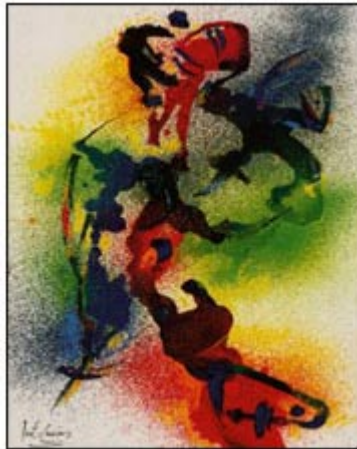


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RESEARCH NETWORKS 15
Sociology of Professions



*Knowledge transfer in the social sciences:
the role of professionals in disintegration research*

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KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES: THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONALS IN DISINTEGRATION RESEARCH

(ANNETTE VON ALEMANN)

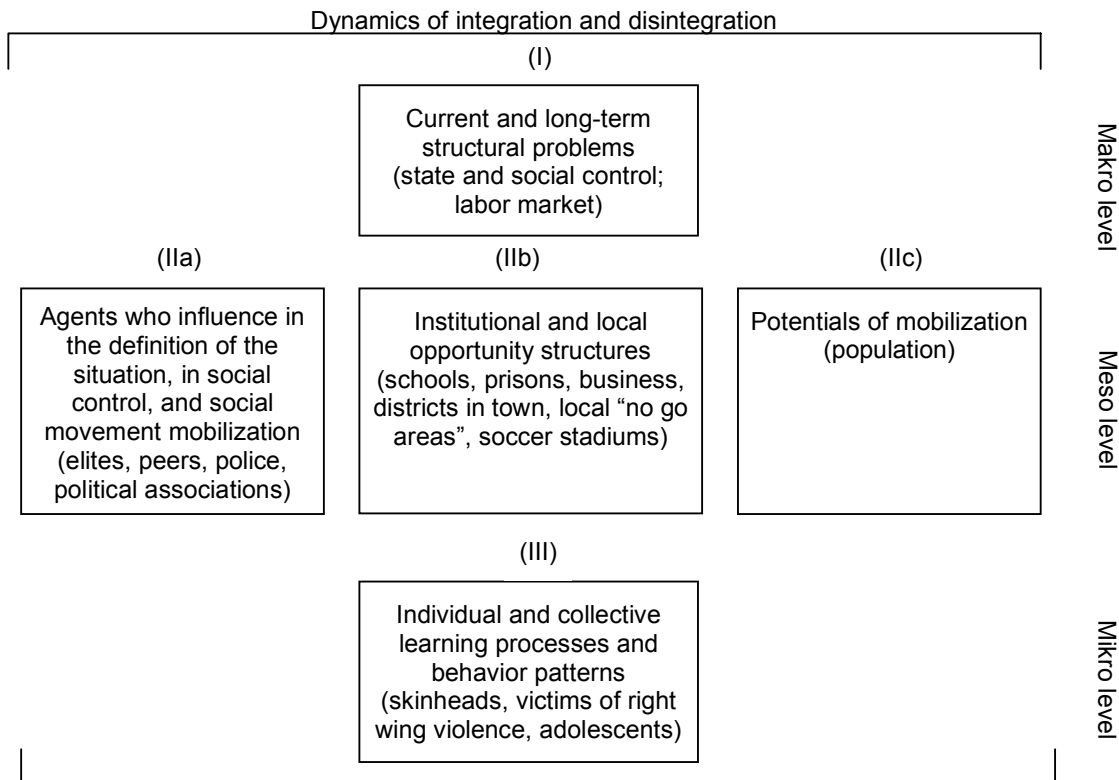
1. Introduction

Ever since the Human Relations studies in the 1930s, social science reflects the professional application of scientific knowledge into practice, its consequences, chances, and problems. In this paper, the application of scientific knowledge to practical problems will be analyzed by presenting the case of a scientific network of German universities, financed by the German Ministry of Education and Research, to investigate both the most fundamental processes of disintegration in a modern society and potentials for social integration from the perspectives of sociology, political science, social psychology, and education science. The aim of this work is not only to advance in science but also to transfer this knowledge to relevant parts and actors of society (i.e. politicians, administrative personnel, teachers, social workers etc.). In this context, professionals on both sides (i.e. science and practice) will be interacting together. To study these processes of interaction, a research project has been established. This project will be presented here.

1.1 Short description of the research network

The research network “Potentials for integration of a modern society” consists of interdisciplinary social science projects at 17 universities throughout Germany. The projects investigate disintegration processes at different societal levels (national and local) and organizational contexts. The research network is coordinated at the Institute of Interdisciplinary Conflict and Violence Research at the University of Bielefeld; the theoretical concept of the studies has been published in quite a number of publications (e.g. Heitmeyer 1997a, b). In these earlier books, many of the researchers of the network have published theoretical concepts of social disintegration.

Figure 1 shows the structure of the research network as it is published in the application for the network (Heitmeyer 2001). The research projects are placed on three levels of sociological analysis (micro, meso and macro level) and can be grouped into five sections. The most important section is the meso level where collective processes can lead to ideologies of social inequality or violence under given opportunity structures. The projects cannot be grouped into



Negative effects of integration problems (i.e. effects on chances of access and participation, group memberships and correspondent acceptance):
xenophobia, right wing action, ethnic conflicts

Figure 1: Dynamics of integration and disintegration according to societal levels

only one field; at the meso level, for example, groups of actors are studied in institutional and local contexts that depend, in turn, on specific attitudes of the population that can be regarded as potentials for mobilization.

Two projects study disintegration processes on a *cross-national context* level. One analyzes the relationship between social change and violence delinquency in historical comparison in Germany, Great Britain and Sweden. The other investigates the mobilization of right wing extremist attitudes in the context of the enlargement of the European Community in Germany and Czech Republic. Four research projects investigate disintegration phenomena in *local contexts*. They analyze group conflicts of adolescents, "fear zones" in the local communities of East Germany, ethnical discrimination and xenophobic violence, and the representation and political integration of districts in town. Projects that investigate *organizational contexts* can be divided into five groups: economic organizations, schools, social associations and

environments (milieus), the penal system, and multi-organizational comparison. Concerning *economic organizations*, two disintegration problems are dealt with: the role of the flexibilization of labor conditions for the development of right wing extremist and xenophobic attitudes, and the impact of globalization and pressure of competition on the social commitment of economic elites (and, therefore, their relevance for social integration or disintegration). In the context of *schools*, one research project investigate the processes of social appreciation, and the other analyzes the learning of social norms. Five projects deal with disintegration processes in different *social associations and environments*. Subjects of the research are systems of negative classifications between social groups, the impact of social repression on right wing extremist groups, the integration and assimilation of immigrants in football (soccer) clubs, processes of entrance and exit in skinhead groups, and the situation of victims of right wing extremist violence. One project studies ethnical conflicts in *juvenile prisons*, and another investigates the hostility against Islam in *different organizational settings* (firms, universities, mass media, schools, etc.).

The research network started in 2002 and is scheduled until 2005. In September 2003, most projects have finished their first research year. They are in their field phase or are finishing the data collection and are in the data interpretation phase.

Besides the specific research interests, there are two other central aims: First, to establish a dense network of scientific collaboration, and second, to emphasize the link to practice. Therefore, a project has been developed that will analyze the application of the knowledge produced by the research network.

1.2 The “transfer project”

The “transfer project” – as it is called provisionally – is designed to study the ways in which the knowledge produced by the 17 projects of the research network is transferred into practice. The research network is a new type of scientific cooperation that aims not only at the improvement of scientific knowledge but also at improving integrative processes on various societal levels, particularly at the reduction of xenophobic and right wing extremist attitudes. The research network has a great importance for the German Ministry of Education and Research that is not only financing the projects but also has an interest in the knowledge produced and its applicability in society. Therefore, the “transfer project” is meant to analyze the interaction of research and practice, and the application or non-application of the scientific knowledge. The duration of the transfer project will be three years. Research will start in

January 2004, will accompany the research projects until midyear 2005 and will continue until the end of 2006.

Therefore, the project is meant to study two different phases of knowledge transfer between theory and practice: the interaction phase, i.e. the interaction of scientists and practical actors during the research of the projects, and the dissemination phase, i.e. the ways of knowledge transfer after the projects are finished and the intercommunication of science and practice is taking place mostly via 'indirect' media (i.e. articles and books, mass media, etc.).

The transfer project will study the question if, and which, knowledge can find the way into practice, the ways in which this knowledge comes into practice (i.e. types of communication and interaction between science and practice), the uses (and usefulness) of scientific knowledge in practice, and the conditions for a successful knowledge exchange between science and practice. The project addresses three sets of questions:

1. Which forms of interaction between science and practice are to be found? What are the consequences (effects, reactions and repercussions) of these interactions?
2. What kinds of dissemination strategies can be discovered, and what are the consequences of the dissemination processes that really take place?
3. Which are the main differences in the consequences of interaction and dissemination processes?

The circumstances of knowledge transfer analyzed here are, for example, different interaction settings and interaction patterns, and types of actors that communicate in the transfer process. The transfer process is conceived as a two-way communication from science into practice and vice-versa that can lead to irritations, change, shifting or consolidation of attitudes, problem views and/or problem solution patterns both in practice and science.

In this communication process, three types of professional actors can be found: 1) professional actors in science (i.e. researchers), 2) professional actors that work as mediators between science and practice (i.e. journalists), and 3) professional (and semi-professional) actors in practice (i.e. politicians, administrative personnel, teachers, social workers, trade unionists etc.). Therefore, professionals can play three roles in the knowledge exchange: They can work as producers, transmitters and users of knowledge.

In the project, we will not concentrate on the question if, and which, actors are professionals in the strict sense of the sociological theories of the professions (and which ones are only semi- or 'near'-professionals), as I have done it in the case of the sociological consultants (cf.

Vogel 2000; von Alemann 2003), but we will refer to all these types of actors as professionals.¹ My aim, here, is to describe the work of professional actors at the intersection between theory and practice and their intermediary work between different kinds of knowledge, conditions of action, conceptions of time, and rewards. We are interested in the nature of the work ‘between’ science and practice that is typical for all kinds of professions, the types of knowledge that can be applied, and the types of actors that interact with each other. The intermediary position and mediation between the two different systems of science and practice is a core assumption of the theory of the professions, and it can be connected, from a theoretical point of view, with systems theory, with concepts of application research, and with research about the diffusion of innovation. Some of the theoretical concepts that are the basis of the “transfer project” will now be presented here.

2 Theoretical implications

2.1 *Two systems: science and practice*

In application research, science and practice are perceived as two different systems with different types of knowledge and different rationalities (cf. Neidhardt 1979; Luhmann 1984). According to systems theory (cf. Luhmann 1984), social systems are constituted by communication and operate on the basis of differing views of reality. According to its function, each system defines corresponding structures that form expectancies by which they control communicative processes. In this context, rationality measures the degree of correspondence between function and structure in systems. There is no hierarchy of rationalities between systems (Daheim et al. 1989). The main differences between the systems science and practice are the following:

1. Science and practice operate on the basis of two different kinds of knowledge: scientific cognition knowledge and practical action knowledge. Scientific knowledge responds to the demand of abstraction and generalization, whereas in practice, knowledge has to be applied in concrete situations with specific boundary conditions.
2. Therefore, science and practice have to different systems of rewards. In science, rewards are given for statements with a high degree of abstraction, i.e. statements that can be generalized. In practice, successful solutions of concrete and singular cases are

¹ Like Dewe and Otto (1991) describe social science knowledge application in different parts of society. Schneider (1989) shows that scientists are professionals and that this can lead to problems of interaction with administrative personnel when the professional attitudes of each part do not fit together.

awarded, i.e. rewards are given for the efficient application or translation of scientific knowledge on a singular case. To work successfully on a singular case, the actor has to disengage from the generalized scientific information and start a new and unique translation process.

3. The differing reward systems correspond to differing types of rationality: while the rationality of science is truth, the rationality of practice is efficiency. Efficiency means the quick and adequate solution of problems. In this context, the pressure of time in practice is much greater than in science.
4. Scientific output is produced under conditions of exoneration from pressures of action, whereas in practice, output is produced under conditions of pressure of action and time. In every moment, decisions have to be taken that can possibly affect human beings and economic values. The consequences cannot be fully anticipated and have to be justified in case of failure. In science, decisions have also to be taken, but the pressure of time and action is not so great because the leading maxim of science is not efficiency but truth and knowledge.
5. While science can be divided clearly into disciplines, action systems in practice are always interdisciplinary and practical problems often affect various parts of society and require knowledge from various disciplines to be solved.

The systems have to operate under conditions of autonomy and specialization in order to be able to produce new output. This leads to different value systems. The possibility of application is for the producers of scientific knowledge only a second-degree problem, whereas it is crucial for practice.

However, both systems do not operate totally separately from one another but interpenetrate each other (Münch 1982, 1984, 1998). In this interpenetration process, important aspects of one system are transferred to the other one and become important parts of the other system. For example, by using arguments based on scientific evidence and theories, actors in practice have to use scientific argumentation patterns and a scientific logic of argumentation (Bonß 1994). Furthermore, in zones of interpenetration new intermediary institutions emerge. For example, the field of technology assessment intermediates between science, technology, economy and politics and works on the prevention of unanticipated consequences of scientific-technical innovations (Zweck 2001).

2.2 *Types and functions of knowledge*

Application research distinguishes two types of knowledge application: instrumental and conceptual application (Wingens 1988). In the instrumental concept of application, actors in practice perceive a social problem that they define as such and, as they know they need social science knowledge to solve it, they fall back on scientific knowledge to get the data they need to achieve their objectives. Objectives of practice consist in the solution of a factual problem (cf. Daheim et al. 1989), the preparation of decisions (cf. Zetterberg 1972), the explanation or justification of decisions in public (cf. Lau 1989), the legitimation (cf. Schneider 1989), postponement or prevention of decisions and the defamation or irritation of political adversaries by means of ‘disturbing’ scientific analyses (cf. Zetterberg 1972). Scientific knowledge is used, mainly, to secure one’s own advantage.

Conceptual application (also called the ‘enlightenment concept’, cf. Beck and Bonß 1985), in contrary, serves to enhance the world view or the conception of a problem of actors in practice. Actors do not ask for scientific knowledge, but this is transmitted to them, e.g. via mass media. The reception of scientific knowledge can lead them to a new conception of a social situation and to the correction or replenishment of their world view. Scientific knowledge does not have to be in accordance with the attitudes of the practical actors but can be relevant in practical use when scientific findings contradict common assumptions and uncover public myths. However, scientific knowledge, in this concept, is only one source of information between many others (Wingens 1988) and is interpreted and valued by actors in practice on the basis of existing knowledge.

Two types of scientific knowledge can be identified: “hard knowledge” comes directly from scientific sources and is presented in scientific language (Caplan 1975), whereas “soft knowledge” comes from “secondary sources” (like mass media) and is integrated subjectively into the actor’s knowledge by the actor himself (Caplan 1975).

The knowledge types “hard” and “soft knowledge” can be assigned to two modes and functions of application:

1. The application of scientific knowledge as “decision knowledge” (“Entscheidungswissen”; Beck and Bonß 1985; Wingens 1988) means the strategical use of scientific knowledge for the preparation or justification of decisions. Application of knowledge means “decisive application” (“Entscheidungsverwendung”; Beck and Bonß 1985) and corresponds to the instrumental understanding of knowledge application.

2. The application of scientific knowledge as “orientation knowledge” (“Orientierungswissen”; Beck and Bonß 1985) is understood as a process of reinterpretation and the new constitution of scientific findings and means a process of ‘transformation of scientific knowledge where scientific knowledge loses its scientific identity and submerges into practice. Application in this sense is conceived as “explanatory application” (“Begründungsverwendung”; Beck and Bonß 1985) and serves to explain or justify decisions.

Both modes of application do not compete with one another but are complementary because they correspond to different settings of application (cf. Beck and Bonß 1985; Wingens 1988). It is understood that the strategical handling of scientific findings is more common in closed organized application contexts (bureaucratic systems) than in less structured contexts with broad ranges of action like settings of consultation and counselling, i.e. the classical working fields or professionals.

2.3 The interaction between professionals in science and practice: scenarios and typologies

The transfer of scientific knowledge into practice presumes the communication between professionals in science and practice. This can take place in direct interaction of scientists and practitioners or indirectly via intermediary institutions. It is more common that practitioners use scientific knowledge that comes to them via media like books, journals etc., but the more effective mode of knowledge transfer and exchange is the way of direct interaction. However, this interaction between two kinds of professionals - scientists and practitioners - is a delicate issue that can fail easily. Scientists and practitioners live in two different systems; they therefore do not have the need to get into a communicative exchange with the other part. They will only do so if they expect that the exchange will bring them gratifications. For the scientist, the advantage can consist in the transmission of his perspective; the practitioner, normally, is interested in the solution of his problem. The exchange of science and practice will also work out if both partners share a common problem that they want to solve, or if their interests go into the same direction (Daheim et al. 1989; Giesen and Schneider 1984, 1985). Giesen and Schneider (1984, 1985) have developed four scenarios of interaction between actors in science and practice. They distinguish the ‘fact’ of successful knowledge application from the social process of cooperation. If cooperation is successful *and* the knowledge offered by science corresponds to the problems of practice, scientific knowledge will be applied.

Cooperation is affected by the institutional conditions of the actors and by their patterns of interpretation of reality. Giesen and Schneider (1984, 1985) distinguish the following scenarios:

1. The *scenario of mutual indifference and disrespect* is characterized by distance to the strategies of the other actor and respect for his value autonomy. Distance and respect prevent conflicts but also interaction between scientist and practitioner. If both partners have the idea that the other one has to submit under one's own rationality, this can lead to expressions of exasperation and disdain.
2. In the *scenario of deceived aspirations* one interaction partner possesses favorable conditions for the cooperation, but finds out that the other one does not. Deception and frustration are the consequences of this coincidence, but there is a chance of application of scientific findings if they are able to solve one's own problems or can be applied to one's own strategical aims.
3. In the *scenario of cooperation* both interaction partners know the structural orientation of the other one. A *successful and balanced cooperation* takes place if both partners respect the values of the other. More common is the *unbalanced cooperation* when only one cooperation partner respects the values of the other one. In both cases, however, a constant interaction process will take place, and the chances for knowledge exchange and application are high.
4. The *scenario of conflict or strategic game* is characterized by a mutual criticism on values and functions. In the *scenario of strategic conflict* both interaction partners want to pursue their own strategic aims and influence the other for the own advantage. A successful and balanced cooperation takes place, in this case, if both partners have the same political and/or practical aim. In the *scenario of strategic game* practitioner and scientist attempt at using the other partner for the own goals, knowing both the strategies and definitions of structure of the other one. The outcome of these games is open, as well as the chances for the application of scientific knowledge.

The typology of scenarios can be complemented by a typology of actors that distinguishes various types of actors according to their openness to innovation and personal traits. The underlying hypothesis is that if people are open for innovations, they are open for new scientific knowledge, too, and will try it out to solve their problems. Rogers (1983) differentiates between five types of adoptors of innovations which can easily be applied to professional actors in processes of science-practice exchange: 1. Innovators are risk-loving,

adventurous individuals who like technology for its own sake, control money and other resources and have a good understanding of complex new ideas. In many cases, they are not fully accepted in their social system. 2. The early adopters have a high degree of opinion leadership and the organization looks to them for cues, information, and advice for adopting new technologies. Their education and social status are higher than that of the other groups. 3. Early majority pragmatists do not like to take the risk of pioneering, but are ready to see the advantages of tested innovations. 4. Late majority pragmatists dislike discontinuous innovations and believe in tradition rather than progress. They accept innovations only if the pressure of the new norms of the social system is high enough. 5. Traditionalists (laggards) do not engage with innovations - except to block them. They are locally oriented and often accept an innovation only when the other groups are ready for new innovations.

Brüsemeister (2003) proposes a similar typology taking the example of teachers in modernization processes. As teachers are professional actors, the “transfer project” will investigate if this typology can be found in other contexts where professionals are exposed to modernization processes. Brüsemeister (2003) differentiates between three main types of actors according to their capacity to organize biographical capital. Type 1 has excellent conditions for innovative knowledge management. He/she is interested in professional development and training, is open for institutional modernization and does not separate between work and private life. He/she is able to use biographical capital (i.e. knowledge and skills) acquired in his/her private life or life history in his professional work and has an integrative world view. The intermediate type 2 fronts modernization processes and professional innovations in an ambivalent way and decides to take part in professional training and institutional modernization according to his perceived utility. In respect to his work-private life integration, he oscillates between a one-world and a two-worlds logic. Type 3 is associated with prohibitive conditions for the diffusion of institutional modernizations; he/she separates between work and private life, does not participate in professional training and concentrates on the problems of his professional work. The distribution of the types differs regionally and depends on 1. the institutional environment of the workplace, 2. the constellation of actors in the innovation process (lone fighters versus innovative collectivities), and 3. the age of the actor (experienced innovative versus non-experienced less-innovative professionals). Contrary to the opinion-leader concept of market research (cf. Rogers 1983), Brüsemeister does not find a correspondence between social background and openness for innovations.

3 The application of the theoretical implications in the transfer project

As presented in the introduction of the present paper, the research topics of the scientific network can be grouped into local and organizational integration settings: the projects analyze disintegration processes in national and local contexts and in various organizational contexts (business; schools and youth groups; associations, clubs, and social milieus; juvenile prisons, and multi-organizational settings). The transfer project has selected seven exemplary projects: three projects that study disintegration processes in local contexts, one project that analyzes precarious labor relations, one that studies processes of social acceptance at schools, one that studies integration and assimilation in football associations and one that analyzes the image of Islam in various organizational settings.

I will show now how the transfer project will work, presenting the example of the selected school research project. First, the researchers have been asked to name their interaction partners in practice, and the institutions that are important in the phase of dissemination of the research outcome. For the school project, the interaction partners are various: Federal Statistic Offices, Ministries of Education, supervisory school authorities, directors of schools, students at schools (8th and 9th grade) in two German federal states, all persons that have contact with those students (teachers, peer groups, social workers and psychologists working at schools, and research groups at schools that work on the subject of political education). In the study of the interaction phase, a typology of those actors will be established, and it will be found out which are the possible scenarios of interaction. If it comes to a direct interaction between researchers and practitioners in the dissemination phase, they will be included in the typology. In this case, the addressees of dissemination are school directors, teachers, supervisory school authorities and Ministries of Education. As modes of dissemination, publications in newspapers and journal articles, books, lectures, and direct communications can be thought.

In reference to the two modes of knowledge application, both of them are possible. If they use scientific knowledge in an instrumental way, they will address to the researchers and ask for scientific evidence to solve concrete actual problems. Scientific knowledge will be used in a conceptual way if one of the dissemination addressees learns about the outcome of the school project through the mass media, e.g. via a newspaper article. He (e.g., a school director) can use it to prepare a decision, e.g. if he plans to install an integration project for foreign students at a given school, and use concrete scientific data that lead him to a specific project design. In this case, the scientific knowledge will work as “decision knowledge”. If the same school director is thinking about integration projects in general (or about specific ethnic conflicts at

his school that he wants to solve), he can use the knowledge produced by the school project as “orientation knowledge”, to give him an idea about how to design a project or how to change his attitude towards integration projects in general. He can also use scientific knowledge to justify an integration project that he has already decided to install at his school, using scientific argumentations to have his decision accepted by the teachers (or the supervisory authority). Various other uses of the outcomes of the school project can be imagined, and the transfer project will study them all and will, in the end, come to a typology of knowledge types and modes of applications, and their consequences for the uses of knowledge.

4 Conclusion

In the present paper, I have presented a research project that investigates interaction and dissemination processes in the knowledge transfer from science to practice. Professionals are the leading actors in this processes, working as producers, transmitters and users of scientific knowledge. The project wants to find out which interaction and dissemination processes take place, and what are their effects and consequences for both practice and science. In addition, the project studies the conditions of knowledge transfer, aiming at establishing a knowledge transfer model that integrates a typology of professional interaction partners and scenarios of cooperation. The project has an innovative theoretical basis as it combines concepts and findings from the theory of the professions, application research, innovation and diffusion research, and systems theory. The research will begin in January 2004, and we will, then, find out if our knowledge transfer model, typologies and scenarios are generalizable for the above mentioned national, local and organizational contexts, and beyond.

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