

## Editorial: Intersectionality and Social Inequalities Beyond Social Origin

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### Abstract

*This introductory article to the themed issue on Intersectionality and Social Inequalities Beyond Social Origin highlights some of the debates on social inequality and the historical and theoretical background of intersectionality. It outlines the connections between social inequalities and social policies, e.g., in that social policies aim to reduce social inequalities and improve opportunities and living conditions, yet also produce social inequalities. The article presents the complexities of axes and dimensions of inequalities and how the concept of intersectionality came into play. It discusses the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to intersectionality. Finally, it introduces the various articles in the issue socialpolicy.ch 1/2023 that bring together conceptual and methodological issues on intersectionality and exemplify how researchers apply intersectionality in their fields of research, therewith yielding new approaches and novel results for social policy.*

### On the Relevance of Social Inequalities

Social inequalities – we use the plural deliberately here as inequalities may manifest themselves in very different ways and have diverse origins and consequences – are a core topic of sociology. As social facts in the sense of Durkheim ([1895] 1961), they arise from social relations and actions in societies and are also reproduced through them; moreover, they shape individuals and societies. According to Kreckel's (2004) definition, social inequality can be understood as a systematic and temporally rather lasting unequal distribution of life chances. It exists wherever “the possibilities of access to generally available and desirable social goods and/or to social po-

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sitions endowed with unequal opportunities for power and/or interaction are permanently restricted, thereby impairing or favoring the life chances of the individuals, groups or societies concerned” (Kreckel 2004: 17; translation by the authors). Social policy is closely linked to social inequalities. It aims to reduce them, on the one hand, and on the other, to improve opportunities and living conditions (see Kaufmann 2002; Boyer 2009). At the same time, it can also produce inequalities if social policies do not have much impact, are, only targeted towards certain groups or assign risks to individuals through activating social policies (see Lessenich 2015).

At the beginning of the 20th century in Western Europe, social policy was understood as a ‘child of the crisis’ (see Boyer 2009) which served to “mediate between the private sphere of market society and the public sphere of the rule of law in order to solve the ‘social question’” (Kaufmann 2002: 25; translation by the authors). After the end of the Second World War, issues of redistribution were added in order to prevent crises. Social policy became about securing an accepted standard of living and about a type of social policy that Boyer (2009) terms ‘child of prosperity’. The core of social policy since the 1970s has been, on the one hand, the protection against social risks and, on the other hand, the improvement of the living conditions of differently disadvantaged social groups. However, social policy also contributes to social inequalities because the political actors in power prioritize certain social risks at different times while others are excluded (see Häusermann 2019), or because institutional options for action are legally or politically limited.<sup>3</sup> Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) considers the way social inequalities are handled (in addition to the aspect of de-commodification) an essential criterion to distinguish between different welfare regimes: are they combated, reproduced and accepted, or approved of? In Western market-oriented societies, social policy can be viewed – at its best – as an essential means of reducing social inequalities or mitigating the effects of social inequalities at different levels: social policies start at the macro level, i.e., the system level or the level of society. They are implemented through institutions at the meso level, in particular through explicit and implicit rules, thereby shaping both the micro level, i.e., people’s individual situations and actions, as well as defining their scopes of action. Social work, another related field, is also closely linked to inequalities. By focussing on an individuals’ life situations, social work deals with the interfaces between micro, meso and macro levels that are often related to disadvantages and power relations within societies.

In today’s Western world, there are at least two views of inequality: the liberal and the social democratic. The differences manifest themselves in two issues: Firstly, in the extent to which all people’s starting chances to acquire or attain positions of socially valued material and immaterial goods according to their performance are equal, i.e., “whether and to what extent unequal persons and groups are to be treated equally or unequally” (Budowski/Nollert 2008: 13; translation by the authors). Secondly, differences manifest themselves in questions of distribution: Should the primary determinant of distribution be performance in markets, need, or ascriptive characteristics, and to which extent can the state “reduce the primary inequality of opportunity, income, and wealth” (Budowski/Nollert 2008: 13; translation by the authors)?

The form of inequality legitimized by the majority in Western liberal, market-oriented societies refers to its meritocratic character: In this understanding, the principle of merit and

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., women’s suffrage in Switzerland, see The Federal Assembly (not dated); or the possibility to sue against discrimination, see Crenshaw 1989, 1991.

equality of opportunity are at the core of the prevalent principle of equality that itself is widely viewed in a positive light. According to the principle of merit and equality of opportunity, an unequal distribution of goods or positions is legitimate if they are based on individual differences in performance (education, talent/intelligence, effort). According to the meritocratic principle (see Hadjar 2008), everyone should have the same opportunities (starting conditions) to achieve certain socially valued goals or goods, regardless of individual characteristics (e.g., social origin, gender). Non-legitimized inequalities, by contrast, are differences in goods and positions that run along ascriptive axes of inequality, such as social origin or gender. In addition, Western social democratic societies also focus on equality in outcome, as issues of social justice, process, and context play an important role. This is reflected in rights and responsibilities: civil and political rights, which are important in liberal Western welfare states, are complemented with social rights in social democratic ones (see Budowski/Nollert 2008: 13). While the liberal view is summarized as (meritocratic) *individualism* from the perspective of justice research, the social democratic view is described as *egalitarian etatism*, as the state has the function of redistribution (see Liebig/Wegener 1995).

While the idea of equal opportunities seeks to achieve the goal of greater equality by creating equal starting conditions or guaranteeing equal opportunities to use these starting conditions – for example, in the education system –, redistribution and compensation have little legitimacy in the liberal understanding of Western market-oriented societies. For the educational system in the Western social democratic understanding, however, this idea of equal opportunities includes both creating equal initial conditions through preschool and individual support as well as counteracting disadvantages throughout the entire educational process in comprehensive schools. In addition, the state reduces large wage differences between different occupational positions through tax systems to enable more balanced life chances between different social groups and across the life course.

When thinking about inequalities, it is useful to distinguish between *axes of social inequality* and *inequality dimensions*. An inequality axis is a structural category in the sociological sense and usually refers to an ascriptive characteristic that structures inequalities in terms of different access to goods and positions. This is primarily about characteristics with which one was born or born into, such as gender, social origin/class, ethnicity, or disability. Common to these characteristics are attributions of society, such as the characteristics that make up a working class or a woman.<sup>4</sup> Inequality axes structure *inequality dimensions* that refer to socially valued goods and positions and that differ in terms of access, acquisition and distribution. Such goods and positions are income, health, political participation, positions of authority or occupational prestige. The extent to which an inequality axis varies according to differences in inequality dimensions is moderated by mechanisms and processes of social inequality. Mechanisms and processes consist in *causes* of social inequalities and not in *axes* of social inequality.<sup>5</sup> For example: gender as an axis of inequality is not the cause of women's lower average income compared to men's (gender pay gap); it is discrimination on the labor market and gender-typical life plans

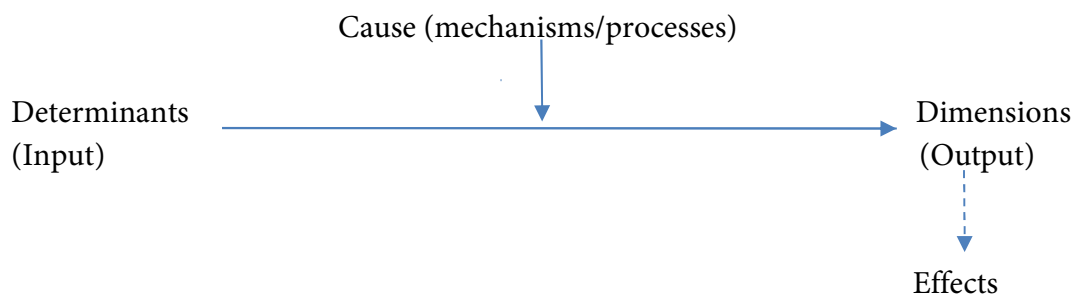
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4 With regard to processes of social change, ascriptive characteristics also include characteristics that are acquired, such as migration status or gender, which, according to modern understanding, can change.

5 These are referred to as *determinants* in the structural level model of social inequality by Solga/Berger/Powell 2009 (see Figure 1), yet are not always clearly distinguishable.

that are part of inequality mechanisms and processes. Furthermore, there is no clear demarcation as to which characteristics correspond to inequality axes, in the sense of an input, and which characteristics are inequality dimensions, in the sense of an output (see Solga/Berger/Powell 2009). In each case, this depends on the research question. A good example here is educational attainment: if we ask how the socioeconomic background of the parental home shapes educational opportunities, then *parental occupational status* is the axis of social inequality (input) and *educational attainment* is the inequality dimension (output). However, if we ask to what extent health status differs by educational attainment, then *educational attainment* is the inequality axis (input) and *health status* is the inequality dimension (output).

Fig. 1: Structural level model of social inequality (Solga/Berger/Powell 2009: 17)



### Social Inequalities: Relevance for Individuals and Society

In political debates and in the public sphere, social inequalities are viewed differently from different political positions. For example, considering economic growth, in particular, it is debated whether social inequalities constitute a problem and if so, to what extent (see Cingano 2014). Accordingly, it must be asked why they are relevant at all.

From the human rights perspective as well as the perspective of meritocracy in Western democratic societies, social inequalities in the sense of systematic and persistent differences in life chances are a social problem. They have negative consequences on different levels: for individuals on the micro level as well as for societies on the macro level. Social inequalities become visible on the micro level in that certain social groups systematically have lower chances of acquiring an education, of finding a job, pursuing a desired profession and earning an adequate income, and thus have a higher risk of poverty. They also lead to lower chances of political participation or health or well-being, i.e., lower life chances in general. Moreover, individuals from socially disadvantaged groups often suffer from the consequences of their lower life chances.

Since social inequalities are systematic and persistent, they are usually passed on from generation to generation unless society succeeds in implementing measures that counteract the causes of disadvantage. An empirically common and typical chain of reproduction of social inequalities can be outlined as follows: Children from working class families, i.e., children whose parents are or were engaged in unskilled or semi-skilled manual jobs, have fewer resources, including education, income and prestige than, for example, children from academic

households. Institutionally, the lack of such resources acts as a barrier to educational attainment: the education system is unable to compensate these resources and accordingly selects certain (shorter) educational paths for working-class children. In addition, working-class children are more likely to drop out of school and thus have a higher risk of remaining educationally poor. A lower educational attainment makes access to the labor market more difficult. The lack of opportunities in the labor market is reflected in a higher risk of unemployment, fewer chances of obtaining skilled and prestigious jobs and, ultimately, lower incomes. The low-skilled group therefore has a higher risk of being income-poor than groups with higher educational or vocational qualifications. As has been empirically demonstrated many times, disadvantages in educational attainment and in the labor market go hand in hand with lower life chances in other areas, such as lower political participation (although the affected individuals often have the right to do so), less opportunities for partnerships, lower well-being, poorer health and a shorter life span. Although at first glance, it might seem stereotypical to speak of higher or lower education or high or lower occupational status, it is useful in characterizing the disadvantaged position that statistically accompanies a shorter lifespan.

Social inequalities are also discussed as a social problem on the macro level, for example, with regards to social cohesion, solidarity, trust in institutions or democracy. Perceiving social inequalities as unjust leads to more protest, withdrawal, resignation, or collective violence and crime. This may negatively impact on the political system that is based on democratic orders in large parts of the world, and thus also on system stability.

Despite their multidimensional nature, social inequalities are often measured in terms of income inequality. More social inequality is usually, though not necessarily, associated with a higher poverty rate in the population. Studies show that high income inequality has a negative impact on economic growth. In particular, the gap between the poverty-stricken population and the rest of the population proves to be important (see Cingano 2014). A lack of education among the population also inhibits economic prosperity.

### **Old and New Perspectives on Inequalities**

While the core theme of the scientific consideration of social inequalities, namely the unequal distribution of life chances, has remained relevant in sociology and social policy, the focus regarding the explanatory mechanisms of inequalities has been widened, especially during the course of the second half of the 20th century.

Historically, research has focused on labor and the labor market as the central causes of the production and reproduction of inequalities: work and the labor market are therefore classified as *old inequalities* and their empirical relevance remains highly persistent (see Becker/Hadjar 2010, 2015). Accordingly, class and stratum differences in life chances resulting from labor market participation have been and continue to be at the center of sociological analysis. Marx ([1844] 1975) and Weber ([1922] 2013) are the most important classics dealing with social inequalities, and most of various class and stratification models refer to them. Both Marx and Weber considered the ownership of means of production or land as the core privilege. While Marx conceived of the opposition between the ruling class that owns the means of production and the oppressed class of workers, who lack thereof, Weber distinguished between estates and later

also between classes and strata that are characterized equally by the possession of resources and social positions with specific interests and specific ways of living. Systematics based on Marx ([1844] 1975) and Weber ([1922] 2013) are still used today to classify social positions on the basis of occupations, such as the Wright class structure (see Wright/Cho 1992), the Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero classification (see Erikson/Goldthorpe/Portocarero 1979), the International Socio-Economic Index ISEI (see Ganzeboom/de Graaf/Treiman 1992), the German (see Mayer/Aisenbrey 2007) or the Swiss occupational classification (see Joye/Schuler 1995; Joye/Bergmann/Budowski 2002).

The emphasis on occupation and the labor market is criticized in that it implies a one-sided focus on economic characteristics and in particular, on the employment process and the labor market (see Crompton 1989). Groups excluded from the labor market, such as (stay-at-home) women, pensioners, the poorly educated, people with disabilities, or migrants without work permits, are thus not taken into account. Underlying the focus on the labor market is a liberal, androcentric concept, since the functional mechanisms behind the labor market as well as areas of life beyond the labor market, such as family and household or citizenship, are neglected. Moreover, these traditional discourses of inequality around classes and strata imply homogeneity within these social groups as well as homogeneity with respect to different contexts of reproduction of inequalities – which we will address below when focusing on *intersectionality* –, thus neglecting the diversity within groups (heterogeneity) and the diversity of the contexts.

Old inequalities have been particularly questioned after the individualization debate following Beck's (1986) time-diagnostic theses on the individualization of society. The core argument is that the classical class and stratum localizations were becoming blurred and less rigid due to educational expansion, the increase of individual freedom in the wake of secularization and the changes of values of obligation and acceptance. This led to the idea that class and stratum differences – and thus old inequalities – were diminishing and would eventually disappear. However, Beck (1986) spoke of an *elevator effect*, meaning, for example, that educational levels and occupational structures had risen for all, with society developing towards a service society, but that inequalities remained the same only at a higher level.

At the latest in the context of the discussions about individual freedoms increasing and life courses becoming more individualized, researchers in the field of inequalities started to focus intensely on identities and lifestyles that are usually understood as *horizontal inequalities*. The focus on new axes of inequality, such as gender, migration background, ethnicity, milieu, or sexual orientation, gained momentum. A neglected critique of inequality debates that emphasize the horizontal axes is that the latter often go hand in hand with economic inequalities and therefore also have a vertical character. Examples of such linkages between horizontal and vertical inequalities are the gender-pay gap or shorter life spans in certain milieus. Therefore, neither is the strong reference of new inequality axes to identities arbitrary, nor is the assumption that identities have nothing to do with material worlds. Rather, as critics argue, the strong focus on horizontal inequalities is a good means to distract attention from vertical inequalities. Old and new inequalities are equally problematic and socially relevant. Therefore, critical voices caution that the present debate about horizontal inequalities and diversity threatens to overshadow that on vertical ones (see Michaels 2006; Gutting/Fraser 2015; Aruzza/Bhattacharya/Fraser 2019; Budowski/Nollert 2023).

## Intersectionality as a Research Desideratum

The analysis of intersectionality – or of intersectionalities – could also be subsumed under *new inequalities* because this term covers a whole array of novel topics of investigation. Compared to horizontal inequalities, however, the intersectionality concept represents an innovation that has played only a marginal role in the study of new inequalities. For a long time, studies of old and new inequalities in the social sciences have mainly focused only on one axis of social inequality: social origin, religious denomination, urban-rural differences, gender or ethnicity. The reason is the implicit assumption that social groups are relatively homogeneous within a society or even across different contexts. Very often, however, not all individuals in a social group are affected by the same disadvantages. Categories in sociological research are used to examine systematic and persistent disadvantages and advantages, i.e., social inequalities; however, the causes and consequences as well as the extent of disadvantages may be specific to certain subgroups. Therefore, both in terms of social science inquiry and in terms of identifying solutions to social problems, it is useful not to homogenize social groups and think of them in terms of *all migrants* or *all women* but at least to be attentive to possibly existing subgroups and therewith account for heterogeneity in groups. In short, the actual heterogeneity within social groups should be accounted for (see Bürkner 2012). However, labeling subgroups should also be reflected, as defining a distinguishing label lends itself as possible foundation to socially stigmatize or discriminate against the group (see Horvath 2019).

The intersectionality approach allows to scientifically perceive and study heterogeneity. The term and concept of intersectionality were coined by Crenshaw (1989), a lawyer; Walby (2007) provided a solid foundation for it with her sociological complexity theory. The focus of Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) now classic work is the discrimination of black women when compared with white women and black men in the legal foundations of the U.S. justice system. Lawsuits against discrimination in the U.S. were at that time only possible with regard to *one* characteristic, i.e., either sex or skin color. In Crenshaw's law case, Black women were laid off as the first social group and therewith discriminated against due to the combination of *woman* and *skin color*; white women and Black men were not laid off. The U.S. justice system did not allow a lawsuit based on the intersection of gender and skin color, which was the reason Crenshaw (1989) introduced the concept of *intersectionality*. It was important to her to develop a Black feminist critique by criticizing the feminist focus exclusively on gender as well as the Black focus exclusively on race as separate structural categories, therefore wrongly analyzing the situation of Black women. In this sense, Crenshaw's understanding of intersectionality addresses the deep structural and systemic issues of inequality.

Although the concept continues to be used analytically in terms of mechanisms of material aspects and attributions (see Thürmer-Rohr 2017), other scholarly or activist actors have adopted the concept, expanded its meaning and increased the possibilities of using it to describe subjectively perceived discriminatory identities and to make political demands. Critical voices raise concerns that the term has been heavily appropriated by white middle-class women (see Christoffersen 2023, this issue) or that recently, white men appropriated the term for themselves (see Michaels 2006; Budowski/Nollert 2023).

While Crenshaw (1989, 1991) uses intersectionality in terms of legally disadvantaging categories, Walby (2007) addresses it from a philosophy of science and sociological perspective. Her complexity theory starts from the strong and explicit critique of the reductionist conventional views on inequalities. Complexity theory criticizes that a wide range of social research – whether quantitative or qualitative – has basically focused on one axis of inequality or structural category at a time.<sup>6</sup> This explains why many (unexpected) social phenomena cannot be adequately explained. Complexity theory offers another approach to intersectionality; it requires a complex consideration of interactions and interdependencies between axes of social inequality, non-linear developments, and repercussions. Complexity theory accounts for *contextual conditions*, i.e., influences of environmental conditions on, for example, the societal level (macro level), the institutional level (meso level) or the individual micro-social environment (individual level). It also accounts for *path dependencies*, i.e., effects of previous events/conditions on later inequality relations.

Crenshaw and Walby's approach account for links between inequality axes when explaining inequalities in addition to primary axes of social inequality, such as class and stratum (old inequalities) or gender and ethnicity (new inequalities). Analytically and empirically, this can be done in two ways. For one thing, multiple inequalities can be analyzed in terms of simultaneously considering multiple inequality axes. This approach would correspond to an *additive perspective*, i.e., for example, with regard to disadvantages of male migrants, disadvantages due to gender and disadvantages due to migration status are considered separately and added up. Alternatively, intersectionality analysis can focus on "the interactions of social inequalities and cultural differences" (Walgenbach 2011: 113; translation by the authors; see also Gross/Goldan 2023 this issue) in the sense of combinations of inequality axes; other differences can be intersecting, too. In our example, such an intersectionality approach would lead to the finding that male migrants have additional disadvantages, beyond disadvantages on the parts of gender and migration status, that are specifically related to the combination of *male* and *migrant*. This intersectionality approach understands axes of inequality as not simply existing parallelly but as interrelated and mutually reinforcing or mitigating.

Alongside content-related and theoretical implications of the concept of intersectionality, there are some methodological implications. The premise of looking at intersectionality results in sets of terms, theories, and even methods (see Walgenbach 2011). The term *intersectionality* was adopted by social science feminist research.<sup>7</sup> Feminist research, or research based on feminist theory, aims to examine the realities of women's lives from a historical-cultural understanding and thus as a social construction rather than a given of nature. This entails that the theory is empirically applied particularly in qualitative research. When working with the concept of intersectionality, qualitative methodology aims at examining cases with regard to the complex entanglement of a wide variety of structural categories in different contexts. In German-language sociology, Winker and Degele (2009), in particular, have introduced a qualitative intersectionality approach.

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<sup>6</sup> In complexity theory, this focus is referred to as *regime*; see Walby (2007)

<sup>7</sup> Feminist research emerged from the political women's movement and had as its starting premise the oppression of women; see Jackson/Jones 1998.



Even though gender studies also have a tradition in quantitative research, quantitative research has hardly referred to the concept of intersectionality for a long time. This is due to its theoretical basis that – in view of its proximity to feminist theory – appeared normative. At the same time, thanks to its possibilities for analyzing complex interactions and decomposing effects, quantitative research has a far-reaching methodological toolkit for analyzing intersectionality at its disposal. Gottburgsen/Gross (2012) demonstrated the value of the concept of intersectionality for quantitative (mainstream German-language) sociology. Since then, the concept has been further explored with quantitative methods (see Hadjar/Hupka-Brunner 2013). Another example of a quantitative analysis on intersectionality is Bürkner's (2012: 189) study on the exclusion of young Turkish women in Germany from the labor market. The mechanisms why young Turkish women in Germany are excluded from the labor market are, on the one hand, patriarchal family structures and here in particular, fathers who deny their daughters access to the labor market in view of later marriage, and on the other hand, barriers in the education system and the labor market. Such barriers are language problems or stigmatization due to residential environments and working class origins.

Despite the novelty of the term *intersectionality*, there are many prominent empirical studies that have dealt with intersectionality without explicitly referring to the corresponding concept – among other reasons, because the term did not exist at the time they were conducted. One such example would be the Catholic working-class girl from the countryside at the center of Dahrendorf's (1965) deliberations about educational inequalities; this quantitative study has found entry primarily in quantitative sociology of education and educational policy (see Becker 2007). Dahrendorf's study's concept of intersectionality – that he did not explicitly name as such and that predates the present one – elaborates the complexity of disadvantage at the intersection of gender, social class, denomination, and urban-rural location. In terms of qualitative research, working class boys' school resistance presents an example of intersectionality at the heart of Willis's (1977) classic study. Here, Willis elaborates how working-class boys develop a resistance vis-à-vis school conditions and socialization that manifests itself at the behavioral level in school absenteeism and disruptive behaviors. Meulenbelt (1988) considers several dividing lines: she addresses gender, ethnicity, and social class as well as their intersections. Her interest focuses on the intersections between the systems of oppression of sexism, racism, and classism.

In conclusion, simultaneously considering different inequality axes and how they are linked has advantages over the one-dimensional and additive consideration of inequality. Likewise, it is important that the context is taken into account. In this way, disadvantages in different worlds of experience and their mechanisms can be uncovered. It is also important not to lose sight of economic inequalities, because – as can be proved empirically – vertical differences continue to exist between different groups, regardless of whether old or new inequalities are focused on. In this respect, when considering horizontal inequalities, it is particularly worthwhile to analyze to what extent they are linked with vertical inequalities, for example, manifested in or linked to lower education, lower income, lower participation or a shorter life span. When working with the intersectionality concept, inequality research needs to maintain a balance between the complexity required – the detailed consideration of different axes – and the danger of over-complexity. Theoretically, an infinite number of different axes can be intersecting, so that in the end

only the individual in their individuality remains (see Simmel 1917; Müller 2011). This would then obscure inequalities, because no coherent (identity or economic) categories and thus no systematic disadvantages could be identified anymore (see Thürmer-Rohr 2017).

### Overview of the Articles in this Issue

This issue of *socialpolicy.ch* 2023/1 on *Intersectionality and Social Inequalities Beyond Social Origin* contains six articles and one Forum article. It brings together theoretical and methodological issues on intersectionality and exemplifies how researchers apply intersectionality in their field of research, therewith yielding new approaches and novel results for social policy.

Eva Barlösius addresses different qualities of categorizations of difference that legitimately name an “official – i.e. explicit and public – assertion of the legitimate vision of the social world” (Bourdieu 1985: 731, quoted in Barlösius 2023) in her article *Talking About Social Inequality: Three Concepts of Difference*. The legitimate vision’s power is supported “by the whole force of the collective, of consensus, of common sense” (Bourdieu 1985: 732, quoted in Barlösius 2023). Barlösius’s essay reveals various tensions between normative objectives and the analysis of social inequalities. Due to changing contexts and values, questions arise about the extent to which *otherness* can be categorized as an equal difference without running the risk of being judged and hierarchically classified, and the extent to which such difference – differences and inequalities – can be conceptualized as social relations. Barlösius proposes the concept of “*unity in diversity* as a common social bond between different attributes and categories”.

In the Forum article, Stefan Hradil (Hradil 2023: in this issue) describes and contextualizes old and new inequalities in view of the social and scientific change in recent decades. He describes the historical development of empirical inequality research before the concept of intersectionality was coined and gained relevance. The change is located in the number of sociocultural groupings and freedoms increasing as well as in decreasing sociocultural consensus, resulting in an increase in political fault lines with consequences for the cohesion of societies and tolerance. Hradil concludes that different approaches are useful for specific purposes of knowledge.

Two texts approach the topic from a methodological perspective. In their paper *Modeling Intersectionality Within Quantitative Research*, Christiane Gross and Lea Goldan (Gross/Goldan 2023) state that it is not clear how intersectionality is modeled in quantitative research. They theorize the idea of intersectionality and what it refers to: multidimensionality, intersectionality and contextuality. In a first step, they contrast the qualitative and quantitative approaches because intersectionality is used more often in qualitative than in quantitative research. Subsequently, they present three different approaches in quantitative research: multivariate linear models, conventional multilevel analysis, and the MAIHDA approach, the multilevel analysis of individual heterogeneity and discriminant accuracy. They discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each of the approaches.

Jenny Rodriguez and Maranda Ridgway, in their paper *Intersectional Reflexivity: Centering Invocations and Impositions in Reflexive Accounts of Qualitative Research* (Rodriguez/Ridgway 2023: in this issue), offer a methodological approach to deepening the analysis of interactions

between researchers and research participants in the qualitative research process from the perspective of intersectionality. They argue that intersectional reflexivity is necessary to understand the data in more detail and depth, and to recognize the power dynamics and games that shape the exchanges between researchers and participants. Previous discussions of reflexivity have focused on the power of the researcher, therewith underestimating or even omitting the importance of the co-constructed dynamics and power struggles between researchers and participants. Using exemplary first-hand cases, they show how researchers and participants reference their intersectional identities to navigate their positionality during their interactions. An intersectional reflexive approach helps increase the accountability of qualitative researchers when analyzing their data.

Three contributions deal with how the intersectionality approach is implemented in research. In *Intersecting Inequalities in Education and on the Labor Market: Gender and Migration Background in Comparative Perspective* (Fleischmann 2023), Fenella Fleischmann asks whether gender and migration background lead to a double jeopardy, i.e., are to be understood as additive disadvantages, or whether gender and migration background interact and create specific inequalities for individuals with these combinations of characteristics, that is, correspond to the intersectional perspective. Employing a comparative perspective, she analyzes educational inequalities in nine country settings and differential labor-market outcomes in Germany considering gender and different immigrant groups. Results indicate that gender gaps in education do not vary by migration background in most countries, i.e., results do not indicate a specific intersectionality between gender and migration background. However, when it comes to labor market outcomes in Germany, analyses reveal intersectionalities linked to migrant generation and ethnic origin.

In *The Nexus of Dis/Ability, Education and Social Inequality: Vocational Training and Higher Education in Germany* (Powell/Blanck 2023), Justin Powell and Jonna Blanck examine the educational opportunities of disabled youth and young adults in different educational systems. Based on the normative perspective of the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and the United Nations 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development*, they compare which education systems of vocational education and training and higher education are more inclusive for persons with disabilities. Their article provides a good review of the current research literature on the topic and points out potential research desiderata. Although “research and policy initiatives [have been redirected] away from rehabilitation and treatment of individuals and towards contextual conditions and barrier-filled environments, human rights charters and anti-discrimination legislation, and mechanisms of social control and exclusion”, education systems are difficult to transform and even provoke backlash against the challenge posed by human rights charters. In this regard, inclusive education systems would be fundamental to reducing intersectional social inequalities.

In her paper *Applying Intersectionality in Policy and Practice: Unseating the Dominance of Gender in Responding to Social Inequalities* (Christoffersen 2023), Ashlee Christoffersen argues that the term *intersectionality* is generally appropriated by white feminism. Therefore, the first and most difficult step in operationalizing intersectionality is to challenge the dominance of this solely gender-based, i.e., white feminist perspective in understanding social inequalities. This is also true for any other single inequality axis. In her view, the empirical evidence of the most

disadvantageous intersectional inequalities is crucial for the relevant starting points for social policy and for defining target groups. The most effective way to reduce social inequalities is to address the needs and interests of the most marginalized social groups in the context of cross-cutting issues that affect different excluded groups (e.g., poverty). Christoffersen sets out how, under these premises, intersectionality is to be understood, what obstacles stand in the way of its operationalization, and how it can be applied in policy and practice.

### **Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to the anonymous reviewers and the editors of *socialpolicy.ch* for helpful comments and feedback.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The authors did not receive any financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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