

Since the first preparatory meeting on the subject in April 2017, with this text (in evolving versions) a call for the establishment of an Academy of Sociology was made. Over 100 sociologists and some social scientists from other subjects supported the call.

## Call for the Establishment of an Academy of Sociology

*(translated from German)*

### **Challenges of societal developments**

A new phase of societal developments and upheavals is being observed worldwide, including the unforeseen phenomena of particularization and division, which were largely believed to be overcome. This accelerated change can be seen in many areas: new technologies and digitalization are increasingly changing not only the world of work, but also, for example, transport systems, energy supplies, healthcare, leisure activities, education, and both the shape and content of our everyday lives. At the same time, the age structure of the population, patterns of employment and family life are changing rapidly, with far-reaching consequences; for example for social security systems. Income inequality, and even more so, wealth inequality, has grown in many societies. Cross-border migration, transnational relations, and cultural heterogeneity are becoming the norm through globalization and international interdependencies. At the same time, these are triggering counter-movements that, for example are manifesting themselves in the form of populist social movements. Armed conflicts, autocratic regimes and underdevelopment in many parts of the world, as well as climatic changes, are intensifying the causes of flight. This, in turn, is leading wealthy target countries of migration to intensify their integration efforts, but also has provoked counter-reactions and new divisions. All of this requires enormous adjustments on the part of social institutions. Many of the consequences of this rapid social, technological and demographic change are yet unknown. Will increasing globalization and digitization destroy more jobs than they create, deepen the division of societies and promote populist politics? Will social media, which we once believed would have enabled new forms of participatory democracy, actually significantly weaken democracies? Will new technologies, prosperity gains, education, and medical progress increase inequalities, or improve the quality of life of a growing number of people? Social, political and technological changes have always had unintended side effects, and leading often to more questions than answers about the consequences of such processes.

### **Goals of the Academy**

Many areas of public life, politics and science are impacted by these developments, and require reliable information and practical recommendations for the (re) design of social institutions.

Scientific knowledge and technical innovations increase a country's prosperity, but the establishment and reform of institutions, the creation of sustainable social organization, and ultimately the enabling of social cooperation and conflict resolution are no less important. Sociological science has always set itself the goal of obtaining well-considered and well-founded answers to pressing questions on the consequences of technological change and social upheaval, with the help of hypotheses derived from theories, systematically collected data and empirical methods appropriate to the respective problem. Sociology is a 'real science' (*Realwissenschaft*) whose highest guiding principle is to subject descriptive statements, hypotheses and results - including those from its own research - to careful examination, and to disclose methodological assumptions, as well as reflect self-critically if answers are not clear or (still) unknown. In basic research, sociological science has always developed theories and hypotheses about social action and social institutions in cooperation with its neighbouring disciplines, but also translates them into practical applications and carries out targeted impact analyses.

In view of the usually high expenditure and the risk of undesirable side effects, society at large and politics depend on the descriptions being correct, the explanations being valid and the hoped-for effects – so far as it is possible to estimate – actually existing. In this context, the members of the Academy of Sociology seek to contribute to gaining a more precise and reliable understanding of the processes of social change, and to gaining theoretically precise and empirically scrutinized knowledge of societal processes. At a time when populist movements, ideas of reality as merely “constructed”, and “alternative facts” are gaining ground, it is all the more necessary to strive for fact-based, verifiable, and then practically usable knowledge in the tradition of scientific education.

### **Foundations are systematic scientific methods**

In sociology and other social science disciplines, methods of controlled data collection and analysis have continuously been developing and improving. Sociology today has a large inventory of modern collection and analysis methods. Progress has been made, for example, in the area of the systematic collection of social macro indicators, survey research, and the methodology of causal analyses using panel data and experimental procedures. Methodologically controlled, qualitative case analyses are also part of the well-developed repertoire of sociological analysis. For the analysis of large amounts of digital data and texts ("big data"), the investigation of spatial data in so-called geo-information systems, and in the context of formal analysis and modelling, for example for the investigation of social networks or social interactions (simulation models, behaviour-oriented game theory), new methods have been developed or existing techniques refined. Digitization produces huge amounts of data. For their adequate evaluation, new processes and IT knowledge are required, but also growing sensitivity to research-ethical and data protection issues. Digital technologies have changed the world in just a few years, and so have the demands on social research. They create tremendous potential for new opportunities for developing and testing sociological theories and hypotheses.

### **The Academy's demands from sociological research and teaching**

In view of the societal questions to be clarified and in light of the potential unlocked by new analytical tools and methods, scientific sociology based on methodological standards requires special support and strengthening. In research, this applies to theory-based primary research, as

well as complex secondary analyses, for example with the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) or the European Social Survey (ESS). It concerns the collection and evaluation of microdata as well as that of macro indicators, the collection and evaluation of quantitative, as well as qualitative data. In the curricula, increased knowledge of systematic and stringent theory construction, modern empirical methods and basic scientific criteria must be taken into account in teaching. Finally, sociology should focus more on interdisciplinarity and contact and exchange with neighbouring sciences such as (empirical) political science, (social) and personality psychology, economics and anthropology, or should also pay attention to recent developments outside of its narrow field of work, in areas such as neuroscience and computer science, behavioural biology or scientific theory.

Methodological accuracy, the empirical verification of descriptive statements, hypotheses and theories, as well as the further development of existing knowledge through replication are prerequisites for sciences that aim to generate cumulative knowledge. From this point of view, the Academy of Sociology and its members are committed to scientific sociology based on clear methodological standards. These stipulate that:

- Sociological research is based on clearly and precisely formulated theories. Whether these theories relate to the social macro level, the meso level of social institutions or the individual or household level depends on the research question.
- Sociological research is based on the use of controlled empirical methods with which theoretical statements are confronted with social reality. All methods are deemed to be “controlled” if they are used by the researcher in a targeted manner and are intersubjectively understandable. It is irrelevant whether these methods are standardized ("quantitative") or non-standardized ("qualitative").
- The increased implementation and promotion of replications is not only desirable but necessary. The entire research process should also be presented clearly and transparently and be accessible for replication, thus requiring the (long-term) archiving of research data.
- The further development of modern data collection and evaluation methods, such as experimental designs, intervention studies, modern statistical methods for analysing causal effects, etc. should be promoted by using the great potential of longitudinal and international comparative surveys. This also includes making digitization fruitful, both when collecting data (using sensor devices, online surveys, etc.) and when linking and evaluating digitized, process-produced data and texts using computer science techniques. Especially for the more qualitatively oriented methods of text analysis, the latest developments in computational linguistics need to be noted and examined for their usability for sociological questions.
- Greater cooperation with neighbouring disciplines is necessary.
- Basic research must be improved, but also the use of the knowledge potential of sociology, the expansion and the stabilization of quality-controlled research data infrastructure, and controlled impact research for evidence-based policy advice.
- Training and further education must be improved, especially in the area of theory development, modelling and research methodology.

### **Members and tasks of the Academy**

The academy is aimed at all sociologists who are involved in research and teaching and is open to all sociological questions, orientations, working methods and priorities, provided that the fundamental goals are supported. It conducts congresses and workshops that set high scientific standards, and is also involved through its presence and active participation in corresponding

international conferences. Its members strive to publish their research results in internationally and nationally renowned journals and in books with publishers that guarantee quality control.

Members strive to continuously improve the quality of teaching, and to continuously adapt content to developments in their respective fields. The academy will also work in particular with scientific organizations, in particular with the German Research Foundation. It will promote exchange in sociological science, advance the education and networking of young academics (e.g. through concepts for graduate schools; best paper awards), make recommendations for teaching and further education, awaken interest in the subject among prospective students (e.g. by re-entering the "CHE ranking"), work towards evidence-based policy advice (e.g. through controlled impact research), promote exchange with non-university scientific research (e.g. MPIs, Leibniz Institutes, IAB, DJI), and establish and strengthen networking with the international community. The academy also endeavours to make the results of sociological science transparent and understandable to the public.