

Sociology in Bielefeld

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Résumé. La faculté de sociologie de l'Université de Bielefeld, où se déroule le congrès international de sociologie est un cas sans précédent dans le paysage universitaire allemand parce que nulle part ailleurs la sociologie n'a acquis une autonomie institutionnelle comparable. Fondée en 1969 cette faculté fut la première à établir un cursus d'études différencié selon les applications professionnelles et à contribuer ainsi à une professionnalisation de la sociologie. La concentration de près de cent scientifiques en sciences sociales d'orientation sociologique et la situation concurrentielle qui en résulte ont contribué à une spécialisation importante et à une différenciation de la sociologie en Allemagne. Le profil de la faculté est caractérisé par son pluralisme théorique et l'intensité de ses recherches.

Resumen. La facultad de sociología de la Universidad de Bielefeld, en la cual se realiza el Congreso Mundial de Sociología, es algo único dentro del panorama universitario alemán, ya que la sociología no ha logrado una autonomía institucional comparable en ningún otro lado. Fundada en el año 1969, la facultad desarrolló como primera institución una carrera de licenciatura diferenciada según campos laborales como contribución a la profesionalización de la sociología. La concentración de hasta cien científicos sociales con orientación sociológica y la resultante situación de competencia ha contribuido significativamente a la especialización y diferenciación de la sociología en Alemania. El perfil de la facultad es marcado por un pluralismo teórico y una alta intensidad de investigaciones.

To speak about Sociology in Bielefeld one could begin with Max and Marianne Weber whose families had strong roots in this region. But the obvious reason in our context is that the ISA-Congress 1994 is taking place in this city and its university. There is an anecdote that an American scientist told his colleague about having got an invitation to Bielefeld in Nordrhein-Westfalen. The colleague answered "I don't know where that is, but I have also been somewhere there in a pleasant place called ZiF where you can meet interesting people." The ZiF (Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Forschung / Center for interdisciplinary Research) is the best known institution at the University of Bielefeld, a Center for Advanced Studies which brings every year one or more groups of scientists from all over the world together with scientists from Bielefeld to work on a common subject of interdisciplinary concern. It was conceived by the sociologist Helmut Schelsky (1912-1984) who had been charged in 1965 to develop a concept for a "University in East-Westphalia" which materialized in 1968/75 in Bielefeld.

Helmut Schelsky, one of the three leading figures in German Sociology during the reconstruction period along with Theodor W. Adorno and René König, also planned the first autonomous department of sociology in Germany – at Bielefeld. It has become the largest department of sociology in Germany, although some other universities have more professors of sociology. In other universities the sociologists are scattered among different departments mostly in a minority position. The unique opportunity for sociology in Bielefeld lies in its organizational autonomy and numerical strength: about 30 professors, 18 assistant professors and more than 30 other scientists are actually working as part of the faculty. Some years ago, before the cut-back management in Nordrhein-Westfalen, the department had around 100 sociologists and related social scientists.

The initiative to organize the 1994 ISA-Congress in Bielefeld came from a group of professors of that department who founded the “Gesellschaft für internationale Soziologie e.V.” to promote international cooperation among sociologists in Bielefeld and to organize the ISA-Congress. The faculty and the university have backed this initiative. The remainder of this paper is to inform our guests about some features of the hosting corporation.

The *Department of Sociology* was founded September 16th, 1969, and will celebrate its 25th anniversary this year. All founding members came from the University of Münster and the affiliated “Sozialforschungsstelle der Universität Münster, at Dortmund,” where Schelsky had assembled a core of sociologists with very different orientations: Joachim Matthes (the first Dean at Bielefeld), Niklas Luhmann, Hanns Albert Steger, Dietrich Storbeck, Franz-Xaver Kaufmann (who succeeded Matthes as Dean after 6 months), and Schelsky himself. In the same process the already existing track of sociological studies was moved from Münster to Bielefeld, whereas the nucleus of the now well-known library came from Dortmund. Thus the department started already with a certain cultural and social capital, and it took its time until the newcomers from other universities (e.g. C. v. Ferber, P.C. Ludz, G. Albrecht, P. Weingart) found their place in that tense network. Moreover the student movement of that time was very active in Münster and Bielefeld, too.¹ Schelsky would and could

¹ The political movement of participatory reforms in German universities had strong impact on the structures of the new university at Bielefeld. F.-X. Kaufmann: Die Universität Bielefeld – ihr Konzept und dessen Schicksal. In: Die

not accommodate to the new conditions and disappointedly moved back to Münster. The multifarious tensions at the beginning created a stimulating climate of competition and a mix of shifting solidarities and sometimes anomy. But in a slow process of innovation and sedimentation the faculty has found its character.

The main innovation at the outset was the *reform of sociological studies*. At the end of the sixties it was still open if sociology in Germany would remain armchair philosophy or move towards professionalization. The latter became the explicit aim of the faculty at Bielefeld, to be sure not in the 'technocratic' way, the critical students imputed to Schelsky and his group. The concept of '*active professionalization*,' which became the hallmark of the sociological curriculum at Bielefeld, covered a re-structuration of special sociologies around certain fields of social practice (e.g. Social Problems and Social Intervention, Public Administration, Regional Planning, Personal Management and Organization, Third World Issues and Development, Education and Science Policy).² Ideally speaking these new Centers of Applied Social Research were expected to do research to define new careers for sociologists, to establish stable contacts with potential employers, to promote practical work experience for the students etc. The concept covered moreover an active involvement of students in the process of learning, including the obligatory participation in field studies. Thus the students of sociology were to receive a threefold orientation: theoretical foundations, methods of empirical research, knowledge and experience in a certain field of social practice.³

Although not all elements of that concept have been realized at any time and in every respect, the concept itself has remained basic to the structure of the faculty and to the curricula of the diploma course of study. Meanwhile other programmes (e.g. for teachers and various interdisciplinary curricula) have been developed, but they are only a secondary position in the policy of the faculty. This concept of 1970/71 has

humane Universität Bielefeld 1969-1992. Festschrift für Karl Peter Grote-meyer. Bielefeld 1992, p. 28-45.

² F.-X. Kaufmann / R. Lohan: Sozialwissenschaftliche Ausbildung und berufliche Praxis. In: Zwischenstation – Universität Bielefeld 1979. Edit. Universität Bielefeld. Bielefeld 1979.

³ Universität Bielefeld: Studienreform an der Fakultät für Soziologie. Dokumentationen und Erläuterungen der Lehrpläne und Prüfungsordnungen. Schriften zum Aufbau einer Universität No.5, Bielefeld 1973.

been very influential for the subsequent development in the teaching of sociology in Germany. Many of its features have now been incorporated in the official standards (Studiengangempfehlungen, Rahmenprüfungsordnungen).

Another lasting innovation is the *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* which was founded by the faculty in 1971 together with the publisher Ferdinand Enke in Stuttgart. At that time it was the first sociological journal in Germany adopting international standards of editing and reviewing. Five editors are elected by the faculty for five years and change by rotation. The journal now publishes six issues per year and is among the leading journals of sociology.

A more indirect impact of the faculty's foundation upon the development of German sociology concerns *differentiation and specialization*. Following Durkheim's thesis one may say that the high social density of sociologists at Bielefeld became the incubator for specialisation. Many of the still existing research committees of the German Sociological Association started in Bielefeld or were supported by the facilities of the Center for Interdisciplinary Research. The high degree of competition among sociologists has surely contributed to the relatively high standard and embracing scope of research activities in Bielefeld.

The basic *organizational* idea for the University of Bielefeld was Schelsky's proposition to overcome the then classical double structure of the German University, including large faculties (as the organising unit for teaching) and small institutes (as the organising unit for research). The so called "faculties" (which resemble more the American university department than the traditional German faculty) were thought to become the basic unit of both teaching and research. It must be added that the original plans of 1966 were for a small university centered on research and limited to 3500 students in ten departments. This 'elitist' blueprint was of course quickly overthrown under the impact of the student movement and the public interest to create large teaching capacities. Bielefeld has now around 17000 students in fourteen departments! The growth of the departments brought substantial organizational problems, especially for the sociologists whose practical skills of self-organisation were in sharp contrast to its theoretical contemplation. Only since 1988 has the faculty acquired a rather stable internal structure: The formal decision structure (Board of the Faculty, Dean, various permanent committees) is

supplemented by two informal structures, namely the assemblies of professors, other staff, students and non-academic workers, on the one hand, and eight *units*, each representing a specific scientific area, on the other hand. At the discretion of the members of the faculty in these units issues of their concern are deliberated and proposals are then submitted to the formal structure. The scientific areas of the units are

- I. Theory and History of Sociology
- II. Methods of Social Research and Social Psychology
- III. Economy and Social Structure
- IV. Politics and Administration
- V. Work and Organization
- VI. Science and Technology
- VII. Social Problems, Health, and Social Policy
- VIII. Sociology of Development, Social Anthropology

Each of these units has about five to twelve staff members which practically allows the participation of all, given the wish to participate ...!

This structure does not exhaust the scientific networks of sociologists in Bielefeld. Many are members in research units outside the faculty or even outside the university. The point here is not to bore our readers with the subtleties of network analysis but to take the courage to comment on *the faculty's research profile*. This means selection and omission, each of us could write another account!

I begin with *sociological theory*. One of the very favourable aspects of this faculty has been since its beginnings the pluralistic orientation both in terms of political opinion and theoretical orientation. Though the work of Niklas Luhmann has got by far the largest international audiences it would be wrong to assume that sociologists from Bielefeld think necessarily in terms of autopoietic systems or of systems at all. Phenomenological, institutionalist, structuralist, feminist and rational choice approaches are taught as well, whereas the critical theory has declined in importance since Claus Offe moved to Bremen and Johannes Berger to Mannheim. The inspiration of Luhmann continues also after his retirement, not only among the group of his students but also in the work of Helmut Willke and Klaus Peter Japp. Phenomenological research has emerged into a research area 'Cultural Sociology and Cultural Analysis' (Richard Grathoff, Karin Knorr-Cetina). This research is linked with methodological advances in the context of qualitative methods.

Several colleagues focus on aspects of the *history of sociology*, I will mention only one group headed by Otthein Rammstedt who has assembled his research around the editing of the works of Georg Simmel.

The concept of active professionalization in sociology and the growing specialization gave occasion to the development of *specific research areas* which have been cultivated for a longer period in Bielefeld. Perhaps the oldest one concerns the *sociology of development*. The focus was first on Latin America (Hanns Albert Steger), and then shifted to South East Asia (Hans Dieter Evers) and Africa (Günther Schlee and Gudrun Lachenmann). There is strong emphasis on the trade-offs between traditional forms of production for subsistence on the one side and market production on the other. Processes of urbanization are studied as well as the processes of state formation and the impact of ethnicity. A graduate programme "Market, State and Ethnicity" is in process.

There is a long tradition of research also in the fields of *social policy* (Franz-Xaver Kaufmann), *health* (Christian von Ferber, Bernhard Badura) and *social problems* (Günther Albrecht) from which several joint initiatives have risen, e.g. the actually emerging School of Public Health as well as the Northrhine-Westphalian Network on Public Health Research or the Sonderforschungsbereich 227 on Prevention and Intervention in Childhood and Adolescence.

Industrial and organizational Sociology is an area in which much research has been done. A substantial part of the faculty's staff was at some point involved in that area, but work has clustered only seldom into larger initiatives. In the 1980s a core of research clustered around the subject "The Future of Work" (Jürgen Feldhoff, Klaus P. Japp, Karl Krahn, Claus Offe, Gert Schmidt). In recent times the focus has moved more towards organizational studies.

A stronger research network is to be found again in the realm of the *Sociology of Science and Technology* (Peter Weingart, Wolfgang von den Daele, Wolfgang Krohn). Here studies on the history of science have a long tradition. In recent times problems of risk assessment and policies to further new technologies have become prominent. The researchers participate in the Institute of Wissenschaft – Technik – Gesellschaft which is located at the university; Peter Weingart formed a research group on "Biological Foundations of Human Culture" at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research. A graduate programme on "Genesis, Structure and

Consequences of Science and Technology" has already started..

A last research area of broader concern focuses on *the state and its limited capacities to effect influence*. Here the theory of Niklas Luhmann has been a constant inspiration or challenge. Two research groups at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research have dealt with that issue: "Guidance, Control and Evaluation in the Public Sector" (Franz-Xaver Kaufmann) and "Staatsaufgaben" (Tasks of the State), a research group organized by Dieter Grimm (Law), Johannes Berger and Helmut Willke. The collaboration of Helmut Willke and Adrienne Windhoff-Héritier in the field of *transformation of national policies* has been awarded this year the Leibniz-Preis, the most prestigious award in German Science.

Beside these highlights a good number of more scattered but nevertheless important networks such as on feminist studies (Claudia von Werlhof, Gudrun Lachenmann, Ursula Müller), Economic Sociology (Hansjürgen Daheim, Elmar Lange, Peter Schöber) or Sociology of Religion (Hartmann Tyrell and others) should be mentioned. Individual work, as valuable as it may be, has to be omitted here when speaking about the research profile of the faculty.

Is there, despite the explicit plurality of approaches and subjects, a *common style* in the work of the faculty? This question is difficult to answer, at least from inside. I hope that my impression is true that professional standards have a high value here and that particular interests have never become so strong as to form stable structures of power. Comparing Bielefeld with other centers of sociology in Germany I believe that there are some performing higher in terms of methodology and organizational strength. But perhaps the importance of instructing empirical research with theoretical foundations is particularly valued here and hence a rather high degree of complexity of much of its research may be characteristic.

Another important aspect of sociological research in Bielefeld concerns *the relationship between empirical research and the training of students*. Besides a small research budget which is allocated by the university itself, there has indeed been much external funding of sociological research at Bielefeld. It has come from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft or the Volkswagen-Stiftung, the largest sponsors of academic research in Germany, but also from the European Commission, from Ministries for Social Affairs or for Science and Technology, as well as from various public and private organisations. The overwhelming bulk of this research

is strictly academic in character, although it often concerns issues of practical (e.g. political) interest. The typical research project is headed by a professor or assistant professor and creates an employment for one to three graduates as well as for some students as research assistants. For those undergraduates that do not find a place in such larger research projects, specific small field studies (Lehrforschungsprojekte) are organised by members of the faculty. It lasts normally for three terms and gives the students the opportunity to conceive, to operationalize and to test their research questions. The high intensity of empirical research gives a substantial part of the students the opportunity to write their diploma or doctoral thesis on subjects involved in a larger context of research. I assume that this is an important point for the excellent student ratings the department has got in various tests.

Let me close by calling to mind a sociologist which has never been a member of the faculty, but as a longstanding guest at Bielefeld had a substantial impact on the students and on some of us: Norbert Elias. The faculty has honored him by awarding the Doctor honoris causa, the only one it has conferred until this day.