

## **“Changing Societies: New Frameworks for Modern Societies”**

April 10, 2018, Berlin Social Science Center

The final conference of the Franco-German collaborative programme ‘Changing Societies’ took place in Berlin on the 10th April 2018. Hosted by the Berlin Social Science Centre (WZB) in cooperation with the Fondation Maison des sciences de l’homme (FMSH), researchers from France and Germany, as well as further afield, to discuss a range of topics central to the way society is now, and how it might change: educational inequality; gender, migration and labour market integration; regulation and citizenship discourses; and what constitutes social progress and a good life. Throughout the event the benefits of cross-national collaboration were emphasised, and there were also field report presentations from researchers who had been supported by the programme to undertake visiting fellowships in France or Germany. Each of these presentations gave an insight into the collaborative processes and contacts that the programme has successfully fostered.

The event began with a welcome address from the Harald Wilkoszewski, the Head of Information and Communication at the WZB, highlighting how the programme has strengthened research links between France and Germany and also helped open up new perspectives, which is particularly important in the times we live in.. This was followed by an address by Jonas Keller from the German Aerospace Centre (DLR), who was representing the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, which outlined the breadth of the topics that the overall programme addresses, while remaining fixed on the themes of change and transformation. Lisa Crinon from the WZB then highlighted the aims of the programme. These are to analyse new frameworks for societal policies and political decision-making but with the explicit aim of foster interdisciplinary and intercultural exchanges. To this end, since 2016 the programme has funded 46 visiting research fellowships which last on average two and half months. The other way that the programme has worked towards these aims is through holding events: in the five previous events over 130 researchers have been involved from many different institutions over France and Germany.

The keynote paper was given by Carlo Barone, who presented his paper entitled ‘Socioeconomic Inequalities in Educational Attainment: A Trend Analysis of European Countries’. Starting from the point of view that education is widely seen as one of the key motors of social progress and social mobility, the paper set out to contribute to the debate over whether inequalities in educational attainment have been reduced over the past decades, or even whether it is possible to reduce them. Using data from 24 European countries, the findings were somewhat mixed. While there was a clear decline in educational inequality in the boom years of the postwar period across countries, since the 1970s this trend has largely stagnated. This led to one optimistic conclusion: that

educational inequality has declined and therefore can be achieved. But there was also a pessimistic aspect: given the stagnation since the 1970s, perhaps educational participation may no longer be able to foster growing social mobility. The discussion focused on the potential drivers of this latter effect, with welfare retrenchment, growing income inequality, rising job instability, declining absolute returns to education and the marketization of education all mentioned.

Following the keynote, three round table discussions were held on each of the key themes of the conference. The first focused on the challenges of labour market integration, with particular focuses on work and family life and the experience of migrants. Mareike Bünning from the WZB highlighted that despite significant reforms in Germany in recent years, there is still a significant gap between the hours that families with young children would like to work, and the hours they do work, an issue particularly affecting fathers. In this discussion increasing the options for flexible working and extending policymaking attention to families of school-age children were highlighted as important. Carsten Keller from the University of Kassel highlighted the challenges of people from migration backgrounds integrating into the labour market in France and Germany. He highlighted that while the selectivity within the education system in Germany affects people with a migration background in particular, while in France the comprehensive educational system does not have these effects. Nevertheless the quality and status of vocational training in Germany, relative to the general education system of France, better prepares people for entry into the labour market. The question of gender norms and gender equality was also discussed, and the polarization of opinions was highlighted, especially the strong adherence in some parts of Germany to a traditional family model. The importance of opportunity structures in relation to people's beliefs about gender norms was stressed: we should not assume that gender norms are just a matter of culture – not everyone is able to choose the work-life balance structure that they want. The case of qualified first-generation migrants working in domestic households was raised in this context by Karin Schittenhelm from Siegen University. Many migrant women become part of the informal labour market in this area because of difficulties in getting their employment credentials and qualification from their home country verified. There are complex interactions between this dynamic and other aspects of work-life balance. Franco-German comparisons in the area of family reunification rights were also discussed in relation to migration and work-family balance.

The second roundtable concentrated on developments of discourses about regulation in an increasing transnational society. Dieter Gosewinkel from the WZB started with the observation that since 1945 two distinct approaches to citizenship have developed: an exclusionary model developed in the Soviet bloc, and a more open liberal model in the West. Recently one can see some of these exclusionary models reemerging in debates in some countries from the former Soviet bloc. Questions of transnationalization of regulation were also discussed. While there has been a trend towards this since 1989, particularly within the EU, more recently renationalization discourses have become more

widespread, especially in terms of migration policy but also in terms of economics Yoan Vilain from the European Law School compared the discourses around constitution law and politics in France and Germany. He noted that these two countries have traditionally been seen as distinct models: while in France the constitution was seen largely as a political text which was less accepted as a legal norm, in Germany the constitutional court has played a central role in political events. However, this situation is changing and discourses over tensions between politics and constitutional law are converging in the two countries. The discussion focused on the links between discourses and politics. In this context the prospects for an EU-wide citizenship law were discussed, and while this is a topic in academic discourse, it shows no sign of moving into the political realm. However, more generally public law discourses tend to play strong political roles. The dynamics in these links between discourses and politics were discussed in relation to Brexit, in which hostility to the European Court of Justice played a role in the vote for the UK to leave the EU.

The third roundtable addressed the broad questions of social progress and the normative foundations of a good life. Definitions of these terms were discussed, in particular the tendency to fall back on economic growth as a sign of progress, which was criticized by the panelists. How to measure such concepts was also a key theme of the discussion. Alexander Stingl from the Leuphana University of Lüneburg, questioned whether any single measure would be a useful way to proceed and highlighted the need for a broad range of indicators. Miriam Teschl from the Aix-Marseille School of Economics (AMSE) highlighted attempts to reformulate this growth-based idea of progress and, in relation to definitions of a good life, discussed Amartya Sen's 'Capabilities Approach'. Whether people believe in social progress was also discussed, with particular reference to the American Dream and the existence or not of a corresponding European conception. Furthermore questions were raised over whether we need a single definition of social progress or a good life – in particular, should we expect developing countries to take the same path to social progress as western countries have done since 1945? The question of a good life, which was seen as more of an individualistic concept than social progress, was also discussed in international terms, in relation to economic inequality and legacies of colonialism – a good life for whom?

Following the round tables, three participants of the research program reported on their scientific and personal experiences during their research fellowship in France or Germany and demonstrated once again the diversity of the Changing Societies Project. Karin Schittenhelm (University of Siegen) did has been comparing asylum regimes and transnational families of asylum seekers in Germany and France during her stay in Paris; Alexander Stingl (Leuphana University Lüneburg) did research on general ecology and the "rural" as a space of imagination; and Emmanuelle Puissant (Université Grenoble Alpes) worked on public policy in socio-economics of work and care.

The conference was closed with a final round table by all moderators of the previous round tables: Baptiste Aguila , Elsa Tulumets , Julia Wambach and the coordinator of the programme Lisa Crinon (WZB). This final discussion focused, as well as the project itself, on the complexity of the phenomena of social change. Baptiste Aguila once again emphasized that the social sciences must prove to be dynamic and innovative, but at the same time not lose their critical attitude, and clearly understand basic problems such as "politics of measurement" as part of the analysis. Elsa Tulumets made clear that a European perspective underestimates the complexity, since we have contradictory tendencies of social changes even inside Germany, which are difficult to integrate and are present and influential. Julia Wambach talked about the conceptual difficulties of her panel discussion and addressed the difficulty of clearly defining social progress and 'good life'.

As the Franco-German programme is also to be understood as part of a European integration process, and Europe is a central component of social change, Lisa Crinon started a discussion about the value and the complexity of Europe. Elsa Tulumets emphasized that European integration does not only mean convergence and harmonization, but also to understand and recognize differences.

Lisa Crinon pointed out, that the discussions of the last two years have not ended. Rather, the research program was only the beginning of these discussions. The task for the participants will be to continue the need for discussion, which has only been intensified by the research programme, well beyond the two years.