

Disability Research in German-speaking Countries

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Introductory Remarks

- my topic: critical disability research
- my focus: Germany
- the background: dominance of special education



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- **Introductory Remarks**
- **Looking back: The German Disability Rights Movement and its development**
- **Critical Disability Research in German-speaking Countries: Debates and Perspectives**
- **Conclusion**



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1933 – 1945: Compulsory Sterilization and “Euthanasia” during Nationalsocialism

Nazi Propaganda



At least 300,000, and perhaps even 400,000 people became victims of compulsory sterilization.

About 300,000 disabled people were killed in the course of the euthanasia program.

The German Disability Rights Movement: its beginning

- 1950s organisations of war veterans
- late 1950s parents' associations
- late 1960s leisure oriented „clubs“ for disabled & nondisabled youths
- 1978 first „Cripples' Group“ with an explicitly political approach



Rallye against the „Frankfurt Judgement“ (1980)

International Year of the Disabled (1981) as „midwife“ for the German disability movement

- Disability activists protest against „disablement“
 - Public protest at the official opening session
 - „Cripples' Tribunal“ – conference on the social oppression of disabled people



1981: “No speeches, no segregation, no violations of human rights”



Source:
private



“Cripples' Tribunal” (1981)



Since 1980s: „independent living“ outside institutions

- In 1986 the first „Centre for Self-determined Living“ opens in Bremen
- In 1990 a national umbrella organisation is founded
- Main issues are:
 - Self-determination
 - Peer Counseling
 - Personal Assistance
 - Barrier-free environment

Since late 1980s: Legal Activities

- 1994: Amendment of Article 3 of the German Constitution: “No person shall be disfavored because of disability”
- 2002 “Federal Act on the Equalization of Disabled Persons”
- 2006: “General Equal Treatment Act”

Protest against bioethics



**UNSER LEBENSRECHT
IST UNDISKUTIERBAR !**

**„Our
right to
life is
indis-
putable!“**

Gender Issues



„Weibernetz
e.V.“:
national disabled
women's network

Conclusion

- Since the late '70s Germany has witnessed an active, creative and successful Disability Rights Movement.
- It fights against segregation and discrimination and aims for self-determination, accessibility and equal rights.
- Its agenda ranges from legal change to bioethics and gender issues.

Some issues of the critical disability discourse

- Self-determination as a paradigm for disability policy
- Historical research of eugenics, racial hygiene and human genetics; bioethics of the present
- Gender Studies: "double discrimination" of disabled women

Exhibition „The (im-)perfect Human Being“ (2001/02)



Source: Stiftung Deutsches Hygiene-Museum / Deutsche Behindertenhilfe - Aktion Mensch e.V. (Hrsg.). (2001). CD-ROM zur Ausstellung: Der (im-)perfekte Mensch. Vom Recht auf Unvollkommenheit. Dresden (Deutsches Hygiene-Museum).



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Summer Institute „Disability Studies in Germany – Re-thinking Disability“, Bremen 2003



© Bifos 2003



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German-speaking Disability Studies: first editions



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... establishing Disability Studies in German-speaking countries

- Working Group „Disability Studies – We do research ourselves“ (founded April 2002)
- International Disability Studies Research Unit - iDiS (University of Cologne, 2004)
- Centre for Disability Studies - ZeDiS (University Hamburg, 2005)
- Swiss Society for Disability Studies (Zurich, 2005)



What is still lacking?

- Not one network for all German-speaking countries, but two separately for Germany and Switzerland, none in Austria
- No university courses (BA/MA/ PhD) in Disability Studies, but singular seminars and modules at a number of universities
- No academic journal, but websites and...



New Book Series: "Disability Studies: Body - Power – Difference"

- **Volume 1:**
Anne Waldschmidt, Werner Schneider (eds.):
Disability studies, sociology of culture, and sociology of disability: Investigations in a new research field, Bielefeld 2007
- **Volume 2:**
Markus Dederich:
Bodies, culture and disability: An introduction to Disability Studies, Bielefeld 2007



No German model of disability, but...

- Fight against segregation
- Disability regarded as a political issue
- „Krüppel-Standpunkt“ (cripples' position) developed
- „peer research“ practised

Conclusion

- In German-speaking countries critical disability studies is ready to be reconstructed, since it has been long practised

Own Research

- PhD at Bremen University with a study on “The Subject in Human Genetics: Expert Discourses on the Agendas and Concepts for Human Genetic Counseling 1945 – 1990” (published 1996)
- postdoctoral research resulting in second book on “Self-Determination as a Construction: Subjective Theories of Women and Men with Disabilities” (published in 1999)



Own Research

- 1997-2000 research project on "Disability and the Process of Flexible Normalization", as part of an interdisciplinary research network at the University of Dortmund
- Since 2001 involvement in Disability Studies



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Current Research Project (1)

- Since October 2004 research project on "1000fragen.de": Analysis of an online platform on bioethics from the perspectives of participation theory and the sociology of knowledge, funded by Aktion Mensch



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Current Research Project (2)

- research project on the organizing principles underlying European social and equal rights policies using supranational and national policies for disabled people as an example
 - Analysis of the development of EU disability policies (welfare, labour market integration, equalization) on the basis of EU documents (1958-2005)
 - International comparison of social policies and equalization policies in Britain, Germany, Sweden
 - Analysis of the interactions between the EU level and the national levels
- funded by RheinEnergie Stiftung Jugend/Beruf, Wissenschaft
 - April 2007 - March 2009



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For further reading see

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- Köbsell, Swantje (2006), The Disability Rights Movement in Germany. History, development, present state. Disability Studies Quarterly 26(2), http://www.dsqsds.org/_articles_html/2006/spring/kobsell.asp.
- Köbsell, Swantje & Waldschmidt, Anne (2006), Guest Editor's Introduction. International Section: Disability Studies in German speaking Countries. Disability Studies Quarterly 26(2), http://www.dsqsds.org/_articles_html/2006/spring/kobsell_waldschmidt.asp.
- Lutz, Petra; Macho, Thomas; Staupe, Gisela & Zirten, Heike (eds) (2003), Der (im-)perfekte Mensch. Metamorphosen von Normalität und Abweichung. Köln, Weimar: Böhlau.



For further reading see

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- Waldschmidt, Anne (2006), Advocacy Movements: Germany. In: Albrecht, Gary et al. (eds). Encyclopedia of Disability. Volume 1. Thousand Oaks, London, New Dehli: Sage Publications, pp. 57-58.
- Waldschmidt, Anne (2007), Disability as a Social Problem. In: Ritzer, George (ed). The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology. Volume III. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 1168-1170.



For further research see

- www.disabilitystudies.de
- <http://idis.uni-koeln.de>
- www.zedis.uni-hamburg.de
- www.disability-studies.ch



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