Taking perspectivity seriously: a suggestion of a conceptual framework for linking theory and methods in longitudinal and comparative research

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Taking Perspectivity Seriously. A Suggestion of a Conceptual Framework for Linking Theory and Methods in Longitudinal and Comparative Research

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Abstract: *»Über das Problem der Perspektivität in Längsschnitts- und kulturvergleichenden Studien. Ein Vorschlag für einen Bezugsrahmen zur Verknüpfung von Theorie und Methoden«*. Positivism and Constructivism often seem to be inconsolable positions in sociological discourse. The main point of dispute is if subjectivity influences perception of reality and thus social research. Using a distinction made by German historians, I frame the problem differently: The question is not if subjectivity influences perception (it does!) but how it frames perception. In other words, one can distinguish between "good" and "bad" subjectivity. Three forms of subjectivity have to be distinguished: partiality ("Parteilichkeit"); perspectivity ("Perspektivität") and "Verstehen". I address the problem of perspectivity: If we allow for multi-perspectivity in a globalizing world, how can we compare results? Is there any common ground for social scientists from different theoretical backgrounds? I argue that social scientists need a common framework which is not theory itself but which helps to compare social theories and link them with both methodology and research practice. Using such a framework, researchers can classify their theoretical and research goals, determine the appropriate data and methodologies for answering their question. I suggest that such a framework should consist of at least sub-dimensions, which of course have to be filled with content: (1) Action Sphere; (2) Analysis Level; (3) Space; (4) Time with the two sub-dimensions (4a) duration and (4b) pattern.

Keywords: Subjectivity, Perspectivity, Social Theory, Social Research Methods, Data, Longitudinal Analysis, Historical Sociology, International Comparative Research.

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I. From Subjectivity to Perspectivity

Since the beginning of sociology as a discipline, sociologists have struggled to handle the problem of subjectivity.[1] Even more pointedly, in Germany, the problem of subjectivity was one of the reasons sociology was created a separate discipline apart from the historical sciences (Kruse 1990): The representatives of the German School of History claimed that no absolute standards for presence and past existed and that therefore, facts should speak for themselves (Ariès 1988, p. 24; Rüsen 1993, p. 95-113; Simon 1996, p. 69-79; Ziemann 2000, p. 53-55).

However, the "facts" do not speak for themselves, as both the original producers of sociological or historical data and the researchers using these data see them from a specific perspective and subjectively (re-)interpret them. In other words: Data are highly constructed (Baur 2009). If one does not reflect this construction process, one unconsciously (re-)produces the data's authors' and/or one's own worldview (Baur 2005, p. 27). Early German historians did both: As the data they used were mostly originally produced by or for the powerful, early German historians unconsciously, told history from the perspective of the powerful. They also wrote historical narratives from their own worldview, typically being national-conservative, anti-democrat, Eurocentric, upper-class and male. Consequently, early German historical science served to politically legitimate historically evolved orders (Wehler 1980, p. 8, 44, 53-54).

So how does one avoid this trap? How does one handle the problem of subjectivity? Early German sociologists' (e.g. Max Weber) and later generations of historians reframed this question: The problem is not, *if* subjectivity influences perception (it does!), but *how* it frames perception. In other words, one can distinguish between "good" and "bad" subjectivity. Three forms of subjectivity have to be distinguished (Koselleck 1977):

1) "*Verstehen*": Subjectivity is necessary to understand the meaning of human action (and data in general), so in this sense, it is an important resource for social science research.
2) *Partiality ("Parteilichkeit")*: Subjectivity can also distort research because researchers are so entangled in their own value system that they systematically misinterpret or even peculate data. This is exactly what members of the

[1] Note that in my argument here, I do *not* address historical sociology, as here the boundaries between sociology and history have always been fluent and many of the problems discussed here have been already addressed for a long time (note particularly the discussions in HSR in the 1970s and 1980s). Rather, my argument aims at mainstream sociology, which today (at least in Germany) has very few links to history. However, one of the consequences of my argument, if taken seriously, is that sociology will have to become, once again, more historically grounded and move more in the tradition of historical sociology.

German School of History did. This kind of subjectivity has to be avoided at all costs.

3) *Perspectivity ("Perspektivität")*: Finally, subjectivity is a prerequisite for grasping reality. The first important steps in social science research are framing a research question as "relevant" and "interesting", addressing this question from a certain theoretical stance and selecting data appropriate for answering that question.

In this paper, I am going to address the problem of perspectivity. As one cannot avoid perspectivity, it is important to make reflect it and make it explicit. So how does one do so?

Early German sociologists answer to this question was: methodology and theory! Since the beginning of the discipline, sociologists have thus advanced many methodological tools that are designed to answer specific theoretical questions and to erase partiality from social science research (Baur 2005, p. 24-56).

At the same time, early sociologists tried to reconcile different perspectives stemming from local, specific, individual knowledge, by making strong use of theory. They thus developed theoretical concepts that should help researchers to make their own perspective explicit and to generalize and transfer results from context to another (Baur 2005, Wehler 1980, p. 45-46, 52-54; Kocka 1986). In this sense, theory makes it possible for researchers working on different topics in different fields to exchange ideas and results.

II. Fragmentation, Globalization and the Rise of Longitudinal Research, or: Why A New Discussion on Perspectivity is Needed

In the first decades of the disciplinary divide, sociology and history, theory and methods were forming a unit in practical research, as the same persons were experts in all those fields. For example, Weber's (1904) "ideal type" and Simmel's (1908) "term of form" are attempts at explaining how historians or sociologists arrange data into models. They represent abstract models of thought that have to be filled with some content (Kocka 1986). In analytical terms, the classics distinguished between (historical) data and (sociological) models and concepts (Kruse 1999, p. 26-38).[2] In their practical research, how-

[2] Note that the sociologists who are today generally considered as "classics" in German sociology developed their concepts of sociology before World War I and partly were very ambivalent towards sociology (Lepenies 1985, Lepsius 1981a, Käsler 1981). After World War I, most of them had died before being able to establish a continuous "school of thought". In contrast, after World War I, multiple perspectives of sociology were competing. Most of them either wanted to define sociology as pure natural science ("Naturwissenschaft") or humanity ("Geisteswissenschaft"). The influence of those who defined sociology as a social science and wanted to do historical sociology was continuously declining

ever, these three aspects were closely entwined. For early sociologists, the research process is a circle where they accumulate more contents-related knowledge, and where they continually develop their theoretical models and concepts. For them, sociology is the precise junction of these aspects. In their works, the classics therefore combine the new theories and concepts with classical historical research (Habermas 1992; Kocka 1986; for Max Weber as an example, see Kalberg 1998, 2001; Rossi 1986).

However, since World War II, interdisciplinary discourse between sociology and history has declined, and within sociology, academic discussions on sociological theory, on methods of social research and research practice have been drifting apart. Today, German mainstream sociology is characterized by three intellectual partial cultures, which are largely sealed off against each other (Baur 2005, p. 45-52):[3]

1) *Sociological theorists* generally discuss the appropriateness of different concepts which they do not test themselves but by meta-analysis of existing empirical studies. Neither do they discuss which methods would be most appropriate for testing theories.
2) The discourse on *methods of social research* generally covers the following themes: epistemology – research design – data selection – data preparation – data collection– data analysis. The question as to how we can derive a research question from a theoretical problem and operationalize it is dealt with briefly at the most. The question as to how get from data to sociological theories is not covered at all.[4]

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during the Weimar Republic (Käsler 1981, 1984). One of the results of the forced emigration in the 1930s was that the tradition of historical sociology was mostly cut off in Germany (Lepsius 1981a, 1981b).

3 This does not mean that there is no historical sociology in Germany (Best/Schröder 1988). The existence of HSR is proof for this. In fact, today there are multiple approaches to Historical Sociology (for an overview see: Skocpol 1984, Ruloff 1985, Badie 1992, Vester 1995, Spohn 1996, 2000, Welz/Weisenbacher 1998, Welskopp 1998). However, while sociological theory and (quantitative) methods of social research are compulsory courses for first-year students at almost any University, courses on historical sociology are often either not offered at all, or they are considered as a specialty. This is certainly not, what classics like Weber had in mind. For them, historical sociology would have been be the guiding paradigm for sociology as a whole.

4 Introductions to empirical (= quantitative) social research typically end with the reader knowing how to arrive at a statistical measure. Authors do not explain what researchers should do with these numbers nor what they have got to do with theory. When authors write, for instance, about the conclusions to be drawn from data to theories, they usually start from a deductive procedure, although an iteration of deduction and induction is typical of *quantitative* research *practice*. When authors write about how to get from data to theories in an inductive manner, their explanations are frequently so short that a newcomer to methods will need far more assistance.
Some authors try to establish a relationship between methods and theory. Schulze 2002, for instance, emphasized the connection between the statistical procedure "factor analysis" and the theoretical concept "dimensions"; between the statistical procedure "regression analy-

3) *Special sociologists* usually have a distinct knowledge of facts and theoretical models and do research using mixed methods – in their specific field. As a rule, authors do not discuss the steps leading from the data to the theory. Readers are merely presented results appearing relevant for the theoretical argumentation. Thus, a gap between methods and applications remains.

As a result, terms, concepts and problems are increasingly incommensurable, and the different communication cultures within mainstream sociology do not know the problems of the other fields (Schulze 2001a). Furthermore, this fragmentation continues within different subfields of sociology. A typical example are the fields of economic sociology, labour market research, welfare state research and sociology of inequality. Researchers within these fields face seemingly contrasting problems and advocate apparently irreconcilable theories, e.g.:

1) In Germany there was a major reform of unemployment security in 2005, called "Hartz IV". There is now a whole body on research on how the reform was implemented, how it was perceived by the population and how it effects the labor market.
2) In the 1960s, almost no German women participated in the labor market. Today, many more women are working. However, the rate of working women is much lower in Germany than say, Denmark and the U.S. At the same time, German birth rates are among the lowest in the World. Why?
3) Germany seems to be characterized by a conservative welfare state, a male breadwinner/female housewife gender regime and a coordinated market economy. What are their characteristics, how are these intertwined, how did they come about and how do they change?
4) Rational choice theory postulates that humans act rationally, trying to do what is best for their own personal interests.

Although these are all very different kinds of questions, all of them are legitimate and genuinely sociological research questions and all of them somehow seem to address the relation between labor markets and the welfare state. Additionally, for each question there is a whole body of serious research addressing it. Still, they seem to be reconcilable.

One of the reasons for this fragmentation of research fields is the expansion of knowledge, which requires specialization within these research areas due to complexity (Schulze 2001b). Consequently, in mainstream sociology, a gap opens between (a) sociological theory and methods of empirical social research and (b) within research fields.

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sis" and the concept "causality". However, the reader still does not learn how to link the concepts to the complex analyses, which he or she usually finds in a research report. Introductions to qualitative social research also neglect the question of theory formation and focus on justifying qualitative methods. For a more detailed description of this problem, see Baur 2005.

While the problem of fragmentation has been lingering for a long time, in recent years, sociology faces some new challenges, namely the resurgence of historical sociology and international comparative research:

1) Sociological theory has recently re-focused on the temporality of society and on trying to gain empirical knowledge on social processes. This requires longitudinal research, for many questions even over time-spans of over 50, 150 or 500 years (Best 1988, Baur 2005). For example, welfare state development reaches back at least to the middle of the 19th century. Thus, doing research on welfare state development requires data and analysis procedures for the whole time-span. Longitudinal research has gained a new boost at least for survey data, as today for many countries, there are large-scale data sets available covering time-spans sometimes several decades and thus providing longitudinal data in trend- and panel-designs.[5] At the same time, access to administrational data such as census data, unemployment records etc. have been made easily accessible in most countries in the last years. This means, that mainstream sociology again becomes more historical. However, this results in new methodological problems: While primary researchers usually know exactly the limits of their data, secondary researchers usually do not (equally well) know the socio-political context in which data were produced, the measurement problems and so on. While historical sociologists are usually are aware of this and have developed procedures for handling this problem (eg. Schröder et al. 2000), most mainstream sociologist are not.
2) At the same time, the world itself and social science research have become more international and a lot of research today is cross-cultural research. The first wave of globalization was characterized by "scientific colonialism" in the sense that theoretical concepts and methods developed in the old scientific power-centers, i.e. Western industrialized countries – especially in the U.S. –, were transferred to other parts of the world. In recent years, this has led to resistance of many Non-European scholars who point out that many concepts in the west do not grasp aspects essential to local history and culture and are thus misleading (see Connell 2007, Boatcă 2003, 2006a).

In summary, at the heart of both longitudinal and cross-cultural research and inter- and intradisciplinary debates lie same problems: Researchers face the dilemma of either over-generalizing and using theoretically and/or methodol-

[5] Again, it is interesting how little data and methods are transferred from history to sociology and from historical sociology to other sub-fields of sociology. For example, Cliometrics and Quantitative Historical Sociology have been a long-established subfields of historical sociology (Scheuch 1980, Ruloff 1985, Best/Schröder 1988), and many articles using longitudinal data have been published in HSR since the 1970s. However, one rarely reads articles using these kinds of data in journals like KZfSS, ZfS, AJS or BJS. Here, longitudinal methods had to be re-discovered in the 1980s, and the mostly use survey data, not process-generated data.

ogically incommensurable concepts for very different research fields or of using context-adequate concepts and methods but at the same time not being to able to efficiently exchange ideas. In other words: the problem of perspectivity has resurfaced.

III. In Need of a Common Framework for Locating the Research Question

So, if one accepts that many perspectives on social reality are possible, acceptable and legitimate, the problem arises how to avoid sociology's fragmentation: If we allow for multi-perspectivity in a globalizing world, how can we compare results? Is there any common ground for social scientists from different theoretical backgrounds? How can we reconcile contrasting theoretical perspectives from different world regions? How can we compare empirical results? How can we generalize without denying singularity? Is it possible to conduct comparative research without ignoring local perspectives? How can we do "objective" research and honor research subjects individuality at the same time? Are research results comparable at all in times of multiple maternities?

In order to have a common ground, I suggest that social scientists need a common framework for research questions, linking theory and methods. Such a framework would not serve two goals (Baur 200, p. 109-124, 160-163, 316-324):

1) *Linking research questions with theory*: The framework would not be theory itself but, in contrast, help to compare social theories and assess which kind of questions researchers using these theories want to address. For example, some theories are better in addressing macro-phenomena (e. g. World Systems Theory, Institutionalism), others in addressing micro-phenomena (e. g. Rational Choice Theory, Symbolic Interactionism).
2) *Linking Theory with Methodology*: Such a framework would allow to link theories with both methodology and research practice, as not all theories can make use of all research methods and data types. For example, Rational Choice Theory needs data on individuals' thoughts and behavior, Symbolic Interactionism needs data on interactions, i.e. what is going on between individuals.

Using such a framework, researchers can thus classify their theoretical and research goals, determine the appropriate data and analysis procedures for answering their question and decide if and how their own research is comparable to other research.

I suggest that such a framework should consist of at least four sub-dimensions (of course, these dimensions have to be filled with content): (1) Action Sphere, (2) Analysis Level, (3) Spatiality and (4) Temporality with the two sub-dimensions (4a) Pattern in Time and Duration.[6] Of course, there is interaction both within and between dimensions, e.g. between long-term and short-term developments or between space and time.

In the next sections of this paper, I will elaborate what I mean with these different dimensions (see also for a longer elaboration Baur 2005). I will conclude this paper with thoughts on what follows from this framework for methodological discourse and practical research.

IV. Action Sphere

With the term "Action Sphere", I mean the actual content and topic of analysis. So, researchers first have to ask: Which arenas of social action does a research question address, e. g. the economy, the media, the law, politics etc.? The examples I gave above all address the relation between labor markets and the welfare state. The actual research topic is both important from a theoretical and a methodological point of view. That is one of the main reasons why special sociologies exist.

In theoretical discourse, various classifications exist which theory can best tackle which kind of problem. For example, in Germany, Richard Münch (1994) and Hartmut Esser (1999a, 1999-2001) have suggested such a classification.

Methodologically, the action sphere also makes a difference. For example, if a researcher wants to apply ethnographical methods, it makes a differences if on observes homeless persons, unemployed persons or managers in companies. Although one applies the same general methods, very different problems in field entry and ethics may apply. Moreover, for different topics, different data types might be available. For example, in European life course research, we today have many panel data allowing tracing life courses for the past twenty years. In contrast, in order to trace organizational populations, survey data are useless. Researchers instead have to draw on process-generated data (Baur 2008).

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6 Duration has to be separated strictly from analysis levels (Baur 2005). Interaction patterns of higher analysis levels (i.e. macro-level processes) do not necessarily change at a lower speed than those of lower analysis levels (micro-level processes). Philippe Ariès (1962; 1991), for instance, proves that sense of family – an explicit micro-level phenomenon – only developed in the course of the 18th century. Typical emotions change in a similarly slow manner (Elias 1978). Lange-Vester (2003) describes a family whose members have been classified ever since the 19th century into "respectable" people following the professional disposition, and "underprivileged" people oriented strongly to particular opportunities – a situation that has persisted throughout the different generations until today. Viceversa, phenomena of medium and higher analysis levels may change at tremendous speed. E. g., the Black Friday in 1929, the Chernobyl catastrophe, or the fall of the Berlin Wall have transformed both national and global economy and politics within just a few days.

V. Analysis Level

The second dimension of the conceptual framework suggested in this paper is the analysis level, i.e.: Does the research question address the micro-level (individuals and small groups such as the family), the meso-level (medium sized groups such as companies, organizations, regions) or the macro-level (whole societies or even the world system)?

Of the examples I gave above, Rational Choice Theory and Symbolic Interactionism address the micro-level, the other research questions all address the macro-level. Within the macro-level, one can further distinguish between research questions focusing on a specific region such as a nation state and those addressing the global level. For example, the Hartz IV unemployment reforms are very important to Germans, as they strongly affect to social security system, but of very little international interest. In contrast, the other questions I named addressed international comparison within Europe and the U.S. In contrast, World Systems Analysis and Globalization theories address the world as a whole. If one has determined the analysis level, one can distinguish research interests even further:

1) Researchers can trace *case histories*, e. g. the history of German unemployment reforms or the development of the German welfare state.
2) On the meso- and macro-level, additional research interests might arise. First of all, social entities on the meso- and macro-level (such as organizations and nation states) always consist of individual persons. Researchers can therefore examine *changes in the social composition of these individuals*. This is exactly what longitudinal survey research is doing. For example, I stated earlier that in Germany in the 1960s, almost no women participated in the labor market. Today, many more women are working. This is measured by a higher participation rate of women in the labor market today.
3) Alternatively, researchers might assess the *frequencies of case histories*. For example, how many welfare states show a similar development history with Germany? One example for this stance of research stems from organization sociology: David Stark and Balazs Verdres (2004) compare Hungarian companies' internationalization histories.
4) Finally, researchers may conduct *multi-level-analysis*, i.e. the interaction of micro- and macro-level. This is still rarely done. An example would be an analysis of how the institutional framework of the German welfare state influences individuals' opinions and behavior and how this in turn shapes future welfare reforms and their success.

VI. Spatiality

A third dimension of comparing research goals is spatiality. When defining their research question, researchers should ask: How does the research question address space? As German sociologists Martina Löw (2001) and Jens Luedtke (2004) point out, there are for ways in which "space" can be conceptionalized:

1) *Space as Container*. Space can be seen as a container, that is: something in which social action takes place. Space in this sense can be an independent variable or the analysis frame. This is the concept of space in most studies, especially in most studies within a national context, but also in international comparison. For example, when comparing unemployment reforms or female participation rates in the labor market, Germany is the analysis frame. If researchers use the concept of space as a container, they should always point out what spatial extension is of interest: a single location, a town, a country, a region, the world? When doing longitudinal research, defining a space may be actually very difficult. For example, "Germany" meant in 1871 the political empire "Deutsches Kaiserreich", which spatially extended far into regions that today are Polish and Czech. During World War II, the name "Germany" meant a militaristic dictatorship spatially expanding its territory by conquest. After 1945, there first was no "Germany" but only occupied areas. Then between 1949 and 1989, there were two "Germanies": the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). Since 1990, "Germany" spatially means both areas. When doing longitudinal research, most researchers either compare Pre-1989 West-Germany with Post-1989 Germany, or they do separate analyses for the West and the East. Both ways are "right" and "wrong" at the same time: On the one hand side, most political and social institutions have been transferred from the West to the East, so in this sense, the today's Germany's predecessor is the old West. On the other hand, East Germany not only has a distinct history, but culturally also still strongly differs in many ways, e. g. gender relations. At the same time, many people have moved from East to West and vice versa, so there is a two-way cultural diffusion. In other words: As no definition is perfect, the "right" definition of a space can only be answered for a specific research question (Baur 2004).
2) *Comparing Spaces*. Of course, researchers can also compare spaces or social action within spaces. For example, when comparing Germany with other welfare states, the nation state "Germany" is an independent variable, being an example of a conservative welfare state, a male breadwinner/female housewife gender regime and a coordinated market economy. It can be either compared with other nation states of the same type, or it can be compared

with liberal, social democratic or post-socialist welfare states; with dual earner gender regimes or with liberal market economies. [7]

3) *Space Constitution*: Although at a given point in time, space might be seen as a container, space is at the same time socially constructed, i.e. influenced and shaped by human actions). The changes of the meaning of the word "Germany" are an example. Thus, researchers alternatively might ask: How are spaces created and defined as social spaces? Using the example of the question: "What is Eastern Europe", Boatcă (2005, 2006b) shows how one can use maps in order to trace the constitution of spaces.
4) Finally, researchers might address the *Interaction of Spaces*. An example is Castells' flows of migration.

VII. Temporality

Finally, researchers have to assess how the research question addresses temporality (Best 1988). To improve the classification process, I suggest two subdimensions: duration and pattern in time.

1. Duration ("Zeitschicht", Durée, Time Layer)

Social processes differ in the amount of time they need to unfold. They vary in duration, "Time Layer" ("Zeitschicht" (Koselleck 2000) or "durée" (Braudel 1958)). Research questions can address phenomena on all time layers, i.e. both long-term, medium-term and short-term developments. The duration of recurrent patterns includes at least four components:

1) *Overall duration* (Schmid 1986, p. 283, Best 1988). Patterns of interaction vary in the time they need for reproducing themselves completely. For instance, if a social scientist wants to analyze a person's typical job routines, it would be enough to observe a person's working days for a week or two, as most of them will be repeated several times over this observation period. In contrast, one can only observe typical male careers by comparing different men's whole life courses and see how phases of education, different jobs and retirement succeed on another. Other patterns of interaction, in contrast, need centuries to unfold, such as hegemonic cycles.
2) *The timing of key events* (Best 1988, Adams 1991; Brockett 1995). Recurrent patterns differ in when and how exactly key events occur. For example,

[7] On smaller scope, Otte and Baur (2008) have divided Germany into for regions which differ in labour market structure and political culture: the North, the South, the East and the City States. The German Family Ministry has divided Germany in eight regions differing in family friendliness (family friendly region; classical middle-class region; region with obscured problems; inconspicuous; single cities; East German refuges; regions without perspectives; changing city). Another classical distinction is between urban vs. rural areas. The authors test, which of these spatial concepts is more important for lifestyles.

in Germany, economic activity flags down at certain periods every year, e. g. between December 24th and January 6th, as most Germans go on Christmas break then. Election cycles are longer, but almost as precise: Within a certain span of time, parliament has to be reelected every four years. Kitchin-cycles, known from economic sociology, also last about 4 years. However, timing is far less exact: It is hard to predict when exactly a boom phase will turn into a recession and vice versa. Although in every economic cycle, typical events are repeated, the times when these take place in a particular cycle cannot be determined precisely. This means that time passing between different events is irregular.

1) *The pace of change* (Best 1988, Laslett 1988, p. 18; Bergmann 1983, p. 479) is closely related with timing and means the number of comparable events and/or action sequences occurring within a given time interval (Aminzade 1992, p. 461). Election cycles and Kitchin-cycles usually recur every four years. For other patterns, a lot more time passes between key events, e. g. Kondratieff cycles may stretch across a period of 50 to 60 years. Terms such as "acceleration" or "deceleration" are only rendered imaginable by the term "pace" (Bergmann 1991; Rinderspacher 1991). For example, if the time passing between key events becomes shorter every time, one could speak about acceleration.
2) *Rhythm* (Herrmann-Stojanov/Stojanov 1986, p. 12-13; Schmid 1986, p. 284). Recurrent patterns also display a particular rhythm which is determined by the occurrence of various key events. In the case of court procedures, certain events usually happen in a very specific sequential order. The same is true for economic cycles, where upswings and downturns usually alternate. Moreover, events may vary in intensity in the course of time. For instance, certain types of economic activities or crimes are conducted more often in summer than in winter.
3) *Interaction of Time Layers*: Phenomena on different time layers may entwine. Patterns of different duration may overlap. There is a simultaneity of non-simultaneity (Nowotny 1991; Vovelle 1994, p. 120-122). Moreover, social processes may assume a diametrical character (Scharmann 1960). In each single event, all different time layers simultaneously manifest. Our action is influenced at the same time by our historically grown geographic environment, by the society in which we live, by our own life experiences and by specific situational requirements. We orientate our way of thinking and acting to phenomena of different duration at the same time – we do this more consciously to phenomena of short duration and usually completely unconsciously to those of long duration (Wehler 1972, p. 48-50). In law, for instance, the mother of a non-marital child may sue the child's father for alimonies. The court proceeding is a unique event for her, which will not be repeated in a foreseeable period of time. At the same time, the case also refers to higher time layers. To be able to file the complaint, the plaintiff ma-

kes use of established patterns of knowledge, thought and action. For instance, she chooses a lawyer from the mass of lawyers specialized in family law at her place of residence. She knows that her child is on a par with children born in marriage according to the currently valid German family law. Events occurring on this medium time layer likewise change, though not daily (as do the concrete procedures), but rather over several years or decades. This medium time layer is superimposed by further time layers changing even more slowly. Accordingly, the mother can only file a complaint, since the rights of children have been improved increasingly for around 200 years, and since premarital sexual intercourse has been de-stigmatized since World War II.

2. Pattern in Time

Sociology is mainly interested in regularities of social interactions. These may take various forms, i.e. be patterned in different ways. I roughly differentiate three basic patterns of social change (cf. in more detail Baur 2005):

1) I call interaction patterns returning over and over again in a similar way "*recurrence*", "cycles" or "reproductions" (Hernes 1976, p. 102-106). In recurrent patterns, certain characteristic features of the chain of events are continuously repeated (Aminzade 1992, p. 468-469; Giesen 2005) so that the interaction system seems stable (Smelser 1968, p. 74-78). Most of the above examples I gave on timing, pace and rhythm, described recurrent behavior.
2) Cyclical interaction patterns may change according to a particular pattern or in a particular direction – in a path-dependent manner – so that "*trajectories*" may appear (Smelser 1968, p. 77; Aminzade 1992, p. 462-468). One could also call this type of interaction as "normal change" (Schulze 2003) or as "progressing form of change" (Simmel cited by Nedelmann 1999). Examples would be modernization, industrialization, differentiation, path-dependent welfare-state development and so on.
3) It is also possible that "*turning points*" (Abbott 2001, p. 243), "disruptions", "temporal halts", discontinuities (Fritsch 1978), "path changes" (Borchert 1998), "fundamental change" (Schulze 2003) occur – i.e. "discontinuity in its purest form" (Nedelmann 1999), moments when everything changes. A turning point is not a coincidence in that a coincidence is a unique event, a short-term change of interaction patterns, which, as a rule, does not persist for a longer time. Coincidences appear unusual, as they don't have anything to do with previous interaction patterns (Koselleck 1968; Koselleck 1973a, p. 148-151). Examples would be the Black Friday in 1929 for economic sociology, the Chernobyl catastrophe for environmental issues, or the end of World War II in 1945 and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 for German society.

Depending on the time horizon, one and the same interaction pattern may appear as a trajectory, a cycle or a turning point (White 1995; Srubar 2001). If we consider, for instance, the economic development in Germany since World War II, we will perceive a long trajectory (economic upturn) until about 1973. The period around 1973 represents a turning point between the economic upturn and downturn. From that time on, the pattern reverses – a second long trajectory (economic downturn) has been observed ever since. If we extend the scope of observation to several centuries, we will establish that such trajectories and temporal halts will repeat over and again, i.e. they are part of Kondratieff cycles. Even if there is a smooth transition between the terms "turning points", "recurrence" and "trajectories", I consider these terms useful heuristic means. Yet, they cannot be more than that due to the basic openness of social processes (Wehler 1995, p. 8; Wallerstein 1995; 1999).

VIII. Using the Conceptual Framework When Selecting the Appropriate Research Strategy

As I stated above, placing a research question on the dimensions of actions sphere, analysis level, spatiality and temporality does not replace theory but should help researchers in selection the appropriate research strategy in three steps: positioning a research question in the framework and choosing the appropriate theory, selecting appropriate data and selecting appropriate analysis procedures. I will illustrate this process by focusing on the dimension of temporality.

1. Positioning a Research Question in the Framework

Researchers can specify for each dimension, which aspect of the dimension they address (e.g. micro- or macro-phenomena, short-term or long-term developments and so on). This enables other researchers to decide If the theory used for addressing the research question is efficient and if and how their own research is comparable with other research. For example, to allow for international comparison, two research projects have to be congruent in what action sphere, analysis level, time layer and pattern they address, but differ on the dimension "space" (i.e.: address to different geographical areas). To allow for historical comparison, research projects have to be the same except for the point in time they address and so on. If this congruency exists, one can test different theories addressing the same aspects of social realities by using empirical data.

2. Selection of Appropriate Data

Once researchers have decided how they position their research question and theory within the framework, they can decide which data they need and which analysis procedure is appropriate for answering their research question. Data are only appropriate if they give information on the research focus specified by the above research framework. For example, if one focuses on the dimension of temporality, it becomes clear that there are at least two issues to be addressed when talking about data (Baur 2005, p. 110-124): the measurement scale and the forms of data collection.

Suitable Measurement Scale

Depending on what time layer a social phenomenon belongs to, the time scale for data collection has to be adjusted. The slower a social process changes, the larger an empirical analysis' time scope has to be set in order to be able to register this change at all. The faster an interaction pattern changes, the tighter the network of observations must be (Smith 1992, p. 28; Baur 2005, p. 113-124). The time layer influences the measurement scale for data collection. In this context, the smallest time unit need not necessarily be the best one (Bloch 2002, p. 200-204). If a researcher focuses on phenomena of a specific duration, he or she will loose sight of the others. From the viewpoint of shorter-term processes, longer-term processes appear unvarying and static. The hectic maelstrom of events obscures the view to details or wider contexts. Vice-versa, shorter processes appear like a swoosh when looked at from the viewpoint of longer-term-processes (Schwendtke 1986, p. 97).

When collecting data, researchers have to go back in time as far as the time layer in question requires. In order to examine change on the stock exchange, events have to be analyzed on the basis of a daily rhythm. To establish the typical production process of a product today, at least two time intervals from the past ten years should be surveyed. To analyze the change in industrial engineering, the research design has to be extended to cover four points in time within the past 70 years. To look into the interaction of geography and social processes, the time frame must be extended to encompass several millenniums.

Suitable Forms of Data Collection

The time layer also influences the data types that researchers can use. The longer a social process's duration, the more data about the more distant past have to be gathered. For each epoch certain data types exist that supply extensive information. Others, in contrast, are unavailable.

Most qualitative and quantitative social scientists focus on one particular data type: interviews with individual people (Schulze 2001c). In this case, researchers automatically choose phenomena of medium duration (Elias 1977a). Medium-term social processes are more or less present each individual's memory. Experiences gathered during that period influence her way of thinking and acting. If she is still alive, her memories may be obtained in an interview. If she is dead, they can be reconstructed from written testimonies.

In contrast, people are usually unaware of change occurring slower than within a single human's life span (Elias 1977a, p. 130; Smith 1992, p. 27). They perceive such patterns either as static or not at all (Vovelle 1994). Likewise, people are often unaware of many very short-term processes. The hectic sequence of events veils the view of the whole. Both for very low and for higher time layers, researchers therefore have to select other data types, especially process-generated data.

The longer the duration of the phenomenon to be surveyed, the more comprehensive are the theoretical and methodological prerequisites for its empirical examination (Müller/Schmid 1995, p. 12). Before researchers can retrace change stretching across several centuries, they first of all have to collect data for each individual century and interpret it. To do so, profound knowledge of these epochs is required. As a rule, researchers have to learn a new language for each epoch. Frequently, they therefore need several decades to study long-term social processes empirically. And frequently such analyses overtax an individual researcher – a human being's life span is simply too short (Le Goff 2002: XXVIII-XXIX).

To sum this up, for pragmatic reasons it is usually necessary for single researchers to concentrate on one time layer and one epoch. And for many types of questions, this will be sufficient. It is, however, important for the researchers to be well aware of the different duration of phenomena (Wehler 1972, p. 48-50).

3. Selection of Appropriate Analysis Procedure

Processes of different duration not only require distinct data types but also distinct analysis procedures. In Baur (2005, p. 164-315), I have analyzed important qualitative and quantitative analysis procedures in order to assess how well the can grasp the time dimension. The quantitative procedures I have studied are cohort analysis, time series analysis, event history analysis and optimal matching techniques. The qualitative methods I have investigated are Grounded Theory, Biographical Research, the Cases Studies Method and qualitative historical methods. This analysis showed that the situation is already quite good in so far, as both in quantitative and in qualitative social research, analysis procedures exist to grasp most the aspects mentioned.

IX. Conclusion

I have argued that if one takes the problem of perspectivity seriously in an internationalizing world, a common framework is needed in order to serve two goals: First, to make research questions and theories comparable and to avoid further fragmentation of sociological discourse. Secondly, to link research questions with sociological theory and methodology, particularly when choosing appropriate data and analysis procedures.

I have suggested that this framework should at least cover four dimensions: (1) Action Sphere, (2) Analysis Level, (3) Spatiality and (4) Temporality with the two sub-dimensions (4a) Pattern in Time and Duration.

If one focuses on the dimension of temporality and uses this framework to assess current sociological debates, it becomes clear, that for (almost) every theoretical problem, an appropriate analysis method exists. However, researchers need to swap methods flexibly between and within the qualitative and quantitative paradigm. Thus, to grasp the full scale of social problems, *mixed methods* are needed.

At the same time, *mainstream sociology's restriction to the presence must be criticized* (Elias 1977a, p. 139): Qualitative researchers almost exclusively investigate medium-term social processes. In quantitative research, longitudinal analyses are still rather the exception than the rule. Moreover, examinations of long-term processes, in particular, remain an exception (Wallerstein 1999, p. 22), with articles published in HSR being one of the few exceptions. This is a problem in as far as many social theories focus on this time layer, e. g. theories of modernization, differentiation, individualization etc. Thus, actually using the available methods for answering theoretical problems (i.e. stronger linking theory and empirical research) would be a great achievement.

A gap in empirical research (not theoretical debate!) are phenomena of long duration (Tilly 1984) and the interaction of time layers. Although time series analysis allows studying the influence of long-term on short-term processes (slow-quick cases), this is not the case the other way round. When investigating long-term social change (e.g. modernization, the development of the welfare state), the *boundaries between sociology and history become fluent*. Thus, mainstream sociologists can learn from methods used in historical sociology and history.

Finally, there are clearly some *methodological blind spots*: Some problems cannot be handled by current research methods thus calling for methodological innovations. Among these are the interaction of time layers (especially the influence of short-term phenomenon on long-term phenomenon); the constitution and interaction of spaces (which becomes all the more important due to globalization); dynamics of multi-level analysis and methods for classifying causal links.

The greatest problem, however are data: At least in Germany, currently most researchers use oral data, i.e. either survey data or qualitative interviews. Some use observation. However, all these data have limits concerning the time-span the can grasp. Thus, it would be important for mainstream sociologists to make stronger use of process-generated data. The few methodological texts on how to access, sample, collect, prepare and interpret process-generated data have mostly been published in HSR or by researchers strongly associated with HSR. Most of these texts stem from the 1970s and 1980s.

In recent years, there have been some major changes regarding the availability of these data: New web- and computer technologies combined with legal and organizational changes concerning public administrational and archival data have made these data more easily accessible for a more general scientific public. E.g., it is now comparatively easy for a graduate student from the U.S. to access German labor market data collected by the German Employment Institute, without necessarily having to travel to Europe. However, the discussion of the methodological implications and problems of these new developments is lacking behind the process of availability. This results in the danger that process-generated data are not handled with the necessary care and interpreted out of cultural and historical context (Baur 2009). Thus, I believe that a renewal of the methodological debate on process-generated data is needed which links the older findings with newer developments.

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