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## Chapter 12

## Diversity, Standardization and the Perspective of Social Transformation

Max Koch, Lesley McMillan and Bram Peper

This volume has brought together a range of theoretical and policy-oriented contributions that all illuminate links between patterns of standardization and diversity, many of which are hidden from our day-to-day consciousness. One of the foremost results of this book project is that it does not make sense to talk of 'diversity' or of 'standardization' in isolation. On the contrary, the existence of and the respect for generally agreed economic, political and social standards is an absolute precondition for diversity – and for orderly human interaction in general. Without agreement on such standards there would be chaos and disintegration both at the system and social level (Chapter 6 by Aschauer). Since both standardization and diversity are interdependent and interwoven by a myriad of ties, the understanding of the specific historical and social forms of this interrelation is a necessary starting point for further theoretical and empirical study. The contributions to this volume suggest that any given extent and quality of diversity is interpretable as the outcome of a historically achieved and socially agreed level of standardization in different societal areas, occurring at the micro, macro and meso levels. As a corollary, a general and fixed definition of the relationship between levels of standardization and patterns of diversity is impossible, since it is contingent on social struggles between various groups and of various sorts. Any agreement on standards is temporary despite the fact that we often perceive them as 'natural'. We will now turn to embed this conclusion into wider social theory debates.

Studying patterns of standardization and social and cultural diversity can be traced back to the origin of the social sciences. Much of Durkheim's classical sociology, for example, is about understanding and theorizing a new type of society that emerged as a result of the break-up of the feudal *ancien régime*: in the emerging bourgeois society the old castes and the corresponding normative systems and lifestyles did not count for much anymore, but a new social order – 'standardized' forms of living together – had not yet materialized. The result was a mismatch between personal or group standards and wider social standards that Durkheim (1897) described as 'anomie'. This situation was generally characterized by a lack of all-encompassing norms and, hence, an absence of legitimate aspirations that would structure individual action in the general interest. However, the example of the French revolution and the initially difficult and violent emergence of the

bourgeois society show that historically established social standards and the corresponding forms of diversity are permanently at risk of being usurped. From the moment that both are questioned as 'traditional' and 'out of date', a process of transformation of these standards is set in motion. Such transformative processes proceed in either gradual, reformative ways, leading to the refinement of generally accepted standards (see for example Chapter 4 on the gendering of human rights), or in revolutions that replace the entire set of social structures, institutions and the associated behavioural codices by a qualitatively different one. Though the latter type of change occurs much less frequently than the former, social scientists are well advised not to rule out this possibility in their attempts to theorize the interrelationship of standardization and diversity.

Experiencing or studying revolutionary transformations is not only reserved for the founding fathers of the social sciences. The 1989 break-up of the former 'actually existing socialism' is a more recent example of a revolutionary transformation of a set of social standards, and it took a particularly radical form in the former German Democratic Republic. The citizens of that country made the unique experience of going through probably the most rapid transformation of practically every social institution and modes of standardization to date. The GDR was certainly not moving towards the kind of paradise it had originally set out to become, but it was an ordered society nevertheless: with an established and predictable arrangement of political and economic institutions, associated forms of welfare delivery and an encompassing ('socialist') value system. People knew what was expected of them in this society based on an ideological monoculture. They might have been bored and unhappy, but they certainly knew their place in it. All this changed virtually overnight on 3 October 1990 when the GDR joined the Federal Republic of Germany and its completely different set-up of economic, political and cultural institutions and social standards. And just as in Durkheim's day, the result was an experience of 'anomie' for many, especially women. The latter, in particular, were to massively lose their jobs in the enfolding deindustrialization of Eastern Germany, and it is not surprising that so many of them showed hallmarks of status insecurity.<sup>1</sup> Those coming from Eastern Germany were also disliked by those who had previously fled the GDR for the West because the 'newcomers' threatened their market position; a similar reaction and associated fears can be observed more recently with the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers in European countries. The downfall of an entire society is only the most extreme example of the vacuum that emerges in terms of social standards that cease to guide and frame our social practices in revolutionary times. Then, especially, it becomes plain that we are existentially dependent on familiarity and standardization, which normally, as if by magic, bring our own behaviour into line with that of our environment. Bourdieu (1986) understood this detachment in terms of a break between habitus and field (see also Chapter 9 by Sabour): the social, economic and cultural conditions that originally structured social space and

1 This became empirically observable in a drastic decline of fertility rates.

social fields change, but the habitus of its occupants continues to be oriented to the old conditions. Habitus is generally characterized by a hysteresis effect, which makes its rapid readjustment to new and emerging social environments difficult or impossible. In the temporary absence of valid social standards that could guide and frame our social practice we cannot but feel alienated from society. Anomie increases as a result.

Like the historical examples of the French Revolution and the downfall of the GDR, the case studies presented in this volume support our thesis that the interrelation between standardization and diversity is not historically fixed. By contrast, it is always socially contested and dynamic. A particular level of standardization and the associated kinds and degrees of social and cultural diversity at a given historical point in time and in a specific location is best seen as a sort of compromise or agreement between different social forces and groups with competing and often opposing interests. However, it remains a temporary agreement, and will be debated and renegotiated when circumstances change. Several chapters in this volume deal with conflicts on the definition of social standards in various social and political areas from the perspectives of gender (Chapters 4 by McMillan, 5 by Sung and Guerreiro, and 11 by Yerkes and Peper), and ethnicity (Chapters 7 and 9 by Glorieux and Laurijssen, and Sabour). In the light of these contributions, levels of standardization and degrees of diversity appear as the results of social struggles and power asymmetries. More or less institutionalized compromises between these groups and forces are expressed, above all, in patterns of socio-economic regulation, policy tools and welfare delivery (Chapters 3 by Jönsson, 10 by Koch and 11 by Yerkes and Peper). Some of the chapters also highlight that even when standardizing forces exist, in the form of policy and directives, practice on the ground can be variable and individual outcomes can run contrary to policy intention (for example Chapter 4 by McMillan and Chapter 8 by Littlewood). At the same time, any particular form of compromise on social standards that influential societal groups manage to negotiate includes corresponding patterns of social exclusion (Littlewood et al. 1999). Not all social groups take part in the bargaining but are nevertheless influenced by them, often in discriminatory ways. Class, gender, ethnicity and age are among the most common areas where discrimination is evident; however, as this volume demonstrates, areas for potential social stratification are numerous.

Taking seriously the fact that there are always social groups that, due to their exclusion from the temporarily valid compromises on the definitions of social standards, cannot and will not accept them, and stressing the dynamic character of the interrelation between standardization and diversity brings us into opposition with social theorists that assume a more or less linear development towards an increasingly formally rational and bureaucratic (Weber 1986) or, to some extent, 'McDonaldized' (Ritzer 1996) society. Since some social groups always suffer from existing arrangements and therefore have an interest in extending their leeway of social and cultural identity, they will attempt to replace the temporarily achieved set of social standards by others. Usurping groups are normally those

that are excluded from the societal mainstream on the grounds of class, gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation (Weber 1978; Parkin 1979).<sup>2</sup> We wish to illustrate our position – that the implementation and generalization of certain standards often leads to resistance by social groups ‘on the ground’ and, in turn, to social transformation – by referring to the case of the probably greatest extent of standardization of production *and* consumption norms, which was achieved about a century ago in Henry Ford’s automobile factory in Highland Park. It is well known – and also noted by Elchardus in Chapter 1 – that this factory regime was based on a strict separation of execution and planning which left the vast majority of employees with simple, repetitive functions in the work process. The bulk of workers became mere appendices of the machinery, and in order for every single worker to function according to plan an entire supervisory army of middle and line managers, personnel specialists and so on, was employed (Koch 2006). However, it is less often observed that Ford regarded his workers not only as a source of exploitation and profit production but also as a potential source of consumption of mass-produced commodities.

The company introduced a new wage system, which came to be known as the ‘\$5 day’. Ford paid more than twice the normal wage in the industry at the time. These wages raised workers above subsistence level and made them potential customers for industrially produced commodities, especially automobiles. The \$5 day, hence, provided the embryonic form of a ‘consumption norm’ for the working class in the sense of the French ‘Regulation Approach’ (see, for example, Aglietta 1986). Furthermore, Ford implemented a profit-sharing system. Yet partaking in it was contingent upon leading a particular lifestyle, specified in a clearly defined code of behaviour (Foster 1988: 18): thrift, having a home ‘worthy of a Ford worker’, not sub-letting rooms in one’s house to boarders, not having an outside business of any kind, not associating or allowing one’s children to associate with the ‘wrong people’, cleanliness, being married, not drinking and smoking excessively, prohibiting one’s wife (in the case of a male worker) from working outside the home, and demonstrating progress in learning English. The supervision of the scheme was the responsibility of Ford’s ‘Sociological Department’, which initially consisted of some 250 investigators. Their duties included home visits of workers (and of their neighbours and acquaintances) to determine their eligibility for the profit-sharing scheme. Furthermore, the Sociological Department provided Ford employees with lessons in family and household budgeting, home management and hygiene, and in ‘effective shopping’. This was complemented by the activities

2 There seems to be a contradiction between Max Weber’s concept of bureaucratization and the ‘iron cage’, on the one hand, and his more general reflections on closed social relationships, where he refers to resistance strategies from those outside the relationship, on the other hand. While the former suggests a linear development towards an increasingly standardized society based on formal rules, the latter leave room for various development paths and leeway of diversity as they consider group interests, conflicts and, hence, social change.

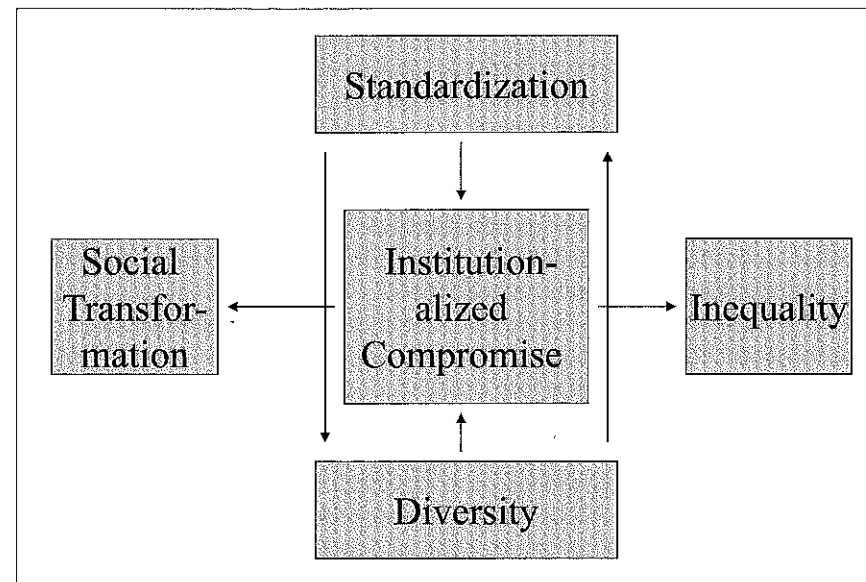
of the ‘Ford English School’, which instructed non-English speaking employees in the virtues of efficiency, thrift, industry and economy, and provided compulsory courses in domestic, community, and industrial relations. In the words of Marcus and Segal (1989: 237), it was the school’s mission to systematically weld the ‘diverse groups comprising Ford’s labor force into a standardized, dependable cohort.’ The new consumption norm, hence, went far beyond the creation of an effective demand force for mass-produced cars via the \$5 day. It was also a means of human or social engineering, since it extended the power of the employer over his employees from the immediate production process to the sphere of leisure and consumption, and daily living. For those workers who worked and lived by the new rules, the participation in the profit scheme and, on this basis, the possession of an automobile and their own home, became symbols of upward mobility and leading a legitimate lifestyle. For those who did not, the acquisition of goods like a car remained a distant dream. These workers were castigated for lifestyles that deviated from the dominant social standards. Ford’s rules and regulations caused a strong standardization of people’s life course, and a degree of social control as a result. As such, it is evident that not only state policy has the capacity to standardize the life course (cf. Mayer and Schoepflin 1989), but all forms of organization lead to a greater or lesser degree of standardization.

Ford’s radical attempt to stipulate both the spheres of production and leisure did not remain uncontested for long. Extreme product standardization, for example, led to dissatisfaction inside and outside the shop floor. Charlie Chaplin’s film ‘Modern Times’ accurately covers the unprecedented extent to which manual labour was reduced to the most simple and repetitive tasks – a mere appendix of the machine system (see also Marx 1977, Chapter 13). The film’s main character is driven crazy as a result of the monotony of his daily work practice. While his resistance strategies against over-standardization of the working process reflect the earlier working-class movement of Luddism, more institutionalized and trade-union based resistance forms were to struggle for a regulation of working conditions within the factory more effectively. And beyond the shop floor, as ‘customers’ of the new mass-produced commodities, workers became increasingly unhappy with the simple design of goods like Ford’s famous ‘Model T’.<sup>3</sup> The limits of extreme standardization of both work procedures and products became obvious as early as the mid-1920s with the decline of the Ford Motor Company and the simultaneous rise of General Motors (GM), which capitalized on customers’ discontent by decentralizing and diversifying car production so that, by 1927, Cadillac presented buyers with 500 colour and upholstery options and ‘reconciled mass production with product variety by using some car parts in more than one division’ (Marcus and Segal 1989: 286). As a result, GM captured the American US automobile market, and Ford had to respond by abandoning the Model T, switching to flexible

3 It soon became the subject of jokes – it was possible to purchase a Model T in any colour so long as that colour was black!

mass production, and embracing the concept of a product line aimed at a wide spectrum of buyers.

The rise and fall of Highland Park is only one, albeit paradigmatic, example of the general rule that over-standardization leads to resistance movements of various kinds that question these standards and call for greater diversity. In order to overcome linear ideas of patterns of standardization and diversity and to move towards a dynamic one that also considers the perspective of social transformation, we suggest the following general model:



**Figure 12.1** Standardization, Diversity and Social Transformation

A given level of standardization in a particular social field is linked to a particular level and quality of social and cultural diversity at any point in time. Both are understood as a sort of 'institutionalized compromise', to which particular social structures and patterns of inequality (class, gender, ethnicity and so on) and exclusion correspond. However, this compromise holds only so long as those social groups, which do not benefit and/or are excluded from the present arrangements, do not manage to cancel and terminate it. This, in turn, results in a new round of negotiations and social struggles until, at a second point in time, a new sort of compromise of social standards and diversity is reached. Hence, our dynamic model is built on and emphasizes the interrelation between standardization, diversity and social transformation: first, not only are levels and qualities of social standards sources for social struggle, conflict and change but also their outcome. The circle

of defining and re-defining social standards and behavioural codes is everlasting. Second, as a consequence, particular historical or institutional compromises of social standards are not to be taken for granted, since they are always open to cancellation and renegotiation. Third, Bourdieu's notion of social space as divided into several, relatively autonomous social fields is important for an adequate understanding of patterns of standardization and diversity, since different societal fields are always in different stages of the definition and redefinition circle of standardization, diversification and transformation at the same point in time. While one field might be at the stage of establishing new standards, others will continue to function and be reproduced according to the lines of the previous institutional arrangement on social standards and patterns of diversity.

Fourth and finally, the notion of conflict and social struggle forbids conflating an achieved degree of standardization of previously more diverse areas and policies with their 'harmonization'. We would stress that power asymmetries, force and violence both at the national and international level have very often been – and continue to be – at the heart of the emergence and generalization of social standards. Elchardus (in Chapter 1) uses the historical decision to adopt 'Greenwich time' as an historical example for the importance of the consideration of force and power in the analysis of standardization processes, but many others could certainly be drawn – most famously, perhaps, Marx's reflections on the historical standardization of the working day in England (Marx 1977, Chapter 10). Since its length is not prescribed by the 'law of exchanges' of commodities and money, it features not a 'fixed, but a fluent quantity'. In the struggle for its definition and limitation,

the capitalist maintains his rights as a purchaser (of labour power, *our addition*) when he tries to make the working day as long as possible, and to make, whenever possible, two working days out of one. On the other hand ..., the labourer maintains his right as seller when he wishes to reduce the working day to one of definite normal duration. There is here, therefore, an antinomy, right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchanges. *Between equal rights force decides.* (Our emphasis)

The term 'harmonization', by contrast, suggests the absence of force and a voluntary understanding on the basis of Habermas's logic of the 'best argument' made in an atmosphere of an 'ideal speech situation' (Habermas 1990). 'Harmonization' would hence be a special – violence-free – case of standardization, which we do not take generally to be the case. The example of EU employment regulation (Koch in Chapter 10) points to the hypothesis that harmonization of regulation is likely to occur in situations of power stalemates: if no single actor is able to push through their interests against the will of others, agreements on voluntary terms and in mutual interest are more probable than in situations characterized by power asymmetries among participating groups. Such 'harmonization' of previously opposed interests is facilitated through the



mediation of third parties such as the EU Commission.<sup>4</sup> Future research could take this hypothesis as a starting point.

We would like to conclude by encouraging further research on globalization and neoliberalism from an advanced theoretical notion of the dialectic of standardization, diversity and social transformation. While it is difficult to predict future patterns of socio-economic development and standardization, several contributions to this volume (Petersson in Chapter 2, Littlewood in Chapter 8, and Koch in Chapter 10) highlight the importance of neoliberal restructuring for the present period. Critical political economy perspectives also raise the issue of whether the autonomy of social fields and, hence, the diversity of society as a whole, is in the process of being undermined by a sort of unfriendly take-over from the economic field which is itself in transition. Some authors refer to this transition in terms of a shift from Fordism to 'finance-dominated capitalism' (Boyer 2000; Stockhammer 2008), while others (including Bourdieu 2005, and Brenner 2004) interpret globalization in terms of a rescaling of regulation from the national to the international level. Just as the genesis of national markets was not the simple result of the gradual extension of exchange relations but the outcome of mercantilist state policies aimed at fostering the commodification of land, money and labour (Polanyi 1944), the formation of the 'global market' is seen as a political creation as well. Neoliberal globalization is, in this perspective, 'the product of a more or less consciously concerted policy' (Bourdieu 2005: 225) aimed at unifying and standardizing the hitherto compartmentalized national economic fields. For Bourdieu (2003: 29–31), and many others, the term 'globalization' is a euphemism for the universalization of the particular national socio-economic model of the US, which is characterized above all by the weakness of the state, the 'imperative of short-term profit' and associated employment patterns: the move towards fixed-term employment contracts, compulsory flexibility and forced geographical mobility in combination with an increased readiness of 'organized self-exploitation' on the part of the employees. This new international economic regime, which is increasingly standardized at the lowest common social denominator, is, according to Bourdieu, amplified and supported by a tighter link between economic and political domination. There is indeed ample evidence that financial markets and large transnational corporations impose their terms of thinking and 'doing business' not only on national economic and finance policy but on other policy areas such as social policy as well (Chapter 2 by Petersson). As a result of the neoliberal perspective's aggressive expansion and generalization,

<sup>4</sup> An example of an ethnic and/or religious conflict characterized by a power stalemate that was given a new direction and a (temporary) institutional solution in the form of the Good Friday Agreement through external mediation is the Northern Ireland conflict. Neither of the opposing parties (the British government and the 'Irish Republican Army') could win the armed conflict and showed all the hallmarks of conflict exhaustion, and would not even have started to talk to each other without the intermediation of the US and the EU (O'Brien 2009).

Bourdieu and others went so far as to characterize it as the new *pensée unique* not only for the economy but also the wider society including academia; a new *doxa* that is drummed into the people's hearts and minds – and, in particular, those of students as the intended future elites – through the symbolic labour of a new type of intellectuals that are organized in powerful think tanks, leading institutions of the political sciences and business schools as well as the media.

Faced with the threat of neoliberal standardization of economy and society, we are clearly in need of comparative research into how this perspective is interpreted and applied across Europe: in particular, how the 'new mandarins' of the public services attempt to run them like private enterprises and how the varieties of 'new public management' influence various social fields and policy domains in different countries – and whether this can be interpreted in terms of a conversion of policy practices. Yet, without attempting to anticipate the outcome of such empirical studies, we may not have to adopt such a bleak perspective as Bourdieu did towards the end of his life. This is because both the historical and empirical evidence examined throughout this volume, and the dynamic concept of the interrelation of standardization, diversity and transformation developed in this concluding chapter suggest that the present wave of socio-economic and cultural standardization along neoliberal lines will not go uncontested. Just as Fordist over-standardization of production and consumption norms ran up against the resistance of workers and consumers, the current attempt to reduce the existing economic, social and cultural forms of diversity in Europe and beyond to one way of thinking, living and policy-making – following Margaret Thatcher's motto that THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE – is likely to face opposition from different groups and directions. The continuing efforts of the present network – whose discussions and debates are based on the EU Intensive Programme and have resulted in the present volume – to think and perceive of Europe in other than neoliberal terms and instead to understand, value and celebrate its diversity and cultural heritage, of which the welfare state is an indispensable pillar, is only a minor voice within a broader counter-movement to neoliberal standardization that has yet to become stronger.

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