

Germany: National report on future socio-economic trends

Deliverable D6.1 – June 2008

Roland Verwiebe, Patrick Präg and Sonja Drobnič -
University of Hamburg



Universiteit Utrecht



Universität Hamburg

Quality is an innovative, quantitative and qualitative research project that aims to examine how, in an era of major change, European citizens living in different national welfare state regimes evaluate the quality of their lives. The project will analyse international comparative data on the social well-being of citizens and collect new data on social quality in European workplaces in eight strategically selected partner countries: UK, Finland, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary and a candidate country for EU enlargement, Bulgaria.

Quality is a Specific Targeted Research or Innovations Project funded within the European Commission's Sixth Framework Programme (contract no 028945), Priority 7, Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge-based Society (March 2006 to February 2009).

Verwiebe, R., Präg, P. & Drobnič, S. (2008). Germany: national report on future socio-economic trends. Deliverable of EU-project Quality, Utrecht: Utrecht University



Universiteit Utrecht



Universität Hamburg

The knowledge and data provided in this publication has been collected as part of the FP6 EU-financed-project QUALITY. It reflects only the authors' views. The EU is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein. The user uses the information at his/her sole risk and liability.

Contents

- The setting.....4
- Description of the process.....4
- Future trends indicated by the team.....5
- Trends and uncertainties discussed by the participants5
- Description of the scenarios.....6
- Chain of events and policy recommendations.....7
- Reflections on the process9
- References.....9

The setting

The scenario meeting in Germany was held on June 19, 2008. It took place in a conference room of the Department of Social Sciences, University of Hamburg. The meeting was scheduled to last three and a half hours, with the first half an hour reserved for socializing and participants getting acquainted with each other, followed by the scenario development procedure.

Twelve people were invited, six of whom were able to attend the meeting. Among the participants were two women and four men, ranging in age from the early thirties to the mid-sixties. The educational level was high: All participants held at least one college degree, four had doctoral degrees. In terms of the area of expertise, two participants were political scientists, two held a law degree, one participant was biologist and one sociologist. Two participants were involved in local politics of the City of Hamburg, one for the Green Party and one for the Christian Democrats. One of the local politicians worked for a youth welfare organization, the other as a scientific assistant to a member of the federal parliament. A biologist worked for a non-profit environmental and nature conservancy organization, and one lawyer in the personnel administration of a large German city and as an expert for management at the municipality level. Two participants were university professors, one of them an expert on social policy and welfare state, the other on urban development, time use, and quality of life.

Participants thus possessed a very broad expertise and knowledge in a diversity of fields. The central question they were asked to address was: *What are the major challenges Germany faces in the next years when it comes to the quality of work and quality of life?*

The rather small size of the group guided our decision not to divide participants into two discussion groups. However, as the session progressed, we split them into two subgroups, each of them finalizing the chain of events and policy recommendation for one scenario.

Description of the process

The scenario group proceeded as follows: The session started with a short round of introductions of the discussants and the researchers. QUALITY project as a whole and the central question to be discussed were briefly introduced. In a second step, participants were presented a selection of socio-economic trends, which took roughly 20 minutes. Another 20 minutes were used for presenting and explaining the scenario technique. After all participants' questions had been answered, participants were asked to spend three to five minutes individually thinking of trends not yet mentioned in the presentation. Each participant then selected about three trends, presented them to the group and was asked to evaluate both their levels of certainty and impact. Accordingly, the trends mentioned were charted in the scenario structuring space we had drawn onto a flip chart.

Participants were then asked to narrow down the number of trends and select the most crucial ones to build scenarios on, and then create two scenarios. Participants were given 20 minutes to achieve this task. In this time, the team of researchers withdrew from the group of discussants to foster the emergent group dynamics. However, narrowing down the trends proved to be a hard task for the group, thus they required

some additional time to select trends and come up with two scenarios. Since some participants had indicated beforehand that they were not able to stay longer than the scheduled time, we had to catch up the time lost. In order to do so, the group was split in half and each subgroup was asked to design chains of events for one of the scenarios agreed upon. Another twenty minutes were scheduled for that step. The remainder of the session was used for presenting the scenarios and their respective chains of events and briefly discussing policy recommendations.

Future trends indicated by the team

Future trends presented to the participants were along the lines of Beham *et al.* (2006) and Kovacheva *et al.* (2007). The presentation was not solely focused on the situation in Germany, but contrasted the German conditions with those of other European countries. The presentation started with socio-economic trends such as the economic situation, unemployment, and the rising rate of female labor force participation. Demographic trends – the very low fertility rate in Germany and the increasing proportion of the elderly – were also mentioned. Immigration and integration problems in Germany were addressed, in particular deficiencies faced by many immigrants with regard to the educational system, the labor market, and the health care system. The last section of the presentation addressed issues of work–life balance, referring to blurring boundaries between work and private life, an increase in insecurity and flexibility on the labor market and the lack of sufficient child care facilities especially in Western Germany. None of the participants openly disagreed with our presentation.

Trends and uncertainties discussed by the participants

Participants were asked to select important trends, evaluate how likely the trends will emerge and what impact they will have on the future society. Trends the participants considered important were as follows:

Likely trends with a high impact:

- Aging of society
- Active aging
- Global urbanization
- Global warming
- Shortage of fossil fuels
- Formalization of informal work
- Higher prevalence of non-standard family structures
- Rise in immigration
- Increasing pressure on the social security systems
- Increasing importance of education
- Intensification of work
- Evolvement of new forms of communication
- Increasing awareness of gender equality

Medium likelihood with a medium impact:

- Awareness of time as a commodity
- Immigration as a cheap resource for the labor market
- Rising costs of leisure time
- Increasing responsibility for health

Unlikely with a high impact:

- Emergence of a global sense of solidarity
- Provision of a basic income for all citizens
- Democratization of the European Union
- Renewable energy sources
- Increase in volunteer spirit
- Resistance against 'securitization' of state and society

Likely with low to medium impact:

- Expansion of public short-distance transit
- Increasing popularity of a direct experience of nature

Description of the scenarios

The first scenario was called the "segregated middle class society." The most prominent features were:

- a shortage of fossil fuels,
- an increasing relevance of global warming,
- an increasing urbanization, which is accompanied by both urban segregation and depopulation of some regions,
- a higher proportion of elderly citizens,
- a tendency towards gender equality, predominately in theory, but also increasingly in practice,
- an increasing importance of empowerment in the sense of lifelong learning.

The second scenario was called the "fairer, more aware and thus more sustainable society." It had the following characteristics:

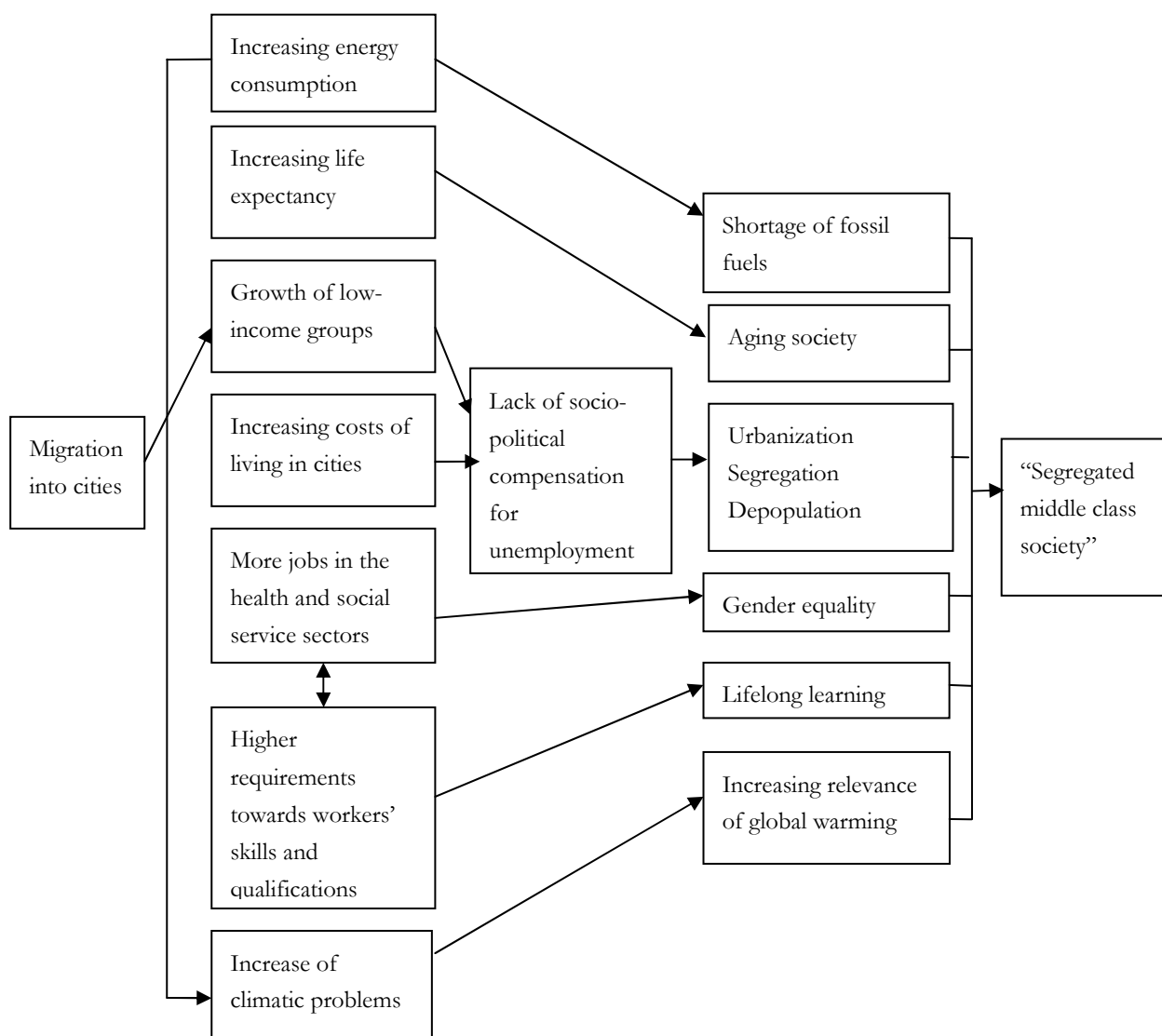
- development of renewable energy sources, along with an increase in self-sufficiency and efficiency,
- the creation of an age-sensitive society, including active aging and more child-friendliness,
- acceptance of the fact that Germany is an 'immigration society',
- social, economic, and cultural diversity of cities,
- increasing quality of and easier access to education, and
- a societal and global sense of responsibility, especially with regard to global warming.

There was some discussion whether the two scenarios could be distinguished in terms of optimism/pessimism or positivity/negativity, but after pointing out that the first scenario also includes positive aspects such as greater gender equality, the discussants consented that the first scenario was only more realistic than the second.

Chain of events and policy recommendations

In order to develop chains of events, the group of discussants was split into two subgroups.

Figure 1: First scenario “segregated middle class society”

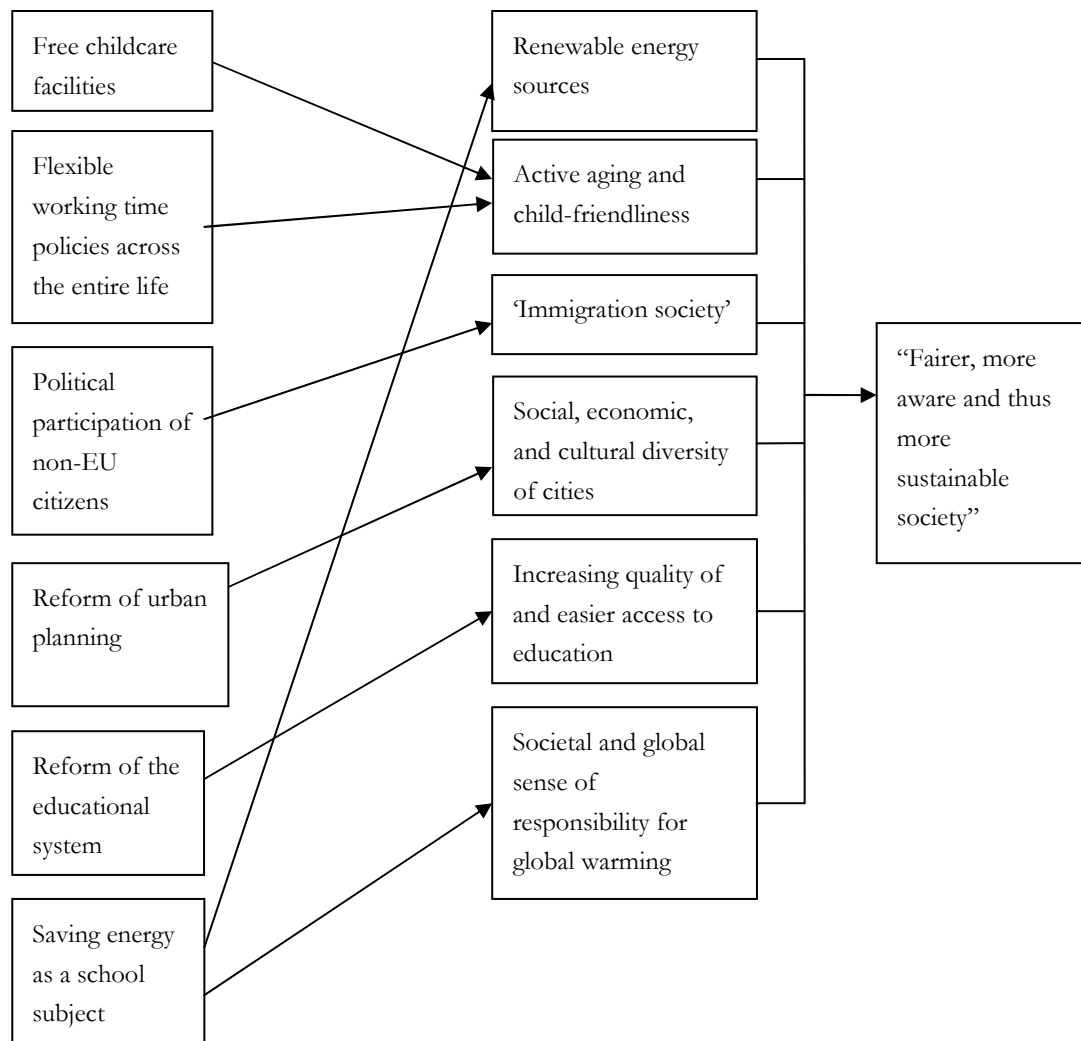


The chain of events developed for the twelve years leading to the first scenario was as follows:

- migration into cities,
- an increase in energy consumption,

- an increase in life expectancy,
- a growing number of jobs in the health and social service sectors,
- increasing requirements towards workers' skills and qualifications,
- rising costs of living in cities,
- a growth in the low-income groups,
- a lack of socio-political compensation for unemployment or poverty, and
- an increase of climatic problems.

Figure 2: Second scenario "fairer, more aware and thus more sustainable society"



The chain of events for the second scenario developed by the second subgroup was in fact expressed in straightforward policy recommendations. In order to achieve a “fairer, more aware and thus more sustainable society,” the following recommendations would have to be implemented:

- the educational system should be made less selective and stratifying, furthermore it should become more accessible by turning schools into ‘educational hubs,’
- saving energy as a school subject,
- flexible working time policies across the entire life course,

- free childcare facilities,
- political participation of non-EU citizens, and
- decisions about urban development should be based on the concepts of intended use, not made by those who are able to pay the highest prices.

After the chains of events had been presented, time for discussing policy recommendations was scarce. Participants pointed out that the chain of events developed for the more optimistic scenario were in fact policy recommendations and mostly agreed that these could be helpful in facilitating change for the better.

Reflections on the process

Overall, both the researchers and the participants seemed to agree that the scenario meeting was an enriching experience. We find that the different scenarios developed provide inspiring perspectives on the development of quality of life in German society, both in terms of realism and what can be desired.

The atmosphere of the meeting was very friendly and the scenario method seems to be a good tool to facilitate group cohesion. With the exception of two pairs, participants did not know one another beforehand, but after the meeting business cards were exchanged and the majority of participants stayed for a snack and socializing for a while. Participants took the scenario method very seriously. This unfortunately also led to delays in the schedule.

Time was major concern in the course of our session. The time schedule was very tight. On the one hand, a longer span of time would be needed to achieve more satisfactory results, on the other hand, scheduling a meeting for a diverse group of experts proved to be a complicated endeavor even for a three hour-session.

References

- Beham, Barbara, Sonja Drobnič, and Roland Verwiebe, 2006: *Socio-economic Trends and Welfare Policies. National Report Germany*, deliverable 3.1 of EU-project Quality, Utrecht: Utrecht University.
- Kovacheva, Siyka, Stanimir Kabaivanov, and Tsvetan Andreev, 2007: *Comparative Report on the Institutional Context of Work and Quality of Life*, deliverable 3.2 of EU-project Quality, Utrecht: Utrecht University.