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Editorial

The core question of this issue of the JSSE, “Sociology? Who Needs It?”, sounds rather radical and provocative. But it may simply mirror the real vanishing of sociological topics from civic education curricula in the past decades occurring at least in some European countries. At the same time, asking this question may hold high potentials of identification for all social scientists, teaching in schools, occupied with teacher training and developing conceptions for curricula of social science subjects and conceptions for school.

Many fellow sociologists, especially those active in teacher training, experience it as a big challenge to explain their teacher students why they and their pupils should study sociology or even sociological theories. Sociological theories in their complexity – so the conventional assumption – can hardly be presented to schoolchildren, it is even contested whether they should be mentioned in schools at all. The usual solution, to expect teacher students to know sociological theories as well as how to simplify them for making them teachable to schoolchildren, seems to fail. Even the very possibility of simplifying sociological knowledge in order to make it understandable for non-sociologists has turned out to be difficult enough to fill decades with controversial debates of academic sociological societies in many countries with no prospect of agreement. The same holds for the debate on the principal applicability of sociological knowledge. Finally, even if sociological knowledge proves to be applicable to teaching and learning in schools, how is this specific applicability meant? What could be the specific goals of learning and teaching sociology in schools? Who would benefit from being educated in sociological thinking? Who would be challenged by students being knowledgeable about sociology? And last but not least: How would sociological ways of thinking relate to approaches focused on political science, which seem to be predominant in current civic education all over Europe? So why instruct teacher students in sociology and why and how bring sociology to school?

During the preparation of this issue many aspects of this complicated relation between the discipline of sociology and its application in school again became evident. This number of the JSSE presents a dialogue on sociology in school which on the one side reflects central tensions, changes, current developments and self-perception of sociology as an academic discipline and at the same time raises very basic questions of the school systems’ self-understanding between providing knowledge, being an agency of socialisation and producing not only practical skills, but politically and democratically approved world-views.

A short systematisation of problems, developments and challenges, analysed by authors of this volume in the tension field of sociology as a school subject and

sociology as an academic discipline, produces a list of three main questions:

1. Can sociology as an academic discipline, struggling with de-fragmentation and discussing since decades about possible de-scientification of sociology through application of sociology, at all afford to function as a basis for school training?
2. Can the school system and its institutionalised curriculum planning at all perceive the necessity of sociological knowledge and skills? Is the (self)-image of school in modern society compatible with using conceptions, theories and approaches of academic sociology?

And if we answer the first two questions positively, we meet the third question:

3. How can and should sociology be used in schools: in explicit form and from its academic perspective as neutral observation of the society within the society, or implicitly as conceptions useful for enhancing school development and individual development of values?

Paradoxically or logically, these questions, arising on the cutting edge between the academic discipline and a possible school subject or field of knowledge, mirror to a great extent problems of academic sociology’s self-perception.

For some decades the questions of whether sociology is a unit at all, as well as questions of borderlines between sociology and other social sciences have been acute in different national and international sociological discourses (Gouldner 1974, Davies 1994, Balog/Es-ser 1999, Funken 2000, Rehberg 2000, and many others). These voices reflect about the de-fragmentation of sociology as discipline, including the multiplicity of partly non-compatible paradigms, research methods and schools. The results of this multi-faceted differentiation process, as elegantly summarized by Sztompka (2010), are pluralistic mosaic sociologies. In his analysis, Piotr Sztompka describes co-existing specific, national sociologies and one unified sociology (occupied with the society in its globality). This unified sociology is seen as emerging from historical and societal processes, bringing humanity to one society in many contexts. However, this prognosis of sociological unity emerging appears rather optimistic even to the theorists of sociology; so how is sociology perceived by



those outside the discipline? Especially relevant for our topic here is the strong heterogeneity of sociology, reflected in its self-image. Sociology as an academic discipline, either internationally or within national associations, does not make up *any kind* of unity which would be capable of developing some unified approach school teaching sociology in schools – there is even no entity in sociology which could provide this for university training in sociology with any universality (Zimenkova 2007). So, how can a de-fragmentised discipline, which does not understand itself as a unit – not even on national associations' level – develop and introduce a solid elaborated conception of teaching sociology in schools? And if the academic discipline itself is not able or not interested, who else should care?

Starting with the very beginning of sociology as a discipline, discussions about the necessity and the possibility of applying sociology have been present in sociological discourses; for the time being they can be best observed on the example of the debates on public sociology¹ (take, e.g. the opening debates of the European Sociological Association in 2009, discussing whether sociology can and should change society with Michael Burawoy, the author of a highly disputed conception of public sociology; see also Shore Scott 1979; Franz 2003). Academic sociologists see professionalisation of sociology outside of the academia as problematic, and fear the de-scientification of the discipline by application (Lumm 1985, Kühl 2004, Kühl/Tacke 2003). This debate pro and contra the application of sociology is relevant for sociology as a school subject insofar as it affects sociology, the self presentation / non-presentation of sociology in the media and thus affects the public presence and effectiveness of the discipline. How and why should actors of the education system and curriculum makers become interested in a discipline which tries hard not to be present in a public sphere?

Given these reservations from the side of the academic discipline, we are also confronted with corresponding reservations from the side of the school system, its teachers and curriculum authors: sociology, which does not present and perceive itself as a unity does not provide much help in curriculum writing. It even presents very different views on what is important and should be learned in sociology by schoolchildren. Working on applying sociology for a school, curriculum authors and teachers (even or especially those who studied sociology) could rather expect a dismissive attitude from the academic discipline.

Given, on the one hand, an academic discipline, claiming that it cannot be applied, and that it is too complex to be explained to schoolchildren and any layperson (which will lose its essence through such

explanations); and on the other hand, the mission of providing skills and values – especially in the area of social sciences, how likely is the school to take up sociology? Why should an academic discipline be applied to school-shaped learning about the society if its majority on principle rejects any application?

Summarising the articles of this volume, we are confronted with a rather specific situation. Although all authors are specialists in civic education and curriculum studies, they refer very explicitly to the academic discipline of sociology, thus implying the academic discipline to be an important actor in the process of bringing sociology to school. However, in principle it must be possible to bring sociology to schools on the initiative of the didactics of sociological or of the theory of civic education. The political and practical support of the academic discipline itself may be of minor importance and this educational initiative "from outside" could even contradict the discipline's self-perception as a non-applicable and a non-normative subject. But would a genuine interest from the side of the school system and from curriculum writers in sociology be enough to bring sociology into schools, irrespective of the disinterest of the academic discipline? If yes, the question arises why sociology – be it as a school subject of its own or a defined field of contents – does not expand in the curriculum? Why did the destiny of sociology in schools differ so much between different European countries, e.g. continuously declining in German curricula from its golden age in the 1970s and 1908s while gaining a quite comfortable standing throughout the same period in the French and Dutch system?

Is the situation of sociology at schools connected to a general lack of interest of the non-scientific community, politics and media in sociological knowledge? In the school context and school curricula, the relevance of economics and political science is recently increasing in many European countries, also in those areas which could as well be occupied by sociology – in the cases where social and political sciences are still considered important for school education². How can

1 Public sociology calls itself, due to its applied focus, sociological reform movement, <http://publicsociology.com/>

2 If we analyse very briefly the development of the logic of the Life Long Learning Program of the EU on the school level, we see that – which is quite traditional for the EU's view on its citizens-employability and entrepreneurship play an important role in Life Long Learning, also on the school level (cf. http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc830_en.htm). The "European strategy and co-operation in education and training" states that "Politicians at European level have recognised that education and training are essential to the development and success of today's knowledge society and economy." (http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc28_en.htm). Although positions like "Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship" are strong in the conception of life long learning, in the quantified benchmarks qualification in the area of social sciences can hardly be found (ibid.)



this be explained? And which is the role of sociology in school curricula?

We see sociology as strongly bound to school subjects occupied with society: civic and citizenship education, political education, economics, history, culture and geography. Sociology, or, better to say, many hyphenated sociologies, would be able to provide relevant knowledge for each of these areas – but what would be specifically *sociological* about this knowledge? From our view on sociology as school subject we would expect sociology to provide students with a critical view on society and its developments, with skills for analysis of the societal rules, teaching to see social phenomena within bigger multifaceted contexts and to reflect about one's acting in society and about society as such. In this sense, sociology would complement perfectly other social sciences taught in school which might be designed more normatively for providing democratic values and affirmative knowledge about polity, policies and politics or for acquiring skills, competences and theoretical framings for rational economic activities. Sociology – if we permit ourselves to argue normatively against the normativism of others – could play the role of a counterpart subject enabling and fostering a specific form of open-mindedness and critical thinking not so common in neighbouring school subjects.

But this possible role of sociology does not happen in schools or it does not happen often enough. The reflective approach of sociology is not being pushed up very much. Is this the case because the contemporary school in many countries is just at the beginning of a democratisation process, having existed for centuries as a strictly hierarchical system and currently struggling with the challenge of democratising itself, rendering the distant stance taken by a reflective subject like sociology inappropriate for that task? Or is sociology expected to slow down the performance and achievement process which modern school has to push in responding to external pressures from politics and society of getting more and more oriented towards directly applicable knowledge and skills? Perhaps, these are only two of the many reasons why sociology as a school subject does not loom large.

The authors of this volume go deep into these problems, questions and tensions, providing elaborated analyses of sociology in schools, between the explicit learning of sociological knowledge and referring to sociology not only in teachers' training, but also in curricula and everyday learning in schools.

In their article on "*Why Sociology Has a Marginal Position in Civic Education in Bulgaria – Nationally Specific and/or Universal Trends?*" Georgi Dimitrov and Elena Stoykova address some genuine problems of the discipline with regard to the context of education, first of all the decline of sociology as discipline worldwide. Describing in detail some problems of the

discipline, Georgi Dimitrov and Elena Stoykova open up an important slot of the discussion on sociology in schools: How can a discipline, experiencing serious academic and presentation problems, find a way into school and in which form? De-fragmentation of sociology is addressed as a problem for sociology's use in school. Furthermore, some problems in Bulgarian sociology – characteristic for transformation societies, and relevant for sociology in schools – are addressed: on the one hand the underdevelopment of sociology in societies where Marxist theory had been prevailing for decades (and where the educational staff had not changed since the socialistic governing), on the other hand, the rise of applied sociology, not concerned with educational processes. Sociology does not have the opportunity to become the basic academic discipline for social sciences subjects in schools. Hence, sociology as a school subject in a transformation society faces a twofold problem: not only is it difficult to conceptualise a school subject between academic knowledge provision and active learning of skills and values, but it is as well difficult to realise such practical teaching in a society, in which this active form of teaching is neither practised nor acknowledged by the teachers themselves. Georgi Dimitrov and Elena Stoykova come to the conclusion that both reform of education and sociology as a discipline providing a problem oriented approach are needed in order to apply sociology in (Bulgarian) schools successfully.

Writing on "*Beyond 'Doom and Gloom' and 'Saving the World': On the Relevance of Sociology in Civic Education*", Vjeran Katunarić also starts with some genuine problems of the discipline, describing contemporary sociology "as beginning and ending its expertise with skepticism". Elaborating on the big challenge of applying sociology to schools, Vjeran Katunarić describes the dilemma of social sciences between figuring as a school subject, thought to prepare citizens for executing their duties and as a subject, based in its scientific contents on a discipline with strong "reservations towards liberal democracy" and a strong wish to preserve its value neutrality. Vjeran Katunarić describes in detail this tension field between sociology as school subject and citizenship education. He shows the whole range of problems appearing in the democratic school oriented towards educating democratic citizens: teaching students to execute their citizenship responsibility means at the same time to accept, in principle, the existing system; sociology sees itself as critics of society, not as its willing instrument for creating good citizens within the given system. The expertise of Vjeran Katunarić sheds light on a very interesting and multifaceted problem: sociology with its knowledge of social problems and its potential of reflective skills is important for citizenship education, but it cannot, due to its critical functions, be taken as a basic discipline for citizenship education. Reflect-



ing on co-operation or exclusion between civics and sociology in schools, Vjeran Katunarić comes to solutions which would, probably, satisfy to a big extent academic critics on applying sociology in schools: sociology should not melt together with civics, and they should not be mutually exclusive, but rather be concurrent subjects in schools.

In her article *"Sociology in French High Schools: The Challenge of Teaching Social Issues"*, Elisabeth Chatel gives an elaborated analysis of the development of sociology as a school subject for French lycées and its development between sociology and economics, between academic discipline and social problem orientation, showing the history of the complex school subject Economy and Social Studies (ESS) and the role of sociological knowledge, skills and theories within it. In her impressive analysis, including empirical data on results of studying ESS, Elisabeth Chatel shows tensions between ESS as knowledge production, as providing students with analytical perspectives, but also as training active citizens with critical attitudes and ways of overcoming these tensions. Developing her complex analysis, Elisabeth Chatel touches upon the central questions of sociology in schools between knowledge providing and application, and on academic sociological knowledge. Most interestingly, the paper shows that the expected impact of sociology at schools is a politically contested issue as this discipline is expected to encourage a critical stance on society, politicians and entrepreneurs. This hope or fear of sociology as a means of critical thinking goes well with some key arguments in the papers of Dimitrov/Stoykova and Katunarić. Moreover, problem oriented teaching may turn out to be reinforcing the critical powers embodied in the discipline of sociology. Incidentally, Economy and Social Studies in France seems to give an example of a peaceful and fruitful co-existence of economics and sociology within one and the same school subject.

The crucial differentiation between knowledge vs. action as subject and result of civic education, which appears to be a very central point for this volume, is addressed also in the article of Lieke Meijs and Ariana Need *"Sociology, basis for the secondary-school subject of social sciences"*. This text provides an elaborated example of history, traditions and modern development of social studies in the Netherlands and reflects on the crucial difference, making sociology a very specific school subject between providing knowledge and giving skills for acting. In this context, Lieke Meijs and Ariana Need point to the differentiation between academic and public sociology, which resulted in a long-time debate in Dutch sociology, difficult not only for the academic discipline, but – or especially – also difficult for the educational system with clear cut ideas and application orientation. This differentiation, relevant in civics as such, is becoming a central problem,

challenge and obstacle in the context of applying the academic sociological discipline in education. Showing the development of the social science curricula, Lieke Meijs and, Ariana Need demonstrate the difference between the self-image of the discipline and of the social studies subject in schools as oriented not primarily on introducing into social science, but using social science conceptions in systematic manner, for applied goals like explaining "social structure and social differences", and explaining (and developing) "political views and political decision-making". The tension between the discipline of sociology and the school subject of sociology proves to be a tension between an academic view on social sciences, oriented towards knowledge and research; and a school view, oriented towards competences. Lieke Meijs and Ariana Need create an interesting way out of this dilemma, as they show the possible development of this school subject towards a unification of sociology and political science within the 'concept-context approach, "characterized by the organization of a subject's body of knowledge into a framework of concepts". This article provides not only a theoretical way out of the problem, but also gives some relevant practical impetus for designing sociology as school subject.

In her article *"Social Theory: Who Needs It? A Didactic Substantiation of Social Theories in Lessons"*, Bettina Zurstrassen provides critique on the presentation of social theories in the lessons. She takes up the challenge of bringing social theory in its explicit form into school. Approaching this topic from a rather academic perspective, Bettina Zurstrassen elaborates on the opportunity and necessity to apply sociological theories in school explicitly, criticising the implicit use of sociology in schools. In this context, her critique does not go toward the textbook and curriculum authors, but rather toward the curriculum plans and publishing houses, who dictate the scientifically not sound manner of sociology's presentation in school context. Bettina Zurstrassen claims – within the framework of an approach focusing on conceptual change – that schoolchildren already work with theories – everyday theories – and that, in consequence, social science theories cannot be considered too difficult for them but can and should be used in school. The assimilation of sociological theories by schoolchildren is possible due to the fact that everyday theories, explaining social life phenomena, do already exist in the children's perception and explanation of the world. The paper gives applicable examples of sociological theories' integration into school teaching. In her suggestions, Bettina Zurstrassen manages to overcome the debate of sociology as academic theory vs. sociology in applied form and suggests using the method of Concept Maps. This shows the opportunities and chances of sociology brought to school – a form of applying sociology which – thank goodness! – appears



to be compatible with the academic self-image of the discipline. The author describes a concrete framework for the development and analysis of social theories which shows how to do this job in everyday teaching and learning in the classroom.

The next article of this issue of the Journal of Social Science Education also takes up a big challenge of integrating sociological theory into learning at schools: explaining sociology and using sociology in working with underachievers. In his article *"Do Underachievers Need Sociology?"* Aladin El-Mafaalani provides a view on overcoming the theory/application dilemma in a very specific and innovative way. His approach elaborates on Goffman's theory of social action, which is capable for serving as a "theoretical foundation for the lesson, but is also explicitly its subject". Aladin El-Mafaalani claims that the special situation of under-achievers in schools requires this approach, giving "social-theoretical background for the theatrical action" and at the same time serving as an instrument for reflection and analysis of the individual, interaction, and institution – reflections in and about school as an institutional setting. Reconsidering special challenges and problems of underachievers and school settings, in which underachievers study, Aladin El-Mafaalani suggest to use Goffman's theory for making institutional rules; theoretical thinking is thus used in order to reflect on and understand the rules, the history and situation of their appearing (analytical component) and to develop them (practical component, skills). Aladin El-Mafaalani describes the applicable way of using Goffman to work with underachievers in schools for helping them to "transcend their normal roles". The result of such an application of sociological theory is twofold: besides (implicitly) providing sociological knowledge, it also provides attitudes, action skills and experience. Crucial especially for underachievers, they make the the experience of being taken seriously and of discovering opportunities and outcomes for engagement. Despite the rather implicit use of the theory in the lesson itself, this conception proves to be a big challenge for teachers, who must be trained intensively in sociological theory. Thus, this article brings together academic training of the teachers and the implicit use of sociological theory in school and for schools.

The next article – written in German – gives a very detailed report on the implementation of sociology in three schools in Bremen, a German city. In her article *"...ich konnte viel über mein Leben lernen" Soziologieunterricht an der Gymnasialen Oberstufe in Bremen – Eine „Parallelwelt“?*³, Marianne Papke gives very interesting insights into the students' understanding of what sociology as a school discipline gives them, what they can learn from sociology for their everyday

life, while combining the theoretical knowledge and the new reflexivity which they gain with help of this subject. Marianne Papke shows how sociology works within the curricula and describes problems, obstacles and successes of this subject. Drawing a detailed picture of how students use theoretical and empirical sociological approaches and data in order to change their own attitudes and patterns in everyday life, this paper gives some very concrete answers to some of the questions guiding this issue of the JSSE. The example outlined by Marianne Papke shows that schools can deal with sociological theories, that working on a cutting edge between sociological theory and practical applications for students' life, including the development of active attitudes, is possible and can be successful. This experience from schools in Bremen demonstrates that sociology, when applied in schools, is inclined or even forced to give up its self-image of neutral observation and tends to become normative in a certain way. However – and this must be a crucial point for sociology as an academic discipline – going to school does not mean to give up its scholarliness. On the contrary, teachers and teacher students need the sociological perspective in order to be successful in explaining social phenomena in and to their classroom. But also students themselves report an improvement in understanding of their everyday life with help of sociological theories learned at school.

The last article – beyond the main topic of this issue – is *"Democratic citizenship – A conditioned apprenticeship. A call for destabilisation of democracy in education"*. With this paper, Maria Olson opens up some other issues of crucial importance for social sciences education which are connected to the topic of sociology in schools insofar as they relate to the discussion of the application of democratic teaching between theories of democracy and practical politics. Maria Olson elaborates on social science education being confronted with European theory and practice of democracy. She describes citizenship education between Swedish challenges and international conceptions, shedding light on some very central problems of citizenship education in European states and opening up a discussion which is relevant for an understanding of democracy and citizenship in theoretical didactics of social sciences and for practical actions in schools. The paper shows aspects of understanding democracy in international educational contexts; it introduces the description of "resided" democracy and pointing to the "democratic not yet" – a conception highly relevant for citizenship education in all migration states. Maria Olson provides a systematic differentiation of people due to their corresponding or not corresponding to "the" democratic being – thus uncovering the normative basis for democracy teaching. In her suggestions she calls for liberation of the "relationship between democracy and educa-

3 "I Learned a Lot About My Own Life..." Sociology Classes in Bremen Gymnasiums- a Kind of "Parallel World"?



tion from the standardised view of a question of integration of not-yets, i.e. children and young people and ethnocultural 'others', in the present societal situation". With help of this fine-graded analysis, Maria

Olson opens up a highly relevant discussion worthy of being picked up for further theoretical development and practical implementation.

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