

'PATCHWORKER': BIOGRAPHICAL CONSTRUCTION AND PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDES – STUDY OF THE MOTIVATIONS OF GERMAN ADULT EDUCATION STUDENTS DURING THE LAST 30 YEARS

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ABSTRACT

The text study the directly and indirectly social dimensions related to the development of a professional habitus linked to adult education (university education). The research, which gathers data (narratives and (auto)biographical writings) collected in the last 30 years, intent to verify if biographical patterns predestine individuals involved with their professional training choices or, if instead, adult education attracts specific target groups. This social research is linked to the vast field of the sociology of occupations and was developed in a university at north of the Federal Republic of Germany through the recollection of data and information with (auto)biographical interviews conducted with new students joining the university course. The conclusions obtained with this work indicate that the subjects involved are probable victims of a structural fraud caused by the modernization of the societies. In the process of upward socio-cultural mobility, customary lifeworld loses its 'natural' significance as horizon-forming knowledge guiding everyday interactions. Deeply anchored prescriptions for coping with reality – traditional mentalities and forms of habitus – become unstable and threaten to dissolve. Conventional rules of the original social environment lose their importance and are replaced by new social milieus. Biographical models are devaluated and have no functional successors. Through this process, a certain 'detachment' of contingent actions is developed by individuals from their 'natural' environments, in the narrow 'opening sector' of the modernized social space.

Keywords: Professional habitus. Adult education. Sociology of occupations.

RESUMO 'PATCHWORKER': CONSTRUÇÃO BIOGRÁFICA E ATITUDES PROFISSIONAIS – ESTUDO DAS MOTIVAÇÕES DOS ESTUDANTES ALEMÃES DURANTE OS ÚLTIMOS 30 ANOS

O texto estuda as dimensões sociais direta e indiretamente relacionadas ao desenvolvimento de um *habitus* profissional vinculado à educação de adultos (formação universitária). A coleta de dados realizada nos últimos 30 anos reúne narrativas e escritas autobiográficas, entrevistas realizadas com ingressantes em cursos de formação profissional universitária. Objetiva verificar se padrões biográficos predestinam os envolvidos a suas escolhas de formação profissional, ou, se, ao contrário, a educação superior atrai grupos específicos. Esta pesquisa social vincula-se ao vasto campo da sociologia das ocupações, e foi desenvolvida em uma universidade do norte da República Federal da Alemanha. As conclusões deste trabalho indicam que os sujeitos envolvidos são vítimas prováveis de uma fraude estrutural causada pela modernização das sociedades. No processo de mobilidade sociocultural ascendente, o habitual mundo da vida perde sua significância 'natural', como horizonte de formação de conhecimento guiando interações do dia a dia. Prescrições profundamente enraizadas para lidar com a realidade – mentalidades tradicionais e formas de *habitus* – tornam-se instáveis e ameaçadas de dissolução. Regras convencionais do ambiente social original perdem sua importância e são substituídas por novos meios sociais. Modelos biográficos são desvalorizados e não têm sucessores funcionais. Através deste processo é desenvolvido pelos indivíduos um certo 'desapego' de ações contingenciais, em seus respectivos ambientes 'naturais', no limitado 'setor aberto' do espaço social modernizado.

Palavras-chave: *Habitus* profissional. Educação de adultos. Sociologia das ocupações.

RESUMEN 'PATCHWORKER': CONSTRUCCIÓN BIOGRÁFICA Y ACTITUDES PROFESIONALES – ESTÚDIO DE LAS MOTIVACIONES DE LOS ESTUDIANTES ALEMANES DURANTE LOS ÚLTIMOS TREINTA AÑOS

El texto estudia las dimensiones sociales directa e indirectamente relacionadas con el desarrollo de un *habitus* profesional vinculado a la educación de adultos (formación universitaria). La recolección de datos realizada en los últimos 30 años incluye las narrativas y escritos autobiográficos, entrevistas realizadas a estudiantes que ingresan a cursos de formación profesional universitaria. Se tiene como objetivo verificar si patrones biográficos predestinan a los

involucrados en sus opciones de formación profesional, o si, por el contrario, la educación superior atrae a grupos específicos. Esta investigación social se vincula con el vasto campo de la sociología de las ocupaciones, y se desarrolló en una universidad del norte de Alemania. Las conclusiones de este trabajo indican que los sujetos implicados son probables víctimas de un fraude estructural causado por la modernización de las sociedades. En el proceso de movilidad sociocultural ascendente, el habitual mundo de la vida pierde su significado "natural", como horizonte de formación de conocimiento guiando interacciones cotidianas. Prescripciones profundamente arraigadas para hacer frente a la realidad - mentalidades tradicionales y formas de *habitus* - se tornan inestables y amenazadas de disolución. Reglas convencionales del entorno social de origen pierden su importancia y son reemplazadas por los nuevos medios sociales. Modelos biográficos son desvalorizados y no tienen sucesores funcionales. A través de este proceso, un cierto "desapego" a las acciones contingentes es desarrollado por individuos, en sus respectivos entornos naturales, en el restringido 'sector de la apertura' del espacio social modernizado.

Palabras clave: *Habitus* profesional. Educación de adultos. Sociología de las ocupaciones.

Introduction

One of the 'secret' components of our everyday knowledge, and one that has been the subject of intensive sociological research at least in recent years, is that certain activities form a specific *habitus* (see Koring, 1990, pp. 8ff). We know this phenomenon from the classical professions – doctors, theologians and lawyers. We also know it from highly interesting biographical analyses of 'modern' occupations, such as technicians or journalists (see Hermanns, Tkocz & Winkler, 1984; Möding & von Plato, 1989). By 'habitus' is meant - to borrow from Bourdieu (1987) – a set of routines, patterns of interpretation, as well as body language scripts that have been 'engraved', so to speak, through professional socialisation and many years of practice, and which have become a kind of background – even tacit – knowledge.

The more traditional the profession, the more visible this professional *habitus* is apparent. The patriarchal and sonorous Chief Physician with his jovial '*and how are we all today?*', the cleric who is pastoral in his attitude even in private conversation, or the 'rapacious' and 'wicked' economist – all of these are obvious caricatures, however, true in a certain sense.

The so-called 'new occupations' (Herrmann, 1990), especially in the field of education and social welfare services, are less easily characterised. They generally dispose of neither an established professional code of behaviour nor a canon of traditional and proven knowledge (Oevermann, 1981; Koring, 1987). Nevertheless, the most important recent empirical studies on the professions have been produced in precisely this field. One of the most

productive areas for such research seems to be that of *adult education*. Nor is it surprising that biographical research enjoys a position of some importance in this connection (Giesecke, 1989; Kade, 1989). It would not be altogether absurd to assume that the search for a professional habitus by those engaged in adult and further education could be the empirical expression of a deep professional identity crisis (Alheit, 1993a, 2010, 2014).

This would not be the place to discuss any large-scale studies on the professions. My analysis is more concerned with a *peripheral problem*, the social dimensions of which are related only indirectly to the development of a professional habitus – namely how do people decide in the first place to take up adult education studies? Can biographical patterns be identified which predestine individuals for such a course of studies? Or, put another way round, does adult education attract specific target groups?

The material presented does not come from a large-scale study in the sociology of occupations, but is a surprising by-product of lecture courses. For the last 30 years or so, introductions to qualitative methods of social research have been carried out on a regular basis within the Adult Education degree course at a university in Northern Germany. Some of the student project groups¹ were motivated in this context to conduct biographical interviews with new students joining the university course.² The

1 The didactic concept behind these seminars and lectures given by myself and my assistants envisage clearly defined 'research projects' (carried out by workgroups on research questions selected by themselves).

2 A total of 58 extensive narrative interviews were carried out in four interview cycles between 1984 and 2007. Each separate project group used the theoretical sampling procedure developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) in determining the sample to be interviewed (see Strauss, 1991; Alheit 1994a). To accomplish the material presented here, I also performed a theoretical sampling in order to obtain contrasting case studies that clearly illustrate the points being made. The interview extracts interpreted here

findings obtained are notable in various respects. In particular, the obvious change in the student profile leads one to cautious conclusions that are presented below. Firstly, I shall be presenting some qualitative data that is admittedly selective and of course particularly striking. Secondly, I shall follow this up with an attempt at placing the findings obtained within a wider theoretical context.

1.0 Characteristic changes in the profile of further education students: from 'clientelism' to 'post-modernism'

A short overview of the German system of continuing education and training should help those adult educators in South America who are not familiar with that system to realise the issues involved. In a certain sense, 'adult education' is the modern variant of the popular education that Adorno described in the mid-1950s as performing a 'gap-filling' and 'peripheral' function within the German education system as a whole (Adorno [1956], 1975, p. 15). Even though there are few terms or concepts that have had a more high-flying career since the introduction of the *continuing education* [*Weiterbildung*] label in the 1970 *Structural Plan for the Educational System* [*Strukturplan für das Bildungswesen*], the 'gap-filler' aspect has adhered. The so-called 'realistic turn', the increasing institutionalisation of the new '*quarternary education sector*' and, above all, its growing importance for the labour market, have done nothing to change this (Alheit 1993b); nor has the greater 'scientific' or academic nature of the courses, which has been associated since

are 'by-products', so to speak, of what was initially an 'open', but subsequently a 'selective coding process' (cf Strauss 1991). Because my own intensive experience as a lecturer during the period in question provided me with contextual knowledge far exceeding that in the interviews, the information on the subject of interest can qualify as highly 'saturated'.

the beginning of the 1970s with an increase in the number of adult education departments at German universities. In any case, these have not resulted in the profession becoming more established in any major sense, and have led to a fluid mixture of specialist, social, organisational, entertainment and occasionally charismatic base qualifications condensing to an independent professional habitus (see Axmacher 1990, p. 30). So how does someone end up wanting to acquire this habitus through starting such a course of studies, a habitus of such oscillating fluidity that secret crises of self-esteem are created by the mere question that lay persons may pose, namely 'what is it actually?' and 'what do you learn?'

1.1 Case type 1: Brigitte³

Brigitte was born in the early 1940s in southern Germany, comes from a middle-class Protestant family and considers herself a member of the '68 generation. She started a sociology degree in a large West German city during the student movement days, but discontinued this when she married young and had a daughter. However, she was always socially involved while her two children were still infants (she had a son one year after the birth of her daughter), and her husband, a liberal and successful businessman in the high-tech sector of industry supports her in this respect. At first she was active in a self-organised day-care centre, and later on in a project for helping the homeless. Since the mid-1970s, she has been involved in organising support for labour migrants – especially from Italy – and has gained experiences in the field of adult education with these groups.

She builds on this experience and develops into a specialist for cultural work within local communities. During the following five years

she organises, together with various adult education bodies, an interesting cycle of projects in the field of education and culture, also acting in a capacity as part-time teacher. She describes this as a very interesting and exciting period in her biography, one where she learnt much more than during the student movement.

The family moves to northern Germany in the early 1980s on account of her husband's new job. At first, she is frustrated, but decides then relatively quickly to go back to university and do a degree in adult education in the new department set up at the local university. In one 'core passage'⁴ of her biographical narrative she says,

Well, Jenny and Erik were now, like, bigger basically – I mean what's big, they were just out of the way, doing their own thing.

Dieter [the husband] had his job and was hardly ever at home and I was just sitting there, hardly knew anyone and the main thing was that I was missing my work terribly, this thing about doing something for others.

Sometimes I sat in the flat and cried, feeling, well, superfluous, out on a limb.

Well - and then I just heard about this new degree course... And to be quite honest, I didn't know what the word meant in the first place.

Anyway, I just went along, joined this seminar and found it okay. Any how it was clear that this was what I wanted to do.

It had always got up my nose that I didn't finish that academic thing properly. So I wanted to do it... 'twas a bit a struggle at first...

What with Dieter saying 'Uni? What good's that going to do you? and so on. And the kids asking

⁴ 'Core passages', as already suggested in footnote 2, are the result of advanced interpretation (coding) processes. The notation used for transcribing the text items is a simple one that aids readability – literary transcription close to the spoken text and made readable through the use of conventional punctuation: notation of single propositions; dashes ('-') to mark prosodic caesura; underlining ('y'know?') to show emphatic stress; use of square brackets ('[...]') to make place names anonymous or to explain new names.

³ All names used in describing case types are pseudonyms, of course.

'Who's going to do the housework?... That got right up my nose.

I just made up my mind quite simply and in a way it was a continuation of the work I was doing in [city].

Symptomatically, Brigitte starts this passage about a crucial turn in her occupational biography with a reference to her family. She 'heals', *ex ante*, her later decision to start a course of studies at the university: the children are bigger, her husband is absorbed in his job. Such an active and self-confident woman obviously feels the need to think about whether her future vocational training will damage their family life. Even the fact that all the other members of the family appear to be going their own respective ways provides her with only a skeleton legitimization. Women, in contrast to men, tend to load the decision in favour of an occupation, a decision that is just as serious for them as for men, with ambivalences, essentially because having an occupation does not reduce the issue of inner-family relations to one with only secondary importance (see, *inter alia*, Dausien, 1996).

On the other hand, the option of pursuing an occupation in Brigitte's case is not some spurious avoidance strategy. She is not completely fulfilled by the family situation. More dramatically still, she was *'missing her work terribly'*. It is symptomatic that the protagonist labels her various part-time activities as *work*. The connotations of the term appear to integrate both aspects for her - occupational or specialist competence (*'my work'*) and also the social, perhaps political necessity that lies behind her involvement (*'this thing about doing something for others'*). The experience of being marginalised (*'... sat there and cried ... superfluous ... out on a limb'*) are clear indications of this.

The *'new course of studies'* is a kind of anchor. In no sense does it appear to be a taken-for-granted way out. She is not even sure

at first what the course actually involves in terms of content (*'to be quite honest, I didn't know what the word meant in the first place'*). Brigitte's reaction is clearly a pragmatic one. She does not make her decision out of some naive enthusiasm, although she knows that the number of alternatives is limited. She *'just went along'* and gained her own impression. Her positive judgement is the precondition for the final decision in favour of studying (*'... found it okay'*).

The fact that her decision is based on *pragmatic* rather than emotional considerations is confirmed once again by her use of the adverbial *'anyhow'* (*'Anyhow it was clear'*). Biographical and situative ambivalences are not completely removed. Instead, recourse is made to *'dormant'* ambivalences (*'that academic thing'*). The very distanced formulation she uses in this context - *'that academic thing'* - shows that the problem for Brigitte is not so much the course as such but the fact that there is a loose end in her biography (*'didn't finish that academic thing properly'*). And she has no desire to continue on from the sociology degree she had been taking at that time, but instead the *work* she did where she used to live. As a daughter from a middle-class and Protestant home it is not so much the career, but the subject itself that she is interested in. However, her interest is not without its problems. The *gender bias* comes into effect. Husband and children demand the housewife in her. For the second time, Brigitte uses the highly connotative expression *'got up my nose'* in connection with an autonomous decision she took, but now there can be no more role bargaining - the issue is her own biographical continuity and consistency (*'a continuation of the work I was doing in [city]'*).

The decision to take up adult education studies has something to do with a specific *match* - this is particularly evident through the

ambivalences and interruptions of the *female* biography. The university course is a continuation of something that is already existent in her biography. Brigitte exemplifies in a certain sense a particular type of student characteristic of socially and politically committed adult education students during the 1980s – people with specific occupational, semi-occupational, social or political experiences that they expect to see continued and consolidated through further study. The course is not seen initially as an independent instance of occupational socialisation, but as a phase in a habitus-formation process that has long since commenced.

Werner, a student from the same generation with many years' experience in continuing vocational training, expresses it thus:

Of course, I want to get something out of the course, I can also imagine coming into contact with some new ideas, I mean new findings in the field, stimulation basically we'll see what happens but the main reason why I'm starting this is sort of: to get on career-wise, not necessarily to make the big time, although - why not?

The initial motivation in Werner's case is more pragmatic, almost instrumental in nature. The purpose of studying is to upgrade his current level of professionalism (*'the big time ... why not?'*). Klaus describes this somewhat differently:

Well, I have always seen my education work in political terms that was what made me go back to university. Whatever, but then I happened to hear that such and such people are here at the university, so here I am.

Klaus is politically motivated, but he, too, sees his future studies as a *continuation* of his prior (professional/political) practice. Studying adult education is a more or less important phase in what is essentially a *linearly* conceived qualification process.

Surprisingly, the range of specific subjects on offer within the department during the

1980s appears to have taken these hidden options into account. In addition to a limited and unspecific basic range of courses in fields like didactics, organisation and counselling in adult education, there are also a wealth of lectures and seminar courses with a professional but above all *political* orientation. In fact, it almost appears as if the various 'matching needs' correspond to a kind of dependency culture or even 'clientelism' on the part of the academic staff themselves – some of them continuously satisfy the demand for trade union related themes in education, others regularly address major problems in Left political history, while others again concentrate the course they offer on clients from vocational or in-company continuing training. In the course of the 1990s, the situation appears to have undergone dramatic changes, however. 'Clientelism' – if the term can even be used in this context – is only found in the field of feminist studies. The biographical profiles and the 'matching needs' of normal students at this point in time have clearly shifted.

1.2 Case type 2: Mike

Mike was born in the late 1960s and comes from a small town in the North of Germany. His milieu of origin is more proletarian-petit bourgeois. His father is a stove setter. However, he has greater ambitions for his children (Mike is the eldest son). They should learn something and achieve more in life than he has managed to do. To obtain this end, he led an authoritarian regime in the family, regularly monitoring school performance, for example, Mike to use his own words, *'always had the feeling of not living up to what father expected'*.

His grades in school are mediocre. After leaving secondary intermediate school he trains as a carpenter, a trade that will not enable him to earn much money. After passing his examinations he does temporary jobs, before going to a technical college. He enjoys

studying, but has no occupational perspective. He leaves technical college with a matriculation standard certificate and goes on to an engineering college, which he then leaves after only one term because he *'hates all that swotting'*, as he puts it.

He works for more than a year as a barman in a 'scene' pub, but ends up deciding to go back to polytechnic and study social work. When he completes his degree there are no more jobs in this field, and he is forced once again to take any job he can find. Various pubs, surveys for opinion research institutes and work as guide in the Middle East are the different stops he made.

At the age of 30 he decides to study adult education. At one important place in his interview he says,

Crazy. Always this feeling of 'that's not what I'm really after', always starting from scratch. The same thing'll probably happen again with this course. I'm doing it, even enjoying it, but nothing'll come out of it. I mean, it could turn out differently, of course, I mean, adult education sounds pretty good an' all. But then - as some of my mates said, they don't get yer back so much as far as learning and all that's concerned. What I mean is you can work on the side as well. So that's what I'm looking for and that's the kind of thing I need. I just wonder if it'll get me anywhere?

Mike commences his introduction to the subject of 'adult education' within his biographical narrative with a concise stock-take of his situation – *'Crazy ... always starting from scratch'*. His repetition of 'always' indicates a kind of 'ritual framing'. Mike is broaching a central motif of his biography, a 'key structure', as it were: *'that's not what I'm really after'*. And he inserts this structure into the quoted passage from his biographical narrative in many different ways. His 'bad prophecy' – *'The same thing'll probably happen again with this course'* – is one example, as it is the fatalistic

sequence of decision, enjoyment, failure. However, the possible alternative is still mentioned (*'it could turn out differently, of course'*) and linked connotatively to his adult education studies.

What is striking here is that the narrator does not explain his positive associations in rational terms at first, but aesthetically instead (*'sounds pretty good'*). Only at a second approach does he provide pragmatic arguments – his 'mates' find what he is doing a good thing; the demands placed on him are not excessive and he can *'work on the side as well'*, an aspect that can be vital for his economic survival. Mike sums up by saying *'So that's what I'm looking for and that's and that's the kind of thing I need'*, or, paraphrased a little ironically, an involvement that sound good, doesn't put me under stress, where I can work on the side. The worrying question *'I just wonder if it'll get me anywhere?'* at the end of the sequence leads back to the reality principle.

Mike's dispositions are not representative in any statistical sense, of course, but they are typical in the sense of a 'law' that operates for an individual case, as Kurt Lewin (1969 [1931]) has so convincingly argued. The dynamic of Mike's educational biography confronts us with a key feature in the field we are looking at. This is demonstrated clearly by some passages from other interviews.

Valina sums up her previous qualification experience as follows:

All the things I've already done, or tried, two degrees, getting my first practical experience again and again, interrupted again and again cos of the children, new themes - environment - women - body - dance, job creation schemes [fictional] employment instead of social welfare benefit], the end.

I'm sceptical about this adult education thing. But what else can I do?

Listings like these conjure up images of

biography as a *'patchwork'* – at least at first glance: many separate pieces, almost collages, but only few visible lines. The same applies to Doris:

Listen, I've been looking for the right thing for me for years, I stopped being a nurse, 'cos it was destroying me. Man, I've done therapies - two - three then school, hard enough for me, and now this university course. D'you know, it's somehow like, if you were seeking something.

In contrast to Brigitte, Werner and Klaus, these people's biographical experience cannot be used as *resources*, at least not in the occupational sphere. Instead, they are virtually unconnected passages in a strange kind of searching process, the end point of which, the adult education course, obtains an astonishingly arbitrary status.

This may explain the fact that the range of courses on offer within the department underwent changes during the 1990s. 'Clientelism' is superseded by a certain consolidation and expansion of the basic range of professional-based courses. The arbitrariness also increases, however: there is an inflationary accession in cultural themes, 'lifeworld' becomes a programmatic concept, special courses on theatre, video, or self-encounter increase in number. Even meditation and esoteric subjects are included. The 'stars', however, are gender-based issues. Seminars specifically for *men* are also integrated in the programme.

It is no exaggeration to speak of a *'post-modernisation'* of the curriculum. 'Patchworkers' are offered a university landscape in the form of 'collages' – sporadic reference to particular meanings without any genuine form of 'meta-narrative' or common understanding, aestheticised arbitrariness without any consistency of legitimation. This outcome appears symptomatic. Does it also lead us to any plausible theoretical interpretations?

2.0 'Patchworkers': the 'multiply bamboozled'

At face value, the shift from the 'Brigitte' to the 'Mike' case type signifies only a changed disposition towards the adult education course. In fact, however, there is a considerable irritation of biographical construction patterns at work. Whereas Brigitte is able to systematically deploy her biographical resources in order to integrate successfully the new learning experience into her overall body of experience by means of tried and tested typifications, Mike is compelled to regroup his arsenal of typifications yet again when he starts the course. The biographical 'patchworking', into which his adult education degree is inserted is indicative of a specific problem.

The following ideas are not aimed at supporting this observation with empirical data, but instead are an attempt to provide a *theoretical* explanation that is more than simply 'object-related'. It is a variation on ideas put forward by Jeffrey Alexander, who sees the interface between social action and its various 'environments' as being the critical location for the theoretical integration of micro- and macro-sociological statements (Alexander, 1993, pp. 196ff). The intention is thus to describe contingent biographical action both theoretically and empirically as interaction with specific environments and to define these environments as products of biographical action.

2.1 The erosion of biographical action environments

There is nothing revolutionary about the idea that contingent actions possess 'environments' (see Parsons, 1966). What is striking is that the classical micro-sociologies, regardless of whether the approach is subsumed under the interpretative paradigm, or the more recent rational choice concept, are not able to

supply a useful actor-environment model, for the simple reason that they disassociate the action itself from its environments – be it egological or situationist in nature, or informed by a strictly rationalist focus (see Alexander, 1993, pp. 199ff). In other words, we might experience much about how social actors picture their action environments, how they ‘model’ these environments from within their own perspective and with their own consciously or sub-consciously available knowledge, which calculation they make about the consequences of their actions etc, but we have little insight into these environments as such.

Jeffrey Alexander adopts Parsons’ three classical systemic action environments: ‘culture’, ‘society’ and ‘personality’ (1993, pp. 204ff). Knowledge that we gain from these environments, not only for rational appraisal of action, but also for intuitive calculation and necessary typifications, is ‘constructed’ in such a way that it treats new phenomena as if they were social facts that have long been known. If established typifications and implicit or explicit calculation no longer suffice, then their place is taken by ‘inventions’ that compensate for the loss of orientation. All this is normal and a component of everyday action. Only when the environment of social action changes so dramatically that neither establishes nor new typifications suffice are we possibly forced to drop even intuitive calculations and to narrate the story of our life in a completely new way (see Alheit 1996).

This case, however, can only be expected in particularly precarious social situations, but the target group we are concerned with here could be especially vulnerable to this precarious development. Proceeding on this assumption would have the benefit of the implicit hypothesis that the environments of contingent action – culture, society and personality with their resources of tradition, solidarity and

identity (see Habermas, 1981, II, pp. 211ff) – are in no sense universal givens, but depend instead on the position of actors in the social space (see Bourdieu, 1987). *Culture* then appears specifically as horizon-forming sociality, i.e. as particular ‘lifeworld’, or the social world in reach. *Society* is above all the dimension of social integration as experienced at community level, i.e. the social milieu to which I belong. And *personality* stands for the act of ‘biographising’ my individuality, that I must perform wherever I have a place in society: the continued synchronisation of the experience I actually have with the experience that I believe myself to have – the constant engineering of consistency and continuity of my ‘self’.

Let us now imagine that the horizon-forming resources of internalised cultural patterns, such as the incorporated ‘habitus’ that we have acquired, suddenly lose all value. Let us further imagine that we have to leave, voluntarily or under compulsion, our original social milieu. Finally, imagine that all this leads to the ‘re-writing’ of our biography. This would roughly be the point of crisis where the ‘environments’ of our action are shifting so rapidly that reactions would be unavoidable (see again Alheit, 1996).

2.2 ‘Opening’ and ‘closing’ of the social space

Over the last 30 years, in the ‘old’ states of West Germany at least, we have indeed been observing an astonishing dynamism in the social space. Not that the crisis we described is normality in any sense. But indications that the social space is ‘opening’ cannot be overlooked (Bourdieu, 1987; Vester et al., 1992; Alheit, 1992, 1994b). And this opening has something to do with a hidden dramatic change in socially specific action environments.

This can be illustrated with some well-known examples: since the early 1950s until the 1980s, the percentage of children from working

class families who study has more than quadrupled. Over the same period, the proportion of women students has risen from 13% to nearly 40% (Vester et al., 1992, pp. 166ff). Educational reform has therefore created movement in the social structure. Parallel to these shifts, the number of so-called 'new occupations' has also been growing. These are occupations that – to borrow from Bourdieu – require a high proportion of 'cultural capital' - occupations in education and training, in science, artistic and cultural professions, occupations in the social welfare field (see Herrmann, 1990).

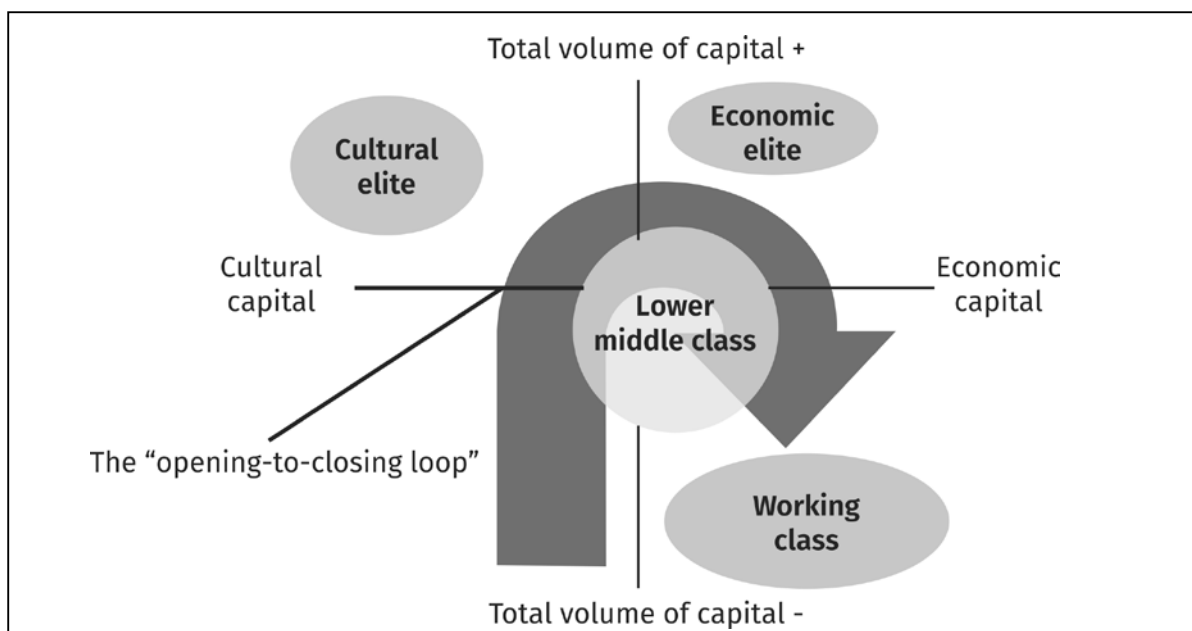
This opening of social space is therefore relatively unmistakable. If we illustrate this on Bourdieu's matrix, we have a dynamic shift from the lower right-hand cell (low volume of total capital, little cultural capital) to the upper centre-to-left area (medium-sized total capital volume, increasing growth of cultural capital; see Fig. 1). Admittedly, this opening process is somewhat problematic for a variety of reasons. Successful social climbers – the 'modernisation winners', so to speak – receive jobs from the pool created through educational reform as a reward for their newly acquired (academic) titles. But entering these new posi-

tions is bound up with two social experiences that confuse (see Alheit, 1993b):

- They frequently experience that the cultural capital they have acquired, above all the social capital they carry with them, i.e. the resource we normally call 'connections', does not suffice to 'fill out' the new position (Alheit, 1993b).
- The expansion of the pool of jobs and the extension of social access has an inflationary effect on the status value of the new post. Upward social mobility is devalued *post festum*.

This is the category to which the cohort in *case type 1* can be assigned – a generation of 'winners' in the opening process who in many cases suffer from their own social ascent. The successors, the 'losers' of the opening process, are hit even harder. Bourdieu speaks of the '*bamboozled generation*' (1987, pp. 241ff). Many achieve the desired 'title', but the positions to go with it have become extremely scarce. The acquisition and devaluation of cultural capital go hand in hand. The process of upward mobility turns out to be a 'loop' and we observe a closing of the social space. This is the category to which we can assign *case type 2* (see Fig. 1):

Fig. 1: The 'social loop' of the patchwork generation (according to Bourdieu's social space)



2.3 ‘Patchworkers’: victims of a structural fraud?

‘Patchworkers’ are the probable victims of a structural fraud caused by the modernisation of modern societies. In the process of upward social-cultural mobility, customary *lifeworlds* lose their ‘natural’ significance as horizon-forming knowledge guiding everyday interaction. Deeply anchored prescriptions for coping with reality – traditional mentalities and forms of habitus – become unstable and threaten to dissolve.

Conventional rules of the original social environment lose their importance and are replaced by *new social milieus* (Alheit & Vester, 1993). *Biographical models* are devalued and have no functional successor (Alheit, 1996). Through this process, a certain ‘detachment’ of contingent actions by individuals from their ‘natural’ environments actually does develop, in the narrow ‘opening sector’ of the modernised social space. We can observe three symptoms of this change, each relating to one of the action environments described above (see Fig. 2):

Fig. 2: Symptoms of crises in everyday knowledge

General levels of orientation Intra-action environments	culture	society	personality	resources
Lifeworld	risks of destraditionalization	“colonialisation” of traditional lifeworld resources	erosion of tacit knowledge	tradition
social milieu	loss of collective orientation	social differentiation	alienation	solidarity
biography	lack of images	loss of motivation	“artificialisation of biography”	identity

Taken from: Alheit, 1994b, p. 187 (inspired by Habermas, 1981, II, p. 215)

1. **Latent detraditionalisation of lifeworlds.** Background certainties previously taken for granted are becoming precarious. The traditional habitus of origin loses significance, leaving behind a wide orientation gap. This symptom has been superbly researched with respect to the

educational careers of working-class girls (see Schlüter (ed.), 1993).

2. **Social differentiation of milieus.** It would be a mistake to believe that all traditional milieus are equally affected by such dissolution processes. Instabilities are certainly evident in that ‘open-

ing corridor' of the social space. This is the location for a clear separation and differentiation of classical proletarian and petit-bourgeois milieus – the background milieus for social climbers (see Vester et al., 2002). New social milieus come into being, the consistency of which can be forecast only with difficulty. One of the most spectacular examples of the past two decades, the so-called '*left-alternative milieu*', has shrunk dramatically following its short career in the 1980s, and is later tending towards 2% of the population (see Becker, Becker & Ruhland, 1992, p. 80).

3. *Artificialisation of biography*. In the process of forced detachment from traditional patterns of expectation, the blueprints of modern biographies are also becoming more fragile. In particular within spheres of the social space, 'life histories' are no longer accepted as attempts by social actors to explain and communicate with themselves and with easily idealised Others, but in certain circumstances may be 'staged' with more or less effort or amusement (Scheuermann, 1994; Alheit, 1994b). Something could develop here into a form of social practice that exponents of system theory describe in highly abstract terms as the necessity of '*auto-poiesis*' of personal systems (see Nassehi & Weber, 1990).

To summarise these observations, we can state that there is clearly a dynamic change in the dispositions and action environments in a certain sphere of the social space. It is also becoming apparent that interrelated reference systems are highly vulnerable. The crisis of lifeworld prescriptions – a phenomenon of the late 20th century at least in Europe – does not automatically produce 'new lifeworlds'.

To return to our adult education example: 'patchworkers' are obviously victims of the opening and closing of the social space. *Patchworking* is a biographical strategy for linking the continued promise of social ascent with the experience of actual exclusion. The choice of ascent routes is by no means coincidental – the new occupations in the field of 'human services' are the primary choice, but the relevant labour markets are virtually closed. However, because precisely these qualification routes are those chosen by the potentially marginalised, the latter become victims of a 'double' exclusion or devaluation. Those affected are *multiply bamboozled*:

- In the process of forced *patchworking*, current students of adult education select 'study worlds' with analogous structures – qualification patchworks without any consistency.
- Diffuse ambitions converge with diffuse milieus of available options. Any form of professional habitus-formation is blocked from the very outset.

The peripheral problem mentioned at the beginning, i.e. whether we can identify '*biographical patterns*' that lead to the choice of the adult education degree course, cannot be answered with any finality. One very sceptical and partial solution suggests itself, however. There is obviously a kind of structural complementarity between characteristic structures of expectations and supply. To put it more bluntly – adult education as an academic discipline (at least in Germany) has itself followed a 'patchwork career' since its brief social climb during the 1970s. In congruence with the biographical experience of a substantial proportion of its later clientèle, it has been subject to a kind of 'post-modernisation' of its own profile. Any predictions of future prospects would be very risky against the background of this finding, which is somewhat limited in its application.

Given the data presented here, a stable and resistant occupational habitus *cannot* be expect-

ed for the time being in the academic field of adult education in Germany.

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