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Culture and Culturality

Approaching a Multi-faceted Concept

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Approaching a Multi-faceted Concept

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1 Concepts of Culture – The Plurality of the Concept of Culture

As early as in classical antiquity, culture occupied a central position in occidental thought.[*] Culture, in its original classical meaning, i.e. the Latin *cultura*, refers to cultivating fields (cf. "agriculture"), meaning tilling, cultivating, planting, as well as mental care and education of intellectual capabilities (cf. Pfeiffer 1997, p. 743). In the Middle Ages, the term hardly played a role in the "Germanic" language area. Only towards the end of the 17th century culture, after having appeared in German texts in its Latin form, became integrated into German, achieving greater significance as a concept (though with partly very different meanings).

This highlights the first difficulty when dealing with the concept of culture. As a consequence of its long tradition, the subdisciplines of the humanities and social sciences now feature a multitude of concepts of culture side by side, all of them defined and used in different ways (cf. Gerhards 2000, p. 16). As a consequence, the concept of culture is far from being sharply defined even in the literature of the field. Disciplines as different as philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and interdisciplinary schools, such as "cultural studies", attempted to describe and characterize what "culture" means from their points of view. Epistemological research in this area is multifaceted, historically speaking, and continues to grow.

This multiplicity is so pronounced also because, depending on the purpose, object and method of a study, it may make sense to opt for a different concept of culture. Generally, concepts of culture can be distinguished with respect to access (qualitative and quantitative or mixed forms) and level of a study (micro-, meso-, macrolevels). However, even within specific disciplines, the concept of culture often remains vague and ambivalent. Theoretical difficulties begin with the many forms culture can assume, and they end with the paradoxes invariably encountered when looking at the phenomenon of culture from a scientific point of view.

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[*] This contribution is based in large parts on Hauser 2009.

Especially three (seemingly) conflicting characteristics of culture cause difficulties (cf. Demorgon/Molz 1996, pp. 43f.):

(1) *Continuity and change:* While culture, on the one hand, ensures the preservation of cultural heritage by means of tradition (holidays, memorial days, etc.), lasting new patterns, techniques, and practices of culture keep arising, often as a result of specific influences.

(2) *Standardization and differentiation:* Culture is frequently described as orientation or standardization of values or patterns of behaviour, thus as uniform; on the other hand, however, there are also individual variations, subcultures, and miniature collectives making cultures appear divergent.

(3) *Openness and boundaries:* Cultures, seen as national cultures, on the one hand, are open to other cultures and cultural patterns (which can also cause them to change) but, at the same time, also represent boundaries of a community: Only those knowing and understanding the common symbols, such as language, history, and institutions, can find orientation and behave accordingly. Behaviour adequate to a culture indicates who belongs and who does not.

2   History – The Genesis of the Concept of Culture

While the classical concept of culture implied cultivation (of soil, plants) or education (of persons), it became broader and was redefined in part from the 17th century onward. Over the following periods of time, the concept of culture was related to the three major concepts of enlightened thought: culture/nature (cf. Pufendorf 2002), culture/civilization (cf. Kant 1977), and culture/life (cf. Freud 1989) (cf. Reckwitz 2000, pp. 66ff.; cf. also Hubig 2010). In its definition relative to those concepts, and in comparison with them, it acquires different meanings. The resultant definitions of culture may also be referred to as concepts of culture "in the narrow sense". They do not point to an ontic difference but merely to different aspects of the same object (cf. Janich 2005, p. 21).

In the period of Enlightenment, the concept was popularized by Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottfried Herder, becoming a buzzword in philosophical thought. The very civilizatory concept of culture can still be found in the everyday meaning of culture. To this day, the "achievements of civilization", such as theatre, movies, or books, are referred to as cultural products or even high culture. This also reflects Western European thought of the late 19th century, when peoples were still judged by their civilizatory achievements, of course always against the backdrop of one's own "cultural achievements" for comparison: Accordingly, there were highly developed cultures and cultures which were less developed or not developed at all – as a rule,

this referred to African or American aborigines. Those were not only devoid of religion, i.e. they were heathen, but also of culture, i.e. civilization.

While Kant "charged" the concept of culture normatively in connection with morals, coupling it to civilization, Herder used concepts of popular psychology to develop the historic-holistic concept of culture, thus recontextualizing it (cf. Herder 1989): "The holistic concept of culture de-universalizes the concept of culture, contextualizing and historicizing it. Culture is no longer a distinguished form of life, cultures rather are specific ways of life of individual collectives in history, and the concept of culture logically occurs in the plural form, referring to the diversity of the totalities of human forms of life in various 'peoples', 'nations', 'communities', 'cultural areas'" (Reckwitz 2005, p. 95).

This makes Herder the first author to establish a broad understanding of culture related neither only to man and nature nor, chiefly in a normative way, to civilization: "*The culture of a people is the bloom of its existence through which it manifests itself in a pleasant but also frail way.* Like human beings coming into this world and knowing nothing – needing to learn what they want to know –, a crude people learns from practice for itself or through contacts with others. However, every kind of human knowledge has its own ambience, i.e. its nature, time, place, and period of life […]" (Herder 1989, p. 571; original italics, R.H./G.B.).

Culture as used by Herder refers, in a neutral way, to the totality of a historically specific contextualized way of life of a collective in contrast to other collectives. This becomes apparent also in the criticism of contemporary concepts of culture, where he complains: "Nothing is less defined than this word, and nothing is more delusive than its application to entire peoples and periods of time" (Herder 1989, preface, p. 39). The concept of culture coined by Herder in this way had a special impact on the discipline of anthropology, which was still young at that time. In their studies of so-called natural peoples, anthropologists found that some of those not only had produced differentiated societies, but also had many rites, traditions, ceremonies, interpretations of the world, and "cultural products", such as carvings, or the like. Accordingly, they did have culture(s), even if those functioned by different mechanisms, and other values and norms influenced activities. The interpretation of culture began to change with these research findings.

The concepts of culture developed in anthropology, also influenced by the emergence of cultural studies, then more and more resembled the meaning of the Anglo-Saxon term "culture" – in the sense of "everyday culture" – thus establishing a broader concept of culture. To this day, this has incorporated everything of importance to human everyday life. Things mental and things material are regarded as culture or are influenced by culture. This enlarged concept of culture (referred to below as the "broader" concept of culture) is used epistemologically chiefly in a reflexive way, i.e., it serves primarily to compare everyday cultures. Culture as defined in this sense is what distinguishes people's ways of life. Accordingly, it is based mainly on

the finding that people developed different ways of life by which they are distinguished (cf. Cappai 2005, pp. 50ff.; Reckwitz 2005, p. 95). This gives rise to a pluralistic concept of culture not referring to *culture* per se, but differentiating between equivalent, yet different cultures in contradistinction to civilizational/normative interpretations. Any culture in this sense seems to be anchored in three units: "[…] in a collective of persons (frequently thought of as a *community), in a shared* space – cultures are associated with geographic spaces – and in a continuity of time – cultures appear to be bound to a *historic tradition"* (Reckwitz 2005, p. 95; emphasis and brackets in the original, R.H./G.B.).

Parallel to the "narrow" and "broad" concepts of culture, a concept of culture developed in the 20th century according to theories of differentiation which strongly influenced especially the social sciences. As a full-blown systematic concept, this concept of culture was found for the first time in systems theory constructivism as described by Talcott Parsons in his evolution theory treatise about functional differentiation in modern societies (cf. Reckwitz 2005, p. 95). This shows culture as a functional societal subsystem, a "fiduciary system", institutionalized mainly in the arts and in education and with the duty of handing down and newly developing interpretations of the world (cf. Parsons 1977).

In the mid-20th century, the "linguistic turn" in linguistics was followed by the "cultural turn": a move away from the narrow normative concept of culture towards a broader concept of culture focusing on associations of meaning. In everyday usage, a very narrow concept of culture can still be found (especially in the public and on the feature pages of newspapers), which is associated mainly with the representatives of culture and, in this way, cultural artefacts, such as books, movies, but also dramas, operas, etc. In this case, the concept of culture, following Kant's interpretation, is linked to civilization and the achievements of civilization, respectively.

In the humanities, this concept of culture was discarded around the middle of the 20th century. This break, which is seen in various scientific disciplines under different names, became apparent first in the linguistic papers by Ludwig Wittgenstein. His work shows him in an epistemological position between studies in the early period (cf. Wittgenstein 2003) and the late period (cf. Wittgenstein 2001), expressed in linguistics in the term "crises of representation" (cf. also Mersch 1999). The fundamental difference lies in the fact that it had been recognized that words, as elements of linguistic systems, derive their significance not from any direct correspondence to the objective world to the elements of which they refer, but rather from their position and their relation with other elements of language. This major difference, which is considered the epistemological turnaround and later referred to as "linguistic turn" (cf. Rorty 1967), means that the meaning of words is detached from concrete representatives, instead emphasizing contexts and reference associations within a linguistic system.

This break also occurred with regard to the concept of culture and was expressed in the term "cultural turn" (cf. Reckwitz 2000, 2005, and others). This means that the concept of culture as civilization or high culture, which used to be associated with the material or immaterial products of these high cultures, is replaced by a concept of culture in which culture means context- or meaning-dependent practices of knowledge, communication and, thus, social and cultural practices, respectively (cf. Reckwitz 2005, p. 96). These practices interact with the environment of human life and existence.

3 Concepts of Culture – Cultural Concepts in Current Research Practice

Current research practice in cultural studies as well as in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research, provided that culture is interpreted as a concept, defines three methodological lines or types of concepts of culture of the "broad" variety according to Jürgen Bolten: *"Material" theories of culture* are mainly based semiotically on the totality of artefacts as meaningful real achievements of a society. Artefacts encompass memorials and monuments as well as factory buildings, tools, or clothes (cf. Bolten 1997, p. 488). *"Mentalist" approaches*, employing cognitive anthropology (cf., e.g., Goodenough 1971), consistently consider culture immaterial. Their interest is devoted less to cultural "perceptus" than to cultural "conceptas". "'Conceptas' means collectively shared values, attitudes, and norms which cannot be described directly as causes of actions and behaviour, but require conclusions drawn, for instance, on the basis of observable reality. In a way, this is the 'cultural memory' or 'knowledge pool', used by communicating parties to obtain interpretations by agreeing on something in the world" (Bolten 1997, p. 488; cf. also Reckwitz 2005, p. 97). *"Functionalist" theories of culture* emphasize the aspect of "making oneself understood". This already denotes a functionalist perspective from which the meaning of the concept of culture again changes – culture is given a foundation in action theory. "Culture" in its functionalist interpretation consequently can be regarded as a system of orientation constitutive of, and necessary for, the social practice of a society, organization or group. This is closely related to the concept of "normality" in the group: Only the existence of specific conventions of social action allows concrete everyday actions to invoke assumptions of normality which are presupposed without being queried (cf. Bolten 1997, p. 488).

The macro-theoretical approaches described above (provided they can be assigned unequivocally) can be summarized as type 3. On the other hand, the micro-theoretical approaches tend to be type 2, relating culture to values and norms as interpretations of systems of symbols. The three variants of the broader concept of culture must not be considered mutually exclusive; on the contrary: "Nowadays, an integrating perspec-

tive is preferred in which culture is perceived as a system of interaction and orientation which can be described by 'perceptus' and explained as 'conceptas'" (Bolten 1997, p. 489).

In scientific theory, the basic problem of the theory of culture in the humanities and social sciences lies in an exact definition of what precisely is to be understood by cultural differences in the light of existing historical circumstances (cf. Reckwitz 2005, p. 96). The question how to define differences conceptually can be answered only once the basis of comparison, i.e. the element to be compared, has been defined. According to Andreas Reckwitz, mainly three different discourses can be distinguished, which will be outlined briefly below as a summary and for classification (cf. Reckwitz 2005).

The *"social theory" discourse* tries to express the differences in "theories of culture" (cf. Reckwitz 2005, pp. 93ff.). These are mostly approaches of social constructivism formulating a general theory of the origins of social order in human thought and action (cf., e.g., Berger/Luckmann 2000). In this approach, action, thought, and perception are based on symbolic orders which, at the same time, are constitutive to the perception of reality and, ultimately, also to the design of (social and cultural) reality. This group includes approaches from social phenomenology to Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and symbolist ethnology to the systems theory constructivism of Parsons and Niklas Luhmann.

The methodological and *science theory discourses,* respectively*,* concentrated in particular on the specific conditions of, and obstacles to, an external understanding of culture. Above all, the discussions in ethnology, especially the "writing culture" and post-colonialism debate (cf. Clifford/George 1986), and socio-philosophical hermeneutics provided important impulses.

In the context of *social science theory*, the question of cultural differences most recently has been studied especially in the theories of globalization (cf., e.g., Castells 2001; Giddens 1990). With regard to conditions in the Western world, cultural differences were also shown in theories of lifestyles (cf. Hradil 1997) and subcultures as well as gender identities. In the more recent post-Foucaultian cultural history these problems were also addressed with a view to cultural disruptions in history. The question about the differences of, and limits to, cultures is discussed in all these discourses, which cannot be clearly separated from each other, in connection with the abstract problem of the "essence of culture" and "what culture is made up of".

The concepts of culture in anthropology, which are based on the broader pluralistic concept of culture, particularly influenced the genesis of the concept of culture. Especially the arguments of the U.S. anthropologist Florence Kluckhohn exerted much influence, who thought that all cultures in the world concealed basic problems of human existence which could be summarized in dimensions and categories, respectively: "All cultures constitute […] answers to essentially the same questions posed by human biology and by the generalities of the human situation. […] Every society's

pattern for living must provide approved and sanctioned ways for dealing with such universal circumstances as the existence of two sexes; the helplessness of infants; etc." (Kluckhohn 1962, pp. 17f.).

This definition by Kluckhohn was broad enough to be filled in different ways by different cultures. Macro-theoretical approaches, building on this principle, tried first to determine the most important dimensions of human existence and then show in various empirical studies by comparison that these dimensions are filled differently in different cultures, and that cultures vary within these dimensions, respectively.

4   Concepts of Culture at the Macro- and Microlevels

These approaches, which have remained influential to this day and are being used especially in empirical studies of culture or comparisons of cultures, will be briefly examined below for their epistemological potential in a comparison of cultures. The best known macrotheories of culture include those by Harry C. Triandis (cf. Triandis 1975, 1984), John Galtung (cf. Galtung 1988), Edward T. and Mildred Hall (cf. Hall 1969; Hall/Hall 1983, 1990), Geert Hofstede[1] (cf. Hofstede 1980, 1993), and Robert Hettlage (cf. Hettlage 1990). In these and other macro-theoretical approaches, the concept of culture typically is reduced to a few categories or dimensions. The reason frequently given is that culture (in the above comprehensive meaning of the broad concept) as a subject of research can hardly be captured completely because of its complexity (cf. Bolten 2001, p. 128). These dimensions or categories, thus the idea, are to make cultures comparable with each other. As a consequence, many macro-theoretical approaches try to develop various cultural dimensions and find epistemological reasons for the choice and weighting of the aspects dominating in a specific case. Although these models seem to be quite appropriate in comparing cultures (which is what most of them were designed for), major objections can be raised against such concept of culture. Thus, critics frequently maintain that this kind of macro-theoretical model resulted in a high degree of stereotyping and, hence, simplification, which prevented many phenomena from being included (cf. Bolten 2001, p. 130).[2] In the attempt to force culture into a manageable number of categories or dimensions, merely part of the "surface" of cultures becomes visible as a function of the dimensions chosen. As a result of these macro-theoretical considerations, only abstract averages are obtained in most cases which say little or nothing about the specific actions of individuals (cf. Bolten 2001, p. 130). The relation between the individual and culture as part of everyday experience remains underinvestigated in

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1   For criticism of Hofstede, cf. Bolten 2001, pp. 130f., and Hansen 2003, pp. 281f.
2   For criticism of macro-theoretical concepts of culture, cf. Bolten 1997 and Demorgon/Molz 1996.

this case, and the question often arises about the criteria by which the categories or dimensions were chosen.

The macro-theoretical perspective is contrasted with various concepts abstracting cultural characteristics from detailed analyses, i.e. proceeding deductively from the microlevel. These concepts therefore can be called micro-analytical and micro-theoretical, respectively. They include concepts, such as the "Dense Description" by Clifford Geertz (cf. Geert 1987), which see culture as a "text" one must be able to "read", and the "Cross Cultural Psychology", inter alia in Alexander Thomas (cf. Thomas 1993), and the "Activity Theory"[3] and the "Cognitive Traits" concept developed in cultural studies. Other concepts of this type stem from the (cross-sectional) area of economics and are often summarized under the heading of "intercultural communication".

However, this perspective, too, entails ontological problems. Thus, deductive models often provide very little information, as findings based on them cannot be generalized. As Bolten puts it, the "more detailed the studies of (sub)cultures are, the less complex they may be if any information about them is to be produced at all" (Bolten 2001, p. 131). According to Bolten, such microanalyses can be used optimally for intercultural coaching or mediation, but not to generate theories (cf. Bolten 2001). Often, approaches based on individual cases are unable to describe adequately cultural contexts in which the culturally specific elements appear, e.g. in the "text" (in the sense of culture as a text, see above) (cf. Bolten 2001). This entails the hazard that the broad context is neglected for assessments of cultural details. Another difficulty connected with micro-analytical approaches is seen in their emphasizing only the dynamic aspect of culture. For that reason, they tended to overemphasize the "change" pole (over "persistence" as the opposite pole) in the sense "that man could develop into anything, given the strong will to do so" (Demorgon/Molz 1996, p. 69).

As has been shown in this brief summary and in the equally brief (and, because of that brevity, often sweeping) criticism, neither the macro-theoretical nor the micro-theoretical concepts are able to describe culture in the most differentiated way possible and in as complex a fashion as necessary, at least for an empirical comparison of cultures. Hence, current empirical cultural research often shows mixed types of various macro- or microapproaches. The anthropological theories of culture described above (cf., e.g., Hall/Hall 1983, 1989; Hofstede 1993; Kluckhohn 1962) are partly modified and expressed in different connotations, recontextualized, and arranged in a structure of meanings corresponding to current development. Mixing and combining different concepts of culture are meant to, if not repair, then at least diminish the deficits referred to above in both the macro- and the micro-theoretical perspectives.

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3   For the Activity Theory, see Engeström et al. 1999.

This technique of mixing various approaches is problematic, however, as it requires the systems to be greatly modified conceptually. It entails the hazard that the original intention of a concept may be lost. The consequence would be that many research projects which (ought to) deal with the concept of culture retract to an interpretation broad enough to encompass the variety of human actions in specific fields, such as communication, behaviour, consumption, knowledge, technology, etc., but then must try, by using props from other cultural models or conceptual building blocks, to adjust this concept of culture so as to match the actual object (cf. e.g. Paschen et al. 2002).

5   An Evolutionist Concept of Culture

Another branch of understanding culture, influenced mainly by anthropology, sees culture as a strategy of humans living in groups adapting to their environment. In this case, "environment" is not only the natural environment, nature, but also man-made social, material and symbolic environments. Also the evolution of social aggregations up to complex functionally differentiated societies consequently is a cultural act facilitating, or making possible, life and survival by adaptation. The "environments", in which people live and which they partly created by culture, show clear differences, as do the cultures which are in a dialectic relation to those environments.

This concept of culture is guided mainly by the praxeological concepts of culture which consider culture a "theory of practice" dependent on the environment and on knowledge – as described by Bourdieu and others (cf., e.g., Bourdieu 1979) – in which the social and symbolic environment is seen as a man-made cultural product and, at the same time, appears as knowledge-dependent, action- and awareness-related objectivity (cf. Schütz 1974 and, based on this, Berger/Luckmann 2000). Practical action and knowledge in this case depend on communication and its (partly technical) media which simultaneously are both the main prerequisite and the main function of cultures. In this concept, human beings develop cultural habits in line with their environment and knowledge which are useful in their closer or more distant living environments. This also includes the way in which technology is used.

Human beings as incomplete beings, "deficient beings", finding their way into life nearly without any instincts, compared to animals (cf. Gehlen 1941, pp. 34ff.), need to produce a technical culture in the sense of creation, i.e. an artificial world or environment (such as housing, roads, bridges) which holds symbolic meanings, but is made by means of technical artefacts (tools, equipment, machines, etc.), in order to survive under the natural conditions encountered and other environmental states (cf. Metzner 2002, p. 231). The huge flexibility this ensures in processes of adaptation to the environment in this case not only allowed human beings to penetrate nearly all over the

world and develop new living space, but also, thanks to the feedback this produced of the different natural conditions encountered, led to a high contingency of cultural developments, such as different cultural practices and languages or, as far as socialization is concerned, manifold social structures. Cultures seen as "evolutionary" in this sense, therefore, in a first approximation, can be defined as follows: They are the outcome of the ways in which human beings cope with life and existence in a community of action and communication within a specific "environment" (cf. Banse/Metzner-Szigeth 2005, p. 33).

As a consequence of this evolutionist understanding of culture, culture can be considered an expanded context of human existence. This covers the whole range of human adaptation reactions. The contexts created in this way are too manifold and too complex to be transferred into a concept which could be operationalized. However, the most important contexts are condensed in three human products: language, history, and institutions. They must be considered functional because they allow groups of human beings to be distinguished by these categories. Consequently, a slightly more concrete, but still quite general, definition of culture can be formulated as follows: Culture becomes visible and plays a role when various groups of persons act differently and their reasons for doing so can be attributed to differences in history, language, and (social) institutions of these groups.

The concept of culture underlying this definition by Klaus P. Hansen (cf. Hansen 1995, 2003) will be described in greater detail below to show that culture, despite all conflicts and complexity, can be incorporated in a differentiated, operational concept (for empirical coverage) of culture(s).

6   The Difference-based Concept of Culture by Hansen

Culture is frequently described as orientation by, or standardization of, values or patterns of behaviour, i.e. uniform or holistic. On the other hand, however, there is also room for individual variation, there are subcultures and miniature collectives which make cultures appear divergent (cf. Demorgon/Molz 1996, pp. 43ff.). Instead of considering culture a holistic entity, Hansen designs a concept of culture which is able to resolve the conflicting ideas of unity and differentiation of culture (cf. Hansen 1995). Consequently, his concept of culture is termed difference-based. Hansen explains it by the example of "Germany": Within German culture, one finds a multitude of different ways of life. Considering, e.g., the way a carpenter in Lower Bavaria lives compared to a manager working at the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, it would be difficult at first sight to find many common features in their everyday life. It would be easier, in fact, to describe the differences. Yet, although the ways of living and everyday activities of the two persons are so different, there are certain commonalities which characterize

them as members of the very same culture. These commonalities, which Hansen refers to as "putty", promote cohesion within a national culture and delimit it towards the outside. These are the common history they experienced, or the history handed down, their common language, and the institutions they share (cf. Hansen 1995, p. 179).

These three constitutive elements of national culture and their importance as cultural dimensions within the framework of the difference-based[4] concept of culture will be described in more detail below. History constitutes a separate sphere of importance. "Human societies must be able to reproduce both materially and symbolically to guarantee their continued existence over time. Symbolic reproduction poses the problem for societies to absorb their cultural contents, practices, languages, institutions, norms, work of earlier generations and pass all of this on to the next generation. This requires not only the indispensable assistance of nature, but also personal 'cultural strategies of permanence'" (Assmann 1999, p. 88).

These "cultural strategies of permanence" are strategies of tradition. In the format of traditions and collective or individual histories handed down, history affects the reality of life, strongly influencing the thinking and action of the people identifying with these traditions. Accordingly, Aleida Assmann defines tradition as "a permanent cultural design of identity. This permanence must continuously be wrung from time as a dimension of destruction, forgetting, change, or relativation" (Assmann 1999, p. 90). A common history (historical facts) does not necessarily result in common views about that history, but constitutes the point of departure and a common point of reference or framework of evaluation for and of these views (cf. Hansen 1995, p. 146).

Language is not just a medium of transmission enabling verbal communication to take place, but is closely connected to perception and reason. Every language community has its individual perception of the meaning of the reality of life achieved through its language (cf. Berger/Luckmann 2000, pp. 24ff.; Hansen 2003, pp. 73ff.). This promotes cohesion of this community and acts as the criterion of inclusion and exclusion. History and language are interdependent, on the one hand, because history is handed down by language and, on the other hand, because language also grew historically and is modified and formed by events in history. Despite their differences, cultures can be described by means of their language and their history as an entity in the sense of natural cultures. These natural cultures are a function not so much of national borders but rather of a common area of language and history (cf. Hansen 2003, p. 179), which can differ greatly from the area defined by national borders.[5] This constitutes a first background moulding the individual, albeit "involuntarily" in most cases, because it is defined by birth. At a later point in time (again mostly involuntarily), the socialization of individuals takes place. Socialization, i.e. education, teaches the indi-

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4   For more details about this concept, see Drechsel et al. 2000, pp. 16ff.
5   National borders are arbitrary political structures which do not necessarily define cultural spaces, as can be seen in the Balkans or in Africa, for instance.

vidual his or her native language and something of the specific history related to the community in which he or she lives. Language, once learnt, plays a key role in this process. It provides the individuals newly born into a society or a communication space with "prefabrications" of objectified human experience, in this way simultaneously empowering the individuals socialized in this way to create their own objectivations (cf. Berger/Luckmann 2000, pp. 40ff.). Socialization also achieves the introduction to, and inclusion into, societal organization and its institutions.

The term "institutions" as used by Hansen was taken from Arnold Gehlen (cf. Gehlen 1962) and is defined very broadly. In the broadest sense, it means stabilized and, hence, institutionalized habits: "It is quite possible to say that animal groups and symbioses are held together by triggers and instinctive movements while humans achieve this by institutions and quasi-automatic habits, established therein, of thought, feeling, evaluation, and action which become specific, habitual and stable only when institutionalized. Only in this way can they be considered habitual and halfway reliable, i.e. predictable in their onesidedness" (Gehlen 1962, p. 79).

Consequently, our institutions are no longer seen as merely governmental or societal institutions but also as social and symbolic institutions, such as Christmas or birthdays. In the concept of institutions by Berger and Luckmann (cf. Berger/Luckmann 2000), institutionalization processes can be described in steps. Institutions can be described epistemologically as objectivations of a higher order. Objectivation is at the beginning of institutionalization. This is achieved by language and action, respectively, habitualized by repetition. In a second step, these actions are further stabilized by typification of behaviour (for instance in social roles). At the end of this process, there is standardization of typified behaviour, which makes it institutionalized. Consequently, Berger and Luckmann offer this definition of institutionalization: "Institutionalization occurs as soon as habitualized actions are typified reciprocally by types of players. Any typification achieved in this way is an institution" (Berger/Luckmann 2000, p. 58).

When a specific collective habitualizes a specific action, the players (as a community) and the habitualized action (as a developing convention) reinforce each other (reciprocal typification), which means that action is institutionalized. The joint action of various institutions in a community develops and, at the same time, structures its type of organization. Although institutions are the outcome of collective action, they basically are opposites of the individual as objective facticities (unavoidably), exerting direct influence on everyday life (cf. Berger/Luckmann 2000, pp. 49ff.).

According to this concept of institution also persons in the real world, imaginary or historical persons can act as institutions. Such a person may have the function of an institution if he or she exerts – due to the importance ascribed to him or her by others, as a result of his or her action or fate – a significant influence on areas of society or groups and thus, in a way, acts like an institution (such as Rudi Dutschke for the student movement in the 1960s). History, language, and institutions ensure continuity in

a community through the process of socialization. They are the externally visible and thus empirically detectable signs of the action of culture(s). They are hallmarks of culture(s) and (functional) poles of identification for its/their members.

7   Areas of Standardization

The core of Hansen's concept of culture are standardizations which, in principle, can be considered conventions.[6] It subdivides the different cultural standardizations into four areas for analytical distinction: communication, thought, feeling, and behaviour and action. Cultural standardizations or conventions are bound to collectives; on the other hand, collectives constitute themselves through standardizations. One exception to this rule are overarching collectives defined much more by a common language, history, and institutions. Initially, collectivity in a quite general sense can be taken as a feeling of community generated by living in line with common conventions which thus constitute a collective. The need to be part of a community, both physically but also psychologically (cf. Tomasello 2007), is one of the prime movers specifically of human living together, or even its source. In addition, collectives offer possibilities to individuals to identify, thus creating identity. This commonality of conventions makes communities confirm purpose; their members feel secure (cf. Hauser 2007, p. 682). In sociology, this is described by the term "assurance of expectation" (cf. Bonß 1995, p. 90).

This can be linked to Gehlen's concept of institutions, which relates to the removal of behavioural uncertainties by establishing norms of behaviour (cf. Metzner-Szigeth 2004, p. 392). This results in more assumptions about the importance to collectives of cultural standardizations: "(1) Efficiency: Tried and tested behaviour implies a lower risk of failure. (2) Acceptance: Standardized behaviour entails no [or fewer; authors' comment – R.H./G.B.] negative sanctions. (3) Anticipation: Conformity makes my behaviour and the behaviour of others possible to anticipate. (4) Normality: Existing conventions simplify the complexity of the environment, thereby reducing the cognitive burden. (5) Creation of meaning: If several people behave the way I do, my behaviour most probably is meaningful. (6) Collectivity: When I behave like others do, I feel a member of the group" (Hauser 2007, p. 682).

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6   Although Hansen uses the term conventions but rarely, standardizations in principle can be seen as conventions. While the standardization concept may be more precise, but also too technical or too abstract, convention is more illustrative but not nearly well defined. For epistemological considerations it is therefore better to use the term standardization, while illustrations by way of example should use really existing conventions. For cultural conventions, cf. also Hauser 2007; for detailed criticism, cf. Altmayer 1996.

Establishing collectives thus has subjective and objective advantages for the individual. Various collectives can be distinguished by the standardizations encountered, which appear as common features of the individuals making up these collectives. This means that the subdivision into different collective relations (within one overarching collective) is derived directly from the range of the standardizations encountered in each case. Wherever similar standardizations occur there is probably also a collective relation (at the level of mono, multi or overarching collectives). The range of standardizations which, at the same time, marks the borders of collective relations, can be termed "degree of partiality" (cf. Hansen 2004) after Hansen. Thus, particular standardizations apply only within specific mono collectives, while other standardizations extend to the level of multi collectives or even global collectives. Consequently, there are universal standardizations which are global in scope and by means of which global collectives can constitute themselves.

However, as standardizations are subject to the change of times and to many influences both within collectives and external environmental influences, standardizations as such and their degree of partiality can change, and so can the borders of segmentation. Standardizations understood as conventions do not arise spontaneously, but develop over a specific period of time and under specific environmental or framework conditions as negotiating processes both within a collective and among several collectives. Communication, thought, action, and feeling of individuals therefore are determined not only by the collective or collectives in which these individuals participate, but also historically, linguistically, and institutionally, in summary, by "cultural spaces and thus understandable only against the cultural background" (Holz-Mänttäri 1984, pp. 32f.). However, the individual is aware of these cultural influences only in part, and they are controllable only to that extent. They have to be that way so that the individual may adapt (and thus participate) in different, or also new, collectives. The spectrum and the variance of the conventions managed in each case thus depend strongly on socialization of the individual, his or her education, and other environmental factors.

8   Culture and Sustainability

Without wanting to anticipate other contributions to this volume, a few general ideas and comments about the relation between culture and sustainability will be made in this last paragraph from a point of view of cultural studies. The first question arising is whether culture(s) is/are sustainable and can be sustainable at all. Cultures are sustainable first and foremost in the sense that they function very effectively and are extremely long-lived. Cultural mechanisms are designed to promote stability and cohesion. Now, this would be an absolutely neutral concept of sustainability more in line

with everyday thinking and often used in the media as well. However, if a normative concept of sustainability is used as a basis, such as the integrative sustainability concept of the Helmholtz Association (cf. Kopfmüller et al. 2001), in which desirable sustainable development can only be achieved when manifold normative indicators are met, cultures and cultural mechanisms cannot be sustainable *per se*. This problem will be illustrated by a brief example: The culture of a people living in unison with nature for centuries, and using natural resources only to such an extent that these can regenerate, can be considered sustainable if the value of resource protection and use, respectively, is used as a yardstick. For comparison, Western cultures are not sustainable because they claim or exploit natural resources to an extreme degree, pollute their environment, and thus increasingly destroy the basis of their life. However, if values such as life, infant mortality, nutrition, or the ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions are used as indicators of sustainability, the fictitious people living close to nature probably would not compare well with Western cultures. The answer to the question whether cultures are sustainable in a normative sense therefore very strongly depends on the concept of sustainability used. Thus they cannot be called sustainable *per se*. Applying yardsticks of value to cultures entails another problem: It cannot be harmonized with a contemporary concept of culture. Contemporary concepts of culture emphasize the very neutrality, in terms of value, of cultures in order not to end up in outdated Western hegemonial categories, such as civilization or high culture, putting their own culture above those of other peoples (cf. above for the "narrow" concept of culture).

Yet, thinking about the relation between culture and sustainability can be fruitful in two ways: *On the one hand*, it can be taken in such a way that the generation of normative sustainability concepts has given rise to a cultural trend which, as an institution (according to Hansen's concept), is part of the respective culture and influences it. The question how such trends or movements gradually gain ground as cultural institutions and become a determining element of culture, raises interesting aspects and questions of further research from the perspective of cultural studies. The *second* line – more relevant to this study – would be to ask how cultural aspects can be integrated into existing normative concepts of sustainability. This has hardly happened so far: Although the concept of culture often appears in the concepts as a relevant element of sustainable development, it very rarely is made explicit (see also the contribution by Jürgen Kopfmüller to this volume). The high relevance of cultural contexts to the establishment of problem solutions (e.g. of a technical or organizational type) which are to promote sustainable development has hardly been reflected upon in the specialized community of "researchers of sustainability". A brief look into cultural and technology studies would show that technical systems are embedded in cultural contexts and interact with them (cf. Hauser 2010). Examples from the field of technology transfer in particular show that, when these contexts are taken into account not at all or insufficiently, this frequently causes partial or complete failure of a technology

(cf. Hermeking 2001). In a similar way, this certainly applies also to organizational structures, though this question has not yet been studied sufficiently well.

That cultural factors so far have emerged in sustainability concepts only as "spacers" may be due partly to the fact that the field of concepts of culture is too broad and the time of researchers is too limited. On the other hand, there have been hardly any convincing attempts to date to conceptualize culture in such a way as to make it operationalizable for integration into existing sustainability concepts. The concept of culture by Hansen presented in this article and the conceptualization of culture as a context and as conventions of action, seem to offer better preconditions for this step. Yet, there is still an interdisciplinary job to be done, namely to integrate cultural aspects meaningfully into concepts of sustainability.

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