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Peter Herrmann: Empowerment - Processing the Processed

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Empowerment – processing the processed ⁱⁱⁱ

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Empowerment – processing the processed

Introduction – Localising Empowerment

To look at empowerment in the context of the social quality approach has to face two challenges,

- * the one being the necessity to locate the orthogonality and embeddedness of empowerment in the context of discussing the other components, namely socio-economic security, social inclusion and social cohesion;
- * the other being concerned with elaborating the specificity of the component and its distinctiveness in relation to other reference-theories of empowerment.

To put it simple, the first question is: How is empowerment linked to and actually defined by the other components? The questions in the second complex are: Has empowerment a distinct meaning in the context of the social quality theory – distinct when compared with the understanding in other contexts? How is it differentiated in relation for instance to empowerment in the context of social work, learning theories and others? Of course, these questions are interrelated and in actual fact, in a way we have to answer both questions simultaneously.

The original definition of empowerment in the theory of social quality, as it had been iteratively developed (see Beck/van der Maesen/Walker, 2001) highlights the following five points:

- * the fundamental reference to equity;
- * the reference to capabilities and capacities and thus – logically – the interaction of action and structure
- * the reference to the actor-orientation of the social-quality concept and thus the central role empowerment has to play;
- * the ‘practical’ relevance of the concept, and its ‘instrumental character’ in terms of policy making;
- * the reference to ‘choice’, again linking action and structure.

Seen in this light, empowerment had been defined in the following way:

¹ See for information on the author <http://www.ucc.ie/en/appsoc/staff/acad/pherrmann/>

Empowerment to realize human competencies or capabilities (versus subordination) primarily concerns the micro-level enabling of people, as 'citizens', to develop their full potential. Thus this component of social quality refers to developing the competence of citizens in order to participate in processes determining daily life.

(Beck/van der Maesen/Walker, 1997: 290).

However, to get a clear understanding we have to look first at the question of power and the two analytically distinct dimensions. Helpful is briefly investigating the linguistic dimension. Taking the French *pouvoir*, we see clearer than in the English language the dimensions of being able to do something, to make on the one hand and on the other hand the dimension of power that is concerned with control. In Italian language we find synonyms as *potere*, *potenza* and as well *forza* and *autorità*. And in German we see the strict link of *Macht*, the root being *machen*, i.e. making. This suggests seeing power as category very much concerned with actually bridging two main dimensions which are in social thought usually seen as independent and/or dichotomous, namely the social and the economic. This characteristic dichotomisation is not just a matter of two areas but reaches the core of social thinking, namely the confrontation between idealist and materialist social theory.

But this is, of course, very much a reflection of real social developments, namely the falling apart of these different dimensions. Niklas Luhmann once characterised this by writing *Alles könnte anders sein - und fast nichts kann ich ändern*. (Luhmann, 1969: 44) [All could be different but I nearly cannot change anything.]. However, the question arises why and in which way everything actually could be different? And why can we not change anything?

Crucial moments in this context – as matter of real development and also as matter that is important when it comes to the epistemological dimension of contemporary analysis – are the two secular shifts we can detect as decisively characterising historical developments: the one is the increasing juridification and more specifically contractualisation – this is not least a matter of increasingly undermining genuine social patterns and replace them by somewhat artificial glues (see Herrmann, 2009 a). We see from here the particularly strong link between empowerment and cohesion. The other secular trend is that around commodification, semi-commodification and decommodification. Though we have to acknowledge the limitation of such statement,

we may say that the commodification-decommodification axes links heuristically empowerment to both, the dimension of socio-economic security and to inclusion.

From here, the most important questions about empowerment and the search for relevant indicators have to concentrate on the following issues. (i) the determination of citizenship and with this the determination of internal divisions and external borders; (ii) the determination of power inequalities and their debate in the context of 'gaining societal wealth' for their (pseudo-)justification; (iii) the discussion of power distribution between win-win and zero-sum games. – Before looking at these issues, some general remarks are required.

Empowerment – some mainstream issues

If we look for empowerment and how it is reflected in contemporary debates, we can see in particular two strands. The one is very much dealing with issues on the individual level, concerned with matters of the empowering individuals in settings of their immediate sociability. As such, relevant considerations are very much linked to the subject of social psychology and as much as they can claim following an emancipative ethos, they are following very much an affirmative notion: being geared towards individuals developing 'ownership' over the immediate environment. The fundamental limitation is given by such approaches being concerned with individuals' development: it is the individual that is encouraged to develop such ownership, proposing that such identification contributes to the enhancement of affirmative (non-)action: systemic attachment rather than systemic development and change are at the centre of this orientation.

On the other hand, empowerment is promoted as strategy of governance, replacing and/or complementing democracy. Again, the fundamental notion is affirmative, actually not meant to deal with the issue of societal power. Moreover, it is not even dealing with the distribution of power within a given system as it rigidly accepts the framework setting without considering the complex interrelationship of relational and processual issues of empowerment. To understand empowerment in a more appropriate way it is useful to start from a tensional field in which power – and subsequently empowerment – can be understood. This field spans on the one hand between individual and societal and is on the other hand characterised by appropriation and control. It is characteristic that the latter dimension is – as

appropriation – primarily concerned with the relationship between humans and nature and – as control – primarily seen as matter of social relationship. However, it has to be emphasised that this is true by way of interpreting contemporary relationships rather than being employed with the generic dimension of power. Generically, we are dealing with a socio-environmental relationship: social processes are linked into and depending on the natural environment; and vice versa, the natural environment does barely exist as such: it is predisposed by the way in which individuals and societies are actually dealing with it and in which way this is a process that is shaped by the socio-environmental presuppositions.

As heuristic tool the following matrix may be helpful:

	individual - (power of individuals)	societal - (power of society)
appropriation		
ruling and control of others		

Figure 1²

In this light it is clear that as much as the social quality concept aims in general on overcoming the methodological individualism which underlies – explicitly or implicitly – most of social science, it is in particular the centrality of *empowerment as an objective component* that makes it possible to grasp the dialectical relationship between (a) actor and structure and thus (b) between the individual and soci(et)al.

As already briefly mentioned, empowerment is commonly positioned at the borderline of the different dimensions of the individual and the social, actually meaning that it claims to fulfil a bridge-function, making it possible to combine in a single act the two dimensions which had been spelled out by *James S. Coleman* as

character of macro-to-micro and micro-to-macro transitions
(*Coleman, 1990: 11 f.*)

The challenge of defining empowerment is seen as overcoming the apparent disparity of

* the *Durkheimian* understanding of the social, pointing on an independent entity in its own rights and

² See in this context as well the reflections on the different traditions of conceptualising the state in theories of social contract as elaborated in Herrmann 2007

- * the original definition of the social quality approach according to which
the social is not existing as such but it is the expression of constantly changing aspects of processes by which individuals realize themselves (verwirklichen) as interacting beings.
(Beck et altera, 2001: 310)

In actual fact, what seems to be suggested as contradiction between the approaches is more a contradiction in earlier formulations of the social quality approach itself as at the same location it is said that

our endeavour is to develop a scientific framework and a political programme which assume the social as an authentic entity.
(*ibid.*)

In other words, this approach itself presumes a certain independence of the social, whereas it states at the same time that the social 'is not existing as such'. Here the attention is turning to another emphasis of the definition, seeing it as

both the ever-present condition (material cause) and the continually reproduced outcome of human agency. And praxis is both work, that is conscious production, and (normally unconscious) reproduction of the conditions of production, that is society.
(Bhaskar, 1979: 43 f.; cited in Beck et altera, 2001: 312)

Seen in this light, empowerment is central to the entire concept of Social Quality. Deciphering the definition of the social, we can highlight as a forgotten matter of interest that an explicit link between the living-together of people and the definition of citizenship is established.

Following the proposal to point out a trinomial structure, (a) the subject matter of empowerment is the provision of the means of and for communication as foundation of the social as interactive process. Whereas other components concentrate on available material resources (*socio-economic security*), the integration into different relationships (*inclusion*) and trustworthiness of relationships (*cohesion*), the concern of *empowerment* is the availability and reliability of the availability of access, necessary to establish the capability of participation.³ (b) The specific nature, i.e. the resources needed being knowledge and rights, necessary to put the potential into

³ This refers largely to the definitions of the other components, recapitulated by van der Maesen, 2003: 23

reality. (c) Taking these considerations seriously when looking at empowerment, we can say that this is a variable that is

- * to some extent the point of departure, the factor on which the realisation of the others is build upon and

- * at the same time the ‘result’ of the other components.

In other words, *empowerment is very much a conditional and – when related to the other components – a resulting factor.* We have to take this already into account when we are looking for a definition of empowerment. The definition proposed is – so far as follows:

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

Or shorter we can say that

Social Empowerment is the degree to which the personal capabilities are and the ability of people to act is enhanced by social relations.

Empowerment is then the core of the entire project of social quality (see Herrmann, 2005). From here, the Social Quality Approach is very much understandable as dialectical theory of action. It is not solely and even primarily concerned with transfer of knowledge, enabling the individual to cope with given structural situations. Rather, empowerment is concerned with enabling the person individually and socially to

- * adapt to a given situation,

- * to cope with changes of situations and

- * to actively influence social developments, i.e. to evoke and maintain changes.

The notion of enlightenment

This stands against commonly used traits of dichotomising the nature in social sciences in which empowerment is usually located on the micro-, the meso- or the macro level alternatively. This does not draw immediate attention to the relational character of the social. Such relational perspective is not simply a matter of relations between people but as well and more importantly a matter of relations between individual and the soci(et)al. – Although this cannot be elaborated, it has to be

mentioned that such a conceptualisation largely helps to overcome the dichotomy between structure and agency. As such, the social concerns

the outcomes of reciprocal relationships (dialectic) between processes of self-realisation of individual people as social beings and processes leading to the formation of collective identities. Its subject matter concerns the outcomes of this reciprocity. ...

The definition of social quality is based on this reciprocity. Social quality is the extent to which people are able to participate in the social and economic life of their communities under conditions which enhance their well-being and individual potential.

(van der Maesen, April 2004)

A very general, i.e. philosophical orientation on empowerment, employing an individualising bottom-up approach, comes from the notion of enlightenment which derives the social from the notion of rationalisation and of translating increasing cognition by the individual into the basis of the social fabric and finally society. In the perspective of the *Kantian* imperative

act so that the maxim of thy will can always at the same time hold good as a principle of universal legislation
(Kant, 1788)

the social is nothing else than an ‘invisible contract’, drawn between individuals not on grounds of necessary control of individual behaviour but on grounds of a higher natural law of reason and the ability as well as duty of the individual to accept responsibility.

As such this can be already seen as an acknowledgement of power, although it fundamentally divides the individual and the social – power is then equalled with responsibility – responding in accordance with the ability to rationally perceive the world and to act accordingly. The social is not seen as a genuine ‘goal and framework’ in and by which individuals realise themselves. Moreover, the social is not considered as being an entity *sui generis*, constituted by social actors. Rather, the social is understood as construct, a conglomerate emerging from isolated individual acts, based on knowledge and constituted by the individual’s efforts to coordinate their actions and activities.

Such a perspective is taken up even by the *Frankfurt School*, the *Institute for Social Research*. There, *Max Horkheimer* in his *Eclipse of Reason* importantly points on the

loss of objective reason as guiding code (see Horkheimer 1947: 4-6), however, he then fails to clearly derive the criteria for ‘empowering subjective-social rationality’ from the social action itself. On the one hand, he refines such rationality by the allusion to religious or quasi-religious value systems; on the other hand, it is a matter that is suggested as being inherent to the objects and processes. Without exploring this further, the relevance for mentioning this approach lies in the fact that we can concede a continuation of these thoughts in terms of empowerment as communicative act. It is here, where *Juergen Habermas* suggests drawing on trust as voluntarily established basis for empowered – and further empowering – societal structures, itself based on practical but in particular intellectual insight. Actual soci(et)al practice as practice of change, however, is replaced by contemplation and consensus, based upon ethical principles. It is the ‘universalistic humanism’ which *Max Horkheimer* already mentioned, writing:

The basic ideals and concepts of rationalist metaphysics were rooted in the concept of the universally human, of mankind, and their formalization implies that they have been severed from their human content.

(ibid.: 62)

The *Theory of Communicative Action*, then, uses this as disguise. Referring to *Max Weber*, we read that

*[t]he social is not absorbed as such by organized action systems; rather, it is split up into spheres of action constituted as the lifeworld and spheres neutralized against the lifeworld. The former are communicatively structured, the latter formally organized. They do not stand in any **hierarchical** relationship between levels of interaction and organization; rather, they stand **opposite** one another as socially and systematically integrated spheres of action. In formally organized domains, the mechanisms of mutual understanding language, which is essential for social integration, is partially rescinded and relieved by steering media.*

(Habermas, 1989: 309; emphasis in original)

This means, however, that in actual fact questions of power are dislodged, and defined as a matter of systems and sub-systems rather than as relationship between real social beings.

As much as *Habermas* draws attention upon the necessity of the intellectual appropriation and the knowing individual – the person, being able to understand and act in accordance with the environment on the basis of a ‘mutual understanding and acceptance’, as much he falls short of the actual unity of the world in which the individual shapes his/her life. Of course, under given social conditions of contemporary societies we find without any doubt the contradiction between different parts of society. However, *Habermas* draws a strict distinction between system world and life world, and goes in particular beyond *Loockwood’s* concept. On the one hand, he applies a voluntarist concept – interpreting the system world as result of ‘irresponsible action’ by the ruling forces. On the other hand and contradicting, the system world is an apparently eternal, time- and even more actorless framework, perpetuating inevitable alienation between actor and a *dues ex machina*, developing just in the sense of the *Weberian* iron cage of bureaucracy. Social quality, if *Habermas* would consider such a concept at all as ‘anti-colonialist’, could only be a ‘set of eternal values, set against the colonialiser’. However, neither the objective dialectic of the different domains nor the dialectical relationship between subjective and objective factors and domains would be understandable as in immediate part of the entire idea of Social Quality. Of course, this is a deviation of the original concept of the critical school. However, it goes even further in the sense that by taking ‘communicative act(ion)’ as basis of any progressive development, the actual ‘social action by real people under real social conditions’ is faded out. ‘Social quality’ in this perspective would degenerate into an idealist concept. Although this can be justified by the Kantian elements of the social quality approach itself, it fundamentally contradicts its action perspective which is fundamental for giving empowerment such a central place. Rather than empowering people as individuals and society as a conglomerate of rationally behaving people by enhancing their discursive power and trusting the ‘power of ratio’, empowerment in terms of social quality breaks up analytically. In other words, locating empowerment as one of the objective factors, linking it to the biographical and soci(et)al dialectically development overcomes the wrong dichotomy of ‘systems, institutions, organisations’ on the one hand and ‘communities, configurations, groups’ on the other hand, or in *Habermas’* terms system world and life world. – The debate of how close this can be linked into an *Eliasian* perspective of civilisation has to be spared although such a side-remark may stimulate for further thoughts.

However, this vision of ‘empowerment by knowledge’ is very vague. As much as *Kantian* thinking is of course idealistic, it would allow well for the further development of in particular

- * orienting on the ‘absolute idea’ as particularly suggested by *Hegel*
- * mechanical materialism as primarily developed by *Feuerbach* or
- * a dialectical-materialist perspective as it is well known from *Marx*.

Empowerment – Overcoming Economist Perspectives

Leaving these debates aside, empowerment had been only recently re-invented and defined as explicit issue of social science. In particular, it has to be mentioned that the new interest emerged from a perceived need for action-oriented approaches of integration, well recognising that the relative openness of modern societies on a structural level, was nevertheless clearly limited by providing an inactivated (i.e. passivising) structure. One major reason for this explication can be seen in an increasing gap between private and public. On the one hand, the public gained more and more momentum – we can see it in the growing meaning of social (policy) actions, the interpenetration of daily life by public measures and the strictly defined responsibility of ‘the public’, meaning predominantly the state and its ‘attached’ bodies, combined with a decreasing control of these entities. At the same time, however, we find an increasing dependency of individuals by these bodies and as well a kind of ‘privatisation’, definitely a ‘closure’. For example one expression of this general shift can be seen in the fact that more and more people are covered by social measures of one or the other kind.⁴ However, such a ‘public system’ is at the same time increasingly ‘private’ as the general interest is getting less and less important, its definition follows private decisions rather than being an issue of real public discourse or let alone public action (see Herrmann, 2006).

Going back to such disparity between individual and social regulation and action, in particular two notions of empowerment are getting prevalent – the one being concerned with a technical approach of increasing the accessibility of given – and uncontested – structures; the other being concerned with developing a vision of increasing the power of the individual in control over his/her own life, overcoming the limitations of traditional economist thinking.

⁴ As for example the increasing coverage of the people by social insurance systems independent of their employment status.

(1)

The first perspective, strongly an individualist strategy, has two dimensions. The one is concerned with the opening of structures. Although it is not geared to fundamental change, the concept is concerned with altering the structure of society. Powerlessness is then seen as result of a mismatch between individual and structure, requiring a simplification of the structures. We find such theorising in particular in reflections on management and of political sociology, looking at questions of government's responsiveness and the respective 'crisis of governance' and 'crisis of governability'. All these approaches assume basically an irreconcilable relation between social and individual. The social is designed as largely independent of the actors, determined (a) by an (undetermined) elite and/or (b) as undetermined entity, a kind of *deus ex machina*. Empowerment in such a context is understood as defining access points that allow successively finding a common language of 'actors' and 'structures'. Although alienation is – even if not necessarily explicitly – accepted as unavoidable, empowerment is interpreted as bottom-up strategy of opening the system to allow for 'participation'.

In theoretical terms, this approach is based in political science on the one hand, and more broadly it can be traced back to systems theory, as brought forward by *Niklas Luhmann*. Though *Luhmann* claimed to start from 'open systems', he established the presumption of mechanisms which in actual fact closed the different entities by referring (a) to functionality of the systems and (b) – especially in later years – the reference to autopoietic self-reproduction.⁵ In terms of empowerment – though not explicitly elaborated by *Luhmann* – it meant that we find potentially two forms.

The one can be seen as 'internal empowerment', being concerned with establishing and developing mechanism of internal control of own resources. In other words, here we can talk of 'empowered management', increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of using respective 'general media' as they are used by the (sub-)system in question.

The other can be seen as mechanism of enhancing communication skills between (sub-)systems. The 'general media' are bound by the 'formula of contingency' as limitations of what a single system can actually deal with. As such these media cannot be 'translated' and consequently exchange is limited.⁶ However, this does not make

⁵ It is a worthwhile debate in its own right to look at how far actually such a closure of system theories reflects in actual fact reality or is simply an expression of certain ideological limitations of systems theory.

⁶ As *Luhmann* mentioned it is not possible to exchange for instance lawfulness by capital gains and vice versa.

the necessity of ‘co-ordination’ redundant. One way of coordination is putting mechanisms of ‘structural coupling’ into place. In a way, these can be seen as effort of translation – for instance ‘rights’ can be seen as a typical example where the legal code is actually used as an answer on civil, political and social challenges (see Marshall, 1950). Such a perspective would allow a way of passive empowerment. The actual power basis is not even looked at; however, the changes which are controlled, are the procedures by which the actual execution of power takes place (in *Luhmann’s* terminology the ‘legitimation by procedure’).

Another mechanism is more active, i.e. it is defined by the actors or the respective subsystem itself. This starts from the presumption that the different systems are well able to produce an effective ‘noise’ which requires at least the targeted system to answer in some way. This kind of action can well be interpreted as empowerment as it is conceptualised by theories of government. Politically, as we will see, it finds its expression in strategies of ‘better government’, orientation on governance and ‘strategic management’ by creating ‘one-point-access’, improved and simplified information etc.

At the end, in this light empowerment is reduced on the partial redistribution of power, enhancing the abilities of the individual to access power points. Turned around, this means however, that power as such is not availed off by the individuals. (a) It is individuals who (may) increase their own power rather than changing the actual power structure. This can be interpreted as an increase in ‘quality of life’, but is alien to increasing ‘social quality’. (b) Power is basically seen in terms of a zero-sum game – collective power, though in modern theories of governance mentioned, is not at the core of such theories. Moreover, here the understanding as it is grounded in (though individualistic) the process of modernisation as matter of enlightenment and cognition of the world is left behind in favour of an entirely mechanical individualist approach.

What can be valuably borrowed from such an approach, however, is the requirement of clearly defining the reference points of the analysis. In regard of the debate on empowerment it is necessary (a) to clearly define over what power is actually exercised and (b) to make out on which level it is actually exercised – this latter point may be concerned with the reference to the same aggregate level and as well with the power which reaches across the different levels. We have to distinguish in particular between

- * sub-systemic exchange, i.e. the execution of power on the same aggregate level (individual power),
- * systemic exchange, i.e. the execution of power in the immediate environment (social power), and
- * exchange with the environment, i.e. the execution of power in the wider environment (societal power).

(2)

The other approach – and one which is very inspiring for understanding empowerment from a social quality perspective – focuses on capacities and capabilities. In particular *Amartya Sen* can be seen as representative – and even initiator – of such an interpretation. The characteristic moment is that such a view takes capacities and capabilities together, thus emphasising the connection between (a) objective conditions of availing of power and (b) the ability to make use of these ‘opportunities’. Not least, this is based on a critique of parts of traditional mainstream economic theory. *Sen* argues against simplifying economist theories of motivation which suggest

to see rationality as internal consistency of choice, and the other ...

to identify rationality with maximization of self-interest.

(Sen, 1987: 12)

Instead, for him rational decisions are only one element of decision making. In consequence, there are as well other moments that finally decide over the power of individuals. The one aspect is simply the economic power in the sense of objectively given resources ‘as such’; however, another aspect is the ‘value’ of these resources in terms of what a person actually can achieve with them.

By developing such a perspective, *Sen* articulates in particular the reinterpretation of poverty as matter of accessing means by which the individual can gain control over the own living circumstances. Philosophically, such a perspective is based on Stoicism and its emphasis of the independence of the individual, the ‘engagement by gaining distance and independence’ (Nussbaum, 1998: 58). Sociologically, such an approach is closely (though not directly and explicitly) linked to interpretative sociology as it looks for structures and resources insofar – and only insofar – as they represent a certain ‘meaning’. In other words, the form is only relevant as far as it

determines – and allows for – a specific and enhanced content. Here, empowerment is very much linked to its etymological root – the *pouvoir*, the ability which can be understood as

the expansion of the ‘capabilities’ of persons to lead the kind of lives they value – and have reason to value.

(Sen, 1999: 18)

Consequently, *Sen* writes:

The concept of ‘functionings’, which has distinctly Aristotelian roots, reflects the various things a person may value doing or being. The valued functionings may vary from elementary ones, such as being adequately nourished and being free from avoidable disease, to very complex activities or personal states, such as being able to take part in the life of the community and having self-respect.

(ibid.: 75)

This is followed by the remark:

There can be substantial debates on the particular functionings that should be included in the list of important achievements and the corresponding capabilities. This valuational issue is inescapable in an evaluative exercise of this kind, and one of the main merits of the approach is the need to address these judgemental questions in an explicit way, rather than hiding them in some implicit framework.

(ibid.)

Nevertheless it has to be seen that this debate is mainly based on an economic approach of ‘balancing resources’, aiming on equilibrium and orienting on ‘coping with situations of shortage’. On the one hand, *Sen* rejects a purely economic approach and argues in particular against welfarism on the basis of Pareto-optimal distributions, which he argues are only concerned with efficiency criteria. He states that

welfarism is the view that the only things of intrinsic value for ethical calculation and evaluation of states of affairs are individual utilities.

(Sen, 1987: 40)

On the other hand, it can be very much argued against him that – by referring to agency – he only adds another moment to individual motivations underlying their decision making. although he mentions the ‘creation of social opportunities’ (see *Sen*,

1999: 40), the said limitation gets clear as he does not attempt to overcome the individualist perspective of the much referred Stoicism and the reference to

four distinct categories of relevant information regarding a person, involving 'well-being achievement', 'well-being freedom', 'agency achievement', and 'agency freedom'.

(Sen, 1987: 61)

Furthermore, with this there is an undeniable danger to slipping down into a solely subjectively defined 'meaning'. Here a similar critique would apply as it had been brought forward in the debate of *Pierre Bourdieu's* class analysis and the notion of – at least partially – interchangeable 'concept de capital' (see Bourdieu 2000) and its culmination in the 'esprit de calcul' (see *ibid.*,: 17). Although power – and with this empowerment – is not infinite and not even quantifiable it is by no means a matter of contingencies. This is true in terms of the range of power and as well in terms of the foundation of power.

An important point in overcoming the difficulties can be seen in establishing a strong link between empowerment and citizenship. This is not only concerned with pointing on rights based aspects of the conceptualisation of empowerment strategies. Of course, strong points can be made in this regard – drawing attention to the historical development as pointed out primarily by *T.M. Marshall (see below)*, but as well at least in terms of the established welfare states, in particular in form of legally codified systems.⁷ Despite this, however, there is a second strand of the debate which focuses on the meaning of citizenship. As much as this is a matter of existing – and withheld – rights we have to go a step beyond. The question of citizenship and rights is very much a matter of 'openness', of existing opportunities to participate (= take part in a given system), but as well of exploring and developing an in general open space. In other words, empowerment has to be concerned not solely and mainly with the realisation of the given social space but as well with the realisation of the self by which then the social space itself develops.

It is somewhat striking that recent debates on empowerment have their origins on the one hand in community work and community development, the latter including

⁷ In this context it is interesting that we find in German social science alongside with the term welfare state (Wohlfahrtsstaat) the term of the social state (Sozialstaat), the first referring more to the general pattern of the welfare-related governance, the different actors and the outcome of any kind of well-being, security and 'social embeddedness' (see in this context Gøsta Esping-Andersen), the second reflecting the judicial codification of social policy in its relation to the 'politics of [soci(et)al] order' (Ordnungspolitik).

settings which deal by and large with ethnic minorities and/or migration issues. One of the most pronounced representatives is probably Paulo Freire, working on a 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (Freire, 1972). Though largely concerned with pedagogy and in particular with developing learning strategies in Latin America, the focus which is of interest in the present context is the emphasis of transformative action as a concept which claims to link dialectically the two sides of the consciousness, i.e. the subjective and the objective side. It is important that in this perspective 'teaching' and the 'appropriation of knowledge' does not equal the reproduction of knowledge. Rather, Freire interprets learning as an act, beginning with 'The Act of Study' (Freire, 1985: 1-4). He explains on another occasion:

In reality, consciousness is not just a copy of the real, nor is the real only a capricious construction of consciousness. It is only by way of an understanding of the dialectical unity, in which we find solidarity between subjectivity and objectivity that we can get away from the subjectivist error as well as the mechanical error. And then we must take into account the role of consciousness or of the conscious being in the transformation of reality.

(Freire, 1973: 153 f.)

Actually it means as well to understand power as a 'passive' factor in the sense of something 'one has or does not have' and at the same time as a process one can use, leaving for the present open the question for what it is actually of use, in who's interest it is executed.

The last formulation makes already clear that power – and with this empowerment – is a matter that relates not only to subjective and objective aspects but – subsequently – as well to individual and collective aspects. Although it is an individual who avails of power, it is always the establishment of identification of the individual with a collective identity by way of self-actualisation.

The 'us and them' of the pluralist form of community were to be interpenetrated into a collective 'us' through a linking of 'public and private interest' formed in open and public dialogue.

(Heskin, 1991: 63 f.)

Thus the reasoning behind selecting the indicators is getting very clear: This is clearly shown in the outline of the indicators which is provided above. Importantly, the indicators can and have to be forcefully welded into the debate on the two tensions:

between communities and institutions on the one hand and between biographical and societal development on the other hand.

This interpretation opens the view on structures and the question if they are characterised by reciprocity (equalling empoweredness) or lack of reciprocity (equalling a lack of empoweredness). In the words used above, it is the reflection of the dialectical relationship between (a) actor and structure and thus between (b) the individual and soci(et)al.

Heskin reminds us of the relevance of *Gramscian* ideas and the fact that the Italian politician and scientist pointed on the necessity of an alternative hegemony, encapsulating the process of what dialectics called *Aufhebung*, the process of simultaneous sublation and supersession.

A major challenge remains to be followed up. Although power is in this understanding in the mentioned approaches – apart from the *Gramscian* view – basically open for the development of an ‘easing’ between different interests and allowing for the development of power in the ‘common and general interest’, there is at the same time the contradicting notion according to which power of communities seems to be somewhat prior to power of individuals, whereas then again the power of the communities seems to be always in danger of being subordinated by the power of society. In other words, these approaches – being fundamentally individualist – seem to presume as irrevocable fact – as general social law – that societal structures emerge in a way that makes them led by interests independent of actors. In other words, the alienation between structure and agency appears in this light as indispensable.

Consequently, we find a kind of ‘normative gap’, namely that community work and development approaches draw on the one hand attention on objective mechanisms of inequality; on the other hand, however, they seem to be ready to leave a high degree of openness to the predisposed normative definition of what empowerment, then, is about although they represent themselves in an objectivist manner. This gets in particular clear by confronting the following statement by *Fetterman* with the just mentioned contradiction which is established by many of those approaches between individual, community and society.

Empowerment has roots in community psychology, action anthropology, and action research. Community psychology focuses on people, organizations, and communities working to establish control over their affairs. ... work in action anthropology focuses on

how anthropologists can facilitate the goals and objectives of self-determining groups ...

(Fettermann, 2001: 10)

The links from here to the first two of the three steps of empowerment evaluation, namely

- * *'establishing a mission or vision'*
- * *'identifying and prioritizing the most significant program activities'*

*(ibid.: 5)*⁸

remains problematic as they are not part of a clearly set overall goal or evaluation respectively. Consequently the relationship between individual and soc(et)al and as well between objective and subjective dimension remain fuzzy, not allowing their translation into the analysis of a concrete social formation.

Empowerment – its relevance in European politics

Strangely, empowerment went through a weird career as part of European (social) policy making. Basically we find the following three notions in the debates.

First, we can see a general, not in concrete politics nor policies reflected philosophical approach. The importance of *Kant* and the tradition of enlightenment had been mentioned before and without exaggeration this can be seen – as positive basic feature as well as limited by the individualist and idealist perspective – ‘European common sense’, defining the European Social Model (see for a debate Herrmann, 1998 a; 2006; Leibfried/Pierson, 1995). Thus, the notion for instance of the Summit in Paris in the 1970s, emphasising that economic growth cannot be an end in itself but has to serve the well-being of the people can be interpreted in this sense.

Second, this general notion had later been translated into what may be called ‘social work’ perspective, being recognised as an important moment of programme policies particularly in the social area (see for instance Herrmann, 1995; 1997; 1998 b; 2009 b). The core was largely concerned with a strategy of solely enhancing individual’s capacities and capabilities of adaptation. This is, by the way, important to note with view on cohesion and inclusion alike. In these terms of ‘empowerment by and in programme policies’ it can be said that failure of inclusion and lack of cohesion hat

⁸ the third step, Fetterman mentions is ‘charting a course for the future.’ (ibid.: p. 6)

been seen as a matter of individual capacities lagging behind untouchable (and not responsible) conditions in the social fabric, a strategy of blaming the victims.

Third, this had been translated back again into a wider social and societal strategy, however one, which had been entirely concerned with matters of economic integration. Interestingly it can be noted that on the one hand the explicit reference to empowerment as it had been spelled out in social policy programmes had been more or less eliminated and replaced by the orientation of activation. This opened the way to an explicit link to welfare and social policies as it is outlined as part of the triangle which had been put forward by the *European Commission* in the Social Policy Agenda of 2000 (cf. Baars et alera, 2000).

The Framework

Domains and dimensions – developing an analytical tool

The term ‘domain’ captures the aspect of ‘property’ as well as the one of ‘master(ing)’. The subject matter of empowerment had been defined at the end of section one ‘as a matter of control over living conditions and life’. It is of particular importance to keep this twofold orientation in mind, i.e. the orientation on living conditions – thus reflecting the ‘structural side’ – and life – by this reflecting as well the side of the ‘actor’. ‘Action’, then, can be taken as the factual bridge of these two dimensions. Theoretically, this reflects very much the age-old sociological debate of functionalism and structuralism (their absolute meaning and relation to each other) and the more recent questions, raised by *Giddens*, *Archer* and others. What can be recorded so far is that ‘living conditions’ and ‘live’, i.e. ‘structure’ and ‘acting’ can be taken as dimensions (on a first level), describing a tensional matrix, against which ‘empowerment’ is measurable as simultaneity of the self-realisation of the individual in and through the social.

Determining the dimensions for the development of indicators further, we have to go back to the subject matters of the different domains, which can be briefly summarised by the following:

Resources for social relations	Capabilities for participating in social relations
Integration into social relations	Strength of social relations

Figure 2

This is in a way the reflection and even dialectic reproduction of the four objective domains inside of the domain of empowerment, namely

Socio-economic security	Empowerment
Inclusion	Cohesion

Figure 3

However, this approach is by no means identical with the notion of a simple reproduction, i.e. the search for indicators in the other domains and their use as dimensions of empowerment. Instead, understanding the domains for our purpose as dimensions, they provide the basis to develop indicators that are sensible towards the question of ‘*what matters?*’. As empowerment – even more than all other domains – is fundamentally

- * processual
- * relational and
- * historical

it has to be considered in this twofold context and tension of the simultaneity of biographical and societal development. The difficult task will be to avoid the limitation of using indicators as means of ‘descriptive measurements’. Instead, the crucial point is to explore the individual’s capacity of appropriation in terms of the enhancement of his or her own control over

- * the living conditions
- * the life
- * and – perhaps most importantly – the ‘comfortable’, ‘appropriate’ and ‘suitable’ matching of both.

These terms – ‘comfortable’, ‘appropriate’ and ‘suitable’ – point into the direction of the subjective dimension which has at least to be kept in mind. For this, it is useful to explore the link (*a*) to socially agreeable or even agreed values⁹ and (*b*) to the subjective conditional factors, namely the collectivisation of norms, participation, sensitivity towards values and social recognition. – At this stage these subjective

⁹ though socially agreeable does not necessarily mean that they are uncontested

conditional factors are simply taken from the given set of considerations, admittedly a tentative concept which has to be further elaborated. Though these subjective factors have to be considered already here, they will be at the same time developed from the elaboration of the objective factors – as conditional factors, they are the material and objective basis from which the subjective factors dialectically emerge.

Locating Indicators

From here it is easily possible to develop a framework in which we can locate indicators for empowerment.

First, it is important to note that, although we concentrate at this stage only at the conditional factors we have to guide the search by keeping at the same time the other two sets of factors, namely the constitutional and normative factors in mind.

Second, it had been said in the beginning that an important aspect of compiling the list of indicators has to consider the orthogonality and embeddedness of indicators, ie. we have to look at the question of how they actually link into the overall system of conditional factors.

And third, it is important to emphasise that we are concerned with a systematic connection between the different factors that – at least in the long durée – the social as the outcome of the interaction between people (constituted as actors) and their constructed and natural environment.

As said elsewhere in this volume, indicators are not measuring instruments in the strict sense. Instead they are means of investigating the borders of a field in which relations are established and processes are developing. As such we propose to characterise in the following as step before coming to the domains the actual meaning of empowerment in respect of empowerment within the quadrangular tension, namely the tension between biographical and societal development and also between communities and institutions. With this in mind we have as well an instrument at our disposal that allows a clear classification of the domains as instruments that are able to understand relationships and processes in context – namely in reflection of their reference to communities and institutions on the one hand and to biographical and societal developments on the other hand. This brings us to the following outline of domains and sub-domains.

Empowering active personalities

Freedom as a substantial, though barely explicitly mentioned, part of social quality, has to be understood in our context – that of the social quality approach in general and that of empowerment in particular – as potentially problematic as it is caught in the tension between individualist (hedonist) and voluntarist attitudes on the one hand and a complete give away of individual control and decision making power, allowing the accumulation of ‘enabling resources and enhanced possibilities’ on the other hand. It is a major challenge to get this on the theoretical level right as we are actually not simply dealing with information and its processing. Knowledge is about developing insights in social contexts and, going even a step further, broad educational processes, understood as matter of socialisation – in German language this refers to *Bildung* and *Bildungsprozesse*. Though literally possibly translated as formation, such term does not really carry the entire meaning which has to be closely linked to concepts of humanism in a broader understanding. Surely going beyond contemporary notions of the ‘information society’. It is difficult to fully reflect this is in the search for indicators. The choice is therefore aiming on allowing an understanding that considers the importance of knowledge as matter of socialisation: enhancing individual knowledge as means that allows participation and gaining social freedom. As subdomains we find consequently application of knowledge, availability of information and user-friendliness of information.

A word of warning may be appropriate: in this light we have to be careful, avoiding the trap of utilitarian approaches towards knowledge that aim on an understanding that is limited to knowledge solely as means to enhance labour market integration.

Though personal relationships name another domain and are linked to empowering social actors (see below), they are hugely relevant as well under the present heading dealing with empowering active personalities, emphasising the aspect mentioned that is already highlighted in the definition of the social, namely the orientation on people constituted as actors. In this sense personal relationships close the circle of the four areas and five domains.

The indicators that are of relevance are in particular concerned with the enhancement of knowledge as condition for controlling the conditions in respect of their potential development. If we then look at the indicators, namely the extent to which social mobility is knowledge-based (formal qualifications), per cent of population literate

and numerate, availability of free media, access to the internet, provision of information in multiple languages on social services, and availability of free advocacy, advice and guidance centres we can clearly see the actual point of reference: we are speaking of real knowledge that is concerned with the understanding of situation and processes rather than technical knowledge as it would be reflected in instrumental reasoning. This has huge implications as well for the quality of educational processes that are under scrutiny. With this we can see a close link that is established by empowerment as central factor in welding individual and social dimensions. The indicators are chosen by their relevance of allowing personalities to develop themselves as conscious social actors.

Empowering institutional systems

If we look at the domain of openness and supportiveness of institutions, we can maintain the orientation of linking the domains with the discussion of the tensional fields. In the present case it is obviously an important aim of the domains to develop an understanding of the meaning of the institutional system for people's everyday life. Whereas we had been dealing in the first instance with the actors and their self-referential capacities, we are now looking at the second dimension contained in the definition, namely the 'framing structure, which translates immediately into the context of human relationships'. In concrete terms we are then dealing with the openness of political systems and the openness of the economic system as sub-domains. One important aspect of this is that the political and the economic sphere are getting understandable in their mutual interwovenness: the political is economic as much as the economic is political, both being a matter of the social.

The indicators that had been chosen – existence of processes of consultation and direct democracy, number of instances of public involvement in major economic decision making, percent of organisations/institutions with work councils – are explicitly aiming on developing an understanding of the dynamic aspects of institutions. Such dynamism is, however, in a social quality orientation only relevant if it goes beyond any notion of learning organisations, i.e. the assessment of the dynamic of institutions themselves. Rather, the really important aspect is the assessment of organisations as stepping-stones which can be used by active

personalities. In this understanding they are very much concerned with building an opening for citizens in order to make their activities soci(et)ally relevant.

Empowering active citizens

All this makes only sense if it is moved towards and within the public space which is considered as a further domain, thus enforcing an understanding of empowerment as matter of active citizens. The term active citizen puts into a nutshell that biographical and societal development are welded together. Public space allows and enforces then the emergence of support for collective action and cultural enrichment as subdomains. Looking at the indicators – percent of the national and local public budget that is reserved for voluntary, not-for-profit citizenship initiatives, marches and demonstrations banned in the past 12 months as proportion of total marched and demonstrations, proportion of public budgets allocated to cultural activities, number of self-organised cultural groups and events, proportion of people experiencing different forms of personal enrichment on a regular basis – are decisively chosen in a way to highlight the process-character of empowerment. All these indicators aim on reflecting social action as (i) people, going together with others and (ii) acting in the public space in a way that aims on this space itself, rather than changing positions and endowments of individuals.

Empowering social actors

Personal relationships as last domain are – as said earlier – providing a bridge. Provision of services supporting physical and social independence; Personal support services and Support for social interaction are the relevant subdomains and it should get clear that this dimension of is not concerned with isolated individuals. Rather, the focus is on processes of social production and reproduction: the way in which people engage with their environment in a process of social (re-)production.

The indicators chosen – percentage of national and local budgets devoted to disabled people, level of pre-and-post-school child care, extent of inclusiveness of housing and environmental design – are obviously of special relevance as they clearly show that the indicators aim at assessing (and changing) the intertwinement of soci(et)al conditions and individual actors. In particular the indicators in this area show also that we are not dealing with direct measurement but with indicators, i.e. indirect

measurements that help to grasp a situation: process and structure by pointing out what the different dimensions of the conditions are. This allows us to understand as well the potential as it is given in any situation.

Labour market issues, referring to a fifth domain, are crosscutting. Employment and labour market issues already play a decisive role in the area of socio-economic security – and there are surely as well qualitative moments included in their discussion. However, when it comes to discussing labour market issues in the context of empowerment the qualitative moment is centre stage and we are dealing in particular with issues around the control of points of entry, exit and change, the domains being control of the contract, prospects of mobility and reconciliation-issues. All these issues are currently prominently on the political agenda: on the one hand as matters of attempting a policy of flexicurity – at least claiming to bring together flexibility as matter of control by employees on the one hand and on the other hand as a matter of globally increasing precarisation (see Tabak, 1996; Hepp, Rolf (ed.), 2009; Herrmann, Peter/van der Maesen, Laurent, 2008).

A brief reference has been made to freedom as central, though not elaborated feature of the social quality approach. The elaboration cannot be dealt with on this occasion. However, one hint may be useful to stimulate further consideration. It is Ernst Bloch's exploration

of four different kinds of possibilities, allowing us with this an informed approach to understanding them in their objectivity. He points on (i) the formally possible – what is possible according to its logical structure; (ii) the objectively possible – possible being based on assumptions on the ground of epistemologically based knowledge; (iii) the objectively possible – possible as it follows from the options inherently given by the object; (iv) and the objectively real possible – possible by following the latency and tendency which is inherent in its elementary form.

(Herrmann, 2010; with reference to Bloch, 1959: 258-288)

Having derived from the foregoing this list of indicators we can discuss further the actual meaning of empowerment not as matter of ascribing a certain status. Instead,

empowerment is to equal parts concerned with matters of actors, relationships and processes. This means also that empowerment can only be understood as matter of embedded structuration of complex processes. Quoting David Miller, Nicholas Barr states

‘The whole enterprise of constructing a theory of justice on the basis of choice hypothetically made by individuals abstracted from society is mistaken, because these abstract ciphers lack the prerequisites for developing conceptions of justice’. Or, if they do manage to make choices it must be in terms of culturally acquired attitudes.

(Barr, 2004: 51; citing Miller, 1976: 341)

This may explain that looking at theories aiming on means of increasing the power of the individual over his/her life confronts us with theories of learning and psychologically oriented strategies of enhancement of self-esteem – power being equalled with individual abilities. But it shows also that looking at the individual cannot be reduced on looking at utilitarian strategies of maximising utility values but is even as such part of a more complex process.

A critical review empowerment as a matter of control over living conditions and life

Clearly spelt out, empowerment in the debate of the institutionalised Europe is very much a concept which in actual fact does not refer to power but instead to capabilities in a liberalist sense. As much as capabilities are the main point of reference, indeed, the crucial question is how to decide between the political, social and scientific conceptualisation of empowerment between societal power and individual capabilities. It is only by referring to the social dimension that this question can be answered. Then, it has to be answered if empowerment is understood as a matter of shaping the situation of an isolated individual – an individual being on his or her own – or if it focuses on the individual as fundamentally social entity and the dialectic of individual and soci(et)al development.

Considering empowerment as process, the latter means that the first and most important question is to determine the actual aim of empowerment. In other words, the question is who benefits from empowerment. And again in other terms we have to ask *for what* a person shall be empowered. At the first glance this is – and actually it

should be – the person who is being empowered. However, in actual fact it can be seen especially in recent times that empowerment had been understood as an instrument to ‘enhance the performance of people in terms of the system’. We find management strategies of which the aim had not been the development of the people concerned but the enhancement of their responsibility in favour of production. Another strand of utilising empowerment for the sake of the system is the widespread use of the concept in the context of welfare (state) reform.

I suggest to define the *aim of social empowerment* in the perspective of Social Quality as **enhancing the participation of people to enable them to balance personal development and coordination with the immediate social and physical environment and the more distant social and physical environment.** In other words, the Social Quality approach understands empowerment as a means to enable people to control the personal, communal and societal environment to foster their own development. Such control comprises of gaining influence over the environment as well as accessing the environment to enrich the socio-personal life.¹⁰

Thus, empowerment has the three dimensions of

- * access,
- * participation and
- * control.

It is clear that the separation between the different dimension of power – technical ability and control over others – as it had been mentioned in the beginning, comes into play.

For the later search for indicators this means that we have to look for input indicators (namely factors that enhance the abilities of the individual/group) and equally important output indicators (namely factors that are available to the individual/group to actively take part in social and societal life). It means as well to be aware of the fact that empowerment always has the two angles of passive and active. However, the particular difficulty is to make clear that the ‘passive’ moments are actually only then ‘real’ if and when they are actually put into practice. This is meant when it is emphasised that we are dealing with real processes where the rights as such are only then meaningful if they are translated into actual action – in particular in looking for indicators this is an important point which has to be kept in mind. In other words, we

¹⁰ It would be necessary to discuss the different approaches of methodological individualism, a task that cannot be approached here.

are already dealing with compassion and social responsiveness as matters of activating collective identities.

This has huge implications as well in regard of the localisation of empowerment in the process of social development. Besides the requirement of determining an aim in the sense of who is profiting in which way from empowerment, another aspect of discussing the aim of empowerment is concerned with locating empowerment between the poles of social integration on the one side and social change on the other side – again a matter which is by way of status and development concerned with the passive and active side of empowerment. Though closely linked to the before mentioned aspect it is important to note that whereas before we dealt with the actor perspective – combining input aspects into ‘the system’ and output aspects regards the individual/group – we are now dealing with the perspective of the impact, concentrating solely on the output. Looking for an answer to the question if social integration or social change is reached we actually have to be clear about the character of social integration. This can have two dimensions,

- * the one being concerned with the integrity of the system – and as such it can absolutely be an ‘emancipative’ instrument, changing the social conditions and the social system respectively,
- * the other being concerned with the integration into the system, a kind of subordination of the individual/group.

It is important to clarify which side, namely the individual/group or the social setting is taken as dependent and which as independent variable.

This is closely connected with the question if empowerment is based on the idea of distributing power in society as a zero-sum constellation. Establishing such a perspective means to consider the link between the individual and society. Interpreting power as zero-sum constellation means that power is a subordinating process. The individual/group is seen not in relation to the environment along the lines of access and participation; rather, in the conceptualisation of power as zero-sum constellation the relationship is set between individuals/groups. However, the Social Quality perspective requires to think of power and empowerment as establishing and designing a relationship between people, but the actual aim is – as mentioned – access and participation in the sense of changing the environment. In other words, the output is personal power in its combination to social power. In practice, this has two dimensions,

- * the one being ‘competition’, i.e. the redistribution of power
- * the other being self-realisation of the individual/group, utilising the social for own purposes and ‘enriching the social’ by reaching a higher degree of sociability.

The question of re-distribution of power, though being strongly linked to empowerment, can be better dealt with in the framework of in particular the factor of socio-economic rights and cohesion. In other words, it is here where actually the complementarities between empowerment on the one hand and in particular socio-economic security and social cohesion on the other hand have to be discussed. On the other hand, self-realisation is suggested to be an original question of empowerment.¹¹ Then, what the individual gains actually equals what is gained on the soci(et)al level. In other words, we are concerned with a process of socialisation as mutual enhancement.

However, it has to be noted that despite the fact of mutual benefit there will be some groups losing their own power. What actually happens in the ideal case is that subordinating forms of power cannot persist under generally empowered and empowering conditions.

Finally, it is important to put the debate on empowerment into a wider perspective of rights. This can contribute to avoiding an individualist approach to empowerment, based on the idea of ‘enhancing individual performance’, thus requiring educational support for the individual rather than securing soci(et)al conditions which are accessible and allow participation of individuals and groups. A rights based approach can link to *T.M. Marshall’s* historical perspective on civil, political and social rights. It has to be emphasised, however, that the different rights are in actual fact only different dimensions of the same right, i.e. the right of what we might call ‘active social inclusion’, i.e. social inclusion on terms and conditions of the individual rather than inclusion as subordination. As it is suggested to talk of ‘active social inclusion’, the granting of the set of different rights can be seen as a major factor of empowerment.

Going back from here, we have to re-establish the link to the relationship between biographical and societal development. This had been understood as a conditioning, mutually beneficial and enriching relationship. Following this line, we can say that the three dimensions of empowerment, namely access, participation and control are

¹¹ In the further discussion of the connection between the four or even eight factors it will be getting clear that there can be major constraints of one factor stemming from the performance of (an)other factor(s).

centred on the common link to autonomy. Individuation thus is not only complementing (let alone opposing) socialisation and vice versa. On the contrary, individuation is a form and expression of socialisation and socialisation realises itself as individuation. Seen in this light, the frequently found interpretation of individuation is a form of increased socialisation – we can establish a strong link to the *Kantian* understanding of the enlightened societal development as putting freedom as realisation of necessity into place.¹² This should not be confused with other forms of individuation which are simply a matter of anomie, where actually individuation translates into forms of isolation (see in this context Herrmann, 2006).

Taking up *Marshall's* consideration of rights we have to emphasise again that the three rights, which in his historical analysis appear to be distinct from each other are in actual fact historically emerging into the one right of what is in the meantime understood as civic citizenship. As such, it can be considered to look at social quality as a matter of merging the rights – civil, political and social – into the one right of civic participation. This again can be seen as merging of biographical and societal development as being concerned with the means and processes and relations necessary for people to be capable of actively participating in social relations and actively influencing the immediate and more distant social and physical environment. Having the definition of empowerment given above in mind, this dimension can be seen as central for societal development. Moreover, this debate is clearly marking a necessary shift in the welfare state. It is not simply concerned with the realisation of opportunities which are given in principal and which we want to be given for everybody. Instead, a welfare state of high social quality has to be concerned with the self-realisation of the individual in the social context and as such the mutual development of the individual and the social. Loyalty is then achieved by evoking a critical distance. This means not least that

- * 'social security' is not simply the provision of replacements for otherwise commodified provisions
- * 'education' cannot be solely concerned with teaching technical skills and retrievable knowledge,
- * 'participation' is not only the opening of existing structures.

¹² Though the idealist turn within the Kantian paradigm is of course a major obstacle.

Instead, empowerment requires truly open structures, starting from the needs of the people concerned and the management of reciprocity of structure and agency.

Of course, this has to be understood not least as qualification of the orientation on capabilities and capacities necessary – A. Sen's work had been addressed before.

To summarise, we can take up the requirement of the trinomial structure. The *subject matter* is the autonomy as capability and right to act. Then, the *resources* are knowledge and rights. This establishes a *relationship to the other components* utilising and actually realising (*verwirklichen*) socio-economic security, social inclusion and social cohesion as a reference for the action of the individual. At the same time, empowerment serves as Procrustean bed for striving for the other components.

Conclusions and Challenges

Up to now we had been concerned with the measurement of the actual degree of empowerment. Although this is the core interest from a social quality perspective and in particular the current project, it makes some sense to go a step further, looking for indicators of empowering structures and mechanisms. In other words, a Social Quality perspective is geared to finding

- * indicators of the character of empowerment ('*aim*'),
- * indicators of the state of empowerment ('*structure*'),
- * indicators of the process of empowerment ('*process*').

Thus, in addition of measuring empowerment by the indicators suggested above it is here promoted to look as well for indicators on a different and additional level.¹³

These are concerned with the activities and structures supported by various soci(et)al actors – considering that, as has been developed, empowerment is a social process and a relationship rather than an individual 'capability'.

The following are to be mentioned as main – general – actors:

- * non-governmental/non-profit organisations (including self-help groups)
- * community development groups/social movements¹⁴

¹³ It has to be decided to which extent this can finally be implemented – in any case the respective considerations always should be made at least in the discussion of the indicators and the assessment of the dimension of empowerment of Social Quality.

¹⁴ There will be a huge overlap with the previous group; however, it is reasonable to distinguish between the two categories as the latter is not to the same 'organised' as the first.

- * non-governmental/non-profit institutions¹⁵ (as e.g. trade unions, employers organisations, political parties, the church ...)
- * state bodies¹⁶
- * statutory support organisations as for example advisory bodies
- * employers¹⁷
- * institutions with a controlling and advising function (as ‘ombudspersons’, complaints bureaus and the like, as well psychological consultancies, child guidance clinics etc.)
- * individual services as psychological consultancies.

Despite this it may be useful to consider other actors when it comes to the debate of empowerment in connection with a specific project. Then, for example, beneficiaries or very specific organisations and/or decision makers may play a decisive role and should be investigated separately.

¹⁵ This category is introduced, taking account of the general exclusion of organisations mentioned here from the NGO/NPO/Third sector (as for example in the explicit discussion of this aspect in the framework of the Johns-Hopkins-Project; e.g. Salamon/Anheier, 1996)

¹⁶ Probably it is useful to subdivide according the classical division of power, i.e. to look separately at legislative, judicative and executive bodies.

¹⁷ The difficulty to deal with is that it can be useful to look at ‘employers’ in general, referring to the ‘entrepreneurial culture’ for example in a country, region or a specific time period and/or to look at individual employers.

Annex - domains, subdomains and indicators

Domains	Sub-domains	Indicators
Knowledge base	Application of knowledge	Extent to which social mobility is knowledge-based (formal qualifications).
	Availability of information	Per cent of population literate and numerate. Availability of free media. Access to the Internet.
	User friendliness of information	Provision of information in multiple languages on social services. Availability of free advocacy, advice and guidance centres.
Labour market	Control over employment contract	Percent of labour force that is member of a trades union (differentiated to public and private employees). Percent of labour force covered by a collective agreement (differentiated by public and private employees).
	Prospects of job mobility	Percent of employed labour force receiving work-based training. Percent of labour force availing of publicly provided training (not only skills based). Percent of labour force participating in any 'back to work scheme'
	Reconciliation of work and family life (work/life balance)	Percent of organisations operating work life balance policies. Percent of employed labour force actually making use of work/life balance measures (see indicator above).
Openness and supportiveness of institutions	Openness and supportiveness of political system	Existence of processes of consultation and direct democracy (e.g., referenda).
	Openness of economic system	Number of instances of public involvement in major economic decision making (e.g., public hearings about company relocation, inward investment and plant closure).
Public space	Openness of organisations	Percent of organisations/institutions with work councils.
	Support for collective action	Percent of the national and local public budget that is reserved for voluntary, not-for-profit citizenship initiatives. Marches and demonstrations banned in the past 12 months as proportion of total marched and demonstrations (held and banned).
	Cultural enrichment	Proportion of local and national budget allocated to all cultural activities. Number of self-organised cultural groups and events. Proportion of people experiencing different forms of personal enrichment on a regular basis.

Personal relationships	Provision of services supporting physical and social independence Personal support services Support for social interaction	Percentage of national and local budgets devoted to disabled people (physically and mentally). Level of pre-and-post-school child care. Extent of inclusiveness of housing and environmental design (e.g., meeting places, lighting, layout).
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