

# "Über sieben Brücken mußt Du gehen...": lifeworlds as places of socialisation and biographical transformation work: a plea for the cooperation between quantitative and qualitative transformation research

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Postprint / Postprint

Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

## Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Schwarz, A. (2003). "Über sieben Brücken mußt Du gehen...": lifeworlds as places of socialisation and biographical transformation work: a plea for the cooperation between quantitative and qualitative transformation research. In D. Pollack, J. Jacobs, Müller, Olaf, & G. Pickel (Eds.), *Political culture in post-communist Europe : attitudes in new democracies*. Aldershot: Ashgate. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-15988>

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„Über sieben Brücken mußt Du gehen...“:

## Lifeworlds as Places of Socialisation and Biographical Transformation Work

### A Plea for the Cooperation between Quantitative and Qualitative Transformation Research

Anna Schwarz

#### **Posing the problem**

The song “Über sieben Brücken mußt Du gehen“ (Over Seven Bridges You Must Go) by the East German rock group “Karat” has enjoyed great popularity since the end of the seventies, including the later, West German, version of it, sung by Peter Maffay. It conveyed a philosophical and consoling message about the normality of the daily struggles in life, about

unforgettable childhood memories, but also about a sunny future that would be attained at some point.

A song, or a picture, sometimes is able, in a concentrated form, to put in a nutshell what social science often looks for and lavishes much time and effort on in its research:

I am referring to the question as to how social change is assimilated in people's personal lives, how also the most recent systemic transformation in Central Eastern Europe is, and indeed has to be, reflected in the microstructure, in the thoughts and deeds, in the social learning process of the people, after it has already been comprehensively received and examined on the macro-level as a top-down controlled change of formal institutions. A new social reality does not fall from the sky, not when the people who translate it into their own lives have already led a life beforehand, when they must search for biographical fixed points or continuities in order to determine their own position within a changing world. Thus, also in the context of the current systemic transformation taking place in Central Eastern Europe, anything new must always, in some way or another, link up with what has gone before, with new combinations or modifications of previously acquired patterns of interpretation and behaviour.

What I am specifically interested in is this biographical work of building bridges between then and now, between the socialist past and the market economy of the present. In the following I intend to discuss this on the basis of the East German case, which, over the last ten years, seems to have been researched more thoroughly than any other case, but which still provokes diverse and controversial interpretations.

I would like to begin this paper by recalling some earlier and partly quite surprising results of research in political culture on the value orientations of the East Germans during the last decade. This will lead to the discussion to what extent interpretations of these survey results so far have been based upon a theoretical model which, at the least, has to be examined more closely, especially regarding the impacts of socialisation. In contrast, it would be my suggestion to take a closer look at the lifeworld<sup>i</sup> as a place where specific forms of socialisation take place, at the same time encouraging the assumption that these forms are nuanced to a large extent, which, in the case of East Germany, can by no means always be seen as a transformation blockade. Rather, these differentiated socialisation impacts according to people's lifeworlds provide a point of reference for current biographical work, where people are challenged to build

bridges during this time of transformation. This, finally, will be more specified with the help of two of my own selected in depths interviews. The cases very clearly portray the ambivalence inherent in the socialisation impacts stemming from the time of state socialism, but thus also the linking with, and partial reinterpretation of, previous orientations. These two cases especially demonstrate what value orientations, such as “achievement” and “success”, can mean in the old and the new system, and therefore render an insight into the microworld of social change. Perhaps, in conclusion, I am able with this to build a small, modest bridge leading over to the quantitative studies and their efforts at modelling and interpreting the change of values during the transformation.

### **Unexpected results of political culture research on the East German transformation**

The collapse of the GDR within only a few months of the years 1989 and 1990 is undoubtedly an example of “accelerated history”, explicable only through a combination of internal and external erosion factors. The theoretical and biographical reappraisal of this collapse as well as of the rapid change of system in East Germany can, even now, though ten years have elapsed, still not be considered to have yet reached its conclusion. Today the question still is and remains important how profoundly and consistently the people in the new *Bundesländer* accept this systemic transformation, help to carry and form the adopted “ready-made state”, and to what extent they adhere to such value orientations as are considered to be essential for modern, pluralist and market economy systems.

For over ten years now many interesting and elaborate studies and surveys have been dedicated to this question, especially within the context of opinion and attitude research. At the beginning of *the last (?)* this decade there was undoubtedly the underlying, politically relevant, question whether the German reunification would succeed or not, and to what extent there would be an East German potential for refusal and blockade.

Now, after this decade has ended, the same question seems to emerge anew, for, ever since around the middle of the nineties, the economical alignment of the East with the West of Germany has turned out to be an unsolved, unexpectedly complicated challenge. Mainly the constantly high unemployment rate in East Germany (19 percent, as opposed to

8 % in the West), and the stagnating household income since 1995 (70% of the West German level) (Grabka/Otto 2001), indicate that towards the end of the decade one must even reckon with a trend towards increased economical inequality of opportunities (“The East is on the brink” was how Thierse, president of the *Bundestag*, pointedly formulated it at the beginning of 2001). Even if enduring economical frustration and deprivation do not always express themselves in people distancing themselves from the political system, the specific nature of the East Germans’ willingness regarding the transformation as well as their loyalty towards the new system must certainly be scrutinised for quite a while yet. With this background in mind it might be of interest to recall some “waymarks” of attitudinal research on the East German transformation and to look more closely at its interpretations.

The first results indicating rapid erosion of the population’s support of the GDR state were produced before 1989 by the *Leipziger Institut für Jugendforschung* (Institute for Youth Research of Leipzig) in an anonymous study, not published at the time. According to this study, in the year 1986, 48 percent of all young people doing their apprenticeship or *Abitur* (A-levels) still stated that they felt “a strong or very strong affiliation to the GDR”, whereas only 7 percent felt hardly or not any such affiliation. This degree of young people’s identification with their own state more or less corresponded to the long-standing values ever since these surveys were begun in the sixties, and can be taken seriously as a representative size. Already two years later, in October 1988, the proportion of juveniles attached to the GDR, according to these anonymous surveys, had sunk to 19 percent, and, parallel to that, the proportion of juveniles with a small sense of attachment to the GDR had risen to 23 percent (Förster/Friedrich 1996: 25-37, Gensicke 1992: 1266-1283).

This clear political process of systemic acceptance eroding amongst juveniles still does not yet, by the end of 1989, seem to apply to the majority of the GDR population, or to yet affect the general existence of the GDR state. According to data by Bettina Westle, such a widespread swing of opinion only took place between the autumn of 1989 and the spring of 1990, judged by comparison with the desired type of state, with the perspective of the GDR becoming sovereign. At the close of 1989, 71 percent of all questioned East Germans

were still in favour of maintaining the GDR as a sovereign state, by March 1990 this proportion had dropped down to below 10 percent (Westle 1992: 464f.). By March 1990, 90 percent of (all questioned?) East Germans already agreed to be united with the Federal Republic, and in the years following the basic opinion became continuously more established that it was right to “introduce a political order according to the Western model” (from initially 68 percent up to 77 percent in the autumn of 1995; cf. Westle 1992, Gensicke 1995: 70, 89-91.). **The high speed of this switch of opinion was to a large extent caused by the enormous political dynamics of this “hot autumn”, by the actually available state political options, the opportunity structures, as well as by the clear gain and loss of image of the contemporary political actors. Resulting from this, the political core decision to change the system, however, is now considered by the large majority of the population and even by the most sceptical political voices to be irreversible.**

What is still, however, worth enquiring into is the population’s assent to the concrete, actual way of shaping this new societal path in East Germany. Already at an early stage, different degrees of assent began to emerge, depending on whether one was questioned on the new democratic system generally, or on “the democracy, as we have it in the Federal Republic of Germany”. This latter specification only met with the approval of about 44 percent of East Germans in the first half of the nineties, as opposed to 81 percent in West Germany, and as many as a quarter of all East Germans consider other democratic models to be better (Gensicke, 1995: 89-91). A critical and distanced position on the political institutions of Germany should by no means, however, be misunderstood as a general rejection of democracy, or as an automatic resistance towards transformation.

**A surprising tendency also appeared in the first five years of the transformation regarding the acceptance of the new market economy system. In Spring 1990, 77 percent of all East Germans still stated their approval of the “economic system of the Federal Republic”. Already around the end of 1991, this proportion dropped down to 54 percent (which is the relatively stable mean value for West Germany), and in the summer of 1995 it sank even further, down to 34 percent, basically one third of the East German population (Köcher 1995).**

Parallel to this crumbling of actual acceptance of the new system there was again an increase in the vague, diffuse support of “the idea of socialism” (after a clear but short slump at the beginning of 1990, following which the number rose again to a proportion of 65-67 percent up to the middle of the nineties, cf. Westle and Gensicke, loc. cit.), accompanied by a stronger turn towards such value orientations as “equality” and “justice”.

(This) (A new ?)tendency towards a more critical assessment of the concrete path of transformation, the new political and economic institutions and their performance, since the middle of the nineties can be observed in most of the Central East European reform countries. Latest then worried questions regarding the “end of the honeymoon” of the transition, a decreasing willingness to reform and a posthumous revaluation of socialism became acute.

In this context, however, I also ask myself how self-reflectively such opinion polls actually confront their own theoretical blind spots, how adequately this specific characteristic of development can be grasped by the models that such surveys are mostly based upon: what extent of time is considered necessary for the acquisition of certain value orientations, anyway? How rapidly is a “revisal of one’s thinking” and a “retraining” thought to be possible? Do such values have to have been experienced in the context of one’s own societal system, or to what extent, in the age of media influence and globalisation, do indirect factors of socialisation, models of other societies with their own conceptions of foreign customs and issues, conveyed over the media, have an effect? How, on the microlevel, does the process of acquiring the value orientations favoured by a certain system take place in an everyday context of living, especially in the case of a dictatorial state system, and how can one gain valid information about it afterwards? What exactly are these “socialist values”, anyway, the revival of which is feared? To what extent is the process of acquiring democratic values during the phase of transformation comparable to the development of a democratic culture in the West European post-war societies? Are “the same institutions” experienced and acquired during this transformation as in the fifties and sixties, or to what extent does the crisis of adaptation modify these democratic-pluralist institutions which are considered ideal-typical?

## A few comments on the interpretations of these results

There are currently different approaches attempting to interpret and explain these newer trends in the attitudes towards the course of transformation, which, however, only partly consider the questions formulated above. Here we shall mainly concern ourselves with relevant explanatory attempts regarding the East German case, since it is particularly this case that exhibits a few special traits (such as the rapid formal takeover of the ready-made state in spite of a relatively weak endogenous formation of actors).

Approaches more oriented towards social psychology, for example, trying to explain these recently more sceptical attitudes the East Germans have towards the course of the transformation, lay their emphasis on these peculiarities: this, they maintain, reflected the East Germans' attempt at insisting upon their dignity and identity in the face of a largely heteronomous transition, and the loss of the East German authorities of interpretation regarding the past and continuing processes of change (Huinink/Häder 1997).

What presently seems to be a central sociological issue, is the controversy about the applicability of the socialisation theory: does the population's change of opinion since the middle of the nineties mainly signal a harking back to traditional patterns of perception from the days of state socialism, reinforced through socialisation, and valid on a long-term basis ("socialisation hypothesis")? Or is it a sign that the experiences of the transition have been digested, in other words the actually experienced changes in one's own social status, especially due to the risk of unemployment ("situation hypothesis"), and also the heteronomous infiltration by the new institutions, including the awareness of an East-West divide in terms of economic living standards and equal political treatment ("collective discrimination hypothesis") (cf. Pollack/Pickel 1999 for a summary of these theories)?

Whichever one of these hypotheses one tends towards, within this quantitative branch of research they all have one thing in common: their main target is to discover to what quantitative extent the "old" or "new" value orientations and experiences can be proved, in order then to demonstrate the stronger plausibility of one hypothesis or the other. Thus one ends up weighing up different degrees of influence of factors, or clusters of factors, which is based on an already



typified catalogue of questions, or model, while conceding the other hypothesis to be partially valid. The result of this, strictly speaking, rarely goes beyond a “one as well as the other” principle to varying degrees.

**It seems to me that a part of the theoretical procedure has been omitted, a little bit of explanation, a little bit of self-reflection in the model assumptions, before one is able to attain a conclusive estimation of the situation: what is especially lacking is an understanding of what the agreement of those questioned to individual value orientations means, and how these value orientations have been acquired factually, through what concrete everyday experiences, what kind of living context they are embedded in, and for what lengths of time.**

**Even for these kind of questions certain starting-points exist, in quantitative as well as qualitative research, some of which I would like to bring to mind, simply because they are so rarely assembled productively.**

#### **Focussing on the socialisation impacts in people’s lifeworlds**

**In quantitative attitude research the model that makes a difference between specific and diffuse forms of system support as well as between the individual objects of this support (going back to David Easton) is undoubtedly an interesting and sophisticated approach, enabling an enquiry into the more specific objects of individual political-cultural attitudes.**

One productive approach in research is the sensitivity to interconnections or embeddings of value orientations. In the middle of the nineties, the *Allensbacher Meinungsforschungsinstitut* (Allensbach Institute for Opinion Research) enquired into the value associations that the East Germans connected with the system of planned economy and market economy. The result was that their dominant value association with planned economy was “social security” (73 percent), with market economy it was “supply of goods” (99 percent). But already the second largest association with planned economy in East Germany turned out to be “achievement” (53 percent), followed by “humanitarianism” (50 percent), “success” (37 percent) and “justice” (35 percent). Market economy, on the other hand, is associated by the East Germans in second place with “unemployment” (94 percent), in third place with “achievement”

(89 percent) and in fourth place with “egoism” (86 percent). “Success” in relation to market economy ranked number five on the scale (74 percent), while “justice” with only 14 percent took up the second last position in the associations of the East Germans, preceding “humanitarianism” (9 percent) (Köcher 1995).

**[Graph1 : HERE ]**

**Grafik und unmittelbar folgenden Absatz bitte doch drinlassen !**

**This could, on the one hand, be seen as the processing of the transition in itself, an up-to-date negative film on the most recent experiences made in jobs, gainful employment and market economy institutions since 1990, in other words a certain foundation for the “situation hypothesis” quoted above. On the other hand, however, this could also reflect an implicit identification with occupational experiences as having been the core experiences made in the old system, and gain relevancy, which could certainly include the awareness of partial previous success and achievement in the earlier society (this would mean a partial confirmation of the socialisation hypothesis). Considering the fact that planned economy is judged far more critically under such criteria as “pay level” (16%), “freedom” (18%) and “prosperity” (21%), we are not dealing with a general sense of “nostalgia”, but with a differentiated memory of previous life circumstances.**

These and other survey results exemplify the difficulty of reaching logical interpretations of such material based only on the measurement of values. Recently, this was even implicitly admitted by Heiner Meulemann in his critical analysis of earlier surveys, which revealed a surprisingly high proportion of East Germans agreeing to the value of “achievement”, a higher percentage, by the way, in 1990 than amongst the questioned West Germans (cf. Meulemann’s contribution to this volume). His interpretation attempts of this surprising result must, however, remain more or less speculative. They reveal especially clearly how much his modelled concept of socialisation and socialisation impacts under state socialism is based one-sidedly on such forms as were intended by the system (Meulemann 1998), how much it admits the transmitted ideological slogans and the claims of power to have had a direct forming effect, conceding that the old system’s verbal staging of itself had a consistent and decisive influence over the people’s life orientation.

The frequently latent understanding of “system” or “structure” prevalent in this study, and many other macro-analytical and quantitative studies of research, to a large extent follows the official and officious intentions of the system itself. “Structure” thus always primarily means intended structure, an ultimately formal abstraction of intended conditions and institutions conforming to the system. How difficult it is to adequately grasp the GDR’s economic system with its “centralist planned economy”, however, is shown very plausibly in the analysis with the programmatic title of “*Der Plan als Befehl und Fiktion*” (“The Plan as Command and Fiction”, Pirker et al. 1995). My question is, to what extent the unintentional consequences, the realisation mechanisms that sometimes transversely cross the official aims of the institution (be it in the economy, the political or cultural life) need to be included in the analysis of “structure”, “system”, “institutions”, and, of course, “socialisation”?

Just to avoid any misunderstanding: it is not my intention to question or negate important insights from the field of political science on the basic ruling mechanisms and institutions of state socialism, also and especially not in the case of the GDR. There is a relatively broad consensus in the scientific literature in its description of these ruling mechanisms. Rainer Lepsius describes them in the following summary: “The basic fundamental order of the political ruling system of the GDR can be described with sufficient precision: through the SED’s monopoly of power, the nationalisation of the economy and the replacement of the market through the planned economy, the hierarchically and bureaucratically organised instructing and allocating procedure within the party and state, businesses and firms, societies and territorial units, the restrictions imposed on civil rights, the lack of the public, and the sanctioning methods in the hands of the party and state system which cannot be controlled by a state founded on the rule of law” (translated from Lepsius 1994: 18).

This definition already recognisably contains the first signs of including unofficial but intended ruling mechanisms and institutions (e.g. the monopolisation of information) in the description of the system’s basic structures and institutions. By the fact that the fiction of the management of the economy is not banished to the level of coincidence or individual

occurrences, a highly productive strain of analysis of the actors' actual economic system and actions is able to ensue (Weinert 1995: 306).

A similarly differentiated analysis of the former political institutions could, in its turn, be integrated when creating a model from socialisation impacts; but, as far as I know, this is precisely what has hardly ever been done so far.

It is, however, under a level of relative clarity in the field of political science or system theory ("structure" or "system" always meaning the official and officious intentions of the system itself) that the grave deficits of the theoretical socialisation concept and reconstructive GDR research are noticed by very different branches of research, ranging from social structure research to biographical research. Rainer Lepsius feels exactly this deficit when attempting to grasp the actual mode of action and, to use my own words, the cultural and lifeworld embedding of these theoretically described institutions. Thus Lepsius states: "It is more difficult to derive from this description of institutions the effects on the lives of individuals, the particular nature of social relations, the degree of conformity, the manifold forms of adaptation, circumvention and avoidance of norms, to bring out the impact of social differentiation, of the potential for conflict, the selection of elites, the mobility and capacity for innovation, and to analyse the formulation of demands and objectives as well as processes of decision-making. There is a gap between the description of institutions, and the proof of the effects, attributed to the institutions, on the structure and development of a society" (transl. from Lepsius 1994: 18).

It is precisely in such a remote branch as biographical research that a similar consciousness of theoretical deficits clearly emerges. Thus, in regard to this, Heinz Bude stated the following opinion in an interview: "...We need more knowledge, more concepts, in order to comprehend this society. It is a question of the inner shape of GDR society, how it reproduced itself in the people's practical life experiences, qualifications such as 'totalitarian' and 'authoritarian', 'pre-modern' or 'undifferentiated' do not help much to understand what developmental probabilities are to be expected after the transfer of new market economy institutions has been completed" (transl. from Bude 1996: 4).

In further fields of research important and sophisticated analyses have been developed, which ultimately always refer to specific kinds of connection between the system and the lifeworld.

They were often carried through at the beginning of transformation research, but remained marginal perspectives in the long run. There were, for example, the works of Giessen and Leggewie (already in 1991), Huinik/Mayer (1993), as well as the analyses on the diversity of socialisation authorities (e.g. Nickel 1992). Since then quite divergent research approaches and projects have referred to the necessity of differentiated cultural analysis (Neckel 1995), and the relevancy of manifold courses of career etc. in the GDR is emphasised (cf. also the panel-studies on the course of people's lives (*Lebensverlaufstudien*) by the Max-Planck-Institute, e.g. Huinink/Mayer, et al. 1995), as well as the analytically revealing role of local contexts (Neckel 1992) or just everyday patterns of how people arrange their lives practically (Weihrich 1998). Numerous sociological and social historical approaches have stressed the constitutive subtly differentiated and fragmented nature of this "real socialist" society (Allheit 1994; Jessen 1995; Kaelble/Kocka/Zwahr 1994; Matthiesen 1998; Pollack 1998; Thomas 1993; Woderich 1991). Yet even in this listing, by no means complete, it is conspicuous that their results so far have only rarely served as stimuli for the theoretical modelling of different socialisation impacts.

(Until now ?) (Thus) a reductionist understanding of 'socialisation' is still dominant in the majority of quantitative studies, which I would like to summarise as follows: 'Socialisation is reduced

1) to political socialisation (due to the political penetration of the GDR as a society that is "*durchherrscht*", i.e. ruled through and through, as Kocka is often one-sidedly quoted with (Kocka 1994: 547)),

2) to intended socialisation, systemically intended adaptation, explicitly demanded through claims to education and control (Meulemann 1998),

3) to attitudes on certain values or institutions that can be explicitly named. To put it in exaggerated terms: such constrictions confuse indoctrination with socialisation, they assume facades to be effective reality, they are taken in posthumously by the old system's claim to omnipresent ruling power, they believe the staging of power more than the citizens of this state often did themselves, and they enquire too little into the actual faculty of perception of the people who experienced and survived this system.

These three forms of narrowing down the understanding of “socialisation” occasioned my own efforts, with a qualitative outlook, to include the whole spectrum of perceiving and acting dispositions in my studies, which look for the traces of the previous society coming to terms with the life of today. The basic reflection is this:

To 1): not only is the political sphere or dimension of different kinds of thinking and acting part of an interesting study in socialisation theory, especially with regard to attitudes of adaptation or deviation in the transformation process; the everyday life, the integration of people and their lifeworld, created a far more extended range of “anchors” of identification with the previous society, e.g. in the social or cultural dimension.

To 2): into the term of socialisation one has to integrate intended as well as unintended (systemic, inherent in the ruling system) socialisation impacts, which assert themselves, partly unconsciously, behind the backs of the “system shapers”, and which, if they were realised consciously, were in their turn used by the “system shapers”, in other words re-intended, but were also partly combated or ignored.

To 3): Many of these political as well as apolitical, intended as well as unintended, socialisation impacts are available explicitly and reflectively, which can be classified in texts in the form of wishes, value orientations, patterns of behaviour – others, however, are stored latently in secondary levels of consciousness, and can only be reconstructed with the help of special scientific procedures of explanation. These latent patterns of perception may be able to filter and form thinking and acting patterns, but people are not aware of them, and thus they are not available discursively (but latent interpretation patterns of social reality, latent structures of meaning, everyday theories, “rules of thumb” for behaving promisingly or riskily, unwritten rules of societal contact, which only become visible the moment they are breached or devalued).

Such a widening of the “socialisation concept” could thus contribute to the assemblage of analyses of system and lifeworld, of intended structures and predispositions for everyday practices (a promise which newer publications occasionally seem to give but not keep, cf., for example, Wolle 1998).<sup>ii</sup>

It is at this point that sociology focussing on qualitative studies could attempt to demonstrate in what way rulership and daily life, systemic claims and life world integration were

interwoven on a concrete level, how the people dealt with this symbiosis which they could not deceive, how they judged it, how they helped to form and reproduce it in many different ways.

The term “lifeworld” should, however, be separated from the frequently used term “daily life”, in respect that the latter term is more meant to describe how individuals actually organise their actions (cf. Wehrich 1998). “Lifeworld”, on the other hand, embraces the whole spectrum of contingent acting opportunities, thus stressing the predisposition of individuals caused by a manifoldly intricate, material and ideological environment, within which they orient themselves by means of their relevant patterns of perception regarding social facts, and organise their actions (Thomas 1997: 33). The interest in “lifeworlds”, in other words, is synonymous with a theoretical change of perspective, from institutional frameworks and influences to the perspective of acting people (partly following traditions of social phenomenology (cf. also Matthiesen 1998, Srubar 1988)).

### **Two qualitative case studies on the biographical building of bridges during the transformation**

This perspective of enquiry and the methodological approach of reconstructing patterns of interpretation (according to Meuser-Sackmann 1977, Oevermann 1989, Soeffner 1992) were the basis for two empirical research projects on the East German transformation process, which relate to one another and which led to the following partial results.<sup>iii</sup> In both projects the sample contained a professional group of people with technical and relatively high qualifications. These were engineers from the field of microelectronics, with university or technical college degrees, between 30 and 40 years of age in 1990, working in the region Berlin-Brandenburg, socialised in East as well as West Germany. From about 70 open (and naturally anonymously rendered) interviews, mostly lasting several hours and written down comprehensively, analyses were made, on the one hand on the “transformation knowledge”, made explicit, and the explicit “perception of transformation” regarding the thematic fields of “job career” and “cooperation abilities of business founders”. On the other hand, an elaborated, hermeneutic-interpretative, course of research led to the reconstruction of latent, subconscious, hidden constructions of meaning, precisely not made explicit by the respondents, on work, jobs, gainful employment and enterprise before and after the collapse of the Wall.

The following short outline of two concise East German cases especially concentrates on those interview sequences that point towards their relationship to important socialisation authorities of state socialism, and which clarify the specific contents of such value orientations as “achievement” and “success” in the old and the new society.

(For the sake of better comprehensibility, we have, at this point, fallen back on explicit statements of the respondents, transcribed in a simplified fashion.)

*The case of Georg Geher: the fighter with staying-power*

In Georg Geher we encounter a self-employed person with a very small business, which already was hived off in 1990 from the earlier and large concern that dominated the region. “I was the first to set up on my own, by the way”, he said proudly at the beginning of the interview, and we will soon understand what this high standing of being “the first for once” derives from in his specific case.

Without being asked, simply of his own accord, Mr. Geher frequently mentions his relationship to political institutions of the GDR at that time, especially to the ruling state party. This indicates that he latently feels confronted (and not only due to the special interview situation) with the problem of evaluating and personally coming to terms with this relationship:

“I was not a comrade, I didn’t have anything to do with them, quite the opposite. I also wasn’t with those that criticised all over the place. I’ve got my family here, I lived my life.”

Definition and justification of his “politically neutral” position in the previous state follow each other closely, and are thus already strongly linked, biographically “looked back on and reappraised”. Mr. Geher marks his family life as being the priority, separates his private living sphere clearly from the political, systemic sphere. The latter he describes as plainly and non-passionately as possible, as something unknown and of no interest to him, but not directly as anything hostile, dictatorial or completely despicable. If this had been the case, he would have probably had to behave much more critically than he obviously did (the logic of the reasons given for this will be examined later on). He does not make his political-institutional distance to the system appear heroic or a matter of principle; rather, one gets the impression of a relatively



peaceful juxtaposed existence. He was evidently able to form his private and family life in the old society to his satisfaction, and, from today's perspective, looks back upon this life positively.

Nevertheless it soon becomes obvious that Mr. Geher has, in fact, experienced his decisive socialisation in a special, elitist institution of the old society: in a boarding school for physical education, which he visited from the age of 12, and where he was able to train intensively and successfully in a national youth team. He describes this period cheerfully and with amusement, adding many affectionate details, which go back to the respect he felt for the teachers and trainers of that time, and which make it clear that he completely fitted into the spirit of his team sport. Here he was able to become independent of his parents at an early stage, achieve great feats, experience success and find acknowledgement.

At no point during the interview does Mr. Geher speak of the negative aspects of this GDR-typical promotion of sports, the health hazards caused, for example, by widespread doping, or of the prioritised political plan to make the small East German republic internationally famous through supreme performance in sports at any cost, including at the cost of destroying people's life designs. Consciously or unconsciously, he endeavours to create as much as possible an untarnished, entirely positive picture of this stage in his life, free from political considerations. He acknowledges the socialisation he experienced in this time completely:

“What the economy did not achieve, a real hierarchy of performance, sports had achieved...my parents would never have educated me so severely.”

Thus he has a positive attitude towards discipline, competitive thinking and a hierarchy of achievement, but does not consider the socialist system generally capable of orienting itself accordingly. By speaking of “hierarchy”, he also accepts different grades of performance and the acknowledgement of performance. That is especially important in his case, since he himself was never able to reach an absolutely leading position, but always remained the “mover-on for the others at the top”, the eternal second. Now it becomes clear what the reason is for his pride at having been the first to become self-employed after the collapse of the GDR. This influence of team sport and competitive thinking must, then, have had a drastic and lasting effect, right up to his working life after the changeover, for he now expects a stronger orientation towards achievement from the new society, a challenge he is ready to meet.

His willingness to repeatedly reach the limit of his own physical and psychological endurance (he speaks of an average working week of 70 hours, and years of foregoing holidays) runs through the whole presentation of his new life as a small businessman. He regards this new situation as extremely straining, but does not want to let the opportunity pass by, and is convinced of his own ability to endure this permanent pressure. Indeed, he basically categorises the people of his environment according to their willingness to make an effort. Mr. Geher considers the realisation of achievement to be possible in each system, in the old as well as the new, and the position one reaches is, in the end, dependent on one's own personal effort. He emphasises this willingness at various times during the interview, often through images of enormous physical exertion:

“Those that harnessed themselves to the cart beforehand, they're now harnessing themselves to it again, that's really so...”

Here he demonstrates a continuity of personal, individual achievement-orientation, but which he integrates in the context of his social and team orientation. One does not draw a cart by and for oneself, but also in order to help others along.

The systemic change, however, has, in his eyes, not brought about a real change in people's behaviour. It is in this context that he imparts to us one of his unfulfilled expectations during the transition after 1990: now that the old inefficiencies of the planned economy were over and the free market economy had been proclaimed, he was eager to see if the previous “grousers” or critics of the old system would really “get their act together” and take advantage of all the new opportunities quickly and successfully. His experience tended to confirm the opposite:

“...the people that really wanted to do something – and that's what I actually mean by it (e.g. when he describes his own activity as the “the newer one” (“Neuerer”, Erfinder) in the old firm before 1989 – A.S.) – those that already did something then – they are doing something again today.”

The conclusion he draws from his transformation experiences is precisely that of biographical continuity (especially regarding the willingness to perform), but also of the widespread attitude of conformity, an ambivalent, distant relationship to the old system, which

he comments on by his own accord, but de-dramatises in his own case through normalisation and generalisation:

“We all conformed to the system, let’s be honest about it [...] and we all groused, and those that groused the most then are those that are grousing the most again, and those that set to then, they’re setting to again today – as far as that goes, you can take a look wherever you want.”

He considers too much criticism of the system to be a senseless waste of effort which only keeps one from doing anything productive. Thus he ultimately also legitimises his own, neutral relationship to the state then, and the path he chose for his life instead to work constructively on his own efficiency in an unpolitical field. Accordingly he has gained lasting confidence in his own strength and self-discipline, which also enables him to endure the hard work his new business life involves, even though he was “not born to be self-employed”, as he concludes.

He has succeeded in entering a new, highly competitive field through his personal passage through the transformation, not in spite of, but because of the specific impact the old society made on him. Georg Geher was able to develop individual achievement in the framework of a socialisation authority that adhered to the system, but still relatively independently of permanent political assertions of loyalty. Precisely this willingness to perform and make an effort continues to have an effect in him as an influencing pattern of perception and behaviour. This personal, biographically continuous line of his becomes his bridge into new territory, it gives him confidence and a sense of self-esteem, making it possible for him to place himself in the new society without a breach of identity, and to cope well with its new standards at the same time.

#### *The case of Alexander Alt – the creative utilitarian*

Alexander Alt completed his studies in technical engineering at a university in the GDR, after which he worked in a socialist large-scale enterprise, doing microelectronic research and development, and gained his experiences of management more on the lower and middle levels of the hierarchy. At various times he speaks of his critical distance to the political system and “the incompetence of his superiors”, which already gave him the idea of founding his own firm

before the collapse of state socialism, a scheme which, however, could not be implemented at the time. As soon as it was possible, still in 1990, he founded, together with a few colleagues, a small software firm which was able to establish itself on the market fairly quickly. He declines the offer of a larger, West German, business to be taken over with his firm as an employee on the grounds that he had always “wanted to do research and development under his own name”. His own firm continues to establish itself and to expand. Alexander Alt also employs a few West German specialists, but has “catastrophically bad experiences” with them (they had only simulated their ability, or had not been able to deal with the East-firm socially). On the other hand, he also gains negative results from attempting to cooperate with East German partners, who do not have enough common features to offer in terms of content, in spite of the good intentions on all participating sides. Thus he continues to go his own way relatively independently, expanding his firm, and currently is quite successfully in the process of gaining a position on the international market outside Europe.

The most important and explicit passages from the interview and the latent, reconstructed patterns of interpretation are summarised in the following graph, which, however, will not be discussed comprehensively at this point but, rather, serves to render this case plausible.

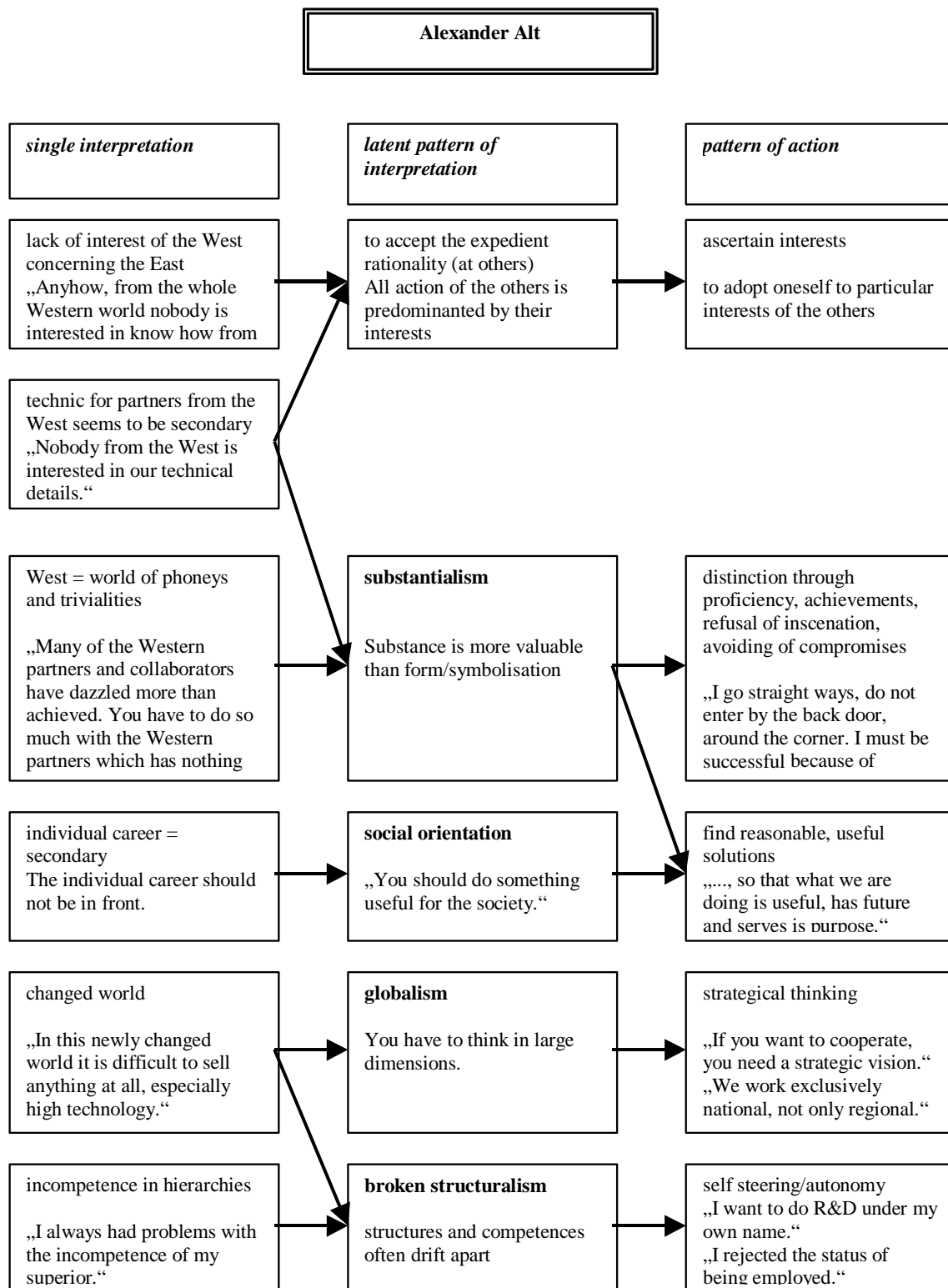
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<sup>i</sup> As translated from the German term *Lebenswelt*, and which, according to the New Oxford Dictionary of English, refers to “all the immediate experiences, activities, and contacts that make up the world of an individual or corporate life” (translator’s note). In the German social sciences debate it includes the complexity of the material and ideological (“ideell”) environment of an individual.

<sup>ii</sup> This claim presents itself almost exactly to the reader in the most recent publication of the historian Stefan Wolle, for example, which has the programmatic title ‘The Ideal World of Dictatorship. Daily Life and Rulership in the GDR 1971-1989’. However, the promise, partly emphasised by the author himself, is not kept, and this study does also not get beyond that ‘one as well as the other’ principle regarding rulership and daily life, the juxtaposition of system and everyday living conditions; the number of female students are placed next to the IMs (informal collaborators of the secret service), and Wolle may finish off with memories made partially more precise, but also with the already well-known conclusion that it was a thoroughly schizophrenic society, where “all...[were] simultaneously supporters and resisters” (Wolle 1998: 336).

<sup>iii</sup> These two projects were promoted by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Society) in the context of the Frankfurt Institute for Transformation Studies at the ‘Europe-University’ Viadrina of Frankfurt (Oder). The applicants working on the first case were Anna Schwarz and Gabriele Valerius, and on the second case Anna Schwarz and Mathias Weber.

Graph 2: Alexander Alt



Similar to Georg Geher, Alexander Alt thus does also, of his own accord, mention his ambivalent relationship to the old system. His ambivalence, however, is not neutral indifference, but a quite clearly reflected, differentiated analysis of aspects that he considers either acceptable or unacceptable. In spite of his latent criticism of incompetent hierarchies and political irrationalities during his career in the GDR, our respondent feels deeply committed to certain ethical imperatives, which can indeed be seen as corresponding to the system's explicitly stated expectations of behaviour in GDR times. This is clearly demonstrated in the following passage:

“We have learnt in school that one is meant to bring to the society something useful with what one does. That one has a duty towards society. And that the personal aspect, a personal career in that sense, should not be prominent in life. And although, on the other hand, I have always rejected communism, on this point I do agree a hundred percent with this principle.”

His acceptance of these life orientations, determined through the educational institutions, is not the only thing. Alexander Alt makes it plain in various passages that his present management transactions still clearly follow this social orientation and utilitarianism. He wants to approach his clients and partners with truthfulness and quality, to build his own business on a solid and professional foundation and, at the same time, help to secure global sustainable conditions. Mr. Alt is strongly of the opinion

“...that we as an East-firm, and our East-clients, that we, in a project, primarily have a common interest, which is that the project itself goes off well, that the solution which we install is technically sound, that it functions, that it is practical, that, as far as possible, no unnecessary resources are wasted, that everything that we do is useful, has a future and serves its purpose.”

This short passage speaks volumes about his self-concept as being a partner to his customers and part of a society that is as stable and open towards the future as possible. His aim is to satisfy his clients on a long-term basis, and he himself speaks of the strength and weaknesses of his product. He looks for authentic, credible, equal social relationships, even in the relationship between manager and customer. He believes in technical feasibility, technical progress, ecological responsibility and in rationality, being far removed from any postmodern refinement.

This last aspect comes out especially clearly through his refusal to completely conform to certain expectations of the new, market economy system, also regarding his lifeworld. He feels his own insistence on expertise is insulted by the West German partners' lack of professional interest in any know-how coming from the East. He characterises his basic perception of this difference through the behaviour and expectations of behaviour on the side of Eastern and Western market actors:

“With West-customers the main point is much more the image that one has as a firm, that as far as possible it is shining, the solidity of the firm, which is also justified, no question about it, that that is also very much a main feature, the outer appearance of the software programme, so not how good they are technically, but how they represent themselves to the outside, and, of course, intensive personal contact, that one must have an extensive conversation about all sorts of things and tennis, or whatever else, much more and to a much more intense degree than about that which one actually wants to supply.”

By distinguishing himself exclusively through quality and his own achievement, Alexander Alt follows a fundamentalist pattern of interpretation, refusing to adopt seemingly superficial, trivial techniques of distinction which are demanded and practiced especially in his new environment. By this he might be overlooking the significance of such techniques and intensive networking in order to slowly render himself trustworthy in a new economic field. This could lead to him being limited in his actions to a certain degree, which to some extent is already reflected in his strongly critical and reserved cooperation behaviour.

On the other hand, generally speaking he appears as one of the most successful cases in our sample so that such a danger can obviously be compensated for. Perhaps, however, it is an inner-German problem that is coming to the fore in this case, in so far as it seems less problematic for him to establish himself on an overseas market than in the Federal Republic of Germany. That could also point to the acting potential which has been revealed through transformation research: special features of East German behaviour might not generally prove themselves to be incompatible with modern, pluralist societies, but meet with marked difficulties especially in the case of the German transformation due to the constellations of actors and powers within Germany.

In both cases outlined above the young businessmen continue to have difficulties stepping out of the previous social integration, which was more levelled out, and slipping into their new social roles. This puts them under pressure to legitimise and motivate themselves. Georg Geher legitimises his new role through the intensity of his efforts; Alexander Alt legitimises it through the quality and usefulness of his products and services. These legitimisations and motivations are not necessarily typical for businessmen in the market economy; they have developed in the context of the previous society, but today they create a variety of acting possibilities.

### **Conclusion and request: grasping the meaning of differences according to the lifeworld and the social creativity of the “homo transformatus”**

The drafting of these two cases was meant to exemplify what such value orientations as “achievement” or “success” can mean in relation to the old as well as the new society, what contexts of socialisation they were acquired in, and what forms of reinterpretation they can be subject to during the phase of transition. Each case demonstrated different influences through formalised socialisation authorities and intended norms as well as different forms of political dissociations from the system’s demands or dysfunctions. The two respondents’ successful arrival in the new society is specifically related to their ability to reflect on and reactivate their achievement-related lifeworld resources under new conditions. These life orientations reflected on in a new way – even though they often originate from old contexts – seem to me to represent less of a transformation blockade, but more of a transformation resource.

This result is also confirmed through numerous other cases in our sample, which at this point can only be summarised as follows:

What was especially remarkable was the diversity, the subtly different influences achieved through work, career, collective and firm, even in a group with a largely comparable background, from which divergent patterns of perception and behaviour resulted. Here I can only refer to a few relevant aspects in the context of the questionnaire on the lifeworld integration, especially in the field of career and gainful employment.<sup>iv</sup>



In spite of the frequently mentioned inefficiency and irrationality of the GDR's organisation of economics and business management, we discovered that our respondents identified with certain aspects of the previous economy and society (the realisation of ambitious projects, the confirmation of one's own capabilities, the management of creative chaos, handicraft work, exchange or reinvention, the complexity and familiarity of relationships within the collective, the intense degree of communication at one's work-place, the acknowledgement of individual talents in the cultural field). In such contexts and fields it often seemed possible to take advantage of individual opportunities of development, and to render these productive in such a way as to be able to overcome the disruptions and insecurities of today (self-confidence, appreciation of expertise, pragmatic handling of "second-best solutions", security through social integration). In addition, this, in my view, then also explains the association of "achievement" and "success" with the previous economic system, as demonstrated in the context of value research.

At the same time the specific way in which individuals are integrated in their work and firm is based upon a general lack of competition between the workers, often even between the representatives of different hierarchies. This, on the one hand, can be understood as the other side of the economic inefficiency, the abolition of social differentiation (in this case especially the missing financial stimulus to reach higher positions), and the "upward-mobility" paths in the old society which could only be influenced partly by the individual (this especially applied to the generation of our respondents – as opposed, for example, to the generation of their parents, who rose to a position through education in the years after the war). On the level of people's lifeworld, however, this brought about the unproblematic tendency to integrate themselves in a complex manner in the collective, a relief of battles for a position and the dispensability of showing off (for which there were neither opportunity, space, media nor accepted role models). From this, then, the posthumous perception of GDR society as having been the more "humane" and "truthful", and the new concept of market economy as being "egoistic", may derive.

Finally, the contexts of our respondents, their lifeworld, also included different conglomerations of ideological concepts, which seem to be more implicitly than explicitly influenced by a materialist and enlightening view of the world and of society. Not the political or ideological slogans of the socialist system, proclaimed in a written form, influenced the way the

people perceived things, but more the underlying, unconscious, partly holistic and partly teleological convictions (e.g. regarding the basic recognisability of the world, the ability of rationality, reason and technical progress to assert themselves, the rendering of a structural constitution and shapeability of social conditions guided by interest).

The “idea of socialism”, when enquired into so vaguely, can thus trigger greatly varying associations in the interpretation and meaning of individuals, and concern a large number of lifeworld dimensions: this spectrum of possible associations extends (on the theoretical level) from linking up with traditions of European intellectual history, such as the Age of Enlightenment, European Rationalism, the Great French Revolution, and later maybe even the Prussian culture, to the many different experiences (on the practical level) with the paternalistic social, youth, family, sports or cultural and educational policy of the GDR.

If, in conclusion, we support a cooperation, a building of bridges, between the quantitative and the qualitative perspectives in transformation research, then this certainly does not mean that the established methodological independence and different nature of expounding and comprehending social research are to be levelled out. There is enough to do for both, independently of each other. Qualitative research, however, could provide some inspiration for quantitative research in three specific phases: a) in the theoretical discussion about an adequate understanding of “socialisation” and “socialisation impacts”, b) in the phase of creating models or formulating hypotheses for the planned surveys, and c) during the phase of interpreting the empirically acquired results on the value orientations and how they have changed. At the same time, it might thus also be possible to develop an even more differentiated theoretical picture of the state socialist past, which would include the lifeworld experiences of people more adequately than before, and acknowledge their biographical achievements of social learning and building bridges. Only in this way can workable endogenous potentials, social capital and the willingness to embrace the transformation be stimulated in the long term.

Yet again it was an artist that put it in a nutshell; we owe the following bon mot to the theatre manager and director Peter Sodann from Halle:

“No-one wants to have the GDR back. But nobody wants it taken away from them.”

(“Niemand will die DDR zurück. Aber keiner will sie sich nehmen lassen.”)

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<sup>iv</sup> Interesting results are also available on the firm as the centre for socialisation in GDR society, for example in Saxonian industry (Weil 1998); this subject is partly taken up more specially in Engler's new publication (Engler 1999) regarding the first decades of the GDR.

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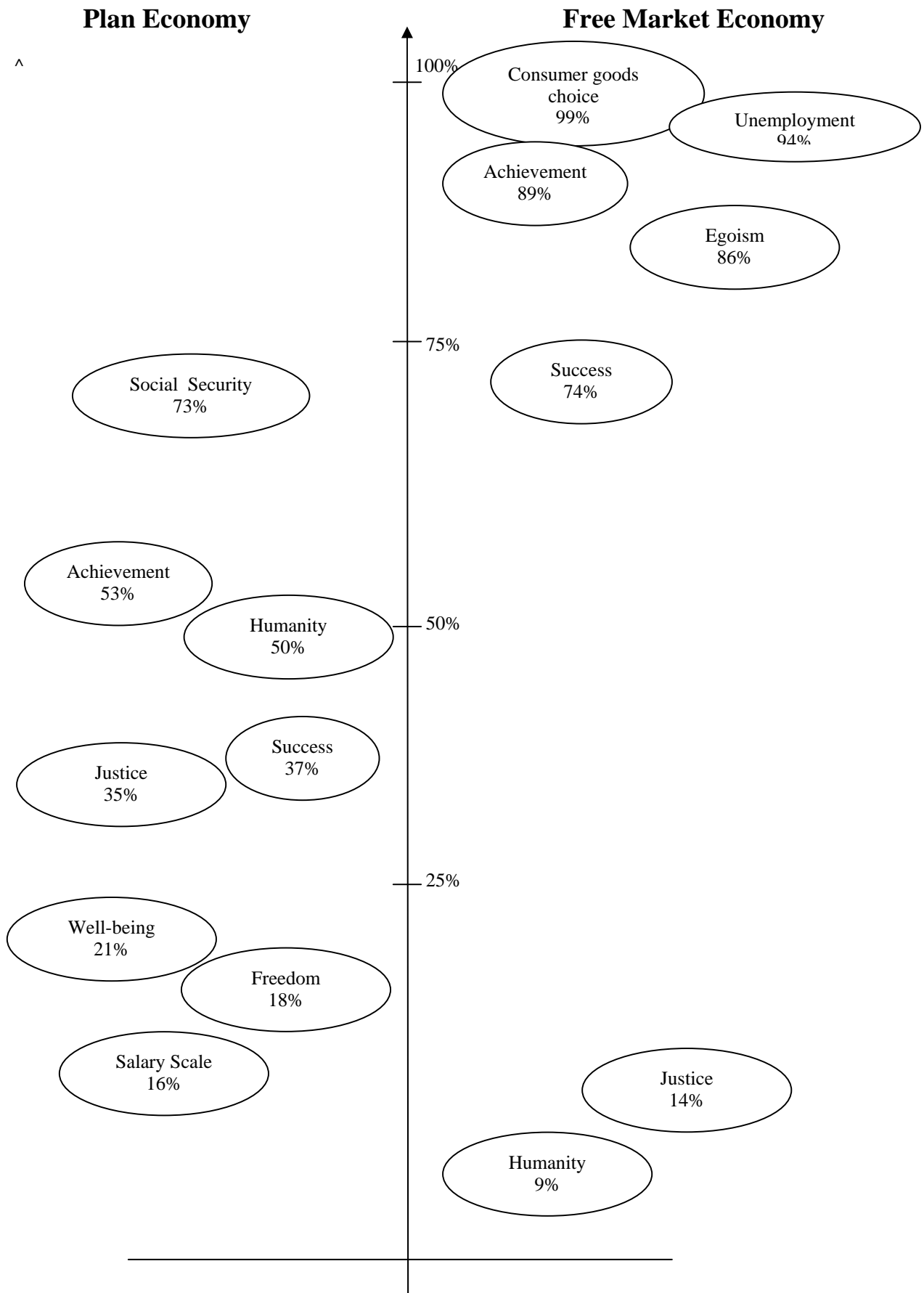
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Picture 1: Value-Association of East Germans for  
Plan Economy and Free Market Economy (Köcher 1995)  
 (Multiple answers were possible)



**figure 2: Alexander Alt**

