



seit 1558

# Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena

## Institut für Soziologie

Lehrstuhl Arbeits-, Industrie- & Wirtschaftssoziologie

**# 4/2008** | **WORKING PAPERS:  
ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY JENA**

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**"Sick society" and "Buschzulage"  
Images of the East German  
Transformation**

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ISSN 1864-7588

Jena, Juni 2008

## "Sick society" and "Buschzulage" – Images of the East German transformation<sup>1</sup>

### 1) Introduction

Words – as sociolinguistics tells us – are not only good for expressing thoughts: they are necessary to *think* thoughts (Zimmer 2006). When two cultural backgrounds are facing each other it is very often the language that creates a bridge and thus an awareness of identity, similarity, and difference – or in cases of communicative failures just the opposite. For instance: in the beginning of the 1990s in interviews at the company level economists and sociologists could discover a tendency by East German managers and works councils to name all kinds of prospective buyers of their company "partner". This terminology didn't change even when they saw their hopes dashed or in cases they were victims of a fraudulence. Some observers have interpreted this "partner"-terminology as an expression of idealism or ignorance, others regarded it as a reaction to deep-rooted social changes that would require a strong orientation towards "thinking and acting based on partnership" (Heering/Schroeder 1995: 160)<sup>2</sup>. It is in this case less interesting which interpretation might be right. It is conspicuous that the terminology is influenced by individual world-views as well as by experiences collected in very different settings, both of which now going through a time of upheaval that might influence them. Nevertheless – and this is our claim – it is not restricted to individuals but is as a term widespread in society (Hopfer 1996: 97).

What is said about words can similarly be claimed with regards to metaphors, too. They can be understood as crystallizations of discourses, as "semantic complexes" ("semantische Komplexe", Link 1997: 15). One could say: if they are wide-spread – as the two examples discussed in this text – they express the hegemonic agreement found in the relevant discourse as in the first of our cases or at least one of the dominant agreements as in our second case. By metaphors two phenomena that are normally not

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was prepared for the Discouri consortium ([www.dioscuriproject.net](http://www.dioscuriproject.net)). The author thanks Janos Matyas Kovacs from the IWM (Vienna) for his stimulating support.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations (scientific, media, interviews) were translated by the author, UB.

associated with each other can be seen in correspondence. "Through this – often only supposed – similarity between so far not connected ideas the specific knowledge- and belief-systems connected to them can be made fruitful mutually" (Knorr-Cetina 1984: 94).

Metaphors are closely related to discourses that construct them. As described in Brinkmann/Seifert (1997) metaphors, discourses and ideologies (not in the meaning of "wrong consciousness" á la Lukács but in the Gramscian meaning of "Weltanschauung", world-view) are mutually inscribed. This means that participants in discourses are influenced by their respective ideologies while taking part in the "politics of signification" as Hall (1982) puts it. At the same time this participation bit by bit reformulates parts of their ideologies that are far from being solid as rock. No ideology, no discourse and no metaphor can become hegemonic in society if they do not offer a fit to the experiences the individual actors in society collect. Thus, it is characteristic of successful politics of signification that on the one hand it connects to these very experiences (primary or secondary, i.e. generated by the media or by opinion leaders) of the individuals it aims at. On the other hand it tries to shift the meaning of images to a new level by offering purposeful interpretations that either slightly differ from former interpretations or that give traditional images a new meaning.

This text has two aims: first it explores the history and conditions of origins of two very popular metaphor-fads in the context of the German transformation process. Second it analyses the impact of the changing contexts on the meaning of metaphors.

The first metaphorical incident comprises the privatisation period from 1989 until 1997. It was a common way to describe the pre-1989 GDR-society and especially the economy as an "sick society/economy" that ought to be "cured" by the transition to market economy and democracy. The second metaphor dealt with is the so-called "Buschzulage" (an additional remuneration, paid as a reward for those West Germans who went to East Germany, the "bush", after 1989 to build up the state administration there; sometimes this was paid for managers in the private industry, too).

There are two theses:

- 1) The early transformation period required a strong and shared belief that the far-reaching political actions started made a good economic and social sense with regards to

the initial situation. Thus the construction of the GDR as an "sick society" served eastern as well as western definitions and postulations.

2) The diversifying interests between East and West as well as the wide-ranging process of de-industrialisation with all its problematic consequences led to a development of more elaborate and distinguishing metaphors such as "Buschzulage" that are not quite emphasizing the common beliefs but the separating elements.

## **2) Images of transformations**

The East German transformation generated quite a set of images to explain this almost unique historical event. The best known novel "Helden wie wir" (Heroes like us) by Thomas Brussig explained the unification metaphorically as a sexual act. Very popular were metaphors from the ship/boat/sea field, e.g. Jon Elster's (1998) book "Rebuilding the ship at sea". In our own empirical research in 140 enterprises from 1995-1997 we found dozens of examples by managers and works councils who analogous to this interpreted their experiences in this way:

- "We are all in one boat and if we have to drown we do it together".
- "We were afraid that your ship would sink".
- "We could sail around all cliffs."
- "We were the flagship of the combinat."
- "Since the privatisation the enterprise has more and more difficulties in continuing to swim."
- "We were thrown into the cold water and had to learn to swim"

Other metaphorical allusions to describe the beginning transformation came from engineering: "cold start" ("Kaltstart" Sinn/Sinn 1992), or from sports: "false start" ("Fehlstart", Hickel/Priewe 1994), depending – as described above – on the ideological background of the authors.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl promised the East Germans – and implicitly the West Germans, too – "blühende Landschaften" (flowering landscapes). These landscapes are only one kind of naturalisation phenomena. Kohl used other ones like the following two ones: The first in a television interview about the meeting with Gorbachev in summer 1989 at the Rhine, quoted by the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (1999/11/03: p. 48):

"My wife and Raissa Gorbachev were in the bungalow while we were sitting down on the wall. We were sitting there for many hours and for the first time we were discussing how to go on. It was summer 1989 and then came the quotation I told him: 'The river Rhine is running past this place. You can dam it up but this water will reach the ocean. And if the Germans want it – the unification will come whenever it is. And if you dam up the river it will destroy the banks. This was the first time he did not contradict."

The second in an interview with the newspaper Super-Illu (45/2005) on the occasion of the publication of his memoirs:

*Question:* The central thread of your book is that you have always stuck to the goal of the German unification even if you received mockery or demonization because of that. What made you believe so strongly in the unification?

*Kohl:* Let me answer this with an image used by my old friend Ronald Reagan to describe the unnatural (sic!) of the German partition: If you amputate limbs from a body the wound can heal and the body can continue to live, but it will not be the same as before. I was always convinced that the unification would come." (p. 26)

Apart from the naturalisation in this quotation there is an hierarchical aspect worth mentioning: the GDR is associated with the amputated part of the body while the FRG was identified with the body as such. The amputation metaphor was highly popular during the transformation process not only in Germany but also in other East European countries. One example by the well known Hungarian economist Janos Kornai referring to a pre-transformation status, too, though of course not with regards to a partition-unification-subject.:

"The population of Hungary suffers considerably as a result of current economic ills. It is the prime obligation of political organizations, parties, and all governmental institutions to alleviate people's misery. The rehabilitation of the economy entails serious sacrifices, but the sacrificial period should not drag on endlessly. If the only cure for a person is to cut off his leg, it is still more humane to perform a single amputation with the necessary anaesthesia than to schedule a long-lasting operation and cut a thin slice off every week or month. István Széchenyi, the great nineteenth century reform politician and one of the first Hungarian economists, used the metaphor of a tooth extraction in his volume Credit: "The tooth extractor or operator is cruel if he keeps

pulling slowly and faintly on account of senseless soft-heartedness, and performs his job with only minor cuts and for a long time'. (...) It is my firm belief that people would by far prefer to face a single, radical shock and the ensuing trauma if they were really convinced that the situation would improve as a result rather than to suffer the hopeless torture, the slow but steady economic deterioration and economic and social spasms we are undergoing" (Kornai 1990: 160f.)

### **3. The sick society – the naturalisation of the GDR**

#### **3.1 Patients everywhere: Is there a normality of sick nations?**

"Every group has its laws, taboos and diagnoses to distinguish between the 'fit' and the 'sick' ones. The concept of pathology as such is a borderline between the 'good' and the 'evil'. This explains the power of disease-imagery" (Gilman 1992: 17).

There is a long tradition of naming diseases after nations. The venereal disease syphilis for example is referred to by various nation-names: In England, Italy and Spain it was called the "French disease", in France the "Italian disease", in Germany people called it the "Polish disease", and in Poland the "German disease".

The other way round: naming nations as sick patients has a tradition, too. Some examples from the media:

- "In fact the 'English patient' has gone for a successful rehabilitation cure. Nevertheless the virus was not wiped out by Blair but by Margret Thatcher's bitter medicine" (Wirtschaftswoche, 2001/17/05: 42).
- Die Welt (1999/23/12) commenting on an Italian government crisis: "The old Italian disease is raging again."
- "German shareholders are worried about the question when the 'American disease' will claim the first victims in Germany, too"; article in Handelsblatt (2002/04/07: 8) about the "excessive greed of managers".
- A title in the Neue Züricher Zeitung (2001/03/05): "Yield and curse of the petroleum. Is Russia threatened by the 'Dutch disease'?"

Thus naming the GDR a "sick society" is in line with several other examples.

Nevertheless: none of these cases seems to be so widespread as the talk about East Germany before 1989. If one interprets Kohl's "flowering landscapes" as the leading

metaphor in the German transformation process this implies a good fit to the assumption of modernisation theory which in the first years after 1989 was one of the most popular scientific approaches to deal with the transformation processes. Its underlying teleological hypotheses went hand in hand with the assumption of the dynamics of the "fit-sick-contrast" which offers an interpretation for change from the old to the new as a teleological development from disease to cure.

In an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (1997/03/01) Peter Gauweiler wrote: "November, 9th 1989, when after the fall of the iron curtain the wall in the people's head fell, too. Suddenly even the smallest remainders of reason were sufficient to understand that more than a quarter of mankind was covered with a shroud." This represents a typical Western interpretation of the pre-1989 society of the GDR. It is not by chance that the author (member of the conservative Bavarian CSU) uses a passive construction to describe the processes of change that led to the destruction of the wall. The hegemonic East German variant would stress the active aspects, the role of the actors in this process much more – and if death plays a role it was merely in the form of a projection like this works council's statement: "Everybody knew that this system was not capable of surviving". Nevertheless it does not mean that Gauweiler intends to ignore the important role of the East German opposition – instead he was looking for the strongest metaphor (shroud equals death) for a description of the GDR.

In general the East German actors at the company level we interviewed chose less drastic descriptions for the description of the pre-1989 society, this manager as an example for many cases: "It was a different form of socialising that many are missing now: the humanity among each other. But again this was socialising in the form of a close association of sufferings."

The metaphorical interpretation of the GDR as a sick society was one of the central headlines for the privatisation process from 1990 to 1995. The early Treuhand-CEO (The Treuhand was the administrative unit created for managing the privatisation of the former socialist companies by either selling them on the market for corporate control or by closing them down) Rohwedder followed the slogan that Margret Thatcher had had the best strategy for transforming a sick patient into a fit nation (see: Köhler 1994). In an interview with the newspaper *Die Welt* (1991/02/01:7ff.) he sketched his credo: "It is hardly believable that these enterprises are in a spasmodic struggle for life now already

since half a year. (...) This makes me say that – if the fever is sweat out in the next nine months – we have reached a turning point.. (...) Now the Red Cross is in Berlin (the head office of the Treuhand was in Berlin, UB), helping, healing wounds, building up, slowly pulling away the patient's crutches, watching him walking on his own, gaining strength and leading a normal life. Then the helpers discreetly withdraw and observe with satisfaction how everything takes its healthy and good course."

In an interview with *Der Spiegel* some weeks (1991/28/01) later he adds: "If you consider that the GDR partly collapsed because of its rotten economic fundamentals then you cannot expect the Kombinate and firms to be in an excellent shape. The large number of shaky enterprises forms the picture of a national economy deeply sick and ruined. (...) The Treuhand wants to save as many firms as possible from death."

Almost a decade later this imagery is still present. In an interview with the *tageszeitung* (1999/20/11: 9) the CEO of the Treuhand successor-organization (BvS) is asked: "As the BvS-CEO do you feel more like the gravedigger of the GDR-economy or like a nurse who saved what could be saved in the intensive care unit?" The CEO of course chose the second alternative.

### 3.2 To live and let die – disease imagery and the transformation of the enterprises

Structure follows strategy – this famous finding by Alfred Chandler (1995 (1962)) is not only true of normality but also of times of changes like the East German transformation. Nevertheless there was no historical precedence and especially in the beginning this process was "characterised by improvisation and simplification of problems representing a response to the crisis-ridden situated conditions" (Lehmbruch 1995: 25f.). The actors at the company level required a strategy and used simplification as a method to gain a guidance for their actions. The sick-fit-imagery was an approach obviously offering all the necessary functions. It created a path and – as could be shown in the transformation research a respective path dependency. "Organisational ideologies focus members' perceptions on just a few aspects of reality, and members' confidence in their biased perceptions greatly exceeds what seems justified. Organisational processes systematically reduce, rather than exploit, the multitude perceptions that numerous people could have brought in" (Brunsson 1982: 42).



Following this logic managers and works councils in the East German enterprises extraordinary often fell back on a general body imagery to explain the function of the former socialist enterprises (VEB): "The whole firm was structured like a body. There was this large brain-like administration and a branching out of arteries and veins like in a human body which of course made crosswise communication a problem."

This perspective virtually suggests a view on the firm's problem as diseases, the most common one (that could be found in nearly 40% of our cases) is the interpretation of the bloated bureaucracy as a hydrocephalus (Wasserkopf): "We all knew that when market economy would come, our hydrocephalus would be too big and had to be removed. (...) We had to dismiss them to survive." The amputation logic (even though paradox with the head as an organ runs all the way through many interviews: "Naturally (sic!) this amputation cannot be free of pain when an enterprise concentrates on its core competencies."

A similar problem definition is the overweight-metaphor and its solution a starvation cure to get rid of unnecessary fat and flab:

- "The new structure units were slimmed."
- "Our main task was to make the core lean to improve the attractiveness to find an investor."
- "In the past we simply could not understand how lean we would have to become to be efficient. We thought we could survive with 350 employees."
- "Being whittled down (Gesundschumpfen) is the best way to find a buyer. The Treuhand wanted to dismiss more and more employees since paring down was the best strategy"

Managers from West Germany were explained as necessary blood transfusion (and many of them supported this view):

- "New employments were made externally since we needed fresh blood in our company. There are these key functions where you need Western managers."
- "We needed fresh blood very badly – especially with regards to managers that were free from GDR behaviour patterns."

The cancer-metaphor could be found in about 10% of the cases. On the one hand it is a very drastic variation of the disease-imagery (and it is closer to the reality perceived

than the hydrocephalus-image) and on the other hand it withholds any form of guilt (this is an aspect that was explained in great detail by Susan Sontag 1981):

- "The number of employees was a real problem. It was the cancer of our economy that we kept the administrative units occupied each other"
- "In 1990 the company was sliced into quite a number of small units. Some unnecessary divisions were cut out like ulcers of cancer."

With the key metaphor of the flowering landscapes and the acceptance of naturalisation with firm problem elements of Darwinism arrived on the scene as social Darwinism with the process of "natural selection" and the "survival of the fittest" which could be found in the interviews frequently: "Only the strongest will survive!" This interpretation marks a significant break with the former (pre-1989) attitude of association within the socialist companies: "Our only survivability was to find someone to buy the fittest parts of our firm and to supply us with work like an infusion".

The sick-fit-metaphor was popular among the company actors (at least among those who "survived" the far-reaching dismissals) for several reasons.

(1) First it enabled the East German actors (works councils and managers) to make a new start with an interpretation that on the one hand gave them the chance to distance from problematic developments in the past (independent from the question what were their contributions to this situation) and to maintain an intact identity and thus construct a personal and subjective continuity beyond the changes induced in 1989.

(2) Second this imagery opened a path for the surviving parts of the firms: the aim was clear and the methods were offered: the best medicine (even if it is a shock-therapy) leads to new health. Since diseases can be cured this imagery offered an attractive chance for East Germans to distance from the past and to establish a perspective for the future.

(3) Third the sick-fit-metaphor declares the transformation process on the company level a non-political event since it only performs "what is demanded by nature". The explicit biologist approach de-politicises a social process and thus exculpates the responsible political and company actors. Moreover its disarming simplicity keeps the public (media and intra-corporate) from differentiation that might have led to alternative

political conclusions and approaches whereas the sick-fit-naturalisation lends the actors using it a higher authority and suggests: "No questions, no alternatives."

(4) Forth – and of special importance in this context – this imagery is not restricted to West or East Germans: it is a common metaphor to explain a complex social process. It offers both sides an obvious explanation of the past and a clear path to the future. But most of all: for those remaining from the East and those joining them from the West it creates a harmonic platform in insecure times stressing common interests, close association and companionship.

After the complete transfer of institutions to East Germany (Offe 1994) there has been wide public agreement on the far-reaching de-legitimation of the old culture. Similar to what Kulke (2006) has recently stated for the remaining managers in the privatised enterprises we could state that especially in the first years after the German unification the vast majority of the "survivors" seems to have largely assimilated to the structures, cultures and discourses (i.e. metaphors) transferred. This exchange deal comprised secure jobs and (by this) social integration in response to the acceptance of submission to the rules of the West. This challenge was supported by a cultural climate in society that made the task of necessary changes in attitudes easier: with the exception of a minority the old culture of the East had hardly any powerful advocate in the West nor in the East heading for the unification. In addition in the last 15 years there have been some explicit and implicit warnings by West German politicians that with the gaining of strength of the old Eastern forces (often identified with the socialist PDS, the successor of the former SED) the danger of losing support from the public purse might increase. But in many cases the sense of community or even solidarity did not last very long. With the ongoing transformation process other metaphors pushed their way to the front, reflecting much more the conflicting aspects of the process.

#### ***4. East and West – totally different or not different at all: the "Buschzulage"***

While the "sick-society" metaphor represents a version of a common imagery the "Buschzulage" is a West German creation that is (in general) not shared by East

Germans though it represented – and still represents – a key stimulus in many East-West conversations.

#### 4.1. "Buschzulage" – Welcome to the colonies?

The German Wikipedia defines the term as follows: "'Buschzulage' is an (unofficial) word describing a special payment for civil servants from West Germany which was added to their salary as an incentive while they were working in East Germany. It was first tolerated by almost everyone but very quickly it got people's blood up. The word initially used as a joke turned into an abuse, a swear word, soon.

'Busch' represents the infrastructure – and partly a depressing area (like the Australian bush), with the additional payment as a compensation for the volunteers to go to this place and work there. But with 'Busch' East Germany was meant in concreto. The reason for the annoyance at that was on the one hand the degradation of the East and its inhabitants (the 'Bush' stands for a minor degree of civilisation) and on the other hand the discrimination against by the better salary that could (by definitions) only be granted to West Germans. (...)" (Encyclopaedia Wikipedia 2005/2006, page 126134: Buschzulage).

In a look back the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (1997/11/25)<sup>3</sup> resumes: "There was a time of great solidarity with the East. When the wall came down even the smallest organization in the West sent fax machines, answering machines or photocopiers to the brothers and sisters beyond ("drüben"). Thousands of 'construction helpers' ("Aufbauhelfer") made their way to Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Brandenburg, Thüringen and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, set on fire by the sense of a new era about to dawn and provided with the so-called Buschzulage".

Even two years before the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, (1995/01/02) commented on the decision of the 'taboo word of the year' ("Unwort des Jahres"): "Third came expressions that according to the jury prove that the people in East Germany are still suffering degradation by words like 'dark Germany' ("Dunkeldeutschland") or the ironic naming of incentive payments like 'Buschzulage', 'disgust incentive' ("Ekelzulage") or 'banana money' ("Bananengeld")."

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<sup>3</sup> This research relies on the analysis of two large data banks (faz-data base: data-acquisition: 02/03 2007; lexis-nexis: 03/2006 and 03/2007).

In a letter to the editor, a reader of the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (1994/04/10) complains about the choice of words:

"Hurtful language. (...) The tense relationship between the East and West Germans may have many causes. On the one hand West Germans lacking sensibility wound the East German souls with sloppy slogans like "Buschzulage". To my amazement the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* uses this expression, too. The respect for the people in East Germany should demand more careful dealing with the language. Quotation marks do not excuse anything. Dr. Jürgen Harbich"

The same argument could be found in several newspaper comments like in "die tageszeitung" (1995/12/07) that expanded the argument to a general criticism of indifferent use of language: "It is not unusual that a song like 'Ten little negros' ("Zehn kleine Negerlein") can enter the charts and is withdrawn only after loud protests by EMI Electrola or that a magazine called people from former GDR the 'new negros' ("neue Neger") are no exceptions but examples of a new carelessness, similar to a liberal newspaper which openly wrote 'Buschzulage'".

Overall there was a remarkable relief in the discourse when in December 1994 the (first) Buschzulage came to an end like in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (1994/12/23): Form January, 1<sup>st</sup>, the public administration in East Germany is no longer a jungle (sic!). The Buschzulage incentive for construction helpers is not to be continued. About 4000 employees and civil servants received this bonus lately."

Metaphors founding hierarchies and subordination are not that rare in the East German transformation process as one might guess after the strong shared belief about the "sick past". Again there is a strong correspondence with experience collected and the respective world view, too: It makes a big difference if one interprets the events happening in 1989/90 as a natural process of healing and of "growing together" (Former chancellor Willy Brandt coined the saying: "Now grows together what belongs together" – "Jetzt wächst zusammen, was zusammen gehört") or as a process of colonisation with West German intruders and East German victims.

This complex has another underlying dimension: the West-East paternalism. The metaphor "Buschzulage" is part of this dispositive; it represents a pejorative version of paternalism while there are positive connotations and terms used by East Germans, too.

Paternalism is thus no phenomenon confined only to West Germans – it can express mutual expectations as well as prejudice.

One could make a distinction between four fields: Terms with positive and pejorative connotations used by East or West Germans<sup>4</sup>.

Version of <b>paternalism</b>	positive connotation	pejorative connotation
used by West Germans	A	B
used by East Germans	C	D

**A: "Brothers and sisters in the East" ("Brüder und Schwestern im Osten").**

This is an old image of family usually used by West Germans to express their "natural relationship" with the East Germans. The image dates back to the time long before 1989 but was still prevalent in the 1990s. Though it uses the "brothers and sisters"-term and thus claims the subjects to be of equal importance it almost always implied the East Germans to be the little brothers and sisters that needed help (by sending them packages before 1989 and "healing" their economy after 1989).

**B: "Buschzulage"**

see below

**C: "Helmut, take our hand and lead us to economy wonderland" ("Helmut nimm uns an die Hand - führ' uns ins Wirtschaftswunderland")**

"With the wonderland argument the West was eased and the East Germans should be motivated – though they knew the economy wonderland only by hearsay. Public opinion polls in the area of Leipzig revealed that 61% of the interviewees expected an 'economy wonderland East Germany'. So those GDR-demonstrators who begged 'Helmut, take our hand and lead us to economy wonderland' were not the exception but the majority" (Wochenzeitung Freitag, 17.06.2005). Thus this paternalistic image was an expression of voluntary self-subjection and perhaps a answer to an approach in 1989/90 to find an independent East German "Third way" which was initially promoted by intellectuals (analogous to the famous change from "We are *the people*" to "We are *one nation*" slogans: "Wir sind *das Volk*" – "Wir sind *ein Volk*").

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<sup>4</sup> Of course the table can only give a rough overview and has several presuppositions like that there is still a meaningful difference between East and West Germans as well as between a positive and a negative connotation of paternalism.

#### **D: "Better-Wessi" ("Besserwessis")**

The "Better-Wessi" ("Besser-Wessi") imagery describes a deep East German discontent arising in the early 1990s. It is rooted in the method of complete institutional and wide-ranging elite transfer from the West to the East based on the belief of a malfunctioning framework of the East German society (in so far: the shared imagery of the "sick society" has played a role). In the slipstream of this process many East Germans had to cope with a perceived de-legitimisation of their biography, their knowledge, experience and the pillars of their identity. Moreover: They often regarded the "Wessis"<sup>5</sup> now taking up their hierarchical positions as not necessarily more competent, or precisely: the "Better-Wessi" term reflects an interpretation of the discrepancy between feigned competence and the very demanding claims out of proportion to it.

#### **4.2. The second wave of "Buschzulagen" in the media**

The "Buschzulage" imagery faced two waves in the East German transformation so far. The first starting in 1990/91 where "Buschzulage" was a general phenomenon for West Germans going to the East and the second in 2004 in the course of reorganization the German welfare state, the so-called Hartz-reforms when West German former Telekom-employees (still with the status of permanent civil servants: "Beamte") were granted a so called "quick decision bonus" ("Schnellentscheiderprämie") which was publicly renamed to "Buschzulage" within days.

The government's authorized representative for East Germany, then, Stolpe expressed his fears in an interview with "Welt am Sonntag" (August 15th, 2004):

"What do the people read in the newspapers everyday ? The 'Reconstruction East' ("Aufbau Ost") has failed. Mass migration of the young to the West. Long-term unemployment without hope for improvement. And now the Buschzulage and Hartz IV on top of all this. This is an explosive concoction."

Similar in a report of Stuttgarter Zeitung (August 11th, 2004): "Their words are furious: 'They want to trip us and kick away our legs!' Hofmann gets angry long before the demonstration starts. "They are greedy without end. This is unbelievable: 5000 euros Buschzulage." Hofmann reminds of plans to send civil servants without jobs from the west for the realisation of Hartz IV and to pay them a bonus for this. "They could not have insulted us worse. And therefore the propensity to violence, too!"

The special background of Buschzulage 2004/2005 is the implementation of welfare decrease in Germany which meant a disappointment for many "economy wonderland" illusions in general and a specific incompatibility with a typical East German orientation towards equality postulations (Engler 2004).

An exemplary primary text shows the variety of arguments:

Stuttgarter Zeitung, Letter to the editor, 2004/03/08: "Offender and executor.

This arrow hits (again once) right into the hearts of the East Germans! In the beginning of the nineties West Germans invented the term 'Buschzulage' when thousands of unemployed and, often, also third-class 'development aid workers' were sent to cover the East with the framework of freedom and democracy. The incentives were created at that time to make these people's start financially more sweet – since for many West Germans the East lay geographically, politically and with regards to infrastructure near the Ural.

Now Mr. Clement comes with the reform package (...) Hartz IV, and sends in complete political tactlessness idle West German civil servants as 'preachers' to the East. This may be a pragmatic solution, but it is not clever at all. (...) Try to put yourself in the East German's position: There is e.g. an unemployed 50-year-old engineer who has had a qualified working life. A (currently jobless) West German civil servant – "fuelled" with 5000 euros – tries to give him an introduction to the 16-sided form for 'unemployment benefit II' ("Arbeitslosengeld II"). This smells strongly like 'offender and executor!' It is totally wrong to name these emotional outburst a political propaganda. 15 years after the unification West German politicians (...) still prove to be completely incompetent with regards to the emotional problems of the East. Hellmuth Schwenk, Friolzheim"

Several newspaper comments focused on the metaphor's life of its own in this second wave of Buschzulage, leading to a paralysis in the public debates:

"Dangerous worlds. It was a short, emotional debate. When the word 'Buschzulage' was finally mentioned there was no space left for rational arguments since it represents paternalism. One word sufficed to end the necessary discussion about an unconventional idea abruptly. One word sufficed to stage the distribution fight along a

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<sup>5</sup> For an overview of the emergence of the Ossi-Wessi topic see Reiher (1996).



deep ditch in the society. The East West conflict lives." Frankfurter Rundschau (2004/07/26)

The central arguments in this debate are:

- the implicit assumption that more than one and a half decade after the unification the East Germans are still not able to cope with the execution of normal administrative machinery
- the different payment of East and West Germans in general
- the broken promise of economy wonderland and instead the reduction of the welfare state subsidies
- the idea that though people in East Germany may have accepted to perform a high flexibility on the labour market well-paid West German civil servants are still given a preferential treatment

#### 4.3 Developing country, trouble spot, colony

The strongest impact of the Buschzulage-metaphor however was provoked by its implicit allusions to the developing country/colonisation context. There has been a discourse in the politics of signification since 1990 if the unification could be assessed as a process among equals or as the strong West swallowing up the East. The positions in this discourse ranged from 're-unification' ("Wiedervereinigung" – the somewhat official position) to 'addition' ("Anschluss" with sarcastic reference to the 1938 "Anschluss" of Austria to the German Reich).

Obviously there are three degrees of escalation in the Buschzulage imagery referring to the aspect of colonisation/developing country – depending on the connotations they evoke:

1. the "developing country" connotation refers to an economic (and perhaps social, political) backwardness; here the aim is to help and support the underdeveloped
2. the "trouble spot"-connotation provokes associations that the "object" requires observation and – if necessary: controlling measures or punishment
3. the "colony"-connotation: is a combination of 1) and 2); it implies a clear and strong hierarchical subordination of the "object"

An article published in 2000 (die tageszeitung, August 25th, 2000) between the two waves of Buschzulage-debates the author explores the "developing country"-comparison in detail:

With regards to the re-construction of the East the large parties repeat the basic mistakes of the foreign aid politics: The projects do not fit to the needs of the people. The region of East Germany is an intra-German developing country. (...) The current program for developing the East German economy might be the most expensive program with the least effect worldwide.

(...) The currency union in 1990 was supposed to create a merger among equals. But actually the economic and political co-operation was like in the classical case of a third world aid program. A highly developed helps an underdeveloped country with the construction – in the beginning even with a 'Buschzulage'.

(...) Like in many developing countries the East Germans have formed an extremely ambiguous attitude towards the model society as a consequence of their opposition. Certainly the consumer norms and habits are copied and popular mass culture is adapted. But at the same time antipathies against the political systems, against important representatives or against individual 'Wessis' are developed.

Like in developing countries in the course of the co-operation there is 'brain drain' and a migration of the young and economically active.

Unlike the people from Poland and Czechia the East Germans could basically not decide their way on their own. Instead from one day to the next they had to turn their lives inside out according to an imported system. Every mistake is obvious and public because of the concurrence or even supervision by consultants, investors or colleagues from West Germany. There is no trial-and-error-period and even worse: There is a permanent situation of patronizing even if it is not meant that way by the individual 'Wessi'."

Though perhaps the individual Wessi does not intend to produce patronizing situations like these the collective action of Wessis in East Germany seems to produce impressions of exclusion that start with language and end with material inequality; the Berliner Kurier (2004/14/07) expresses this in one shot headline: "More Buschzulagen for West civil servants sent to the zone?" ("Weitere Buschzulagen für die West-Beamten im Zoneneinsatz?") – with "Buschzulage" expressing the material side and "Zoneneinsatz" the symbolic language side. There is hardly one East German who would use the term "Zone" to describe the Eastern part of Germany. "Zone" is a cold war expression, a short form of 'zone occupied by soviets' ("Sowjetisch besetzte Zone")

which was at that time (until the early 1970s) used by conservatives (and sometimes social democrats, too) to point out that the GDR is not a full state but only a dependent zone. Parallel for quite a period of time the Hallstein doctrine was a guide for the West German foreign policy stating that it is considered an unfriendly act (*acte peu amical*) if another state establishes diplomatic relationships with the GDR (which was the in many West German newspapers still written in quotation marks to express distance: "GDR"). So the nowadays use of "Zone" – if not meant explicitly ironic – transports associations of dependence and subordination and can thus cultivate exclusion and a growing divide between East and West Germany as the following text resumes (Die Welt, 2004/24/07):: "Buschzulage, second episode! The furious exclamation in East Germany because of the planned bonus reveals more than we would like. The controversy was inflamed by the use of the old emotive word: Buschzulage. More than fifteen years after the fall of the wall (...) there is still the old touchiness and yes: it has even increased. 'The West and the East Germans are distancing from each other' Elisabeth Noelle laconically states. There is a growing number of East Germans who doubt that there will ever be a successful growing together of the two parts."

The 'trouble spot' ("Krisengebiet") imagery on the other hand stresses the crisis interpretation of the East German development. It can be integrated into the Buschzulage-metaphor like in the following example (Die Welt, 2004/27/08):

"All the parties in the East are outraged at this 'Buschzulage'. There it is again, the cliché of the trouble spot ("Krisengebiet"), where West Germans cannot be expected to work without a special bonus."

Or it can suggest (ironically) more than only difficulties but perhaps "real trouble" in the sense of danger like in this comment (Die Welt, 2004/06/08):

"Again we are facing the return of the year 1989. 'We are the people' we here in the Eastern trouble spots ("nahöstliche Unruhegebiete") while German civil servants arm ("rüsten") themselves for their UN mission ("Blauhelmeinsatz") and ask nothing but a modest Buschzulage for this."

While this and the following text can be interpreted as ironical reflections of outrage they still seem to depict a relevant detail of the debate. This next cutting (Tages-Anzeiger, 2004/06/08) takes up the topic and turns it to the colonisation context: "And then there is the news that West German civil servants receive a Buschzulage if they travel to the

Eastern 'colonies' to spy on East German unemployed". Here the imagery comes back to the early post-Wende metaphor like in "Compensation for Go-East-pioneers" (Der Spiegel 14/1991).

Buschzulage in this context reflects the colonisation claim ironically from the position of the powerful. It can be read as an unofficial admittance that there might be some truth in the colonisation idea with the conclusion that the colonising actor must be compensated<sup>6</sup>. At the same time the effects of this logic on East Germans are still denied – an interpretation that again reflects the different power positions in the process – in the politics of signification as well as in politics as such.

When it comes to serious, non-ironical statements the imagery of the Eastern colonies is used especially by East Germans. In this first example (Frankfurter Rundschau, 2004/06/08) the head of the PDS (successor of the SED) Bisky is asked:

"Q: Your party fellow Peter Porsch spoke about a 'new colonialism' with regards to the West German civil servants who should be employed in the East. Is the East a West German colony?"

A: Let me express it this way: There are features of a colonisation here, yes.

(...)

After the joining the West the East Germans were treated like joiners ("Beigetretene"). West German conditions were popped on their heads whatever the consequences might be – with a fatal politics of de-industrialisation by the Treuhandanstalt.. The political conviction 'The East like the West' has failed."

The impression that the East might be a kind of colony is not restricted to the political sphere, but can also be found in primary texts like letters to the editors. The following report by Associated Press Worldstream (2004/22/07) develops a sophisticated argument by comparing the two waves of Buschzulage:

"The bonus mocked as Buschzulage perhaps made a sense then. One needed quite an art of persuasion to make the rotten buildings look interesting, and to make someone forget the lack of restaurants and possibilities of leisure time activities. Apart from that the construction helpers were accepted in many parts of the public administration, if only they did not behave like 'Besser-Wessis' or like 'DiMiDos' (short form of

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<sup>6</sup> Kramer (1996) has explored that in retrospect the term "Buschzulage" has always implied "arrogance" of the colonizers towards the colonized.

DienstagMittwochDonnerstag, TuesdayWednesdayThursday) who arrive on Tuesday and leave on Thursday back home.

(...) In the fifteen years since the unification the people from Rügen to Plauen and from Eisenach to Frankfurt/Oder have regained a piece of an own identity and self-confidence. It did not go down well with the East Germans that now again 'helpers' from the West were supposed to be necessary to solve a problem in the East. Peter Finstermeier, a computer expert from Leipzig, was outraged when he told 'Leipziger Volkszeitung': 'Bavaria with the lowest unemployment rate sends people to Leipzig with one of the highest unemployment rates. This proves again: We are a colony of the West.'

The "Association for the German language" ("Gesellschaft für Deutsche Sprache", <http://www.gfds.de/index.php?id=148>) draws the attention to the historical roots of the term and states that initially "Buschzulage" was considered for civil servants of the German emperor who were sent to the African colonies. So on the one hand it is plausible to associate "Buschzulage" closely to the colonization image like in this passage of the Tagesspiegel (23/07/2004): "The term 'Buschzulage' suggests that civil servants from the West are sent to the bush like Africa-soldiers and therefore needed a compensation". But on the other hand and with regards to the number of findings the colonisation imagery obviously did not enter the official media discourse as a legitimate term – it is hardly used and in these cases often with quotation marks indicating the author's distance whereas the "Buschzulage"-term as a weaker version has obviously entered the everyday language. It seems to represent an implicit discursive adaptation of hierarchical classifications. This image has got material and symbolic implications. On the one hand it makes the different wages/incentives for similar jobs a topic of discussion. On the other hand it reflects the varying chances of access to positions in companies or in society in general with West Germans given preference in many cases and East Germans being "incapacitated" or located by West Germans.

### **5. From "reconstruction East" to "de-construction West"?**

Once again: If one interprets Kohl's "flowering landscapes" as the leading metaphor in the German transformation process it is only a question of time that the power of explanation of this metaphor collides with the experience the people collect. This can be

either in cases where people consider the economic de-industrialization in the East and the money transfer to the "Neue Bundesländer" as a failure and not as a success story like on the cover and the related story in the Spiegel example (15/2004) below stating: "1250 milliard Euros. What for? How the reconstruction East became a deconstruction West"



Or by interpreting the money transfer to the East as a reason for the fall of the West as in this example (Bild-Zeitung, 01/04/2007): "Politicians demand a fairer distribution. Now it's turn for the West! 250 milliards were pumped into the reconstruction East".



The basic metaphor that formerly united the discourse is now questioned by (West-) media like the Bild-Zeitung that formerly supported the unification process very strong. The text says: "More than sixteen years after the unification one cannot speak anymore of the poor East and the rich West Germany. The East has caught up and often even overtaken. And while many landscapes in the East are flowering, in the West streets and schools, theatres and barracks go to rack and ruin since there were hardly some investments in the 90s here. So this demand by politicians and mayors is long overdue: Now it's turn for the West! Harald Fichtner, mayor of the Bavarian city Hof complains: 'The bulk of the people has no understanding for the fact that we cannot finance our city's budget but are obliged at the same time to finance the East with the solidarity surtax'. Fichtner's gallows humour: 'Here we have a joke: A father from Saxonia tells his son: 'Come one, let's go to North Bavaria to see how the streets formerly looked here in the East.'"

### **6. Different or not?**

Hopfer (1996) has pointed out that an identical nature of language in East and West Germany has for a long time been taken for granted and as a consequence of this the differences have been underestimated. This text has depicted several examples that the East German transformation has created a multitude of metaphors giving evidence for both sides of this assumption. Most East and West Germans had an imagery of the "sick

society GDR" in common which helped them with a scheme to interpret the past without de-legitimizing the actors at the company level too much: a disease could be cured within the transformation period – that was the main promise of this imagery. And a disease meant that not the "body" as such was dysfunctional and that – though there might be some actors to blame – the whole process was still supposed to be part of a "natural normality" with alternating states of health and disease.

Apart from the shared beliefs and with time passing by several influential metaphors grew that stressed the distance and differences between the two parts. These processes did not take place in a chronological sequence, but were overlapping and still are. Sense making/production –as it was discussed above – is an effect of discursive interaction and thus reflects differences of power. This applies to the East German case, too. The less powerful situation of the East German position put these actors generally at a disadvantage or even discriminated them against as in the case of "Buschzulage" and the colonisation-image which led to perceptions of exclusion and being misunderstood (vgl. auch Gärtner/Kasek 1995).

To actually quantify and qualify the social meaning of the metaphors in the East-West-discourse it would require a complete research project, partly to gain a systematic overview of the material in the media (in general most electronic data banks cover a period beginning from 1993), partly to have genuine interviews with people from East and West Germany focussing the imagery of the transformation. Without more specific data it is hardly possible to resume whether there is a general and uniform tendency. Thus there are variations of all four kinds that can be discovered in the material lying on the desk, i.e. East Germans and West Germans stressing the identity or the difference version – depending on the specific context and the experience.

	East	West
identity	1	2
difference	3	4

Moreover none of these positions can be found as an ideal type. Instead one can expect mitigating or extenuating statements that depend on the genuine context and reflect the compromised relation with regards to the specific demands of the roles, political



opinions and experiences involved. So e.g. from an East German perspective one could receive ironic assessments like:

- 1) East and West Germans are not different at all – especially the East Germans.
- 3) East and West Germans are totally different – especially the West Germans.

A decade ago Kramer (1996) observed a new "language wall" expressed in terms like "Buschzulage". Perhaps it is this irony that once tears down this wall.

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## **Abstract**

This text explores the history and conditions of origins of two very popular metaphor-fads in the context of the German transformation process. Moreover it analyses the impact of the changing contexts on the meaning of metaphors.

Two theses are illuminated:

1) The early transformation period required a strong and shared believe that the far-reaching political actions started made a good economic and social sense with regards to the initial situation. Thus the discursive construction of the GDR as an "sick society" served eastern as well as western definitions and postulations.

2) The diversifying interests between East and West as well as the wide-ranging process of de-industrialisation with all its problematic consequences led to a development of more elaborate and distinguishing metaphors such as "Buschzulage" that are not quite emphasizing the common beliefs but the separating elements.

The research is carried out by an analysis of data banks containing nationwide German newspapers.

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### Impressum

#### WORKING PAPERS: ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY JENA

ISSN 1864-7588

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Institut für Soziologie, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena  
Postanschrift: D-07737 Jena, Besucheranschrift: Carl-Zeiss-Str. 2, D-07743 Jena  
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