Europe

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Abstract: While 20 or 30 years ago there was very little agreement among German-speaking sociologists that Europe was a relevant subject of sociological inquiry, it has since become widely accepted that Europe matters. Not least the growing nationalism and Euroscepticism in many EU member states raise questions that are highly relevant to the sociology of Europe and clearly underline that meaningful discussion of the future of Europe must necessarily include the contribution of sociological scholarship. However, a review of the German-language sociology of Europe shows that for a long time it surprisingly had less of an international or European orientation but was rather classically influenced by German-language publications, which were little known abroad. This has changed only gradually over the past two decades, and even then only for parts of the field.

Keywords: Sociology of Europe, European public sphere, post-sovereign territoriality, European solidarity

1 Introduction

The topic of European integration has long been ignored in German-language sociology, having been seen as a marginal field in political science, law, and economics. As Maurizio Bach has noted, “For sociology, the integration of Europe has been as good as non-existent” (Bach, 2015: 599). But this could only be justified as long as the social consequences of the integration project—and their effects—were not too obvious, and as long as its sociological relevance remained more or less in the background.

It is thus not surprising that the first publications on the subject of the EU came out of political sociology (Bach, 1992; 1999; 2000; Lamla, *POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY*, this volume) or were published jointly with political scientists (e.g., Leibfried and Pierson, 1997). These studies were mainly written for sociologists who had an interest in political science and who dealt decisively with questions of political order and political action in the context of European integration. From the outset, sociological analysis of European integration has sought to position its own theoretical instruments so as to enable sociologists to adequately describe and interpret these current developments.

Starting in the early 1990s, M. Rainer Lepsius and Maurizio Bach began to seriously grapple with the issues surrounding the integration process. Building on the work of Max Weber, Karl W. Deutsch, and Stein Rokkan, they developed a theoretical-categorical set of instruments that would support a specifically sociological approach

Note: All quotes from German-language sources were translated by the author.

to the subject area of EU integration. Starting with historical-sociological studies on the forms of socialization in the nation state (Lepsius, 1990), these early forays into European sociology focused above all on the question of institution building and—especially after the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty—on constitutional issues, always in terms of their societal impact (Lepsius, 1991a; 1991b; Bach, 1992; Lepsius, 2013; Brunkhorst, 2014). To what extent—as Peter Flora (1999) asked in the wake of Rokkan’s work in this field—can historically developed ties between the population and institutions of the nation state be transferred to the supranational level?

Georg Vobruba pointedly described this early sociology of European integration as one that spotlighted the tensions between national and European forces in the formation of European institutions. Ultimately, he noted, the “domain of the sociology of European integration expands [...] to the extent that the tension between European institutional development and the rival interpretations and interests of the relevant actors has practical consequences” (Vobruba, 2008: 48).

The European sociological research agenda that developed in subsequent years largely retained this view. Responding to the social conditions of national societies, it addressed the changes brought on by European integration, consistently using the nation state and its national society as a yardstick for sociological analysis. During these early years, the core sociological issue of the emergence and development of an original European society—alongside, or even instead of, the nation state—failed to draw much attention from scholars. In 2000, in a special volume of the *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* titled *Die Europäisierung nationaler Gesellschaften* (*The Europeanization of National Societies*), which Bach himself had edited, he noted that research on the social consequences of European integration was still sorely lacking despite the topic’s fundamental relevance to social scientists. That continued to be the case during the following years, when scholars focused less on the social consequences of European integration and their evaluation and problematization than on the question of *whether* such an influence existed. Debate during these years centered mainly on the following themes: a) the emergence of a European public sphere, b) the change in spatial structures and borders in Europe, and c) the development prospects of European solidarity and social policy.

2 A European Public Sphere?

For a long time, the question of the emergence of a European public sphere (Eder, 2000; 2006; Trenz, 2002) determined sociological discussion on the state of European integration. Indeed, it provided an almost perfect case in point in the underlying scholarly debate on the topic of European integration. In fact, until well into the 2000s scholars who were engaged in this discussion were almost expected to point to the lack of a European public sphere as proof that social integration was impossible (Gerhards, 1993; Grimm, 1995; Kielmansegg, 1996). The public sphere—or so went the

dictum of the time—was to be found exclusively in the nation states. Neidhardt, for example, noted retrospectively that

“Europe provides an example where the topic of the public sphere also puts to the test a category system in which the central point of reference, namely ‘society,’ was always exclusively conceived in the social sciences as ‘national society.’ The academic disciplines themselves have long practiced precisely the same parochialism that they have attributed to their subject as a problem (Beck and Grande, 2004 [Germ.], 2007 [Engl.]). One can now rejoice that this stupefaction has been disrupted” (Neidhardt, 2006: 46).

The debate over the European public sphere gained critical momentum when the EU’s democratic deficit became a subject of public and scholarly discourse. Nevertheless, sociologists were deeply divided over the importance (and even existence) of this deficit. Some saw it as a logical consequence of the lack of a European public opinion and thus as an insuperable obstacle inherent to the EU—a conclusion that they corroborated empirically in a number of research studies (Gerhards, 2000; 2002; Eilders and Voltmer, 2003). Others offered much more positive visions of the EU. In particular, since the beginning of the 2000s Klaus Eder and Hans-Jörg Trenz have systematically developed an argument for the emergence of a European public sphere and substantiated it in several empirically grounded studies. For example, in his 2002 book *Zur Konstitution einer politischen Öffentlichkeit in der Europäischen Union* (*On the Constitution of a Political Public Sphere in the European Union*), Trenz argued that the European public sphere should not be seen as competing with the national public sphere but rather as a communication context that develops on the basis of and in interaction with the latter. “Parallel to the unfolding of European governance and the institutional stabilization of a supranational order of government, intermediate communication contexts will also develop in the European space, connecting European rulers with a diffuse audience” (Trenz, 2002: 13).

Nevertheless, the existence of a nascent European public sphere only began to gain broad scholarly acceptance with the onset of the major fiscal and economic crisis that swept through the EU in 2008, which brought on a flurry of reporting on Europe and prompted EU member states to pay closer political attention to developments in other EU member states. Yet the original expectation that such a sphere would have a positive impact on European integration—by increasing democracy in the EU and promoting public participation, social connectedness, solidarity, and so forth among EU citizens—has yet to be fulfilled. On the contrary, it has become evident that the emergence of European media discourses and European social movements can also promote anti-European and anti-democratic sentiment (Roose, 2015).

It is against this critical backdrop that Christian Lahusen’s new study (2019) should be read. In his monograph *Das gesplittene Europa. Eine politische Soziologie der Europäischen Union* (*Divided Europe. A Political Sociology of the European Union*), Lahusen gives a detailed and, above all, empirically rich account of how a common European social area and space for European discourse develops. He asks to what extent the European Union now influences the way Europeans think and act, whether

they now feel European, what this means in terms of individual identity constructions, and to what degree Europe has meanwhile become a space of experience and reference. Are Europeans aware of the situations in other European member states, and what relevance do those situations hold for them? Or do social conditions remain primarily national?

The context of Lahusen's study is the European economic and fiscal crisis of the mid-2000s, a watershed event that had dramatic social consequences throughout the EU, all of which provided an immense boost to the development of a European public sphere. The crisis has caused a sea change in European thought, Lahusen concludes, such that we in the EU are now gradually moving away from a "permissive consensus" towards a "constraining dissensus" (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). While the EU and its policies play an increasingly important role in the perception of European citizens, Lahusen finds major differences of opinion, which he suggests are largely determined by social structures. Persons who feel basically uninvolved in the European project, he notes, tend to express Eurosceptic or negative attitudes towards it, whereas those with better resources tend to be more pro-European (see also Fernández et al., 2016; Fernández and Eigmüller, 2018; Kuhn et al., 2016). Lahusen's study thus confirms the current state of research, with one important additional nuance: beyond these socio-structural determinants, regional differences—particularly those between urban and metropolitan regions on the one hand and rural areas on the other—play a decisive role and sometimes carry even more weight than the differences between countries. Overall, Lahusen shows that the European social space has become an important factor in the thinking of Europeans. Following Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, he shows that the nation state is still the relevant variable for European perception, but the EU is gaining importance as a complementary factor and is, of course, a key reference value.

Lahusen expressly stressed that this development also entails risks, "for there emerges a shared but nationally segmented discursive space in which the actors speak less with than about one another and in which they are less likely to develop an understanding than a lack of understanding for each other" (Lahusen, 2019: 274).

3 The Constitution of Spaces and Border Formation in Europe

Another strand of European sociological research has focused from the very start on the social consequences of the kind of territorial reorganization of politics, economy, and law that was gradually implemented over the course of the European integration project. The question of the constitution of social spaces and the formation of borders in Europe had become a focal point of scholarly research by 2004 at the latest, when debates over the EU's first eastward enlargement—which especially affected Germany—came to the fore. During the years that followed, the topic was elaborated in many

different analyses and came to represent an essential field in sociological research on Europe in German-speaking countries.

One seminal research study in this vein can be found in Georg Vobruba's 2005 *The Dynamics of Europe*. In this volume, Vobruba analyses the dynamics of integration and enlargement in the EU within the context of border-dismantling initiatives within the union itself and of massive fortification projects along its external borders. Starting from the concept of *border*, he describes the tensions between an emerging European society and European political institutions. The interacting processes of deepening and enlarging the European Union carry within them their own dynamics of expansion, such that each successfully completed round of enlargement sets in motion both integration and exclusion processes vis-à-vis the EU's new neighbors along its new external borders. The study's basic question is how the EU will continue to successfully manage this dual tension between social integration at home and the long-term stabilization of its periphery. Although some of his premises must now be regarded as outdated, since 2005 little has changed in terms of the fundamental dynamics that Vobruba observed or with respect to the political and social tensions they generate (here the recent attempts to integrate Turkey into the European asylum system come to mind). At the same time, the recent so-called "refugee crisis" has shown that the persistence of national borders should not be underestimated and that today's "borderless Europe" could soon become a Europe of nation states with reinstated national borders (Pries, *MIGRATION*, this volume).

In this context, the volume *Postsouveräne Territorialität* (2015), published ten years later by Ulrike Jureit and Nikola Tietze, was a crucial contribution to the sociological development of scholarship in this field. Like Vobruba, the authors also adopt a spatial-analytical approach to European integration but with an impressive combination of social-scientific and historical analyses. The book's added value lies mainly in its ability to set the new spatial concepts of the EU alongside familiar historical models, thereby giving a broader view of the nation. Historically speaking, the current entanglement of local, regional, national, and supranational power and activities is actually not new. However, what is new, according to the study, is a "post-sovereign territoriality," which describes a "change in statehood" (Leibfried and Genschel, 2008). From a sociological perspective, this shift in perception stemming from a new territoriality raises the question of the conditions for the development of society. The reason for this is that European integration has had a lasting impact on the territorial shape of Europe, with clear consequences for the territorial dimensions of society. The resultant changes in the construction of identities and subsequent shifts in the extent and range of solidarity that are called for have also become the subject of European sociological study: "The transformation of state order in the context of post-sovereign territoriality, which is becoming increasingly differentiated, not only leads to increasingly complex constellations of action and decision-making; it also generates structurally new conflict dynamics. This is exemplified by the disputes over European social policy" (Jureit and Tietze, 2016: 363).

This is because, from a sociological perspective, one significant result of European integration has been the increasing dissolution of the nation state's still-constitutive union between geographical space and that of official state membership. Unlike the earlier national welfare-state system, individual access to (or exclusion from) welfare-state services in EU states is currently determined by exactly where in the state, and for how long, that individual resides. In effect, this situation dissolves the congruence between these two state spaces—one geographical, the other membership-based—where social policy is financed, implemented, and used (Ferrera, 2004; Eigmüller, 2017). Taken together, these changes create contradictions between national and transnational European solidarity. "In the post-territorial interdependencies between the European legal space, the spaces of national membership, and the geographical spaces of social policy, a variety of tensions arise between the norms and standards that structure and legitimize these respective spaces" (Jureit and Tietze, 2016: 363).

Since borders have long been interpreted as constitutive not only of political power structures and state sovereignty within the modern nation state but also of national societies, the shift and reorganization of EU state borders has raised the question of how this "restructuring of the territorial-political order" (Bach, 2010: 165) will affect European societies. While the territorial principle represented the cornerstone of national identity constructions and "an indispensable prerequisite for the self-enabling of politics in modernity" (Bach, 2010: 163; Luhmann, 2000: 212f.), in the "postnational constellation" (Habermas, 1998 [Germ.], 2001 [Engl.]) this territorial principle no longer aids the formation of a transnational collective identity (Bach, 2010). Nor does the defining of common external borders help EU member states to form a common identity. On the contrary, it would appear that numerous potential political-territorial identities, with different and asymmetrical borders and opportunities for institutionalization, continue to exist and to differentiate themselves, as it were, within a plurality of different European countries.

So, at the end of the 2010s, we must conclude that a common European identity is not in sight. Thus, the question posed by the sociology of Europe in these years has not been surprising:

"How can a new kind of society and politics be discovered and justified that does not rely on the old stabilizing factors, building both internally and externally on the historically established forms of nationality, while opening them up and extending them? [...] And how can this horizon of possibility and reality opened up by dissociating basic social and political concepts and structures—society, state, politics, social inequality, mobility, ethnicity, justice, solidarity, etc.—from the national orthodoxy and redefining them from the cosmopolitan perspective?" (Beck and Grande, 2007: 5).

In a sense, their comments outlined the European sociological research program of the next fifteen years, which focused on two key questions: What are the consequences of European integration for national societies, and what are the conditions for the social integration of the EU?

4 Solidarity, Social Policy, Social Integration

This, in turn, brought scholars back to one of the most prominent questions of German European sociology, namely, the social dimension of European integration (Pfau-Effinger/Grages, *SOCIAL POLICY*, this volume). Here, too, research during the early years was clearly divided into the more political-sociological works that focused on the big political questions, especially those concerning the future and political preconditions of an originating European social policy (Vobruba, 1999; Leibfried and Pierson, 1997) and those that addressed more the individual preconditions of a Europeanization of the social sphere (Mau, 2003; Gerhards and Lengfeld, 2013).

Stefan Bernhard succeeded in combining both perspectives in his 2010 volume *Die Konstruktion von Inklusion: Europäische Sozialpolitik aus soziologischer Perspektive* (*The Construction of Inclusion. European Social Policy from a Sociological Perspective*). One of Bernhard's main contributions to the debate at the time was to offer a new theoretical perspective on the process of integration. Following Kauppi (2003) and drawing on Bourdieu's field theory, Bernhard developed an instrument for understanding social phenomena from the unequal distribution of and the struggle for power. Putting forth the thesis that European social policy is knowledge-based, he shows that the knowledge resources of European social policy take shape during the emergence of a political field and are used within the framework of this field. In contrast to previous studies, Bernhard not only described sociopolitical institutionalization processes but also showed how, at the European level, a social space has begun to grow out of the protracted and open-ended growth process in which political actors produce, discuss, and legitimize sociopolitical knowledge. "Europe can thus be understood as a transnational configuration of fields that can be distinguished from one another in their claim to validity and their expanse, in their degree of institutionalization and their conflicts" (Bernhard and Schmidt-Wellenburg, 2018: 389).

This field-theoretical approach was used and developed in various ways in the following years. Such an approach involves systematically adopting the perspective of a second-order observer and asking, for example, how scholars, experts, and professionals reflect on Europe and, in so doing, constantly revise and update it (Georgakakis, 2013; Büttner et al., 2015; Georgakakis and Vauchez, 2015).

Another innovative approach to the Europeanization of social policy was developed by Stefanie Börner, who adapted a historical-sociological perspective in her 2013 volume *Belonging, Solidarity and Expansion in Social Policy*. Drawing on her research into the historical process that steered the development of national social policy, she asks how institutionalized social policy at the supranational level can help expand the territorial framework of redistributive solidarity. This "historicizing" approach to the EU, which combines historical sociology with existing theory to dissect the EU's development over time and compares specific moments in its evolution to already completed phases of state-building or social integration (Börner and Eigmüller,

2015: 6), has proven to be a very valuable tool for analyzing and explaining social developments within the EU (cf. also Marks, 1997; 2015).

Above all, these studies were important because they broke with the dictum that had long prevailed in sociological research on Europe, which had unquestioningly made the nation state and national societies in their respective constitutions the yardstick of comparison. Especially in the field of social-policy research, it has long been conventional wisdom to stress that European welfare states in particular are so demanding with respect to the social conditions that must given for their emergence and development that the nation state is the only viable unit of redistribution (de Swaan, 1992).

As in regard to the emergence of a European public sphere, this view only changed in the wake of the economic and fiscal crisis in the late 2000s, as the EU itself increasingly became the target of social demands. At the beginning of the 2000s, the EU enlargements at the time and the associated frictions and conflicts gave rise to a broad debate on the territorial dimension of European integration and its social relevance (cf. Eigmüller, 2010). No later than 2010, by contrast—once the dramatic social consequences of the economic and fiscal crisis had gradually come to light—the issues surrounding Europe's social dimensions and the shortcomings in its social and societal integration had become a powerful issue on the agenda (Bach, 2019).

In this context, discussion of Europe's crisis became the starting point for sociological debate on Europe; or rather, the crisis itself became the central theme (Preunkert and Vobruba, 2015). How much conflict does Europe need (Vobruba, 2015)? And how do these social conflicts affect the process of social integration (Fehmel, 2015; 2019)? While researchers agree that there has been a significant increase in conflicts within the EU, they offer differing interpretations of this trend. Some stress that these conflicts further minimize the already thin reservoir of perceived commonalities in and for the EU and thus recommend that European interdependence be partially reduced and the idea of subsidiarity strengthened (Immerfall, 2013: 35)—in effect, that demarcation efforts resulting in renationalization be bolstered (Fehmel, 2014: 115). By contrast, others stress that the surge towards integration and European socialization comes precisely out of the crises in Europe and the resultant politicization of crisis management and transnationalization of social conflicts that such crises express (Vobruba, 2015).

So, does social conflict lead to social disintegration or rather to further social integration? Answering this question would require expanding the usual European and institutional sociological perspectives to incorporate conflict theory (Tietze and Eigmüller, 2019: 1; Bach and Vobruba, 2012: 167) and, by extension, to address the question of social inequality within Europe (Heidenreich, 2006; Mau, 2006).

But in what direction is European social policy actually developing? Which social order and which forms of social integration can be observed in the EU and its societies? Richard Münch made significant headway towards answering these questions in 2008 when he showed that the construction of a European society could be seen as the interaction of a progressive European division of labor and the creation of a le-

gitimate order of these increasing dependencies. His central argument points to the emergence of a European cult of the individual that no longer unfolds in the collectively confined form of the national welfare state but rather in the context of the European internal market, which brings about a “superimposition of the collectivist mode of social integration by an individualistic mode and its semantic and institutional formation by constitutional liberalism” (Münch, 2008: 341).

As the driving forces behind the opening of a new scope for action and, above all, the emergence of transnational European solidarity, Münch identified the emerging European Economic Area (Münch, 2010), the expansion of education (2014), and the differentiation of occupation and living conditions and asked, most importantly, about the grounds for the legitimacy of these developments. He studied the latter question in light of the “legal construction of Europe” (2008: 18) and the accompanying national discourses.

Crucially, Münch showed that the European project is clearly based on differing ideas of solidarity and justice. The aim of European social policy, he observed, is not “the replacement of the national welfare state [...] but first and foremost an increase in the economic performance of all member states” (368). And that largely means dismantling barriers to market access, eliminating discrimination, and creating equal opportunities, thereby securing individual freedom and human rights in the process. The “neoliberal” principle underlying this solidarity pattern is “not post-market redistribution but pre-market promotion of the performance of those who have so far been less capable” (368).

This European social model, open to those outside and pluralistically structured on the inside, erodes national forms of solidarity and increasingly undermines the already eroding congruence of cultural homogeneity and political unity.

5 A European Society in the Making? European Identity and Societal Formation

In the end, all of these contributions revolve around a core question of the sociology of European integration: Is a European society in the making, and if so, what are its characteristics?

Initially, the debate about the conditions of social integration within the EU—that is, the question of the prospect of developing a European society—was clearly divided into two camps. Some scholars pointed to a “Europe without society” (Bach, 2008) and thus to a design that was still inadequate in comparison to that of national society. They stressed the reality of the unequal opportunities for participation within Europe and the existence of a “Europe of the elites” (Haller, 2009). Others soon began to investigate the social imprinting power of the European institutional project on the basis of empirical studies and drew conclusions about the future shape of European society “*sui generis*” (Lepsius, 2000: 213).

The inspiration for this somewhat empirically oriented European research was initially Karl Deutsch's transactionalist theory (Deutsch et al., 1957), which began to be connected to the subject of European integration at the end of the 1970s. Various studies have shown that the process of European integration increasingly served as an important driving force for new, cross-border activities. While research had previously concentrated on macro-level interactions, that is, interactions between nation states, regions, international organizations, and corporations ("transnationalism from above"), "transnationalism from below" gradually became the focus of interest. The concept of "horizontal Europeanization" (Mau and Büttner, 2010) now concentrated on individual interactions, such as cross-border worker mobility (Mau, 2007: 53) and exploring emergent interpersonal contacts and the formation of pan-European networks from which further forms of transnational integration could emerge.

How these results could be interpreted and applied to the study of European social formation and the social relevance of these transformation processes was finally resolved by viewing the EU as a type *sui generis*, "as an independent social sphere between nation and world society" (Büttner and Mau, 2010: 232).

According to Deutsch, for whom societies emerged from a densification of the processes of communication, interaction, and exchange, the European integration project now faced completely different questions. Does greater contact with foreigners bring with it a more cosmopolitan view of the world (Mau, 2007)? Does increased cross-border transfer of goods, money, communication, and personnel lead to increased mutual trust (Delhey, 2004; 2007; Kleiner, 2012; Delhey and Deutschmann, 2016)? Does all of this lead to a stronger identification with the EU and the formation of a European identity (Kaina, 2009; Kuhn, 2015)? And under what conditions do redistributive bonds of solidarity beyond the nation state emerge (Gerhards and Lengfeld, 2013)? The latter study showed, very impressively, that even at the height of the European fiscal and economic crisis, the willingness to support EU member states that were in need of solidarity remained surprisingly high and that solidarity in Europe was far greater than had previously been assumed in the public debate, both academic and political (Gerhards and Lengfeld, 2013; Gerhards et al. 2019).

On the basis of these and many similar studies, the ensuing years witnessed a number of further studies that no longer focused on the great question of the developmental conditions of a European society but rather on the individual preconditions of Europeanization. Max Haller (2009) was the first to give strong impetus to this debate in his argument centering on the "Europe of the elites" and the central problem to which it referred, namely, that Europe is most beneficial to the elite members of European societies, whereas *ordinary citizens* are not directly affected by the EU and its possibilities, nor do they even benefit from it.

This thesis was increasingly taken up in subsequent years when, with a view to the socio-structural dimensions of the process of Europeanization, researchers began to look closely at exactly who participates—and how—in Europeanization and who remains excluded from it. The scholarly focus thus shifted from the Europe of elites (Haller, 2009) to the Europe of ordinary citizens (Hooghe, 2003; Gaxie et al., 2011;

Fernández et al., 2016) and in particular to the social aspects of these developments. One example is Theresa Kuhn's 2015 study, *Experiencing European Integration: Transnational Lives and European Identity*. Kuhn describes in great detail the impact of transnationalism on EU support and European identity, shedding light on the transnationalization process that is transforming European societies. In so doing, she shows that not all transnational interactions have an equally positive effect on EU identity-building and EU support. Rather, these transnational interactions themselves are socially stratified, such that Europeans benefit from them or react to them in very different ways (cf. also Kuhn et al., 2014; 2018). Interestingly, it is above all this branch of German-language European sociology that has been most widely received internationally, presumably because many joint European research projects preceded it.

6 Outlook

In recent years, the sociology of Europe has developed just as rapidly as its subject matter. While 20 or 30 years ago there was little agreement among German-speaking sociologists that Europe was a relevant subject of sociological inquiry, it has since become widely accepted that "Europe matters: in all areas of life. [...] European society is not only a sociological chimera or a normative vision, although it is also the latter. Rather, it embodies not only a historical community of experience and destiny but also an economic, working, educational, solidarity, legal, religious, and cultural community" (Müller, 2018: 48). A review of the German-language sociology of Europe shows that for a long time this field of study surprisingly had less of an international or European orientation but was rather classically influenced by German-language publications, which were little known abroad. This has only gradually changed over the past two decades, and even then only for parts of the field. The recent renaissance of field theory in the area of European studies points to a closer connection to French debates, whereas work in the field of attitude and values research tends to follow the anglophone debates within the area of international European studies, where it has received increasing attention.

This realization and sociologists' greater consideration of the topic has entailed a significant qualitative change in the German sociology of Europe. Today, comparison to the nation state and national society figures increasingly less in the sociological engagement with Europe in all its dimensions. This carries with it the decisive advantage that current research in this field does not stop with the observation that EU development is inadequate compared to that of the nation state and its national society. It is both commensurate with the developments themselves and above all broadly empirical. Thus, the initial description of a "postnational constellation" (Habermas, 1998 [Germ.], 2001 [Engl.]) and the rather distanced view of a "Project Europe" (Münch, 1993; Wagner, 2005) have gradually developed into a European sociological approach that studies the EU itself and, especially, its impact on society. This explicitly includes a bottom-up perspective on the integration process. That this

development is not unproblematic has been shown very clearly in recent European sociological studies. Increasingly, scholars' optimistic interpretations of Europeanization and transnationalization as forces that can overcome national borders and promote the gradual emergence of a post-national society (Beck and Grande, 2010) have given way to a differentiated view of current social developments that stresses both the integrative as well as the disintegrative tendencies of European integration (Lahusen, 2019) and the newly emergent lines of social division (Kriesi and Pappas, 2015; Aschauer, 2017). The growing nationalism and Euroscepticism in many EU member states raises questions that are germane to the sociology of Europe, and these trends clearly show that meaningful discussion of the future of Europe must necessarily include the contribution of sociological scholarship. The future of the European project depends on whether it will be possible in the future to overcome the new social divisions and actually deliver on the European promise of similar and comparable living conditions for all EU citizens everywhere in the EU.

What the German-language sociology of Europe still mainly lacks (and what seems to have completely disappeared with the late Wilfried Spohn), however, is a view of the EU and its social development from the outside, as well as the consistent inclusion of a postcolonial perspective (cf. Spohn, 2009) in sociological studies in this field. Only by including such a postcolonial perspective can Europe's present be understood and analyzed. This becomes clear not least in the current daily debate over the consequences of the so-called "refugee crisis," with populism, Euroscepticism and nationalist movements on the rise in many EU member states (Bhambra, 2016: 199).

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