

*William Thompson Working Papers, 15*  
*ISSN: 1649-9743<sup>i</sup>*

**provided by**

European  
social  
organisational  
science  
consultancy

---

Institute for Independent Research

Dr. Peter Herrmann, The Jasnaja Poljana, Aghabullogue, Clonmoyle, Co. Cork  
Ph. +353.(0)87.2303335, Secretariat: +353.(0)86.3454589, e-mail: herrmann@esosc.eu, skype: peteresosc URL:  
<http://www.esosc.org>

**for**



**College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences**

**Applied Social Studies**

<http://william-thompson.ucc.ie>;

Ph. +353.(0)21.490.3398; FAX: +353.(0)21.4903443

---

*Peter Herrmann: Indicators – From Where, What Goal, Which  
Way,<sup>ii</sup>/<sup>iii</sup>*

---



## **Indicators – From Where, What Goal, Which Way**

---

### **Table of Content**

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1. Context of the Discussion .....	3
1.2. The purpose and content of this Chapter .....	5
<b>2. Contradictions and Reductionism of Modernity.....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Reductionist Character of Modernisation .....	5
2.2. Contradictions of Modernisation .....	7
<b>3. Indicators and the Constitutive Interdependency .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. Indicators and the Context for Constitutive Interdependencies – the Third Assumption.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5. The Framework.....</b>	<b>13</b>
5.1. Defining Indicators.....	16
5.2. The Fundamental Challenge – Bridging the Gap.....	18
5.3. The Practical Challenge – Requirements for Defining Indicators .....	19
<b>6. Conclusions.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Editorial Note.....	28

---

## **Indicators – From Where, What Goal, Which Way**

### **1. Introduction**

#### *1.1. Context of the Discussion*

Social Indicators are for a long time already under scrutiny – and we can even speak of a social indicator movement. The reason for this is rather simple – an

inherent factor of the concept of modernisation has to be seen as working in the background. On the one hand modernisation is fundamentally contradictory; on the other hand it is reductionist, trying to eliminate even space for contradictions. This will be further explored in the following. In any case, as limited as the concept of modernisation is: it is gaining dominance although contested by claims of postmodernisation. The present thesis is that both, postmodernisation and globalisation – though claiming new dominance and expressing a process of overcoming previous developmental stages – are in actual fact only a higher and perhaps the highest) stadium of modernity. The crux is – and this is the challenge which the various debates on indicators aim to address – that the moral and intellectual claim of enlightenment-based modernisation falls short when it comes to reality (a) of modern societies and (b) the process of further modernisation. This determines the complex soci(et)al relationship as it is outlined by the Social Quality Approach. And it is claimed that the Social Quality Approach is actually the first reasonably well-developed paradigm that is in a position to translate the general theoretically ambitious analysis of society (and societies) into their empirically oriented analysis. Similarly ambitious undertakings did exist, but had been up to hitherto limited to individual aspects: specific groups, specific processes and/or structures. Three examples – limited though excelling – can be easily found: Frederick Engels' analysis of the *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Émile Durkheim's study on *Suicide* and the analysis *Marienthal: The Sociography of an Unemployed Community* by Marie Jahoda, Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Hans Zeisel. All three had been enriched by methodological considerations and saw their partial (biased and incomplete, i.e. focused) analysis at the same time closely embedded into a wider process of social analysis. Probably this had been made most explicit in Durkheim's study as it had been here where he worked on the topic of anomie. Indicator research that is led by the Social Quality Approach can be determined and distinguished by the following from other approaches: it is integrated into wider theoretical considerations and it is not concerned with conditions of life; instead, it looks genuinely at the state of societies in their different dimensions. But it looks at societies from the perspective from everyday's life and "real people".

### *1.2. The purpose and content of this Chapter*

Indicator concepts are traditionally very much limited by two perspectives: First, their objective is the analysis of conditions of life and they aim on overcoming shortcomings and flaws in the quality of life. However, they take for granted what should be considered as good or bad, better or worse. With this, they are fundamentally individualist (*see already the critical discussion of the capability approach in Herrmann, 2009 b*). Second, they are dealing with “closed spaces”, are directed towards the analysis of conditions of life in enclosures: estates, urban spaces and especially nation states are usually point of reference. And we find as well regional studies – as those directed towards the EU, taking a comparative perspective. However, the discussion of standards remains faded out. It is about individuals’ well-being which may be measured in objective and/or subjective terms. However, in any case it remains underdeveloped how we can deal coherently with these standards.

## **2. Contradictions and Reductionism of Modernity**

### *2.1. Reductionist Character of Modernisation*

As pointed out elsewhere, the idea of the social quality approach had been seen as developing a

*“normative guideline for public policy and practice, as a scheme of reference for understanding relevant conditional structures as the basis for this guideline, and as a socio-political goal to enable people to enhance these conditional structures in a responsible and democratic way.” (Beck et altera, 2009: 4)*

However, it is decisive to acknowledge the integrated character which had been underlined throughout the book: first, we are dealing with normative, conditional and constitutional factors. Second, the three sets of factors cannot be seen in isolation but only in their mutual interdependency and complementarity – a factor that is of crucial importance.

It would fall short of meaning if we reduce this on the need for developing complex, “multidimensional” systems of indicators. As important as this is, we have to refer to another point – as said the underlying philosophy of

modernisation. If we define modernisation as process of enlightenment on the ground of which

- rationalisation of the world and
- increasing control over it

go hand in hand, we are confronted with the ambiguity of this process: it is a process by which rationality is actually split into societal and social rationality to the same extent as to which individualisation and increasing individual responsibility – as for instance defined in the Kantian categorical imperative – is taking over and this individualisation leads nolens volens to the emergence of a split between individual wealth and social development. In actual fact we are facing the process in which the production of wealth gains independence from its actual meaning.

With respect to indicator research this has two important implications. First, we are facing a separation of normative, constitutional and conditional factors. Though this may sound very abstract, we can see this in expressed manner in very concrete processes of everyday's life: for instance, welfare and social policy are – artificially – set apart, being seen as independent of the social process of production and reproduction. In the extreme, it had been the charitable ladies in Victorian England who established charitable work that – in part – aimed on repairing the damage caused by harsh capitalism of the “bourgeois gentlemen”. And it had been the citizen (bourgeois-humanist) thinkers – philosophers, lawyers, and even representatives of science – who pleaded for respecting the “norms of good life”. And it is the reduction of social relationships on imaging, branding and virtual processes as it is criticised in today's societies. Although in particular normative and constitutional processes are very much pushed towards an idealist and virtual world, they are at the same time “objective” in their character, i.e. function as real determinations of daily life.

Second, we are consequently confronted with another reductionism – crucially important for the debate on sustainability. Hand in hand with the artificial separation of the three factors we find the fundamental split of human beings from the environment as integrated entity. The different verbs: command, control, dominate, master point into the direction of a confrontation of individual and environment.

With this, we can see the process of modernisation as momentum that reduces – at least in tendency – on complex processes and relationships on one-dimensional structures: in particular the production of goods as realisation of conditions, the production of services as realisation of relationships and the production of morality and knowledge as realisation of norms. Their integration, if at all, is undertaken *ex ante*.

As much as this is concerned with the process of modernisation, it means, of course, that the same ground pattern is characterising modernity – any interim step on the pathway of further development according to these rules.

## *2.2. Contradictions of Modernisation*

Of course, this leads to severe contradictions of that process. Fundamentally we can grasp this as contradiction or at least tension between social and individual points of reference and short-term and long-term orientations and orientations on narrow- and wide-ranging scopes. Rather, than tackling this by looking further into theoretical discourses (*see for instance Wagner, 1994; Muench, 1984, in particular chapter II*), some examples will be used in the following to show the meaning of these contradictions, aiming on preparing the ground for some conclusion for indicator research on different national levels, in an international perspective and also globally.

A first example can be taken from the current socio-economic crisis. By and large, it had been clear that the recent economic development could not be maintained. However, everybody had to follow the stream – GDP being the major (if not only) figure that had been acknowledged for a long time. And actually we find in many cases of new approaches even a confirmation of the limitations. Although they may claim to go “Beyond GDB” (*see European Communities, 2009*), the pattern of the argument looks unchanged. It is only a change of the husk, whereas the core remains intact. It is still wealth, personal happiness; the factors going into the account differ and are multiplied. However, we are supposed to use the same approach of a balance sheet, of scoreboards without considering the definition of what they are actually measuring – elsewhere this had been frequently discussed in the work of the Social Quality Foundation by Laurent van der Maesen with view on the work of the group headed by Anthony Atkinson.

This limitation does not allow

- overcoming the fundamentally individualist character
- tackling the fact that we have to search for a method that deals with processes (rather than linear developments) and relationships (rather than structures) (*for the theoretical and methodological reflection of this challenge see Beck et altera; op.cit.*).

It remains contradicting as any genuine social character remains underdeveloped, caught in the fundamentally individualist approach.

A second example is the way in which modernity deals with citizens and organised citizenry. First and foremost, the state as we know it, is very much a child of modernisation.<sup>1</sup> The ideas of Montesquieu are in this context much more important than the various considerations around contractualist approaches (Rousseau, Hobbes, Locke etc.). However, at the same time the idea of this state had been very much based on the fundamental contradiction: on the one hand it had been the capitalist state that claimed being direct representative of the people, in one or another way the manifestation of the general interest, the *volonté générale*, *volonté du tout* or something like this. However, at the same time it systematically established a “civil society”, suggested to be outside and potentially even against the state. Civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations etc. are part of a wider dispersal of the social and of society. In actual fact this is a contradicting system that requires much deeper consideration not least by our own work on social quality.

The mainstream position draws on three sectors, namely the state, the market and the so-called third sector. There is some perplexity arising if we consider that the social quality approach proposes an integrated set of three factors which require thorough consideration: at first glance there is some correspondence between the three sectors on the one side and the three factors. In other words, we can heuristically assume that in contemporary systems a certain division of labour amongst the sectors can be found – presented in the following.

---

<sup>1</sup> Though it occasionally looks as if it would be the father.

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Market</i>	<i>Normative</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Constituti</i> <i>onal</i>	<i>Civil</i> <i>society</i>
<i>socio-economic security</i>		<i>social justice (equity)</i>		<i>personal</i>	<i>(human)</i>
<i>social cohesion</i>		<i>solidarity</i>		<i>security</i>	
<i>social inclusion</i>		<i>equal valuation</i>		<i>social recognition</i>	
<i>social empowerment</i>		<i>human dignity</i>		<i>social responsiveness</i>	
				<i>personal</i>	<i>(human)</i>
				<i>capacity</i>	

However, bearing in mind what had been said with respect to the reductionist character of modernisation and modernity it is important to understand first the society for which indicators are gathered before actually looking for indicators.

### 3. Indicators and the Constitutive Interdependency

In chapter 3 the second assumption had been explored and presented as matter of a constitutive interdependency. The work of the Foundation's indicator project and as well the more recent work of the Asian Social Quality Network clearly shows the importance of such interdependency.

The early work undertaken by the Foundation can be seen as reasonably straightforward. We could at least presume a basic common understanding: Though different in scope, all European societies are kept together by a certain accumulation regime based on Fordist capitalism, changing over time through similar resource management (this is not least characterised by the patten of the replacement of different economic sectors and with some similarity the Kondratjev'sche waves or cycles); a by and large similar normative framework, based on Christianity past and present, and also a certain mode of regulation, supposing the state in the tradition of Western enlightenment which is not least the tradition of positive law; finally we are confronted with similar patterns of understanding citizenship – closely linked to the before mentioned mode of regulation. Although there are surely definite differences amongst the EU-countries there is at least some commonality.

Part and parcel of this commonality is that this pathway levelled the way for a very specific centralisation of power – within the countries and as well the establishment of the West as world centre, though always in tandem with the

United States of America which had been to a large extent based on the same ground pattern of societal hegemony, and at the same time being in a similar way characterised by the tensional relationship between individual and social, private and public (*see in this context as well the discussion of the European Model in Herrmann, 2007*).

We can actually even claim a general meaning of indicators – during the first phase, the Foundation's Indicator Project proposed 95 indicators, suggesting their universal meaning.

In the meantime, however, while taking a global perspective, this claim of universality has to be qualified – the earlier assertion seems even to be impudent.

#### **4. Indicators and the Context for Constitutive Interdependencies – the Third Assumption**

Coming back to the centre-periphery pattern, we have to acknowledge historical realities. The distribution of political and economic power and as well the dispersal of cultural and economic wealth had not always been following the same lines, as we know them from today. At least two patterns are remarkable: on the one hand we find different centres that exist without even knowing of each other or at least without knowing that outside of the own realm another developed culture would exist. If anything had been known at all, it had been a “non-culture”, barbarians as they had been called without knowing that they themselves would be called barbarians by the others. On the other hand we find historical shifts – of different degree, in different veins and in different reach, but all following the same ground-pattern: raise and fall of empires – be their meaning limited to a region or be it that we are dealing with power shifts on a truly global scale (*see in this context Kuczynski, 1984*).

At first glance, this seems to be not connected with the search for indicators. However, a second look tells a different story. It is important to see that these macro-level shifts on the global power-scale are an expression of at least three mingled moments. These can be presented as follows.

First, this is a matter of suppression: resources, determining the superiority of a specific accumulation regime, allow one system to exercise this superiority not

only by producing a greater “wealth”, but what is more: they can in the first instance actually *define the “meaning” of wealth*. It is decisive that this is not only and not primarily concerned with the question of which goods are valued. The more important part is the definition of the productive forces and relations of production. This means that resources are specifically defined – valued – and with this advantages are coming into force that can be – at least for some time – used in a competitive perspective, creating and maintaining temporary superiority. Natural conditions as climate, the availability of human resources, fertile soil, natural logistical advantageous location, the geopolitical position etc. come to mind. But as well the (way of) acknowledgement of the productive force of house work. All these conditions are not advantageous per se, but only if seen in the context of the development of the accumulation regime.

An example for this can be taken from the important work on Adam Smith in Beijing by Giovanni Arrighi, where he looks at why

*“according to all available evidence ..., prior to the Great Divergence wages and demand were higher and capital more abundant in Europe than in Asia, and this difference in all likelihood contributed to making labor-saving, energy-consuming technology economical in the West but not in the East.”*

*(Arrighi, 2007: 31)*

Second, the value system, the normative orientations cannot be seen as generally valid on a global perspective – the same values for humankind. However, they cannot be reduced on features that are defined subjectively by those who possess power either. Hegemony is a pattern of ideologically carried and institutionally practiced governance that emerges from the interplay of (a) resources, (b) the development of the productive forces and relations of production and (c) the herewith related reproductive system. Although we find the recurring valuation of familial bonds, harmony and solidarity and the like, we have to be very sensible in dealing with them. On the one hand, the emphasis of familiarism and Confucian values (*see for instance Chiu/Wong, 2005; such statements had been repeatedly as well heard by the authors while collaborating with Asian colleagues*) is problematic when investigated empirically. These norms are very vivid as well in many Western countries and there even strongly

reflected in national legislation. For this we can look for instance at the family law in France or the intergenerational contract in various countries: both, the pension systems and usually the social benefit systems are basically built on the presumption that the family comes as first supporter in case of need. The – catholic – principle of subsidiarity, the emphasis of self-supply by work as expression of the protestant work ethics and the role attribution as we find it in Mencius saying

*[l]ove between father and son, duty between ruler and subject,  
distinction between husband and wife, precedence of the old over  
the young, and faith between friends. Fang Hsü said.!*  
*Encourage them in their toil,  
Put them on the right path,  
Aid them and help them,  
Make them happy in their station,  
And by bountiful acts further relieve them of hardship*  
*(Mencius: 60)*

are thus close relatives. However, looking at the concrete developments from today's perspective gives easily a wrong impression, neglecting the historical perspective. It is proposed here to see the differences not primarily in the value systems per se. Instead, relevant is the concrete meaning of these values for the reproduction and as well within the complex mode of regulation ("governance").<sup>2</sup>

Thus, it is not only important to thoroughly reflect the "developmental stage" of countries and regions (as for instance expressed in the distribution of the value creation between households, agriculture, industrial production and service delivery. Equally important is the way in which the respective "stage" had been reached. We can think for instance of Ireland – a country which had been for a long time coined by agriculture, did not develop a really mentionable industrial system and then imported a well developed service industry; we find a different feature in England, a country which is usually seen as cradle of industrial

---

<sup>2</sup> Special thanks go to Kezban Celik, Sibel Kalaycioglu and the most challenging work with the students at the Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey and to Lih-Rong Wang, Pei-Shan Yang and Joanne S.C. Liu, Department of Social Work, and Tzong-Ho Bau, Department of Political Science National Taiwan University, Hsia-Hung Chen, Department of Sociology, National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan and Wendy Earls, School of Arts and Social Sciences. James Cook University, Cairns, Australia; P.H.

capitalism, for a long time characterised by being an industrial society. We could easily continue, looking in the same vein at differences between Western European countries and Asian countries, countries of the Islam, countries of South America, Africa etc.

Thus, in addition, it is important that we do not find (and actually never found) simple block-building with oppressors here and oppressed there. Sure, colonialism and imperial governments will not be denied. However, at the same time we have to acknowledge facts as the following:

- even within the colonies and oppressed countries we do not only find ruling classes that are directly the long arm of the colonialiser but as well the ruling classes of the countries themselves;
- there had been tremendous shifts, central regions declining and peripheral regions taking their place – but only taking it for some time and being later pushed aside again
- and finally, the shifts had been accompanied by multilevel processes of “shared power”.

For the latter, Taiwan and Turkey are an excellent example as presented by Herrmann in his work on issues of global social policy (*cf. Herrmann, 2009 a*). These “mergers”, the emergence of new systems by mixing different existing complex systems are the challenge in the search for social quality indicators. From the previous experience, looking at the context for their constitutive interdependencies means to distinguish between and bring together the following analytical levels: (a) the “traditional patterns” as they are defined in their ancient origins, (b) the broad mixtures as they developed over the centuries, defining the framework for specifically enlightened societies (taking the specific Western, Asian and Islam stance on enlightenment into account) and (c) the concrete mixtures as they are currently emerging from the concrete design and maintenance of economic blocks and relationships within these blocks.

## **5. The Framework**

The core of the argument which is developed from the indicator work in the

EUropean and Asian context, and which gains strong support as well from the experiences in Turkey, is as follows. Any components have to be developed and selected by having two factors in mind: First, we are dealing centrally with the interconnectedness of the different factors. This means as well that the distinction between conditional, constitutional and normative factors is actually only artificial, having an analytical character.

This means, second, that the ultimate underlying standard has to be seen in the constitutive glue of human practice, this is visualised in the following graph:

<b><i>Human Practice</i></b>		
<i>socio-economic security</i>	<i>personal (human)</i>	<i>social justice (equity)</i>
<i>social cohesion</i>	<i>security</i>	<i>solidarity</i>
<i>social inclusion</i>	<i>social recognition</i>	<i>equal valuation</i>
<i>social empowerment</i>	<i>social responsiveness</i>	<i>human dignity</i>
	<i>personal (human)</i>	
	<i>capacity</i>	
<b><i>Conditional (relations)</i></b>	<b><i>Constitutional (processes)</i></b>	<b><i>Normative (orientation)</i></b>

*Social Quality Architecture as Foundation of Practice*

With this in mind, the next step is to look at the general development of indicator research as it had been briefly mentioned above with reference to the OECD. With reference to work at the OECD, it had been said that the indicator research had been marked by simple comparative measures of economic income measures in the first decades of the last centuries, moving on from the 1960 to broader concepts of welfare, quality of life, social health etc. and moving further from the end of the last century by orienting towards a global level (*OECD, 2009*). Actually, looking more closely at the development we find three overlapping patterns.

First, it is the movement from simple economic figures towards more complex measurements. This meant as well a shift for instance in theories of poverty, striving for developing a more complex understanding. Thus, we find for instance in 1979 the work on Poverty in the United Kingdom: a survey of household resources and standards of living published by Peter Townsend (*see Townsend, 1979*); in Germany

we find, not least connected with the name of Wolfgang Zapf, the development of a broader understanding of conditions of life, founding a broader social indicator movement (*see the series on Soziale Indikatoren, 1972 ff.*). – It is not a contradiction that we find only with relatively short delay the resurfacing and actually mushrooming of poverty reporting systems (*see for instance for Germany Otto/Karsten [Eds.], 1990*). The specific character can be seen in the fact that the interest came from trade unions on the one side and experts in social work on the other side. In any case, the background had been not the interest in simplified poverty measurement on the local level. Instead,

*From the perspective of the administration the use value of poverty reports can be seen in particular in their use as instrument of a preventative social planning, ...*

*(Haensch, 1990: 69; translation P.H.).*

Second we find the movement from investigating small, manageable spaces to finally the global level. However, the widening meant to some extent at the same time again a step back: The increasingly global orientation meant in many cases also the fallback on rather simple analysis of poverty rates and the reasoning on the possibility of calculating relevant standards of relative poverty. Or it meant applying standards from one country or region in another context. However, it is on this stage as well that we find efforts of developing a wider understanding, for instance and in particular the work by the United Nations' programs on Human Development. Of course, at their time these approaches had been originally avant-gardist advances. However, despite all other pros and cons, the two major challenges which remained unaddressed, had been the following. First, all these approaches remained to a very large extent individualist, at the end going back to the Benthamian understanding of the greatest happiness for all; second, they remained stuck in a somewhat negativist approach, being concerned with problems of exclusion, orienting mainly on problems of individuals rather than searching for solutions for societies. What do we mean by this? All these concepts did actually start from the assumption of a "good society" without, however, reflecting what such a good society or even what the social actually is and moreover: how to develop criteria for such "goodness".

To some extent we find, third, a movement which aims on developing such broader understanding: not starting from analysing exclusion (thought this is, to lean on Luhmann's term, a loud and penetrating "background noise"), but from the

understanding of a “good society” or “good development”. Broadly, the main difference from a social quality perspective is our own concern with a sound theoretical grounding.

Ontological, epistemological and theoretical issues had been raised already elsewhere (*see N.N. [eds.], forthcoming*). In this chapter another point is of interest. For understanding this, and based on what had been said in the previous sections, a point of departure is the concern with the psychogenesis and sociogenesis as described by Norbert Elias.

### *5.1. Defining Indicators*

Indicators in the context of the social quality approach have a special meaning – because they are as indispensable as they are they are also highly complicated if looked at in a strict sense. They are indispensable as they offer a concept that tentatively allows an insight into qualitative issues of life, living conditions/circumstances and the reach and meaningfulness of life. Surely, they cannot replace qualitative intense interviews – and they should not even try doing so. The latter are well able to explore issues on an individual level. However, indicators – in the understanding of indirect measurement tools – provide a means to grasp general trends in respect of these issues. It is important as well to see them being geared towards these three dimensions in their interplay: qualitative issues of life, living conditions/circumstances and the reach and meaningfulness of life. The best way to answer this challenge is the proposed being a hierarchical concept: as mentioned above reflecting the research orientation from universal-abstract to concrete-specific. However, it is this orientation which permanently calls for developing universal-abstract criteria from the praxis of humans in their concrete life. General values as Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Islamism or Taoism to name but a few do not appear as general value systems per se in an abstract sense. Rather, they are part of historical practice. For developing indicators this means that we have to look for ways that genuinely – and somewhat paradoxically – start from the contradictions in which practice is located.

Such reference is especially useful when it comes to taking a global perspective. Of particular importance is that it is now possible to achieve a meaningful

understanding of contradictions. A recent debate on employment in Asian countries points on this fact. It is not alone the formal position that counts but as well the overall meaning. Of course, this is similar to what the capability approach suggests: the core question is what can people do with provided resources and which resources do they need to develop as independent actors with a high self-esteem. However, the difference is that we claim a more social and historical perspective. For instance, the family values and kinship relations frequently claimed for Asian countries as dominant are not relevant as abstract values but in the way they fit into the suggested system of *appropriateness* and *power*. In this light, two points can exemplify the meaning. The family is part of an overall security and support system. Within this system, the relevance of the family is not given as value per se but as expression of a lived system of checks and balances. It is a specific mechanism of socialisation serving as control mechanism (for instance via education) and also as support mechanism. This means as well that such valuations may be maintained over time even after loosing their objective dimension. However, the other side of the coin is that certain behavioural requirements evolve though they lack any substantial meaning. In the Asian context the family may be an example for the first, certain forms of competition, aiming on overcoming hierarchies can be taken as example for the second one. To be sure, such statement does not say anything about real values. It says only something on the actual socio-individual meaning which has to be reflected in the (choice and interpretation of) indicators.

Here we see that any debate on indicators in a social quality perspective has at its last task to look for data. Before it comes to this stage it is more important to define the array of what is actually evaluated. In other words, it is important to look for ways of modelling. The question has to be what kind of society are we actually in? Then it is possible to define the specific understanding of social and define its quality. But before doing that, it is possible to define as well the different expectations. The problem we have to face is that we will be always dealing as well with normative factors – and the uncertainties coming from here are not avoided by leaving these factors out of the approach. Rather, it is decisive to include them explicitly in order to understand different meanings of social facts.

Consequently, social quality indicators are highly complicated. They can only offer tentative instruments as they have to grasp relationships as integral part of their analytical framework. Looking at the debate on social quality indicators over the last years – from the work done by the Network since 2001 until today's Asian explorations – any social quality indicators are obviously only as valuable as their qualitative interpretation is capable to grasp the interconnectedness on two scales. As mentioned above, the first stretches between process and relations (in mainstream sociological language: agency and structure); the second covers (making reference to Norbert Elias) sociogenesis and psychogenesis.

It is important to include this perspective into the process of indicator definition as well. It is essential not to start from the perspective of the researchers – the idea of an academically imagined society; instead the focus has to be on the question of the conditions in society and the way people interact with these conditions, i.e. the constitutional processes.

### *5.2. The Fundamental Challenge – Bridging the Gap*

The fundamental difficulty has to be seen in the key aim of social quality to overcome the present fragmentation of policy, for example at EU level, between welfare policies, economic policies and employment policies. By creating a coherent, theoretically grounded concept that not only embraces all policies but also all stages of the policy process, it is intended to furnish both policy makers and the general public with an analytical tool to understand society and change it – again it has to be emphasised that it is about practice, understood as integrated practice rather than being a matter of making superficial, tentative adaptations. The current search for ways to overcome the crisis is typical for the latter: even its interpretation is dubious. It is seen as financial crisis only, as broader economic crisis, a moral crisis, expressing the unbridled greed. Surely, all the different perspectives may play a role. However, the core question is how we can understand the entirety of the system and how it works on the local, national, regional and global level. For this, it is important to start with a perspective that brings together the macro-perspective – i.e. an understanding of what a “good society” is about – and the micro-perspective – i.e. an understanding of

everyday's practice. The paradox is, however, that we will not be allowed to start from general norms about such a good society as such. Instead, we are looking for general principles that are in particular concerned with what people can do to obtain of opportunities to act. Herewith we find as well a fundamental difference in comparison with the capability approach. We are not looking for indicators dealing with capabilities of individuals. Nor do we deal with functionings. Instead, we can usefully imagine social quality as matter of creating social spaces. So we arrive from previous observations – the production of the social (*see Herrmann/Herrenbrueck, 2006 a, b*) – at an understanding indicators being a matter of measuring the outcome of this productive process.

### *5.3. The Practical Challenge – Requirements for Defining Indicators*

The main problems of the search had been elaborated by Laurent J.G. van der Maesen in the working paper on “Reflections on the first set of Social Quality Indicators from the ‘European Network Social Quality Indicators’” (*see van der Maesen, Laurent J.G. 2009; some of the following formulations are directly taken from this working paper without further reference*). These are the questions of adequacy, coherence and appropriateness – the problem of data availability is also mentioned but it plays a general role in quantitative empirical research and does not need special attention here.

Against the background of what had been said before we have now at least the standards at hand that help us to assess adequacy, coherence and appropriateness.

#### *Adequacy*

Adequacy of indicators in a social quality perspective is about making sure that they concern the actual life, every day's life of people in the social spaces where they live. With this in mind, social quality indicators are adequate if they express the essential characteristics of the sub-domains they are related to. It concerns the adequacy with regard to the deductive form of reasoning. We have to ask if indicators respect the theoretical and conceptual foundations of social quality? Furthermore, it concerns the adequacy with regard to the inductive form of reasoning. The proposed indicators, do they signal important societal trends and changes relevant for the recognising of the

nature of the four conditional factors in various countries? Therefore, the theme of adequacy concerns the interpretation that the connection between the outcomes of the deductive and inductive forms of reasoning with regard to the recognition of the essential characteristics is as optimal as possible.

It can be proposed that a set of four criteria can be applied for assessing the adequacy of indicators, which are shown in the following matrix.

		trends and changes	
		system maintenance	adaptability and change
conceptuality	based on social quality criteria		
	theoretically reflected		

### *Coherence*

Coherence of indicators in a social quality perspective has to ensure that the different domains and sub-domains are reflected in the choice of indicators. In a negative sense, the question is, if we can find unclear overlaps of some indicators for the conditional factors respectively or between these factors. In other words, will some indicators prevent a real discrimination between the nature of the conditional factors? This theme concerns the conditional factor analysis. According to the national reports, especially many proposed indicators of social inclusion demonstrate an overlap with indicators of socio-economic security, social cohesion and social empowerment. In a positive sense, the question of coherence refers to the theme of the mutual relationship of indicators within the conditional factors respectively and between the conditional factors. By strengthening the mutual relationship the coherence in the set of social quality indicators will be strengthened as well.

		mutuality	
		complementing	parallel
Exclusiveness	width of meaning		
	specificity		

### *Appropriateness*

Appropriateness of indicators in a social quality perspective has to reflect – by induction – existing knowledge of the essential characteristics of the sub-domains (or they should be based on these characteristics respectively). Furthermore, the data assessment of the indicators is inductively based as well. The crucial questions that have to be addressed are first on power and second on property. In another context (*see Herrmann, Peter/Dorrity, Claire, 2009*) this had been put forward in the perspective of “Societal Scope of Legal Functionality” as shown in the following matrix and here it is claimed that the same pattern can also serve as general framework for assessing indicators.

		appropriation	
		property	adequacy
equality	legitimacy		
	empowerment		

Again, the four parameters – empowerment, legitimacy, property and adequacy have to be applied in each case of a proposed indicator.

## 6. Conclusions

Applying these rules in the perspective on different settings, we can start from three points that are highlighted by Alan Walker with reference to G. White et altera.:

*low spending on welfare; an emphasis on the societal role in welfare (family, community and employers) rather than the state as a provider of social rights associated with citizenship; and a preference for selectivity and funded social insurance over universalism and tax-financed pay-as-you-go.*

*(Walker, 2008: 11 of the contribution)*

However, it had been noted before that at least the reference to different valuation of distinct contributors – especially mentioned in the first point – is questionable in its importance. What we can see, instead, is the difference of underlying accumulation regimes and respective modes of regulation. Taking this into account, the notion of an “oikonomic welfare state” as highlighted by Jones (*see Jones, 1990*) has much plausibility. It is then important to look not only at the way in which provisions are made; of not less interest is (a) the understanding of welfare itself and (b) importantly the understanding of the constitutional factors.

With respect to (a) we find a paradox with respect to the understanding of the individual in the different “models” (*see for the discussion of the applicability of the modelling process Walker, op.cit.*). Whereas the *Welfare State*, being seen characteristic for the West, is in the tradition of the Western enlightenment strongly oriented on supporting the individual – his/her independence, the empowerment as matter of finding his/her own way independently, being included as matter of allowing independence and where cohesiveness is defined along the line of granting equal access to independence. If, with a broad brush, we turn now towards the *Asian Welfare Society*, it is apparently the other way round – a pattern that leaves seemingly most of the responsibility to the individual and “subsidiaries” (in particular the family), thus depending on individuals’ activity, is in actual fact heavily coined by an orientation on and characterisation by sociability: To the extent to which the individual is not able to look after his/her own socio-economic security, it is the network of family bonds but as well the “roles” as they had been outlined before:

*[l]ove between father and son, duty between ruler and subject,  
distinction between husband and wife, precedence of the old over  
the young and faith between friends*

We can conclude that in the Western case the conditional factor of empowerment is predominant, whereas by and large in the Asian case the conditional factor of inclusion has a higher score. This, of course, determines a different concrete understanding or definition of what social quality is about – and this has surely to guide the search for indicators.

However, at the same time we should not overestimate the meaning of value systems. We face the difficulty of arguing on three levels which we can only distinguish on a general-abstract level but not on the level of determining concrete social quality levels:

(i) The first is the general-abstract understanding of what social quality – the definition of its different factors – is about.

(ii) The second is the concrete-abstract level: the understanding of social quality in concrete societies as they are shaped by their traditions – still, this remains abstract as these traditions are in no case “pure”: different technological, economic, social and political developments had been always in one way or

another global – speed, intensity and meaning of the influences surely being different during the periods; different religious systems influenced each other since many centuries, the pressure not always going into one direction; etc. – In consequence,

*[w]ithin Asian countries, ethnicity, religion, colonialization history and degrees of democracy have created a heterogeneous entity hard to be measured by a unified standard. Hence, another challenge to the indicator transformation in Asia is to identify similar societal orientations and welfare provisions that could be integrated into a set of indicators.*

*(Wang, 2008: 73)*

However, it should not be overlooked that the same pattern is in force in the Western hemisphere.

(iii) The concrete-specific analysis has to refer to the concrete way in which the systems develop: here it is not so much the “mix” of different traditions but the “merger”: the way in which traditional economic, political (in the understanding of mode of regulation) and social patterns and those of the globalising nation states intermingle, emerging to some new social qualities. It is important to note that on the one hand we have for centuries already a parallel process of emerging capitalist societies – however, the its pattern frequently changed, not least depending on the concrete performance within the centre-periphery-relationships. It had been in this context as well that the role of ideologies and values systems, the mode of regulation shifted into different directions or gained (and of course lost) a certain scope. As Kwong-Leung Tang states

*one must not envisage economic globalization simply as the rapid acceleration of the flow(s) of goods, services and capital across national borders over the last 50 years. It also involves the expansion of capitalist economies that, ultimately, supplant local control.*

*(Tang, Kwong-Leung, 2008: 339)*

We can then finally say, the search for indicators has to be guided by the three principles: adequacy, coherence and appropriateness, each stretching across a four-field matrix. And this in mind has to be applied for the past, the present and

the emerging future. The objective is getting clearer then: indicator (re)search is not primarily about measuring social quality. At its core we can see its understanding as the major task.

### References

- Arrighi, Giovanni, 2007: Adam Smith in Beijing. Lineages of the Twenty-First Century; London/New York: Verso
- Beck, Wolfgang/van der Maesen, Laurent/Walker, Alan, forthcoming: Theoretical Foundations [draft version, May 15th, 2009]; in: N.N. [eds.] Sustainable Welfare Societies and overall Sustainability
- Chiu, Sammy/Wong, Victor, 2005: Hong Kong: from familistic to Confucian welfare; in: Walker, Alan/Wong, Chack-kie [eds.]: East Asian Welfare Regimes in Tradition. From Confucianism to globalisation; Bristol: Policy: 73-93
- European Communities, 2009: Beyond GDP. Measuring Progress, True Wealth, and the Well-being of Nations. 19/20 November 2007. Conference Proceedings; Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities; [http://www.beyond-gdp.eu/proceedings/bgdp\\_proceedings\\_full.pdf](http://www.beyond-gdp.eu/proceedings/bgdp_proceedings_full.pdf) - 07/07/2009 8:54 a.m.
- Haensch, Walter, 1990: Armut und Armutsberichterstattung in Kommunen; in Otto/Karsten: 58-76
- Herrmann, Peter, 2007: Social Professions and the State; New York: Nova
- Herrmann, Peter, 2009 a: Social Quality – Looking for a Global Social Policy; Bremen: Europaeischer Hochschulverlag
- Herrmann, Peter, 2009 b: Social Quality – Looking for a Global Social Policy. An Introductory Text; in: NTU Social Work Review, 19/2009; Taipei: National Taiwan University: 133-188
- Herrmann, Peter/Dorrity, Claire, 2009: Critique of Pure Individualism; in: Dorrity, Claire/Herrmann, Peter [eds.]: Social Professional Activity: The Search for a Minimum Common Denominator in Difference; New York: Nova: 1-27
- Herrmann, Peter/Herrenbrueck, Sabine, 2007 a: Professional Disciplines – Contingent Rationales and National Traditions; in: Herrmann,

- Peter/Herrenbrueck, Sabine [eds.]: Changing Administration – Changing Society. Challenges for Current Social Policy; New York: Nova: 3-22
- Herrmann, Peter/Herrenbrueck, Sabine, 2007 b: Social Quality – Opening Individual Well-Being for a Social Perspective; in: Herrmann, Peter/Herrenbrueck, Sabine [eds.]: Changing Administration – Changing Society. Challenges for Current Social Policy; New York: Nova: 22-45
- Herrmann, Peter/Sabine Herrenbrueck, 2006: Producing or Reproducing the Social – a Review of Professional Practice from a Social Quality Perspective. Presentation during the Federal Congress of Social Work in Muenster 2005; Muenster 2006; [http://www.bundeskongress-sozialarbeit.de/AG\\_14\\_Herrmann\\_Herrenbrueck.pdf](http://www.bundeskongress-sozialarbeit.de/AG_14_Herrmann_Herrenbrueck.pdf);
- Jones, Catherine, 1990: Promoting Prosperity: The Hong Kong way of social policy; Hong Kong: Chinese University Press
- Kuczynski, Juergen, 1984: Gesellschaften im Untergang. Vergleichende Niedergangsgeschichte vom Roemischen Reich bis zu den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika; mit Beiträgen von Hans-Heinrich Mueller und Karl-Heinz Roeder; Koeln: Pahl-Rugenstein
- Mencius. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by D.C. Lau: London et altera: 2003
- Muench, Richard, 1984: Die Struktur der Moderne. Grundmuster und differentielle Gestaltung des institutionelle Aufbaus der modernen Gesellschaften; Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp
- N.N. [eds.], forthcoming: Sustainable Welfare Societies and overall Sustainability
- OECD, 2009: Chronological Evolution of Related Measures of Progress; <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/24/56/41288178.pdf> - 16/06/2009 8:49 a.m.
- Otto, Hans-Uwe/Karsten, Maria-Eleonora (Eds.), 1990: Sozialberichterstattung. Lebensräume gestalten als neue Strategie kommunaler Sozialpolitik; Weinheim, München: Deutscher Studien Verlag
- Soziale Indikatoren, 1972 ff.; Frankfurt/M.-New Work: Herder&Herder
- Tang, Kwong-Leung, 2008: East Asian Perspective on Globalization: Implications for Social Policy Analysis; In: International Nanjing Conference of Social Quality and Social Welfare. 10. 24-26, 2008: Social Quality in Asia and

- Europe: Searching for the Ways to Promote Social Cohesion and Social Empowerment; Nanjing University
- Townsend, Peter, 1979: Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living; Harmondsworth: Penguin
- van der Maesen, Laurent J.G., 2009: Reflections on the first set of Social Quality Indicators from the 'European Network Social Quality Indicators'; European Foundation on Social Quality; Working Papers, Nr. 3, March 2009; [www.socialquality.eu](http://www.socialquality.eu); enter site, under working papers; 04/07/2009 7:47 a.m.
- Wagner, Peter, 1994: A Sociology of Modernity. Liberty and Discipline; London/New York: Routledge
- Walker, Alan, 2008: The Social Quality Approach – Bridging Asia and Europe. Draft; in: International Nanjing Conference of Social Quality and Social Welfare. 10. 24-26, 2008: Social Quality in Asia and Europe: Searching for the Ways to Promote Social Cohesion and Social Empowerment; Nanjing University: 11 of the contribution)
- Wang, Lih-Rong, 2008: Social Quality Indicator in Asia: What is Unique? In: International Nanjing Conference of Social Quality and Social Welfare. 10. 24-26, 2008: Social Quality in Asia and Europe: Searching for the Ways to Promote Social Cohesion and Social Empowerment; Nanjing University,

---

### *Editorial Note*

---

- i The William-Thompson-Working-Paper-Series is edited by the European Social Organisational and Science Consultancy for University of Cork, Department of Applied Social Studies and meant to offer a space for publications of occasional documents. One aim amongst others is to offer a space for publication of work by colleagues of the Department of Applied Social Studies at University of Cork.  
The work is edited and supervised for publication by Peter Herrmann, ESOSC.  
The papers will only be published as PDF- or word-file on the website <http://william-thompson.ucc.ie>.  
Requests for publication can be sent to ESOSC at [herrmann\[at\]esosc.eu](mailto:herrmann[at]esosc.eu) and will be accepted for publication after collective assessment (*peer-reviewers will be listed on the website without reference to concrete documents*).  
The copyright is still with the authors so that the documents are free to further publication.
- ii The present paper emerged from discussions within the framework of the author's position as advisor of the European Foundation on Social Quality, The Hague and draws from discussions in particular with Laurent van der Maesen. Though I owe much gratitude to these discussions and the friendship, the responsibility for what is said is entirely with the author and the positions are not the positions of the Foundation.
- iii © for this edition: Peter Herrmann, 2009
- iv Herrmann, Peter; dr. phil (Bremen, Germany). Studies in Sociology (Bielefeld, Germany), Economics (Hamburg), Political Science (Berlin) and Social Policy and Philosophy (Bremen). Had been teaching at several Third Level Institutions across the EU; currently correspondent to the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Social Law (Munich, Germany), senior advisor to the European Foundation on Social Quality (Amsterdam, Netherlands) and Director of the Independent Research Institute European Social, Organisational and Science Consultancy (Aghabullogue, Ireland) and teaching at the University College of Cork, Department of Applied Social Studies, (Cork, Ireland), where he holds the position of an adjunct senior lecturer and Kuopion Yliopisto, Yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta. Sosiaalipolitiikan ja sosiaalipsykologian laitos (Kuopio, Finland), where he is adjunct professor. He held various positions as visiting professor and is currently in this position at the Corvinus University in Budapest. Member of the Administrative Board of the European Social Action Network (ESAN), representing this in the Platform of Social NGOs.  
Member of several editorial boards; editor of the book series Applied Social Studies – Recent Developments, International and Comparative Perspectives (New York, USA) ) and Studies in Comparative Pedagogies and International Social Work and Social Policy (Bremen, Germany); peer-reviewing for several journals in the social area and book series.