Sociology of Social Sustainability - On the Idea of the Internalization Society

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At the UN level, Agenda 2030 with 17 universal Sustainable Development Goals was adopted in 2015. In the main and sub-goals, they deal with social and ecological issues. In this transdisciplinary context, the author advocates a change of perspective, away from the restricted social-ecological point of view and establishing a discourse about social sustainability. By means of a distinction between social sustainability in four conceptions, which follow the welfare regimes known from social policy research, along with four thematic dimensions, the conceptual field is to be made clear, and argued why the exclusion of social policy from the discourse on sustainability and from the consideration of a post-growth society must come to an end. These considerations are rounded off with the question of the normativity of social sustainability and a critique of virulent sociological skepticism. This was to be overcome in the context of global climate change and its social consequences and to create an evident research foundation through sociology.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda, adopted by the United Nations in September 2015, systematically linked social and environmental sustainability goals for the first time. In the case of the social sustainability goals, the industrialized countries also became the addressees and not exclusively the so-called developing countries, as was still the case with the pre-agenda, the Millennium Development Goals of the 2015 Agenda. However, to what extent do social and, above all, socio-political modernization goals change in the context of the sustainability perspective? Is it even possible to speak of "social sustainability" and if so, what exactly is meant by it? Do the questions formulated under the term "social-ecological" research and policy meet the complex requirements of the SDGs and a program of social sustainability? From a sociological point of view, there are considerable doubts about this, because modern society appears peculiarly reduced in these discourses: the welfare state does not appear.[1]

In the discourses on ecological transformation and sustainability, the welfare state as a central form of regulation of modern societies is almost consistently avoided as a topic alongside the capitalist market economy (e.g. WBGU 2016). A "sociology of sustainability" (Engels 2017) should not follow this avoidance strategy. For sociology, social policy has been of outstanding importance not only since Max Weber. According to Weber, social policy has its starting point in the critique of processes and results of formal rationalization, prototypically in modern capitalism. This intervention and thus becomes the object of an institutionalization whose criterion of ra tionality is the satisfaction of individual needs

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[1] The article is based in part on Chapter 1 ("On the Concept of Social Sustainability") in Opielka 2017, which in turn is based in large part on an essay by the author in the journal "Sociology" (Opielka 2016).

(Weber 1988). Social policy became the dominant regulative of modern, especially democratically constituted societies (Opielka 2008). With the now obvious social relevance of the conflict over sustainability and the establishment of environmental policy, new questions therefore arise from a sociological perspective:

- What is the state of research on the relationship between welfare regimes and environmental regimes? Can mutual increases be observed? What role do which normatives play in this context?
- What is the importance of non-social science perspectives in research on social sustainability? To what extent can the focus on social sustainability contribute to deeper transdisciplinarity in sustainability research?
- What political contexts of use of the concept of social sustainability can be observed? Can the concept contribute to the development of a new socio-political arena based on SDGs and human rights?
- How can aspects of social sustainability be measured empirically? Which indicators are appropriate here and how can the results be interpreted?

These questions of a sociological research agenda Social Sustainability are discussed below, albeit some very briefly. First, it is asked whether the conceptual, epistemological framework of contemporary sustainability discourse may have quite systematically prevented a serious engagement with social policy. With the help of a differentiation of social sustainability into four conceptions and four thematic dimensions, the conceptual field will be opened up and it will become clear why social policy has to be considered in the sustainability discourse and in the reflections on a post-growth society.

One of the premises is that the welfare state itself is by no means only a desirable driver for (also) material economic growth (via the argument of job security) but can at the same time be an organizer for systemic sustainability if its *internal logic* is oriented toward social sustainability. The discourses on sustainability and social policy have one central commonality: their focus on the value of equity. Another commonality, within the tension between externalization and internalization of problems, is the focus on the latter: Both social policy and sustainability do not want to externalize existing conflicts to - moreover, as weak as possible - third parties, but to solve them within the respective responsible systems.

The resolution "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (UN 2015) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on October 21, 2015, shortly before the Paris climate summit, outlined a strategy with the "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDG) that could do just that: on the one hand, systematically linking climate and welfare, environmental and social policy, and on the other hand, differentiating them in an application-oriented way into a complex set of sub-goals and determining relevant indicators for compliance over time. At least 10 of the 17 goals of the SDG strategy "Agenda 2030" are social policy goals (such as poverty eradication, equal opportunities, social stability and inclusion).

1.   On the concept of social sustainability

Climate change and capitalism are common, global phenomena. But they differ strikingly in two respects, superficially historically: climate change has appeared on the political agenda since the 1970s, capitalism since the 1840s. The ecological question as a species question has been occupying humanity for almost 50 years, the social question as a class question for a good 170 years. What lasts a very long time indicates stability, importance for social actors, and institutionalization. To many people, the ecological question still seems to be conjured up, climate change a construction. Similarly, many thought and still think the social question was solved long ago, capitalism victorious. Most people, however,

see a high relevance in both questions and suspect a connection, but it is not "clear". This has to do with the second, serious difference between climate change and capitalism: they also differ analytically.

The so-called "sustainability triangle" that has been circulating since the 1990s seems intuitively convincing at first glance. It distinguishes between ecological, economic and social sustainability - depending on stakeholder interests, three "pillars" are conceived that either reinforce each other or slow each other down. In 1998, for example, the Enquete Commission of the German Bundestag "Protection of Man and the Environment" described sustainability for the first time as the permanently sustainable development of the economic, ecological and social dimensions of human existence (Deutscher Bundestag 1998). Since then, these "three pillars" of sustainability have been frequently and controversially[2] described as interacting with one another and as requiring balanced coordination in the long term.

The three-pillar or triangular model of sustainability has a parallel, which has received little attention so far, to the model of the three processes "efficiency-consistency-sufficiency", which is also present in the sustainability debate and is aimed at corporate sustainability strategies (Schaltegger et al. 2003, p. 25), but which can usefully apply to all substance-related sustainability strategies. Joseph Huber had already called for "consistency before efficiency before sufficiency" and an "overall strategy of graduated preferences" in the 1990s. He said that one must "first and foremost try to improve the ecological adaptability of material flows by changing material flow qualities (consistency) in order to then, also for economic reasons, optimally increase the resource productivity of these material flows (efficiency), and where both types of changes reach their limits in their interaction, that is where we simply have to be satisfied (sufficiency)." [3]

The parallel between the three-pillar and three-process model of sustainability could be the following: ecological sustainability and consistency, economic sustainability and efficiency, social sustainability and sufficiency. But the stumbling block is unmistakable. An understanding of social sustainability that has so far focused primarily on inequality and justice has little to do with sufficiency. On the other hand, it is precisely here that the door opens to linking the discourses with post-growth and social sustainability, as the discussion about a socially just design of the energy transition in Germany shows.

The three dimensions of sustainability are found as a unifying interpretative pattern following the 1992 UN Conference in Rio de Janeiro (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, UNCED), whose final declaration, however, does not include such a triangle.[4] Interpretive patterns are usually implicit and preconscious. Here the analytical problem mentioned at the beginning is built into the triangle: In a capitalist-constituted global economy, economic sustainability means that the functional imperatives of the economic system must not be jeopardized. Its protagonists in the sustainability discourse are employers, business associations, economic wings. Social sustainability means the other side in the antagonism of classes: This is where trade unions and NGOs position themselves worldwide, committed to representing the capitalless and the excluded. Thus, when a homeostasis of this triangle is invoked, as in virtually all relevant sustainability discourses, class antagonism is built into the figure of sustainability and simultaneously stretched into a second antagonism, namely the "pure" ecological question. Thus, the triangle of sustainability is based on a double antagonism: first between social and economic

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[2] Grunwald/Kopfmüller 2012; Felix Ekardt considers the distinction irrelevant and defines sustainability exclusively in terms of justice theory: "Sustainability is about the integrated management of intertemporal-global problem situations." (Ekardt 2011, p. 44)

[3] Huber 1995, p. 157; critically, however, Ekardt 2016.

[4] Final Declaration 1992: http://www.un.org/Depts/german/conf/agenda21/rio.pdf; the Declaration of the Stockholm Conference 1972 does not contain this either: http://www.un-documents.net/aconf48-14r1.pdf

sustainability (class antagonism) and then also between this tension and ecological sustainability in a narrower sense. Antagonisms or ambivalences tend to paralyze actors. A double ambivalence in the three-pillar concept of sustainability thus entails an aggravated risk of stalemate. The example of climate policy is a good demonstration of this: Trade unions and regional politicians are fighting side by side with energy companies for the continued existence of fossil energy production through lignite and against decarbonization. Stephan Lessenich has summed up the confusion potential of late modernity in the sustainability-relevant concept of the "externalization society". In this society, people live "according to absolute standards (...) above the circumstances of others"[5]. Climate change and capitalism merge in social looking away. A Babylonian confusion of people's capitalism and people's climate change seems to make all actors irrelevant, who are then not held accountable. Climate change in capitalism becomes a whimsical narrative, a cultural figure that can only become politically useful as a "resource of the imagination" (Hulme 2014, p. 333) still. Is the change from the logic of externalization to a logic of internalization, of making oneself honest, even conceivable, a path toward an "internalization society" recognizable?

Here, a document can help both to sharpen the concept of social sustainability and to define the possibilities and limits of political climate protection measures in more detail. It is a discussion paper by the Commission for Social Development of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC for short [6]) entitled "Emerging Issues: The Social Drivers of Sustainable Development" (UN ECOSOC 2014). Its argumentation focuses first on the organized class compromise, which is aligned with the dominant valuation of gainful employment. This corresponds to the basic impulse of ECOSOC, which is further sharpened in the triple construction of the UN sub-organization ILO (governments-unions-employers). Since the 1980s, in ECOSOC's view, three political discourses have softened the old wage-labor centering:

1. The discourse on **women's work** since the 1980s, which shows, on the one hand, that equal pay for equal performance is just as little established as a visible valuation of family or domestic work.
2. The perception and recognition of the **informal economy** since the 1990s - through the self-articulation of the Global South and the relevance observation of the subsistence economy; the discussion about an expansion of GDP to include non-monetary welfare benefits also belongs here.
3. Finally, since the 2000s, due to the observation of "jobless growth" and following the financial crisis, a questioning of **economic growth per se,** whose ecological consequences initially played a minor role.

The triangle of sustainability ("the three pillars of sustainable development") is invoked at the beginning of the paper in specific wording: "sustainable development, enabled by the integration of economic growth, social justice and environmental stewardship". The three dimensions are to be treated more equally than before. Why? The answer is simple: "Indeed, the interpretation of sustainable development has tended to focus on environmental sustainability while neglecting the social dimension." But what is this "social dimension"? Could it be more or something other than "social justice," than a focus on inequality and its redress? The ECOSOC document hints at it. A remarkable range of action areas are cited and combined as "social drivers for sustainable development." From the promotion of the informal economy, to a universalistic social policy including a basic

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5 Lessenich 2015, S. 24; ausführlich Lessenich 2016.

6 ECOSOC, meanwhile, sees itself as "the United Nations' central platform for reflection, debate, and innovative thinking on sustainable development"; it is responsible for monitoring the SDGs (UN ECOSOC https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/home

income ("transformative social policy"), to a "green economy", to participation and empowerment, to a generally social and solidarity-based economy; a list of drivers that would have been un- thinkable in a trade union context just a few years ago.

Against the background of this discourse development, the next step towards a generalization of social sustainability in international politics becomes comprehensible, as it succeeded with the SDGs in 2015. ECOSOC was tasked with monitoring and its Statistical Commission with indicator development (Opielka 2017, p. 87ff.).

2. Four conceptions of social sustainability

It seems helpful to define the hitherto diffuse term social sustainability more clearly and to remove it from its limitation to left-wing capital(ism) critique (without renouncing it). In particular, it should no longer be reduced to the economic context. [7] In addition, it would be advisable to adopt a social-scientifically integrative perspective, initially sociological and later transdisciplinary, which is above all also capable of being connected to political control (governance). This connectivity is provided by the concept of the "welfare regime" used in comparative welfare state research, which became known primarily through the work of Gøsta Esping-Andersen.[8] Recently, it has also been examined for its applicability in environmental and sustainability policy.[9] In the first step of differentiation, regime theory considerations are therefore still used with restraint.

A discourse-analytical approach[10] allows us to distinguish between four[11] conceptions of social sustainability:

1. A **narrow** understanding of social sustainability as "social redistribution": Here, "the social" is conceived as one of "three pillars" of sustainability, as conflict reduction and redistribution, antagonistic to (rather economically liberal interpreted) economic sustainability and accompanying ecological sustainability, which is at the center of this conception.[12] This perspective tends to assume social- democratic-socialist politics or such a regime, and thus the genesis of the third "social" pillar as a union-left, political program against a dominance of the "economic" (capital) pillar. The discursive understanding of "social" thus corresponds to today's use of "social" in the sense of vertical distributive justice.[13]

2. An **internal** understanding of social sustainability as sustainability of the social: This conception initially has little to do with ecology and the concept of sustainability commonly used today. It refers primarily to the social itself, to the preservation and reproduction of the core community systems of a society. This understanding comes

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7 Thus in the Jahrbuch Ökologische Ökonomik 2007 (Yearbook of Ecological Economics 2007). Sociologically extended already in Littig/Grießler 2005, but a systematic reference to the welfare state is missing.

8 Esping-Andersen 1990, on the subsequent discussion in welfare research Arts/Gelissen 2002; Esping-Andersen can draw on a discussion in political science theory of international relations (without explicitly mentioning it). The regime theory of Robert O. Keohane and Stephen Krasner - German representatives include Volker Rittberger or Michael Zürn - emerged around 1980 as a further development of the interdependence theory. International regimes are cooperative institutions characterized by informal and formal, legal and non-legal structures that deal with conflicts between nation-states. Four characteristics of international regimes are distinguished: principles (shared basic assumptions), norms (general standards of behavior), rules (specific rules of conduct), and procedures (concrete, mutually agreed-upon procedures) (Hasenclever et al. 2000). Esping-Andersen transferred these considerations to the analysis of the welfare state itself; his concept of regime does not apply to supranational but to internal institutional networks.

9 Gough 2016, at least as a policy comparison Koch/Mont 2016; also Opielka 2017, pp. 74ff.

10 Here, reference should be made to the enormous wealth of international publications on sustainability sciences in journals (Kates et al. 2001, Bettencourt/Kaur 2011).

11 Compared to Opielka 2016, the "internal" understanding was differentiated in terms of regime policy into a market-centered "skeptical" (liberal) and a community-centered "internal" (conservative) concept.

12 Exemplary: Senghaas-Knobloch 2009, similarly also Jahrbuch 2007, toned down Littig/Grießler 200.

13 In a classic study, Eckart Pankoke traced the German history of usage and thus also the change in the meaning of "social" (Pankoke 1970).

close to a conservative political or regime principle, such as that advocated by the ordoliberal Freiberg School of economics. It is about a sustainable wealth culture, for example through the promotion of family businesses or increased foundation formation, or about "good governance," the long-term stability of institutions. This concept builds a bridge to responsibility toward nature and the environment via the commons. Air, biodiversity, water and natural beauty are threatened by egoism and short-term thinking; the view of the commons in a concrete smaller society up to a world society includes the whole ecology of the social, from nature to the spiritual world heritage.[14] In these rather conservative discourses, the concept of "social sustainability" tries to avoid a transformation of institutions or redistribution processes and instead, without changing society, to protect nature institution-immanently, just internally.[15]

3. A **skeptical** understanding of social sustainability as sustainability of economic functionalities. In this case, it is a matter of intergenerational justice - close to the internal understanding - for example, in the distribution of the financing burdens of pension insurance between young and old, in financial policy terms the limitation of public debt ("black zero") and also the prevention of a growing demand for public investment in the promotion of sustainability by taking on new debt. In this liberal type of politics or regime, social sustainability is conceived skeptically, often with aversion and negatively; it is hardly to be found as a positive concept in these discourses.

4. Finally, there is also a **broad** understanding of social sustainability, in which the "social" is understood as the "societal", following the English usage: Social sustainability is conceived here as a social project, a transformational project. In this arena, discussions are held about the post-growth society, about "green growth" and "degrowth." Social sustainability is developed in the garantist policy or regime type as an umbrella concept for the sustainability discussion. The term "guarantism" requires some explanation: the classical policy legitimations liberal/socialist/conservative - i.e., center/left/right - have been challenged in recent decades by a global agenda of basic social rights that cannot be subordinated to this triad without circumstance. There are strong arguments that democracies develop an evolutionary dynamic toward basic social rights supported by appropriate policy structures (especially direct democracy). The "guarantism" regime type takes this dynamic into account. The essentially human rights foundation of the guarantist regime type (Opielka 2008) marks a strong understanding of social sustainability, the antithesis of the skeptical, liberal understanding. The tableau of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN's vote for a "holistic"[16] policy change stand for a broad understanding of social sustainability.

In Figure 1, the four conceptions of social sustainability are inserted into the systematic representation of welfare regimes. This is explicitly not connected with an analysis of environmental policy regimes. Such an analysis, formally comparable to the analysis of welfare regimes, is not yet available.

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14 A group of researchers at the Environmental Research Center Leipzig (Klauer et al. 2013) argues in this direction with a "stock concept" that brings the dimension of "time" into the economy and thereby operationalizes sustainability.

15 Zimmer (2015) goes to the extreme limits of the thinking possibilities of a conservative party like the CDU, as is also shown by the foreword to the publication by parliamentary group chairman Volker Kauder.

16 „The SDGs are a universal agenda of sustainable development, calling on all nations to pursue a holistic strategy that combines economic development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability." (Bertelsmann/SDSN 2016, p. 8)

	Types of the welfare regime			
	liberal	*social-democratic*	*conservative*	*garantistic*
Steering/Governance: • Market • State • Family/Community • Human / fundamental rights	**central** marginal marginal medium-high	marginal **central** marginal medium	marginal subsidiary **central** marginal	medium subsidiary medium **central**
Dominant form of welfare state solidarity	Individua-listic	wage labor-centric	communitarian - etatist	citizen status, universalis-tic
Full employment guarantee	weak	strong	medium	medium
Dominant form of welfare state control	Market	State	Morals	Ethics
Concepts of Social Sustainability^f	skeptical	narrow	internal	far
Empirical examples in social policy	USA	Sweden	Germany, Italy	Switzerland ("soft g.")

Figure 1: Types of Welfare Regime and Conceptions of Social Sustainability [17]

All four concepts of social sustainability contain essential and sustainable aspects. As politically-normative as they are constructed, they are at the same time analytical conceptions for the investigation of the steering performance of social systems.[18] The **narrow** understanding puts the focus on that socio-economic conflict situation that Thomas Piketty interpreted as a process of global dominance of capital returns over workers' incomes (Piketty 2014). This situation is reflected in discussions about energy prices or lignite mining, according to which climate protection measures have a socially unequal impact and threaten to exacerbate existing disadvantages.

The **internal** understanding, on the other hand, focuses on community design options, on a "transformation design" (Sommer/Welzer 2014), on mental changes (behavior, consumption) and technical innovations (Zimmer 2015); institutional changes are wrong for this politically rather conservative faction.[19]

The **skeptical** (liberal) understanding also wants to avoid institutional changes and essentially relies on technological solutions to the sustainability problem. Finally, the **broad** (guarantist) understanding of social sustainability could become a guiding

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17 Opielka 2008, p. 35, abridged and expanded to include the concepts of social sustainability.

18 Applying the empirically grounded theories of welfare state development in international comparisons (power-resources, functionalism, institutionalism, etc., cf. Esping-Andersen 1990) to the emergence of environmental regimes could lead to considerable insights.

19 The regime-theoretically conservative, internal understanding also has a leftist or left-liberal expression and history in its "communitarian," communitarian-empathic dimension (Opielka 2006).

principle of the sustainability discourse. By emphasizing the social, societal and institutional aspects of a transformation to a more sustainable society without being content with them, it is made clear that a primarily technological or economic strategy misses the systemic character of the socio-ecological problem.

A broad understanding of social sustainability aims at a comprehensive reorganization of politics, as it was successfully achieved in the 20th century with the idea of the welfare state and the establishment of various forms of a "welfare regime" worldwide.[20] To be hoped that the sustainability movement, like the labor movement before it, will succeed in demanding and promoting new institutions that systematically develop the social equalizing impulse of the welfare state into a kind of "eco-welfare regime".

A sustainability movement needs transformation narratives. Psychic transformations require symbolic representations of the unthought, the "not yet" (Bohleber 2014). This is also true for social change. Michael Braungart, the inventor of the "cradle-to-cradle" principle, criticizes the sustainability discourse, saying that sustainability is not enough; quality is much more important (Braungart/McDonough 2014). Viewing humans as pests of nature would feed resignation and cynicism at the same time. The activity of humans, their sociality, should and can benefit the world. Only through man does the world become a good place for man. Nature alone, the romantic dream of a life identical to nature, would be a nightmare.

3. Four thematic dimensions of social sustainability

What is the thematic issue at stake when talking about a **broad** understanding of social sustainability? Does the perception of problems change and, even more, can analytical considerations for research be developed through this perspective? In the following, four systemic stages of development, four levels of emergence[21] of social sustainability will be outlined:

The first level is about the **factual**, about the eco-social question or problem indication - it is the level of differential diagnosis. Here we find a variety of topics from socio-ecological research (SÖF)[22], from the broad international discussion on transition and transformation to a sustainable society.[23] This is extended to include research on the welfare state and welfare regimes. This includes the development of SDG indicators and their monitoring. In temporal terms, this level is also the terrain of empirical futures research, which lays the material foundation for all transformation reflections with megatrend analyses, scenarios, roadmaps and stakeholder participation.[24] The level of the factual is not only itself problematized by political-cultural discourses that assert or fear a "post-factual" world.

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20 Opielka 2008, following the work of Gøsta Esping-Andersen; on an early positioning of social policy in ecological discourse, see Opielka 1985.

21 The four levels of emergence correspond to the four levels of reflection of a theory of action and systems based on Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Talcott Parsons (Opielka 2006). In Parsons' sociological perspective of knowledge, two opposing hierarchies can be distinguished: the energetic hierarchy from matter to information (level 1 to 4) and the informational hierarchy from information (or mind) to matter (level 4 to 1).

22 In 1999, the German BMBF began an exploratory phase for a research line of the same name (Balzer/Wächter 2003), which has since achieved an extraordinary empirical and theoretical presence, at least in the German discussion: http://www.fona.de/de/19711; the tentative but increasing overlaps with likewise BMBF-funded processes of futurology under the signature "Foresight" (Zweck et al. 2015) appear relevant.

23 Grin et al. 2010; Scoons et al. 2015.

24 Popp/Zweck 2013; Armin Grunwald has justified in a differentiated way in the tradition of Kant and Popper why the future cannot be negotiated in the mode of the "factual". It is not yet, after all, and thus the assumptions about it are not falsifiable either (Grunwald 2009). Epistemically, this objection cannot be refuted at first sight, even if we are convinced that the future and time in general cannot be understood only as a linear phenomenon. For the present argumentation, it may suffice to point out that the "factual" is understood to mean only socially action- and system-relevant problem indications, behind which, of course, there are interpretations whose genesis often and partly intentionally remains in the dark.

Their constructivist program denies the objectivity of reality and even communicative consensus-building about empirical facts, especially when future facts are involved. Socioecological research fuels doubt about the "factual," pretending to be convinced of facts that are not certain. An example of this alarmism is the volume "Two degrees more in Germany. How Climate Change Will Change Our Everyday Life. The 2040 Scenario" (Gerstengarbe/Welzer 2013): serious efforts are made by the physical climate experts of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) to simulate models and their regional impacts: "Cities in Bavaria, Thuringia, Saxony, Saarland and southern Baden-Württemberg will be particularly affected by a warming of more than 1.5 o C." (Grossmann- Clarke/Schubert 2013, p. 192ff.) But what does this projection mean for society, especially when the paragraph before it reports that cities in western Germany already have an annual mean temperature "two to four degrees higher" than the national average? Not only can no clear indications of extreme weather events be derived from these factual expectations - a task for meteorologists - but also hardly any fears of a noticeable increase in, for example, heat deaths. Facts are inextricably linked to their assessment, evaluation and classification. Holistic research on social sustainability requires seriousness and competence, which at least the social science part of that alarm paper lacked.[25]

The second level stands for the **political**: Topics here are application and transfer orientation, real-labs, translationality (application-oriented basic research). In democratic cultures, this includes participation and discursivity, up to and including citizen science. Application orientation is not spurned, but praised, for very basic political reasons, because every community is political. Similar to cultural studies-influenced "postcolonial studies," it is about a perception of voices from the "off" and their representative inclusion in dominant discourses, about their discursive inclusion (Lessenich 2015, 2016). In general, a research program of social sustainability on the level of the political demands value reflexivity: No strategic interest can be justified without arguments that reveal its normative dimension.

On the third level we find the **organizational aspects of** the "scientific community": The topics of "social sustainability" here are interdisciplinarity and above all (and at the same time most difficult to implement) transdisciplinarity and neodisciplinarity. The cooperation of disciplinarily organized science (interdisciplinarity) is not sufficient for complex problem areas; here the disciplines should also come closer to each other epistemologically and strategically (transdisciplinarity). And if that is not enough, new disciplines (neo-disciplinarity) emerge, like social work, communication sciences or information sciences in the past. In the search for transdisciplinary research for sustainability, therefore, more and more new disciplines are emerging (sustainability sciences).

The fourth level of a scientific engagement with social sustainability aims at the **epistemic**, at the conditions of possibility for complex, holistic and systemic thinking. Topics here are the tension between evolution and emergence, i.e. development and leap, the big question about the conditions of scientific paradigm shifts.

The themes outlined here can also be found in more recent texts on "transformative science"[26], , although mostly in a different or without analytical systematization. The representation of reality in science is multidimensional and can lead to conflicts on every level. Heuristics are needed to distinguish between them, especially when science wants to contribute to shaping the future and inevitably takes sides in social conflicts. The president of the DFG, Peter Strohschneider, strongly criticized the concept of

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25 In contrast, the weighty anthology "Climate Change in Germany" (Brasseur et al. 2017) offers some sociologically knowledgeable contributions (especially Renn 2017), even if the welfare state implications are not addressed.
26 Schneidewind/Singer-Brodowski 2013, Jahn 2013.

"transformative science" as a de-differentiation of complex reality. A "Great Transformation", in the sense of the **broad** concept of social sustainability represented here, is morally overloaded and at the same time contributes to depoliticization, because everything is now subjected to the expert-driven sustainability goal. Armin Grunwald reassured, compared the emergence of transformative sustainability research with the genesis of the technical sciences, saw parallels and, moreover, no desire to overturn, but an organizational opportunity to broaden the scientific view.[27] Similarly, in a position paper, the German Council of Science and Humanities acknowledges the need to address "major societal challenges," which science policy actors would primarily understand as climate change, global warming, and clean energy (Wissenschaftsrat 2015, p. 15). The focus on social sustainability allows for an additional, reassuring, and encouraging parallel: presumably, the transformative sustainability sciences at the beginning of the 21st century fulfill a similar function as the social sciences did at the beginning of the 20th century. Sociology was not the only discipline to conceive of itself then as a medium of social reform and an answer to the social question as a class question (Kaufmann 2014). The result was the welfare state. A good century later, the eco-social question will be answered, if things go well, with a global "eco-welfare regime".

To conclude these considerations, which are dedicated to a sociologically based conceptualization and culminate in the thesis that only a "broad" understanding of social sustainability adequately meets the societal challenges, a brief look at alternative conceptualizations will be taken. Armin Grunwald's book *Understanding Sustainability*, which has documented and discussed this work on the concept and meaning of sustainable development, facilitates and accelerates this look (Grunwald 2016). Two lines of meaning appear helpful, also for locating one's own position. First, the distinction between "strong" and "weak" sustainability, and second, the distinction between "integrative" and "strong" sustainability.

„Strong" sustainability is an approach[28] that does not assume that resources and capital are mutually substitutable. In contrast, the approaches of "weak" sustainability represent precisely this substitutability - technology can replace nature, for example (Grunwald 2016, p. 121ff.). While the approaches of weak sustainability are mainly represented in neoclassical economics, it is rather philosophers who, oriented on principles, engage in discourses of justification, and whose strong sustainability assumptions are also not clouded by operationalization issues.

The conflict between "weak" and "strong" approaches in the sustainability discourse can be deciphered using the four-typology explained above: Weak approaches correspond to the more skeptical understanding of social sustainability. Those who focus on the market and the economy must be convinced, if only for epistemological reasons, that basically all social phenomena can be reduced to market relations and thus to relations of exchange. Strong approaches can be found in the three other concepts of social sustainability - depending on which additional political assumptions (more socialist, conservative or guarantist) prevail.

More remarkable and theoretically more demanding is the "integrative" concept of sustainable development that Grunwald himself prefers. It consists of three substantive elements: intra- and intergenerative justice, global orientation, and anthropocentric approach.[29] All three elements are relevant for the present conception, even if a different, namely historical-systematic approach is chosen here with the regime theory: The welfare

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27 Strohschneider 2014; Grunwald 2015, 2016.

28 Often it remains unclear whether these are theories, i.e. science, or political et al. perspectives for action.

29 Grunwald 2016, p. 94; but the derivation and thus the entire chapter 4 of his book is also worth reading.

regime theory approach advocated here is constituted in terms of both control and justice theory.

The problem is, however, that the three traditional regime concepts - liberal, socialist, conservative - find only very partial answers to intergenerational justice problems. Liberals think in terms of benefit calculations, socialists in terms of class utopias, conservatives in terms of community particularisms. Thus, intergenerational justice thinking can be distilled from any regime approach only to a limited extent. Only the guarantist approach - which underlies the UN's Sustainable Development Goals - seems to be substantially universalist in its approach. This also identifies the element of global orientation: analogous criteria apply, sustainability must be thought of and pursued globally. Finally, anthropocentrism: The concept of social sustainability and thus also the **broad** concept represented here are anthropocentric for epistemic reasons alone, as long as animals, trees or stones are not contractually capable members of societies. Contractual would mean that they also have obligations against humans and can be punishable accordingly. As long as nothing of this is evident, we should only hold humans and their societies responsible for sustainability.

4. How normative is social sustainability?

In a report on current attempts to ground a "sociology of sustainability," Anna Henkel observes "the sociological skepticism toward sustainability from the point of view of normativity" (Henkel 2017, p. 308). It may be helpful for non-sociologists to learn that this sociological skepticism has always applied to social policy as well, which has been regarded as "social reform," as (catheder-)socialist, or at any rate-as a science-not only applied and inferior therein, but also as sociology's normative and thus dirty little sister, much like social work. Here, too, Max Weber said what needed to be said almost a century ago in his paper on current attempts to ground a "sociology of sustainability," Anna Henkel observes "the sociological skepticism toward sustainability from the point of view of normativity" (Henkel 2017, p. 308). It may be helpful for non-sociologists to learn that this sociological skepticism has always applied to social policy as well, which has been regarded as "social reform," as (catheder-)socialist, or at any rate-as a science-not only applied and inferior therein, but also as sociology's normative and thus dirty little sister, much like social work. Here, too, Max Weber said what needed to be said almost a century ago in his.

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