

# Editorial

As Peter Herrmann reminds us in the fourth article of this issue, we currently face societal abundance versus increasing inequality of access. Referring to different studies, he concludes that the following trend is indisputable: in 2015, just 62 individuals had the same wealth as 3.6 billion people. The wealth of these 62 people has risen by 45 percent in the five years since 2010. The wealth of the bottom half fell by just over \$1 trillion in the same period, amounting to 38 percent. Finally, since the turn of the century, the poorest half of the world's population has received just 1 percent of the total increase in global wealth. This trend will not only determine the chances for processes resulting in sustainable urban development all over the globe, but also the main challenge of the development toward overall sustainability of human existence on earth. For example, the shielded and armed residential areas of the super-rich in Rio de Janeiro pave the way for unsustainable societal relations in this megacity.

All topics discussed in this issue cannot be disconnected from this main trend. This trend also questions—because of the current transformation of production and reproduction relations and modern techniques of accumulation of wealth—the famous study by Richard Pipes (2000). He argued that a wide range of nations and political systems demonstrate persuasively that private ownership has served over the centuries to limit the power of the state and enable democratic institutions. The meaning of the concepts of property, possession, and democracy in Pipes's “epistemic world”—of latter of which's subject is articulated in the philosophy of Michel Foucault (May 2006)—can be questioned: are they still appropriate in the applied epistemic world of disembedded economic and financial strategies at the global scale today?

The idea behind the composition of this issue is twofold. First is to present studies from different epistemic worlds. They may contribute to our understanding of similarities and especially the interesting differences between these worlds in, for example, Russia, India, Southeast Asia, Western Europe, and so on. With this in mind, Ananta Kumar Giri—a philosopher from India—criticized the dominant (Western) interpretation of concepts of “human” and “social” some years ago. He argued that for rethinking and reconstitution of these concepts:

it is difficult to think in the conventional language of solution and conclusion. It invites further critical self-reflection, mutual dialogues, self and soci(et)al transformations. ... We have looked at the limitations of assumptions of the human and the social in approaches of human security and social quality. We have pleaded for transformation of both these approaches through a foundational rethinking of the very terms of our discourses ... which invites us for new



adventures in ideas and relationships and to be engaged in meditations and struggles for realisation of beauty, dialogues and dignity in society. (Giri 2011: 117)

In his article in this issue, Giri notices that the hard-core and hardware topics as outcomes of the Western mechanistic view about people, societies, and the planet remain largely unchallenged. As one of the consequences, the tendency is strong to reduce the most complicated challenge of humankind—namely, the sustainability of their living conditions on earth—to the question of how to restrict carbon dioxide emissions and related forms of pollution with the help of new energy production technologies. This is criticized from the human security and social quality perspective in 2015 (Gasper et al. 2015). One of the recent proposals is to store these emissions in empty former gas and oil caves, seemingly to complement these technologies for not preventing business as usual and especially economic growth as a condition for capitalistic-oriented objectives and interests.

We should notice that modern means of communication stimulate a seeming consonant of interpretations about the daily circumstances people live in. This diversity will be particularly masked by popular one-liners on Twitter and Facebook, which have recently been systematically loaded with ostentatious lies serving political goals. In other words, with the development of social media and mass communication, constantly updated with the minutiae of people's lives, the compulsion toward instant opinion sharing has allowed the proliferation of conspiracy theories, lies, and “fake news” on social media. This has implications for politics. The president of the United States of America is a master in propagating herewith constructed fallacious impressions of these daily circumstances. This concerns rightly a disdain of the existing different epistemic worlds. Donald Trump is disparaging other societies and nations—increasing division between people, even at the level of political rhetoric. But according to Greg Weiner (2017), this disdain goes much further:

The president's daily, even hourly abuse of language is also deeply problematic for a republic that conducts its business with words and cannot do so if their meanings are matters of sheer convenience. The unique arrogance of Mr. Trump's rejection of the authority of custom is more dangerous than we realize because without custom, there is no law.

By rejecting “the authority of custom,” this rhetoric leads to acceptance, or at least passivity, toward racist and fascist discourses in mainstream US public discourse. Once fascism and racism are seen as “legitimate” positions in a democratic society, the societal fabric and democratic institutions begin to unravel.

The articles in this issue express and clarify that, for example, ideas about human development will be heterologously colored in Taiwan, Germany, Russia, or India. The reason is not only the difference of the affinity with a particular ground pattern

of thought (conceptual framework) as the source of ontological and epistemological assumptions, which determine the nature of the epistemic world (Bhaskar 1979). The reason is also the cultural heritage that strongly influences the operationalization of the applied or chosen sociophilosophical conceptual framework. Because of the increasing interdependence of localities, societies, and international regions, and because of the common shared challenge—namely, the development toward overall sustainability—the inevitable and compelling task is to interpret the main processes in the same way. An understanding of the consequences of the different epistemic worlds is therefore a condition *sine qua non*.

A second aspect of the idea behind the composition of this issue is to present demonstrations of endeavors to explicate on the concrete (societal) level, the abstract (political) level, and the comprehensive (global) level the application of the different epistemic worlds. The level of general politics functions or should function as an intermediary between the daily circumstances of the societal level and the global level. The first article, by Ming-Lun Chung, is on the question of bullying in Taiwanese schools. The second article, by Rolf Dieter Hepp, considers increasing precarity due to Western capitalistic oriented labor market policies concerning the daily circumstances of people at the societal level. Both discuss two opposing positions at the concrete societal level—thus, in schools and at the workplace—which will open new horizons for research. In other words, the oppositions are related to two totally different understandings of the nature of the necessary transformation of relationships to effectively address the issues identified.

The third article is by Ananta Kumar Giri. He considers the one-sided accent of the human development discourse. The fourth article is by Peter Herrmann, on the traditional approach of accounting in the business world as being strongly determined by assumptions underlying neoliberal (political-oriented) interests. Both articles address their subjects from two opposing positions that may also be connected with the societal level and the global level. The outcomes of their subjects as presented in the third and fourth articles will become manifest in both schools and the workplace. These subjects will also play a role on global level, concerning, for example, strategies toward sustainable development as discussed in the fifth article. In other words, these two positions on societal level do not stand alone.

The fifth article is by Vyacheslav Nikolayevitch Bobkov and Nikolay Vyacheslavovich Bobkov. They propose new gnoseological, ontological, and axiological prerequisites of the development toward the overall sustainability on a global level, as opposed to the prerequisites of the modern industrial capitalist market society. According to the authors, the first will be based on the elaboration of the interrelationships of the social quality approach, the Russian interpretation of quality of life approach, and the noosphere paradigm of global societal development. The authors' purpose is to stimulate reflection on how this form of reasoning about processes on comprehensive (global) level can be connected with both opposing

positions, as clarified in the first and second articles on concrete (societal) level, and in the third and the fourth articles on the abstract (political) level.

Ming-Lung Chung argues, in the first article, that according to recent research, the prevalence of school bullying in Taiwan is gradually worsening among schoolchildren of all ages. This has led to anti-bullying actions initiated by governmental authorities. The Taiwanese government considers this issue closely associated with violent behavior and drug abuse. In this article, the roles of professionals (school staff) and community groups are highlighted in order to change the top-down interventions into a more modern and inclusive form of governance. Rather than seeing bullying as the result of deviancy, the recognition of these different perspectives at the concrete everyday level can move toward a form of school policy in which all children are empowered in the process of education, rather than reactively dealing with the symptoms of bullying behavior. This article tries to explicate the difference of the “mind-set” (or epistemic world) of policy makers and civil servants, supported by policy researchers on the one side and those of representatives of school staff and community groups on the other. Chung argues that an understanding of this difference will be a condition for paving the way for a transformation in anti-bullying approaches that can be based on participatory democratic forms of communication.

This also implies a long-term mechanism for examining the transparency of politics and policies, and bridging the emerging gaps between evidence-based research and top-down anti-bullying policy making. The community voice should not be silenced in the name of maintaining the sacred societal order. Important in this is an accent in this analysis of the interdependence of the roles of policy research and political governance. The former is in this case almost dominated by the latter, also because of the distribution of research funding. According to Chung, without changing this interdependence we are confronted with an invisible obstacle for changing existing circumstances and their structures, conventions, and practices. Top-down governance tends to reproduce the existing structure and deprive schools of autonomy, and to reduce opportunities to empower school staff to be more flexible in dealing with school bullying. With this in mind, Chung explores the question of the proposition and application of critical realism as developed by Roy Bhaskar (1979)—namely, whether the “generative mechanisms behind school anti-bullying policy making” can be justified. The purpose is to learn how these mechanisms could be activated in policy-making processes within the context of top-down governance, in order to strengthen new forms of governance (in particular, participatory democracy). This also implies that the questionable position of the academic world concerning the position of actors engaged with daily circumstances should be changed. In the study about the ostentatious lack of support of the academic world to community groups in Western Australia that tried to defend the primeval forests (Van der Maesen and Cadman 2016), we can find the recent consequences of the interdependencies of the political and the academic world. A supportive role of the academic role concerns the heart of the matter of the social quality approach’s ambition to strengthen

empowerment of people. It is a condition to be able to cope in a responsible way with the increasing complicated changes of their daily circumstances in such a way that they are also enabled to contribute to the development of the overall sustainability.

Rolf Dieter Hepp argues, in the second article, that existing societal notions are jeopardized because of deep-seated structural changes in the world of work. These changes are caused by current processes of societal transformations and are strongly stimulated by modern communication technology. Classical notions have lost their potential legitimization and, according to Ulrich Beck (2014: 171), “with global risks, old monopolies on reality definitions are being dissolved, and expert definitions or reality relying on the metaphysics of reproduction become irrational.” On the labor market, this is demonstrated by new forms of working contracts, based on atypical and temporary conditions. In recent decades, former forms of insecurity and precarity due to exclusion of the traditional labor market have found their way into the center of society. Traditional research, not addressing the fundamental tilting of production relationships (thus maintaining the traditional epistemic mind-set), will blame the individual for their insufficient capability to adapt to the new situation. According to Hepp, going beyond this conservative labor market research, a comprehensive restructuring of sociostructural groups becomes visible in the cataclysmic change in working and living conditions. They tend to assign new meanings to the ideas and lives of individuals. In his article, he refers to different explorations, oriented on the new world of work. We learn from these ongoing studies that the phenomenon of precarization is not only a cyclical problem under the new working conditions but also structurally positioned in the working process and living conditions. Hepp calls this “the starting point of a new quality” of societal transformation.

An important question is how to develop new forms of sociability that may result from the fragile position of modern forms of precarity as well. The areas of web technology and online social networks give rise to new occupational fields and occupations. While the debate in Germany sees the consequences of these developments result in stronger forms of individualization, the debate in France, according to Hepp, places greater focus on its embeddedness in an unfolding societal structure. This brings the focus on creativity to cope with new and unforeseen possibilities. He argues that a really important research focus should be how to pave the way for employees of companies or freelancers to unfold and to understand their creativity in the new working and living conditions: “the field of tension between self-realization, work and lifestyles will therefore be examined in its various guises.” Presenting outcomes of a great number of studies, Hepp concludes that precarization produces a restructuring of daily circumstances. This transverses the classical division between the periphery and the center. It concerns both skilled and unskilled workers and this places fear, apprehension, and uncertainty in societies. A picture of a prosperity society is painted that negates the problems and conflicts that the disputes within society do not perceive. The presidential elections in the United States and

Austria, and the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom are points of reference where we see a breakup of discursively mediated realities taking place.

Ananta Kumar Giri discusses, in the third article, how mainstream discourse and practice of development—for example, in the context of the United Nations—focus on what can be called the prose of development: the hard-core and hardware issues of economics, politics and infrastructure. Poetics, on the other hand, provides starting points for very different conceptual frameworks for development and transformation. It seeks to express the suffering and joys of souls and societies, and therefore offers a new dimension to the social quality idea about “the social” as the outcome of the dialectic between processes of self-realization of human beings and the formation of collective identities. It cultivates a pathway of creativity of the self, culture, societies, and the world amid threats of conformity and destruction of wider human potential. It also opens up our understanding of the mystical dimension in our sociohistorical existence, as well as our scientific and political struggle for justice. Giri refers to community actions, including the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra (MST, Landless Workers’ Movement) in Brazil, fighting for land. In its movement for justice, it also embodies mysticism, as it draws not only on classical Marxism and Leninism but also on mysticism of liberation theology.

The other “mind-set” is clearly demonstrated in the politics of India’s current government. It now plans to build one hundred smart cities across the country. Modern technology is seen here as the ultimate solution for societal problematique. But is sustainable development of urban circumstances a genuine subject for mechanistic conceived interventions and innovation? With the problematique of India’s megacities in mind, the target of smart cities reduces this to a one-dimensional subject. Based on different studies, Gardiner Harris (2015) concludes that New Delhi is one of the worst public health disasters in the world, with summertime temperatures that reach almost 49 degrees Celsius. Delhi’s true menace comes from its air, water, food, and flies. These perils sicken, disable, and kill millions in India annually. Of course, poetry does not seem to be in the agenda of such missions as smart cities, as it is also missing even in the much-valorized discourse of alternative human development coming from scholars such as Amartya Sen. These scholars do not address the questions of what fully nurtures us, or of what role devotion to creativity plays in giving human life its meaning. Where is poetry in the current discourse of happiness and human development? Giri refers to Martha Nussbaum, who— notwithstanding her affinity for the “human contract approach” and to the herewith related individualistic orientation on quality of life (Nussbaum and Senn 2000)—is drawn to poetry, which she appreciates as a creative and expressive tool against fundamentalism (Nussbaum 2003). But Giri also refers to Martin Heidegger and his love for poetry: “but ... neither his philosophy nor love for poetry became a tool in voicing protest against Nazi barbarism what to speak of fighting against it.” Quite the contrary. With this, Giri clarifies that all of us must do an immense work in order to

open our minds for poetics as a tool for achieving justice, human dignity, solidarity and equal value—the normative factors of the social quality approach.

Peter Herrmann discusses, in the fourth article, the modern forms of accounting in the business world with regard to environmental challenges and the objectives of societal corporate responsibility (Lin et al 2016). The thesis is that the current form of accounting fails to address the challenges that emerge from social quality thinking. This article may be appreciated as an elaboration of a specific topic in the context of the existing main antagonism of capitalism, namely between individualization and socialization (Herrmann 2016). The article is not focused primarily on changing the technicalities of accounting; rather, it questions the basic assumption of traditional accounting, constituting its own “epistemic world.” Traditional accounting is connected with the values, based on exchangeability and profitability instead of usability and appreciation. In other words, exchange value currently provides the momentum of societal development, with disastrous consequences for the development toward overall sustainability. Because capitalism has ultimately led to the disembedding of economic processes and the emergence of the highly financialized market society, Herrmann states that accounting becomes only accountable to itself.

The arithmetic summation is self-referential and has lost the connection to the use value, to the substance of what is accounted for. The segregation between use value and exchange value is getting more virulent. Because there is a limit to the expansion of use value (the limits of exchangeability of commodities), the exchange value is pushed much further; furthermore, the exchangeability of money (and other financial assets) is seemingly without limits. Therefore, Herrmann asks if we can justifiably continue with an income/input-oriented system, not only because the actual gain is going far beyond the account of commodities, but also because economic and financial interests and power systems are increasingly disconnected from other dimensions of societal complexities. The dominant practices of accounting are embedded in a specific “epistemic world,” which is presented as an evidence *sui generis*, neglecting the dangerous trend of increasing the gap between societal abundance versus inequality of access. Herrmann presents his new challenge for accounting. We must focus on the kind and degree of socialization of production—in terms of investment and appropriation alike. This implies establishing an accounting system that does allow relationality as subject matter, as elaborated in the social quality theory. This demands for a system that actually requires a conscious exploration of relationality. This relationality concerns the whole of the actual production in *sensu stricto*, the (productive) consumption, the distribution, and the exchange. Thus, as production is genuinely social (as conceived in the theory of social quality), the challenge is not only about tackling the issue of property of the means of production. Equally important is tackling the challenge that accounting cannot be limited to contribute to assessing conditions that aim on only guaranteeing profitability for individual enterprises.



In the final article, Vyacheslav Bobkov and Nikolay Bobkov introduce the well-known (in Russian academia) noosphere paradigm oriented on a particular global societal development. It is different from the usual “human development approaches.” The authors aim to connect this paradigm with the social quality approach and the Russian interpretation of the quality of life approach. According to the authors, this will deliver an alternative for the one-sided capitalistic orientation on the commodification and marketization of natural and cultural resources. They will contribute to people’s humanistic socialism as a condition for the realization of overall sustainability as well. During recent decades, European “quality of life approaches” appeared on the Russian academic agenda, but not without changing its highly individualistic oriented ontology and epistemology. In the Russian interpretation, extra accent is laid on the interdependencies between (groups of) people, systems, institutions, and other societal phenomena. With help of these changes, both authors aim to pave the way for its connection with the social quality approach. The ambition is with help of this connection to stimulate further research in Russia. The question should be raised if the “epistemic worlds” of both approaches are similar, which would be a necessary factor for their connection. In the article, the authors present seven types of societal-based qualities as their outcomes of these connections (quality of society, of the entrepreneurial life, of the workplace, of societal infrastructure, etc.). The authors aim with the integration of both approaches to pave the way for discussing the noosphere paradigm as introduced in the past by the French philosopher Edouard Le Roy and the French theologian and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin. This is further elaborated by—in their words—a “world class genius,” Vladimir Vernadsky. This paradigm connects processes, as referred to in the social quality approach, with laws and limitations of homeostatic mechanisms, such as the law of harmony of the biosphere and planet Earth as a superorganism. It has strong affinity with the theory of the Humanosphere Potentiality Index (Sato et al. 2016).

The authors discuss the recent Russian academic work, resulting in proposals for the organization and legal basis for regulating the movement to a society of noospheric harmony embodied in the Noosphere Constitution for Mankind. The content of this endeavor is confronted with the highly problematic “state-monopoly capitalism” as the dominant socioeconomic and sociopolitical practice in Russia. This theme has been analyzed earlier by one of the authors; it stimulates material self-interest, the monetary absolutization of human beings, and environmental destruction (Bobkov et al. 2013). On the other hand, both authors propose the idea of people’s humanistic socialism as a hypothetical socioeconomic and sociopolitical system. In the authors’ view, it will accentuate cultural progress, limitation of material overconsumption, and priority to knowledge and creativity as the basis of life. It will provide sustainable socioeconomic development and thanks to this, it will contribute to the development toward overall sustainability. This development will actualize the noosphere paradigm as a source for the prerequisites of greater social quality as well. This hypothesis may be appreciated as an endeavor to stimulate a discussion about alternatives for—in their



terms—the capitalistic market approach and the state monopolistic capitalism. It is also an invitation to apply and enhance the noosphere paradigm in connection with the social quality approach.

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