

Transformations that Cannot Happen or There Won't Be Clear Answers as Long as We Ask the Wrong Questions

Peter Herrmann

The following reflections argue that theories of development, particularly, modernization fail to develop themselves and still follow the tradition of one-dimensionality—this is evidenced by terms like pre-/postmodern, renaissance, or Middle Ages, all referring to the linearity of time under which everything else is subordinated. It is also evidenced by modernization theories, proposing a certain developmental sequence—the standard example would be the Rostowian model. Underlying is a mechanical understanding of society and economy, based on the assumption that increasing material wealth “presents itself as ‘an immense accumulation of commodities’.” The following will reflect on a concept of relational processuality.

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Socialization as core of society building

The following argues that theories of development, particularly, modernization fail to develop themselves and still follow the tradition of the linear development—this is evidenced by terms like pre-/postmodern, renaissance, or Middle Ages, all referring to the linearity of time under which everything else is subordinated. It is also evidenced by modernisation theories, proposing a certain developmental sequence—the standard example would be the Rostowian model. Underlying is a mechanical understanding of society and economy, based on the assumption that increasing material wealth presents itself as “an immense accumulation of commodities.” The following will reflect on a concept of relational processuality.

Peter Herrmann, is a Professor, Research Fellow at the Human Rights Center, Law School at the Central South University, Changsha, PRC; Member of the European Academy of Science and Arts; Member of the Beyt Nahrin Mesopotamian Academy of Sciences and Arts (BEN-MAAS). He can be contacted at herrmann@esosc.eu.

Applying such a concept will give evidence that transformations cannot happen until they follow a concept of adaptation. One country or group of countries is expected to adapt by adopting not only formal rules, ideational mechanisms, institutions, and the underlying “social habitus.” The main argument is derived from the take-over of the former socialist countries by “the West,” the latter claiming to represent a universal blueprint. In the present case the empirical dimension is mostly derived from comparing the old and the new Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and what had been the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In a retrospective on the first version of these reflections, i.e., the Working Paper,¹ the conclusion is two-fold as far as we are looking at the perspective of theory development. Notwithstanding the claim of social quality thinking and some tentative notions of its realization it lacks a radically processual approach to reality. In particular, the emphasis of indicators entails some structuralist perspective which is fixed at any one time. In other words, development remains stuck in thinking of replacing stages. History and society are in tendency limited to a modular system of which the elements can be combined arbitrarily and voluntarily and should be combined in a “good way,” while what the “good” actually is remains undefined. On the other hand, we find development similarly caught in structuralist fetters. Now the problem is linearity, suggesting a sequence of stages, where they are now not made up of a modular system but a matter of a predefined stages of a sequence: At some point, the society enters into the mainstream, and from then on the development is more or less predefined. In any case, even the simplest form of processuality, namely reflexivity remains outside of the consideration of both approaches. However, fundamentally such societies do not exist in reality. Hence, as such, we are concerned with the process of socialization. In other words, we can speak of an increasing number of elements and the connections between them tightening. Merging the social quality thinking and theory of social development, we arrive at the proposal of social qualification, emphasizing ambiguity. On the one hand, it is the qualification of individuals through interaction and their constitution as conscious participants of the processes of interaction; on the other hand, it is about the qualification of this interacting structuration, achieving the ability to manage the change that is permanent and of which the meaning is permanently changing. In summary, social qualification is a process by which conscious interactors permanently change the situation and the constellation that is framing the interaction.

Historical realities

Especially large-scale developments and transformations are like naturally given laboratories allowing observing change and stability. This is, even more, the case

¹The present contribution moves the reflections, laid down in the working paper 18, published by the International Association on Social Quality (<https://socialquality.org/wp-content/uploads/IASQ-Working-Paper-18.pdf>), radically further and requires from the reader “co-reflection,” differing from “information absorption.”

when we are observing moves that are in one or another way a matter of retardation, moves towards a status quo ex-ante. This had been the case in Central Eastern Europe. Already this term is telling, highlighting the ambiguity of belonging and not belonging. The pre-socialist era already had been characterized by some form of such ambiguity, characterizing the situation already a country like Germany: one can see, using a broad brush, that the area that became the GDR, had been earlier very much the corn chamber of Germany, the poor part, delivering “raw material,” namely agricultural products, to the industrially more advanced West. Of course, further elaboration would suggest differences, as it is also the case when we look at the west: the coal mining and steel industry next to the Ruhr, the administrative center in Berlin, the chemistry industry around the Rhine-Main Region, the machine, and electro industry in Berlin, etc. amongst others were added to the administrative and educational centers. It is critical to acknowledge that all these “centers” were shaped differently after 1945, during pre-fascist, fascist, and post fascist geopolitics, and then more pronouncedly, in 1949, after the establishment of the two German states. Different terminology had been and still is used, namely “the division of Germany”, the establishment of “two states on German soil”, “eastern zone” and “Soviet zone”. Taken together, we find a constellation marked by overlapping and exclusive characteristics that include space, developmental time, class, industrial, and management structure. In some respect, this was seen during different phases as relatively stable equilibrium, a somewhat floating constellation that had been to the extent stable to which no sudden ruptures occurred. The year 1945/49 had been a critical rupture, as essential parts of the ancient regime broke apart, this concerned the corn chamber and the administrative center in and around the central government. While the “ancient regime” refers first and foremost to the pre-49-era, it also includes the period commencing with the foundation of the German Empire in 1872, which is a crucial factor in the identity building of the legal tradition. It is hard to imagine what it meant: The FRG in some way without its Prussian tradition ‘the state of the Richter and Henker’ (the judges and hangmen) and also void of major parts of its tradition of the people of the poets and thinkers (‘the country of the Dichter und Denker’).² The GDR, having this heritage, aimed at building an entirely new state; while these are more heuristic notions, they give at least tentative clues, allowing to grasp the complexity of the transformative processes.

Taken with a broad brush again, one may say that the years during which an alternative pathway had been pursued, we find indeed a somewhat collectivist approach not simply given by the changes of the property but also and perhaps even more so as attitudinal change. In the entire region of the so-called Central Eastern Europe, we find a constellation that has its foundation in some form of collectivity, the state – and this is relevant independent of a positive or a

²Fontane, Goethe, Hegel, Hoelderlin, Leibniz, Lessing, Nietzsche, Schiller, Schlegel, and Schopenhauer are just a few names evidencing the importance of the intellectual centers in the eastern parts of the country.

negative identification with the state or collectivity. Especially as all the societies of the region had been in a critical situation of emerging formations, the tight rules of a clear resource pool, a definite regulative system of distribution, a clearly defined international standing, and a definitive as well as an unquestioned power structure. This had been a fertile ground not for relations that are – in the light of Westerners (classified as arbitrary and highly individualist) whereas those who had been socialized in the east depending on trust, often arduously and in a long process developed and often combined with various forms of mutual support. This aspect is, pending further empirical research, also a reason behind the lack of polarization in general, and by definition³, the result of inequality.⁴ The overarching notion can be made out by accentuating that “West meets East” is just another expression of capitalism reinterpreting the history of the recent past in the role of missionaries who wanted to spread the message of infallible salvation for people moving in their path. It could not be expected in another way: denied moving on, fighting for their way, many ended up by radicalizing the salvation, showing more radical capitalism, a more inversed imperialism (the radical closure of borders and fertile ground for racism and not least the right-wing politics and moralist-conservative notions). A very recent example is the change of the Hungarian constitution, providing a strict definition of traditional gender roles:

The new Hungarian constitution defines family as “based on marriage and the parent-child relation. The mother is a woman, the father a man.” It also mandates that parents raise children in a conservative spirit.

“Hungary defends the right of children to identify with their birth gender and ensures their upbringing based on our nation’s constitutional identity and values based on our Christian culture,” it says. (Dunai & Komuves, 2020)

Two seemingly marginal points are of importance when considering the development:

- The belittling of the change by dealing with it in an omnibus legislation, launching the major change as part of an omnibus bill (Act amending certain laws relating to justice: <https://www.parlament.hu/irom41/13648/13648.pdf>) that deals with a multiple issues, some of them relating to more or less simple administrative issues, thus the severity of the change is somewhat “veiled.”

³Though not necessary.

⁴This had been frequently pointed out, refer Winkler, Hernan, without date: The Effect of Income Inequality on Political Polarization: Evidence from European Regions, 2002–2014; http://www.ecineq.org/ecineq_nyc17/FILESx2017/CR2/p11.pdf; 2021/04/07

- The self-limitation of the critiques, focusing on the consequences for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning and the harsh restrictions, easily forgetting that it is the CEE-version of the “moral and spiritual turn”, proclaimed in 1982 by Helmut Kohl going hand in hand with Reaganomics and Thatcherism and marking a shift towards a new world view and order. In this context, the phrase moral and spiritual turn, originally used in October 1982 in the Government Statement of the newly elected Kohl-Regime, had been later transmuted into the guiding figure for the 1989-seachange (<https://www.thelocal.de/20181003/german-word-of-the-day-die-wende>).

Bringing this in line with the 1989-events, it makes perfect sense to speak of a take-over. The German claim “We are the people” had been mended into “we are German citizens,” adapting the German basic law,⁵ the quest for justice limited by the realization of the state of law (Herrmann, 2021).

This brief description shows that social qualification, as proposed here, like a merger of social quality and social development thinking, is not a matter of altering single parameter(s) but requires a structure-processual change, comparable with earlier saying:

at any single moment something is structure or process but never both at the same time. And it permanently changes itself based on the changes it induced.

This translates into the impossibility of applying concepts and terms like trust, support, recognition, and like without noticing the conceptual difference of these characteristics if occurring in different contexts.

Especially indicator research is highly in danger of evading the need to recognize the complexity. Instead, it means the return to mechanical thinking, considering matters as a variable combination of individual items. Understanding trust and other core stances and their demeaning after 1989 require developing a deep understanding of the societal processes before the change, which subsequently led to a transformation that could not happen.

Analysing regional development(s): Social research as contextualization

Looking at the development of the CEE countries, means first to engage in a brief historical review of the development of the social quality approach. In 1990 everything started, first culminating in 1997, when the leading document of social quality thinking, namely the Amsterdam declaration, had been launching the initiative publicly. This had been the start not only of a new thinking, but a

⁵The FRG did not have a constitution but a constitution-like basic law, always maintaining the “German Question” open.

reflection of real European societal developments that can be characterised by a few dates: 1989 we find the end of a “historical experiment.” For the time being, this need not be characterized as a failure of socialism, the imperial takeover of the CEE countries, or whatsoever; it had been a period when the European Union (EU) was still experimenting with certain programs in social and welfare policies. These experiments had been not least consequence of another crisis and period of Euroscepticism. Such experimentation came in the middle to the end of the 1990s, bidding farewell to a specifically EU-defined approach to social policy and society building. The shift was because of the dispute over the antipoverty programs (a renewal of the program policy, now under the title “PROGRESS,”) impeded by the European Court of Justice based on the legal action of some member states. European social policy now entered a new stage as “the Amsterdam Treaty” (1997). The pivotal part was the employment chapter introduction because of the ongoing dispute (see Herrmann, 1995). This development can also be seen as a part of the geopolitical shift. As EU-capitalism did not face the pressure from outside anymore and competition by an alternative system could now be overwritten by competitiveness on the global markets and later the solution of inner-European power struggles.

It is pivotal to acknowledge this historical background when it comes to the developmental analysis of the CEE countries (many aiming already at an early stage at EU membership) and the relationship and the specific integration of these countries into the existing European geo-strategies. We also need to analyze the developments within the region in question: Comparison of these countries from 1985 with the so-called Perestroika and then specifically with the subsequent development versus after 1989 when it came to the collapse of the socio-economic formation of an entire region which claimed to represent a different societal model. Such a claim had surely been justified in the light of the development of society. Without entering a debate about the pros and cons of the political-cultural and socio-economic system of these countries, they played undoubtedly the role of a counterbalance, questioning.

It is important to acknowledge this historical background when it comes to the analysis of the development of the CEE countries (many aiming already at an early stage at EU-membership) but even more so when it comes to the relationship and the specific integration of these countries into the existing European geo-strategies. In the same vein we have to analyse the developments within the region in question: the analysis of these countries has to go back to at least 1985 with the so-called Perestroika and then specifically with the subsequent development after 1989, when it came to the collapse of the socio-economic formation of an entire region which claimed to represent a different societal model. Such claim had surely been justified in the light of the development of society. Without entering a debate about the pros and cons of the political-cultural and socio-economic system of these countries, they played undoubtedly the role of counterbalancing the hegemony of the established western capitalist system. Perhaps we should go even further back and look at the development of the new political approach after

the cold war which found its first point of culmination in the *Kniefall von Warsaw*, Willi Brandt's Warsaw genuflection in 1970. Although it had been only a symbolic gesture, it was most important for the entire future development, as it was and is seen as a culmination of the entire process of détente.

These two pillars, the development in the so-called West, in particular, the EU as it existed until 1989 on the one hand and the so-called "East," namely the east European countries (EEC) countries, had been artificially tied together. The phrase, "What belongs together, is growing together again"⁶ became a common dictum. But the reality was different. It had been the enforced secularization of "capitalist modernity," going so far that Fukuyama saw "the end of history." This enforced merger as the interpenetration of a specific form of capitalism was the expression of the general geopolitical orientation, allowing that the winner takes all. Two statements are of pivotal importance Margarete Thatcher and Helmut Kohl, taken as Duo, established with their proclamation the relevant pillars (Thatcher and Kohl, 1990). It is critical to note the exact wording, suggesting lives up to that point had not been worthwhile. Living in the GDR then was seen by Kohl and his companions as "lost lives" (this terminology was frequently used to describe the situation). According to Thatcher (1980), "There is no alternative." Taking the two as Duo marks the future plans, fully elaborated in the conclusions, presented by the Lisbon Council in 2000, stating that it "has today set itself a new strategic goal for the next decade: to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (Lisbon European Council, 2000). Ideologically, this had been implemented, and is probably fair to say that the current "Zeitgeist" is marked by the following characteristics: competitiveness, individual advantage, privatism, and weird merger between paternalistic subordination and obstinacy. Importantly we need to recognize that this is not just an ideological reflection or subjective notion. Instead, we are facing an objective constellation, that nearly engraves specific habits into the social fabric. While this is socially differentiated, it can be said that there is a general norm applicable to all members of this era and society. Thus, we arrive at a multi-layered and multi-periodical structure of regional, local, and social references. We are dealing with major developmental steps of the region, countries, and social strata. The shades suggest that the regions are more advanced than their people as agglomeration accumulates progress, merging the progressive impulses from the different strata. The higher themselves concentrate a lot of it ("skimming advances and

⁶https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Willy_Brandt, 2020/11/08/with the reference "In 1989, as quoted in 'Confederation Again' (26 July 2018), by Brian Reynolds Myers, Sthele Press"; according to the German reference (https://de.wikiquote.org/wiki/Willy_Brandt) this is according to the "Bundeskanzler Willy Brandt Stiftung" a shorthand of the sentence "Jetzt sind wir in einer Situation, in der wieder zusammenwächst, was zusammengehört." (Now we are in a situation where what belongs together is growing together again.—transl PH)

privileges”), whereas other “lower” social echelons are confronted with barriers, not having (easy) access to achievements.⁷

In short, the transformation was meant to be an adaptation of a criticized development strategy amongst others by the founders of social quality thinking for its one-sided prospect of a social model for which the foundation had not been socialized, understood as “the outcome of the dialectic between processes of self-realization of people (as social beings) and processes resulting into the formation of collective identities.” Instead, was referred to an economic model, standing on the pillars of:

- Growth (measured in GDP standards) as an expression of wealth and well-being.
- Competitiveness as evidence of healthy performance.
- Knowledge as an instrument, instead of acknowledging it as matter of a socio-personal development.
- Social cohesion as a reduced understanding of a complex relationality.

The problem is not new nor unique. A long-term development standing behind contemporary capitalism needs to be acknowledge that capitalism is far more and different than the economic production system that we commonly refer to, for instance, criticising neoliberalism. We need to analyze different timeframes proposed by Fernand Braudel (1969)—on how developmental stages overlap and cross each other, is defining the concrete shape of any formation that can be seen as “capitalist.” However, looking at the developmental aspect, the proposed perspective completely differs with the mainstream, particularly the view by Rostow (1960). He proposed consumption at the core of the entire developmental process—placing production as a primary feature, the level of consumption was seen as an ultimate standard of progress. In other words, the social was defined as a matter of consumption. On the surface, this may appear as being the real cause of existence, as it cannot be denied that the market exchange stands at the core of existing in modernity. However, this overlooks that commodity production is only a means of production in a broader sense. In the present understanding, any production, including the production of commodities, is part of the production of daily life. Frederick Engels (1884) contended this by stating, “[a]ccording to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of the immediate life.” This production of daily life happens in a contradictory constellation, characterized by the fact of private property. Taking this as a point of departure, we can take up a straightforward definition of capitalist formation in a e broader sense. Brewer (2016), in a small

⁷This is admittedly a more or less daring formulation of class theory, limited to a very rough juxtaposition. While it is meant to be a contribution to a debate, it is necessary to ask for caution to avoid wrong attributions. Important is not least to emphasise the objective processes that are determining access.

piece titled *This Is How Capitalism Actually Works*, states: "... use a legal framework of private ownership to extract value from the labour of others. The end game is a system that hoards wealth, stifles innovation, and ultimately destroys the value created by cooperation among those who seek to do things that cannot be done alone." We recognize two inherent dimensions of capitalism with this in mind. One dimension is about the production process and the role and function of the different acts and actors. The means of production and producing surplus beyond the sustenance product to the highly differentiated "three-class-society," in which the actual producer of an element of the total product (technical dimension of the division of labor), the owner and the manager of the means of production being alien to the entire process of production as such, though indispensable for securing the socialization of the process, i.e., for mediating between use value and exchange value. The other dimension is about consumption, in its extreme form completely detached from the (re)productive process, —the value shifts from assessing what to how much is produced. The latter is well expressed right at the beginning of Marx's *Capital*, where we read: "The wealth of those societies in which the capitalistic mode of production prevails, presents itself as an 'immense accumulation of commodities', its unit being a single commodity" (Marx, 1867). The concrete and specific relationship, differentiated weighing and grouping around production and consumption, and between the different modes of control (knowledge of production, control of property, legal ownership, etc.) are decisive in determining the concrete form capitalism takes (a first rough characteristic is already given by mentioning finance capitalism, trade capitalism, industrial capitalism, and servant capitalism). Even before globalization, any such constellation had not been straightforward "national decision." Instead, we are moving along the following eight lines:

- The first is reflecting regional settings and conditions. The most obvious factor is the climate, determining to some extent "what can be done," how people are conditioned in their behavior by natural conditions. Another relevant factor is language, constituting not least regional "families," thus establishing some commonality.
- The second line reflects "what is done" on the national level. This can be understood as an outcome of power relationships, resulting in some form of national identity war experience within a region, attributing a specific role and function.
- While both can be seen as defining moments in the long run, they are providing only a foundation and seedbed for the establishment of a specific regional and national structure of socio-productive and socio-reproductive patterns. The important point is to recognize them as processing of complex relationalities: the *Longue durée* interlinking with the *temps allongée* and these planes of history interacting in both respects, the regional and the national. But in addition, to the criss-cross relationship that is the long-term regional plane directly relating to the national dimension of the *temps*

allongée—and of course, in the very long run, even the long-term dimension is undergoing some alteration.

- The same is replicated and multiplied when we arrive at the third plane, now witnessing the interaction of the three levels in the hierarchical line (regional and national) and the various possible interactions between the different times and spaces.
- Of course, further complications are given by the fact of interregional relationships. Again, concerning the criss-cross-interaction between the different temporal and spatial references.⁸

Should we speak of the three planes of history as specific attributions, the “*Longue durée*” being a matter of mentality and general identity; the “*temps allongée*,” the layer of structuration and definition of agencies, and the “*temps rapide des événements*” reflecting the level of behavior and action? The reading of works of the *École des Annales* suggests such interpretation, presenting an understanding that, using parlance nowadays, can be labeled “deep history.”⁹ Of crucial importance is that the same relationality needs to be found here. Speaking of processuality, as we find it when looking at the different factors, being structure and process at the same time, which translates into something like being event and flow at the same time.

Conflicting histo-structural dimensions of social qualification

There had been early discussions on the understanding of quality. One interpretation showed that it is a more or less open concept, referring to something good or high-quality materials without inherent criteria. In other words, this criterion is defined outside of the “object.” The other dimension sees quality more as categorical. Seeing standards of quality as inherent to the matter in question (in this case: the social) and allowing more pronouncedly to speak of quality in a negative sense: it is not simply “bad” or “low”; instead, the “bad quality,” is defined by some clear criteria.

Referring to the second interpretation, we see the confrontation with two distinct layers of reference: (i) one concerns the social quality and its development within a given area (and across eras) – in the case of the present analytical goal we are looking at two areas, namely the East and the West, or more specifically the EEC countries and the EU-member states. Of course, such analysis is limited by using a broad brush, outlining the cornerstones of the development (see *International Journal of Social Quality*; Volume 10 (2020); Issue 2 (Dec 2020); the pictures provided will be very different, depending on the point of reference). It has been accepted that the “*punctum Archimedis*,” the Archimedean point, is open for definition. However, it is becoming interesting when it comes to the point where (2) we analyze from the same platform the potential conflict and tensions

⁸While we speak of regions and nations, we should not forget that this is only a small part of the entire setting, fading out the role of different classes.

⁹Further reflection must be dedicated to the contradiction between this approach and the ascending from the abstract to the concrete.

between the different regions, concerning and reflecting the impact and manifestation of the various historical planes at the same time.¹⁰ It needs some patience to allow engaging in such complexity, as we are stuck up in the tradition of pre-quantum-theoretical thinking. Social analysis without thoroughly considering processuality will always be stuck, limiting itself to dealing with relationships. So, this means any analytical perspective is bound to two limitations: the first is about the firm acknowledgment of assessing social quality is not and cannot be a matter of measurement (see Herrmann, 2012) In consequence social quality can only be fully unfolded as an analytical tool when seen as process analysis, thus requiring freedom (in the above-defined understanding) being an additional analytical factor. The other fundamental limitation arrives at the argument, that such kind of assessment is bound to an ongoing discourse that underlies the same laws of processual relationality, meaning that it permanently refers to the conditions without fully recognizing that they are changing because of their activity. We may tentatively use the term (not only self-) referential iterative process. Meaning most of these processes are reinforcing themselves or using another expression. We see the Matthew effect at work. Looking at the interrelationship of different references. In this case, the different regions, follow two parameters of special relevance. The first is the socio-economic standing of the region, independent of how it is measured/assessed. The second factor is about the power of one or the other unit, concerned with establishing and utilizing some form of dominance, in the form of dependency. In the theory of economics, such imbalance was seen in Riccardo's theory of competitive advantage. While this suggests equal power between different agencies, we can conclude that such constellation is the first and foremost unequal power. Substantial power is defined by the factual (not abstract) relationship of exchange value and use-value within and for the communities in question. Taking the classical example, used by David Riccardo, we see that the benefits in production of wine being advantageous for Portugal, whereas that of clothes was advantageous for England.

The baseline for this comparison is the time needed to produce the relevant exchangeable units of each product. Formally this is correct. However, it is obvious that the exchange value of clothes – if taken as matter of a generalised use value – is much higher than that of wine – the reason being obvious: One can live without wine but hardly without clothes and clothes are needed by everybody, wine not. In other words, the saturation of the market with wine is reached much faster than that of clothes. Part of the reason is the limitation of storage; another reason is given by the fact of clothes having a more generalised exchange value than wine – everybody needs clothes; some may enjoy wine. Moving such an example to the extreme, we may say that the production of gold as universal means of exchange is much higher in value than, let's say, the production of strawberries.

¹⁰This can also be applied in a comparative perspective of nation-states or any other special entities. Further consideration may be given to a similar pattern for comparative research regarding different social groups, including professionals, etc.

This is even then correct, if the cost of production is the same.¹¹ What applies to the production of commodities also applies to the assessment of values and political matters. All this is valid independent of the subjective valuation. Moving this explicitly towards the reinterpretation of social quality thinking and referring to social qualification, we introduce freedom, of course not understood as openness for action according to arbitrary and voluntary gusto or as abstract opposition. Instead, it is about the thorough understanding of complexities and action that takes this knowledge into account to unfold the options, making conscious use of the given contingencies. In other words, concerning transformation, social qualification would mean initializing a process not only of learning but also of reformulating the process of learning according to the advancing knowledge. In a very schematic way, we find the following juxtaposition of takeover (linear development) and transformation (social qualification):

Linear development	Social qualification
Subordination under the existing societal system, clearly defined allocation of power, mainly one-sided.	Definition of a new societal "goal" with open power relations.
Adaptation by way of recognizing the changed condition of the self-stabilization.	The overall goal is subject to permanent change according to the permanently, also self-induced evolving conditions.

A comparative socio-historical approach: An outline

Against this background, we evaluated the two regions in question comparatively and determined the power relationship between them.¹²

This can be seen as a framework that allows more detailed analysis, which, of course, cannot be delivered here. However, the presented framework can be used to analyze the different regions in question and determine in a comparative evaluation the power relationships between them. Principally the analysis in six fields is outlined in the following matrix:

Region 1	Region 2
Longue durée	Longue durée
Temps allongé des épisodes	Temps allongé des épisodes
Temps rapide des événements	Temps rapide des événements

¹¹When it comes to the theory of value, this means that the cost of production should include the reference to the time during which a product can be used. For example, if products A and B, require the same effort and time. However, if product A can only be used for 1 month, whereas product B can be used without time limitation. The value of product B will be higher than the value of product A, even though the production cost is the same for both.

¹²An additional problem is the differences in the long-term perspective and similarities with some general values and practices.

In which way ever we are concerned with the social quality of the Eastern region and the individual CEE-countries. We began with the analysis of the relationship with the hegemonic countries of the West when focusing on the transformation process analysis. In other words, we distinguished the process of transformation on the one hand and the region and its countries on the other hand. These are two very different issues. So far, going for metrics was only the first step, presenting the direction of the analysis on the general and abstract levels. While we would ideally look at the social quality as a matter of ordinary lives, we limit ourselves on elaborating a very rough perspective that can lead to further detailed analysis as it was liberated only after the Amsterdam declaration. If Region 1 was taken as the hegemonic power, we still must find a way to look at the substance that defines the hegemonic position. Only then we can assess the process we are looking at and see if we can really speak of transformation as outlined under the heading of social qualification or if it is more appropriate to speak of subordination. For this, a rough and tentative developmental pattern was proposed—from the adaptations of Rostow and Clark, more fundamentally going back to Marx and Luxemburg. We arrive at the following pillars of the development of the economic structure in the long run.

Simple (re)production of daily life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Near to) pure subsistence economy. • Rudimentary barter. • Early trade system.
System reproduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First financial capitalism. • Early fabric system. • Industrial capitalism.
System expansion/enhanced reproduction of all days live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced industrial production. • Franchizing economy. • International trade capitalism. • Emphasis of foreign trade balance. • Extractionism.
Transition economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycling capitalism. • Culturally oriented capitalism. • Capitalist sharing economy. • Behaviourism.
Transformation economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing economy. • Moral economy. • Globalist sustainability. • Extrapolation of the tension between increasing commodification and development towards the commodification, and forms of barter. • Re-regionalization and localization. • Re-Parochialism.

We found a kind of circular movement, which consists of two circles. The one is the large and overarching circle describing the movement from immediately dealing with use value (production and consumption) towards an abstraction (in extreme cases, finance capitalism that loses complete link to production and the

regional economy) and moving further, back to some form of refocusing on use-value, now on an advanced level. On the second layer, we find another circular movement, one that describes a similar path. However, here we are dealing with the link to use value. To be more precise, use-value is not a matter of absolute concern, but the use within the given system/on the given level of development. We can conclude that such changes include the development from executing immediate power, concerned with the situation one confronts with the societal power that is different from daily life. We can imagine this as a power balance sheet with a shift between the two dimensions.

In an initial stage, the power over the situation is identical with the power and control of the broader social situation. Accumulation of power over the social situation turns at some stage into an overwhelming pattern, silencing the meaning of the power over the immediate situation. In this stage, an additional level emerges that is now opening another layer of societal power, itself distanced from the given “concrete power over every day’s life.” In simple terms, for the small farmer, who is subsistence oriented, complemented by some minor barter, book-keeping is a “too large thing” to show any use value. In a developed industrial economy, the work of the accountant of an enterprise seems to be as concrete as that of the worker at the assembling line—Here the latter lost as much concreteness as the accountant gained.

While there is “total power” in the case of simple sustenance orientation, this power decreases with the increase of societal differentiation and the establishment of mediating bodies. This means that in more complex societies, it is more likely that societal power is outplaying individual power (ignoring that societal power can easily be transposed into individual power). In simple terms, being able to use a computer without being able to afford one makes the knowledge meaningless. On the other hand, having the material means to buy a computer, includes in many cases also the resources to avail of the education needed to use it or to employ somebody who can use it.

One dimension of societal development and the increasing complexity is enhanced societal, abstract control and the price paid for the loss of immediate control over life which is a pivotal point reflecting the general development of societies. Another more critical aspect is the question of property that is finally defining the relationship between the two powers. Even though it is easy to imagine downwards penetration that is societal power being translated into personal power, it is tougher to think upward unfolding (i.e., the use of pure personal power to execute societal control).¹³ This can also be applied in the perspective of a comparative look at different societies, a society that is producing products and commodities that are close to using value will have a weaker position than those societies where the economy is growing by the production of more universal

¹³Trump as president may be taken as example showing that such transfer is possible but difficult to maintain.

values, and in particular, commodities, as it means at least, that the second kind of society is potentially undermining and subordinating the first kind of society.

As far as it concerns the present debate, the critical part is the growing distancing from the immediate use value—in terms of economic value and/or in physical terms—is enhancing the power over others. In other words, a product from agricultural work best for immediate consumption does give little market power. On the other hand, a product of less daily utility by the real people establishes a higher market power. Exceptions are seen in emergencies, for instance, under conditions of societal transition, where the dominant mechanisms of exchange and ruling are suspended temporarily. Another situation where these dominant mechanisms are ignored is under pandemics or other emergency stations where real use-value becomes more important than the exchange value. The weight and direction of such suspension are not necessarily clear. Of course, at first sight, money cannot buy everything; however, we might also find the situation where the money can and does buy everything and decides over death and life.

Filling the frame: An example

In a nutshell, this results in the argument on three layers: (1) historical perspective: —whenever it comes to the assessment of the country and its wealth, we have to consider it quantitatively and qualitatively; (2) countries or regions are not only located in history but also defined by the relationship to other countries and regions—as we are dealing with power relationships in a geopolitical perspective; (3) against this background people are developing their identity and at the same time, —with this, —they accommodate themselves: They qualify the situation, that interprets it according to the specifications given context and the specific meaning; furthermore they use this definition of the historical stage to enhance their own action. —Here we see the concrete meaning of freedom as it had been defined earlier. It is such relational processuality that Marx (1852) must have had in mind, writing that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.”

Against this background, an important remark must be made regarding references. We are looking for information, that usually cannot be found in the standard literature present in libraries and journals. Informative are autobiographies, biographies, and novels. But the most critical source is creating their history by living and looking at the agencies in person.

Such an approach allows the analysis of the development of the individual countries, a group of countries, or the region. We take Germany as an example. The part that became the GDR, had been for a long time known as the corn-chamber of Germany, the poor eastern part of the country (a status which had been inherited from Prussian times). Unquestionably, the situation after World War II had been characterized by a major ambiguity. On the one hand, it remained economically a retarded area as the major destruction during the war especially in

the eastern parts of Germany, was never reconstructed,¹⁴ nor did the fact that the USSR insisted on the payment of reparation. Nevertheless, it had been a somewhat strong state, for different reasons a strong ally of the USSR, in some way stabilizing the entire CEE region—this had been a pivotal factor in respect of the relationship to other countries (east and west). It has been commonly known, that the relationship between the USSR and the GDR had been firm: reflecting the Second World War and its aftermath, the GDR—before its constitution as an independent state being one of the four zones into which Germany was divided (The Berlin [Potsdam Conference], 1945), emerged as a bulwark between the two blocks. This had been manifest in many occurrences of the Cold War, the erection of The Berlin Wall (see Herrmann, 2010) in a very subtle way. The delay of establishing a constitution for the country been a special notion going with the fact that Germany had been two German states, two entirely different social-political and social-economic systems.

As such, it has been also of outstanding importance in the years after the change. Although the meaning of the quoted phrase, “What belongs together, is growing together again,”¹⁵ implies the claim to sole representation from the west. Here we concentrated on a takeover while other countries of the region maintained/regained their independence. The GDR was integrated into the former FRG under the aegis of the west but remained in the position of the periphery of the rich western parts. And indeed, until today, there is a major gap in the living standards between east and west Germany (e.g., Bartels & Schröder, 2020). This is of special importance as the maintenance of such gap established a very specific notion, characterizing cohesion and the lack of it within the German borders, expressed in the following aspects: (1) in objective and subjective terms, a structure that is difficult to break open, characterized by the juxtaposition of “Wessies” and “Ossies.” (2) the establishment of a nation-state that (re)claimed the role of an imperial leader, referring to its “historic position,” its strong economic performance, and its relative openness. For example, the infamous role it played in history or the fact that the “relative openness” had been that of maintaining the segregation of citizens with a migratory background and the economic performance not least depending on blossoming landscapes never meant to develop in its true meaning. On the contrary, always depending on certain social groups or regions falling behind. Looking at the former GDR (part of the CEE as region), it implied the ambiguity. Suggesting that “Ossies,” classified as second-class citizens, are nevertheless part of Germany as a global or at least European hegemon. In other words, we were witnessing the qualification of some nationals of a “first-class state” as “second-class citizens.” While it is not the entire truth, it is an

¹⁴The policy of the scorched earth when the fascist troops had to withdraw.

¹⁵https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Willy_Brandt, 2020//11/08/with the reference “In 1989, as quoted in ‘Confederation Again’ (26 July 2018), by Brian Reynolds Myers, Sthele Press”; according to the German reference (https://de.wikiquote.org/wiki/Willy_Brandt) this is according to the “Bundeskanzler Willy Brandt Stiftung” a shorthand of the sentence “Jetzt sind wir in einer Situation, in der wieder zusammenwächst, was zusammengehört.” (Now we are in a situation where what belongs together is growing together again.—transl PH)

important part of the broader constellation behind the extremist right and fascist forces and their rise in the “eastern federal states.” (3) The lack of mutual respect, for instance, evidenced in the fact that there had not been any serious consideration to maintain those elements from the socio-political and socio-economic system of the GDR that had been advantageous. On the contrary, the new situation meant that there had not been any counterpower, forcing the old capitalism to concessions in the spirit of social security, social progress, and social respect. “Return of Manchester Capitalism” had been an often-heard phrase. For many, the situation had been made more daunting by “the West ‘celebrating its generosity’ by granting meaningless, symbolic ‘rights’, like allowing the continued use of the Ampelmaennchen (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ampelmännchen>) and maintaining a somewhat distinct rule for drivers turning to the right even if the traffic light is red. On the one hand, much had been lost on the way to Manchester capitalism concerning “structural facts” of a specifically shaped collective work and support system. Nevertheless these support mechanisms had been also welded into a complex “social habitus” of which several aspects had been at least to some extent maintained, having mentioned collectivity and trust at the beginning of these reflections may give some idea.

Cum grano salis, similarly complex constellations can be drawn for all CEE countries. Looking from the perspective of social quality at these countries today, for example, analyzing their developmental perspective, one must take this into account as defining factors for all these countries. Any analysis must also relate to some general questions of national identity and its different temporary dimensions, as outlined earlier by Fernand Braudel. The importance of each is seen by today’s re-emerging nationalism and regionalism, which is a consequence of the link between possibilities to digest transformation and having been forced to adapt to processes and structures alien to the deep-rooted and/or more recent patterns of societal reproduction.

Finally, there is an additional layer that must be considered when it comes to an analysis of this kind. The social quality approach is taken as a methodological reference because its analysis is iterative and multi-layered, for instance, dealing with countries as nation-states and the people, constituting this as an institutional entity and being constituted by it.

A methodology-Matrix

Looking at what had been presented so far and in a somewhat anecdotal manner unveils a major challenge. We must grasp a very complex scenario of methodological requirements in a way that is still reasonably operational. Quantitative analysis is very soon reaching its limits in making realities understood (see Herrmann, 2012). In consequence, we must transform the multi-layered perspective¹⁶ into

¹⁶Applying computer simulation would allow a multi-layered conceptualization of analysis. However, this is not possible because of the nonquantifiable perspective.

a procedure of multiple consecutive steps at the end. We will still be limited to undertake one step only. Importantly we have to keep the following aspects in mind.

- (1) Referring to the regulation theory, we take the accumulation regime and the mode of regulation as a point of departure for the analysis. With this, we are looking at the foundation of society building as socio-politico-economic structuration. It is quasi-reified in a specific set of normative and legal mechanisms of the regulation (see Herrmann, 2014).
- (2) While these are without question general-concrete formations, they are as such not yet specific. In this respect, it is useful to look at two dimensions of concretization, namely, the life regime (in analogy to the accumulation regime) and the mode of living (analogous to the accumulation regime/mode of regulation). Taking the two aspects together (1 and 2) allows us to understand the interlink between structure and helps in a better understanding of the interplay between society and individual.
- (3) Subsequently, the interplay between life regime and mode of living that is the “general living conditions” and the specific “translation into real life situations, lived by real people under real socio-personal conditions”, can be grasped by the social quality approach with the three pillars of constitutional factors, conditional factors, and normative factors.¹⁷
On the one hand, this is used to refer to the analysis of the two preceding layers, namely the foundation and the concretisation. At the same time, it opens the prospective to analyse the historical and the spatial dimension, as discussed below.
- (4) What had been presented earlier concerning Fernand Braudel is here understood as three dimensions of the historical perspective, namely stabilization (long durée), modification (time of episodes), and the alteration or adaptation, respectively (history of events).
- (5) The spatial dimension is composed of the local level, the immediate community, and reference to peers. The first level of regional development, the characteristics being positioned within nation-states; the level of the nation-state; the second level of regional development, characterized by the contradistinction to other regions; followed by the perspective of global society and finally by cosmo-political perspectives.

Of course, finally, we must also consider the mutual influence and interference of the historical and the spatial dimension.

¹⁷A comprehensive overview can be found on the social quality associations website: International Association on Social Quality, April 2020: Elaboration of the Theory of Social Quality and Its Approach; <https://socialquality.org/theory/;2020-10-29>

Conclusion

The methodological reflections can only be seen as a sketch of an approach suitable for understanding the social qualification of countries and regions that are undergoing a process of transformation, based on a review of the developments in the former GDR. (1) Transformation means, importantly, that we are not looking at the development of key factors—a development that is concerned with different paths and movements on one common ground. Instead, we are concerned with paths and movements on different planes. (2) This means that we need a different terminology if we apply similar words and concepts, which may be the case when it comes to socio-economic security but also when we talk about justice, emancipation, the number and role of solicitors or medical doctors or the role of the family. (3) Applying a thorough, “deep” analysis allows us to relate different aspects of social quality (analysis) ventilating questions like the following: Are we concerned with secular developments, or are they specific to individual countries, regions, and/or specific periods? Are they specifically defined by historical circumstances, and if so: is it a matter of stability, alteration, or far-reaching change? Can they be considered genuine developments, based in inherent contradictions, emerging from tensions and contradictions in the geopolitical settings or result of octroi? Most important is in this light freedom – in the said understanding – as condition and result of development as social qualification. The main issue for developing a perspective of social qualification concerning transformation can be defined by the extent and degree of non-/conformity and coherence/divergence between the point of departure and the new/future societal pattern. (4) This adds a new dimension to social quality analysis and development theories which may be called “degree of disruption.” While there is the popular saying that the grass is always greener on the other side, there is also the widely accepted wisdom that nowhere is better than home, and it is difficult to transplant old trees. This is what we found as part of processes of transformation: the blossoming landscapes (the alternative that had been promised) turned out to be less helpful than the promised land and brought in disadvantages for certain groups of the population and/or in respect of certain issues (as child care, provision of healthcare, accessibility of cultural spaces, etc.) “without compensation”. Taking all this together, we can say that transformation forced people in several cases to speak a language which they did not fully understand, full of “false kindred.”

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