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# ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY IN EUROPE: SWITZERLAND

By

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A glance at the history of Swiss sociology<sup>1</sup> indicates that reflection on the relation between the economy and society was an important element in research and teaching in Swiss universities as early as the end of the 19th century. Therefore, the historical roots of current economic sociology are the core topic of the first section of this article. The second section describes attempts to revitalize and to institutionalize this sociological subdiscipline at Swiss universities after World War II. In the third section, a compact overview of current research projects follows.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the list of authors and projects referred to in this survey does neither claim to be representative nor complete.

## Between Institutional Emancipation and Antisociological Zeitgeist

Doubtless the most prominent figure to engage in anchoring economic sociology in university teaching and research in Switzerland was Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923). Although Pareto was appointed by the University of Lausanne in 1893 to teach economics, he fought vehemently to get sociology accepted as an equal subdiscipline of the social sciences (cf. also Pareto 1986). A further but less prominent promoter of economic sociology was Louis Wuarin, who taught sociology, social economics and the study of political systems at the University of Geneva between 1890 and 1921. As in Geneva, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the claim that the study of the economy should no longer be monopolized by economics was heard in Fribourg. In contrast to Geneva, however, this demand was supported not by the liberal bourgeoisie but by the protagonists of Catholic social theory. In view of this, it may be no surprise that Kaspar Decurtins, leader of the Catholic labour movement in Switzerland, co-author of the papal *Enzyklika Rerum Novarum* (1884-1891) and the person responsible for the recruitment of lecturers at the “Catholic” university founded in 1889, first committed Pater Albert Maria Weiss as Professor of Economics and Social Theory.

As in Lausanne, early economic sociology studies in Bern and Basle also stem primarily from economists. The Ukrainian Naum Reichesberg (1867-1928) counts as one of these. In 1898, he received a professorship in the capital and supported the expansion of public statistics and an international law for the protection of workers. In Basle it was primarily Hans Ritschl, the

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1 Due to the linguistic and confessional diversity in the country as well as its federalistic academic system there is actually no genuine Swiss tradition in sociological theory and research (cf. Levy 1989, Zürcher 1995). Swiss sociologists indeed make more references to their colleagues using the same language in the North (Germany) or in the West (France) than to their compatriots beyond the linguistic border.

2 The author would like to thank Thomas Eberle, René Levy, Ueli Mäder, Chantal Magnin, Andreas Pfeuffer, Alex Salvisberg, Christian Suter, and Patrick Ziltener for the information they provided.

successor of Robert Michels (1876-1936) (professor of economics and statistics, 1914-1928), who rendered outstanding services in this connection. He focused on the sociology of finance in his lecture course on economics and sociology. From 1928 Edgar Salin (1892-1974), neohistorical economist and PhD supervisor of Talcott Parsons, taught in Basle. He found international recognition as first editor of the originally transdisciplinary journal *Kyklos* (from 1948), and as an advocate of the idea that economics should take into consideration the structural and cultural contexts of economic action (cf. Salin 1967 [1923]).

At the University of Zurich only the activities of Josef Goldstein stand out at this time. In 1898 Goldstein received the *venia legendi* (authorization to teach at a university) for statistics and economic policy, whereby his reputation rested on the work “Berufsgliederung und Reichtum” (occupational structure and wealth) and on studies concerning population development and occupational structure in France, which were discussed in detail in the journal *Année Sociologique*. Besides his courses “Moral-, Sozial- und Wirtschaftsstatistik”, he also taught on the “Gesetzmässigkeiten im Gesellschaftsleben” (regularities in social life) in the winter semester of 1899/1900 as well as in 1904/1905 on the “Zusammenhänge von Wirtschaft und Technik” (relationships between economy and technology). His career came to an abrupt end when the Social Darwinist, member of the National Assembly and factory owner, Eduard Sulzer-Ziegler (1854-1913) complained to the education authorities following a factory visit that Goldstein had undermined the “authority of the enterprise” and the majority of the visitors were (female) Russian students.

Similar to sociology on the whole, economic sociology suffered a severe set-back in Swiss universities in the period between the wars. A symbolic low was doubtlessly the presentation of an honorary doctorate at the University of Lausanne in 1937 to Benito Mussolini, who was praised as the “créateur et réalisateur d'une conception sociologique originale” (from Zürcher 1995, p. 163) in the laudatio. The initiator of this honour was Pasquale Boninsegni, who as successor of Pareto had been responsible for teaching political economics and sociology since 1926. The antidemocratic and antisociological *zeitgeist* in the 1930s also gained a foothold at the University of Fribourg, for in 1933 Jacob Lorenz (1883-1946), a prominent antisocialist and antiliberal and glowing supporter of an authoritative “Swiss corporatism”, was appointed to the new chair for Economics and Sociology.

### **Attempts at Revitalization after the End of World War II**

Important contributions to economic sociology immediately after the end of the war stem from Maurice Erard (University of Neuchâtel) and Richard F. Behrendt (University of Bern). The economist Erard occupied the first chair for Sociology in Neuchâtel between 1954 and 1986. As a dedicated “sociologue pluraliste”, since 1948 he taught not only general sociology but also the history of economics, statistics and econometrics. His most important research work dealt with the enterprise (Erard 1960), women's participation in employment and class structures. Like Erard, Behrendt, who held a chair between 1953 and 1965, was a qualified economist. His research and teaching interests were directed primarily towards the interaction between the economic and sociocultural factors in development processes (Behrendt 1965). Although Behrendt, contrary to Erard, was not appointed as a sociologist but rather as a economist, he fought vehemently to establish the “Institut für Soziologie und sozio-ökonomische Fragestellungen” in 1960.

Aptly, in the same year that Behrendt left Switzerland for Berlin, thus weakening the orientation towards economic sociology at the Institute in Berne, the University of Basle appointed the economist Karl William Kapp (up to 1976) as Salin's successor. Kapp's reputation was based on the pioneering socioecological work *The Social Costs of Private Enterprise*, he had published in 1950. After the departure of Behrendt, the sociology of development nevertheless experienced an upswing in Switzerland, and this is primarily thanks to Peter Heintz, who was appointed in 1966 to the new chair for Sociology in Zurich, where he focussed among other things on the crossnational stratification patterns in the world economy (Heintz 1969, Heintz and Heintz 1974). In St. Gallen and Basle too, economic sociology gained in importance towards the end of the 1960s. Thus in 1968, the Sociological Seminary was founded at the commercial academy of St. Gallen under the directorship of Andreas Miller and "economic sociology" was established as a main subject (until 1991). The appointment of Paul Trappe followed in 1969 in Basle. As a former member of Behrendt's staff, he has been interested in questions of development in general (Trappe 1984) and rural sociology and cooperatives in particular (Trappe 1966).

The upswing of economic sociology continued in the 1980s as well. After his appointment in 1982, François Hainard proceeded with Erard's tradition in economic sociology by making the cultural aspects of the economy and the problems of migration his major topics (Hainard 1981). However, it was the Sociological Institute of the University of Zurich built up by Heintz, which became a stronghold of economic sociology in the 1980s. As early as the 1970s, a number of Heintz' scholars published various studies in economic sociology (e.g., Bornschier 1976, Höpflinger 1977). In particular, the work of Volker Bornschier caught international attention, especially his cross-national analyses of the effects of the activities of transnational firms on income distribution and economic growth in the periphery of the world economy (Bornschier and Chase-Dunn 1985). In the 1980s, he also focussed on social stratification in Switzerland and on long waves in the development of Western industrial societies (Bornschier 1998 [1988]). In the 1990s, he further investigated the European integration process (Bornschier 2000a) as well as the growth effects stemming from European integration and collective social capital (Bornschier 2000b). The strong position of economic sociology in Zurich is underpinned by Bornschier's teaching activities, the projects of the World Society Foundation founded by Heintz who died in 1983, and by various contributions from his collaborators. Their studies were concerned, among other issues, with economic crises in Mexico (Stamm 1992), with debt cycles in the world system (Suter 1992) with neo-corporatism, industrial relations and interest groups in the European Union (Nollert 1992/1997), with changes in the European integration process (Ziltener 1999), and with development strategies in Malaysia (Trezza 2001). Moreover, two colleagues of Bornschier, Hans Geser, Marlis Buchmann (Professor at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) from 1990 and from 1994 also at the University of Zurich) and their collaborators have also been concerned with sociological aspects of the economy (e.g., Fluder et al. 1991, Buchmann et al. 1999).

With the appointment of Claudia Honegger and Andreas Diekmann in 1990, the University of Berne again started to conduct research in the field of economic sociology. To begin with, it is noticeable that Honegger primarily uses qualitative research methods, whereas Diekmann utilizes quantitative ones. Worth mentioning are the studies of Diekmann (together with Josef Brüderle and Henriette Engelhart, 1993) on gender related income discrimination and on the

Swiss Labour Market Survey 1998, and a Swiss version of Pierre Bourdieu's *La Misère du Monde* (Honegger and Rychner 1998).

After Miller's departure from St. Gallen in 1991, the main subject "economic sociology" in economics was replaced by the general, department-independent subject of *Management of Social Processes*. Nevertheless, the Sociological Seminar, meanwhile headed by Peter Gross, has carried out many projects in economic sociology since the end of the 1980s. The following should be mentioned here: a survey on the computerization of small businesses, studies on the importance of the self-employed in processes of structural economic change, on employee apathy, on firms' policies concerning older employees, on computerization of management, as well as ethnographical studies on Japanese managers in Switzerland and on foreign exchange dealers. There were also interesting contributions from Emil Walter Busch of the Institute for Work and Labour Law (Business Management Department).

Of particular interest are doubtlessly the works of René Levy (University of Lausanne) on social stratification (Levy et al. 1997), of François-Xavier Merrien (University of Lausanne) on labour markets and New Public Management, of Yves Flückiger (economist at the University of Geneva) on income inequality, economic integration problems and new forms of employment, of Jean Ziegler (Professor at the University of Geneva since 1972) on famines in the Third World, of Pierre Weiss (University of Geneva) on employment and work, as well as the study on poverty from Ueli Mäder (Basle, 1991). Furthermore, the works of Christian Suter, at the ETH since 1997, should be emphasized. Suter's work deals, among other things, with the relationship between globalization and regime changes in Latin America (Suter 1999) and with the living conditions of single mothers and the redistribution effects of welfare state measures. Finally, it should be mentioned that since 1998, the two chairs in Neuchâtel carry the label "General and Economic Sociology".

### **The Main Focus of Current Research**

Looking at current research activities at the universities<sup>3</sup>, it is a matter of fact that the labour market and the problems of development are getting most attention. Sociological research on the labour market plays an important role, especially in Berne and Zurich. Diekmann (with Ben Jann) is conducting a survey on the "Future of Working Life" that investigates the objective situation of the working population on the labour market and the subjective value which people attach to work. Also, the 1997 ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) module on "Work Orientations" will be replicated. His colleague Ruth Meyer Schweizer is responsible for the Univox long-term surveys on basic attitudes to work, working values, and perception of one's own work situation. Also in Berne, Honegger together with Chantal Magnin is conducting a sociological survey on the unemployment insurance in Switzerland based on the practice in regional labour office centres. In Zurich, it is mainly the chairs of Geser and Buchmann that deal with the sociological aspects of work. Together with the Swiss Institute for Business Cycle Research (KOF/ETH) and collaborators (e.g., Urs Meuli), Geser is currently in charge of a prospective study of Swiss companies in industry, trade and the service industry under the title of *Wandel der Arbeitswelt* (change in the world of work, see <http://socio.ch/work/home.htm>). Buchmann's current research projects at the ETH deal with

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<sup>3</sup> In non-university research institutes, sociological aspects of economic phenomena hardly play a role at all. A praiseworthy exception is the Swiss Academy of Development in Bienne, founded in 1991 (see <http://www.sad.ch>).

the change in working and occupational qualifications (with Stefan Sacchi), with educational, occupational and employment careers (with Sacchi, Irene Kriesi and Andrea Pfeifer), with work and identity (with Alexander Salvisberg), and with the importance of new information and communication technologies (with Salvisberg). Work is also an issue in the study of working-poor from Olivier Steiner (Basle), Ueli Mäder and Stefan Kutzner (both Fribourg), in the project on employment policy in the European Union from Jean-Michel Bonvin (Fribourg), in the qualitative analysis of the attitudes to work of white collar employees in small and medium enterprises from Françoise Messant-Laurent (Lausanne), and in the project on flexibilization of working time from Michèle Ernst (Lausanne).

Sociological aspects of economic development and economic inequalities are still to the fore in Zurich. For example, Bornschier is at present conducting cross-national analyses dealing with growth and distributional impacts of transnational firms' activities (with Mark Herkenrath), with the economic relevance of social capital, with the social factors favouring the diffusion of the internet (both with Thomas Volken), and with the relationship between the perception of social inequality and economic growth (with Hanno Scholtz). Aspects of development are also included in the projects of Christoph Bosshardt on trust (Basle) and of Claus Daub (Basle) on theories of globalization.

Apart from these two dominant theme complexes, the sociological research landscape in Switzerland still offers a variety of projects which have more or less stringent ties with economic sociology. In this connection, we should mention Berne and the qualitative survey of habitus formations, mentalities and everyday economic theories of young entrepreneurs by Honegger and Peter Schallberger, and the survey on the expansion of business management thinking (Realities and Rationalities) by Honegger, Susanne Burri and Pascal Jurt.

In Geneva, strong ties with economic sociology are found primarily in the projects of Flückiger and in Lausanne, of Merrien (policies of social integration in European systems of collective action), of Jean-Yves Pidoux (economy of culture), of André Mach and Thomas David (globalization, neoliberalism and corporate governance), of Sébastien Guex (financial policy and banks), and of Antoine Kernen (social impacts of the privatization in China). Strong connections are also found in the Fribourg Department of Social Work and Social Policy in the projects of Carrie Yodanis on the economic costs of violence to women, of Michael Nollert (also University of Zurich) on non-profit organizations providing social benefits, transnational economic elites and intercorporate networks (Nollert 1998, Windolf and Nollert 2001), and of Alessandro Pelizzari on sociological aspects of New Public Management. Suter's current research activities include an international comparison of the perception of inequality and a project that deals with the scale of "verdeckte Armut" (hidden poverty) in Switzerland. In St. Gallen, although sociology has meanwhile changed from the Department of Economics to the Department of Humanities, questions concerning economic sociology are continuing to be dealt with. Examples of work there include Achim Brosziewski's management studies and an ethnographical project on the social microstructures of financial markets (Urs Bruegger in collaboration with Karin KnorrCetina at the University of Constance, see Bruegger and Knorr Cetina (forthcoming)). Finally, it should be mentioned that the two chairs in Neuchâtel remain true to their tradition. Thus, apart from Hainard (e.g., on the work situation of migrants) and Schultheis (e.g. on youth in precarious economic circumstances), who has in the meantime transferred to the University of Geneva,

Erwin Zimmermann (Director of the Swiss Household Panel) and Andreas Pfeuffer (e.g., on the history of socio-economic statistics) are also pursuing related projects.

### **A Concluding Assessment**

A glance at the history of sociology at Swiss universities indicates that, as early as the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it were principally open-minded economists who emphasized the social embeddedness of the economy. With the exception of the University of Fribourg, which according to its founders was to form a Catholic think-tank, the efforts at institutionalization were normally supported by liberal-democratic political forces. As a result of the rise of patriotic, anti-sociological attitudes in the academic system these efforts were contained after World War I. More and more it was suspected that the sociological analysis of economic processes, in view of the ever-increasing crisis, no longer contributed to solutions of that crisis, but rather to encouraging materialism and societal disintegration. Mussolini's honorary doctoral degree in Lausanne and the appointment of Lorenz in Fribourg, doubtlessly form an absolute low point in this development. Fortunately, immediately after the war a revitalization of economic sociology was discernible. Beginning with Erard in Neuchâtel, a number of economists who studied the sociological aspects of economic processes were appointed as faculty members. Following that, particularly in Neuchâtel and Zurich economic sociology advanced to a core element of teaching and research in the sociology departments. If one observes the development in the last decades, the expansion of this subdiscipline appears to be unbroken at first glance. Like in other countries, this expansion is unfortunately not due to the diffusion of paradigms of "New Economic Sociology" (Swedberg 1997), but rather to intensified reference to genuinely economic approaches (e.g., human capital theory and rational choice theory).

If one concentrates on the research landscape of Switzerland, two main fields of focus become apparent. With the appointments of Behrendt, Heintz and Trappe in German-speaking Switzerland, and Erard, Hainard and Ziegler in the French-speaking part, the analysis of economic development processes has advanced to the dominant fields of research in economic sociology. Since the end of the 1980s, work and labour markets have also established themselves as themes of focus. Assuming that research on development will continue to lose significance, labour market research will advance to the dominant field of research. In addition, no dominance at large of either quantitative or qualitative methods can be discerned. While quantitative data analyses are preferred in Zurich, interpretive approaches dominate in Basle and St. Gallen, and both groups of methods are equivalently represented in Lausanne and Berne.

The overview on teaching and research activities presented here, as well as the lively interest in the Research Committee for Economic Sociology founded within the Swiss Sociological Association in the year 2000 confirms that a growing number of sociologists are professionally involved with economic issues and no longer shy away from the intranational dialogue. In comparison to the large neighbouring countries (Germany, France, Italy), however, the number of economic sociologists will self-evidently stay low. Moreover, there is still no fruitful dialogue between sociology and economics. Finally, it is regrettable that although sociological analyses of economic phenomena won't wither in the short run,

economic analyses of social facts obviously enjoy more and more legitimacy in public and private institutions funding research.

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