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Precarity – Logical Consequence of Societies that Lost the Social

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Precarity – Logical Consequence of Societies that Lost the Social¹

The past is a place of discovery, but it is also a setting for the stories we tell. Our desire for narrative and development and completion provides us with the past that, while often complex and contradictory, must be made ultimately comprehensible.

(Osborne, Roger: Civilization. A New History of the Western World; London: Jonothan Cape; 2006: 45)

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Abstract

The essay proposes an alternative understanding of social policy, focussing on social quality and as such bringing together biographical and societal development and as well institutional and communal concerns. On this basis the author proposes a definition of precarity that goes far beyond insecurity of employment and its consequences for every day's life. Thus, actually a definition of precarity is suggested that, while recognising the dimension of individual insecurity with its shortage of resources and the lack of power over the own life, points on a second and crucial dimension. This is the precarity of a society and its integrity due to the loss of its social dimension, being solely shaped by and engaged in individualism. Precarity, then, is the paradox of individuals loosing control in an otherwise individualistic, 'privatised' society.

Zusammenfassung

Dieses Essay schlägt, orientiert am Ansatz 'Soziale Qualität', ein alternatives Verständnis von Sozialpolitik vor. Damit bringt es Fragen der Entwicklung des Individuums und Entwicklung der Gesellschaft ebenso zusammen wie die Dimensionen des institutionellen und des kleinräumig-solidaren Seins. Auf dieser Basis schlägt der Autor eine Definition von Prekarität vor, die weit über Unsicherheit der Arbeitsmarktposition sowie deren Konsequenzen im Alltagsleben hinausgeht. Damit wird ein Ansatz vorgeschlagen, der zwar die Frage individueller Unsicherheit mit den Konsequenzen für die materielle Versorgung und den Mangel an Kontrolle über das eigene Leben sieht, der aber zugleich auf eine zweite und wesentliche Dimension eingeht. Diese betrifft die Prekarität der Gesellschaft selbst und ihren Verlust an Integrität auf Grund des Verlustes des Sozialen. Diese Gesellschaft ist ausschließlich durch Individualismus geprägt und verliert sich in Individualismus. Prekarität ist folglich das Paradox von Individuen, die selbst – in einer Gesellschaft die ansonsten gerade individualistisch im Sinn von privatistisch ist – keine Kontrolle mehr haben.

Instead of an introduction: Social Quality – Welfare Society – Empowerment

Talking about precarity and precarious employment causes some difficulties as further analysis easily ends in a – though not outspoken – perception of a wrong point of reference. Actually the term precarity starts from a strong notion of normality – however, normality is not being defined. Of course, the one question – and closely linked with the topic – is if we can actually still expect anything being normal. Postmodernist approaches would suggest a patchy carpet, seeing precarity as a general and fundamental trait of the time. However, this is only one dimension. The other and more fundamental question is concerned with developing an understanding of what actually the social is as we are not talking about anything else as

- * social integration, i.e. the definition of what actually society is about,
- * social inclusiveness, i.e. what actually determines the individuals' position within this society and finally
- * social integrity, i.e. what can be seen as glue of society and actually 'links' society and individuals.

In other words, before we actually speak of precarity – we have to determine criteria for assessing it. And these criteria can only be gained by defining a point of reference. The question then reads: precarious with regard to what?

The following proposes that in order to get a good grasp of precarity it is necessary to relate it not just to employment – this is in many cases the mainstream focus. The reason for proposing a wider view is threefold.

First, there are of course good reasons to focus on precarity in terms of employment – as a precarious position on the labour market. Usually the respective position is a core issue. However, one point in question is if the precarious employment situation is actually the cause or the consequence of something that goes beyond. If only looks at 'precarious employment' or a 'precarious position on the labour market' one could suggest as well talking about hidden unemployment, instable employment or something similar.

Second, be it in terms of causes or effects, precarity is actually not just concerned with the position of the individual; rather, if a society that claims to be an ‘employment’ or ‘labour society’, cannot fulfil such claim there seems to be something wrong with the society – in other words, it seems to be not simply the precarious employment situation of the individual nor the precarity of individuals’ life but the precarity of society.

Third, though not necessarily outspoken, all concepts of social policy are not only over-emphatically employment centred. In addition, they are as well limited by being welfare-*state* centred. This implies again a very limited understanding of what precarity is – even if taken as matter effecting the life situation of individual citizens. Instead of orienting the debate of precarity along the welfare state it is suggested to focus on welfare societies. Such a remark does not at all deny the importance of referring to citizens. Rather, it emphasises such an orientation. However, it suggests overcoming a limited understanding of market citizens and furthermore it rejects the limitation of seeing the citizen as only related to the state. As real citizen, the concern is (a) the entire personality in its relation to the public and (b) the relationship to different forms or dimensions of the public.

These three points can be seen as basic assumptions of the following observationsⁱⁱ and will be elaborated further. However, what will be provided is only in a last section directly dealing with the issue of precarity as such.

Well-Being or Well-Fare

It is meant to be provocative to say that we are actually confronted with a paradox in that the social is pushing higher and higher on the agenda just by the fact that we have lost it out of sight – this is true with regard to general public debates, policy makers and not least scientists. This refers to an increasingly technicist dealing with ‘social issues’ and issues of people’s life: More and more we find debates on social instability, the costs of the welfare state, the necessity of both more individual responsibility and the return to solidarity – pity with the poor and the newly emphasised laws against beggars, the celebration of multiculturalism and the hatred discrimination and persecution of migrants are just two sides of one medal. However, at the same time we find an increasing unease and uncertainty: going far beyond a reissue of the fin de siècle uncertainty, there is the growing feeling that, ‘though our knowledge increases we are actually less and less able to change anything’.ⁱⁱⁱ The problem behind such a paradox is – thus the thesis – an increasing specialisation of knowledge and actually of the process of cognition in the sense of its fragmentation. Hand in hand with this goes an increasingly technicist, incremental approach of defining what actually the social is. Subsequently instead of reflecting the social as such, we are dealing with institutions, mechanisms and programmes that are oriented towards what has conventionally been defined as the social. And as much as we are increasingly concerned with the social – here taking the form of a hyperactive and incremental meddling with symptoms – we are on the other hand lost in a moralist feeling of something that we have lost and of which we cannot make out the contours. – And, of course, in a largely institutionalised world, a world which is – despite all claims of blurring borders of postmodernism – intrinsically caught in its own ‘iron cage’ as Max Weber called it.

It is symptomatic that we are actually rarely speaking of society in the true sense; instead, if we refer to society, the understanding is linked to the (nation) state. And although the nation state is actually a very recent invention, our thinking is even in a supposedly globalising world still caught in the same pattern.

Michael Zürn and Stephan Leibfried, as part of their project *Transformations of the State* (s. <http://www.state.uni-bremen.de/>) ‘provide a definition of the modern nation-state in four intersecting dimensions – resources, law, legitimacy, and welfare’, elaborated in their article on *A New Perspective On The State* (*European Review*, Vol. 13, Supp. No. 1, 1–36 [2005] *Academia Europaea*). Even such reference defines the citizen largely

- * as object of the state,
- * maintaining a top down perspective and
- * sees people – in which way ever they are defined as members of the nation state – as ‘receivers’. – Even the ‘power’, citizens have due to the legitimacy dimension cannot be really seen as fundamentally including a dimension of activation.

Looking at further developments of the welfare state on grounds of such a definition, searching against this background for more integrative patterns will always be caught in a mode which is shaped by these three basic guiding points: object, hierarchy and receiver-role. Although with some qualifications, this

concept subsequently supports as well an individualist understanding of the welfare and social togetherness. What is proposed here is a different approach that is not concerned with a supply-social policy nor aiming on introducing activation approaches that are based on subordination under one strictly employment oriented system of economic growth – it is suggested to arrange such perspective as at most being concerned with well-being. On the other hand, a truly welfare-perspective – this is the proposition made – would be concerned with more: the one radical: ‘well’ remains as common; however, the second radical changes from a static orientation on ‘being’ on ‘fare’, the one which shows a link to the Latin, in English simply meaning ‘making’, journeying. As such it implies several sides:

- * first, the doing well of the individual, meaning the status of being well, coping well, being in a situation which is shaped by good living conditions
- * second, it is concerned with the doing well of the individual in terms of actively being employed with this well being, i.e. not simply receiving ‘means’ but creating, ‘producing’, shaping the own life
- * third, there is the dimension to it of making in terms of the provision of (conditions for) well-being and well-fare – provisions that are not actually coming from the individual but from others, be it other individuals or/and groups and
- * fourth, this kind of welfare shows – looking from the terminology perspective – linked to some kind of processuality: it is simply not possible to do or make anything without change of an antecedent situation or condition; in other words, we compare a situation and its change over time.

Looking at welfare in such a perspective means to look at social policy in an entirely different way. Now, the challenge is not simply enhancing the existing institutional system (or, looking at contemporary real policy: to defend it against further cutbacks). Rather, what is required is to find an integrated approach that considers the four dimensions mentioned before, namely well-being, activity of individuals, activities of other individuals and institutions and systematic change. Sure, there are elements of all this in existing policies. However, if proposed as a truly integrated, systematic approach it can actually be said that it is contrary to traditional and mainstream approaches in social policy.

Social Quality as Development of an Integrated Approach to Social Policy

Social quality is concerned with a wider approach towards social issues, going beyond investigating a status quo of individuals and/or institutional supply systems. The approach is fundamentally different to mainstream approaches in two regards.

The one difference is to be seen in the fact that the approach is concerned with *relational issues*. The focus lies on the relationship of human beings to each other and the way they are – as individuals – depending on and contributing to a wider set of relations. The other difference is that this approach is fundamentally *process-oriented*, i.e. it is concerned with developing entities. For this we start from an analytical raster based on two dialectical tensions, namely

- * the tension between biographical and societal development and
- * the tension between communities and systems.

This is understood as constitutive dependency as shown in the following graph:

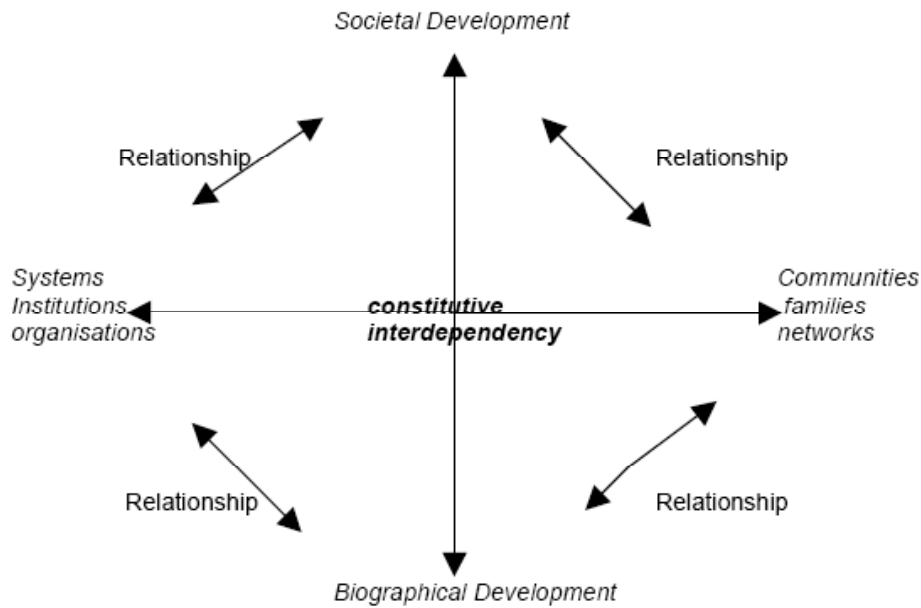


Figure 1: The Constitutive Dependency

The building blocks of this *processual relationship* can be found as the three layers of constitutional conditional and normative factors as summarised in the following table.

CONSTITUTIONAL (PROCESSES)	CONDITIONAL (OPPORTUNITIES)	NORMATIVE (OUTCOMES)
Personal Capacity	Social Empowerment	Social Justice (including Equity)
Social Recognition	Social Cohesion	Solidarity
Personal Security	Socio-Economic Security	Human Security
Social Responsiveness	Social Inclusion	Democratic Citizenship

Figure 2: Social Quality Building Blocks

The conditional factors are defined in the following:

- * Social empowerment is the extent to which the personal capabilities of individual people and their ability to act are enhanced by social relations. This conditional factor is especially an outcome of processes concerning the formation of collective identities in the interactive setting of biographical development and the world of daily life (communities, families etc). This requires a degree of mutuality. As such it is complemented by social cohesion.
- * Social cohesion is the extent to which social relations, based on identities, values and norms, are shared. This conditional factor is especially an outcome of processes concerning the formation of collective identities in the interactive setting of societal development and the world of daily life (communities or families). This requires a degree of reciprocity. The objective basis is found in socio-economic security.
- * Socio-economic security is the extent to which individual people have resources of time. This conditional factor is especially an outcome of processes concerning the formation of collective identities in the interactive setting of the societal development and the world of systems (institutions or organisations). This requires a right based constitutional framework. This refers to social inclusion.
- * Social inclusion is the extent to which people have access to and are integrated into different institutions and social relations that constitute everyday life. This conditional factor is especially an outcome of processes concerning the formation of collective identities in the interactive setting of biographical development and the world of systems (institutions or organisations).

It is important that these conditional factors are actually necessary, though not sufficient conditions – only by the constitutional factors they are getting manifest and can establish themselves as factually existing.

- * First, the provision of the necessary material and other resources. It regards a specific degree of *socio-economic security*. It is oriented on human security as the basis for the provision of general

protection by collective entities (communities as well as systems and institutions) as conditions for processes of self-realisation. It has two aspects: (i) all welfare provisions which guarantee the existential security of citizens (income, employment, housing, health, education), and (ii) juridical provisions which guarantee societal security of citizens.

- * Second, the disposition of the necessary collective accepted values and norms. It regards a specific degree of *social cohesion*. It is oriented on solidarity as the basis for collective identities and concerns processes that create, defend or demolish social networks and the social infrastructures underpinning these networks. In other words it refers to the glue which holds together communities, families, networks and groups or systems as elements of societies.
- * Third, the accessibility of the institutional and structural context. It regards a specific degree of *social inclusion*. It is oriented on a democratic form of citizenship as the basis for participation in economic, political, and cultural systems and processes of being included in other forms of collective identities and realities that determine self-realisation.
- * Fourth, the capability to interact in daily circumstances. It regards a specific degree of *social empowerment*. It is oriented on the realisation equity in social relations by delivering points of departure for the development of human capabilities. In other words it refers to being enabled to engage in collective identities as essential preconditions for self-realisation and primarily concerns enabling people, as citizens to develop their full potential.

After having provided these definitions, we can now link this back to the four dimensions of welfare as they had been proposed in the previous section, namely individual well-being/living conditions, the individuals shaping of his/her live, collective welfare provision/relational welfare dimension and finally processuality

Taking these concerns of well-being and welfare policies, we can link them in the following way with the social quality issues:

WELLBEING/WELFARE DIMENSION	SOCIAL QUALITY DIMENSION	AGGREGATE LEVEL
individual well-being/living conditions	socio-economic security	societal development
individuals shaping of his/her live	empowerment	biographical element
collective welfare provision/relational welfare dimension	inclusion	institutional level
processuality	cohesion ^{iv}	community level

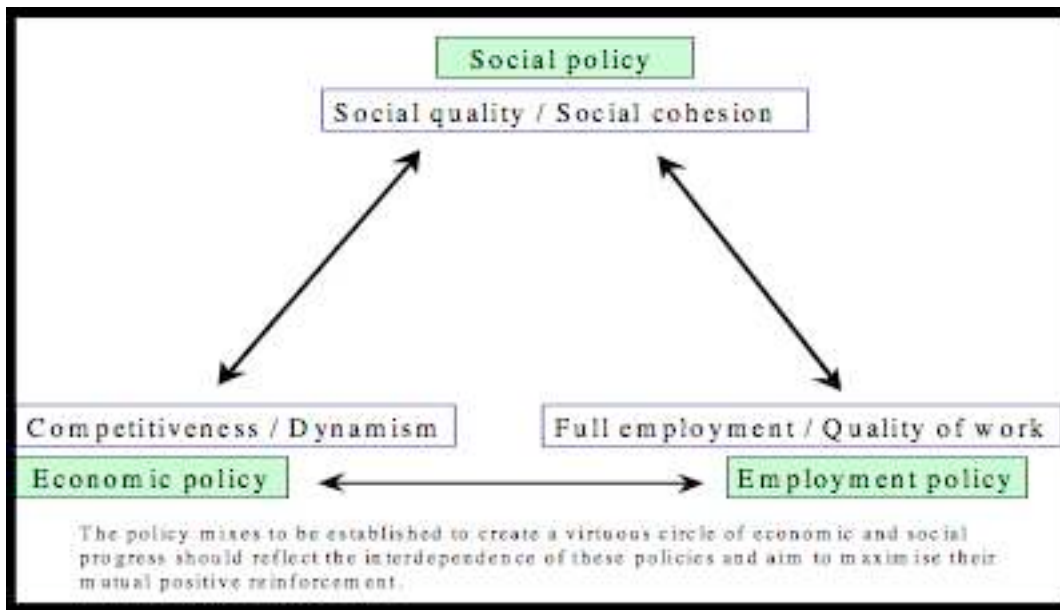
Figure 3: Wellbeing, Social Quality and the Levels of Intervention

Social Quality and Social Policy

Taking this as definitional framework we have to recognise that the Social Quality Approach is in actual fact in two directions meaningful.

First, it has an analytical dimension, meaning it can be used as instrument to investigate concrete conditions of life. Such analysis can be concerned with the analysis of societies at large but it can as well be used as instrument for analysing single issues – as policy instruments, professional activities, legal provisions and of course concrete ‘social problems’ as for instance precarity in its various dimensions – later we will come back to this.

Second, the approach has a normative and policy function, i.e. it is providing a guideline for successful policy. In this regard it is not primarily concerned with providing a ‘distinct area of social policymaking’. Rather, it serves as guideline of activities in different areas and provides a substantial focus. We can refine this by drawing a distinction of the following kind. The European Commission suggested in the social policy agenda of 2000 the attribution of policies and their substantial focus by the following triangle.



(From: European Commission: Social Policy agenda. Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions; Brussels 28.6.2000; COM [2000] 379 fin.: 6)

Figure 4: The Social Policy Triangle

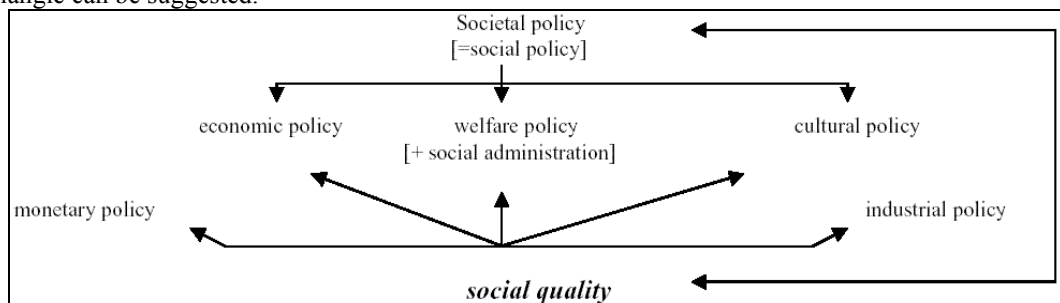
Without doubt it is important that this suggested a shift by taking at least verbally the concept of social quality on board. However, it is questionable that the concept had been reinterpreted in terms of a separate, distinct area of policymaking rather than seeing social quality as focus of policymaking in more general terms.

Taking the definitions from above, we can actually define social quality

as the extent to which people are able to participate in the socio-economic, cultural, juridical and political life of their communities under conditions which enhance their well-being and individual potentials for contributing to societal development as well.

(Herrmann, Peter: Social Quality and the European Social Model. Opening individual well-being for a social perspective; in: Alternatives. Turkish Journal of International Relations 4/4; Published and Edited by Bulent Aras; Istanbul: Faith University. Department of International Relations, Winter 2005: 16-32; here: 21 – <http://www.alternativesjournal.net/>; <http://www.alternativesjournal.net/volume4/number4/herrmann.pdf>)

Taking such an approach and including what had been said before, the following reinterpretation of the triangle can be suggested.



(From: Herrmann, Peter: Person oriented services and social service providers in comparative and European perspective. Current debates on changes by liberalisation in a perspective of a theory of modernisation; New York: Nova, i.p.[2007])

Figure 5: The Social Quality Agenda

The segregate character of social quality as topic dealt with by social policy is replaced by positioning it as a general focus – in a way this links well into actually quite different and even contradicting

traditional approaches as for instance the understanding of the unity of economic and social policy, the German *Staatwissenschaften* ('science of the state'), the *Ordnungspolitik* ('politics of social order') and as well elements of the Jacobinist tradition of the state as responsible social order rather than an institutional bracket for otherwise isolated instances and subject matters. A significant moment of this approach is that here form follows substance rather than developing substance as consequence of form.

Seen from here, involvement into the employment system is one, though admittedly important, moment of social quality – but is one moment amongst others. However, the following qualifications have to be made.

a) As important as it is, the quality of employment – in terms of the 'richness' of the work and as well in terms of the status of the worker is of central importance.

b) This means as well that any employment is to be valued not least in terms of its social meaningfulness. This is, of course, problematic in a capitalist market society in which valuation is based on prices set by standards of commodification. Such a principle means at the same time that many of those activities concerned with establishing and maintaining the social fabric, are taken out of this system of valuation, as they are not 'marketable'. On the other hand it means that actually unproductive activities – especially in a virtual society – are highly 'valued' in monetary terms. So, this shows the necessity of going beyond the concept of the status of employment.

c) Such socially meaningful activity is both, a means to achieve social quality in terms of 'success' with regard to all the dimensions of the social quality agenda and as well a consequence of social quality from other dimensions.

d) Social quality and as part of this employment and socially meaningful activities are not simply concerned with the situation of the individual. Rather, the concern is as well oriented towards issues of social integrity. It is in this sense that the definition of social quality speaks as well of *individual potentials for contributing to societal development*.

Looking now at the mechanism of policymaking we are facing another challenge. Here it is said that precarity is not a matter of individual life situations, the individuals' position but expression of social and societal instability and at the same time cause for 'individual precarity', including insecurity with regard to employment. If this is true, we need at the very same time not just institutional mechanisms in order to stabilise and/or balance different individual pillars of the policy system. Rather, we need, indeed, a new system. This would be concerned with new institutional mechanisms, their enhancement towards 'governance' and finally – or better: fundamentally – a renegotiated understanding of 'general interest'.^v

Element of the latter has to be a redefinition of integration and of the role of employment within such a new framework. This is not simply a matter of negotiating new rules of social insurance, for instance by recognising certain currently excluded activities in the calculation of pension claims or similar. Rather, we have to look beyond such superficial moments. Alluding to *Gøsta Esping-Andersen's* outline of *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (see *Esping-Andersen, Gøsta [1990]: The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism; Cambridge: Polity Press*), we should not concentrate on further steps of decommodification (and the defence of areas which are in danger of re-commodification); rather the challenge is now to question if not radically the entire commodification as foundation of social integration, so at least the understanding. At the end, this might be employed with well-known instruments – in actual fact the recognition of parental leave in the pension systems is one, the recognition of (certain) voluntary work is another example; systematically introduced sabbatical for training can be as well mentioned and the list could be substantially expanded – in this context the *Plea for a System of Security for Employment or Training* by Paul Boccara (see *Boccara, Paul: The labour market, employment and unemployment policies; in: Herrmann, Peter [ed.]: Human Human Beings - Between the Individual and the Social; New York: Nova; cf. detailed Boccara, Paul [2002]: Une Sécurité d'emploi ou de formation. Pour une construction révolutionnaire de dépassement contre le chômage; Paris: Le Temps des Cerises, Pantin*) is a valuable guideline. Although (some of) the measures may well be the same as in contemporary policymaking they are different as much as they are part of a fundamentally changed point of departure. Rather than dealing with employment integration and efforts to establish a best-fit between employment and social security system, here they are concerned with integrity and sustainability of social and societal integrity.

Starting from here, a twofold challenge is linked to such a conceptualisation, the first being concerned with the separation of power. All EU member states follow in principal the Western tradition of the enlightened state, and in particular the division of power, establishing the three pillars, namely the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. However, taking the fact of modernisation serious, we have to supplement such 'holy trinity of delegated power' and with this changing it

fundamentally. Rather than reducing power on the principle of institutionalist delegation it seems to be necessary to include the life-world perspective as immediate supplement into the structure of governing. Of course, we have to be careful and avoid throwing the baby out with the bathing water: the separation of power is – in the societies we are dealing with – an important protective instrument against the misuse of power. And it is for this reason, that we should open the view on the ‘soft-mechanisms’, comprising of social professions, social care, open-methods and round tables etc. *systematically into the governing structure*. The term governing structure is explicitly used as it suggests regulated and systematically controlled mechanisms of determining the process of socialisation – and as such it is different than the concept of governance. And it is as well different to traditional lobbying processes as they are entirely uncontrolled, following with the orientation on stakeholders very much an approach that builds on the fundament of the distribution of economic power and its inbuilt inequalities. What is suggested here is to re-socialise certain processes – on another occasion I oriented on a move ‘from contract to status’.^{vi} It is simply a process that is concerned with the appropriation of institutions by people concerned.

Second, implementation has to be made a systematic part of policymaking. It is without doubt already the case that implementation actually influences to a large extent not only policy processes but is as well an immediate instrument of policymaking (*see for instance Bohnert, Werner/Klitzsch, Wolfgang, 1980: Gesellschaftliche Selbstregulierung und staatliche Steuerung. Steuerungstheoretische Anmerkungen zur Implementation politischer Programme; in: Mayntz [Hrsg.], 1980: Implementation politischer Programme. Empirische Forschungsberichte; Königstein/Ts.: 200 ff.*) – we can probably even speak of a general shift in policymaking, moving power on the one hand increasingly towards the judicative and moving it on the other hand increasingly towards the tale end of the executive, the implementing social entities. However, it is again a more or less incremental and uncontrolled move, actually undermining the separation of powers. And again we arrive at the conclusion that it is necessary to systematically develop the extension of separation of power. It is only by such shift that processes of socialisation as they had been mentioned before can be managed in an efficient and sustainable way.

Social Quality and Social Precarity

It is from here that we can actually assess the question of precarity in a different light as it is now concerned with a much wider framework that allows

- a) analysing and understanding precarity as a consequence of the dissolution of different aspects of the social
- b) developing a wider concern with not only employment but with something that we can identify as ‘socially meaningful activities’
- c) proposing ‘non-technical’ and ‘non-institutional’ solutions to precarity and finally
- d) providing a new outlook on policy development.

At this point, the focus of interest are points (a) and (b). Precarity, thus the thesis, is due to an unsustainable shift of the balance of the various social quality dimensions. If we refer to the conditional and constitutional factors and bring them together we arrive at the following graph

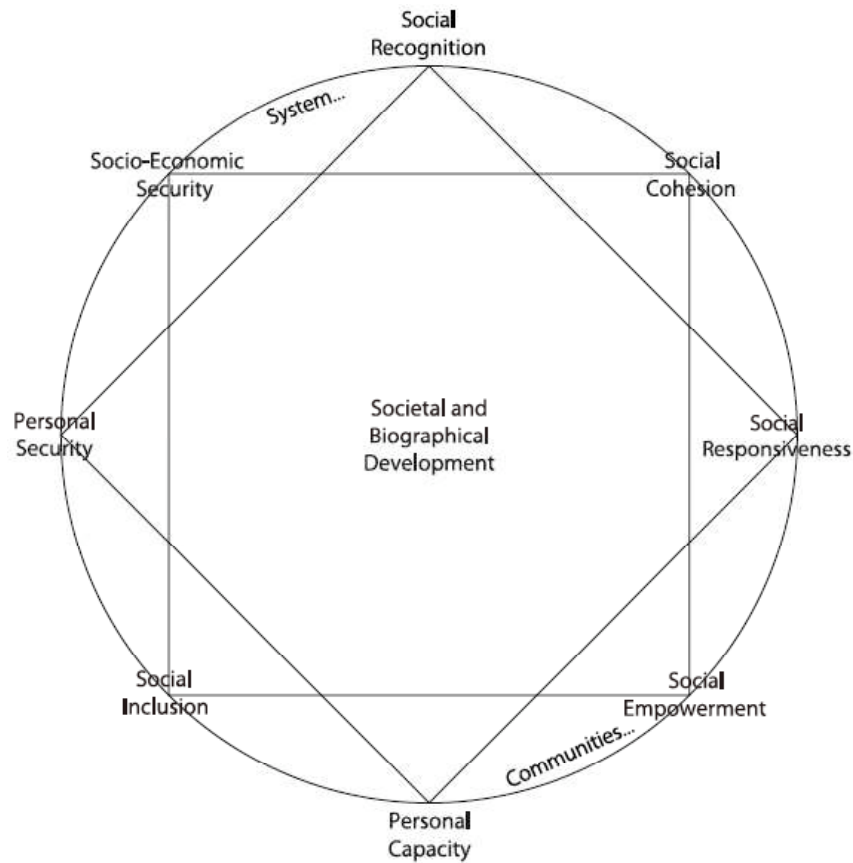


Figure 6: Conditional and Constitutional Interplay

– the relationship has been already explored in the text before (*s. page 5*). What the graph suggests as societal and biographical development can be seen as well as non-precarious situation or, as we might say as well, as integrity. In other words, we arrive from the social quality perspective at the following definition of precarity: it is the unbalanced relationship of the different variables that ideally constitute social quality. Unbalanced, then, means that the different factors are not appropriately weighed. Instead, the overemphasis of one factor actually results in a distortion of the others.

This can be clearly seen in terms of a ‘technically misunderstood employment strategy’ and activation policies.

First, we find mechanisms to get people into ‘employment’ in the actual sense of getting them out of the unemployment statistics. Precarious, then, means that (a) the employment is not necessarily stable and even meant to be of long-term character. In most of these cases, it seems to be more important to get people out of certain institutional standards of the security systems; (b) employment is not developed in a sustainable way – and this perspective is often true for both sides, i.e. from the perspective of the employment-system and the employers and as well in the perspective of the employed. For instance, the recognition of existing qualifications and the provision of education and training is largely ignored.

Second, the meaning of employment is by and large disregarded. (a) One aspect here is that socio-economic security stands in the centre – the thesis of such approaches being that there is an automatism between bringing people into work and other moments of ‘social integration’ and even integrity. (b) Another aspect is that actually the other dimensions are actually reinterpreted in the given light. For instance empowerment – in terms of the Social Quality Approach

concerned with the means and processes necessary for people to be capable of actively participating in social relations and actively influencing the immediate and more distant social and physical environment

– means currently only the promotion of manpower. Surely, this is an important aspect; however, it is only one aspect amongst others; and actually it is more concerned with the individual’s integration into an existing system rather than with *actively influencing the immediate and more distant social and physical environment*. Cum grano salis, the same mechanisms of alteration can be seen with respect to other Social Quality-dimensions.

Third, the social dimension of employment is largely considered to be a factor of macro-economic concern. Other aspects and actually many forms of ‘alternative economies’ are on such a basis excluded from further consideration. This can be seen by looking at the social economy and the so-called Third-System as promoted by the EU. All respective policies are mainly geared into the direction of integrating these patterns into mainstream economy, thus actually undermining the substantial specificities of economies in question.

Outlook – Challenges for a European Social Model

What can we conclude now from such a broad model with respect to the current debate on the welfare state debate, the future of respective policies and – going beyond – with respect to the debate on the European Social Model (ESM)? Primarily the task is to find a European identity. Up to now, the ESM is fundamentally defined as matter of traditions – however, at the same time disregarding (a) that the referred traditions are only in very broad terms defined and (b) that they are to a large extent ‘cultural’ traditions rather than being directed to the actual determining forces of real politics and policies of the current state(s). (c) Finally it can hardly be ignored that actually during modernity these values paradoxically diverged to a large extent. Although converging to some extent by commonly focusing on the establishment of capitalist economies and the ‘enlightened state’, the actual shapes of these economies and states took amazingly different forms even across core Europe. Sure, certain general ‘modern structures’ can be found quite broadly. However, on this basis we find various concretisations as laid down in contractual systems, treaties and social contracts respectively (*see Herrmann, Peter [forthcoming]: Developing a Methodology Based on the History of Ideas for Social Professions – The Meaning of the Founding of the State. Meta-Theoretical Perspectives for Developing a Methodology for an International Approach*). These differences are complex in nature – concerning the general institutional structures, social security systems and trickling down to (or perhaps even building up from) the modes of life and the very specific life regimes.

Without being able to go into details, two points have to be distinguished. First, developing social policy competence on the European level is of immediate necessity. And such competence has to be genuine. Subsidiarity is a concept that is easily used as wrong defensive. European social policy cannot be concerned with establishing a EU-wide implementation body nor does it suggest unified socio-cultural patterns. However, needed is a space of common concern about social quality, a space that orients towards increasing

the extent to which people are able to participate in the socio-economic, cultural, juridical and political life of their communities under conditions which enhance their well-being and individual potentials for contributing to societal development as well.

Second, as such social policy needs to be concerned with socialisation rather than being concerned with a productive function, having a flanking role etc. Sure, all these traditional moments have to play some role. However, with the change of the focus as it is suggested here, policies have to be concerned with aiming on establishing a ‘congruence’ between the different building blocks as they had been outlined before and summarised in *Figure 2: Social Quality Building Blocks* on page 5.

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- i Special Thanks to Stephanie Knoche, scientific assistant at ESOSC, who gave valuable hints to a first draft.
 - ii The following elaboration is more essayist in character, by and large disclaim to present the usual scientific apparatus. I want to express my special Thank You to *Laurent van der Meassen* with whom I developed and discussed many of the issues over the last two years or so.
 - iii A formulation like this goes back to Niklas Luhmann, *passim*.
 - iv This includes a slant of ‘negotiation’
 - v It is not the place to discuss here the dubiety of the concept of general interest.
 - vi Obviously alluding to the famous phrase of the development *from status to contract* as used by *A.S. Maine*.