in the ”unidimensional concept of institutional transfer” and the ”unidimensional understanding of time in short-term policy” (p. 48).

She continued that both concepts crassly contradicted the actual complexity, dynamics, and long-term nature of social change in eastern Germany. In her eyes, the main reason that the political class is clinging to these visions was their ”interest in preserving the status quo” (Landfried, 1995, p. 32). The result of this policy as described in her article has been the perpetuation of institutions and rules of the game of the ”‘semisovereign state’” (p. 48). To her, however, this outcome cannot be called success; instead, it shows the system’s lack of ability to learn. The opportunities for reform that have been missed have already worked against integration, she wrote. ”This process of dis-integration can be interpreted as a consequence of a unification policy in which neither the shortcomings of western institutions nor the worthy elements of eastern institutions was sufficiently taken into consideration when western institutions were transferred to the new federal *Länder*” (p. 50).

The Thesis that Political Action Has Had Unintended Economic Impacts

In his critical examination of unification, Seibel (1995) took up the explanatory approach based on the notion of path dependency. The course of economic transformation in eastern Germany, he said, was not determined by ”extraordinary strategic vision” but rather by a ”series of decision-making sequences with a medium-term time horizon” (p. 249). According to him, the transition was characterized by the ”necessity of radically simplifying the problem and reducing political complexity” (p. 249). In his view, the resulting political decisions led to unintended economic and social impacts that further restricted the discretionary leeway of the actors. In Seibel’s view the definitive mistake of western German transformation policy was the attempt to stem the flow of eastern Germans to western Germany by promising to unify the currencies of the two countries soon. The politically motivated, favorable exchange rate led to an economic disaster of unimagined scope in eastern Germany. ”The basic model for coping with the crisis was to ”seize the bull by the horns” by introducing costly measures to keep political and social costs down” (p. 227).

Three key decisions followed in the wake of this response. First, the ruling coalition agreed to the high-wage policy preferred by the unions, consent given from a position of relative weakness. Second, the western German social safety net was immediately extended to eastern Germany. Third, the eastern German economy was privatized as quickly as possible. These decisions themselves had profound implications. The high-wage policy further reduced what little competitiveness eastern German business organizations still had. Because of the West German government's fears of having to assume full responsibility for the economic and social aftermath, the efforts to privatize the economy in eastern Germany were spurred on. Concepts of turn-around management, in turn, were pushed into the background, a de-emphasis that pushed the economic and social costs of the transformation process higher still.

Seibel (1995) has pointed out that transformation policy has incurred economic and social impacts that could not have been predicted and that indeed have been diametrically opposed to stated policy objectives. The political actors, according to Seibel, had been oriented to a dual vision: the nation-state and the German welfare state. "It was the unintended consequences of this pattern that completely inverted changed its welfare components" (p. 245). To Seibel, a noteworthy feature of German transformation policy has been the "elasticity of the consensus-building processes and of institutional differentiation, which have made the key contribution to successful management of the unintended economic and social impacts of the strategic decisions made in 1990" (p. 249).

This assessment is refuted by other authors who point to the unintended impacts of political action. Müller (1995) has criticized the *in*flexibility of the dominant pattern of transformation: "market-induced modernization." A number of unintended and irreversible economic impacts stemmed primarily from the rigid adherence to this vision. Because the policy-making community claimed that economic imperatives were compelling these decisions, it could not handle the ensuing problems but only externalize them to institutions and associations that were basically not responsible for them" (p. 25). The externalization of control over political processes, which Müller has called "conservative modernization," had a boomerang effect, overburdening and thereby eroding the structures of compromise that have been partly credited with the relative success of the western German model" (p. 28).

The Thesis that Opportunities for Reform Have Been Missed

Beyme (1994b) has argued that the neoinstitutionalist theses of inherent dynamics and path dependency do not adequately characterize the course of German transformation (see Wiesenthal, 1996a). According to him, the state was able to exert relatively effective control

in a number of policy fields, such as labor market policy, school policy, finance and legal policy, and constitutional policy (Beyme, 1994b, p. 266). However, this fact is overshadowed by the exceedingly successful efforts to control parastate actors and associations. Parastate actors, such as the *Treuhandanstalt* (the government holding company established to sell off or liquidate the state-owned businesses and property of the former GDR) and the central bank, dominated privatization policy and monetary policy, respectively. Unions and employer associations dominated wage and capital investment policy. Health-insurance funds and associations of sickness-fund physicians were instrumental in shaping health policy. This ”chaos of control” made ”innovations unlikely” (Beyme, 1994b, p. 266). Necessary reforms were not carried out, and the opportunities for new solutions were missed. Beyme cited four reasons. First, the actors were under considerable time pressure. Second, the issue in 1990 was not only whether there would be reforms but, as in the question about restitution of private property, also whether an earlier status quo would be restored. Third, the state carrying out the transformation was not fully sovereign. Fourth, there was no relevant experience or knowledge on which to draw when making decisions about how to proceed with unification.

For all the criticism of the unification process and for all the regret about missed opportunities for reforms, Beyme (1994b) has come to an optimistic conclusion. It was precisely in the first years of the FRG that ”nondecisions and missed chances for reforms” dominated the picture, yet ”the history of this republic became a success story” nonetheless (p. 267). He has conceded that opportunities for necessary reforms did slip by, but he has insisted that unification has not failed.

The lack of innovative impact that the unprecedented event of unification has had on western Germany is lamented far more intensely by Lepenies (1992). ”With few exceptions, the political class of former West Germany has turned unification and its aftermath into a festival of self-confirmation” (p. 31). He continues, however, that responsibility for this fact lies also with the East Germans, who allowed western dominance by failing to shape policy on their own in the first place, a lapse that Lepenies ascribed to ”overpolitization” and ”overmoralization” by the GDR regime.

By contrast, Jann (1995) has optimistically pointed out that the transformation process has by no means come to an end after five years. As he sees the situation, the two phases of institutional transfer and its consolidation are likely to be followed by a third one, a ”phase of development” in which ”the task will be to fill the established framework with a life of its own, adapt it to existing environmental conditions . . . , and draw one’s own lessons from the experience that has been acquired in the meantime” (p. 57). Jann has rejected the thesis that the political class has been bent on preserving the status quo. To him, that motive has not been the cause of the ”blueprint approach” that dominated in the first phase of the transfer. He has offered four alternative reasons for the major role that the approach had: the urgency of the problems that had to be dealt with, intertwined institutional processes, fear of experiments, and the influence of western German advisors (p. 61).

The Thesis that the Intention Was to Colonize Eastern Germany

Dümcke and Vilmar (1995) have explicitly argued that the calculated intention of western German actors was to colonize eastern Germany. The authors have supported their thesis with the observation of four ”colonialist structural elements”: (a) eastern Germany’s attempts to reform were ignored by western Germany, (b) the economy of the GDR was undermined by precipitate currency union, (c) all decision-making centers were brought under western German control, and (d) the people of the former GDR were overwhelmed by the upheaval, especially by its speed and by the dominance of western Germany.

In their most recent publication, Vilmar and Dümcke have continued their radical critique of the course of the unification process. Eastern Germany, according to them, has been politically subjugated by western German actors, economically colonized, and socioculturally liquidated (Vilmar & Dümcke, 1996, pp. 38-43). The authors have also pointed out processes of democratization, but they have added that it would need an ”alternative unification policy” to promote them (Vilmar & Dümcke, 1996, p. 44). In their view, the political actors ought to accept eastern Germany as a special economic zone to be granted continued support and broad rights of autonomy because of the special features of the life world there.

To Brie (1994), it is historical fact that the eastern German transformation took place essentially as an incorporation and institutional transfer. The public debate about unification is shaped by two contrary interpretations of this fact. In the one case the GDR’s accession to the FRG and the transfer of western German institutions to eastern Germany is celebrated as liberalization, whereas in the other interpretation the accession and transfer are regarded as a process of colonization that deserves to be criticized (see Pollack, 1996b). Observers ascribing to the latter interpretation take exception to the fact that the discourse about liberalization is focused only upon the ”character of these institutions and their structure as liberal spheres of opportunity” (Brie, 1994, p. 2). Brie has charged that important questions about the distribution of power are not being posed, that the specific context of the transfer is being ignored, and that institutional solutions are not being closely examined for suitability.

By contrast, the discourse about colonization has been said to reflect the unequal distribution of power and the unfair allocation of opportunities, risks, and hazards in the transformation process. “From this standpoint, the status of the eastern Germans as a dependent and unorganized minority is the result of colonization. According to the colonization thesis, western, superior resources of power have been used to create such imbalance, to barricade the institutional space against representation of eastern German interests, and to isolate the former FRG from retroeffects that the transformation process might generate” (Brie, 1994, p. 8). The disfranchisement of the eastern German elite, the

denial of guarantees to push through special eastern German interests, the loss of jobs as an accepted price of unification, and a number of other phenomena are incompatible with the paradigm of liberalization. They support the colonization thesis instead.

Brie (1994) stated, however, that this thesis cannot explain why the eastern Germans permitted themselves to be disempowered to this extent. Moreover, the fact that the transferred institutions are not in themselves means of subjugation is neglected. Lastly, the assumption that the western German actors *consciously* pursued a strategy of colonizing eastern Germany is problematic in Brie's eyes. Other authors view the thesis of eastern Germany's colonization far more critically. Schäfers (1996), for example, has explained that the concept of colonization "neither captures the attitude of the population in Germany's new federal *Länder* nor takes account of the transfer payments made by the citizens of western Germany" (p. 117). Empirical studies, however, show that the inclination to externalize the problems of unification is especially great in eastern Germany. Many eastern Germans continue to agree with stereotyped "antiwestern" statements such as "The Germans in the West have not learned to share despite their prosperity" or "The West Germans have conquered the GDR in colonial style" (Kaase, 1996, pp. 391-395).

The Thesis that Eastern Germany Has Been a Privileged, Special Case

Compared to the development in the other eastern and central European societies that are undergoing transformation, the eastern German "lurch into modernity" appears to be a "privileged, special case" according to Wiesenthal (1992, 1995a; see Offe, 1994; Rose et al., 1993). He has stated that the integration of the systems has been hugely successful in eastern Germany. Whereas the institutional and administrative systems in the other countries "still bear more or less pronounced characteristics of the old order, the reform of eastern Germany's institutional system has been largely consistent" (Wiesenthal, 1995a, p. 154). The author has attributed this success to the "unique project" (p. 147) of "exogenous transformation" (Lehmbruch, 1993). "The decisions in 1990 to incorporate the GDR into the Federal Republic meant transferring the institutional system of legal standards and practiced procedures and appointing a set of 'institutionalized' actors" (Wiesenthal, 1995a, p. 146; see Wiesenthal, 1995b).

But what facilitated quick success at the level of integrating the two systems involved considerable complications when it came to social integration. Compared to the attitudes in other societies undergoing transformation, the critical attitude of the eastern Germans is "marked by persistent disillusionment and a rejection of the transformation" (Wiesenthal, 1995a, p. 154). Wiesenthal has cited three key points in explaining this phenomenon. First, the phase during which living conditions clearly benefited from the currency union of 1990

and from increases in income has been followed by a phase in which problems such as unemployment and social uncertainty loom large as costs of unification. ”This temporal pattern for distributing advantages and disadvantages—goods first, bads later—is the least favorable constellation as far as social integration is concerned” (Wiesenthal, 1995a, p. 155). Second, the dominance of western German actors has offered a suitable surface onto which to project the thesis that eastern Germany has been colonized. Third, the discussion about reform in eastern and western Germany has been inadequate, and the practice of calling eastern German biographies into question has been a problem, as was the deprecation of eastern German life experience. According to Wiesenthal, these points are key aspects of the ”social construction of reality” that are currently preventing social integration, but he has optimistically asserted that the transformed institutional system is the best basis for successful social integration in the future.

Interim Conclusion II: The Control Debate

This debate is marked by the coexistence of neoinstitutionalist approaches and approaches based on agency theory. The leitmotif common to all the theses is the controllability of the unification process. The interim assessment of unification, or, more correctly, of unification policy, is largely negative. It is said that policy failed, particularly at the outset of unification. The assertion is that policy-makers reduced their already narrow room for maneuver even more by acting rashly, as when they fixed the exchange rate between the West German and East German mark in 1990. Path dependencies characterized the rest of German unification, whose inherent dynamics took on a life of their own. There was no extraordinary strategic vision. For lack of time or for the purpose of preserving the status quo, recourse was taken to outmoded and inappropriate policy designs, which then had unintended economic and social impacts. In cases where control was successfully exerted, the efforts only served the pursuit of the particular actor’s own interests. But not all the authors of this literature indulge in massive criticism. Despite the missed opportunities for reform, reserved hopes for a reenactment of western Germany’s success story have been expressed. One also finds the assertion that the integration of Germany’s two previous systems has succeeded precisely because of the external control brought to bear by western German actors—an almost enthusiastic-sounding appraisal given the background of criticism against which it is placed.

All in all, one cannot speak of comprehensive and discriminating interim assessment. Most of the literature is confined to individual facets of the unification such as the use of opportunities for reform and the special-interest policies of the actors involved. With few exceptions (see Altenhof & Jesse, 1995; Weidenfeld & Korte, 1996), the foreign policy

dimension of the unification has been left almost totally unconsidered. Despite clear warnings, this ”second arena” of German unification (Lepsius, 1994) has evidently been forgotten about. Conceptually, the action taken by nonpolitical actors is taken into account only in isolated instances. Most authors writing on this subject focus narrowly on western German actors. Most contriutions to the literature make no reference to such eastern German actors as the civil rights movements and parties that formed during and shortly after the regime shift, the managements of conglomerates, and the academic elite. This omission may be due to the de facto dominance of the western German elites, which, however, remains inexplicable unless the weakness of eastern German actors is kept in mind: their abdication of responsibility to shape policy on their own (Lepenies, 1992).

Moreover, some theses are based on unrealistic or mutually contradictory assumptions. One example is the architecture-of-undercomplexity thesis. On one hand, German unification is described as a highly complex, extremely dynamic, long-term process. On the other hand, it is assumed that this process could have been extensively controlled given the ”right” policy concepts. With this illusion of control, the degree of control that actually was achieved is totally underestimated. The other extreme is the assumption of colonization, according to which western German actors had no difficulty carrying out their intentions to colonize eastern Germany. Accordingly, the degree of control actually exerted is totally overestimated. As in the debate about modernization, internationally comparative studies are the exception confirming the rule that research has been confined to the intra-German transformation o society.

IV. Summary

A fleeting review of the various theses appraising German unification seems to show that the social science discussion is marked by wide theoretical variety and, all in all, by solid judgment. This impression is wrong. With few exceptions, the debate is conspicuous neither for theoretical breadth and depth nor for realistic overall judgment. The discussion has three weak points: division, isolation, and negative perspective.

The division of the discussion into two separate debates is not a matter of extreme positions being distorted only by the media (Pollack, 1996b). Two dominant debates about unification have in fact issued from the tradition of transformation research. In the one discussion, participants pointedly arguing the case of modernization find that their position is attracting a host of critical replies; in the other, some interlocutors persist in their actor-related perspective and occasionally spark controversy with adherents of neoinstitutionalist theses of similar thrust. The two debates are largely separate from each other. No intermediate theoretical positions have been taken up yet. Structuralist approaches are still the exception and have been unable to bridge the gulf as had been hoped. The object for research is hardly the reason, however. Theoretically speaking, German unification is a worthwhile field of inquiry in terms of conflict structures and major international events, trends, and cycles. But where are the social science studies on the ways in which foreign policy impinge on unification, on the way in which unification is historically embedded in international developments? Isolated efforts in this direction, such as Klein's (1994) thesis of double modernization, remain mired in the general rhetoric of crisis and lack, for instance, clear-cut statements about institutional options. Where are the analyses of the eastern German grass-roots movement, its emergence in the 1980s, its brief flowering when the regime was shifting, and its current insignificance? Could not such studies make important contributions to the explanation of Germany's unification process and thereby correct the theses (e.g., colonization) that pivot solely on the dominance of western German actors?

The isolation of the social science discussion on German unification is plain on at least two levels, methodological and discursive. Obviously, most of the theses, such as those about socialization, compensation, and colonization, are confined to eastern Germany's transformation process. Only a few also take account of developments in western Germany. Analyses in which the intra-German transformation process is compared with that in other eastern and central European societies are genuine rarities. It may be objected that the special nature of the German case permits, even calls for, this focusing. But the fact that German unification represents a privileged, special case becomes clear only in comparative analyses. The methodological restrictions coincide with discursive isolation, with the discussion on German unification being conducted altogether separately from the debate about the transformation of other former east-bloc countries. Disregarding their common

roots in social science transformation research, the participants of the one discourse show little or no awareness of those of the other. This regrettable lack of communication prevents fruitful mutual exchange.

The two aspects of the social science debate about the intra-German transformation that are being criticized here—the split between them and their isolation—lead to a negative perspective. To be sure, positive assessments can also be found alongside the many skeptical and critical judgments noted in this article. On the whole, however, the negative aspects of the process, impacts, and perspectives of German unification are exaggerated. This effect is especially clear from the discussion of the transformation's controllability. Based on agency theory, the discourse is clearly dominated by the theses of path dependency, inherent dynamics, preservation of the status quo by western German actors, and colonization of eastern Germany. Broader analyses, in which attention to the issue of controllability is complemented by consideration of such evaluation criteria as the speed of social change, ways of dealing with social impacts, or the consistency of the overall institutional solution that is found, come to more favorable judgments, particularly if they are comparative in design. Unmistakably, the social science evaluation of the intra-German transformation is a function of the theoretical and methodological caliber of the reasoning. As shown by the polarity between the thesis of modernization and that of socialization, that fact is the main cause of the observable East-West divide between the appraisals.

One may regret the selective perception of social science appraisals of German unification and the lack of impact they have had on public discussion (Pollack, 1996b, p. 413). More problematic, however, are the still unexploited potential for theoretical innovation that has arisen from the transformation of eastern and central European societies. Nevertheless, these social upheavals are not over, and researchers studying these transformations have not signaled that they are ending their efforts.

In which direction will social science research on German unification develop? Two trends are emerging, internationalization and regionalization. First, future research will tend toward internationalization, primarily Europeanization, thereby widening the scope to include eastern and western Europe. The growing number of comparative studies will help put some extreme positions on German unification in perspective. In some cases social science work on German unification may be reintegrated into international transformation research. The second line of development will undoubtedly be toward increasing regionalization. As the old gap between eastern and western Germany (see Geissler) is overcome, new differences become apparent at the level of the federal *Länder* and local authorities. The perspective will shift from the inequalities that are to be surmounted to the differences that are worth preserving. The thesis that it is necessary for eastern Germany to tread its own path (Biedenkopf) points in this direction. This trend is being supported by the reorientation of entire institutes, which are looking, for example, at "Berlin–Brandenburg as a field for social science experimentation and as an ideal space for possible social innovations (Koch & Woderich, 1996, p. 14). These two perspectives on social science transformation research are not mutually exclusive. The potential for future theoretical development could lie precisely in linking internationally comparative and regionally focused studies.

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Verzeichnis der Arbeitspapiere (Stand: Januar 1999)

Abteilungsübergreifend

FS III 93-301 Wir und die Anderen. "Imagined Communities" im westeuropäischen Vergleich.
Dieter Fuchs, Jürgen Gerhards und Edeltraud Roller

FS III 96-301 The Mass Media and Modern Government
Kenneth Newton

FS III 96-302 Das intermediäre System der Politik als Orientierungssystem der Bürger
Dieter Fuchs, Edeltraud Roller, Dieter Rucht und Bernhard Weßels

Abteilung 1 "Öffentlichkeit und soziale Bewegungen"

FS III 90-101 Strukturen und Funktionen moderner Öffentlichkeit. Fragestellungen und Ansätze.
Jürgen Gerhards und Friedhelm Neidhardt

FS III 91-101 Mesomobilization Contexts: Organizing and Framing in two Protest Campaigns in West Germany.
Jürgen Gerhards und Dieter Rucht

FS III 91-102 Left-libertarian Movements in Context: A Comparison of Italy and West Germany, 1965-1990.
Donatella della Porta und Dieter Rucht

FS III 91-103 The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements: Its Impact on their Mobilization.
Hanspeter Kriesi

FS III 91-104 Persönliche Netzwerke und die Mobilisierung politischen Protests: Stand der Forschung und strukturanalytische Perspektiven.
Thomas Ohlemacher

FS III 91-105 Öffentliche Kommunikationsbereitschaft. Test eines zentralen Bestandteils der Theorie der Schweigespirale.
Dieter Fuchs, Jürgen Gerhards und Friedhelm Neidhardt

FS III 91-106 Eine Untersuchung des Beitrags politischer Klubs zur Entwicklung einer demokratischen Infrastruktur in Polen - am Beispiel von 'Dziekania'. (Forschungsbericht)
Helmut Fehr

FS III 91-107 Parteien, Verbände und Bewegungen als Systeme politischer Interessenvermittlung.
Dieter Rucht

FS III 91-108 Die Macht der Massenmedien und die Demokratie: Empirische Befunde.
Jürgen Gerhards

FS III 92-101 Anbieter von öffentlichen politischen Veranstaltungen in West-Berlin.
Barbara Blattert
Nachfrager und wahrgenommenes Angebot von öffentlichen politischen Veranstaltungen in der Bundesrepublik.
Jürgen Gerhards

FS III 92-102 Support for New Social Movements in Five Western European Countries.
Dieter Fuchs und Dieter Rucht

FS III 92-103 Dokumentation und Analyse von Protestereignisssen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Prodat), Codebuch.
Dieter Rucht, Peter Hocke und Thomas Ohlemacher

FS III 92-104 Social Relays: Micro Mobilization via the Meso-Level.
Thomas Ohlemacher

FS III 93-101 Westeuropäische Integration und die Schwierigkeiten der Entstehung einer europäischen Öffentlichkeit.
Jürgen Gerhards

FS III 93-102 Selbstkontrolle in den Medien: Der Deutsche Presserat und seine Möglichkeiten.
Jessica Eisermann

FS III 93-103 Prominenz in der Bundesrepublik.
Birgit Peters

FS III 93-104 Bevölkerungsmeinung und Gewalt gegen Ausländer im wiedervereinigten Deutschland. Empirische Anmerkungen zu einem unklaren Verhältnis.
Thomas Ohlemacher

FS III 94-101 Von den Oppositionsgruppen der DDR zu den neuen sozialen Bewegungen in Ostdeutschland?
Barbara Blattert, Dieter Rink und Dieter Rucht

FS III 94-102 The Political Construction of the Nuclear Energy Issue and Its Impact on the Mobilization of Anti-Nuclear Movements in Western Europe.
Ruud Koopmans und Jan Willem Duyvendak

FS III 95-101 A Burning Question: Explaining the Rise of Racist and Extreme Right Violence in Western Europe.
Ruud Koopmans

FS III 95-103 German Unification, Democratization and the Role of Social Movements: A Missed Opportunity.
Dieter Rucht

FS III 95-105 Diskursanalyse im Zeit- und Ländervergleich. Methodenbericht über eine systematische Inhaltsanalyse zur Erfassung des öffentlichen Diskurses über Abtreibung in den USA und der Bundesrepublik in der Zeit von 1970 bis 1994.
Jürgen Gerhards und Monika Lindgens

FS III 95-106 Social Movement Mobilization under Right and Left Governments: A Look at Four West European Countries
Ruud Koopmans and Dieter Rucht

FS III 96-101 Politische Unternehmer, Netzwerke und Bewegungserfolg: Die "Einzelmitglieder" der NSDAP, 1925-30
Helmut Anheier und Thomas Ohlemacher

FS III 96-102 Protest - öffentliche Meinung - Politik [vergriffen]
Friedhelm Neidhardt
erscheint in: Wolfgang van den Daele, Friedhelm Neidhardt (Hrsg.), Kommunikation und Entscheidung. WZB-Jahrbuch 1996. Berlin: edition sigma 1996.

FS III 96-103 Determining the Selection Bias in Local and National Newspaper Reports on Protest Events
Peter Hocke

FS III 96-104 The Role of News Factors in Media Use
Christiane Eilders

FS III 96-105 The Observation of Public Opinion by the Governmental System
Dieter Fuchs and Barbara Pfetsch

FS III 97-101 Citizenship, National Identity and the Mobilisation of the Extreme Right. A Comparison of France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland
Ruud Koopmans and Hanspeter Kriesi

FS III 97-102 The Impact of Editorial Content on the Political Agenda in Germany: Theoretical Assumptions and Open Questions Regarding a Neglected Subject in Mass Communication Research
Christiane Eilders

FS III 98-101 Proteststrukturen im Ost-West-Vergleich 1989 - 1992
Susann Burchardt

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Paul Statham

FS III 98-103 Die Branchenstruktur der Markt- und Meinungsforschung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von 1986 bis 1996. Eine deskriptive Analyse
Simone Wack

FS III 98-104 Konjunkturen der NS-Bewegung. Eine Untersuchung der Veranstaltungsaktivitäten der Münchener NSDAP, 1925-1930
Helmut K. Anheier, Friedhelm Neidhardt und Wolfgang Vortkamp

FS III 98-105 Challenging the Liberal Nation-State? Postnationalism, Multiculturalism, and the Collective Claims-Making of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in Britain and Germany
Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham

FS III 98-106 Die Stimme der Medien im politischen Prozeß – Themen und Meinungen in Presse-kommentaren
Friedhelm Neidhardt, Christiane Eilders und Barbara Pfetsch

FS III 98-107 Methodenbericht zum Projekt: Die Stimme der Medien im politischen Prozeß – Themen und Meinungen in Pressekommentaren
Christiane Eilders und Albrecht Lüter

Abteilung 2 "Institutionen und sozialer Wandel"

FS III 90-202 Politisches Denken in der Informationsgesellschaft. Zum Zusammenhang zwischen Fernsehnutzung und Einstellungskonsistenz.
Katrin Voltmer

FS III 90-203 The Normalization of the Unconventional - Forms of Political Action and New Social Movements.
Dieter Fuchs

FS III 90-204 Vielfalt oder strukturierte Komplexität? Zur Institutionalisierung politischer Spannungslinien im Verbände- und Parteiensystem in der Bundesrepublik.
Bernhard Weßels

FS III 90-205 Zum Wandel politischer Konfliktlinien. Ideologische Gruppierungen und Wahlverhalten.
Dieter Fuchs

FS III 91-201 Ein analytisches Schema zur Klassifikation von Politikinhalten.
Edeltraud Roller

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Dieter Fuchs

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Bernhard Weßels

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Arend Lijphart

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Bernhard Weßels

FS III 92-205 Hermeneutisch-klassifikatorische Inhaltsanalyse - Analysemöglichkeiten am Beispiel von Leitfadengesprächen zum Wohlfahrtsstaat.
Edeltraud Roller und Rainer Mathes

FS III 92-206 Ideological Basis of the Market Economy: Attitudes Toward Distribution Principles and the Role of Government in Western and Eastern Germany.
Edeltraud Roller

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Max Kaase und Hans-Dieter Klingemann

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Dieter Fuchs

FS III 93-203 A Metatheory of the Democratic Process.
Dieter Fuchs

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Carolin Schöbel

FS III 93-205 Mass Media: Political Independence of Press and Broadcasting Systems.
Katrin Voltmer

FS III 93-206 Mobilisieren Interessengegnerschaften? Die "Hostility"-Hypothese, Wahlbeteiligung und Wahlentscheidung bei der Bundestagswahl 1990.
Bernhard Weßels

FS III 93-207 Wählen als rationales Handeln: Anmerkungen zum Nutzen des Rational-Choice Ansatzes in der empirischen Wahlforschung.
Dieter Fuchs und Steffen Kühnel

FS III 93-208 Gruppenbindungen und rationales Handeln als Determinanten der Wahlentscheidung in Ost- und Westdeutschland.
Bernhard Weßels

FS III 93-209 Geteilte Medienrealität? Zur Thematisierungsleistung der Massenmedien im Prozeß der deutschen Vereinigung.
Babara Pfetsch und Katrin Voltmer

FS III 94-201 Democratic Transformation and the Prerequisites of Democratic Opposition in East and Central Europe.
Bernhard Wessels und Hans-Dieter Klingemann

FS III 94-202 Cultural Conditions of the Transformation to Liberal Democracies in Central and Eastern Europe.
Dieter Fuchs und Edeltraud Roller

FS III 94-204 Individuelle Teilnahme an politischer Kommunikation im Prozeß der deutschen Vereinigung. Zur Struktur von interpersonaler und massenmedialer Kommunikation.
Katrin Voltmer, Eva Schabedoth und Peter R. Schrott

FS III 94-205 Nationalitätenkonflikt und Mechanismen politischer Integration im Baltikum.
Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Jürgen Lass und Katrin Mattusch

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Thomas R. Cusack und Joyce P. Kaufman

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Robert E. Goodin und Hans-Dieter Klingemann

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Edeltraud Roller und Bernhard Wessels

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Thomas R. Cusack und Bernhard Weßels

FS III 96-204 Social Alliances and Coalitions: The Organizational Underpinnings of Democracy in West Germany.
Bernhard Wessels

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Edeltraud Roller

FS III 96-206 System Characteristics Matter: Empirical Evidence from Ten Representation Studies.
Bernhard Wessels

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Dieter Fuchs

FS III 96-208 Legislative Recruitment in Germany: Professionalization or Political Class?
Bernhard Wessels

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Thomas R. Cusack

FS III 97-202 The Electoral Process in the Unified Germany.
Dieter Fuchs und Robert Rohrschneider

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Dieter Fuchs

FS III 98-201 Vom Konsens zum Dissens? Politische Ordnungspräferenzen von Eliten und Bürgern im ost-westdeutschen Vergleich.
Christian Welzel

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Hans-Dieter Klingemann

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Hans-Dieter Klingemann and Richard I. Hofferbert

FS III 98-204 The Political Culture of Unified Germany
Dieter Fuchs

Abteilung 3 "Sozialstruktur und Sozialberichterstattung"

P 89-101 Die Sozialstruktur der Bundesrepublik in den 1980er Jahren. [vergriffen]
Wolfgang Zapf

P 89-102 Folgen von Arbeitslosigkeit für die Wohlfahrt von Individuen und Haushalten.[vergriffen]
Detlef Landua und Wolfgang Zapf

P 89-103 National Character Revisited. [vergriffen]
Alex Inkeles

P 89-104 Der Wandel von Lebensformen und seine Folgen für die soziale Integration. [vergriffen]
Martin Diewald

P 89-105 Stabilität und Wandel von Parteineigungen. Eine Panelanalyse politischer Präferenzen in Bundesrepublik. [vergriffen]
Detlef Landua

P 89-106 Die Wechselwirkungen zwischen Beschäftigungspolitik und sozialer Sicherung. [vergriffen]
Richard Hauser

P 89-107 Is Happiness Relative? [vergriffen]
Ruut Veenhoven

P 90-101 Erweiterungsmöglichkeiten der Standardverfahren der empirischen Sozialforschung. [vergriffen]
Detlef Landua

P 90-102 Sozialreport 1990 - Daten und Fakten zur sozialen Lage der DDR. [vergriffen]
Dokumentation eines Workshops am Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB)

P 90-103 The Duration and Extent of Poverty - Is Germany a Two-Thirds-Society?
Bruce Headey, Peter Krause und Roland Habich

P 90-104 Modernisierung und Modernisierungstheorie. [vergriffen]
Wolfgang Zapf

P 90-105 Von Klassen und Schichten zu Lebensstilen - Ein neues Paradigma für die empirische Sozialforschung? [vergriffen]
Martin Diewald

P 90-106 Zukunftsforschung aus den U.S.A. - Prominente Autoren und Werke der letzten 20 Jahre.
Katrin Gillwald

P 91-101 Der lange Weg zur Einheit. Unterschiedliche Lebensqualität in den „alten“ und „neuen“ Bundesländern. [vergriffen]
Detlef Landua, Annette Spellerberg und Roland Habich

P 91-102 Ein Jahr Umfragen in den Neuen Bundesländern -Themen und Tendenzen.
Christian Holst

P 91-103 Zeitgemäße Fragen nicht nur an die DDR-Soziologie.
Michael Thomas

P 91-104 Technik, Alter, Lebensqualität. Zur Bedeutung von Technik für die Lebensführung älterer Menschen. [vergriffen]
Jürgen Hampel, Heidrun Mollenkopf und Wolfgang Zapf

P 91-105 Ausländer in der Bundesrepublik. Soziale und ökonomische Mobilität.
Wolfgang Seifert

P 91-106 East Germany: Incomes, Inequality and the Impact of Redistributive Government 1990-1991.
Bruce Headey, Peter Krause und Roland Habich

P 92-101 Freizeitverhalten - Werte - Orientierungen. Empirische Analysen zu Elementen von Lebensstilen.
Annette Spellerberg

P 92-102 Das Jahr danach. Zum Transformationsprozeß Ostdeutschlands und seiner Bewertung aus der Sicht der Betroffenen.
Detlef Landua

P 92-103 Hoffnungsträger Ost. Entwicklungsdynamik und Entwicklungsperspektiven im Berliner Umland aus der Sicht von neuen Führungskräften.
Katrin Gillwald

P 92-104 Die Transformation in der ehemaligen DDR und die soziologische Theorie der Modernisierung.
Wolfgang Zapf

P 92-105 Wohnungsversorgung in der ehemaligen DDR. Verteilungskriterien und Zugangswege.
Wilhelm Hinrichs

P 92-106 Technische Hilfsmittel statt Betreuung? Erhaltung und Unterstützung einer selbständigen Lebensführung im Alter.
Jürgen Hampel

P 93-101 Lebenslagen im Umbruch - Zur sozialen Lage privater Haushalte in der osteuropäischen Transformation.
Horst Berger und Roland Habich (Hg.)

P 93-102 Arbeitsmarktsegmentation - Mobilitätsbarrieren für ausländische Arbeitnehmer?
Wolfgang Seifert

P 93-103 Die Auswirkungen der hohen Unterbeschäftigung in Ostdeutschland auf die personelle Einkommensverteilung.
R. Hauser, K. Müller, J. Frick und G. Wagner

P 93-104 Is Happiness a Trait? Tests of the theory that a better society does not make people happier.
Ruut Veenhoven

P 93-105 Veränderungen der Struktur und der sozialen Lage ostdeutscher Haushalte nach 1990.
Horst Berger, Wilhelm Hinrichs, Eckhard Priller und Annett Schultz

P 93-106 Technical Aids in Old Age - Between acceptance and rejection.
Heidrun Mollenkopf

P 93-107 Stabilisierung trotz Differenzierung? Sozialstrukturelle Entwicklungen und wahrgenommene Lebensqualität in Ostdeutschland 1990-1992. [vergriffen]
Detlef Landua

P 93-108 „ … im Westen noch beständig, im Osten etwas freundlicher“ Lebensbedingungen und subjektives Wohlbefinden drei Jahre nach der Wiedervereinigung. [vergriffen]
Detlef Landua, Roland Habich, Heinz-Herbert Noll, Wolfgang Zapf und Annette Spellerberg

P 93-109 Ökonomische Verhaltensweisen und politische Einstellungen im vereinten Deutschland.
Wolfgang Seifert, Richard Rose und Wolfgang Zapf

P 94-101	Alltagskultur in Ost- und Westdeutschland. Unterschiede und Gemeinsamkeiten. *Annette Spellerberg*
P 94-102	Arbeitszeitpräferenzen. Basisdaten für eine bedürfnisgerechte Arbeitszeitgestaltung. *Karin Schulze Buschoff*
P 94-103	Jugendliche im Transformationsprozeß. Vorbedingungen, Probleme und Chancen zur Integration ostdeutscher Jugendlicher im vereinten Deutschland. *Kerstin Seiring*
P 94-104	Lebensbedingungen und politische Einstellungen im Transformationsprozeß. Ostdeutschland und Osteuropa im Vergleich. *Wolfgang Seifert und Richard Rose*
P 94-105	Lebensstile in West- und Ostdeutschland. Verteilung und Differenzierung nach sozialstrukturellen Merkmalen. *Annette Spellerberg*
FS III 95-401	Wie Migranten leben. Lebensbedingungen und soziale Lage der ausländischen Bevölkerung in der Bundesrepublik. *hrsg. von Wolfgang Seifert*
FS III 95-402	Familie und Erwerbsarbeit in der Bundesrepublik. Rückblick, Stand der Forschung und Design einer Lebensformentypologie. *Karin Schulze Buschoff*
FS III 95-403	Erwerbsverläufe in Ostdeutschland. Einflüsse und Folgen. *Horst Berger, Thomas Bulmahn und Wilhelm Hinrichs*
FS III 95-404	Sozialberichterstattung in und für Deutschland - ein Ziel, zwei Wege? Dokmentation einer Arbeitstagung zu „Sozialreport 1994“ - „Datenreport 1994“. *hrsg. von Roland Habich, Wolfgang Zapf und Gunnar Winkler*
FS III 95-406	Developments in Satisfaction Research. *Ruut Veenhoven*
FS III 95-408	Ökologisierung von Lebensstilen. Argumente, Beispiele, Einflußgrößen. *Katrin Gillwald*
FS III 96-401	Mobilität zur sozialen Teilhabe Älterer. *Heidrun Mollenkopf und Pia Flaschenträger*
FS III 96-402	Lebenszufriedenheit im europäischen Vergleich. *Ingeborg Weller*
FS III 96-403	Vereinigungsbilanzen. Die deutsche Einheit im Spiegel der Sozialwissenschaften. *Thomas Bulmahn*
FS III 96-404	Happy Life-Expectancy. A comprehensive measure of quality-of-life in nations. *Ruut Veenhoven*
FS III 96-405	Response Style und Response Set. Eine Längsschnittuntersuchung zu den Zufriedenheits- und Einstellungsfragen im Sozio-ökonomischen Panel. *Jörg-Peter Schräpler*
FS III 96-406	Rethinking Modernization: Legacies of Parsons and Hilbert. *Edward A. Tiryakian*
FS III 96-407	Wohnortwechsel zwischen den Bundesländern im Kontext der Vereinigung. *Wilhelm Hinrichs*

FS III 97 - 401 Ungleichheits- und Gerechtigkeitsorientierungen in modernen Wohlfahrtsstaaten. Ein Vergleich der Länder Schweden, Großbritannien und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland
Steffen Mau

FS III 97 - 402 Die Sozialstruktur der DDR. Versuch einer Rekonstruktion auf der Basis einer 1987 durchgeführten soziologischen Untersuchung
Siegfried Grundmann

FS III 97 - 403 Lebensstile und Wohnverhältnisse
Annette Spellerberg

FS III 97 - 404 Wohnmobilität und Wohnverhältnisse in West- und Ostdeutschland
Nicole Schneider

FS III 97 - 405 Privathaushalte und Haushalten in Ostdeutschland
Annett Schultz

FS III 97 - 406 Ein Fall von Car Sharing: Umweltentlastung durch soziale Innovation
Katrin Gillwald

FS III 97 - 407 Soziologische Forschung in der DDR. Einige Aspekte der Arbeit des Wissenschaftlichen Rates
Rudi Weidig

FS III 97 - 408 Sozialindikatorenforschung in der DDR. Wissenschaftstheoretische, forschungsorganisatorische und institutionelle Aspekte
Horst Berger

FS III 97 - 409 Wohnbedingungen und ihre subjektive Wahrnehmung in Ostdeutschland 1990-97
Wilhelm Hinrichs

FS III 97 - 410 Arbeitszeiten - Wunsch und Wirklichkeit in Ost- und Westdeutschland
Karin Schulze Buschoff

FS III 97 - 411 Ein Suchen und Sichfinden im Gestern und Heute. Verändern die Ostdeutschen ihre Einstellungen und Haltungen zur Demokratie und gesellschaftlichen Mitwirkung?
Eckhard Priller

FS III 98 - 401 Inequality and Support for Redistributive Policy: One World of Post-Communism, Two Worlds of Western Capitalism?
Jan Delhey

FS III 98 - 402 Über die Möglichkeit einer kontinuierlichen und zügigen Fortsetzung des chinesischen Modernisierungsprozesses
Li Pengcheng

FS III 98 - 403 Lebensstile im Zeitvergleich: Typologien für West- und Ostdeutschland 1993 und 1996
Annette Spellerberg und Regina Berger Schmitt

FS III 98 - 404 Teilzeitbeschäftigte in Europa. Arbeitsbedingungen, Familienkontext, Motive und subjektive Bewertungen
Karin Schulze Buschoff und Jana Rückert

FS III 98 - 405 Das Erwerbsverhalten von Frauen im europäischen Vergleich. Welche Faktoren beeinflussen Arbeitszeiten und Arbeitszeitwünsche?
Karin Schulze Buschoff, Inge Weller und Jana Rückert

FS III 98 - 406 Rette sich, wer kann? Die Krise der gesetzlichen Rentenversicherung und die Privatisierung der Altersvorsorge
Thomas Bulmahn

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Thomas Bulmahn

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Wilhelm Hinrichs

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Zsolt Spéder, Roland Habich

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Jan Delhey

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Wolfgang Zapf

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