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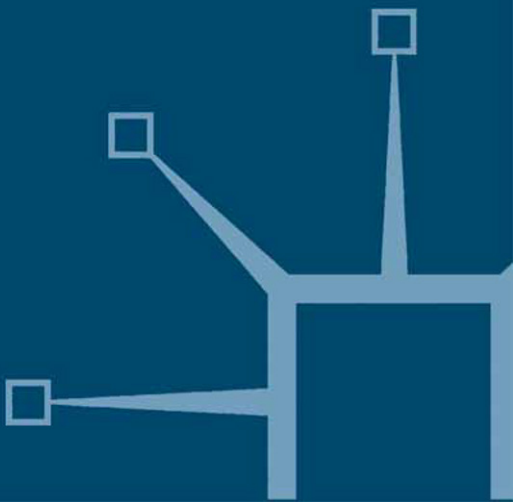
Engineering Society

The Role of the Human and Social Sciences in Modern Societies, 1880–1980

Edited by
Kerstin Brückweh, Dirk Schumann,
Richard F. Wetzell and Benjamin Ziemann



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Also by Kerstin Brückweh

THE VOICE OF THE CITIZEN CONSUMER
A History of Market Research, Consumer Movements, and the Political Public Sphere (*editor*)

Also by Dirk Schumann

RAISING CITIZENS IN THE 'CENTURY OF THE CHILD'
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INVENTING THE CRIMINAL
A History of German Criminology, 1880–1945

Also by Benjamin Ziemann

CONTESTED COMMEMORATIONS
Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture

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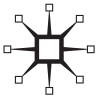

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Acknowledgements

This volume pursues three major aims. First, we seek to analyse the impact of the human and social sciences in various fields of application, taking a comparative perspective that includes case studies from Great Britain, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, and the United States. Second, we employ the notion of the 'scientization of the social' in order to integrate the history of the human and social sciences into the mainstream of the historiography on Western societies in the twentieth century. The endeavours of pollsters, psychotherapists, statisticians, and other experts who tried to bring scientific knowledge to bear on social problems were part and parcel of the many social reform projects that have characterized Western societies since 1880. Finally, we aim to reveal the ambivalences and unintended side effects of the scientization of the social in order to contribute to a reflexive social history of the twentieth century.

Most of the chapters in this volume were presented in preliminary form at an international conference that took place at the Humanities Research Institute, University of Sheffield. During the conference, Sabine Maasen and Felix Keller offered comments on two panels and stimulated our discussion with their sociological expertise. Both the conference and the work on this volume were generously supported by the German Historical Institute in London and the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC. We are indebted to their directors, Andreas Gestrich and Hartmut Berghoff, for this support. During the preparation for the conference and this volume, we received intellectual and practical support from a number of colleagues. In particular, we would like to thank Moritz Föllmer, Murray Goot, Lynda Hodge-Mannion, Holger Nehring, Theodore Porter, Dan Scroop, and Anja Kruke and Gabriele Lutterbeck at the Archiv der sozialen Demokratie in Bonn, which provided the cover image. Jon Ashby did a superb job copy-editing some of the chapters. The kind permission of Riksbyggen Press in Stockholm, The History of Advertising Trust in Norwich, and the Katholiek Documentatie Centrum in Nijmegen to print copyrighted material is gratefully acknowledged. Last but not least, we wish to thank Michael Strang, Ruth Ireland, Jenny McCall, and Clare Mence at Palgrave Macmillan for their interest in our project and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

The editors
February 2012

1

Introduction: The Scientization of the Social in Comparative Perspective

Benjamin Ziemann, Richard F. Wetzell, Dirk Schumann, and Kerstin Brückweh

In a memorandum submitted to Germany's Catholic bishops in 1905, the Jesuit priest Hermann Krose called for the establishment of a central statistical office in the Catholic Church. Krose was strongly influenced by the ideas of the Belgian astronomer and statistician Alphonse Quetelet (1796–1874). According to Quetelet, the behaviour of individuals in a given social context displayed a certain probability to commit crime, suicide or other social actions. Since differences between individuals disappeared in larger aggregates, societies as a whole showed characteristic patterns that could be compared by statistical means.[1] A central statistical office for Germany's Catholic Church, Krose proposed, should gather data on the number of Catholics and priests in each diocese, the numbers of conversions and lapses, the percentage of Easter communicants, and the average number of church-goers on Sunday. Such data, he argued, would be a crucial weapon in the confessional conflict with the Protestants and also demonstrate the modern administrative standards of the church. Krose began publishing his own annual compilation of data in 1908 and set up a provisional office for church statistics in 1909. A full-fledged statistical office of the Catholic Church was finally set up in 1915. Well into the post-Vatican II period, statistical data on church-goers and other statistical parameters of practised piety provided a crucial basis for internal debates on pastoral shortcomings and reform strategies in the German Catholic Church.[2]

Krose is just one vivid example of the many practitioners of the social sciences who have endeavoured to analyse and reform social relations in various fields of society. They all contributed to what this volume calls the 'scientization of the social'. In the first section of this Introduction, we discuss this concept, issues of periodization, and theoretical frameworks and implications. Reflecting the organization of the chapters in this volume, the following three sections of the Introduction examine the dynamics of scientization in three fields of applied knowledge: first, social and penal policy; secondly, therapeutical approaches; and thirdly, the application of opinion polling, marketing techniques, and organizational research by business firms, political parties, and churches.

K. Brückweh et al. (eds.), *Engineering Society*

This volume uses the notion of the 'scientization of the social', coined by the historian Lutz Raphael, to analyse the intended and unintended consequences that the 'continuing presence of experts from the human sciences, their arguments, and the results of their research had in administrative bodies and in industrial firms, in parties and parliaments'. Where possible, it also seeks to trace the impact of these social science experts on the discursive construction of meaning in the context of 'social groups, classes and milieux' and their everyday lives.[3] An analysis of the scientizing of the social allows us to chart the ways in which the practical application of a broad range of human sciences conceptualized social problems and those of individuals, and offered to solve them by means of statistical calculation, testing, surveying, counselling or other forms of therapy.

The term 'scientization' should not be confused with 'scientism', a term introduced into the English language in the 1940s by the economist Friedrich von Hayek, who meant to criticize, as methodological 'scientism', the view that the methods of the natural sciences are the most 'appropriate way of understanding social phenomena'.[4] While such a tendency to ape the epistemology of the natural sciences did indeed pervade American social science,[5] our concept of the scientization of the social simply refers to the application of social scientific knowledge in various social fields. Furthermore, our use of the term 'scientization' should be distinguished from that of Jürgen Habermas, who used the German term *Verwissenschaftlichung* in an article on the 'scientization of politics and public opinion', first published in 1964.[6] A key proponent of the Frankfurt School of 'Critical Theory', Habermas bemoaned the colonizing effects that the modern social sciences were having on the life-worlds of ordinary people. For Habermas, 'scientization' was thus shorthand for a pervasive and dangerous tendency of the social sciences to replace free political deliberation among equal and enlightened citizens with a technocratic 'calculation' of political decisions.[7] While we also stress the ambivalent results of the scientization of the social, we, unlike Habermas, use 'scientization' as a value-neutral analytical concept.

The scientization of the social shaped not only social relations (between welfare state clients and their case workers, for instance) and the ways in which complex organizations such as firms, churches or parties operated. The application of social scientific knowledge also changed the self-descriptions of society. In the late twentieth-century America, for instance, 'narcissism', a term originally coined to probe clinical phenomena, was transformed into a category of social critique to highlight deficiencies in American mass culture.[8] In another transfer of meaning, the scientization of market research techniques such as panel surveys and consumer interviews contributed to the idea that the marketplace is a 'democracy of goods', and thus helped to establish semantic links between mass consumerism and Western democracy.[9] A classic example of the power of sociological self-descriptions is, of course, the Marxist terminology of 'classes' with its statistical underpinnings during the early period of the Soviet Union.[10] For a historical perspective on the scientization of the social it is therefore helpful to distinguish between the social structures of society and the semantic forms of social self-description, and to bear in mind that the human sciences can transform both.[11]