

Working Paper

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New Ways of Life or Old Rigidities?
Changes in Social Structures and Life Courses
and Their Political Impacts

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Abstract

Like other advanced societies, Germany has experienced marked developments of its social structures during the last decades. But Germany has also been a rather special case due to historical events and institutional characteristics. This distinctiveness is now seriously called into question. In this paper, we trace major changes in social structure during a period of roughly the last four decades. In particular, we look at developments in the areas of population and the family, education, labour markets, class structures, and life-course patterns. In the final section, we address the question of how these changes might have affected interest formation, political cleavages, and policies.

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1. Introduction

According to widely shared views, there have been profound discontinuities in the social structures of advanced societies during the last decades. To mention but a few of these changes: The expansion of the service sector, technological advances and trans-national markets have reshaped the occupational structure; women have demanded and gained access to education and careers and have revolutionised the small worlds of families and the large world of demography; the inflow of migrant workers has dissolved local communities and created new ones.

Germany is no exception to these trends, but it is also a special case. Among else, it has undergone severe disruptions during and after the Second World War including the separation into two states and their re-unification. Germany is also special in the sense that, up to the 1980s, it enjoyed a remarkable quality as a 'stable state', a model case of high economic competitiveness, low industrial conflict, high levels of social protection, successful neo-corporatist coordination and political gradualism within a federal framework of checks and balances. This distinctiveness of Germany is now seriously called into question.

In this paper we want to trace major changes in social structure during a period of roughly the last four decades. In particular, we will portray developments in the areas of population and the family, education, labour markets, class structures, and life-course patterns. We see our task here mainly as providing descriptive background information for political processes. However, some analytical issues can hardly be avoided. Such intriguing issues are whether the distinction of historical periods which may be compelling for the political arena has a counterpart in social structure, what kind of social-structural changes have defined the political agenda and have triggered political responses, and to what extent the observed changes in social structures must themselves be understood as (intended or unintended) political outcomes. We will address the empirical task in the second and major section of this paper and some of the analytical issues in the third section.

2. Ways of Social Life in the 1960s/70s and 1980s/90s

Let us begin with a description of the major social structures and life course patterns prevailing in the two decades before and after 1980, respectively. Roughly these periods correspond to government coalitions influenced or dominated by the Social Democrats (1966-1982) and the Christian Democrats (1982-1998). We will present two slightly different kinds of mappings. The first one follows the conventional concept of social structure, i.e. static distributions of social positions in various institutional settings as cross-sections of the population (see tables 1 and 3). The other one is aimed at the dynamic character of the various domains of the life course and is focused on the birth cohorts that experienced important transitions in their lives in these two periods (see tables 2 and 4). As it will become apparent, these perspectives complement each other. The summary descriptions in tables 1 and 2 should be understood as 'stylised facts'. Where available, they are further backed up by empirical evidence (table 3 and 4 and references in the text).

2.1 The 'Golden Age': the 1960s and 1970s

Demography, Gender and Family

First, we will have a look at the social structures in the first of the two periods (table 1, column 2). In regard to demographics, with the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 the steady influx of East Germans into West Germany came to an end (3.8 million from 1950-1961) (Herden and Münz, 2001), but during the 1960s they, of course, still had to find their way in the West (Lüttinger, 1989). Together with the inflow of foreign workers and their families which continued throughout this period (1960: 0.32 million, 1980: 0.63 million) this contributed to positive population growth until 1973 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1999a). Population size was, however, most affected by the post-war baby boom which had started in about 1957 and ended in 1966 with the peak in 1964 and 1.08 million new births. The baby boom was an echo effect of the large cohorts born around 1940 but also a consequence of early marriage and early first births. It can be seen as an expression of an optimistic future orientation based on high rates of economic growth. As a result, demographic discontinuities heavily affected the opportunities of young people moving from school to the labour market.

At least until the early and middle 1970s, this was a period where traditional family values prevailed. Women were almost universally engaged in gainful employment before marriage and the birth of the first child, but labour force participation of married women was still low, intermittent and often part-time (Willms-Herget, 1985). The women's movement and the student rebellion opened up a hot debate on the traditional family, but this started to have behavioural consequences only for those younger women and men in the family formation phase after 1970. Gender relations were dominated by division of labour and power inequity within households, families and partnerships, big differences in educational attainment and a strong segregation between women and men in regard to vocational training, occupations and rank in firms.

Education

Education and training were characterised by the traditional institutions of a tripartite school system access, the dual system of vocational training, and a growing tertiary sector. Institutional reforms were often half-hearted due to conflicts between CDU/CSU and SPD governed federal states – the comprehensive secondary schools, comprehensive institutions of higher education, the establishment of the 'Fachhochschulen' (polytechnics) as a second tier in higher education, and the reform of vocational training (1972) to name a few. Participation, however, grew rapidly on all secondary and tertiary levels to the benefit of rural areas, women, Catholics, and the middle and lower social classes. Manpower requirements after the 'Sputnik Shock', lagging opportunities and demographic pressures all contributed to a massive wave of educational expansion. However, it should be noted that the modal qualification of the German male was still compulsory school plus a craft or industrial apprenticeship, of the German female it was compulsory schooling and no apprenticeship. Less than 6 per cent of the adult population had a higher degree, but more than half had obtained either a vocational or a professional qualification.

Labour market

Labour markets in the 1960s and 1970s were marked by increasing numbers of jobs, low levels of unemployment and shortages rather than excess of labour. Education, training and labour markets were in a close match and relatively well coordinated. Segmentation lines on the labour

markets followed the distinctions between the qualification levels of the un- and semi-skilled, skilled manual and non-manual, and professional, and between large and small firms (Sengenberger, 1978; Blossfeld and Mayer, 1988). The occupational structure changed rapidly in regard to sector, occupation and firm size. The primary sector was shrinking from 25 per cent (1950) to 9 per cent (1970), the tertiary sector increased up to 42 per cent in 1970, while industrial employment showed remarkable stability around 45 per cent, peaking in 1970 with 49 per cent (see also table 3). In contrast to many other highly industrialised societies, Germany maintained a large amount of mostly qualified employment in production and thus the important role of skilled workers.

While many men who were made redundant in the rural sector or in traditional occupations like tailors and bakers faced downward mobility into semi-skilled jobs, many more men with industrial and commercial apprenticeships experienced marked upward mobility into white-collar positions in sales, management, and public service. Advances in real wages of skilled workers were marked and allowed them a growing share in consumption, but they were still comparatively moderate. This resulted in disproportionate gains in profits and incomes of the self-employed and in growing militancy in collective bargaining as in the metal industry strikes of 1969. Whereas the degree of inequality within the group of wage earners increased, so did the gap between wage earners and the self-employed. Although some academic observers announced a growing trend of polarisation between skill levels (Kern, 1970), in fact there was a continuous trend of occupational upgrading (Müller, 1983). This was not least due to a massive growth of highly qualified jobs in the public sector.

The linkage between wage incomes and net family incomes was increasingly weakened by transfers distributed via the welfare state, so much so that some observers even introduced the notion of 'welfare classes' as social classes whose income was directly or indirectly derived from the public purse (Bergmann et al., 1969). At any rate, to the extent that the proportion of GNP spent on social transfers was enlarged, the welfare state assumed a growing significance both for material well-being and socio-political integration. As to social policy risks the major problem of that period was old age poverty for women who had not been able to build up sufficient pension entitlements (Alber et al., 2001:656).

Social classes

The major building blocks of the class structure were not difficult to identify. First of all, families rather than individuals were the units exposed to market opportunities and risks of various kinds. While the class cleavage between wage earners and self-employed persisted, it was modified by the growing importance of joint stock companies. More importantly, however, were the traditional class distinctions based on skill and qualification with the skilled workers as the quantitatively dominant category and the academically trained professionals and civil servants as another fairly visible and distinctive group to be complemented by the intermediate classes of manual supervisors and Meister and qualified white-collar employees, on the one hand, and the un- and semi-skilled workers on the other hand. The shrinking category of the farmer was maintained in the form of publicly subsidised medium-size family farms. Both the increasing relative gains in earnings and consumption power and labour legislation enhancing the legal status of manual workers versus non-manual employees let actual class differences lose visibility and conflict potential (Handl et al., 1977). Personnel in the social services grew to such an extent that it not only came to be recognised as a distinct class and status category, but as

an important carrier of special attitudes and interests. Intergenerational social mobility was widespread due to the shifting occupational structure and on balance in an upwards direction, although relative mobility distances and chances were fairly stable and clearly patterned in a strong hierarchical manner (Müller, 1978). Except for deficits in access to education these opportunity differences were overwhelmingly perceived as legitimate, since they were seen as mediated by personal ability and effort (Mayer, 1975).

Although the massive influx of expellees, refugees and foreign workers clearly introduced heterogeneity into formerly tightly knit social milieus and communities, they still formed integrated settings where class, religion and region coincided in defining the boundaries of social networks and made the new groups only barely accepted outsiders. The political parties could rely on rather stable voting blocks split by class and religious cleavages and connected via the intermediate organisations of trade unions, professional associations and churches.

Life-course patterns

We now turn to life course patterns in the first historical period (table 2, second column). Their historical development in Germany after WWII is usually constructed as two phases which roughly coincide with the two periods used here: a phase of institutionalisation and standardisation which lasted until at least the early 1970s, and a phase thereafter of de-institutionalisation, pluralisation and de-standardisation. The latter is assumed to continue up to the present with accelerating and accentuating tendencies (Kohli, 1985; Mayer and Müller, 1986). When tying life course patterns to historical periods one should, however, be aware of a number of complications. Such periods cover different age segments for given birth cohorts. Thus people enter these periods with life courses which have been shaped by earlier times such as the pre-war, war and immediate post-war times. Conversely, we can assume that period changes should become most visible in differences between cohorts in the transitions to adulthood (Mayer and Huinink, 1990).

The 1960s and 1970s were the formative years for the cohorts born roughly between the late 1940s and late 1950s, if we take the end of schooling and the entry into the labour market as boundary transitions. These cohorts profited from the expansion and reform of the educational system. For the first time in German history, modal educational trajectories transgressed compulsory schooling and some training and showed – also for girls – a sequential pattern: kindergarten and preschool, elementary school, and secondary school up to 'Mittlere Reife' (intermediate leaving certificate) or 'Abitur' (higher leaving certificate) followed by vocational training or higher education. At the same time, education became the decisive gateway not only to employment and occupational careers, but also to chances on the marriage market; it had important effects on fertility behaviour and civic and political attitudes. Longer education spells and further education were facilitated by the removal of fees for secondary schools and universities and the extension of public financial support ('Honnefer Modell', 'BaföG').

The transitions from schooling to training and from training to first job were swift in timing and mostly successful in regard to the training-employment match (Konietzka, 1999; Hillmert, 2001a). Youth unemployment was lowest among all highly industrialised countries, because apprenticeships served as an efficient bridge into firms (Soskice, 1994). The occupational careers of men were characterised by continuous employment, permanent work contracts, long firm tenure, occupational stability and/or upward career mobility as well as progressive real wage

trajectories. Expansion of the higher salary groups of the civil service also opened up career opportunities for middle-aged civil servants and employees, but chances were declining for university graduates in the second half of the 1970s. Women extended their employment beyond marriage until the birth of the first or second child, but re-entered only partially after the childcare phase. The welfare state guaranteed wage replacement in case of illness, prolonged paid maternity leave, and introduced subsidised parental leave. The development of pensions was tied to the rise of net real wages and the pension system standardised legal ages at retirement and ensured relatively high replacement rates. The public and private sector (especially larger firms) as well as manual and non-manual work converged in regard to termination protection, sick leave, and paid vacation. Since sectoral, qualificational and occupational restructuring was to a larger extent brought about by exits and new entries, rather than by reallocation of workers, opportunities for labour-market entry and careers were generally good.

Age at marriage and at first birth dropped and the number of children per family increased with a sharp reversal in both nuptiality and fertility in the first half of the 1970s. Divorce rates were low by international standards and in comparison to the immediate post-war period. Besides a good job and a family, home ownership became an important and increasingly realistic life goal, subsidised and encouraged by loans and tax regulations (Mayer, 1975).

Up to the mid-1960s, life courses tended to become more orderly, continuous, differentiated in their sequential patterns and more standardised in regard to universality and age grading of important life transitions (Mayer, 1995). In the eyes of some observers, the standardisation and institutionalisation of the life course replaced the class structure as the most salient social structure (Kohli, 1985). The subjective hallmark of the life course regime took a significant development. For the older cohorts, the subjective biography meant material progression and accumulation as a contrast to the dire conditions just after the war, but also conformity to traditional roles in the economy and the family. Social identities were well-defined and stable, deviant behaviour like having illegitimate children was consensually defined and sanctioned. For the cohorts born after around 1955, material security began to be taken for granted. As a result, the quality of work and of life in general became more valued. Behavioural norms underwent remarkable changes: accepted premarital sex, rise of non-marital unions, delayed ages at marriage and first births, declining fertility, and increasing divorce rates underscored a new sense of the value of the individual and its autonomy (Buchmann and Eisner, 2001).

2.2 New challenges: the 1980s and 1990s

Up to now we have described the social structures of a period which by now is often termed the 'Fordist regulation regime' (Boyer and Durand, 1997; Myles, 1993), the 'Golden Age' (Esping-Andersen, 1999) or an 'exceptional period of prosperity' (Lutz, 1984). If there was a 'Golden Age' for Germany, it was, however, amazingly short. Its onset was delayed by the enduring impact of WWII and the long era of the Adenauer government. At least to some extent, it was cut short by the first oil shock of 1973. However, as a social-institutional model it extended well into the 1980s. What has changed in German social structures in the 1980s and 1990s in comparison with the two decades before (table 1, column 3)? Above all (after 1989): unification. By merging

West and East, Germany has become more Protestant and atheist, more old age (by early retirement campaigns), more unequal in the income distribution, and more dependent on the welfare state. For this discussion, we will concentrate on West Germany and West Berlin for the 1980s and United Germany for the 1990s.

Demography, Gender and Family

In regard to population dynamics, demographic aging was both fact and public topos of the 1980s and 1990s. Continuous low fertility and more than expected increases in longevity led to increasing proportions of the elderly. With actual retirement age around 60 (VDR, 2002:115), forced retirement in the East after unification beginning with age 54, actual age at labour market entry at 22, the relationship between social security contributors and receivers or other dependents has begun to deteriorate. The proportion of those 60 years and older changed (only) from 20 per cent in 1971 to 23 per cent in 2000 for the whole of Germany, but is expected to rise to 29 per cent in 2020 and 36 per cent in 2050. The old age dependency ratio, defined as a relation of the 60+ to the 20-59 year-olds remained rather constant from 40 per cent in 1971 to 41 per cent in 2000, but has an expected rise to 53 per cent in 2020 and 75 per cent in 2050. Demographic aging spurred consequential debates on the financing of the pension system leading to increased contributions and the introduction of a partial private insurance component in a formerly pure pay-as-you-go system.

Population grew from 61.7 (1980) to 66.7 (1998) million in the West and from 78.4 to 82.0 million in Germany as a whole (Herden and Münz, 2001): by migrant workers and their families, East Europeans of German descent (2.5 million between 1988 and 1998), migrants from other EU countries and of course, most significantly, by the incorporation of 16 million East Germans. Another several hundred thousand persons are probably working in Germany illegally. Lack of public support for the family and child care, but also categorically changed gender relations go a long way to explain continuous fertility decline. In East Germany, the number of first births were halved after unification and advanced only slowly. Up to now they have recaptured neither the former Eastern nor even the West German level (Kreyenfeld, 2001).

With regard to private lives, the experiments and exceptions of the 1970s became the new standard. This is the case for non-marital unions which became an accepted stage before marriage. Marriage is now contemplated when the first child arrives or is wanted. Some observers speak of a dualisation of family behaviour: one part of the population consciously aiming at families with two children and one growing part not wanting any children at all (Huinink, 1995). Lifelong childlessness is now estimated to have risen beyond a fifth of all women. Divorce rates have been continuously growing. There is, however, more continuity than is usually apparent. Still, about four-fifths of all children grow up with both father and mother and with at least one sibling.

Education

The qualification structure in terms of educational distributions shifted massively upward between 1980 and the turn of the century. While the shift to secondary education continued, enrolment in higher education in the 1980s fell back both in absolute numbers and proportions of cohort or of those with 'Abitur' and then rallied in the 1990s (Mayer, forthcoming). Women have overtaken men in their share of general education and have greatly increased their mean occupational qualifications. The PISA study demonstrated major deficits in educational

outcomes. Even the upper segments of the highly stratified school system performed poorly in international comparisons. Thus Germany is threatened to lose its century old distinction as one of the most qualified and educationally competent nation. A growing element was further training after the start of the occupational career (Hillmert and Jacob, forthcoming), but this has cumulated among a few years up to about age 35. Continuing education has served to accentuate educational advantage rather than to compensate for deficits (Becker and Schömann, 1999). The segregation between male and female vocational training persisted in regard to both institutions (dual apprenticeships vs. vocational schools) and occupations. There was a noticeable shift towards service occupations and new training occupations were developed, but in comparison to demand still far too many young men were trained in industrial occupations (Alex, 1999). Following the business cycle, the middle of the 1980s, the early 1990s, and the most recent years were difficult times for both access to vocational training and entry into the labour market. The dual system of training came under considerable pressure (due to the declining willingness of employers to offer training places). Whether educational returns declined or actually increased remains controversial (Tessaring, 1998).

Labour market

In regard to sector dynamics and occupational structure, shift analyses show that the rate of change was clearly higher in this historical period. This was partly due to the reorganisation of firms where many industrial services (information services, financial services, training) were outsourced. Services now comprised the largest share of the labour force with 45 per cent. Despite enormous shrinking and out-migrating of industrial production, this was still lower than in comparable nations (Scharpf and Schmidt, 2000). East Germany, of course, suffered a huge loss of industrial employment (more than 2 million workers or almost a fifth of the total labour force of the GDR in 1989). Like in other advanced societies, with the shrinking of the productive sector, the un- and semi-skilled found it increasingly difficult to find employment. The tightening public purse led to a reversal in the growth of public sector employment. The share of agriculture was further diminished in the West and dramatically curtailed in the East (from about 1 million or 10 per cent at the end of the GDR to 250,000 employed or 4 per cent in the mid 1990s) (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1994, 1997).

The viability of the German model (Streeck, 1997) lost most of its credibility in regard to labour market performance. Unemployment increased from 0.76 million in 1980 to 3.9 million in 1998 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1981, 1999b, 2001) and despite moderate declines up to September 11, 2001 reached this level again in 2002. Worse than that, the level of structural unemployment increased from one business cycle to another leading to a very high share of long-term unemployed. The full amount of unemployment is still hidden by shifts between unemployment and training and also by shifts into early retirement. Nonetheless, the construct of an insider-outsider labour market (Lindbeck, 1989) can claim only partial validity; women actually strongly increased their labour market participation (Blossfeld and Hakim, 1997). However, they often still worked in segregated, non-career jobs with less pay and, if married, often part-time, facing a wage gap of about 20 per cent (Brückner, 2000). So, despite significant changes in attitudes and forceful equity laws and policies, most women (in the West) still were secondary breadwinner. Women in the East maintained their full-employment model, even if they could not often realise it.

In the 1980s and 1990s, several observers focused on the decline of the lifelong occupation and

the breakdown of the normal work biography. There are clearly some trends in this direction, but their amount and significance has probably been overrated. Fixed-term contracts have somewhat increased for both low and high skilled and especially first jobs. Temporary work is still very limited and has been regulated (by law and collective agreements) rather than deregulated. The same is true for 'marginal' employment (in terms of working hours) which actually increased.

In contrast to especially the Anglo-Saxon countries, there was no comparable increase in wage inequalities. In West Germany, there has been a slight decline in the eighties and an increase in the nineties (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2002:583). Income inequality has been smaller in East Germany (Hauser, 2001). In regard to the welfare state, the expected backlash has hardly occurred, if we consider the social budget as percentage of GNP (Alber et al., 2001; See also table 3). With the introduction of old age care insurance (1996), the system has even expanded. The costs of German unification were to a large extent financed by including East Germans into the Western social insurance funds. The major social policy risks markedly shifted from old age poverty in the first period to young families with more children, single mothers and the long-term unemployed. An ever larger share of social assistance was claimed by residents of foreign descent or citizenship including 'Aussiedler' (immigrants of German descent).

Social classes

Starting already in the late 1970s, many social scientists started to question the continuing salience of economically based class distinctions. Not only was the emergence of 'new inequalities' of age, generation, gender, and ethnic origin proclaimed (Kreckel, 1983; Berger and Hradil, 1990), social milieus were seen as overriding or replacing class as bases of identity, life chances, behaviour, interests, and attitudes. 'Individualisation' was the notion which found widespread acceptance as the self-image of society also in the media and political parties. The 1990s brought the harsher realities of class-based advantages and disadvantages back to many individuals and families. Risks of unemployment, income loss, housing costs, bad health and the chances to find adequate treatment, life expectancy, and children's educational opportunities persisted to be tied to class location. The expansion of dual earner families is likely to increase the income gaps between households (Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001). Employment in the public sector and the ensuing protection, earnings opportunities and pension entitlements, privileged even more in times where private sector employment and income trajectories became more hazardous and not least in comparison to the unemployed. Inheritance, especially of real estate, increased class inequalities as more and more of the post-war generations passed it on to their children and grandchildren (Favouring sons more than daughters: Braun *et al.*, 2000). More significantly, chances to inherit both real estate and capital diverged dramatically between East and West Germany. The pension rights of the elderly, often augmented by savings, came to constitute a new kind of privileged class situation vis-à-vis the middle-aged and young.

Hardly noticed, social mobility research showed remarkable stable inequalities of opportunities throughout the decades since the 1960s and showed Germany to have the strongest links between class origin, educational attainment of parents, and children's educational opportunities of all OECD countries (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993). The PISA results revealed these results to an attentive public. Germany exhibited among all the 32 countries one of the largest competence differences by social class. Work-life mobility declined, not least because initial educational attainment had improved. Chances of downward mobility also increased:

dramatically in the East (Mayer, 2001), but also in the West.

Immigration from non-EU countries including 'Aussiedler' and war refugees from the Balkans increased considerably and was severely restricted thereafter. The debate about citizenship, multiculturalism, and assimilation intensified and found a preliminary conclusion with the controversial draft of a 'Zuwanderungsgesetz' (Immigration Act) in 2002. Foreign-born and their descendants were disproportionately unemployed and living on social assistance. Their low language skills and lack of training threatened them with persistent social exclusion. Exclusion was also an important theme in regard to the East Germans who increasingly did not compare themselves with their situation in the GDR, but rather with the better-off West Germans. Very real discrepancies and subjective cleavages emerged. This was partly softened by relative gains of the East Germans in real labour and social wages (Hauser, 2001; Diewald et al., 2002) and the integration of the PDS as a legitimate political force.

Life-course patterns

We now look at the life course patterns in the 1980s and 1990s which have been termed 'post-Fordist', 'post-industrial' and pluralized (see also Corsten and Hillmert, forthcoming). Although such a dramatic view is hardly borne out by available data, there is little dissent about the tendency that the locus of life course organisations shifted from the collective units of families, households, partnerships, and social status groups to the individual. It is also apparent that persons were expected to take control of their own lives at ever younger ages. Economic conditions, labour market recessions, rapid structural change, and unification for the East Germans led to an increase in differences in life courses and inequalities in life chances (Table 2, column 3). In general, it were the life courses of women that changed more markedly in this historical period.

If we go through the various life transitions in a diachronic fashion, the first remarkable fact of the 1980s and 1990s was a further rise in the age at leaving school and at leaving occupational training and entering employment (cf. table 4). Several factors contributed to this: higher participation in upper secondary education; longer transition times between school and training; spells of unemployment; waiting periods until the start of military or civil service; higher proportions of unsuccessfully completed apprenticeships; multiple training periods; longer durations of study (Konietzka, 2002). In regard to some of these aspects, the versatile situation of training and labour market entry were obviously more important than long-term trends (Hillmert, 2001b).

Working lives started now more often on the bases of fixed-term contracts especially for very low and very high skilled workers. Although there was much talk about the decline of occupation, occupational stability and matches between training and employment did not change much (Hillmert, 2002). Firm tenure decreased a little bit for men, but increased for women (Mertens, 1998). Median labour income trajectories became flatter due to low or negative real growth and the reduction of non-tariff payments. Careers became more contingent on the economic fortunes of the employing firm (dramatically so in East Germany, see Goedicke, 2002), therefore heterogeneity across working lives increased. Ages at the end of working lives decreased markedly and the proportion of men working between the ages of 60 and 65 dropped from 44 per cent (1980) to 31 per cent (2000), for women the change was minimal (both 13 per cent); the proportion of men working between the ages of 55-59 dropped

from 83 per cent to 79 per cent. For women, in contrast, it rose from 39 per cent to 58 per cent (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1981, 2001). This also led to greater variances at the age of retirement not least due to policies for early retirement.

Ages at leaving home hardly changed and oscillated with the business cycle and labour market opportunities, the ages at forming non-marital unions as households stagnated or decreased somewhat, while the age at marriage and at first birth increased markedly. This meant, in effect, that at age thirty almost half of the men and a third of the women were not yet married and that half of the women and two-thirds of the men were not yet parents. Divorces affected about a third of all first marriages. While non-marital unions became a widespread family stage before marriage and an accepted form of union also for the middle-aged, divorced and widowed, children were still normatively expected to be raised by married partners. This is, however, less true for East Germany with over 10 per cent of non-marital first births.

The subjective hallmark of the new life course regime has probably been rather hedonistic for the young adults of the more advantaged part of the population where all persons have their own life designs and life projects. For the other part of the population, subjective life courses have meant diligent adaptation to insufficient incomes.

3. Structural Changes and Political Consequences

In this final section, we want to address the question how the described changes in social structures might have affected interest formation and political cleavages, political agendas and policies. Here our answers are necessarily much more tentative than conclusive. On the one hand, there is less systematic evidence or at least it cannot be developed here in sufficient empirical and methodological detail. On the other hand, there are many (and increasing) uncertainties of how the theoretical linkages between social-structural change and political changes should adequately be constructed. What we can do, however, is to select some particularly crucial facts and their potential implications. We will concentrate on three points.

(1) Do we find any temporal correspondence between structural changes and political periods?

The periods invoked by writers on politics and the political economy – like: before and after the first and second oil shock – have only limited meaning for the observer of changes in social structure. First of all, despite political, social and economic turmoil and widespread feelings of dramatic change, it is characteristic for Germany that a number of structural and institutional continuities prevail. One such major continuity lies in the educational and training system. Vocational and academic credentials still define boundaries and distances between social status groups and to a large extent also income and life chances. If politics has played an active role in this field in the last decades, then rather in maintaining these structures than in changing them, seeking for adaptation without threatening the German model. Second, major structural changes appear to be rather long-term, gradual and robust. This applies for educational upgrading and expansion as well as for the advances made by women in social, political, educational and employment participation. With hindsight, the 1960s and 1970s have been a major turning point. Third, major structural discontinuities, especially demographic changes,

only partially coincide with the aforementioned political periods. For instance, the baby boom cohorts born in the early 1960s put much pressure on training and labour markets in the 1980s and triggered massive political responses, while this period in retrospect appears as a relatively stable and prosperous time.

The question then is, will the 1990s mark a more significant turning point? Will the coincidence of unification, rapid technological and organisational change and the exposure to trans-national markets also imply structural ruptures? Will the more deregulated labour markets of East Germany become the frontrunner for Germany as a whole? So far, the normal and largely protected work biographies, at least, have eroded only at the fringes, i.e. with regard to fixed-term contracts and early retirement.

(2) Have the structural changes affected processes of interest formation and political cleavages?

During the 1980s and 1990s, political party alignment of social classes and status groups underwent a dramatic change in the eyes of both academic and political observers. Voting volatility and voting abstention increased and the 'normal vote' appeared to be much less reliable than in former times. All parties – with the possible exception of the Greens and the PDS – competed for centrist policies and the middle class with the SPD paying more attention to industrial and public service workers and their unions; the CDU/CSU to the self-employed; and the FDP to the professions. Ever more, personalities and media performance as well as the skills of the political game seemed to be more relevant than class interests and their articulation and representation.

However, if one asks which of these assumed changes can be attributed to structural changes which occurred after 1980, the answer is: probably very little. Research on political values and quantitative electoral research demonstrated some tendencies of restructuring but also remarkable continuities in class coupling (Müller, 1999; Brettschneider et al., 2002). It is a safe assumption that a much better educated and informed electorate is less likely to be found among the ultra-stable, normal voters, and that qualified, employed women are less likely to follow simply the voting preferences of their husbands. It is a puzzling question whether and how the expansion, educational upgrading and reshuffling of white-collar positions (in regard to gender and sector) affected the formation and distribution of political orientations and interests. As Müller (1999) has shown, the service class is split in their political alignment according to the differentiation between white-collar positions in the private sector (mostly managerial) tending towards the CDU/CSU and the public sector (mostly social services) tending towards the SPD. When introducing this distinction, political class alignments turn out to be much more stable than many observers believed.

As yet, there is also little sign that 'new' structural groups such as the elderly, the e-boom yuppies of the 1990s or the globalisation losers aggregate into visible and distinct collective political actors. The established parties still rally around their traditional organised interests. Both the reduction of the industrial workforce and of the personnel in the public sector reduced union membership and should have severely weakened the political force of the trade unions. However, reorganisation (like merging a number of unions) and the dependency of the Social Democrats on their support limited that impact. Labour market rigidities testify the persistent

political strength of the trade unions despite heavy losses in membership.

(3) How responsive have politics been to structural changes?

Parties, politics and even unions responded more quickly than the general public to the issue of equity between women and men. 'Gender mainstreaming' and related policies have started to respond to the demands of well-educated, well-trained and self-confident women. This may have undermined a traditional organisation of interests and class cleavages based on males and their stage in life. The new educational equality of women not least affected their family and fertility behaviour and posed therefore policy challenges ranging from child care to pensions and old age care. However, here institutional adaptation was extremely slow as shown in the areas of the provision and financing of kindergarten and preschool places, the lack of full-day schools and the very slow shift from social benefits for the old to young families.

Another major structural change which has come to dominate the political agenda is demographic aging. The burdens posed by increasing longevity and low fertility and (partially) higher related health and pension costs were highly visible in the 1980s and 1990s, but still policy reactions were slow as in the introduction of a private component in old age insurance, or counterproductive as in early retirement schemes. Old age accentuated the distribution of inequalities in comparison to those in the active years. The birth cohorts in or close to retirement enjoyed high pension entitlements, could accumulate savings, were the recipients of considerable inheritances (in the West), and benefited from the introduction of old chronic care insurance. Although the direct formation of their collective interests has been almost non-existent, the threat of withdrawal of electoral support was sufficient to safeguard their entitlements.

A third major structural change was more gradual and less visible at least in regard to its consequences: the delayed transitions to the full responsibilities associated with adulthood as shown in the medians and variances at the ages of entry into employment, marriage and first birth. Partly this was a consequence of the upgrading of schooling and training, but partly also due to increasing numbers of young men and women combining training and higher education, higher education and employment and the like. Again there is a failure or slowness of institutional adaptation by which advanced attainments could be reached in shorter time like the shortening of the Gymnasium, the combination of training and higher education and especially the late introduction of short courses (B.A.) in universities and polytechnics.

Summing up and generalising these examples, we want to put forward three theses:

First, the changes in social structures and life course patterns which Germany experienced across the last four decades have been much more consequential as challenges for political action than as conditions for a restructuring of collective interest formation and political cleavages. Changes in social structures did not lead to a major reorganisation of collective interests. This might result from the fact that the established parties quite effectively integrated and accommodated parts of new or growing interest groups.

Second, these political challenges originated probably to a greater extent from changes in regard to age and gender than from macroeconomic forces of internationalisation and industrial restructuring. There can be little doubt that the competitive pressures resulting from European market integration and from the expansion of financial as well as of product markets will sooner or later restructure the employment system. So far, however, it seems that the protection provided by labour market regulations and the monetary redistribution of the welfare state have prevented both the rise of a new kind of employment relationships as well as the formation of new interests groups. Political attention is therefore focused on the more indirect problems of financing the welfare state, i.e. old age pensions, unemployment insurance, rising health costs, and social assistance.

Third, in spite of the challenges mentioned, the absence of institutional adaptation and increased flexibility is much more conspicuous than dramatic transformation (at least as far as West Germany is concerned). Among those which stand out are the institutional stratification of education, the predominance of the dual system of vocational training, the close links between education, employment and occupation, the persistence of occupational and firm labour markets, the only partial labour market inclusion of women, the rigidities and privileges of public service employment, the relatively comfortable material situation of the elderly, and relatively high levels of employment protection. Many of these features have in the past been seen as assets rather than liabilities of the 'German Model'. One might wonder, however, whether these non-changes should not be better interpreted as rigidities, i.e. as a sign of lacking adaptive capacity. Another indicator for this is the primarily administrative division of labour between different departments and policies (on structural similarities of problems for social and educational policy, see Allmendinger, 1999). It seems obvious, then, that structural changes do not find their way into the political economy quasi automatically.

Tables

Table 1: Social Structures in Germany in the 1960s/70s and in the 1980s/90s

	1960s/70s	1980s/90s
Demography		
Population dynamics	Baby boom and fertility decline, beginning immigration	Population aging, fertility decline, immigration
Family	Almost universal marriage	Non-marital unions, pluralisation of family forms, legal recognition of non-heterosexual unions
Citizenship, national integration	Homogeneous	Immigration without assimilation, East/West cleavages
Education		
Qualifications and skills	Highly stratified education system, dual system of vocational training, educational expansion	Only modest educational inflation
Labour market		
Occupational structure	Upgrading; de-ruralisation, skilled industrial workers, expansion of white-collar work and qualified public service	IT-revolution, flexible and precarious work moderately increasing
Labour markets	Segmented and segregated, high level of secure employment	High level of structural unemployment
Industrial organisation	High level of union membership	Decline of union membership
Income inequality	Stable and decreasing	Stable or increasing
Women	Gender division of labour within households	Increasing labour market participation of women
Social classes and social security		
Class structure	Middle class integration, status distinctions, rise of welfare state clienteles; integrated social milieus	Increasing salience of cultural capital; social milieus heterogeneous by age and life style
Voting behaviour	Stable normal class vote cross-cut by religious cleavage	Rise of new politics (green party) and regional party (PDS), decreasing electoral participation
Social security	Expanding entitlements, universal coverage, old age poverty	Increasing contributions, declining entitlements, introduction of private insurance component
Social and political exclusion	Unskilled, small farmers	Immigrant workers, labour market outsiders

Table 2: Life Course Patterns in Germany in the 1960/70s and in the 1980/90s

	1960s/70s	1980s/90s
Demography		
Family formation and dissolution	Early universal marriage and childbearing, low divorce rate	Initial non-marital unions, delayed and partial marriage, increasing risk of divorce
Age at leaving home	Decreasing	Increasing
Education		
Education	Persistent inequalities in opportunities	Prolonged, interrupted educational careers, multiple training periods
Age at leaving school/training	Medium, stratified by qualification	Delayed, high variance
Labour market		
Labour market entry	Early, continuous, low youth unemployment	Delayed, increasing transition difficulties
Working lives	long firm tenure, occupational stability, upward mobility	between firm/between occupation mobility, episodes of unemployment
Women's careers	Pre-marriage, pre-birth employment, discontinuous careers	Increasing long-term participation, but mostly part-time
Age at retirement	Low variance at legal ages	Early retirement, high variance
Political alignment		
Political life course	Generational imprinting and continuity	Decreasing life-course political alignment
Social security		
Precarious life-course stages	(Women's) old age poverty	Solo mothers, young families with children, early adult marginality

Table 3: Empirical indicators (cross-sections)
Structural change and marginalisation in the labour market, West Germany 1970-1995

Year	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
Labour force participation rates (population)						West+East
Men	59.1	57.1	58.4	60.3	60.8	57.8
Women	30.2	30.9	32.6	35.9	39.2	40.9
<i>Labour force composition</i> <i>(% of all employed)</i>						
						West+East
Men, full-time	65	62	61	60	58	53
Women, full-time	26	26	27	27	26	27
Men, part-time	1	1	1	1	2	3
Women, part-time	8	11	11	12	14	17
<i>Unemployment (%)</i>						
Total unemployment rate	0.7	4.7	3.8	9.3	7.2	9.3
Unemployment rate: without training	-	6.1	5.9	14.9	13.3	20.0
Unemployment rate: Non-Germans	0.3	6.8	5.0	13.9	10.9	16.6
<i>Social budget</i> in % of GNP						
	25.9	33.3	32.0	31.3	West+East 28.8	West+East 33.2

Sources: Official statistics¹

¹ Labour force participation and composition, social budget: Arbeits- und Sozialstatistik 2002; Unemployment by qualification: IAB; Total unemployment and by nationality: Bundesanstalt für Arbeit: ANBA-Jahreszahlen.

Table 4: Empirical indicators (birth cohorts)

Selected life-course indicators (in years) for the birth cohorts 1950–1971 (West Germany and German citizens only)

Birth cohort	1950	1955	1960	1964	1971
Median age (first job): men	18.8	19.5	19.9	20.3	21.1
Median age (first job): women	18.1	18.9	19.7	20.3	20.9
Median age (first stable job): men	20.2	21.3	21.7	21.8	23.9
Median age (first stable job): women	19.0	20.0	21.0	21.7	22.3
Median job duration (first stable job): men	4.3	5.3	5.3	6.6	5.5
Median job duration (first stable job): women	4.6	4.8	5.2	5.3	5.3
Median occupational duration (first stable job):men	> 9	>11	> 9	13.1	> 8
Median occupational duration (first stable job): women	6.2	7.7	7.6	7.4	6.4
Median age at first marriage: men	25	27	30	29	- a)
Median age at first marriage: women	21	23	26	26	- b)
Median age at leaving home: men	25	24	23	23	24
Median age at leaving home: women	22	21	21	21	22

First stable job: minimum duration of two years

a) less than 25 per cent have married until age 27; b) 25 per cent have married until age 24, but less than 50 per cent until age 27

Sources: Own calculations; Data: German Life History Study

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