

European Foundation on Social Quality

Social Quality: The Theoretical State of Affairs

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present the actual theoretical state of affairs of the Social Quality Initiative and to point out our research strategies for the next three years. In a separate document the Foundation's ideas are published with regard to the more practical institutionalisation of this initiative and related policy strategies.¹ Both documents complement each other as the theoretical debate on social quality is a main condition for the success of Foundation's project to develop indicators.. To this purpose a European Network on Indicators of Social Quality has been established in October 2001 consisting of 14 national reference groups all over Europe. This Network will have to have completed its activities in October 2004. Already in the General Paper² in preparation of the first network meeting a first reflection has been made on the social quality theory as presented in the Foundation's second book, *Social Quality: A Vision for Europe*.³ With this reflection an ongoing debate has started in co-operation with the members of the Network in which theoretical gaps in the second book have been recognised and many questions are articulated that still need to be resolved. In this paper we will present the basics of social quality and the recent theoretical developments. This document is also based on lectures, given in Florence, Dublin and Athens. We will start this presentation with a short introduction into (1) the nature of this initiative and (2) the underlying policy arguments. We continue with (3) the basic principles of the theory of social quality and the current theoretical state of affairs of this scientific enterprise. With that in mind a connection can be made with (4) our theoretical dialogue with the European Commission concerning its policy direction as reflected in the decisions made at the Lisbon Summit in 2000. We conclude with the main research objectives and strategies for developing social quality in the next few years.

2 The start of the social quality initiative

2.1 The initiative

The social quality initiative was launched during the Dutch Presidency in 1997 to promote a new approach to the daily circumstances of citizens in Europe, the Member States, regions, cities and communities. During the 1990s three international meetings about economic and social

¹ L.J.G. van der Maesen, *European Centre for Social Quality and Citizenship: A Centre for Debating, Theorising and Applying Social Quality in the European Union*. Amsterdam: EFSQ, 21 June 2002.

² W.A. Beck, M. Keizer, L.J.G. van der Maesen, D. Phillips, *General Paper on Behalf of the first Plenary Meeting of the Network Indicators of Social Quality*. Amsterdam: EFSQ, October 2001.

³ W.A. Beck, L.J.G. van der Maesen, F. Thomése, A.C.Walker (eds), '*Social Quality: A Vision for Europe*'. The Hague, London/Boston: Kluwer Law International, 2001.

transformations in Europe laid the foundation of this academic movement.⁴ Connections were made with participants of the European Observatories on Social Exclusion and on Older People. The point of departure was a critique of the dominant policy paradigm that subordinates juridical, welfare and cultural policies to economic policy and fails to recognise, and therefore give expression to, the essentially social character of the needs and preferences of citizens. The Foundation, instead, sought to replace the 'handmaiden' functionality of these policies. In June 1997 the first book of the Foundation, *The Social Quality of Europe*,⁵ was published. The concept intends to provide an alternative policy rationale and an analytical instrument for developing knowledge-based democratic, social and political relations. Moreover, our theoretical ambition is to create a new point of reference for both science and policy and also common points of departure for interdisciplinary approaches. The concept is especially focussing on the participatory aspects of societal processes in order to support and enhance the role of organised citizens under new economic and political circumstances.

2.2 *The main thesis*

The first book's main thesis concerns the supposition that traditional approaches of policymaking in Europe subordinate social policy (in the broadest sense) to economic policy. These approaches reflect a top-down form of governance and cannot provide a secure basis for building either a socially just Europe or one that reflects the needs and preferences of citizens. The contributors of the first book, instead, sought to provide an independent rationale for economic, cultural, juridical and welfare policies at the same time. This also involved the development of a standard with which to measure the extent to which the quality of the daily lives of citizens has attained an acceptable European level, that is social quality.⁶ With this publication the Foundation started debates and studies to achieve the following *three aims*. In the first place, by theorising social quality, new scientific and analytical tools can be developed for transcending the present scientific disciplinary fragmentation. This may be seen as a condition for changing the unequal relationship between politics, economics, social policy and cultural policy. The second aim is to develop practical yardsticks, like indicators, profiles and criteria, that can be used by researchers, policy makers and organised citizens in the EU for comparative research. This is a condition for understanding and assessing the impact of social, economic and cultural processes on the social quality of daily life. Finally, we aim to establish new autonomous

⁴ These meetings were organised by SISWO, the Dutch Institute for the Social Sciences. In the institutional context of SISWO the Foundation has been able to develop its own juridical status. From the beginning of 2001 the Foundation has become fully independent thanks to the support of three Dutch Ministries, the City of Amsterdam, the European Commission, other sponsors and especially the assistance in kind of about fifty academic institutes all over Europe.

⁵ W.A. Beck, L.J.G. van der Maesen, A.C. Walker (eds), *The Social Quality of Europe*. The Hague, London, Boston: Kluwer Law International, 1997 (the paperback edition: Bristol: Policy Press, 1998).

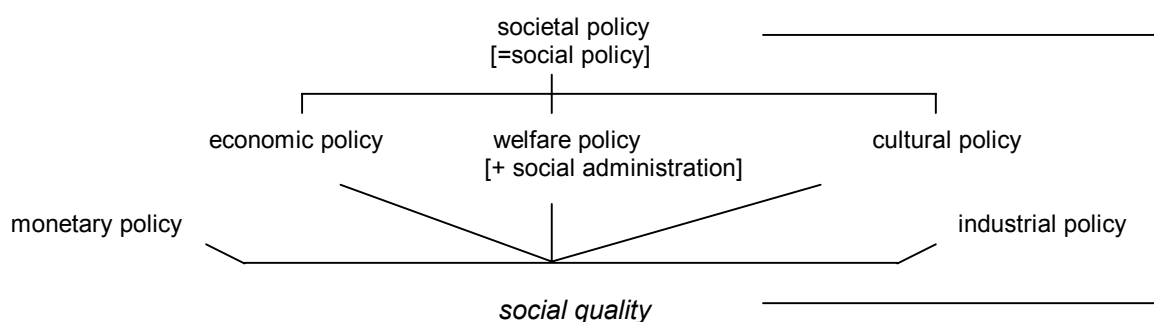
⁶ This refers to a normative point of departure. The intention is to develop instruments with which to contribute to social justice and equity in the Member States and Accession States. Its acceptance will have far reaching political and economic consequences.

benchmarks for policymaking and interventions of organised citizens, which move beyond the existing fragmentary policy approaches. This will enable citizens to relate more easily to politics and policymaking and to connect politics with social quality.

2.3 A short excursion

In the Foundation's second book the distinction between polity, politics and policy is made in order to understand the above. Polity means the formal and informal institutional framework or context in which politics operates. Politics itself regards the game to be played in settling the goals and rules of processes and dynamics in which decisions are produced regarding the authoritative reallocation of resources. Policy then is the content of outcomes of the implementation of the settled goals in the given framework. In other words, politics precedes and wraps up policy.⁷ Usually a distinction is made between economic, social, juridical and cultural policies, conceiving 'social policy' as 'social administration'.⁸ Social policy in the broader sense – or better 'societal policy' – therefore concerns the content of outcomes of settled goals addressing the social dimension of human configurations and circumstances in regions, cities, communities and families. It concerns outcomes produced by (a) the state and its public organisations, (b) commercial firms and (c) non-profit organisations and foundations - in fact any organised group in society. The traditional and dominant interpretation equates social policy with collective action through government. It is oriented on health, education, social security, housing, but this is social administration. The following figure shows a different view:

Figure 2-1: The proposed role of social quality



⁷ G. Therborn: *On Politics and Policy of Social Quality. A lecture held during the international conference on social quality in Amsterdam, 8-10 June, 1997.* Uppsala: SCASS, 1997.

⁸ This equation has serious limitations: (i) it overlooks important sources of social inequality, (ii) it ignores prevailing distribution of power, (iii) it denies social objectives of other policy domains, (iv) it only focuses on the central and local state and not industry, commerce and voluntary bodies, and (v) it says nothing about the welfare of citizens and the range of social institutions that have a bearing on welfare. Therefore we use the concept of 'welfare policies' instead of social policies. See: A.C. Walker, *Social Planning.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1984.

2.4 *The definition of social quality*

In the Foundation's first book social quality is defined as 'the extent to which people are able to participate in the social and economic life of their communities under conditions which enhance their well being and individual potential.' To achieve an acceptable level of social quality four conditions must be fulfilled. They are accepted as the four components of social quality and presented in the first book's quadrant of social quality⁹:

- people have to have access to *socio-economic security* – whether from employment, social security, health care or other sources – in order to assure circumstances necessary for a dignified life, and to protect them from poverty and other forms of material as well as immaterial deprivation,
- people must experience *inclusion* in, or minimum levels of exclusion from, key political, social and economic institutions such as the labour market, political systems and community organisations in order to realise their potentials,
- people should be able to live in communities and societies characterised by a sufficient level of *cohesion* as condition for collectively accepted values and norms which are indispensable for their social existence,
- people must be empowered in order to be able to fully participate, especially in the face of rapid socio-economic change. *Empowerment* means enabling people to control their own lives and to take advantage of opportunities.

2.3 *Dissemination of the concept*

The Foundation's first book has been discussed in a European conference of scientists and policy-makers during the Dutch Presidency at the beginning of June 1997. At that time the Foundation also published the *Amsterdam Declaration on Social Quality* based on the book¹⁰ and subjected it to debate in a public symposium in Amsterdam with 400 participants. Since then nearly 1000 scientists all over Europe have supported the Declaration with their signature. These signatures have been presented to the President of the European Parliament. Between June 1997 and January 2001 representatives of the Foundation have held lectures and workshops in many Member States and contributed to conferences and public debates from the perspective of the social quality approach. The European Department of Kingston University in London in co-operation with the Foundation

⁹ In the fourth section we will refer to a new theoretical step. In the Foundation's second book these components are interpreted as the objective conditional factors of social quality. There are also subjective and constitutional factors of social quality. See note-2.

¹⁰ *Amsterdam Declaration on Social Quality*. Amsterdam: EFSQ, June 1997 (see note-2, pp. 385-386 as well).

started the production of the *European Journal of Social Quality*, published by Berghahn Books in Oxford.¹¹

From 1998 on the Foundation's Board has initiated projects to put the theoretical suppositions of social quality to the test of daily reality. The first two projects focused on employment policies and public health policies. Also a start was made with studies on cohesion and socio-economic security, two components or objective conditional factors of social quality.¹² Furthermore since 1999 the Foundation has co-operated with three Dutch NGO's on the project 'The Voice of Civil Europe'. The aim is to underpin the position of citizens in the European Union. Topics discussed are the future institutional shape of the Union, e.g. a Constitution, and the enlargement and its consequences for the daily life of citizens in both Member States and Candidate Member States. The Foundation aims at presenting the outcomes to similar NGO's in other Member States. The point of these endeavours is quite clear. To develop the theory of social quality a confrontation with the praxis of human existence is a *conditio sine qua non*. The essential motive of the social quality initiative reflects how (organised) citizens cope with the nature and consequences of processes and applied policies. This has also been addressed in the second book of the Foundation, published in 2001, based on the outcomes of the debates mentioned above.

2.5 *The main theoretical challenge*

Before discussing the recent theoretical state of affairs, it is worthwhile to refer to some conclusions of the first book. The editors remark that the concept of social quality is theoretically important as it emphasises that quantitative criteria should be clearly derived from more fundamental qualitative principles. Yet if no such connection is made, 'social quality' will remain an abstract and affirmative concept, of little use in theory and research on social problems in the widest sense. The ultimate challenge of the social quality perspective may be that it confronts European citizens, on the threshold of a new era, with a long and heterogeneous tradition of European thought about the quality of social life, starting 2500 years ago with Plato's *Politeia*. Moreover it does so by acknowledging the need to relate to (and partly include) other, also long established and heterogeneous traditions, thus finding a new configuration characterising and stabilising the diversity of 'European' identities.¹³

¹¹ Since 1999 six issues have been published by Berghahn Books in Oxford: Vol.1/Issue 1 & 2 about Social Quality, Vol.2/Issue 1 about Age and Autonomy, Vol.2/Issue 2 about Social Quality and Employment Policies, Vol.3/Issue 1 & 2 about Citizenship and Welfare Protection.

¹² The first complete introduction of these types of exploration is presented in: *Annual Report 2000*. Amsterdam: EFSQ, June 2001.

3 Underlying arguments and the most essential choice

3.1 Three arguments

In this paragraph three arguments will be enunciated for creating a new theoretical framework, thus transcending disciplinary fragmentation and paving the way for comprehensive policies. In order to assess this fragmentation a fundamentally philosophical choice is inevitable. That point will be addressed at the end of this section. The *first* argument concerns an empirical issue. Notwithstanding the plea for the so-called 'liberalisation' of social relations with market mechanisms, we notice an increase of inequality. An example is provided by the United Nations Development Programme in 1999. In 1960, 20% of the world's population in the richest countries had 30 times the income of the poorest 20%. In 1997 this had increased to 77 times as much.¹⁴ An isolated and fragmented economic approach does not address the needs of millions of people. The *second* argument regards societal processes. We may notice a structural distinction between growing international networks (and their political and economic interests) and local communities as a source for democratic politics. The strengthening of this distinction undermines these politics. The *third* argument is related to an analytical question. In spite of the clear consequences of societal processes – see the ongoing unification of Europe – we lack a common interpretation of important concepts with which to interpret these processes. One of the reasons is a thorough fragmentation of economic, sociological, juridical and cultural thinking. A clear example was given during the conference of the European Parliament on social quality in March 2000. The concepts applied during this conference were economic progress, social protection, economic security, social exclusion, social cohesion, inclusion and economic growth. Yet these and other concepts are used in connection with different frames of references which causes essential confusion. What is missing, is conceptual coherence. Therefore discussions about the European social model in contrast to the social model of the USA - a main theme of this conference - remained unclear.¹⁵

3.2 The heuristic meaning of the connection between the three arguments

¹³ J. Baars, K. Knipscheer, F. Thomése, A. Walker, 'Towards Social Quality in Europe', see note-6, p.348-349 (paperback, Bristol: Policy Press).

¹⁴ UNDP, *Human Development Report 1999*. New York: United Nations, 1999.

¹⁵ A.C.Walker, L.J.G. van der Maesen, 'The European Social Model and Social Quality: a Discussion Paper on behalf of the Conference on Social Quality, European Parliament'. Amsterdam: EFSQ, March 2000.

Especially, both the first and the third arguments undermine the understanding of the second argument. Realising the process of understanding implies, according to Habermas, a minimal balance in power, positions and information as well as common accepted concepts for interpreting our world.¹⁶ In other words a certain level of equity is required. Yet these conditions are neither an institutional, nor a social reality. With his analysis of the transformation of capitalism Castells elucidates this conclusion. He explains the mechanisms responsible for the breaking up of relationships on an individual level, the social level and with regard to environmental aspects. The nature of the recent social transformation stimulates a “fundamental split between abstract, universal instrumentalism, and historically rooted, particularistic identities. (...) In this condition of structural schizophrenia between function and meaning, patterns of social communication become increasingly under stress”.¹⁷ The reciprocity between the third and the first argument legitimises the fragmentation between disciplines because their functionality for dominant interests prevents equity. Nevertheless, the consequences of this transformation affirm the necessity of creating a process of understanding to cope with this structural schizophrenia. The social quality initiative is an attempt to provide conceptual coherence.

The lack of conceptual coherence blocks an understanding of the increase of inequality. Certain key elements of the globalisation process are indisputable, the issue is precisely what nation states and supra-national bodies like the EU can do in response to them and to mitigate their worst impact. Meanwhile contradictory conclusions by prominent and well-known institutes are presented to the world without any hesitation. On the one hand, for example, World Bank economists argue that the free market and economic growth will help the poorest.¹⁸ On the other hand, for example, the Washington Centre for Strategic and International Studies says that the theory and practice of the free market on a global level will destroy the identities of historically rooted communities. The abolition of national labour protection regulations stimulates production and distribution and, therefore, the realisation of profit for the new economic giants. Representatives of the Washington Centre conclude that this ‘turbo capitalism’ reduces human beings to objects of profit making and causes the commodification of all manifestations of nature and culture.¹⁹ This is not contested because of the lack of an acceptable point of reference to transcend this contradiction.

3.3 *The necessity of a choice*

¹⁶ J.Habermas, *Theorie des Kommunikativen handelns. Band 1*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981, p.387.

¹⁷ M.Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Volume 1: The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford; Blackwell Publishers, 1997, p.3

¹⁸ D.Dollar, A.Kraay, *Growth is Good for the Poor*. Washington: World Bank, 2000.

¹⁹ D.H. Lamparter, F. Vorholz, ‘Das WTO-Fiasko: Der Kapitalismus macht ungleich. Der US-Ökonom Edward Luttwak über den globalen Vormarsch des Turbokapitalismus und über Gerhard Schroder und Tony Blair’. *Die Zeit*, 1999, 9 December, 50, 25.

With these three arguments in mind the Foundation follows critics of the post-modernist commentary on ideology. According to Bauman, instead of being proud of not concerning ourselves with any coherent vision of the good society and of having traded off the worry about the public good for the freedom to pursue private satisfaction, we should be ashamed of these types of ideas and related actions of the new populist parties and movements.²⁰ Therefore we aim at a theory of social quality that can build on consensus and by these means can influence democratic norms and values. In terms of Bauman, it means that social quality has to be a goal, or a moving target, offering something positive to all the major forces of Europe. This especially regards the consequences of globalisation. Therefore, we have to understand what this means to prevent confusion among types of ideologies. The need for analysing these questions touches the essence of the social quality approach. We need yardsticks to measure and interpret these consequences and contribute to the translation of consensus about visions on the good society. Because of the hedonistic character of populism the choice is evidently not between populism or non-populism. The choice is between the proposition of human life as merely an external association of elements without intrinsic connection (the utilitarian anthropology) and the proposition of individual subjects as intrinsically social beings (the expressivist anthropology).²¹ The concept of social quality reflects the second proposition. Therefore, an adequate understanding of 'the social' is essential.

4 The actual state of theoretical affairs

4.1 The meaning of 'the social'

The Foundation invited scientists to comment on the Foundation's first book from their disciplinary point of view (economy, law, political sciences, etc.) as well as to reflect upon the application of the concept. Moreover others have been invited to present their ideas concerning current tendencies on European and national level and connect these with their own assumptions about the social quality approach. Both invitations paved the way for the first and second parts of the Foundation's second book.²² Both parts enabled the editors to renew the social quality theory. One of the main criticisms

²⁰ Z. Bauman, *In Searching of Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999, p.8. He calls for a positive concept of ideology: "the name of ideology has been assigned to the cognitive frames, which allow various bits of human experience to fall into place and form a recognisable, meaningful pattern", p. 118. It has to be confronted with the outcomes of the schizophrenia (see Castells, note-18). Locality becomes devalued and capital becomes exterritorial. For Bauman globalisation means, among other things, the progressive separation of power (related to global network systems) and politics (related to local communities).

²¹ C. Taylor, *Hegel*. London/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp 10-50. See as well: R. Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse for Freedom*. London: Verso, 1993. According to Bhaskar, the call for an expressive unity, lost since the idealised Greek world, "paid due heed to diversity, which would be in effect a unity-in-diversity, and to the constitutive role of subjectivity", p.18. This essential choice is put forth in the second book's, see note-2.

²² See note-2.

was that it lacked a theoretical foundation. In response to this we have sought to create a scientific framework that explores the nature of the *social* as an authentic entity and determine the disposition of the social quality of aspects of daily life.

The conclusion of the theoretical endeavour is that the 'social' concerns the self-realisation of individuals as social beings in the context of the formation of collective identities. In other words, 'the social' is the outcome of constantly changing processes through which individuals realise themselves as interacting social beings. The related dialectical processes create or *constitute* the social world.²³ The main question is what policies or interventions of citizens are needed to contribute to the self-realisation in the context of the formation of acceptable collective identities and vice versa. The social quality approach is essentially oriented on (i) formal policymaking processes, (ii) collective actions and interventions by systems, institutes, companies as well as organised citizens, and (iii) the way they address real human needs and acceptable preferences and wants. The reason for this is the overall neglect of this aspect. Insight into the social will create a more solid and authentic basis for those policies and interventions. The nexus of policymaking, actors and needs, regards the so-called 'genetic code' of social quality (see further section-5.2).

Thanks to this renewal of the theory with the concept of 'the social' we are able to explore the *constitutional factors* of social quality, namely the processes concerning the above-presented dialectic. These processes take place in concrete public spaces. This concerns the four components as *objective conditional factors*. They are the key-points for orientation in constructing a composed set of indicators. The recognition of these constitutional factors provides the components with a more sound theoretical dimension. Furthermore, individuals orient themselves based on self-reference. The assumption is that 'the social' results from the dynamics of interacting individuals in the context of objective conditions. That means we also have to consider the cognitive, motivational and affective aspects of self-interpretation as they are in definition crucial aspects of interacting human beings. These concern the *subjective conditional factors*. They may be seen as a logical consequence of the recognition of the constitutional factors.²⁴

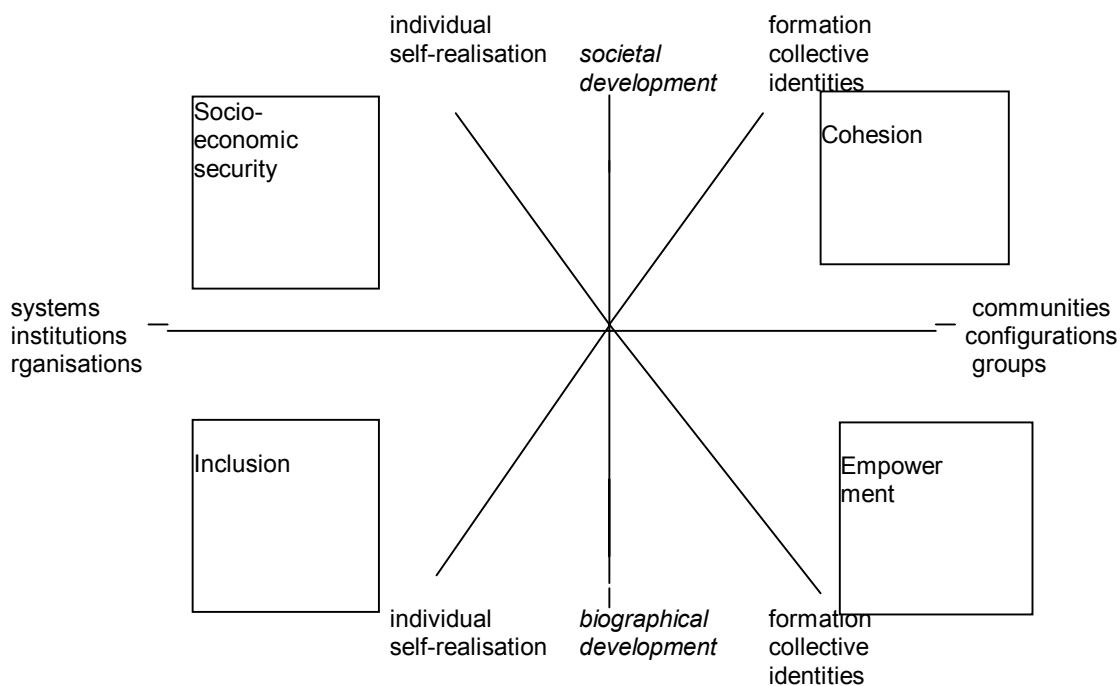
4.2 *The connection of the constitutional and the objective conditional factors*

²³ This refers as well as to; A. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity press, 1995. According to Honneth, a political community can only fully succeed to the degree to which it is supported, on the part of members of society, by cultural customs that have to do with the way in which they deal with each other reciprocally.

²⁴ The distinction between the three factors determining social quality is introduced in the second book and elaborated in the General Paper (note-3). In fact the elaboration of this distinction concerns the main challenge of theorising social quality.

As mentioned above, the social quality quadrant in the second book is based on the interpretation of 'the social'. It presents the four components or objective conditional factors reflecting the dialectic. In relation to the first book, the meaning of the vertical axis has changed. Instead of the tension between macro and micro circumstances and relations, it reflects societal developments and biographical developments. This change enables the connection of social quality with the question of human needs, preferences and wants, as well as the judgement of their relevance. The dialectic explicates the intrinsic connection between the subject matters of the components. This renewal of theory and the

Figure 4-1: *The dialectic and the objective conditional factors*²⁵



resulting comparability of components paves the way for the development of coherence in concepts like social protection, inclusion, security, welfare, etc. In other words, it has become possible to connect these concepts on an abstract level.

The actual nature, content and structure of social relations is a function of the relationship between two axes (see figure 4-1). The horizontal axis represents the tension between systems, institutions and organisations on the one hand and communities and groups on the other. The vertical axis

²⁵ See note-2, p. 315.

represents the tension between social processes at the societal level and biographical ones at the individual level. The interaction of these tensions is the dynamic behind both self-realisation and the formation of collective identities which in turn lead to the *production* of the social world. This makes the figure appear unclear as the dialectic seems static. Yet it is operating in each component and circling in the quadrant. The aspects produce different outcomes. Socio-economic security e.g. is an outcome of the confrontation of the dialectic and the dynamic between societal processes and systems. Cohesion is an outcome of the confrontation of the dialectic and the dynamic between societal processes and the world of communities, etc. Thanks to the recognition of these dialectic processes in 'public space', the second book opens the exploration of needs, preferences and wants of human subjects. Implicitly it reformulated the heart of the matter of social quality.

With this brief excursion into social quality theory the scientific rationale of the concept is shown. Because the heart of the social world concerns the self-realisation of individuals as social beings, the main point of reference for quality should be the circumstances of daily life. Therefore, quality is a function of permanently changing interactions among actors in everyday life and cannot be reduced to processes between systems and communities and groups. Furthermore, quality does not have a one-dimensional nature. There are no quality standards independent from historical and situational circumstances in which the social world is manufactured. Finally, the interpretation of quality in terms of minimum standards for everybody is not an option. In Therborn's terms social quality implies an 'open horizon' rather than a 'social floor'. Fifth, quality depends on capacity. In other words, quality will be realised if people are enabled to develop communicative capacities in ever more complex circumstances. Sixth, quality is not only a question of outcomes but also of processes. The nature of interventions, the choice of strategies for action and the type of organisation have an important bearing on the quality of the process.

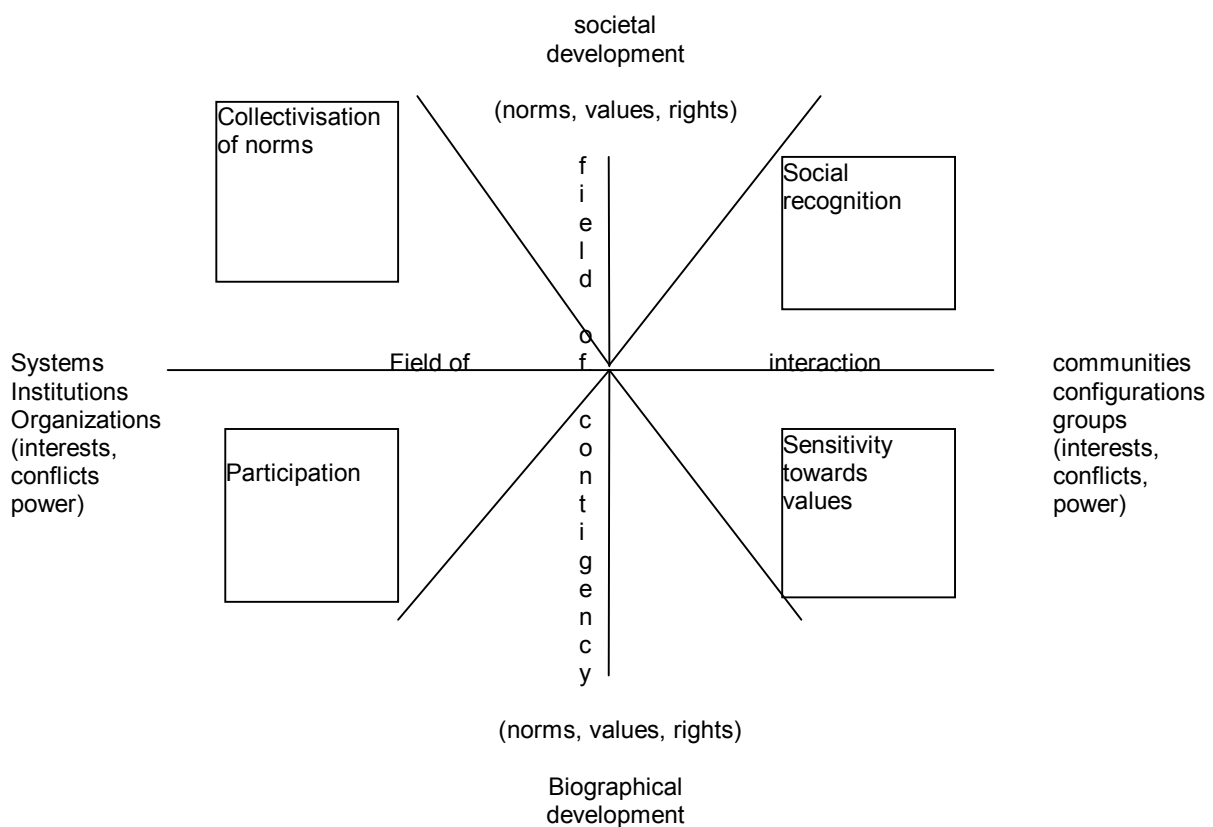
4.3 The connection of the constitutional and subjective conditional factors

We have to take on board an important paradox. The individual subject is dependent on the appreciation by his/her social environment. At the same time his/her subjective judgement determines the reality of this appreciation. Daily injuries in word and gesture, e.g. on the street, in a shop, at a police station, etc. have a negative impact on this judgement. This refers to the subjective conditional factors that influence the nature of the dialectic between the self-realisation and formation of collective identities because of the importance of self-reference. As social quality accentuates the relationship between interacting human subjects as social beings and the participatory characteristics of policymaking, it has to take on board this dimension. Then it can develop benchmarks to steer processes of policymaking and interventions of (organised) citizens. This point addresses the tension

between the rational-technical and the value based constructivist approach on the development of 'social indicators'.

We presume that both axes and the tensions they represent produce points of gravitation for the subjective dimension of social quality of daily circumstances. The horizontal axis provides the code for analysing processes taking place in the field of interactions, i.e. interactive communication about interests, power and conflicts. This is the field of contingencies. The vertical axis provides the code for analysing values, norms, principles, rights and conventions. In combination with the working of the main dialectic they produce the four points of gravitation as shown in the figure below.

Figure 4-2: The dialectic and the subjective conditional factors

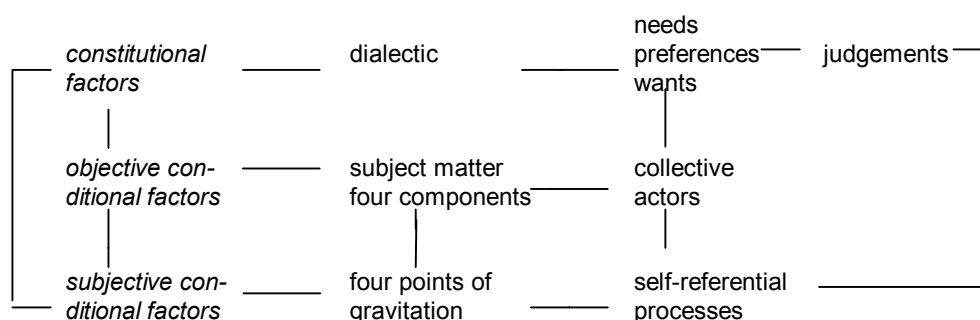


The four points of gravitation are primarily responsible for the concretisation of the social. This means that processes concerning participation, social recognition, collectivisation of norms and the sensitivity of values determine the nature, the extension, the range and the morphological structure of the social. Thanks to this determination the social obtains a concrete form, a 'Gestalt'. The evaluation

of this complicated set of processes and interrelationships with regard to the subjective conditional factors requires its own methodological instruments, namely profiles.

With the above in mind we can illustrate the connection between the three factors (figure 4-3). The connection between these factors and their nature, and needs, collective actors and self-referential processes has created the basis for the genetic code of social quality (section-5.2).

Figure 4-3: The three factors of social quality



4.4 The start of the operationalisation

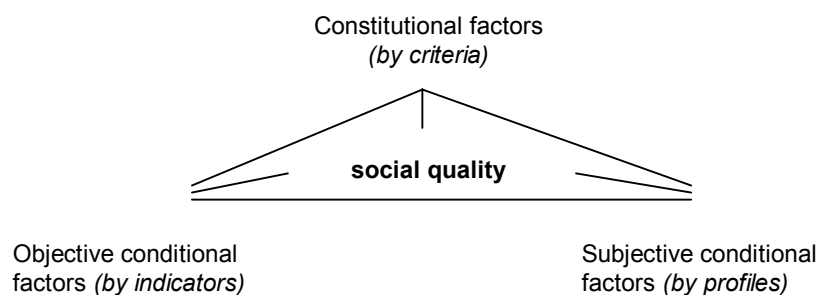
A concept that focuses on both objective living conditions and subjective well being at individual and societal level at the same time requires a multidimensional frame of measurement. This should combine quantitative and qualitative, material and immaterial, general and specific indicators, facts and satisfactions. These should address issues, situations, life domains, area or policy specific questions. The connection of these three types of factors is new in the context of indicators research. The four components or objective conditional factors should be analysed by objective *indicators*.²⁶ In the form of *profiles* we will tackle the subjective conditional factors, namely the role of life scripts, the biographical story of the acting individual subject. With the help of a matrix of *criteria* we will combine the judgement of the beholder of social quality with the objective verification of the expert. This combination creates our methodological triangle. It will demonstrate that the construct of classical indicators cannot be sufficient for measuring social quality.

The indicators are measurement instruments for the objective conditional factors of social quality. Profiles concern expressions of subjective self-estimations with regard to the degree of participation

²⁶ In October 2001 the Foundation started the 'Network Indicators of Social Quality' financed by the European Commission (DG-X11). Experts from 16 Member States and Accession States participate in this Network supported by national reference groups that confront the outcomes with circumstances in their own country. Especially this Network will develop the indicators of the objective conditional factors (see also note-3).

in public affairs. This is also connected with social recognition by the social environment, the degrees of openness towards values and acceptance of collective norms. Yet the most fascinating question is

Figure 4-4: The methodological triangle²⁷



who decides what quality should be? Are they experts from institutions, using instruments for peer reviews, inspections, indices and systems of monitoring? Or do we have to refer to bottom-up methods regarding new relationships based on citizens' and consumers' control and participation? The essence of social quality is determined in human praxis. Therefore we need methodological criteria to decide. In the second book we refer to Grunow for constructing criteria necessary for this judgement.²⁸

5 From social quality to policies: the genetic code as intermediary

5.1 An implicit dialogue

In this section we will confront the outcomes of the initial phase of theorising social quality with assumptions that underlie European policies. We will especially refer to the decisions made during the Lisbon Summit in 2000 and the outcomes of endeavours of the European Commission (DG V) to operationalise these.²⁹ With help of this confrontation we will try to clarify some of our main assumptions and how to use them for processes of policymaking and interventions by (organised) citizens. The step from abstract reasoning (see above) to, in this case, policymaking will be made with help of our assumption concerning the *genetic code* of social quality. This genetic code (see fig.

²⁷ This triangle was presented for the first time in the General paper, note-3.

²⁸ See note-2, Chapter-XVIII.

²⁹ European Council, *Presidency Conclusions*. Lisbon: Press Release SN 100/100 EN, 20 March (2000), p.2

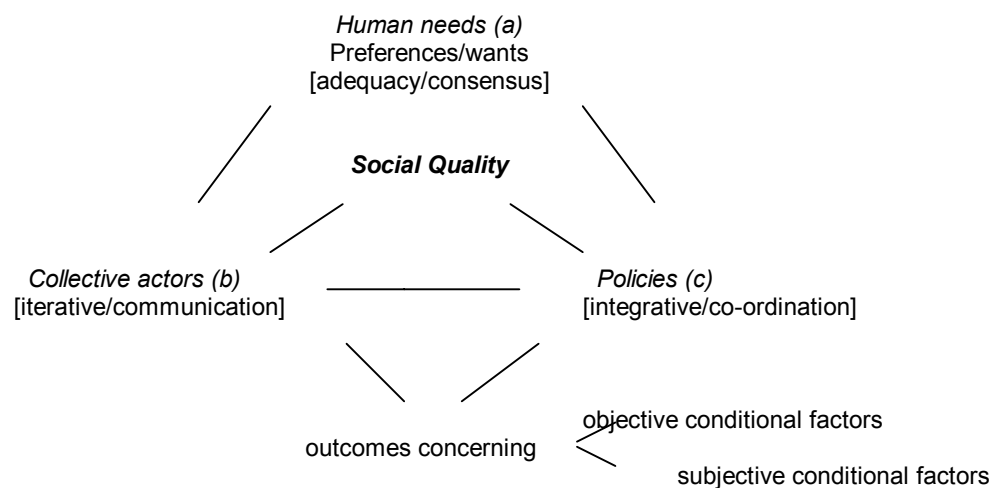
4-5) has been derived from the connections between the three factors of social quality (fig. 4-3). We will first start the debate about differences and similarities, as this has been rather implicit until now.

5.1 The genetic code of social quality

The genetic code represents the central working hypothesis of the social quality approach linking theory with different policy fields and policies (e.g. employment policies, public health policies, etc). The collective actors (political parties, bureaucratic institutes, firms, companies, social configurations and organised citizens) should be invited, enabled or pressed to design policies which address recognised individual and collective problems, needs, wants and preferences. The nature of the outcomes – the level of social quality – will be determined by their consequences for the constitutional, the objective conditional and the subjective conditional factors as well the conditions for their reciprocity. This is visualised by the ‘genetic code of social quality’ (see below).

All *policies* (ad-c) have to be linked with the *actors* in the systems, institutions and organisations as well as groups, informal configurations and communities (ad-b), and with *human needs* (ad-a). This is the case for social policies, and therefore employment policies and public health policies as well. These

Figure 5-1: The genetic code of social quality³⁰



have to be linked with a manifold of actors and needs. In summary, figure 5-1 concerns both (i) policies and (ii) all phases of policymaking (acknowledgement, design, application, development and evaluation). The interrelationships in this figure will (iii) be successful if the basic conditions exist

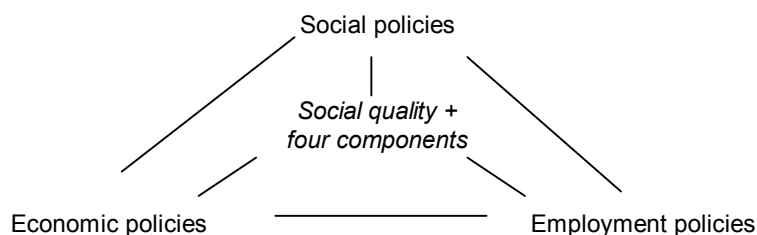
(forum, a specific level of public ethics, systems for communication and understanding). The actors should (iv) stimulate policies developing social quality with an iterative method (search process); a basic condition is inter-human communication and dialogue. These policies have to be (v) integrative in order to produce social quality: a condition is the existence of mechanisms for co-ordination. Finally, needs, preferences and wants have to be (vi) adequate (legal, legitimate and functional). A condition is the creation of consensus with regard to the notion of justice.

5.2 *The Lisbon Summit 2000*

One of the decisions of the Lisbon Summit 2000 was to develop the EU into the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy stimulating cohesion too. DG Employment and Social Affairs operationalised this in the new Policy triangle. This concerns the use of the open co-ordination method for three types of policies, namely social, economic and employment policies.³¹ For the first time, the social quality approach was formally taken on board in contributing to the mainstreaming of the Policy Agenda (see figure 5-2). The Commissioner for Social Affairs, Mrs Anna Diamantopoulou, explained the meaning of the social quality initiative for the European Commission. In the foreword of the Foundation's second book she says, 'The first book of the European Foundation on Social Quality, *The Social Quality of Europe*, has been widely welcomed by European policy makers as well as scientists across Europe. It played an influential role in the development of the new Social Policy Agenda, which emphasises the promotion of quality with regard to social policy, work and industrial relations. A key message is that economic growth is not an end in itself but essentially a means to achieve a better standard of living for all. I firmly believe that extending the notion of quality to the whole of the economy and society will facilitate the improvements in the interrelationship between economic and social policies that are so vital for the future success of Europe. The idea of social quality captures perfectly what Europe has achieved and continues to aspire to. It also allows the everyday concerns of citizens to be reflected in the highest policy circles. The Foundation's second book extends and deepens our understanding of social quality and, therefore, will be an invaluable resource in both the implementation of the new social Policy agenda and in the modernisation of the European social model'.³² In line with this comment the Foundation received illustrations of the interpretation of the first book from DG Social Affairs in April 2000 (see e.g. figure below). These were connected with the preparation of the Lisbon Summit.

Figure 5-2: DG Social Affairs' interpretation

³⁰ See note-2, p.370.



The illustration above is explained as follows: “in the vision of a co-ordinated strategy, structural and labour market policy are to be interrelated to the frame of a co-ordinated macroeconomic strategy for growth and employment. This is the foundation of the Cologne process. The main critiques against this vision are: (i) the absence of reference to the specific social dimension within the employment strategy; (ii) the absence of an independent rationale for social policies: the main mention being ‘social protection as productive factor’, with a risk of entrapping social developments within a narrow economic frame, as justifications for social policies are based on purely economic criteria; (iii) the limitation to the economic model in order to boost efficiency; equity or solidarity are considered as competing issues, not as funding principles”.³³

5.3 The EC’s new Social Policy Agenda

In the presentation of the last Social Policy Agenda the European Commission presented a triangle (see below) that differs from both figure 5-2 and the Foundation’s first and second book in the following respects:

- In this figure ‘social quality’ does not function as a link between a manifold of policies (see the genetic code). In the EC’s presentation it is connected or associated with social policies only.
- It is equalised and synchronised with social cohesion. This differs essentially from the social quality quadrant. Cohesion is only one of the objective conditional factors of social quality.

Figure 5-3: Final proposal for the EC’s Social Policy Agenda³⁴

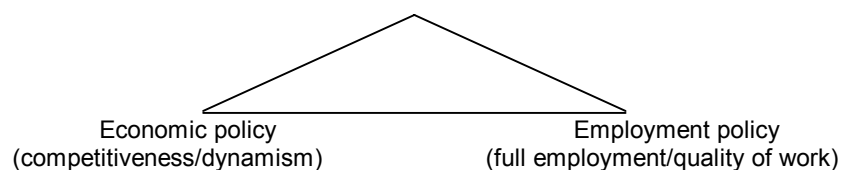
Social policy
(social quality/social cohesion)

³¹ Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission tot the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions; Social Policy Agenda*. Brussels; COM (2000), 379 final, 2000.

³² See note-2, Foreword.

³³ European Commission (DG Social Affairs), ‘Illustrations of the Foundation’s first book’. Brussels; DG-V, April 2000.

³⁴ See note-32.



In other words, placing 'social quality' at the top of the triangle under 'social policy' reflects a different understanding of the idea of social quality to that of the Foundation. Furthermore, this EC triangle is not clear about abstract instruments with which to connect the three aspects on the corners. It seems to lack a rationale and particularly one that will appeal to and bring on board European citizens. According to the Foundation, that rationale could be social quality. In other words, for improving the quality of life of citizens, social quality could be the driving force behind each of the policies and also their relationship. Thus the abstract and the practical connection between economic policy, social policy and employment policy should be provided by their interrelationships with actors and needs. Both (see the genetic code) cause the intrinsic existing reciprocity of the sides of this triangle and others.

In the 2001 Report on the social situation in the EU there is a confusing connection between the suppositions of figures 5-2 and 5-3. The Introduction says: "The Social Agenda as agreed at the Nice Summit provides the political basis for the consolidation of a comprehensive strategy of mutually reinforcing economic, employment and social policies [ed.: or 'social administration', see note-9]. It pinpoints the promotion of quality in all areas of social and employment policy as a driving force behind a thriving economy with more and better jobs and an inclusive society and as a key way to secure that the European Union achieves the goals it has set itself regarding competitiveness, full employment, living standards and quality of life. The strengthening of the European economy and its social model will result from policies promoting synergy and positive interaction between economic growth, employment and social cohesion".³⁵ In the Introduction the same triangle was published: "the policy mixes to be established to create a virtuous circle of economic and social progress should reflect the interdependence of these policies and aim to maximise their mutual positive reinforcement".³⁶ The comments presented above do also account for this aspect of the Report. Moreover, the concept of 'social cohesion', used in this official triangle, is an aspect of 'social administration' and therefore by definition the result of top-down policy processes. It lacks a reference to a subject matter connected with the dialectic between self-realisation and the formation of collective identities, namely the constitutional factor of social quality.

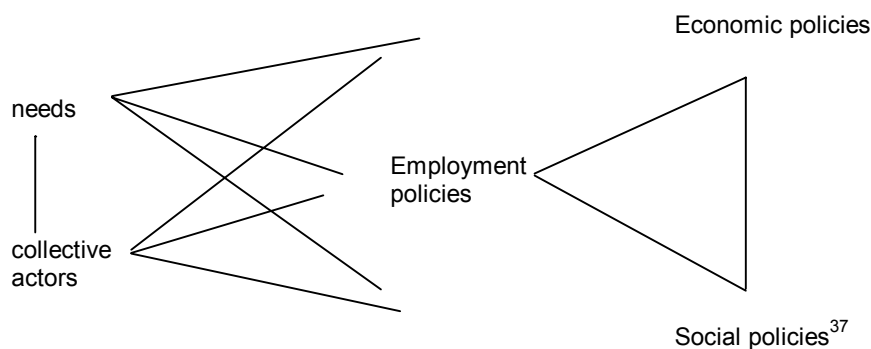
³⁵ EUROSTAT, European Commission, *The social situation in the European Union*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2001, p.7

³⁶ See note-36, p.7.

5.4 Social quality for analysing employment policies: an explicit dialogue

To understand employment policy from the perspective of social quality we may connect the genetic code with the original EC triangle (see figure 5-4). In the genetic code a distinction is made between policies, collective actors and needs. These policies intervene or change the resources and context of the objective and subjective conditional factors. Actors are part of this context and resources. Some of them are responsible for employment policies with which to change these resources and contexts.

Figure 5-4: Connecting the genetic code and the original EC triangle

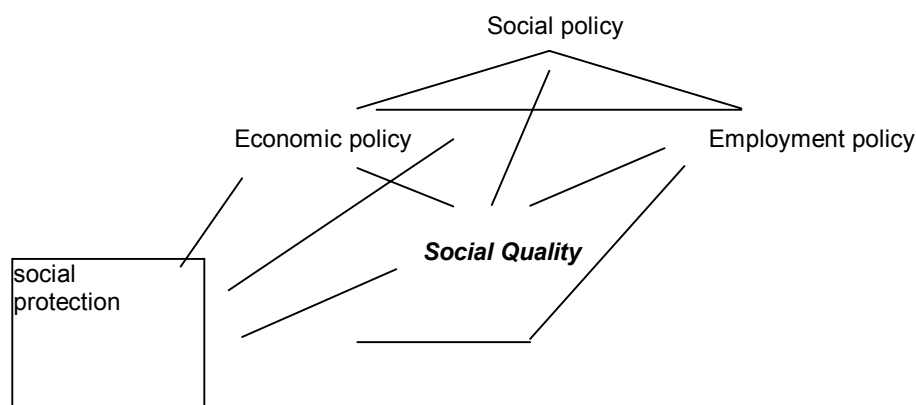


Others have to cope with these changes in a way they decide to do and as the nature of resources and context will enable them to do so. Thanks to this genetic code these types of policies and thus the manifold of related policy fields can be connected in an abstract way. This will facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the outcomes of daily life processes and coherently contribute to different types of policymaking and actions of organised citizens. The intermediate function of social quality enables a connection of a particular policy field like 'social protection' with social, economic and employment policy. Therefore, the nature of social protection and its changes can be analysed and understood in a new way. The social quality approach does not see it as the 'handmaiden' of economic policy.³⁸ This is illustrated in figure 5-5.

Figure 5-5: Intermediate analytical and conceptual function of social quality

³⁷ In this case it regards 'social administration', see note-9.

³⁸ See note-2, p.332: In the official presentation "social protection operates on the border of a 'causal loop'. In many EU documents about social protection we see the presentation of assumed causal relationships. For example, social protection should 'provide people with income in times of need and allow them to accept and embrace economic and social change. In this way they promote both social cohesion and economic dynamism'. The vulnerable part of such arguments is, that events are explained by their consequences to the extent that an effect does not so much become a cause but is a cause. "



Although the concept of 'social protection' is used in different ways in various Member States, the principle may be clear from figure 5-5. According to the second book, social protection regards an aspect of the component socio-economic security of the quadrant. This can be distinguished in different domains and related indicators. This will be the task for the new 'Network Indicators of Social Quality' and its 16 national reference groups (see below). Social protection concerns concrete aspects of daily life. Employment policies intervene in (other) concrete aspects of daily life, and so do general social policy and economic policy. By interpreting the manifold of aspects with one conceptual scheme of reference the ratio, nature and consequences of these policies can be connected with policies concerning social protection. This is always the case, but usually in an implicit and unarticulated way. The European Foundation on Social Quality is (a) explicating this question and (b) proposes to develop this conceptual and analytical connection explicitly with the social quality approach (see figure 5-5). The challenge for critics is to articulate the implicit analytical intermediaries they use to apply and to compare with the social quality approach. This is a rational invitation as intermediaries are applied in every case. This point concerns the debate with the European Commission about the new Social Policy Agenda. The triangle (figure 5-3) did not explain the implicit conceptual and analytical intermediary. In the following section we will explain how the Foundation elaborated the explicit dialogue about the nexus between employment policies and social quality, seen as an intermediary.

6 Concluding remarks

6.1 *The normative position*

The social quality initiative is based on an explicit normative position, explained in the second book. According to a critic of this book, it does not reduce its scientific quality: "In fact, by stating their normative paradigm the authors open up their work for critique in a better way than those who conceal their position behind a veil of neutrality and use their norms much more implicitly or as

pretended common sense. The book gives an honest overview of the critique on the concept of social quality, as it was defined in the first volume. It sums up ways to overcome this critique and defines the domains where solutions must be found. It offers descriptions; it discerns aspects of the problem; and it points to relations between the aspects and to further ways of deploying the concept as a scientific and political theme. It outlines the framework within which this should be done (...) this conclusion contains a fundamental critique of the dominant views in the European Union and in the Member States, which are mostly governed by politicians who represent social-democratic political parties but are implementing and supporting neo-liberal ideas. So the book may not only be seen as an excellent example of interdisciplinary and internationally co-ordinated social research on the basis of a clear normative paradigm, but also as representing the inner struggle within European social democracy with its own inheritance. The results open a view on a real Third Way, a way between casino-capitalism and state-controlled social security systems. The book shows that, at least on a theoretical level there is an alternative. Sooner or later this insight may become a part of the political programmes too".³⁹

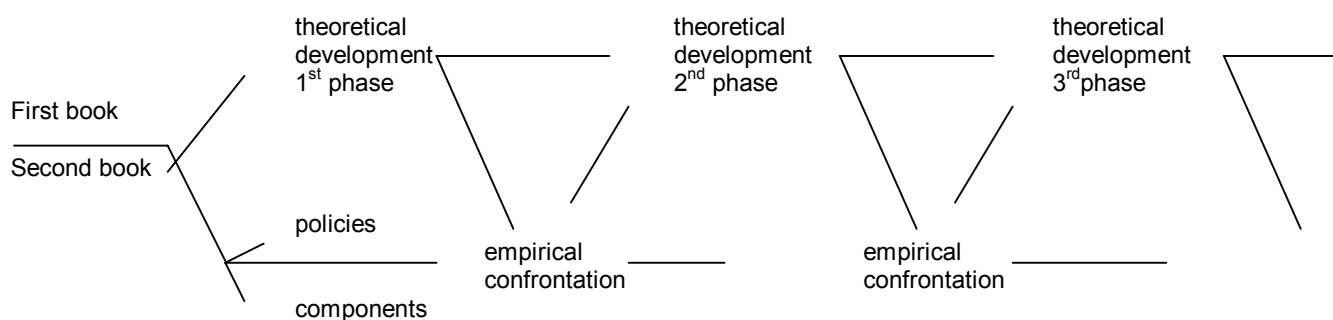
The Foundation tries to enable inter-subjective acceptable judgements about aspects of daily life in the Member States and Accession States of the European Union. By developing measurement instruments (indicators, profiles, criteria) daily circumstances become comparable entities all over Europe. They also help analysing the role of citizens in how they influence their own societal circumstances as to develop their individual capacities. Therefore, if successful, the social quality initiative will challenge European policymakers to create points of departure for developing equity and life chances in all regions and cities of Europe. This fundamental drive does not stop at the borders of Europe. The Foundation aims at developing measurement instruments that are applicable in all societal circumstances and social relations. With these also political-economic instruments are delivered to start the dialogue on similarities and differences between, for example, the European Union and the United States of America. Knowledge about these similarities and differences – their causes and their consequences for citizens – may be of utmost importance for developing a vision for the future of Europe.

6.2 *The Foundation's recent strategies*

We are conscious of the fact that the social quality theory is still in its initial phase. Following both publications we have made a step forward into the phase of empirical verification. Implicitly, the following method is being used for elaborating the theoretical level as well as the concept's applicability:

³⁹ K. Klop, 'Book Review of 'Social Quality: A Vision for Europe' ', *Acta Politica*, Vol.36, Winter 2001.

Figure 6-1: From theory to reality and back



6.3 Confrontation with policies

Since January 2001 the Foundation has – with support of the European Commission (DG V and DG XII) and in co-operation with nine academic institutes in Europe – been working on the confrontation of social quality with employment policies. Studies of the European Commission have been analysed to distinguish the most important aspects of employment policies. With figure 5-2 in mind the participants designed indicators to analyse these aspects from a social quality point of departure, resulting in a Joint Report⁴⁰ and a compilation of nine National Reports.⁴¹ One of the conclusions is that “the concept of social quality offers a heuristic instrument for understanding the idea of flexicurity [as a domain of the pillar ‘adaptability’] and the tension between security and flexibility that underpins it. It offers a unique way to explore its indicators for measuring tendencies in Europe, which are important for analysing the nature of inclusion [one of the components or objective conditional factors of social quality] in economic subsystems. Moreover, it gives real meaning to the guiding principle of ‘quality’ on the European Social Agenda. With this preliminary research they have demonstrated different approaches to flexicurity in the Member States and, especially, different models of family / employment relations (...) what is required now, we believe, is first of all new empirical work on this topic in order to develop robust variables or sub-indicators on flexicurity that can be translated directly into tools for both policy makers and citizens. Second, to co-operate with the Dublin Foundation on the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions in order to elaborate European data for analysing the dynamics between security and flexibility. Third, to start a co-operation with the European Foundation on Social Quality’s new Network Indicators of Social Quality in order to connect the research of indicators on flexicurity (the policy approach) with indicators inclusion (the component’s

⁴⁰ European Foundation on Social Quality, *Social Quality and the Policy Domain of Employment: Joint Project Report*. Amsterdam; EFSQ, April 2002.

⁴¹ European Foundation on Social Quality, *Social Quality and the Policy Domain of Employment: Annex 2, National Reports*. Amsterdam: EFSQ, April 2002.