

Christoph Lorke

Beyond Egalitarianism: Statistical Knowledge and Social Inequality in the German Democratic Republic

ABSTRACT

Despite all the political and ideological pronouncements, there were also various forms of social inequality in the ‘real existing socialism’ of the GDR (German Democratic Republic). These have been extensively studied at the latest since the construction of the Berlin Wall. Since these years, there has been an intensified preoccupation with socially deviant living conditions, which have been documented statistically. However, these figures raised questions about the limits of socialist communisation and the realisation of the ideologically articulated goal of bringing about a convergence of the ‘classes and strata’. Therefore, the goal was to synchronize these figures with the state’s self-image, which in turn revealed numerous contradictions. Based on a deconstruction of contemporary statistical measurement procedures as well as studies and the resulting interpretations of social inequality, the article first proposes a phase classification of this approach to social differentiation. In a further step, the resulting intended and unintended effects are illuminated.

Keywords: social inequality; social sciences; statistics; poor and rich; marginalized groups; Socialism; Cold War; Ideology

Modern societies constantly produce descriptions of their social structures. Statistical methods of measurement are a reflection of a modern social order and at the same time an expression of normative standards and justifications.¹ However, the appropriation of social reality by political leaders sometimes contradicts real social developments. In the societies of ‘really existing socialism’ (*real existierender Sozialismus*), as recent research concluded, social inequalities remained a taboo²; the vision of an egalitarian,

- 1 See, amongst others: Ann Rudinow Sætnan/Heidi Mork Lomell/Svein Hammer (eds.): *The Mutual Construction of Statistics and Society*, New York 2011; Richard Rottenburg/Sally E. Merry/Sung-Joon Park et al. (eds.): *The World of Indicators. The Making of Governmental Knowledge Through Quantification*, Cambridge 2015.
- 2 Christiane Reinecke: *Fragen an die sozialistische Lebensweise. Empirische Sozialforschung und soziales Wissen in der SED-„Fürsorgediktatur“*, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 50

harmonious society prevailed, instead. This seems hardly surprising, since the issue of social inequality—or rather the issue of overcoming it—was deeply entrenched in the politics of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The much invoked ‘rapprochement of classes and strata’ (*Annäherung der Klassen und Schichten*) and the granting of social security were among the central promises and correspondingly propagandistically declared goals of the socialist state. According to the self-perception of socialist societies, the societal transformation into such a state had several positive effects on the structure of society: a homogeneous society, including small degrees of social differentiation, small differences in income, and standardised socio-political achievements. This claim also explains the overemphasis on social equality and the fade-out and externalisation of certain social phenomena such as ‘poverty’ and ‘wealth’, which were defined as ‘alien’ to socialism. Seen from this perspective, social policy was a means of preserving power through the preventive suppression of social tensions. Furthermore, it was to serve as propagandistic proof that socialist societies were the fairer, more humanitarian alternatives to their western equivalents.³

Precisely for this reason, the question arises as to how social difference was captured in East Germany and how state socialist egalitarianism affected the understanding of social differences. Recent studies suggest that these postulates and promises of an egalitarian society remained an illusion in the GDR, as well as in the other countries of the “Eastern Bloc”.⁴ These findings are widely and commonly

(2010), pp. 311–334; Lothar Mertens: „Was die Partei wusste, aber nicht sagte...“ Empirische Befunde sozialer Ungleichheit in der DDR-Gesellschaft, in: Idem (ed.): Soziale Ungleichheit in der DDR. Zu einem tabuisierten Strukturmerkmal der SED-Diktatur, Berlin 2002, pp. 119–157; in contrast, see: Siegfried Grundmann: Soziale Ungleichheit – ein Tabu in der DDR?, in: Nikolai Genov/Reinhard Kreckel (eds.): Soziologische Zeitgeschichte: Helmut Steiner zum 70. Geburtstag, Berlin 2007, pp. 97–109. According to Grundmann, the presentation of social differences was rather distorted, short-ended and defused (p. 98).

3 From a sociologist point of view, see: Frank Adler: Einige Grundzüge der Sozialstruktur der DDR, in: Projektgruppe „Das Sozio-ökonomische Panel“ (ed.): Lebenslagen im Wandel. Basisdaten und -analysen zur Entwicklung in den Neuen Bundesländern, Frankfurt am Main/New York 1991, pp. 152–177.

4 Members of the technical intelligentsia and armed organs, heads of the upper levels, functionaries or chief physicians as well as independent households formed the upper social edge in GDR society. Even if politicians tried to counteract a bundling of negative social conditions and reduce their emergence by securing basic needs, certain other groups can be found on the lower rungs of the social ladder. Female and unskilled workers and employees in the agricultural sector tended to have below-average mobility opportunities. In addition, pensioners in need of care and recipients of minimum pensions, disabled persons unable to work, single parents and large families were regarded as the largest fringe groups of socialist societies. Cf. Elvir Ebert: Einkommen und Konsum im Transformationsprozeß. Vom Plan zum Markt – vom Mangel zum Überfluß, Opladen 1997; André Steiner: Statistische Übersichten zur Sozialpolitik in Deutschland seit 1945. Band SBZ/DDR, Berlin 2006, p. 88;

known.⁵ Nevertheless, the specific conditions under which these observations of the social emerged still continue to constitute a considerable research gap, especially with regard to the history of knowledge. My paper aims to paint a more complex picture

Jens Gieseke: Soziale Ungleichheit im Staatssozialismus. Eine Skizze, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 10:2 (2013), pp. 171–198.

- 5 We also know a lot about the mental processing of social inequality and the modes of imagining inequality that prevailed in politics, science and the media (e.g. Christoph Lorke: *Armut im geteilten Deutschland. Die Wahrnehmung sozialer Randlagen in der Bundesrepublik und der DDR*, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2015; Idem: *Depictions of Social Dissent in East German Television Detective Series, 1970–1989*, in: *Journal of Cold War Studies* 19:4 (2017), pp. 168–191), about discrepancies between state propaganda claims and social reality, for example in relation to pension policy (Beatrix Bouvier: *Die DDR – ein Sozialstaat? Sozialpolitik in der Ära Honecker*, Bonn 2002; Christoph Lorke: *Von Anstand und Liederlichkeit. Armut und ihre Wahrnehmung in der DDR (1961–1989)*, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 10:2 (2013), pp. 199–218; Dierk Hoffmann: *Die ungelöste Rentenfrage in der DDR*, in: *Deutsche Rentenversicherung* 68:2 (2013), pp. 112–120; Idem: *Am Rande der sozialistischen Arbeitsgesellschaft: Rentner in der DDR 1945–1990*, Erfurt 2010; for a local level in a comparative approach, see: Dorothee Lürbke: *Armut und Armutspolitik in der Stadt: Castrop-Rauxel, Freiburg und Schwerin im innerdeutschen Vergleich, 1955 bis 1975*, Freiburg 2014; for poverty amongst large families, see: Christoph Lorke: „Soziale Ungleichheit und soziale Ungerechtigkeit“: Kinderreiche Familien in der DDR, in: *Deutschland Archiv Online*, at: <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschland-archiv/206153/soziale-ungleichheit-und-soziale-ungerechtigkeit-kinderreiche-familien-in-der-ddr> [accessed on 26 September 2019]) and about mechanisms of repression in the context of the GDR social policy (e.g. Alexander Bruce Burdumy: *Sozialpolitik und Repression in der DDR. Ost-Berlin 1971–1989*, Essen 2013; for the criminal offence of „Asozialität“, see: Matthias Zeng: „Asoziale“ in der DDR: Transformationen einer moralischen Kategorie, Münster 2000; Sven Korzilius: „Asoziale“ und „Parasiten“ im Recht der SBZ/DDR: Randgruppen im Sozialismus zwischen Repression und Ausgrenzung, Köln/Weimar/Wien 2005; Thomas Lindenberger: „Asoziale Lebensweise“. Herrschaftslegitimation, Sozialdisziplinierung und die Konstruktion eines „negativen Milieus“ in der SED-Diktatur, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 32:2 (2005) pp. 227–254; Joachim Windmüller: *Ohne Zwang kann der Humanismus nicht existieren... – „Asoziale“ in der DDR*, Frankfurt am Main/Berlin/Wien et al. 2006). For a comparative classification in the specific German-German constellation, see: Hans Günter Hockerts (ed.): *Drei Wege deutscher Sozialstaatlichkeit: NS-Diktatur, Bundesrepublik und DDR im Vergleich*, ünchen 1998; Winfried Süß: *Soziale Sicherheit und soziale Ungleichheit in wohlfahrtsstaatlich formierten Gesellschaften*, in: Frank Bösch (ed.): *Geteilte Geschichte. Ost- und Westdeutschland 1970–2000*, Göttingen 2015, pp. 153–193; Manfred G. Schmidt/Tobias Ostheim: *Sozialpolitik in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, in: Manfred G. Schmidt/Tobias Ostheim/Nico A. Siegel et al. (eds.): *Der Wohlfahrtsstaat: Eine Einführung in den historischen und internationalen Vergleich*, Wiesbaden 2007, pp. 173–192; Johannes Frerich/Martin Frey: *Handbuch der Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland. Teil 2: Sozialpolitik in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, München 1993. Reference is also made to the relevant 11 volumes on the history of social policy in Germany since 1945, published by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

in order to describe and historicise these processes of reflection. How can we capture something analytically which, according to the socialist party leaders, was not allowed to exist at all? Approaching the production of social classifications from a historical perspective, one can assume that their contemporary perception and perceptibility was always structured by systems of perception and evaluation and the principles of their 'classification'. They were the products of past and present symbolic confrontations with the social world. Specific taxonomies reflect effective social definitions. These 'social maps' served to structure and classify the complex reality of social structures and inequalities.⁶ According to Pierre Bourdieu, the state had the monopoly on the "appropriate" classification and order of the social. Consequently, I assume that the formation of categories, their recognition and reproduction have decisively shaped social order.⁷

In order to assess the extent to which these rather general considerations can claim validity for the more or less 'closed' GDR society, it is first necessary to at least sketch fundamental developments in the field of the (social) sciences. For quite a few observers saw little more than 'self-deception'⁸ in empirical social structure research in the GDR. Thus, there was a need for scientific expertise in the GDR, too, but only in a narrowly defined ideological framework. This meant that room for maneuver, available resources and the choice of topics were largely determined by the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED). Admittedly, research has shown that a distinction must be made between different periods. Thus, for example, for the period from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, with growing demands for control and a growing need for information, it is still possible to discern, despite narrow limits, co-determination by individuals and—with the SED's unchallenged claim to power—influence on politics by academics. At that time, there was a widespread belief, both in science and politics, in the predictability of social processes and social planning ambitions, as well as the partial integration of scientific findings into political and cultural action—from which various social science research efforts were to benefit.⁹ In the period that fol-

6 Peter A. Berger: Ungleichheitssemantiken. Graduelle Unterschiede und kategoriale Exklusivitäten, in: Archives Européennes de Sociologie 30:1 (1989), pp. 48–60, here referring to Bernhard Giesen: Natürliche Ungleichheit, soziale Ungleichheit, ideale Gleichheit. Zur Evolution von Deutungsmustern sozialer Ungleichheit, in: Idem/Hans Haferkamp (eds.): Soziologie der sozialen Ungleichheit, Opladen 1987, pp. 314–345.

7 Pierre Bourdieu: Sozialer Raum und „Klassen“, Frankfurt am Main 1995, pp. 23–30, especially p. 25; See also: Peter A. Berger: Die Herstellung sozialer Klassifikationen: Methodische Probleme der Ungleichheitsforschung, in: Leviathan 16:4 (1988), pp. 501–520.

8 As a West German economist and philosopher described it: Horst Laatz: Zur Entwicklung der empirischen Sozialstrukturforschung in der DDR, in: Dieter Voigt (ed.), Die Gesellschaft der DDR. Untersuchung zu ausgewählten Bereichen, Berlin 1984, pp. 147–165.

9 Central to the relationship between empirical social research and politics in these years is the article by Christiane Reinecke: Fragen an die sozialistische Lebensweise. Empirische Sozial-

lowed—specifically from the end of the 1970s onwards –increasing refusal of and resistance to consultation is discernible, a return to the earlier, increasingly one-dimensional relationship between science and politics, whereby the exchange between political authorities and scientists was to decline significantly, if not a pronounced lack of interest. With regard to the communication between science and politics, East German social scientist Manfred Lötsch was resigned to the fact that critical indications remained in the anterooms of the actual decision-making processes or were reinterpreted there.¹⁰ Thus, by this time and with the drifting apart of social policy programs and rhetoric on the one hand and economic performance on the other, the GDR had reached a point at which social planning promises had been pushed to their limits by social science.¹¹ This, in turn, created the breeding ground for the emergence of increasingly critical expert knowledge—whereby the knowledge gained here was largely ignored by the political leadership even until the fall of the Berlin Wall, certainly also because the findings there pointed to necessary changes that did not meet with any approval among the top functionaries who were not very reform-minded.¹²

forschung und soziales Wissen in der SED-„Fürsorgediktatur“, pp. 314–316. For the earlier phase, see the preliminary remarks in: Andreas Malycha: *Geplante Wissenschaft. Eine Quellenedition zur DDR-Wissenschaftsgeschichte 1945–1961*, Berlin 2003; Idem: *Neue Forschungen zur DDR-Wissenschaftsgeschichte. Aspekte des Verhältnisses zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik*, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 41 (2001), pp. 663–676; Peer Pasternack: *Wissenschaft und Politik in der DDR. Eine Kontrastbetrachtung im Vergleich zur Bundesrepublik*, in: *Deutschland Archiv* 41:3 (2008), pp. 510–519; Agnes Tandler: *Geplante Zukunft. Wissenschaftler und Wissenschaftspolitik in der DDR 1955–1971*, Florenz 1997; See, fundamentally, about that relationship and the various feedbacks: Peter Weingart: *Die Stunde der Wahrheit? Zum Verhältnis der Wissenschaft zu Politik, Wirtschaft und Medien in der Wissensgesellschaft*, Weilerswist 2001; Mitchell G. Ash: *Wissenschaft und Politik. Eine Beziehungsgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert*, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 50 (2010), pp. 11–46, especially pp. 30–42.

- 10 Manfred Lötsch: *Abschied von der Legitimationswissenschaft*, in: Hubertus Knabe (ed.): *Aufbruch in eine andere DDR. Reformer und Oppositionelle zur Zukunft ihres Landes*, Reinbek b.H. 1989, pp. 192–199, p. 197; See: Christiane Reinecke: *Fragen an die sozialistische Lebensweise. Empirische Sozialforschung und soziales Wissen in der SED-„Fürsorgediktatur“*, p. 321.
- 11 Lutz Raphael: *Die Verwissenschaftlichung des Sozialen – Wissens- und Sozialordnung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts*, in: Idem (ed.): *Ordnungsmuster und Deutungskämpfe. Wissenspraktiken im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen 2018, pp. 13–50, p. 32; See also: Idem.: *Experten im Sozialstaat. Statuswechsel und Funktionsdifferenzen in Demokratie und Diktaturen in Deutschland 1933–1990*, in: Idem (ed.): *Ordnungsmuster*, pp. 95–129, p. 107.
- 12 André Steiner: *Wissenschaft und Politik. Politikberatung in der DDR?*, in: Stefan Fisch/Wilfried Rudloff (eds.): *Experten und Politik: Wissenschaftliche Politikberatung in geschichtlicher Perspektive*, Berlin 2004, pp. 101–125. On the relationship between science and politics in the GDR, with particular reference to aspects of political control and dominance

Based on these preliminary considerations, my paper aims to analyse the effects and consequences of statistical and social knowledge about social imbalances in GDR society in a longitudinal perspective, whereby the GDR was an exemplary and equally special case for the ‘Eastern Bloc’.¹³ The focus is on the construction, purposes and dissemination of existing contemporary knowledge about social, or even more precisely: monetary inequality, rather than the concrete results of these diagnostics. Investigating the forms, techniques and effects of knowledge production and circulation seems promising. The deconstruction of contemporary modes of measurement and interpretation of “social space” enable us to ask new questions about representations of social orders under particular political conditions—not only of a socialist dictatorship but also in modern industrial societies in general.¹⁴ Such a perspective also allows insight into contemporary ideas and different interpretations of social equality and justice.

and the limits of political-dictatorial penetration of individual subjects, see: Jürgen Kocka: *Wissenschaft und Politik in der DDR*, in: Idem/Renate Mayntz (eds.): *Wissenschaft und Wiedervereinigung. Disziplinen im Umbruch*, Berlin 1998, pp. 435–459. For institutional and personnel frameworks of GDR sociology, see: Hansgünter Meyer: *Soziologie und soziologische Forschung in der DDR*, in: Bernhard Schäfers (ed.): *Soziologie in Deutschland. Entwicklung, Institutionalisierung und Berufsfelder. Theoretische Kontroversen*, Opladen 1995, pp. 35–50; Horst Berger: *Das Institut für Soziologie und Sozialpolitik im Spannungsfeld von Wissenschaft und Politik*, in: Wolfgang Girmus/Klaus Meier (eds.): *Forschungsakademien in der DDR – Modelle und Wirklichkeit*, Leipzig 2014, pp. 211–239; for an overview, see also: Jürgen Kaube: *Soziologie*, in: Jürgen Kocka/Renate Mayntz (eds.): *Wissenschaft* pp. 255–310. On the relationship of social self-interpretation and scientific practice to planning processes, see also: Peter C. Caldwell: *Dictatorship, State Planning, and Social Theory in the German Democratic Republic*, Cambridge 2003; Dolores L. Augustine: *Red Prometheus. Engineering and Dictatorship in East Germany, 1945–1990*, Cambridge 2007.

- 13 For an overview, see: Frank Adler: *Einige Grundzüge der Sozialstruktur der DDR*; for an in-depth understanding, see: Heike Solga: *Auf dem Weg in eine klassenlose Gesellschaft? Klassenlagen und Mobilität zwischen Generationen in der DDR*, Berlin 1995; see also Siegfried Grundmann: *Die Sozialstruktur der DDR: Versuch einer Rekonstruktion auf der Basis einer 1987 durchgeführten soziologischen Untersuchung*, Berlin 1997; for research in the GDR before 1989, see: Rudi Weidig (ed.): *Sozialstruktur der DDR*, Berlin 1988 (here almost two thirds of the GDR population was subsumed under the category of ‘working class’ status 1985, p. 16); in the Federal Republic, e. g. Dieter Voigt/Werner Voss/Sabine Meck: *Sozialstruktur der DDR. Eine Einführung*, Darmstadt 1987; Horst Laatz: *Klassenstruktur und soziales Verhalten. Zur Entstehung der empirischen Sozialstrukturforschung in der DDR*, Köln 1990.
- 14 Thomas Mergel: *Soziale Ungleichheit als Problem der DDR-Soziologie*, in: Christiane Reinecke/Idem (eds.): *Das Soziale ordnen. Sozialwissenschaften und gesellschaftliche Ungleichheit im 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt am Main 2012, pp. 307–336, here p. 307, p. 316; for aspects of social mobility and patterns of inequality in the GDR society, see also: Idem: *Gleichheit und Ungleichheit als zeithistorisches und soziologisches Problem*, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 10:2 (2013), pp. 307–320.

Moreover, we can outline how statistical knowledge translated into political action. In order to deal with these questions, first, I put a phase model up for discussion, before I address the intended and unintended ‘side effects’ of these developments.

Approaches to and Measurements of Inequality in GDR Society. A Phase Model

Statistical studies on social differentiation, for various reasons, did not play a pronounced role in the first years following the founding of the GDR. Only the establishment of the First Five-Year Plan, forced collectivisation, the workers’ revolt of 1953 and the food ration cards still valid until 1958 should be mentioned. In other words, all of these aspects make a more in-depth study of social differentiation in the ‘reconstruction years’ seem inappropriate, as more acute problems had to be overcome at first.¹⁵ Moreover, such discussions would have led the desired rapid realisation of the intended social model *ad absurdum*. In contrast, the 1960s can be described as a *phase of discovery* of social frictions in GDR society. This shift can only be understood against the background of the development of knowledge about global inequality after 1945, a research area that has recently received more attention from the historical sciences.¹⁶ After the construction of the Berlin Wall, political attention increasingly turned inwards. Now, the focus was on questions concerning the economic measurability of social differences and the political feasibility of solving social problems. During the years of euphoric planning, when the belief in shaping social conditions became increasingly important, this general trend led to discussions about material and social living conditions and needs in the Soviet Union, the GDR and other socialist countries.

This, however, resulted in official investigations kept under lock and key. Political leaders commissioned scientific studies in order to obtain information on social developments and vacancies, for example with regard to wage structures or the required level of state allowances such as pensions or child benefit.¹⁷ Since the mid-1960s, greater

15 Cf. the contribution in Dierk Hoffmann (ed.): *Vor dem Mauerbau: Politik und Gesellschaft in der DDR der fünfziger Jahre*, München 2003.

16 Cf. Daniel Speich Chassé: *Die Erfindung des Bruttosozialprodukts. Globale Ungleichheit in der Wissensgeschichte der Ökonomie*, Göttingen 2013; for a comparative perspective, see the instructive ideas in Felix Römer: *The Politics of Measurement: Knowledge about Economic Inequality in the United Kingdom and Beyond since 1945*, in: *History of Knowledge*, 2 June 2019, at: <https://historyofknowledge.net/2019/06/02/politics-of-measurement/> (accessed on 26 September 2019).

17 Berthold Bley: *Zur Quantifizierung der Bedürfnisse und der Bedürfnisbefriedigung im Sozialismus*, in: *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift/Technische Hochschule Ilmenau* 27 (1981), pp. 17–29. The first studies were carried out in the early 1960s and were intended to de-

effort was put into drawing a picture of social structures based on empirical facts. Initially, statistical-methodological questions were discussed at sociology congresses. Various transfer processes can also be observed in a transnational context, with the Soviet Union playing a decisive role here.¹⁸ The numerous statistical studies from these years demonstrate the increasing preoccupation of socialist regimes with questions of social equality, social differences and its dialectics.¹⁹

While inequality of income and especially poverty remained a taboo in public, it became the subject of scientific observation, at least for internal purposes. “The essential task of the socialist state”²⁰, one economic dissertation claimed in 1963, “is to eliminate unjustified differences in the satisfaction of needs, but maintain some differences”. It is hardly surprising that no specific reference was made here to the differences that still existed. However, at the same time, it was almost conceded with resignation that even in socialism these “cannot be eliminated once and for all”.²¹ In addition, there has been a reduction in consumption in families as the number of children increased, particularly in the area of nutrition. On the basis of these findings, an increase in payments from the Social Fund was called for, which was then implemented.²² Inequalities of income were regularly noted, for example in an economic dissertation from 1965, which was, for good reasons, declared a confidential matter (*vertrauliche Dienstsache*): The author, an economist from the Institute of Political Economy at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, demanded that the consumption level of the lower income groups should match neither to the average improvement of living standards nor to the average consumption level. He suggested increasing lower incomes, as well as pensioners’ incomes, and to reduce the number

scribe socio-economic conditions by means of statistics. They saw themselves as a contribution to highlighting the importance of statistics for improving social living conditions: Kurt Lungwitz: *Über die Klassenstruktur in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Eine sozialökonomisch-statistische Untersuchung*, Berlin 1962; see for sociological contexts Horst Laatz: *Klassenstruktur und soziales Verhalten. Zur Entstehung der empirischen Sozialstrukturforschung in der DDR*.

- 18 Thus, for example, the reception of relevant studies from the Soviet Union by GDR life-standard research lead to various transfer processes. An example of this is Waleri Jakowlewitsch Raizin: *Normativmethoden der Planung des Lebensstandards*, Moskau 1967, Bundesarchiv Berlin, DE 1/54600.
- 19 Initially, statistical-methodological questions were discussed at sociology congresses. See, as an example Manfred Lötsch: *Sozialstruktur der DDR – Kontinuität und Wandel*, in: Heiner Timmermann (ed.): *Sozialstruktur und sozialer Wandel in der DDR*, Saarbrücken 1988, pp. 13–26.
- 20 Paul Frenzel: *Die Sicherung einer planmäßigen Entwicklung der Befriedigung individueller Bedürfnisse mittels des sozialistischen Systems der Einkommensbildung*, Leipzig 1963, p. 74, p. 79, p. 159. All translations were made by the author.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Ibid.*

poorly paid jobs. Thus, a necessary correction of the gap between the lower and upper income groups was seen as the most urgent task. If there were no political interventions, the author warned, “exaggerations can lead to serious political problems” and would be an obstacle to the political and moral unity of the people.²³ Even if we can only make assumptions about the (certainly limited) influence of scientific expertise on day-to-day politics, such theses are unlikely to have left the political leadership untouched. One way or another: social policy appears here as a defensive prevention policy.²⁴ Such demands did not go unheard. The multiple increases in gross minimum wage, state child benefit and pensions in these years were the direct consequences of those scientific-statistical explorations. This example reflects the central functions of empirical social research not only in the GDR; this was most likely the case in most Western and Eastern industrial societies in the second half of the twentieth century: in the exercise of control through classification, in the enabling of planning of social processes and ultimately as a vehicle of obtaining political legitimacy both internally and externally.²⁵

It is, therefore, not surprising that a comprehensive scientific institutionalisation of the observation of the social sciences was established precisely in these years. In the mid-1960s, the research department ‘Standard of Living’, affiliated with the State Planning Commission, took up work. It dealt with the quality, quantity and structure of certain consumer goods, services and housing.²⁶ This development was part of a comprehensive reform course in the 1960s, and did not only put into perspective the GDR’s self-image as a ‘working society’.²⁷ It also refers to the dimension of the symbolic order and the power of categorisation by scientific experts, who were closely

- 23 Josef Bernard: Das persönliche Eigentum und der Stand der Versorgung der Arbeiter- und Angestelltenhaushalte mit langlebigen Konsumgütern, Halle 1965, S. 88. The income of private craftsmen was about twice as high as that of workers and employees which ultimately led to the latter falling short of their consumption levels. Cf. also his considerations one year before: Idem: Die ökonomische Funktion des persönlichen Eigentums im Sozialismus, in: *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift/Technische Hochschule Ilmenau* 13 (1964), pp. 379–387.
- 24 Josef Bernard also considered the most pressing social problems to be solved to be the low child benefit, the great social disadvantage of women with illegitimate children and the low pension for single pensioners: Josef Bernard: Sozialpolitische Probleme der perspektivischen Entwicklung des Lebensstandards, in: Hans Rößler (ed.): *Die Konsumtion im Reproduktionsprozeß*, Halle 1967, pp. 371–404.
- 25 Christiane Reinecke: Fragen an die sozialistische Lebensweise. Empirische Sozialforschung und soziales Wissen in der SED-,Fürsorgediktatur“.
- 26 Bernard Rolle/Helmut Steiner: Von den Anfängen der DDR-Sozialstrukturforschung. Voraussetzungen – widersprüchlicher Verlauf und ausgewählte Ergebnisse, in: Ingrid Lötsch/Hansgünter Meyer (eds.): *Die Sozialstruktur als Gegenstand der Soziologie und der empirischen Forschung. Beiträge zu einem Kolloquium in memoriam Manfred Lötsch*, Berlin 1998, pp. 25–60, here pp. 42–45.
- 27 Martin Kohli: Die DDR als Arbeitsgesellschaft? Arbeit, Lebenslauf und soziale Differen-

linked to the political elite and who pointed to the high degree of scientification of politics and the politicisation of science.²⁸ These interdependencies refer to the political aim of measuring the degree of social differentiation on the one hand, but tabooing their analysis on the other hand, since the results were usually only accessible to a small circle of selected persons.²⁹

After the *phase of discovery*, the 1970s were as a *phase of intensification* in dealing with economic inequality, which was not least a side effect of the *Unity of economic and social policy* program in the GDR. The implementation of a performance-oriented wage policy in the context of the ‘developed socialist society’ aimed at reducing existing social contradictions and increasing average and minimum wages, as well as pensions. Scientific observations also justified the overriding political goal, which was not the pursuit of economic equality, but a society with equal development and life opportunities throughout. Raising the lowest income level was seen as a means of reducing inequality and mitigating certain reproductive mechanisms, such as the lowest levels of living conditions, physically dangerous and inferior work, low education and unfavorable housing conditions.

At that time, various statistical findings indicated that differences in consumption among the population were first and foremost determined by the income factor.³⁰ Several studies based on income statistics from the early 1970s showed that a larger household size was associated with lower income levels, which had far-reaching consequences for the families: The increased need for frugality led to lower consumption of fruit, tropical fruits, sweets, cocoa products as well as shoes. Due to the ‘money question’, as it was explicitly and relatively openly called in one study from 1973, larger families had to resort to cheaper goods more frequently. Based on these figures, the study observed “significant differences in some areas of living standards”, which particularly affected large families. Politicians were therefore called upon to “gradually eliminate these unjustified differences”.³¹

zierung, in: Hartmut Kaelble/Jürgen Kocka/Hartmut Zwahr (eds.): *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, Stuttgart 1994, pp. 31–61.

- 28 Pierre Bourdieu: *Sozialer Raum und „Klassen“*, pp. 23–30; Steffen Mau: *Das metrische Wir: Über die Quantifizierung des Sozialen*, Berlin 2017, pp. 197–204.
- 29 Helmut Steiner: *Aufbruch, Defizite und Leistungen der DDR-Soziologie: Die 60er Jahre*, in: Hans Bertram (ed.): *Soziologie und Soziologien im Übergang. Beiträge zur Transformation der außeruniversitären soziologischen Forschung in Ostdeutschland*, Opladen 1997, pp. 223–262; see also Helmut Steiner/Gustav-Wilhelm Bathke/Hansgünter Meyer (eds.): *Klassengesellschaft im Umbruch. Soziale Mobilitätsprozesse in der DDR-Gesellschaft*, Berlin 2010.
- 30 Günter Manz: *Die Einordnung des sozialistischen Lebensniveaus in die Volkswirtschaftsplanung*, Berlin 1972, p. 73.
- 31 Peter Rohrberg: *Bedürfnisse und Volkswirtschaftsplanung*, Berlin 1973, p. 101. However, rising incomes were not seen as the only way to solve these problems. The care and upbringing

Further studies arrived at similar findings about such “considerable differences in per capita income”.³² Some of the studies even predicted that this situation would “be highly unlikely” to disappear in the future. Sometimes researchers even predicted that, “with high probability”, this situation would never be resolved. Party leaders must have been particularly alerted by a proposal in a study from 1972: the study called for a long-term plan to “counteract the widening of income disparities between the lower and upper groups”.³³ In fact, the regime made certain efforts to achieve this: between 1965 and 1975, the per capita income of workers’ and employees’ households did indeed increase considerably. The net monetary income of households and individuals changed, too. Per capita income in 1965 was less than 400 marks in two-thirds of all households—a number regarded as a kind of subsistence minimum. 10 years later, only a quarter were left with less than 400 marks per month. The fact that these 400 marks were worth significantly less in 1975 than a decade ago due to rising prices was, of course, not mentioned in the contemporary surveys. Despite many improvements, it was also noted that the incomes of households with five or more members grew more slowly than the rest of society.³⁴ Further surveys found more economic disparities. In

ing of children in kindergartens to relieve women and a higher financial compensation for the cost of child care were also mentioned, cf. Esther Mattered: *Verbrauchsgewohnheiten in kinderreichen Familien und daraus abzuleitende Bedarfstendenzen*, Leipzig 1974, p. 7, p. 49. Bundesarchiv Berlin, DL 102/841. Regarding this aspect, see also the statistical observations in other contemporary studies: Christel Lehmann: *Die Entwicklung von Kindern aus desorganisierten Familien*, Berlin 1970, p. 42; Fritz Ahnert: *Untersuchungen über die Sozialstruktur dissozialer Familien im Kreis Kalbe/Milde*, Magdeburg 1969, p. 27; Helga Ahnert: *Untersuchungen über den Einfluß dissozialer Familienverhältnisse auf die körperliche und geistige Entwicklung der Kinder im Kreis Kalbe (Milde)*, Magdeburg 1969, pp. 27f. According to the lists in the latter studies, a family with two children had 122.50 Marks per month at their disposal, including child benefit per capita; this proportion decreased steadily: four children (87.20 Marks per month, including child benefit), eight children (73.80 Marks per month, including child benefit) or even twelve children (44.97 Marks per month, including child benefit).

32 See the next annotation.

33 Ökonomisches Forschungsinstitut der Staatlichen Plankommission: *Abschlußbericht zur Analyse ausgewählter Probleme sozial-ökonomischer Prozesse der Jahre 1960 bis 1970 als Ausgangspunkt der langfristigen Planung*, ausgearbeitet von der Forschungsgemeinschaft „Entwicklung des Lebensniveaus“ unter Leitung von Dr. Montag, 1972, pp. 10f.; pp. 16f., Bundesarchiv Berlin, DE 100/400. The low proportion of women in the higher wage groups was identified here as particularly problematic. In the construction industry, where the highest average wage was achieved, the proportion of women was extremely low, namely at 11 per cent.

34 An increase in monthly household income was also recorded. The increase in net revenues and the ‘elevator effect’ observed here is explained by the rise in qualification levels and by the qualification structure. For the lowest income groups and families with several children, the increase in the minimum wage had an impact. Werner Schmidt: *Untersuchungen*

1979, an analysis of net monetary income between 1970 and 1980 showed a “significant difference between growing absolute differences and decreasing relative differentiation”.³⁵ The language used here remained deliberately defensive. The term ‘inequality’ was intentionally avoided. Instead, the term ‘difference’ was used to describe the social order, so that no problem of unequal distribution of resources was expressed.

The most comprehensive study dates from the early 1970s and was prepared at the Institute for Consumption and Living Standards of the Faculty of Economic Sciences at the School of Economics in East Berlin. This was the only time in GDR history that a poverty threshold had been calculated. The study constructed a ‘shopping basket’ based on extensive statistical calculations and defined a social minimum for the GDR society. By including various needs such as nutrition, housing, culture and education, it demonstrates that the researchers were oriented towards international views—including those of the western situational approach.³⁶ The evaluation of the figures triggered far-reaching internal discussions and raised general, uncomfortable questions of income policy. It was less about the remarkable fact that the ‘shopping basket’ also included gifts from the West. The authorities were more concerned that 45 percent of all households with five or more persons and two out of three pensioner households lived “below the poverty line”.³⁷ Moreover, the study detected a “poor” diet among the lowest income groups, especially with increasing family size.³⁸

zu Entwicklungstendenzen und Hauptfaktoren der Einkommen und ihrer Unterschiede in Familien der Arbeiter- und Angestellten im Zeitraum 1965–1975 (1974), p. 15, p. 25, pp. 28f. Bundesarchiv Berlin, DE 100/424.

35 Jürgen Boje: Forschungsbericht. Analyse der Entwicklung der Nettogeldeinkommen der Bevölkerung im Zeitraum 1970 bis 1980 mit einigen Schlußfolgerungen für 1981 bis 1985 (1979), pp. 46f. Bundesarchiv Berlin, DE 100/466.

36 The other aspects listed here were (in this order) health and personal hygiene, communication and change of location. See Renate Walther: *Die Bedürfnisse der Bevölkerung in der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft*, Berlin 1972. These evaluations were based on a typical household of four people: a 32-year-old man, a 30-year-old woman and two children aged 10 and seven.

37 Günter Manz: *Entwicklung der Armut in Ostdeutschland unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Altersarmut*, Halle/Saale 1995, p. 87; Idem.: *Einkommens- und Subventionspolitik*, in: Idem./Ekkehard Sachse/Gunnar Winkler (eds.): *Sozialpolitik in der DDR – Ziele und Wirklichkeit*, Berlin 2001, pp. 179–198; Elvir Ebert: *Einkommen und Konsum im Transformationsprozeß. Vom Plan zum Markt – vom Mangel zum Überfluß*, p. 58; a summary of the household income of private households (estimated on the basis of model calculations by the Institute for Market Economy Leipzig) is provided by Gunnar Winkler (ed.): *Sozialreport ‘90. Daten und Fakten zur sozialen Lage in den neuen Bundesländern*, Berlin 1990, p. 123.

38 In general, too much energy and too much fat was consumed. With decreasing income per capita and increasing family size, the consumption of meat, sausages, dairy products, fruit and vegetables also decreased, as did the intake of nutrients such as protein, calcium,

So, the mid-1970s and early 1980s heralded a *phase of skepticism and uncertainties*. While socialism had begun with the goal of eliminating or reducing economic injustices as far as possible, the regime now laid stress on the realisation of the performance principle. This was not a completely novel idea; rather, the corresponding considerations of promoting and increasing the material and cultural standard of living were already virulent in the past. But this aspect was now gained a different quality. As a result, in view of socio-economic difficulties, rising foreign debt, the threat of a loss of control and the realisation that social processes cannot easily be regulated.³⁹ The performance principle increasingly called into question the basic assumption that fundamental social contradictions could in principle be overcome. Despite of harmonising social descriptions, various studies drew attention to the continuing “problems of the process of approaching classes and social layers” and called for a rethinking oriented towards rationalisation and effectiveness.⁴⁰ This marked a conceptual turning point in

phosphorus, iron, vitamin B2 and C. The consumption of food was also reduced. Günter Manz: Entwicklung der Armut in Ostdeutschland unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Altersarmut, p. 77; Manfred Möhr: Zur Ernährungssituation in der DDR, Berlin 1971, pp. 19f.

- 39 As early as the 1950s, this approach was propagated with reference to the ‘principle of material interest’ and to the mobilisation and increase of labour productivity, including considerations on benefit payments: Harry Matthes: Das Leitungsprinzip als Grundlage der Entlohnung in der volkseigenen Wirtschaft, Berlin 1954. With regard to increasing labour productivity in the agricultural production cooperatives (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaften*) to increase yields, Josef Sommer: Sozialistische Arbeitsorganisation und Leistungsprinzip in den LPG, Berlin 1959, a little later on principles of competition in agriculture Dieter Pfützner/Fritz Theilig: Was der Genossenschaftsbauer vom Leistungsprinzip wissen muß, Berlin 1960. Apart from these early reflections, see already the first reflections on this with the ordinary member of the Academy of Sciences of the GDR: Otto Reinhold: Theoretische und praktische Probleme der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft, Berlin 1974.
- 40 Parteihochschule „Karl Marx“ beim Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands (ed.): Probleme der Klassen- und Sozialstruktur der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft, Berlin 1976/77; Gert-Joachim Glaebner: Sozialstrukturforschung in der DDR zwischen Affirmation und kritischer Analyse. Ein Beitrag zum Gedenken an den Soziologen Manfred Lötsch, in: Hans Bertram (ed.): Soziologie, pp. 103–108, especially p. 104. The striking emphasis on rationalisation and efficiency can also be found at Manfred Lötsch: Über die soziale Struktur der Arbeiterklasse. Einige Schwerpunkte und Probleme der soziologischen Forschung, in: Wissenschaftlicher Rat für Soziologische Forschung in der DDR (ed.): Soziologische Probleme der Klassenentwicklung in der DDR. Materialien vom II. Kongreß der marxistisch-leninistischen Soziologie in der DDR, 15.–17. Mai 1974, Berlin 1975, pp. 89–110.

GDR social self-descriptions (which of course was also observed in the Federal Republic)⁴¹; it was also characterised as the “realistic” turn.⁴²

Besides reward, the ‘performance principle’ always also implied sanction and was therefore Janus-faced. In retrospect, Manfred Lötsch, who headed the department “Social Structure in Socialist Society” at the Academy for Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the SED, and who can justly be called the most important keynote speaker, conceded that there was a “considerable deficit of performance-stimulating mechanisms”⁴³ in GDR society. The dilemma formulated by scientists of maintaining fundamental socialist visions on the one hand and ‘releasing potentials’ among individuals through functional differentiation on the other, offered ample rooms for political controversy. Various researchers highlighted the different positions of the individual professions within the reproduction process. It was criticised that technical engineers had the highest qualifications, but their income barely reached the level of economists or middle managers. From the researchers’ point of view, these wage differences had an “unjustified impact” on consumption opportunities.⁴⁴

This also included questions connected to the distribution of money and thus “fair” distribution and activation possibilities, i. e. the demand for consistent implementation of the performance principle, while at the same time improving the supply of consumer goods.⁴⁵ In all these considerations and deliberations, the principles of

41 See, for example, Ernst Zander: *Kommunismus und Leistungsprinzip*, Heidelberg 1975, for later years, see Dieter Voigt/Sabine Meck: *Leistungsprinzip und Gesellschaftssystem*, in: Dieter Voigt (ed.): *Die Gesellschaft der DDR. Untersuchung zu ausgewählten Bereichen*, Berlin 1984, pp. 11–46.

42 Manfred Lötsch: *Sozialstruktur der DDR – Kontinuität und Wandel*; see also Rudi Weidig: *Sozialstruktur der DDR*, p. 159: “Social differentiations that reproduce and manifest themselves are inevitable means for overarching goals.”

43 Manfred Lötsch: *Abschied von der Legitimationswissenschaft*, p. 195.

44 Wolfgang Grömmel: *Probleme der Entwicklung der sozialistischen Intelligenz bei der Gestaltung der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft*, Berlin 1977; the “rapprochement between the working class and intelligence” was also rejected in this study; see also Dieter Dietzel: *Probleme der Stellung und Entwicklung spezifischer Gruppen von Angestellten in der Sozialstruktur der sozialistischen Gesellschaft*, Berlin 1977; Angela Lachmann: *Einkommenspolitik und Leistungsprinzip – Der Zusammenhang zwischen sozialistischer Verteilungspolitik und volkswirtschaftlichem Leistungswachstum unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Einkommen der Bevölkerung aus gesellschaftlichen Fonds*, Leipzig 1987. In the latter dissertation, the author demanded that the priority of income distribution according to work performance should be maintained (p. 155).

45 Autorenkollektiv des Lehrgebietes Politisch Ökonomie des Sozialismus der Sektion Wirtschaftswissenschaften der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin: *Die Leistung im Wechselverhältnis von Produktion und Distribution und das Geld im Sozialismus*, Berlin 1982; Ulrich Busch: *Sozialistisches Leistungsprinzip, Geldeinkommen und Konsumgüterproduktion*, in: *Wirtschaftswissenschaft* 35:3 (1987), pp. 355–372.

social security of course remained untouched.⁴⁶ What remained unspoken in all these works, however, was that women's employment was often economically indispensable in order for family income to reach an existence "above the lowest level"⁴⁷; Neither did the unsurprising fact that merit was excluded in certain areas of the GDR working world, above all in the area of state security⁴⁸ and armed organs (like the National People's Army/*Nationale Volksarmee*, the border troops of the GDR or the German People's Police/*Deutsche Volkspolizei*), play a role. This resulted in demands for an increasingly performance-oriented wage policy. For this reason, according to some researchers, "driving forces" (*Triebkräfte*)⁴⁹ should be given special recognition in future as productive and innovative elements of social development. These differences in performance and social positions were considered to be legitimate and were intended to increase individual responsibility and personal initiative.⁵⁰

- 46 On the contemporary discussion of the relationship between social security and the socialist principle of merit, see the essays in Klaus Gloede/Joachim Pein/Kurt Hecht (eds.): *Das sozialistische Leistungsprinzip als Triebkraft der umfassenden Intensivierung*. Konferenz der Forschungsgruppe „Sozialistisches Leistungsprinzip“ der Sektion Marxismus-Leninismus am 25. und 26. Oktober 1988, Potsdam 1988; from a trade union perspective and with regard to performance-stimulating bonus payments, see Erhard Koschwitz/Wolfgang Mallock: *Leistungsprinzip – warum und wie?*, Berlin 1988.
- 47 Manfred Lötsch: *Sozialstruktur und Systemtransformation*, in: Rainer Geißler (ed.): *Sozialer Umbruch in Ostdeutschland*, Opladen 1993, pp. 31–39, here p. 39.
- 48 Günter Förster: *Die Juristische Hochschule des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit. Die Sozialstruktur ihrer Promovenden*, Münster 2011, pp. 162–169.
- 49 Pioneering was Manfred Lötsch, partly together with his wife: Manfred Lötsch: *Sozialstruktur und Wirtschaftswachstum: Überlegungen zum Problem sozialer Triebkräfte des wissenschaftlich-technischen Fortschritts*, in: *Wirtschaftswissenschaft* 29:1 (1981), pp. 56–69; Idem: *Soziale Strukturen als Wachstumsfaktoren und als Triebkräfte des wissenschaftlich-technischen Fortschritts*, in: *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 6 (1982), pp. 721–731; Ingrid Lötsch/Manfred Lötsch: *Soziale Strukturen und Triebkräfte: Versuch einer Zwischenbilanz und Weiterführung der Diskussion*, in: *Jahrbuch für Soziologie und Sozialpolitik* (1985), pp. 159–178; Ingrid Lötsch/Manfred Lötsch: *Kontinuität und Wandel in der Sozialstrukturforschung der DDR*, in: *Jahrbuch für Soziologie und Sozialpolitik* (1989), pp. 231–248. See furthermore Rudi Weidig (ed.): *Soziale Triebkräfte ökonomischen Wachstums: Materialien des 4. Kongresses der Marxistisch-Leninistischen Soziologie in der DDR, 26.–28. März 1985*, Berlin 1986 (and here especially his presentation: „Hauptreferat: Soziale Triebkräfte ökonomischen Wachstums“: “And finally, the performance principle applies in our society. [...] Income differences of a certain degree caused by these are social differences. [...] They act as a driving force by helping individuals, groups and collectives to realise that it is the improvement of one's own performance that can improve income levels and personal circumstances.” Translated by the author); Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim ZK der SED (ed.): *Bedingungen und Triebkräfte des Leistungsverhaltens im Sozialismus: Forschungsergebnisse einer interdisziplinären Arbeitsgruppe der Sektion Marxistisch-leninistische Philosophie der Humboldt-Universität Berlin*, Berlin 1989.
- 50 Karin Linse: *Die Entwicklung der Lohnformen in der DDR*, Jena 1988, p. 100; Lothar

Contemporary (Re-)Interpretations of Economic Inequality and its Lingering Effects. Cursory Remarks and Conclusions

When various social scientists began to differentiate between justified and unjustified differences within GDR society and to search for causes of the low social mobility of certain social groups, other studies quickly focused on the factor of individualisation. On the one hand, the result was a more complex, problem-conscious picture of state-socialist GDR society; on the other hand, (social) scientific observation revealed numerous side effects, three of which will be examined in more detail.

Firstly, this approach cemented an existing division into ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’ poverty. Low incomes of large families, for example, were explained by contemporary scientists as a result of their inability to adequately handle existing economic resources. Instead of clothes and food, a TV would be purchased, was the assessment, which was empirically supported by a list of equipment with durable consumer goods, as in a medical-sociological examination from 1970. Whereas 44.3 per cent of the average population in the Magdeburg district had a washing machine and 43.7 per cent a refrigerator, the figure for the so-called ‘dissocial families’—a social category that was developed in those years specifically to describe social reality⁵¹, but was by no means limited to the GDR and thus once again refers to structural observational similarities of the social⁵²—studied was only 28.8 and 11.5 per cent, respectively. The situation

Mertens: Rote Denkfabrik? Die Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim ZK der SED, Münster et al. 2004, p. 255.

- 51 See, for example, and amongst others, the following works from the medical or medical-sociological research contexts, as Steffen Möbius: *Zur Pathogenese und Prognose der Dissozialität im Kindesalter unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der frühkindlichen Hirnschädigung*, Jena 1969; Helmut Heinroth: *Alkoholmißbrauch und Sozialverhalten – dargestellt an sozialhygienischen Untersuchungen in Familien, die durch Alkoholmißbrauch entfällig wurden, sowie epidemiologische Beziehungen zur Dissozialität in einer Großstadt*, Halle 1975; Annemarie Franz: *Auswirkungen frühkindlicher dissozialer Lebensbedingungen auf Entwicklung und Verhalten von Vorschulkindern*, Rostock 1980.
- 52 In general, see Christoph Lorke: *Armut im geteilten Deutschland. Die Wahrnehmung sozialer Randlagen in der Bundesrepublik und der DDR*. A close correlation between the observation of social ‘lower classes’ and the attribution of ‘dissozialität’ can also be seen in the Federal Republic. See, for example, the studies by Werner Schumann: *Intrapersonale und interpersonale Spannungen bei Dissozialen und sozial angepassten Jugendlichen*, Berlin 1961; Dietmar Kurzeja: *Jugendkriminalität und Verwahrlosung. Zu den Ursachen der Dissozialität Jugendlicher. Kritische Bestandsaufnahme und Versuch einer Neubestimmung*, Gießen 1973; Ilona Töpner: *Drogenkonsum in Beziehung zu Dissozialität und Aggressivität bei Jugendlichen. Eine psychologische Untersuchung an 586 Real- und Gymnasialschülern*, Würzburg 1976; Udo Rauchfleisch: *Dissozial. Entwicklung, Struktur und Psychodynamik*

was different regarding the supply of television sets: While these were to be counted in 74.5 per cent of all households, the proportion among ‘dissocial families’ was slightly higher (77 per cent). The fact that this deviation did not represent a significant difference and could also be attributed to other causes did not play a role in the interpretation of the social. Rather, the interpretation chosen here fitted in with the overall image that the author projected in connection with bourgeois lines of tradition above the lower social margin.⁵³ Excessive consumption of alcohol, promiscuity and a lack of physical hygiene fit into this image of imagined social deviation, as these conclusions can be found in contemporary research.⁵⁴ Such “symbolic operations” regarding self-responsibility could not only contribute to permanently marking ‘otherness’ in ‘one’s own’ society, but also help to mobilising other forms of behavior.⁵⁵ They perhaps wanted to make unmistakably clear that social problems were societal atavisms, exceptions and absolutely ‘alien’ to socialist nature. This example reflects processes of ‘othering’ and thus attempts to externalize such observations.

Secondly: Despite assurances to the contrary, such contemporary categorizations regarding economic structures helped to maintain the existing social order. This refers both to traditional gender imbalances (that could only be hinted at in this text)⁵⁶ and—because foreign ‘contract workers’ were not included in the analyzed statistical measurements—to the stabilisation of an ethnically homogeneous socialist society,

dissozialer Persönlichkeiten, Göttingen 1981; Karl Gerlicher/Joachim Jungmann/Jochen Schweitzer (eds.): *Dissozialität und Familie. Zur Kooperation von Jugendhilfe und Jugendpsychiatrie unter familientherapeutischer Sichtweise*, Dortmund 1986.

- 53 Fritz Ahnert: *Untersuchungen über die Sozialstruktur dissozialer Familien im Kreis Kalbe/Milde*, p. 30; for interpretations, see Christoph Lorke: *Armut im geteilten Deutschland. Die Wahrnehmung sozialer Randlagen in der Bundesrepublik und der DDR*.
- 54 Among many examples, see Christel Lehmann: *Die Entwicklung von Kindern aus desorganisierten Familien*; Hermine Blümel: *Augenblicklicher Stand der Erfassung und Betreuung dissozialer Familien in einem Berliner Stadtbezirk*, Berlin 1970; Erika Donath/Ilse Schneeweiß: *Dissoziale Familien aus jugendärztlicher Sicht*, in: *Medizin und Soziologie* 3 (1967), pp. 158–167; Matthias Wolf: *Ursachen und Mitbedingungen der Asozialität. Typenanalytische Untersuchungen zu Dissozialen sowie typenanalytische Auswertung von Nachuntersuchungen der späteren Entwicklung der begutachteten Probanden*, Berlin 1978; Doris Mackuth/Eberhard Burger: *Über Ursachen und Erscheinungsformen der Dissozialität. Untersuchungen an Familien des Kreises Eberswalde*, Berlin 1980.
- 55 Peter A. Berger: *Ungleichheitssemantiken. Graduelle Unterschiede und kategoriale Exklusivitäten*.
- 56 For modern research, see Katrin Schäfgén: *Die Verdopplung der Ungleichheit: Sozialstruktur und Geschlechterverhältnisse in der Bundesrepublik und in der DDR*, Opladen 2000; regarding intersectionality, see Jens Gieseke: *Die egalitäre DDR? Staatssozialistische Intersektionalität und der lange Schatten des Intershops*, in: Eva Maria Gajek/Christoph Lorke (eds.): *Soziale Ungleichheit im Visier: Wahrnehmung und Deutung von Armut und Reichtum seit 1945*, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2016, pp. 163–180.

which was oriented towards a four-person household. Possible consequences for the period after 1990 can only be guessed at here.⁵⁷

Thirdly, and of great relevance for the final crisis of the GDR: The increasing reflection on social differences was a *nolens volens* modification of existing visions of social justice. From then on, the principle of performance, the greater degree of autonomy and transparent social differentiation, for many, were the most important distributive principles that were to incentivise the workforce of the companies. These ideas were popularised in various ways in the final years of the GDR. The aim was to design the distribution of the acquired social wealth in such a way that on the one hand the social entity was promoted and on the other hand the diverse specific interests and needs of the concrete subjects, too.⁵⁸ This intensive preoccupation led to the fact that the Central Committee could hardly close its eyes to the contradictions mentioned. In 1986, it focused on the “requirements and driving forces of economic growth through the further acceleration of scientific and technological progress and through the intensification of the national economy”⁵⁹, as evidenced by the still existing, albeit highly selective, perception of social science findings. There was, thus, a genuine awareness of the problem, and even more: In some party officials’ view, talking about equality and justice resembled ‘squaring the circle’, because socially “different starting conditions” of different family milieus undeniably existed. Therefore, it was not considered reprehensible, for instance, to guarantee outstanding researchers an “adequate material recognition of their achievements and above-average living conditions”⁶⁰, such as the provision of their own homes or special holiday and recreational opportunities. According to advocates of the “driving force”, the GDR could only remain competitive with capitalist companies in the world market if individual work performance was rewarded and a larger income gap taken accepted, even if this led to discontent. Regarding these particularly high-performing cadres, however, there were warnings against conveying an impression of “exclusivity”. This could create a psychological distance to the rest of the population.⁶¹ Those demands for stimulating effects, recognition of performance and performance-related pay were later raised even more strongly by other authors for specific groups and were reissued for a wider audience,

57 To cite just one of many possible references: Jan C. Behrends/Thomas Lindenberger/Patrice G. Poutrus (eds.): *Fremde und Fremd-Sein in der DDR. Zu historischen Ursachen der Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Ostdeutschland*, Berlin 2003.

58 Josef Bernard/Hans-Jürgen Gericke (eds.): *Sozialistisches Leistungsprinzip und umfassende Intensivierung*, Halle/Saale 1987.

59 Bericht des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands an den XI. Parteitag der SED, Berlin 1986, p. 58.

60 Frank Adler: „Jeder nach seinen Fähigkeiten, jedem nach seiner Leistung“. *Soziologische Analyse zur Durchsetzung des Leistungsprinzips in unserer Gesellschaft*, Berlin 1987, p. 32, p. 62, p. 82.

61 *Ibid.*

stressing the need for social differences. For example regarding the natural and technical intelligence, whose number was estimated at 6,000 to 9,000 persons. They would have taken on a “key role” due to their “innovative basic function”, whereby dysfunctional levelling of income would have a performance-inhibiting effect on their willingness to be (highly) productive. They were, therefore, not only granted more time and space for creative thinking and a high appreciation of their professional performance, individuality and self-realisation as well as freedom of creative thinking, but also a higher degree of recognition of social differences. In the view of another contemporary author, at any rate, the given structures contrasted with the requirements of the socialist performance principle.⁶² Elsewhere, in a brochure published by the Academy of Social Sciences at the Central Committee of the SED, it was even stated that the performance principle created ‘social energy’ for performance in work and education and that performance-related remuneration had a stimulating effect. Social differences between predominantly physical and predominantly mental work were accepted as necessary as well as just, and it was predicted that these would not be eliminated in the future.⁶³ Although these demands were finally not implemented, they point to the growing contradictions of the late GDR society and the resulting tensions and doubts.

According to Bourdieu, naming power (*Benennungsmacht*) is the capacity to influence and regulate certain terms, categories, and perceptual schemes to authorise social worlds of imagination. The symbolic order of society always entails the assignment of status and prestige, but also forms of delegitimisation. This presupposes notions of a just order and accepted inequalities that influence the ideas of social appropriateness. Order knowledge and classification, according to Luhmann, promote the assignment of clear boundaries and affiliations. Thus, statistical results refer to symbolic representations of structures of inequality and to unequal “interpretation patterns” in politics, science and “semantics”.⁶⁴

The history of statistics on income and wealth in the GDR after 1945 offers a prime example of the dynamics of science, power and knowledge. GDR society was by no means free of social differentiation: by gender, age, region, by sector and occupation, by educational level, by informal influence and meritocratic aspects, but also with regard to access to ‘western’ resources. Due to scientific efforts to collect infor-

62 Irene Müller-Hartmann: Sozialstrukturelle Probleme der Entwicklung der natur- und technikwissenschaftlichen Intelligenz unter den Bedingungen der Intensivierung, Berlin 1989, pp. 151f.

63 Frank Adler: Jedem nach seiner Leistung – soziale Sicherheit für alle, Berlin 1989, p. 14.

64 Understood here as higher-level generalised, relatively situation-independent available rules of processing meaning and interpreting reality, which have “inequality” as their theme. Niklas Luhmann: Gesellschaftliche Struktur und semantische Tradition, in: Idem: Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik. Studien zur Wissenssoziologie (vol. 1), Frankfurt am Main, pp. 9–71, here p. 19.

mation as an element of societal self-reflection and interpretation, these developments did not remain hidden from the political leadership. Contemporary forms of scientific description outlining the social order always were associated with the question of social security. These descriptions served purposes of prevention and security among others, because predictions about the nature and inequalities of a society could help minimise the occurrence of unpleasant social risks.

In the sense of a history of precaution in modernity⁶⁵, social and socio-political areas have by no means been excluded from such attitudes. Reflections on differences of income and their possible consequences have been common since the early 1960s. “The failure to take poverty research into account is due to the inability of the SED leadership to really understand the real social processes”⁶⁶, said GDR poverty researcher Günter Manz, a long-standing staff member at the University of Economics (*Hochschule für Ökonomie*) in Berlin-Karlshorst and entrusted with the compilation, supervision and evaluation of scientific papers devoted to social processes of differentiation. However, as discussed in this article, it was also the ambivalent notion of social justice that became increasingly clear at the end of the GDR. These conditions/contexts fostered the powerlessness of the leading party in the face of complex processes of social change.⁶⁷ Instead of a more in-depth examination of the results of statistical income studies, defensive prevention and intervention strategies minimising potential social risks were adopted. At the same time, mantra-like formalised and ritualised semantics of integration and inclusion dominated in the GDR public.⁶⁸ However, this contradiction must not obscure the fact that these contemporary social constructs have always and mostly tacitly touched upon several reciprocally excluding dimensions; in some respects, this may have had an impact after 1990, too.⁶⁹ Excluding dimensions like the ones discussed above are often ignored in nostalgic reviews of the social character of GDR society.—Such dimensions, just as current expressions of social dissatisfaction in the East are not only the result of the manifold upheavals after 1990⁷⁰, but also of the lived, experienced and internalised social structure before that year, with all its contradictions.

65 Nicolai Hannig/Malte Thießen (eds.): *Vorsorgen in der Moderne: Akteure, Räume und Praktiken*, Berlin/Boston 2017.

66 Günter Manz: *Armut*, p. 11.

67 *Ibid.*

68 Very pointed about this is Ralph Jessen: *Semantic Strategies of Inclusion and Exclusion in the German Democratic Republic (1949–1989)*, in: Willibald Steinmetz (ed.): *Political Languages in the Age of Extremes*, Oxford 2011, pp. 275–291.

69 For reflections on this, see Christoph Lorke: *Gleichheitsversprechen und ihr Erinnern im geteilten und vereinten Deutschland*, Arbeitspapier aus der Kommission „Erinnerungskulturen der sozialen Demokratie“, at: https://www.boeckler.de/pdf/p_ek_ap_07_2019.pdf (accessed on 28 September 2019).

70 Regarding the increasing social inequality, see the research of Gunnar Winkler: *Sozialreport* (different years); Rainer Geißler (ed.): *Sozialer Umbruch in Ostdeutschland*, Opladen 1993;

Christoph Lorke is employed at the Department of History at the University of Münster. He currently holds the professorship for Modern and Contemporary History. His research focuses on the history of social inequality, social history, the history of ideas, migration, gender and family history in Germany and Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. Most important publications: *Armut im geteilten Deutschland. Die Wahrnehmung sozialer Randlagen in der Bundesrepublik und der DDR*, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2015; *Liebe verwalten. ‚Ausländerehen‘ in Deutschland 1870–1945*, Paderborn 2020.

Dietmar Wittich (ed.): *Momente des Umbruchs: Sozialstruktur und Lebensqualität in Ostdeutschland*, Berlin 1994; Martin Diewald (ed.): *Zwischenbilanz der Wiedervereinigung. Strukturwandel und Mobilität im Transformationsprozeß*, Opladen 1996.