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KZfSS Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie

Provided in Cooperation with:
Springer Nature

Suggested Citation: Grunow, Daniela; Sachweh, Patrick; Schimank, Uwe; Traunmüller, Richard (2023) : Social Integration: Conceptual Foundations and Open Questions. An Introduction to this Special Issue, KZfSS Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, ISSN 1861-891X, Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH, Wiesbaden, Vol. 75, Iss. Suppl 1, pp. 1-34, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11577-023-00896-1

Köln Z Soziol (2023) (Suppl 1) 75:1–34
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11577-023-00896-1

Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie

EINLEITUNG

Social Integration: Conceptual Foundations and Open Questions. An Introduction to this Special Issue

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Received: 18 April 2023 / Accepted: 4 May 2023 / Published online: 21 June 2023

Abstract Is the social integration of contemporary Western societies at risk? We will not provide an answer to this question, which is high on the political agenda. Instead, in our introduction to this special issue, we first offer conceptual clarifications. What is a theoretically sound and empirically useful understanding of the social integration of modern societies? Second, we ask three basic questions for which adequate answers have not yet been found: (1) How is social integration generated? That is, what are its central mechanisms? (2) Is social integration a functionally necessary precondition of societies, as concerns about its erosion suggest? Or is it a goal in itself, that is, a normatively desirable state? (3) What about the dark side

A shorter, German-language version of this paper was published as RISC working paper no. 2 in June 2022. https://www.fgz-risc.de/fileadmin/publikationen/2022/fgz-wp_2_grunow-et-al_gesellschaftliche-sozialintegration.pdf.

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of social integration, i.e., its unintended or tacitly accepted side effects for society, its individual members, or particular social groups?

Keywords Modern society · Conflict · Social cohesion · Social solidarity · Social inequality

Sozialintegration: Konzeptuelle Grundlagen und offene Fragen. Eine Einleitung zu diesem Sonderband

Zusammenfassung Ist der soziale Zusammenhalt in modernen westlichen Gesellschaften gefährdet? Wir werden keine Antwort auf diese Frage geben, die ganz oben auf der politischen Agenda steht. Stattdessen bieten wir in unserer Einleitung zu diesem Sonderheft zunächst konzeptionelle Klärungen an. Was ist ein theoretisch fundiertes und empirisch nützliches Verständnis der Sozialintegration moderner Gesellschaften? Zweitens stellen wir drei grundsätzliche Fragen, auf die bisher keine adäquaten Antworten gefunden wurden: (1) Wie wird Sozialintegration erzeugt? D. h. welches sind ihre zentralen Mechanismen? (2) Ist Sozialintegration eine funktional notwendige Voraussetzung für Gesellschaften, wie die Sorge um ihre Erosion andeutet? Oder ist sie ein Ziel an sich, d. h. ein normativ erstrebenswerter Zustand? (3) Wie sieht es mit den Schattenseiten der Sozialintegration aus, d. h. mit ihren unbeabsichtigten oder stillschweigend akzeptierten Nebenwirkungen für die Gesellschaft, ihre einzelnen Mitglieder oder bestimmte soziale Gruppen?

Schlüsselwörter Moderne Gesellschaft · Konflikt · Soziale Kohäsion · Soziale Solidarität · Soziale Ungleichheit

1 Introduction

Why are we talking—again—about social integration? Just 24 years after Jürgen Friedrichs and Wolfgang Jagodzinski (1999) published a special issue in this very journal on this exact topic, the question of social integration has resurfaced as a hot topic in public, political and social-scientific debate. In recent decades, contemporary societies have been and continue to be shaken by a series of crises that are suspected of endangering social cohesion. The magnitude of these interrelated crises could not have been anticipated when the earlier special issue was published. The global financial and economic crisis and the resulting sovereign debt crisis, the Eurozone crisis, the incoming "wave" of refugees in the summer of 2015, the populist challenges to liberal democracies, the climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and most recently, the social and economic consequences of the Ukraine War raise new questions regarding the future of social integration against a background of increasing social fragmentation and polarisation (Gerhards et al. 2019; Lahusen and Grasso 2018; Lengfeld 2017; Lux 2018; Rippl and Seipel 2018; Sachweh 2020; Van Bavel et al. 2020).

The special issue reframes these discussions sociologically by translating the problem all these crises have in common into a well-established sociological re-

search tradition on social integration. This reframing enables us first to respond to urgent political debates as sociologists with an analytical distance founded in the discipline's theoretical concepts and empirical research methods. Second, our framing allows us to abstract from the current crises and to place our reasoning in the broader context of conditions, ingredients and reference points of social cohesion.

The often-heard assessment that social cohesion is at risk requires critical, analytically informed reflection. There are many unanswered questions about the conceptualisation of social integration, its forms, conditions and determinants, as well as its modes of action and effects, including its potentially counterproductive side effects for societies and groups. Our goal in this debate is to use the concept of social integration to provide the social sciences, which are situated in the tradition of empirical-analytical approaches to social phenomena, with conceptual tools and perspectives for developing empirically grounded answers. By explicating this empirical-analytical understanding of social cohesion as social integration, we enter into a discussion with other social scientists who understand social cohesion differently: what are the strengths and weaknesses of their approach compared with ours?

To delimit what we want to accomplish here, it is first useful to distinguish the perspectives of a general social theory from a theory of modern society.[1] The former is an ahistorical, abstract perspective that encompasses the micro-, meso- and macro-levels of social integration.[2] The second perspective, which we want to address in this chapter, in contrast, focuses on the current state and future development of cohesion in contemporary societies and the challenges associated with it. From this perspective, the macro-level of society as a whole is the point of reference, rather than the internal integration of societal sub-sectors such as the economy or the education system, organisations, social groups or interactional situations. Temporally, we focus on the present and the near future, taking into account the notion that present and future conditions, prospects and aspirations are always shaped by past events and experiences.

We are convinced that it is relevant to critically reflect on the thesis that social cohesion—in our conception, social integration—of contemporary Western societies is at risk. In the following, we first present what we consider to be the most important building blocks of a concept of social integration for the epistemological interest outlined here. Second, we formulate three major guiding questions that we believe are of particular importance for making theoretically and empirically substantive and reflective contributions regarding the current and future social integration of contemporary societies, thus advancing research on social cohesion. For each of these guiding questions, we offer reflections on their classification, on unclear aspects and unresolved theoretical or empirical problems, and suggest conceptual starting points that we believe have analytical potential.

[1] For this distinction, see Luhmann (1984, pp. 14–16) and Lindemann (2018, pp. 14–16).

[2] From this perspective, the social integration of work teams in a contemporary organization or of small groups of Australian Aborigines 3000 years ago would be as relevant as the social integration of the contemporary USA in terms of conflicts along different dimensions, such as ethnicity, race and class.

We conclude with a brief preview of the articles in this special issue. They are organised around four thematic spotlights that speak particularly to the social scientific challenges we raise in this chapter: (1) Theoretical and conceptual groundwork; (2) Religion and identity; (3) Ideology and politics; and (4) Social inequality and conduct of life.

2 The Concept of Social Integration

We first need to clarify the concept of social integration that we want to address in this special issue. We will elaborate on this aspect in the first section of this introduction. Some may experience it as "a long and winding road"—but we consider it necessary to explicate our point of departure before we turn to discuss our three basic questions in the second section of the chapter. To be sure, there is no widely shared understanding of the concept of social integration in the literature so we have to set out our understanding in some detail.

To begin with, sociology was confronted early on with phenomena of social integration when the "*social question*" was put at the top of the political agenda at the beginning of the nineteenth century. One might even go so far as to speak of the birth of sociology out of the huge problems of social integration arising from the fundamental societal upheavals of the French Revolution and the industrial revolution (Müller 2021). Since then, debates about social integration have resurged again and again. Ranging from early fears about a decline of community by processes of individualisation and pluralisation to more recent questions of multi-culturalism, migration and global solidarity, sociological discussions about social integration abound. To be sure, the wording has differed. Besides integration, other terms have been used, such as social cohesion (Delhey et al., this issue), compliance (Etzioni 1975), conformity, or "solidarity" (Durkheim 1964). Cooperation and coordination are also discussed as modes of social integration. Even more related concepts are identification with a social order, social capital (Putnam 2000; Franzen and Freitag 2007), or trust in others. As antonyms of social integration the following are used, among others: conflict, deviance, withdrawal, distrust, anomy, disorder.

However, both the synonyms and the antonyms often suggest a simplistic consensus-based understanding of social integration, which is no adequate representation of the "social glue" that holds contemporary plural, differentiated and ever-changing societies together. Modern society does not rely on an overall consensus with regard to values, world views, religion, political convictions, but on the contrary allows for the cultivation of differences. Furthermore, these differences are not just tolerated but desired—among others, as sources of all kinds of innovations from technology and the arts to ways of living. Thus, social integration in modernity is not based on a society-wide "groupthink" (Janis 1972), with everybody confirming everybody else's perspective but, on the contrary, on an opening of conflicting perspectives—a point strongly emphasised by Nicole Deitelhoff and Cord Schmelzle in their contribution to this special issue. This is the *paradoxical nature of the social integration of modern society*, and of contemporary society in particular: a societal order that rests, not only but substantially, on on-going injections of disorder. Hence, a proper

conceptualisation of social integration today must take into account a societal order that gains stability out of permanent challenges of its components, including the most fundamental ones—and clarify that such a flexible mode of social integration is a precondition for a higher adaptive capacity of society and a higher productivity in all of its spheres, in contrast to a societal order that enforces conformity to rigid standards of appropriateness or normalcy.

2.1 Two Points of Reference

Before we start elaborating an analytical perspective that fits these realities of modern society, we must distinguish two points of reference in studying social integration:

- On the one hand, one can be interested in the integration of particular kinds of persons into society.[3] For example, to what extent do members of the upper versus middle classes obey the law, talk to their neighbours and have confidence in democracy? Pursuing questions like these, one can characterise certain categories of people as being more or less well-integrated members of society. Richard Münch (2015, p. 243) speaks of "actor integration".
- On the other hand, our concern can be the overall integration of a particular society. What is the level of trust among members of society, how much consensus exists with respect to central values, what share of the population conforms to important norms etc.? With these questions, we focus on "action integration" (Münch 2015, p. 43)—the fit or non-fit of the sum total of the different activities of all kinds of members of society to a given societal order.

Both points of reference are certainly important but direct our attention to very different aspects of social integration. This special issue's main interest is in contemporary societies' social integration, not in the social integration of certain kinds of people into society. However, in particular if one suspects or knows that certain social groups play an important or even crucial part in weakening or strengthening society's "action integration"—intentionally or unintentionally—it may be a promising research strategy to take a closer look at these groups' "actor integration". For instance, if there are reasons to suppose that some groups of immigrants might be a special challenge for a society's social integration it makes sense to study how and how much these immigrants actually are integrated into society, and in which respects they have or cause problems of integration.

2.2 Systems Integration

After having clarified our point of reference, we can now turn to the question: what property of society is referred to when its social integration is addressed? A first, very abstract answer proposed by Niklas Luhmann (1997, p. 603) states that integration is a characteristic of composite entities consisting of elements related to each other. On this level of abstraction, one could also speak about the integration of

[3] As sociologists, we are not interested in the individual social integration of particular persons. For us, specific individuals are just cases of categories of people.

a machine, or a human body, or a symphony. Society certainly is an entity composed of a multitude of interconnected sub-units. Thus, social integration refers to a certain quality of the relations among the sub-units of a society.

In Luhmann's systems-theoretical approach, the most prominent sub-units of modern, functionally differentiated society are its sub-systems such as the economy, science, politics, or religion. Consequently, his main concern with regard to a society's integration is not social integration but systems integration—the coordination of interdependencies between societal sub-systems in such a way that no sub-system brings about unsolvable problems for other sub-systems (Luhmann 1977, pp. 242–248). For example, if the educational system neglects for a long time crucial qualifications needed for jobs in industry, this would finally amount to a lack of systems integration between education and the economy. Schools and universities produce a workforce that does not fit economic demands, which, in turn, can result in a crisis of certain industrial branches and, as a result, of the economy as a whole. In this way, the sub-systems of modern society can confront each other with a multitude of different kinds of critical problems. This sounds as if functional differentiation has resulted in a proliferation of trouble zones of systems integration. But the opposite is the case: most of these potential problems of systems integration have never reached a level that could be critical for society as a whole. Indeed, the "trick" of functional differentiation is the fragmentation—by multiplication—of trouble zones, compared with the one overwhelming trouble zone of the "social question" in the nineteenth century. In addition, reliable mechanisms of taking care of potential problems of systems integration have been installed (Schimank 1999).[4]

The absence of critical problems of systems integration also manifests in the good functioning of the various societal spheres so that actors can maintain what Luhmann (1973, pp. 50–66) calls "trust in systems", such as trust in the integrity of the legal courts, in parliamentary democracy or in scientific truths. The level of systems integration is, on the one hand, an important determinant of social integration: the higher the former, the higher the latter. As long as the economy or the health care system works well, most people do not consider individual deviance or collective rebellion as feasible action alternatives. On the other hand, adequate systems integration is also an effect of sufficient social integration because systems integration, contrary to a systems-theoretical perspective, is executed by actors, in the end by individual persons. Consequently, the good functioning of society depends on individuals acting as reliable agents of the imperatives of functional requirements and interdependencies of societal spheres.[5] Whenever individual actors, for whatever reasons, neglect this "functional mission" as an essential part of their—usually occupational—social integration, societal systems integration can be at stake.

[4] There is one important exception. The capitalist economy is an inherently crisis-prone sub-system of a functionally differentiated society, and its crises often amount to rising prices, falling living standards, or increased unemployment, all of which weaken social integration (Schimank 2015).

[5] Durkheim's (1964) concept of "organic solidarity" of modern society comes close to this point.

Thus, systems integration is certainly an important dimension of the integration of modern society, which we, however, leave out of consideration in this special issue for the sake of concentrating on social integration.[6]

2.3 Actors and Intersecting Social Orders

This special issue's focus on social integration calls for an actor-theoretical approach. On a still high level of abstraction social integration can be conceived of as the integration of actors into a social order. Thus, the analytical point of departure is "actor integration"; still, the point of destination is "action integration", namely, the state of affairs of the respective social order.

Note that actors are not necessarily individual persons, and that a social order is not necessarily a societal order:

- We distinguish two principal kinds of actors: individual persons, on the one hand, and "composite actors" (Scharpf 1997, pp. 52–60), on the other. The latter consist of a plurality of individual actors, with collective actors such as—at least temporarily—small groups, masses or social movements, and corporate actors, in particular, organisations or nation states, as the two principal types.
- With regard to social orders below the level of society, there are several intersecting dimensions. There are small and often not very durable social orders such as small groups or interactions; there are informal social orders such as neighbourhoods and formalised ones such as organisations; there are nested social orders such as interactions within organisations within societal spheres; and there are overlapping social orders such as societal spheres like science and social classes like the middle class, with many but not all scientists being middle-class persons and most middle-class persons not being scientists.

Our centre of attention in this special issue is the social integration of individual persons into contemporary society. Accordingly, we do not investigate corporations that avoid paying taxes, or the mafia and its activities with regard to social integration; and we do not consider the social integration of social orders below the level of society. These are important topics, to be sure—but not our topics here.

Still, acknowledging intersecting social orders into which individual persons are more or less integrated is essential to understand the overall social integration of contemporary societies. From the societal perspective, all mentioned and other sub-units of very different size, durability, and form bring about societal social integration as the aggregate result of nested and parallel social integrations of all members of society into all of its sub-units. As a consequence, it would be a wrong reading of the conceptualisation of social integration we propose here that we analytically confront society, on the one hand, on the "macro-level", with individuals on the "micro-level", on the other. Instead, what is often called the "meso-level"—the social orders below the societal level—are explicitly included. Indeed, on this level the richness of

[6] An additional reason is that systems integration—for better or worse—has lost some prominence as a research topic during the last 20 years.

empirical variety of relevant societal structures becomes important—to mention just the "varieties of capitalism", "welfare regimes", "party systems" etc.

A sub-unit's social integration can either contribute to societal social integration, or be a source of trouble for it. There are four logical possibilities:

- The integration of a sub-unit can support societal integration, as with a state church that disciplines its members not only with regard to religious matters but also as members of society in general.
- Conversely, a sub-unit's lack of integration can be a problem for societal integration. An example case would be an increase of "bowling alone" (Putnam 2000) neighbourhoods in which crime rates grow because no one feels responsible for the social control of deviance.
- However, the integration of a sub-unit may also bring about a decline of societal integration—for example, a highly cohesive movement for regional independence that fights for its autonomy.
- Finally, a sub-unit's lack of integration may be beneficial for societal integration—if, for example, a social class is not unified and organised politically so it cannot pursue successfully its common interests, which are opposed to important aspects of the societal status quo.

For all possibilities, there are many empirical example cases. Thus, an important task for further research is to specify the factors that determine which possibility occurs in an empirical case.

2.4 Well-Ordered Unity

Referring back to Luhmann's abstract definition of integration we ask now: with regard to society as an entity, individual actors as its elements, and interactions among them as the relations—what must be the quality of these interactions in their entirety so that the overall societal order is socially integrated? Obviously, this quality is a property neither of single individuals nor of single interactions between two individuals but of society as the sum total of interactions. Stepping back to the abstract level, a composite entity is well integrated if it shows an adequate level of unity resulting from a sufficient orderliness of the relations between its sub-units so that the entity reliably reproduces itself and does not collapse into a chaos of sub-units disentangled from each other. Social integration, accordingly, is a state of societal order where a sufficient number of individual members of society interact with each other to a sufficient degree in a manner that maintains this order—including orderly changes of it.

The extreme opposite of social integration—used by Talcott Parsons (1937) as the starting point for reflecting upon Georg Simmel's (1968 [1908], pp. 21–30) famous question: "How is society possible?"—is sketched in Thomas Hobbes' (1973, p. 67) famous scenario, informed by early modern religious wars in Europe and England, of a "warre of every one against every one". Less extreme states of social disintegration are Edward Banfield's (1967) "amoral familism", which describes low levels of trust in fellow men, except for family members, in Southern Italy, or Robert Putnam's (2000) "bowling alone", which diagnoses an erosion of social capital in

the USA over the last decades. All three studies, by the way, depict disintegration as a crucial cause of unrealised advantages of social coordination and cooperation. Hobbes (1973, p. 65) points out that in a situation of totalised violence "life is cruel and short ..."; Banfield proposes "amoral familism" as an explanation for the economic backwardness of Southern Italy;[7] and Putnam is aware not just of the decline of US civil society but also of individual suffering from boredom and loneliness as a consequence of declining social capital. Put differently, important positive societal functions of social integration are underlined by these three classic reflections.

What is required to achieve a sufficient level of social integration is, again, abstractly pointed out by Luhmann (1997, p. 603): a "reduction of degrees of freedom" of the sub-units of the composite entity. Applied to the social integration of society, this means that each individual member of society must refrain from certain alternatives within its repertoire of action that erode an established social order, even if some of them look very attractive. For instance, insurance fraud or tax evasion could be quite simple for some people; still, they must resist the temptation because it would amount to an exploitation of those who are honest insured persons and tax payers. More generally, if too many people show deviance from established norms, and this becomes common knowledge, these norms lose their power as binding obligations. If Ego suspects that many others no longer act according to the proclaimed rules it comes to the conclusion that it had better deviate, too, and not become the sucker.

Compared with such secretive individual practices of disrespect for the demands of social integration, open collective rejections or violations of current norms and values may escalate much more quickly—for instance, all kinds of riots or rebellions. The US "Tea Party" movement, which strongly re-shaped the Republican Party in the direction of Donald Trump's political re-shaping of US society, or the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, were social movements that cancelled existing implicit agreements on social integration. Participants in unrest in the Banlieues of French big cities, to give another example, set fire to cars and buildings, plundered shops, killed policemen and uninvolved persons, and by these and other activities not only questioned but no longer respected basic components of the existing societal order.

At the other end of the spectrum, we find activities contributing to social integration, whether as an intended signal or a trans-intentional side-effect. People show, in various ways, that they are proud to be Germans, or citizens of Europe, or that they are solidary with their immigrant neighbours against xenophobic groups. Many other activities contribute to social integration, although not everyone may notice it, or some may notice but do not care about it. For example, many people simply conform to rules of honesty of annual tax declarations because they learned that it is appropriate to do so; that this behaviour and attitude reinforces other persons' honesty and the overall level of honesty within a society is an effect but not a concern of what people do.

People contribute to social integration even if they question particular values or rules with the explicit wish for a debate about changing or maintaining them.

[7] As an empirical explanation Banfield's thesis was much criticized. As a general theoretical model which can be applied to other empirical cases it can still be quite fruitful.

Democracy, as a basic principle of dealing with controversial issues of living together in society, is the best example of a procedure of handling conflicts that never arrives at a final solution but, on the contrary, gives everybody a chance to question again what was arrived at as an always preliminary solution (see Deitelhoff and Schmelzle, this issue). Moreover, in the final end relying on majority rule, democracy is no mode of decision-making that guarantees "good" results. Majorities can, for various reasons, be quite foolish sometimes. But most of the time, we hope, they are more clever than other modes.

2.5 Normative Connotations

The examples just given have already shown that studies of social integration very often imply strong normative connotations. Is the society whose social integration is at the focus of attention a "good" or a "bad" society? Of course, the answer to this question depends on the world-view and the values of the observer—no matter whether it is a social scientist or a journalist, politician, or citizen. Nazi Germany—to use an extreme example—could be regarded as well integrated in the first years of the regime, compared with the Weimar Republic, with generous social policies for the unemployed and low-paid workers—as long as they were not explicitly Social Democrats, Communists, or Jews. In a similar vein, the Olympic Games in Berlin 1936 could be regarded as a successful staging of social integration of the German population. After the depression following the First World War and the profoundly felt humiliation caused by the Versailles treaties, German society may have gained new self-esteem as an "imagined community" (Anderson 2006). Still, a social integration based on "othering"—the exclusion and social devaluation, in the extreme annihilation, of others—is not morally acceptable to most of us.

Does this mean that everybody has to accept everybody else no matter what his or her values, opinions or lifestyle are? It is clear that an all-inclusive social integration, too, is unattractive to most of us. Not only because it would include Nazis and other "exclusionists"—but also because acceptable ways of living differ, and even if someone does not claim that theirs is superior to others they may want to live it undisturbed by others' ways of living, just as they do not disturb them. To give a politically inoffensive example: if one likes to live a quiet life one does not choose a home in a nightlife district of the town—even if one does not make one's own lifestyle a precept for everybody.

We do not want to raise normative issues like these here—not least because we are not sure that we will give the same answers to all of them. The value orientations of social scientific observers of society may be as diverse as within the population as a whole. But we direct attention to the fact that such issues are entangled with the analytical questions we are interested in. In other words, we cannot avoid being confronted with value judgments about a "good" society if we study social integration, and we should be aware of that.

2.6 Disintegration and Over-Integration

Coming back to analytical aspects, we already mentioned disintegration as an opposite to a well-integrated state of a societal order. Quite often these two states are seen as the two poles of a continuum of more or less integration. What is true about this view is that integration is a gradual characteristic. There are not just two states: maximum integration of a society, on the one hand, or zero integration on the other. Indeed, these two extremes are probably just logical possibilities but will never occur in "real life". Instead, we usually have some mixed state of more or less integration. Thus, looking at a particular society over time one might detect that today it is somewhat less integrated than 20 years before, and one might suspect that this trend will go on in the near future. Perhaps there are societies that oscillate regularly in long waves of increasing social integration, then reaching a turning point and decreasing up to the other turning point from where integration increases again.[8]

Such gradual changes of social integration are certainly interesting phenomena to study, especially with regard to potential regular patterns. What is still wrong, though, about such an understanding of integration is the notion of a duality of integration and disintegration. Instead, it is analytically more fruitful to conceive of the spectrum of possible gradual states of integration ranging from total disintegration, on the one hand, to total over-integration, on the other. Thus, empirically we find not only too little but also too much integration; and a well-integrated state is a *balanced middle level* in-between these two poles of problematic integration. Such a view gets rid, by the way, of the prevalent normative connotation that more integration is always better than less. Münch (2015, p. 245) notes: "Social integration is not an overall positive state of affairs." We are biased to perceive a lack or decline of social integration as a critical problem of society; we are often not sufficiently sensitised to the opposite, which can be equally dangerous. Unfortunately, the sociological use of terms has so far mostly reproduced and reinforced this misleading premise of everyday thinking instead of critically questioning it.

Because of this bias of journalistic and political as well as social-scientific observations of society it is not necessary here to explicate disintegration in detail. We are all familiar with what it can look like. Analytically, we already conceived of it as an insufficient "reduction of degrees of freedom" of the sub-units of a composite entity. Deviance, excessive individualism without concern for the public good, destructive social conflicts or rebellions are well-known typical manifestations of disintegration of the societal order. Over-integration, in contrast, consists of an excessive "reduction of degrees of freedom". It manifests mainly in a repression of individuality and innovation by all kinds of rigorous social control. Extreme states of over-integration are societal orders that resemble more and more "total institutions" (Goffman 1973) or "greedy institutions" (Coser 1974). Familiar recent examples are societies dominated by strict religious authorities such as Iran after the Mullahs took con-

[8] Etzioni's (1993, 1997) "communitarian" vision of a "good society" rests theoretically on a functional antagonism of societal "order" and individual "autonomy"; and he sees empirically long-term societal dynamics as a back and forth between these poles (Lange 2000).

trol, or by ideologically dogmatic political regimes such as former and still existing Communist countries. One major problem of these over-integrated societies is that all kinds of creativity and innovative initiatives are stifled—or pushed into social niches—so that they become what Michel Crozier (1970), with regard to France, called "blocked societies". Münch (2015, p. 245) concludes: "social integration levels down differences and thus the richness of cultures and social life as well as the potential for innovation and change. Thus, we can say that a balance of integration and at least some disintegration is a necessary prerequisite for preserving the potential for diversity and innovation". Because "disintegration" sounds problematic, we prefer to express the same idea of a desirable disintegration as the avoidance of over-integration.

As it appears, it is not so difficult to point out what disintegration on the one hand, and over-integration on the other look like. For both extremes of the spectrum we have considerably clear indications. But when is a societal order well integrated? This middle level is not so easy to describe—as a result of two important features of integration. The first is that integration in general, and social integration in particular, can best be defined ex negativo—as the *absence* of both dis- and over-integration.[9] But to state negatively what is not there does not say positively what is there instead. Closely connected to this negative characterisation of a well-integrated societal order, secondly, is the fact that this state of being well integrated tends to be *unobtrusive*. In other words, most of the time nobody cares about or even notices social integration as long as it is well-balanced.[10] Almost only if it drifts in one of the two problematic directions of dis- or over-integration do we become aware of this requirement of a well-functioning society. Again, this neglect of the topic of social integration as long as it is safeguarded holds true not only for ordinary citizens, politicians and journalists but also for social scientific observers of society. They, too, tend to forget about this requirement of a stable societal order as an important issue of theoretical reflection and empirical investigation as long as "everything works well".

2.7 Empirical Determination of Social Integration

At this point, we can address an implication of our conception of social integration for its empirical determination. In the double sense just explained, social integration is a latent variable: we can only describe its absence with some precision, and it is no eye-catcher but needs a deliberate direction of attention to become visible. From this latency follows that it is not at all trivial to identify adequate indicators for the various aspects and ingredients of social integration. The attempt by Jürgen Friedrichs and Wolfgang Jagodzinski (1999, pp. 19–21) to distinguish indicators on the macro-, meso-, and micro-level, and their critical discussion of many of them,

[9] As already mentioned, Luhmann (1977, p. 242) draws attention to this when he defines integration—by which he means systems integration—as a state of affairs where no societal sub-system's operations create unsolvable problems for other sub-systems.

[10] There are exceptions. In particular, if a publicly scandalized aspect of social integration—for instance, crime rates in certain city quarters—turns from bad to significantly better as a result of successful deliberate efforts by politicians, courts or the police, this can be an occasion for an explicit recognition of the fact that in this respect the societal order is now well integrated.

though more than 20 years ago, still demonstrates the pitfalls of this first step of measurement. To pick up just three examples from their stocktaking: are divorce rates a macro indicator of social integration? Or are unhappy non-divorced couples a manifestation of over-integration? The same could be asked about a high level of patriotism. And what about high numbers of non-voters? Do they all go back to a fundamental dissent with the democratic basic consensus as an important political component of social integration? Or can it be that a growing number of non-voters express, on the contrary, satisfaction with all or most political parties' management of the societal order so that citizens do not see a reason for voting?[11]

Further problems of empirical determination show up in the operationalisation of indicators. Again, for almost any indicator of social integration that has been used until today there have been problems about how to construct an adequate quantitative or qualitative representation of it. For example, how do we measure patriotism—if this is regarded as a manifestation of social integration—quantitatively? There are standardised questions to measure patriotism as an attitude. Some operationalise it in very general formulations so that the same question can be used in different countries and for different points of time whereas other questions are much more specific with regard to certain events at a certain point of time in one country. Do more specific or more general formulations have a higher validity and reliability? There is no general answer to this question, it must be asked again in each and every case. Moreover, we know about the often wide gap between attitudes and action. As a consequence, operationalisations of patriotism as specific practices might come more to the point. But this can turn out to be even more difficult. What concrete practices are good operationalisations? In the USA one might perhaps ask whether someone hoists the national flag in the front yard of his or her house. But what about people living in housing complexes in the centres of big cities, or who cannot afford their own house? In other countries such as Germany, this would surely be an inadequate operationalisation, even for house owners. Thus, even if this operationalisation might be a good one for many milieus of the US-American society, it would clearly fail in international comparisons. Numerous further examples of such problems of operationalisation could be given, but the general point is clear.

The third step of an empirical determination of social integration is to find or to collect empirical data that fit the chosen indicators and their operationalisations. Sometimes we have very good indicators of the aspects of social integration we are interested in; and we also construct very good operationalisations of these indicators; but then we must realise that no appropriate empirical data are available, and for certain reasons it seems impossible that we collect the needed data in a survey of our own. Perhaps legal rules prohibit that a needed combination of data is collected about single persons; or the costs of data collection are unaffordable; or—in international comparisons—the data might be collected in one country but not in others; or—in

[11] This argument was made in US-American political science of the 1950s (Lipset 1976 [1959], p. 181). For Germany at the time, shortly after National Socialism, such an assessment would certainly have been viewed skeptically—which shows that the same behavior can and must be understood very differently in different contexts.

comparisons of different points of time—data might be available for the present but not for the past.

All these problems of indicators, operationalisations and data can occur in all kinds of empirical studies. However, perhaps social integration is a variable that is particularly difficult to grasp empirically—surely not the only difficult variable in the social sciences, but one of them. Further reflections and experiences could specify the problems of empirical determination, and the attempts to handle them better than before.

Yet another difficulty of empirical determination shall be mentioned, which relates to the next step of investigation, after data have been collected. Studying social integration can first of all be aimed at a descriptive measurement in various dimensions, for particular countries, and over particular periods of time. However, having described empirically an existing level of social integration, and having compared it for different dimensions, countries or points of time, two explanatory questions arise. The first one with regard to social integration as the dependent variable: what are the causes of given levels of social integration, and of differences in these levels between dimensions, countries and points in time? The second question takes social integration as the independent variable: what are the societal effects of different or changing levels of social integration? We deal with both explanatory questions in more detail in the next sections of this introduction. Here, we only direct attention to the fact that it is often not easy to separate the empirical data on social integration, on the one hand, from its causes and effects, on the other.[12]

2.8 Ingredients of Social Integration

We come back to a final question of analytical conceptualisation already alluded to at the beginning of this section with our listing of synonyms and antonyms of integration. What does social integration consist of? What are its basic ingredients? We propose a more systematic typology of four different ingredients of social integration. All of them are well known in the relevant sociological discussions under various names, and different sociological schools of thought emphasise different ingredients.

To begin with, there are two ingredients of social integration that refer to *co-orientations*, often also called beliefs or attitudes, of actors.

- *Ingredient 1:* social integration as *consensus*.[13] This consensus includes evaluative and normative orientations with regard to what is desirable and what is obligatory as well as cognitive orientations concerning the factual nature of the world. With regard to this ingredient the level of social integration is determined by how many members of a society share these orientations and to what degree. In other words, how many identify how strongly with the shared orientations? Bearing in mind

[12] Robert Putnam's studies on social capital are an example of this (e.g. Putnam 2000). Greater civic involvement is said to result from higher levels of trust emerging in dense social networks, which themselves are an aspect of civic involvement.

[13] Giegel (1992) still offers a good overview of sociological discussions about consensus.

that a well-integrated societal order is a balance between dis- and over-integration, with regard to the consensus ingredient strong dissent—with the extreme of a split of society into groups hostile to each other, as for a long time in Northern Ireland—is the one problematic tendency, excessive consensus with enforced dogmatic orientations is the other. Against excessive consensus, modernity has emphasised productive dissent—as it is built into democratic modes of collective decision-making, in particular. Productive dissent requires civilised modes of handling conflicts, especially the prevention of violence. Furthermore, all involved actors must have a consensus as accurate as possible about their dissent (Miller 1992) so that negotiations or majority decisions produce specific results instead of vague compromises on which no one can build.

- *Ingredient 2*: social integration as mutual *trust*. Mutual trust is a basic mode of orientation towards other social actors—persons, groups, organisations. Until the opposite is proven, trust supposes that others obey rules, keep promises and agreements, and, even if they act self-interested, have no "unfriendly" intentions against oneself or act in "unruly" ways, for instance, do not steal but buy. In the trust ingredient the level of social integration is assessed by the number of members of society who are trustful and the degree to which they are trustful. Again, too much overall social trust—which amounts to a blind reliance on others' good behaviour and good intentions that can be easily exploited by those who do not share this orientation—is as problematic as too much distrust. In modernity, with an increasing number of interactions with strangers, a "healthy distrust" supplements trust as a "realistic" precaution against "blind trust". All kinds of institutionalised checks and balances are manifestations of this "healthy distrust", which is not meant personally but reflects modernity's licensing of the pursuit of ego-centred interests in anonymous competitions.

Two further ingredients refer to *co-interaction* as a result of the interdependence of individual activities:

- *Ingredient 3*: social integration as *conformity*. This ingredient refers to the compliance with all kinds of norms ranging from legal rules to informal customs, and regardless of whether compliance is reached by force, by incentives, or by identification with what the norms demand.[14] A minimum level of conformity goes no further than refraining from deviance with what is demanded as "'must'-norms" (Dahrendorf 1967, pp. 147–148). A higher level of conformity amounts to an engagement for the societal order that goes beyond this minimum—a voluntary overfulfilment of what is normatively expected. With regard to this ingredient the level of social integration is determined by how many members of society show what degree of conformity with existing norms. Deviance, and all other kinds of disregard of norms, are manifestations of disintegration whereas mechanical ritualistic conformity with norms that are never questioned and suppress individuality expresses over-integration. Modernity has established a greater tolerance for nonconformity, especially with regard to others' ways of living that contradict one's

[14] See this distinction of types of compliance in Etzioni (1975).

own convictions. This tolerance includes an open articulation of dissent but renounces sanctions, in particular, the use of violence.

- *Ingredient 4*: Social integration as *cooperation*. Cooperation ranges from self-interested collaboration as "resource pooling" (Coleman 1974), including the strategic cultivation of social capital for potential future opportunities and needs for cooperation, to a reciprocal or altruistic solidarity with others who need one's help (Gouldner 1984; Stegbauer 2011, pp. 67–86). With regard to this ingredient the level of social integration depends upon the number and extension of cooperative ties among members of society and the intensity and solidaristic quality of cooperations. Egoism and social isolation indicate disintegration, enforced cooperation and the suppression of individualistic ways of handling one's affairs are symptoms of over-integration. Modernity has established modes of a legitimate refusal of cooperation. The institutionalisation of a pursuit of self-interests not only in the capitalist economy but also in other societal spheres is a defence against requests for solidarity and re-distribution; and this pursuit of self-interest has been reinforced by an installation of competition for scarce rewards, which inhibits "friendly" relations towards one's competitors.

Together, these co-orientations and co-interactions bring about social integration. In our view, this *balanced four-ingredients-understanding* brings home the common denominator of most understandings of social integration to be found in the sociological literature. The two advantages of our conceptualisation, compared with others, are:

- We not only use these four ingredients whereas other understandings rely on only three, two or just one of them; and we not only add them up but present them as integral parts of a social mechanism—which, to be sure, is still heavily under construction.
- We no longer understand social integration as a simple maximisation of consensus, trust, conformity and cooperation but take into consideration that a well-integrated social order of modern societies is a state of balance between disintegration and over-integration.

Assessing empirical studies of social integration with regard to these two aspects, first of all one has to state that most studies confine themselves to one or two of these four ingredients. This produces not only an incomplete picture of social integration but obvious interplays between these ingredients are overlooked. Some theoretical perspectives point out specific elements of this interplay. The connection between consensus and conformity is highlighted by structural-functionalist role theory and Parsonian systems theory. From here comes the understanding of social integration based on a normative consensus that generates conformity with shared norms, and a focus on socialisation as the production of socially integrated individuals. Rational choice theories, on the other hand, often draw attention to the connection between trust and cooperation. Only if trust grows between egoistic maximisers of self-interest an "evolution of cooperation" (Axelrod 1984) becomes possible; and successful cooperation, in turn, reinforces mutual trust. A closer look at other theoretical perspectives might show that they reflect still other connections between the

four ingredients. But theoretical reflections are one thing; in the final end, bringing them into touch with empirical data is the proof of the pudding.

Second, most empirical studies still use a yardstick for measuring social integration that simply boils down to: the more, the better! This particularly fits quantitative studies that can demonstrate the decline or growth of percentages of the population that show consensus, trust, conformity, and cooperation. But the problem is that an optimal—or, to be more modest, a feasible—social integration of modern societies is no maximum, but a balance. This is what we know from experience—but where exactly this balance is situated we do not know at all. This state of theoretical as well as empirical research amounts to a profound ignorance about what we want to know. Is a certain empirically found level of social integration not enough, too much or just right? About 200 years of sociological research have not brought us closer to better answers to this urgent question.

3 Three Unsolved Questions

Our previous considerations have laid out the basic features of an understanding of social integration that is now to be subjected to a critical discussion. As we have just noted, this exercise did not provide an answer to the question of what the state of social integration is here and now. Nor will we be able to just knock it out in the following. Instead, we want to take our conceptual thinking further by deepening our basic understanding at three important points that we have already hinted at. First, we want to consider social integration as a mechanism, that is, to ask how it is causally produced. Second, we raise the question of how much social integration is needed for a stable societal order. Thus, the balance of a well-integrated society will be considered in terms of the point at which disintegration or over-integration begins. Third, we take a look at the dark side of social integration, i.e. its undesirable side effects, which are often overlooked or tacitly accepted. We cannot answer these three questions conclusively either. Rather, our aim is to contour them and thus make them more tangible for further discussion.

3.1 The Causal Mechanisms of Social Integration

The first question we want to raise is: how is social integration generated? Although our first section contemplated social integration as a phenomenon that needs a concise and differentiated elaboration, we now ask how a given state of social integration can be explained.

Clearly, these two issues are intimately related: to be able to explain social integration we need to carefully separate what social integration "is" from its antecedents (and its consequences). Are cultural norms of "amoral familism" (Banfield 1967) that inhibit social cooperation beyond the family an explanation for (a lack of) social integration or are they merely a form or dimension of social integration? A lack of conceptual clarity runs the risks of producing tautological explanations. And although this problem is particularly thorny in culturalist explanations, it is in no way absent from institutional or socio-structural explanations of social integration. Levels

of economic inequality, for instance, cannot explain and measure social integration at the same time.

Putting these definitional aspects aside, we observe that research on the determinants of social integration tends to focus on correlations. What is needed is a better understanding of the causal mechanisms in the generation of social integration. This involves two distinct challenges: a) establishing credible and robust causal effects (i.e. does X cause social integration?) and b) understanding the underlying mechanisms (i.e. why does X cause social integration?).

In the search for causal effects we expect research on social integration to benefit greatly from considering causal research designs and identification strategies that are currently gaining traction in the social sciences (Angrist and Pischke 2010; Morgan and Winship 2015). These could range from controlled laboratory or survey experiments on the psychological underpinnings of social integration to large-scale field experiments of socially cohesive behaviour in real-life settings as well as quasi-experimental designs that exploit naturally or institutionally occurring sources of variation that may affect social integration. A somewhat related development to increase the credibility of causal claims in the social sciences are preregistrations, where research questions, hypotheses and analysis plans are fixed and documented before data analysis (Nosek et al. 2018, see Jünger and Schaeffer, this issue).

Although these research designs will help to point out more credible cause-effect relations, they will not tell us why and exactly how causal determinants bring about effects with regard to social integration. Spelling out this causal chain is what mechanism-based explanations are aimed at (Mayntz 2005; Hedström and Swedberg 1998; Hedström and Ylikoski 2010; Greshoff 2015). Often this is only possible, at least at the beginning, with qualitative "causal reconstructions" of the complex causal chains and connections that underlie actors "doing integration" in day-to-day interaction.

In an actor-based analytical framework, social integration is the result of individual and composite actors and their inter-related actions: does it bring about a well-balanced societal order, or does it result in societal disintegration or over-integration? From this point of view, we are interested in the specific processes and dynamics by which actors contribute—more likely unintentionally than intentionally—to social integration. More specifically, we can distinguish four situations:

- actions intended to contribute to social integration and achieving this result;
- actions intended to contribute to social integration and not achieving this result and/or bringing about harmful unintended side-effects;
- actions with other intentions that contribute to social integration ("invisible hand");
- actions with other intentions from which harmful unintended side-effects result.

In particular, the "invisible hand" explanation of social integration deserves more attention. When actors contribute to social integration without intending to do so, even "private vices" can result in "public virtues", as Bernard de Mandeville knew. The related analytical challenge is how to best aggregate these behaviours of multitudes of actors to the level of societal structures.

That individuals may contribute to social integration without intending to also means that other actors—such as policy makers intending to produce social integration—who know about this transintentional effect can attempt to deliberately shape the context and try to "nudge" (Thaler and Sunstein 2009) individuals into acting as producers of social integration. For example, the more night strollers—whatever intentions they pursue—populate the city centre late at night the more public safety as a manifestation of the conformity dimension of social integration is guaranteed. Each night stroller contributes to the safety of all of the others; the other way round, each one's safety is assured by all the others. By making the inner city attractive for night strollers—open restaurants and bars, cinemas, late night opening hours of museums or public libraries, meeting places etc.—urban planning can design an environment that turns people's behaviour towards a strengthening of social integration. Of course, a constantly looming possibility is that such deliberate attempts at crafting or engineering social integration will not only fail but even have detrimental effects. Yet, by providing robust and valid causal explanations of social integration, social scientists can contribute to minimising this risk.

Finally, we must take into consideration that there are actors who do not want to contribute to social integration but, on the contrary, want to bring about dis- or over-integration, or whose activities trans-intentionally produce these two problematic states. Actors such as criminals or revolutionaries may have an interest in social disorganisation, just as "true believers" in some religious dogma may prefer the societal over-integration of a theocracy—see not only the Taliban in Afghanistan. Others still may not care about the dis- or over-integrative side-effects of what they are, for quite different reasons, doing. Putnam's "bowling alone" phenomenon is a good example. Nobody wants a decline of social capital but the circumstances of life of more and more persons bring about a withdrawal from civil society activities in the neighbourhood or voluntary associations.

Most sociological work on social integration is far away from spelling out the social mechanisms that generate a strengthening or weakening of social integration from the interplay of the respective constellations of actors. Quantitative studies often stop when they have provided us with significant and robust correlations and leave the black box of causalities unopened; and qualitative studies sometimes get quite far in a deeper understanding of the causalities at work in their respective empirical cases but do not take the next step of crafting generalised theoretical mechanisms that can be applied to other cases. However, both empirical approaches should aim for more. We should not be content with our sociological explanations of the emergence, maintenance, or erosion of social integration before we have spelled out the underlying mechanisms.

3.2 The Base-Line of Social Integration

After having established our concept of social integration and asked how social integration is generated, we have to consider a second question: is social integration, as concerns about its erosion imply, a functional requirement for societies to achieve other ends, such as a certain degree of social stability or an effective societal "functioning"? Or is social integration an end in itself, which implies that it would

be a normatively desirable societal state-of-affairs? Thus, whereas social integration was the dependent variable—the explanandum—in the previous sections, now we treat it as the independent variable—the explanans.

Having developed into a predominantly empirical discipline, one might assume that sociology cannot say much about the question whether social integration is a desirable requirement for the achievement of other ends, and in how far it is an end in itself. Nevertheless, sociologists' continuing preoccupation with the issue suggests that the concept of social integration assumes an important—and in comparison with other disciplines somewhat unique—conceptual status in sociological thought. In a study on the history of sociological thought, Robert Nisbet (2004) has argued that the distinctiveness of sociological thought can be characterised by five core ideas—community, authority, status, the sacred and alienation—which are rooted in a conservative nineteenth-century countermovement to the rationalistic individualism of Enlightenment thinking (Nisbet 2004). Thus, a concern about the decline of communal forms of social integration and the supposed dissolution of the moral fabric that held pre-modern societies together represents a key issue of many sociological analyses of the transition to modernity (Berger 1991, p. 17; Müller 2021).

The conceptual status of this focus on problems of social integration, however, remains unclear. Is it an ideal-typical state-of-affairs, conceptually comparable with the idea of equilibrium in modern economics? Is it an implicitly or even explicitly normative concept—such as the notion of democracy in political science—that states what "we" understand as a "good society"? To what extent does it also serve as an (implicit) benchmark in the empirical study of societies—and what kind of society do we have in mind when we think about a well-integrated society?

With regard to post-World War II Western societies, the "Golden Age" of organised welfare capitalism from the 1950s to the mid-1970s is often regarded as the hallmark of socially integrated societies (Hobsbawn 1995, pp. 324–401). After the disastrous disruptions of the Second World War, the "post-war social settlement" of industrial society achieved a high degree of social integration through active government intervention in the economy, redistribution to curb economic inequalities, and the expansion of the welfare state to shield citizens from the vagaries of the market (Streeck 2014, p. 24). Yet, although this arrangement integrated a (predominantly male) majority of the labour force, it relied heavily upon a strongly gendered division of paid work and unpaid domestic labour, as well as on the subordinate status of immigrant workers (see next section). Moreover, during the 1960s a criticism of this state of societal affairs as "over-integrated" came up. In particular, this criticism pointed out conformity pressures that tended towards a repression of individuality and creativity, so that the countercultures of the late 1960s started to swing the pendulum in the other direction of disintegration. Since then, tendencies of individualisation, liberalisation and pluralisation have unfolded and entered prominently into the debate (Beck 1983). More recently, globalisation, supra-nationalisation, and immigration are further driving-forces that challenge the integrative capacities of the old industrial order—powerful forces that have given way to various side-effects that are now widely regarded as symptoms of social disintegration.

With regard to the *functional necessity* of social integration, the most radical view is put forward by Niklas Luhmann (1984), who doubts that there is a need, to say nothing of a growing need, for social integration by a shared normative consensus. Instead, from his systems-theoretical view of the functional differentiation of modern society, the seamless coordination and cooperation of the various societal spheres is sufficient for a stable societal order. Analogously, whether members of a society really need much normative 'common ground' in order to interact in socially integrative ways is therefore an open question. Such a view presents a strong challenge to anybody who argues that social integration is—still—a highly relevant topic.

Yet, the current observations giving rise to worries about social integration often rest on the assumption that without "sufficient" levels of social integration, societies show various signs of dysfunction or produce negative externalities that undermine individual as well as collective well-being (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010). With regard to the question what these specific societal "trouble zones" are that may endanger social integration, it seems that these have changed over the last decades.[15] Some topics addressed now were not very prominent 25 years ago—such as rising inequality, immigration from Non-European continents, the transformation of work, or right wing populism—whereas others dealt with then may be considered less relevant today, such as the acceptance of laws. Although the question when and under which conditions dynamics in the direction of disintegration in fact become dysfunctional, or produce negative externalities, can most likely only be answered empirically, it casts the difficulties that the investigation of social integration faces in sharp relief. After all, societies vary in their reactions and capacities to cope with challenges to social integration. For instance, the degree of inequality that is deemed acceptable differs across nations (Osberg and Smeeding 2006; Sachweh and Olafsdottir 2012), as does the tolerance towards immigrants (Crepaz and Damron 2009) or the capacity of political systems to accommodate populist parties or movements (Rydgren 2005; Manow 2018). Ultimately, then, it seems unlikely that an "optimal" or "sufficient" level of social integration can be defined a priori. What social scientists can provide, however, are empirically rich investigations of the specific economic, political, institutional and cultural conditions that give rise to any detrimental effects of the above-mentioned social changes.

In sum, social integration can be viewed as an end in itself, a normatively desirable state-of-affairs, on the one hand, and as a functional necessity, on the other. Discussions up to now seem to have demonstrated that with regard to both views, an assessment of which degree of social integration is (un)desirable or produces (dys)functional effects, cannot be provided by purely theoretical reflections but must be based on empirical studies of particular societies. This implies, though, that it is an open question whether we will ever be able to identify generalisable benchmarks for a minimum—or comfortable—level of social integration of contemporary West-

[15] As a look back at the earlier special issue of the KZfSS on social integration shows (Friedrichs and Jagodzinski 1999).

ern societies, not to speak of higher generalisations with regard to modern society or even all kinds of human societies.[16]

3.3 The Dark Side of Social Integration

The second question took social integration either as a functional requirement of societal order—i.e. as a means of achieving further ends—or as an end in itself, i.e. a conception of a "good society". Our third and final question continues viewing social integration as explanans and takes a look at the other side of the coin: *Granted that all societies must be socially integrated to a certain extent, what are the costs of social integration to society as well as to its individual members or specific social groups?*[17]

This question entails, first, empirical and normative assessments of social integration that relate to various forms of political, economic and social inclusion/exclusion (Picker 2017), within-/between-group solidarity (Wildt 1999), and social inequalities resulting from social contracts based on these, for example, inequalities arising in the realms of paid and unpaid work (Smith 2006; Grunow 2019). Second, it entails questions that concern societies in general, i.e. considerations regarding the innovation capacity and performance of societies displaying different degrees and varieties of social integration and centralisation (Crozier 1970; Hall and Soskice 2001; Heinze 2013; Mayer and Hillmert 2004). If we fail to apply the analytic lens of social integration critically, we may overlook the unintended and tacitly accepted side-effects of integrated societies.

3.3.1 Group-Level Societal Side-Effects

On the group level, we see two forces that are potentially detrimental to social integration: insider-outsider dynamics and related to this, integration into groups that contest, or are suspected to contest, basic democratic or human rights principles underlying social integration in western societies.

The dark side of insider-outsider dynamics relates to the fact that the costs of social integration occur on different societal levels and are split unevenly among different social groups. Most notably, this is the case whenever social integration is intensified by means of partial exclusion. If a high level of social integration of most members of society is achieved by the exclusion of some, so-called "outsiders", i.e. on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, migration, or gender/sexuality, the excluded groups likely bear many of the costs of integration. Such costs are visible, for example, in group-related social inequalities, such as gaps in socio-economic achievement

[16] The latter analytical point of reference was seen as a possible level of generalization when structural-functionalist thinking formulated functional prerequisites of any kind of human society (Levy 1971). The result of such an attempt were mostly arbitrary trivialities.

[17] Furthermore, it should be critically asked what consequences arise in the relationship of socially integrated societies to each other, e.g. when resources are scarce and in demand, such as recently COVID-19 vaccines or oil and other raw materials as well as staple foods? How resilient are recent trans-, international and global ideas of social solidarity in times of acute crises? And how can we make sense of worldwide social inequalities if neglecting the dark side of social integration—historically a mostly national construct?

and payoff by gender and migration background. Many forms of social integration require us to define boundaries within which integration is supposed to happen, and thus to create "insiders" and "outsiders", most of whom become "winners" and "losers" in societies based on partial exclusion.

Often, such boundaries—and the resulting social inequalities—have historical roots, reflecting past and path-dependent forms of partial inclusion and exclusion, as well as new challenges of such established orders. The question of political, economic and social inclusion and exclusion, for example, has been tied to inequalities on the basis of class, race, ethnicity, gender and various forms of spatiality, including migration (Picker 2017). More recently, such forms of inclusion/exclusion have extended to the digital realm, i.e. the "digital divide" (Alam and Imran 2015; Livingstone and Helsper 2007). The digital realm has also become a central social space in which established principles of social inclusion and exclusion and related to this, definitions of insider and outsider groups are being challenged (Ils et al. 2021).

Today, views of social integration that stress common identity by shared values—as in Emile Durkheim's (1964) notion of "mechanical solidarity"—have been found to work to the detriment of those who are considered outsiders (Fraser 2007; Sandelind 2018; Taylor 1998). Besides, as Elias and Scotson (1994), as well as the debate over "bridging" versus "bonding" social capital (Putnam 2000; Coffé and Geys 2007), have shown, tight social integration within some groups can result in the accumulation of advantage and group privilege ("opportunity hoarding") and the exclusion and stigmatisation of others, even if no initial differences in resources and power exist. If group-based boundary making and opportunity hoarding become institutionalised, i.e. in laws and organisational practices, social integration at the group level can ultimately contribute to the social exclusion of other groups, and thus undermine social integration of society. History has shown that the excluded can even be the majority of members of society, when power-balances, and thus the chances for opportunity hoarding, work to their disadvantage. If we think, for instance, of industrialised societies during the "golden age" as integrated, and consider paid work a key mechanism of social integration (Smith 2006), women, the unskilled and migrant laborers could empirically be identified as outsider groups who benefitted less from this type of social integration, and bore higher costs, than others (Van Berkel et al. 2002).

The second problem at the group level is *integration into groups that contest, or are suspected to contest, basic democratic or human rights principles*. If individuals integrate into social groups that do not share the principles underlying the status quo of social integration, this destabilises social integration on the macro-level. Research suggests that the tendency to integrate into groups that contest such principles, for example, right-wing political parties, is higher among individuals that feel threatened to become outsiders because these groups politically mobilise such threats (Oesch 2008; Sachweh 2020; Schmuck and Matthes 2017). Another side-effect of insider-outsider dynamics is integration into minority groups that are suspected to contest basic democratic principles. An example of this is integration into certain religious groups in the context of immigration. On the one hand, such communities often provide newcomers with vital access to relevant information, housing and paid

work in the destination country. In this sense, integration into religious communities fosters immigrants' integration into the host society. On the other hand, religiosity and religious practices are often considered cultural barriers to social integration into host societies and foster discrimination of members of religious groups (Di Stasio et al. 2021; Kogan et al. 2020). So processes of social integration by individuals with an outsider background may be hampered, based on group affiliation.

3.3.2 Societal-Level Side-Effects

The second concern regarding the dark side of social integration focuses on side-effects arising on the level of society as a whole. Social integration has been found to create societal costs[18]. First, the more socially integrated societies are, the less room might be left for individual freedom. This aspect relates back to issues of common identity and shared values. We thus ask with even stronger emphasis: is social integration always a "good thing"? What we address here is one of the most important in-built tensions of modern society: the push towards individualism as a cherished cultural ideal of a "good life" against the need for collective conformity to secure the basic functioning of society on the basis of institutionalised norms and a minimum of shared values.

Second, connected to the first point, strongly integrated societies may be efficient at first, or in some respect, but lack the capacities for self-renewal and innovation in the long run, as a result of centralisation, a corporatist proliferation of "veto players" (Tsebelis 2002), or bureaucratisation (Crozier 1970; Hall and Soskice 2001; Heinze 2013; Mayer and Hillmert 2004). As modernity is committed to progress in all societal spheres, creativity and innovation are core drivers of societal dynamics and key competencies in cross-national competition. Research has shown that societies do not need to be overly integrated to stifle creativity and innovation; already a well-balanced state of social integration can suppress innovative potential to some extent (Hall and Soskice 2001; Hall and Gingerich 2009). Contemporary societies thus face a trade-off between innovation potential on the one hand and social integration on the other.

An as yet unsolved question is whether social integration has indeed weakened or whether this perception is based on rising standards regarding appropriate levels of social integration, i.e. with respect to (former) outsider groups. Related to this, and acknowledging the dark side of social integration the question arises whether societies should indeed worry about a weakening of social integration. Is there really a higher risk of modern societies falling apart and drifting towards anarchy? Or are we merely observing struggles that are fuelled by the dark side of the social contracts and insider-outsider constellations underlying current societal order? In the former case, basic principles of democracy and human rights are at stake. In the latter, we might not be heading towards social disintegration, but towards a modified set of social contracts for social integration in contemporary societies. In principle, such modifications might reduce social inequalities inherent to social integration.

[18] Which, by the way, may reinforce group-based inequalities.

4 Thematic Spotlights

Our guiding questions are addressed, with varying emphasis, in four themes around which we organised the contributions to this special issue: (1) Theoretical and conceptual contributions to social integration; (2) Religion and identity; (3) Ideology and politics; and (4) Social inequality and conduct of life. These themes, we argue, are vital to and inspire the provision of new and better answers to the open questions we have raised.

4.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Contributions

The three contributions to this sub-section offer both complementary and, in some respects, alternative conceptualisations of social integration than we propose in this introduction. Read together, our introduction and the three contributions document the ongoing lively and in some respects controversial debate about basic analytical questions, in particular, what should be understood as social integration, what are its important dimensions and components (and how can they be measured empirically), and how much and why members of society as well as their sociological observers should care about the state of social integration.

From a Weberian perspective, Thomas Schwinn's approach to social integration replaces society as an analytical reference point with different levels of societisation ("Vergesellschaftung"): social categories, milieus, intermediary organisations, and state order and the global level. This analytical strategy results from a critique of current deficit diagnoses, which typically identify society-wide disintegration tendencies—hardly ever over-integration—that are not reflected in empirical research results. In other words, Schwinn argues for a significant downscaling of the question of social integration and the consideration of corresponding phenomena. In the final step of his considerations, the author takes a closer look at the relation between social and cultural integration. He points out that it is a vain hope—also held by sociologists—that social integration can rely on cultural integration. On the contrary, certain basic value conflicts and dilemmas are inherent to Western modernity and will never be finally resolved, but can only be rebalanced again and again. All in all, instead of speaking of the social integration of society at large, Schwinn argues for a multitude of partial analyses of limited societal constellations with respect to their particular state of social integration.

In Schwinn's observations, it is repeatedly expressed that social integration should not be understood as the absence or even elimination of conflicts. This topic is explored in greater depth in the article by Nicole Deitelhoff and Cord Schmelzle. They make it clear that a naïve understanding of social integration as an always harmonious, consensual living together misses the point, especially in pluralistic and functionally differentiated modern societies. On the contrary, an absence of conflicts arouses a suspicion of over-integration. Conflicts, even hard and unsolvable conflicts are ubiquitous events in contemporary societies, so we must ask: under what conditions, and in which forms do conflicts lead to social disintegration, and when do they contribute to the maintenance of social integration? In particular, democracy as a mode of handling conflicts of interest as well as of identity should be reconsidered,

because it is threatened from various sides in many countries. The authors see especially three tendencies at work that effectively weaken the productive potential of conflicts—a depolitisation of political decision-making and consensual forms of consultative or participatory decision-making—or turn conflicts into destructive ones, in particular populist parties' stirring up of identity-based conflicts.

Finally, as an empirical science, sociology always has to ask for the operationalisation of theoretical concepts in order to investigate how they look like in a given state of society. For quantitative social research this amounts to making theoretical concepts measurable. In this respect, too, social integration turns out to be a challenging concept that raises difficult questions for social research, some important ones still unsolved. Jan Delhey, Georgi Dragolov and Klaus Boehnke provide an overview of existing measures of social cohesion. All the measures that they review have been designed for cross-national comparisons of a large number of societies and reflect the multifaceted nature of social integration. This sets them apart from measurement approaches that focus on a single component of social cohesion (such as trust or identification), that define cohesion merely ex negativo (e.g. in terms of the absence of discrimination, conflict, and violence), or that conceptualise social integration as an attribute of individuals. Based on a systematic evaluation scheme, Delhey, Dragolov and Boehnke compare these measures of social integration with respect to what they measure, how and for what purpose. They also highlight key empirical insights gained by these measures, touching upon the issues of cohesion levels, cohesion regimes, as well as determinants and outcomes of social integration.

4.2 Religion and Identity

Sociologists have long considered religion the "social glue" that keeps societies together. But in the light of secularisation and individualisation, the salience of religion for social integration has been lost out of sight since the 1980s. Things have changed drastically since the beginning of the twenty-first century and the religious factor is now again at the centre of many key debates around social integration (Traunmüller 2009, 2011). Interestingly, religion is now primarily seen as a potential source of conflict and disintegration. In the USA, for instance, heated debates revolve around polarising culture wars that pit religious and secular groups against each other on issues such as abortion, gay rights or family values (Fiorina et al. 2005). In Western Europe, immigration from Muslim origin countries has led to a growing religious and cultural diversity that poses formidable challenges for social integration (Van der Meer and Tolsma 2014; Traunmüller 2013). The papers collected under this subsection address the role of religion and identity for social integration from several different perspectives.

Matthias Koenig takes the lead and provides a synthesis of existing research on religion and immigrant integration. By discussing the symbolic, social and institutional boundary dynamics of religious diversity in Western Europe he addresses the problem of social integration at three distinct but interrelated levels, starting with religion as a salient identity marker rooted in intergenerational patterns of Muslim religiosity as well as anti-Islamic rhetoric. He then documents how religious differences translate into obstacles for social integration, including both self-segregation

and prejudice-based discrimination. Last, he turns to institutional arrangements of church-state relationships in Western Europe and argues that these have become increasingly accommodating and inclusive of religious diversity.

The article by Fenella Fleischmann and Yassine Koudhja directly follows up on the theme of religious boundaries and examines empirically how integration into the labour market, social networks, attitudes, values and identification relates to religious change among Christian and Muslim immigrants. Based on original data from a four-wave panel study in the Netherlands and using latent growth models, they demonstrate that overall the religiosity of recently arrived immigrants tends to decline. Interestingly, the findings are very similar for Muslim and Christian newcomers and suggest that all immigrants are susceptible to the secularising forces of the receiving society.

Studying the effects of ethnic diversity on generalised trust (a key measure in social integration), Stefan Jünger and Merlin Schaeffer take an innovative look at two specific forms of ethnic residential segregation. According to the contested boundaries hypothesis, places sandwiched between homogeneous ethnic enclaves and according to the halo-effect hypothesis homogenous neighbourhoods that border on ethnically diverse ones are likely to suffer from social disintegration. In their pre-registered study, they merge geo-coded data from the German General Social Survey with 100 m × 100 m spatial grid data from the German Census 2011. Applying edge detection techniques to identify residential boundaries and a recently developed method of measuring residential halos they investigate the important question whether ethnic residential boundaries and halos erode social integration.

4.3 Ideology and Politics

One of the spheres where contemporary challenges to social integration are most visible and pertinent is the political sphere. During the early decades following WWII, political conflicts were firmly regulated and institutionalised. In most rich Western democracies, catch-all political parties whose ideological positions could be clearly aligned on a left-right continuum used to integrate large parts of the electorate into the political system. Although the emergence of new social movements and the shift towards postmaterialist values during the 1980s added some complexity to this picture, it left the established modes of democratic conflict management unchallenged.

Currently, however, the rise of right-wing populism, the decline of established catch-all political parties ("Volksparteien") and the emergence of new ideological cleavages provide evidence that these former pillars of social integration appear to lose ground. The reconfiguration of national patterns of resource allocation and cultural value systems through globalisation, supra-nationalisation and cross-border mobility is often said to have complemented—or even supplanted—traditional ideological cleavages (left/right, materialist/postmaterialist) and patterns of identification (Kriesi et al. 2006). Against this backdrop, Celine Teney and Li Kathrin Rupieper investigate to what extent a globalisation-related cleavage can be identified in Germany. Based on repeated cross-sectional survey data reaching back to the early 1990s, they investigate whether globalisation-related issues have increased

in salience and whether the German population has become increasingly polarised around these issues. They find that of the four issues "immigration", "European integration", "economic liberalism" and "environment", only questions of immigration have gained in salience since 2015. However, they find no evidence of an overall sharp polarisation of immigration-related attitudes but a shift towards increasing tolerance. Also, attitudes towards environmental issues have become more positive. There is thus little evidence of a new division between cosmopolitan "winners" and communitarian "losers" of globalisation in the German population.

Somewhat relatedly, Jennifer Fitzgerald, Kathryn Schauer, Rachel J. O'Neal and Pavel Bacovsky study the role of place-based attachment for support for democratic principles. Using Swedish panel data on a sample of adolescents, they find that place-based identification and belonging—i.e. feeling at home in one's country, city or neighbourhood—strengthens support for democratic principles. This relation is robust to the inclusion of other important predictors of democratic support, such as trust, internal political efficacy beliefs or anti-immigrant attitudes. Their findings thus underscore that pro-democratic orientations are positively impacted by feelings of belonging to place-based communities, and hence that social and political integration are intricately linked.

Among the disintegrative tendencies in the political sphere that established democracies have been witnessing over the past years are the decreasing electoral turnout and a growing political disaffection, which are often said to have turned either into affectively charged modes of political contestation or widespread political alienation and withdrawal (Gidron and Hall 2017; Hochschild 2016). Through qualitative interviews with young working-class residents of a declining coal town in Northeastern Pennsylvania, Jennifer Silva examines the affective dimensions of political beliefs and action through a case study of young working-class adults. By studying in-depth a population that is rarely reached in conventional survey research, her findings testify to the emotionally painful experiences of social suffering that underlie her interviewees' distrust of politicians. Lacking any collective mode of coping with these experiences, she shows how her respondents' turn to individualised strategies of self-help justifies political disengagement and a turn towards conspiracy theories. Thereby, Silva provides us with a detailed picture of the perceptions and experiences that deepen the divide between elites and ordinary citizens and open up gaps in the representation of specific groups.

Finally, Kathrin Ackermann, Julian Erhardt and Markus Freitag investigate to what extent volunteering—which is an important aspect of how an individual's cooperative behaviour can strengthen social cohesion—is affected by welfare state policies. Contrary to the thesis of a "crowding out" of civic engagement by welfare state institutions, they show that strong welfare states enable, rather than undermine civic participation—especially for those individuals that strongly benefit from welfare state redistribution. In doing so, the authors shed an important light on the institutional conditions that can foster social integration.

4.4 Social Inequality and Conduct of Life

We have argued that the "dark side" of social integration comprises the production and reproduction of social inequalities, based on insider-outsider constellations and related path dependencies underlying existing social contracts. Against this background it may at first sight appear counter-intuitive that both rising and declining social inequalities and the rapid changes in conduct of life over the past decades are currently seen as the main drivers of social disintegration. At deeper inspection, however, these trends reflect social changes with the capacity to alter social integration by making visible and challenging some of the long taken-for-granted social contracts that disadvantage outsider groups. The papers contributing to the theme *Social inequality and conduct of life* are especially suited to take a critical and empirically informed look at these changes, keeping in mind the dark side of social integration.

The first paper by Olaf Groh-Samberg, Tim Schröder and Anne Speer provides a conceptual approach to understanding social integration in light of how socio-economic stratification relates to current sociocultural conflicts. To this end, the authors first refine the concept of social milieus by linking socio-economic status positions to cultural values. Second, they apply this concept empirically to a German subsample of the 2016 European Social Survey to illustrate how basic cultural orientations are structured by, and cross-cut, socio-structural class positions. The authors conclude that social milieus embody different modes of social integration. There may thus be potential to challenge and change established principles of social integration.

The second paper by Natalie Grimm, Andrea Hense and Berthold Vogel addresses the changing nature of paid work as a major source of social integration. As more flexible, precarious and less committed employment relationships emerge as a consequence of digitalisation and the de-bordering of gainful employment, classical individual and societal-level functions of paid employment for social integration are weakening. These transformations challenge the foundations of the working society and raise questions regarding the present and future of paid work as a key force of social integration.

Carlotta Giustozzi contributes the third paper in this section of the special issue and explores the effects of unemployment on close personal relations. Guistozzi assesses whether negative effects of unemployment for social integration are primarily explicable by financial losses or whether social and cultural aspects of identity are more salient. The perspective presented by Giustozzi thus goes beyond analysing the direct effect of unemployment by differentiating effects by gender, household composition and individual work and family values.

The fourth paper by Christopher Swader and Andreea-Valentina Moraru provides a critical look at the thesis of the "loneliness epidemic" in contemporary societies, by assessing structural foundations of loneliness in individualised compared with socially integrated societies. The authors detect three pathways toward "less loneliness" among 20 European societies, based on data from the 2014 wave of the European Social Survey and other sources. These pathways, which combine various levels of public support, internet access and volunteering, help us to understand why

fewer people appear to be lonely in individualist societies than in highly integrated societies. Lower levels of social integration are thus not necessarily detrimental to living a "good life".

Taken together, the papers in this section take stock of whether and how formerly central realms of social integration, i.e. employment, the family and institutionalised forms of civic participation, may have lost part of their socially integrative function. In part, alternative forms of collectivity have risen, for instance, through new forms of civic engagement or within social milieus, cross-cutting or further differentiating the classic realms of social integration. However, certain social groups are clearly at risk of becoming or remaining outsiders and of occupying disadvantaged positions in contemporary societies. These groups, among them those in precarious employment and the unemployed, may thus rightfully challenge current social contracts underlying social integration.

Increasing socio-economic disparities and the attendant polarisation between "winners" and "losers" have contributed not only to the reconfiguration of subjectivities and ways of life, they are also supposed to foster segregation and segmentation among social groups (Jackson and Grusky 2018; Schimank et al. 2014). Do the various changes documented in the empirical contributions to this special issue indeed foster social disintegration or do they merely reflect changing modes of social integration?

Acknowledgements We would like to thank Taylan Yildiz and David Strecker for valuable comments to an earlier version of this paper. In addition, we would like to thank the contributors to this special issue for helpful comments on earlier paper drafts.

Funding This work was financially supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Research Institute Social Cohesion (Daniela Grunow, Patrick Sachweh, Uwe Schimank and Richard Traunmüller; funding code 01UG2050AY). Furthermore, Daniela Grunow and Richard Traunmüller were supported by the German Research Foundation, Research Group Reconfiguration and Internalization of Social Structure (FOR 5173, no. 439346934).

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

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