Transformative Communities as Alternative Forms of Life?
Conceptual Reflections and Empirical Findings (Co-Housing in Switzerland)

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"The most urgent and important innovations in the 21st century will take place in the social field. This opens up the necessity as well as possibilities for Social Sciences and Humanities to find new roles and relevance by generating knowledge applicable to new dynamics and structures of contemporary and future societies."

Vienna Declaration 2011

1. Introduction[1]

Not only current museum exhibitions in 2017,[2] but also a re-awakened interest in the political and the shaping of the political, can be regarded as indices that we are presently experiencing a *renaissance of community*. This is occurring in the context of various crises, giving rise to a discourse on social, ecological and economic crises[3] and connected, as a whole, to the critique of growth-oriented societies and their post-Fordist urban policy. This critical analysis of the present is not undisputed. Thus, for instance, the Green economy[4] defends the view that economic growth and ecology are mutually interdependent, and the circular economy emphasises, in turn, that the aim is to optimise product cycles[5]. Nonetheless, there is growing awareness of an urgent need for change. This impression, which is precisely not only subjective, is not only the starting point for many scholarly debates, but also forms the point of departure for many projects and initiatives that have arisen in recent years. From among these, I would like to call attention here to some in the field of Swiss housing cooperatives. Our SNF-project at the University of Basel, "Transformative Communities as Innovative Forms of Life: An Investigation Using the Example of German-Swiss Co-Housing and Contract Farming Projects" (2016-2019), serves as both empirical and conceptual basis for my discussion.

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[1] This contribution was written as part of the project on "Transformative Communities as Innovative Forms of Life", which is supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (project no. 162889).

[2] Cf. "Together" (Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein) and "How to live together", as well as "Assemble: How We Build" (Kunsthalle Wien and Architekturzentrum Wien).

[3] Cf. Claus Leggewie, Claus und Harald Welzer. 2009. Das Ende der Welt, wie wir sie kannten: Klima, Zukunft und die Chancen der Demokratie. Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer; Heinberg, Richard (2010): Peak Everything. Waking up to the Century of Declines. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.; Jackson, Tim (2011): Wohlstand ohne Wachstum. Leben und Wirtschaften in einer endlichen Welt. München: Oekom.

[4] Richardson, Robert B. (2013): Building a Green Economy: Perspectives from Ecological Economics. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

[5] Braungart, Michael and William McDough (2003): Einfach intelligent produzieren. Cradle to Cradle. Die Natur zeigt, wie wir Dinge besser machen können. Gebrauchsanweisung für das 21. Jahrhundert. Berlin: Berliner Taschenbuchverlag.

In the background, my reflections touch on the larger social-political question of whether and to what extent capitalism as a form of life needs to be transformed. Along with Rahel Jaeggi, it can be shown that a "critique of forms of life"[6] is necessary, if social renewal is supposed to take place. This is all the more urgent inasmuch as (political) liberalism, as is well known, largely refrains from passing political-ethical judgement on forms of life. Nonetheless, it would be difficult to avoid posing the following questions. How can a (sustainable) transformation of our societies successfully occur? Are there actors who can bring about social change? What institutional conditions have to be fulfilled, such that social innovations can come about?

There is another important point to mention which affects all cooperative housing projects, not exclusively in Switzerland, but one can argue: worldwide. I mean the strong will and desire for building new forms of social identities which are connected to special forms of communities and which are often based on the search for an "authentic self" and more "authentic ways of life".[7] The well-known diagnosis of alienated ways of life is a strong motivation for the people belonging mostly to the left-alternative milieu in Switzerland to engage in "commons"[8], and sometimes also in utopian ways of a better life. As far as we see in our project, alternative social identities are given and more over explored in the context of intentional and transformative communities. In these contexts alternative groups try to invent more authentic, simple and social forms of life. This means that they are struggling together for a more sustainable future, i.e. a future that is ecologically, socially, and economically more tolerable.

Consideration of the more recent generation of housing cooperatives in Switzerland can help us not only to interpret the most recent developments as a response to social change and a will for more authentic ways of living,[9] but – with respect to the alternative and/or more sustainable forms of life that need to be established in light of the above-mentioned crises – this development also raises the necessary future-oriented question concerning the point of departure for social change in general. With regard to this, one thesis runs as follows: The projects that we have studied can be interpreted as an (innovative) answer to social changes; at the same time, however, they are to be understood as possible points of departure for future forms of life and they have been conceived as such. In my contribution, I would like to mobilise

[6] Rahel Jaeggi (2014): Kritik von Lebensformen. Berlin: Suhrkamp, Rahel Jaeggi (2005): 'No Individual can resist': Minima Moralia as Critique of Forms of Life, in: Constellations 12:1, 65-82.
[7] See for a historical and analytical perspective on the terms of authenticity and community the work of Sven Reichardt (2014): Authentizität und Gemeinschaft. Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
[8] Elinor Ostrom (1990): Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[9] Hartmut Häussermann and Walter Siebel (2000): Soziologie des Wohnens: eine Einführung in Wandel und Ausdifferenzierung des Wohnens. Weinheim: Belz Juventa.

arguments that support such an interpretation, both on the theoretical level and from an empirical point of view.

Overview

The problematisation of the initial situation raises questions surrounding the project theme "Transformative Communities as Alternative Forms of Life?" and, in so doing, has sketched out some first thoughts on cooperative housing forms in Switzerland (Section 1). After this presentation of the problem, I deal with the necessity of a "critique of forms of life" and the question of the extent to which the conception of transformative communities as "problem-solving instances" can help (Section 2). A key position for the argument is provided by the next chapter, which concerns the question of social innovations and/or a "praxeological understanding of innovation" (Section 3). The findings obtained there flow directly into the fourth part, which bears the heading "The Practice of Cooperative Housing Forms seen from an Innovation-Theoretical Perspective" (Section 4). A summary, finally, involves the attempt to provide a tabular representation that differentiates the previously presented "praxeological understanding of innovation" according to dimensions (micro, meso and macro) and fields (spheres of action, facilitating factors and limitations). A brief conclusion ends with a consideration of the future outlook seen from a political-normative perspective (Section 5).

2. The Critique of Forms of Life and Transformative Communities as "Problem-Solving Instances"

As already affirmed at the outset of this contribution, a critique of forms of life appears today to be more urgent than ever.[10] The fact that the crises described above have something to do with our forms of life has been problematised by the Berlin-based philosopher Rahel Jaeggi for some time now in her work. Jaeggi argues that forms of life are shaped by "interconnections among practices and orientations and orders of social behaviour"[11], as well as by their normative character: i.e. for Jaeggi, there are more appropriate and less appropriate forms for life. In addition, forms of life are relatively stable over time and precisely not interchangeable at will. Jaeggi notes: "Forms of life are 'instances of problem solving'. Forms of life respond

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[10] Cf. Dietmar J. Wetzel (2016): „New Aesthetico-Political Forms of Community? "Occupy" and the "Sharing Economy" as Examples. In: Claviez, Thomas (ed.), The Common Growl. Toward a Poetics of Precarious Community. Bronx, NY: Fordham UP, p. 159-173.
[11] Jaeggi, Kritik von Lebensformen, p. 89.

to problems confronting our species and are attempts to solve these problems".[12] These problems do not only exist as such from a "subjective" point-of-view; rather, they also exist "objectively" – and thus they are not only impregnated by social relevance, but also by political-ethical relevance. The pressure of such problems is apparent, for example, in the cases of climate change and demographic explosion, growing inequality and the (associated) concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands.[13]

Forms of life need to be distinguished analytically from way of life and lifestyles. In contrast to a way of life, forms of life are less fixated on an individual action orientation, but are directed rather to the collective. They are, moreover, more long-term and more deeply anchored than lifestyles, which can be conceived as superficial phenomena of forms of life.[14] As will be seen, elements of a critical engagement with dominant social forms of life are to be found in the housing forms described. The latter can thus be understood as experiments, which (have to) prove themselves by their specific *problem-solving capacities* in Jaeggi's sense. As the outcome of her reflections, she concludes:

"Forms of life succeed when they can be understood as the result of successful processes of accumulating experiences (or: a learning process) and when they enable further learning. And the task of a critique of forms of life is to ask the metaquestion as to the criteria for recognizing whether a certain kind of dynamic has succeeded as a process of learning or (with Dewey) of the deepening of experience."[15]

These reflections by no means lead to the monism of a supposedly one-and-only correct form of life; rather, they are meant to stand for "an experimental pluralism of forms of life".[16] Following Jaeggi, this can be clarified by way of an example: Whereas bourgeois marriage functioned as (in Hegel's words) a superior "problem-solving instance" in the 19th century, in the 21st century is exposed to a variety of forms of legitimate criticism (Feminism, left-wing utopias). In certain social milieus, however, marriage still represents a well-founded and carefully-considered form of life. Nonetheless, it is encountering competition from other forms: for example, living-together, "wild" marriages and a patchwork of similar forms of relationships. More than ever, which forms of life seem appropriate depends on social milieu,

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[12] Rahel Jaeggi (2015): Towards an immanent critique of forms of life, in: Raisons politiques 57: 13-29.
[13] Even in times of fake news, it must be possible to identify social, economic and ecological problems. The fact that they are often regarded as controversial in political-ethical terms is another matter.
[14] Stephen Katz (2013): Active and Successful Aging. Lifestyle as a Gerontological Idea. In: Recherches sociologiques et at anthropologiques 44:1, p. 33-49.
[15] Jaeggi, Towards an immanent critique of forms of life, p. 26.
[16] Ibid., p. 28.

educational level and adherence to one's own convictions. As consequence, there is not only a "pluralization of forms of life", but also, as has been often invoked, a "new obscurity".[17]

The extent to which learning or learning activity can be regarded as a "source of innovations" has to be regarded as a lacuna in the research that has be done thus far, just like the question as to the criteria for evaluating a form of life. Here, precisely the ecological and social effects of different forms of life would have to be made the focus and compared with one another. Of course, it remains essentially the task of politics and political actors to determine an ecological, social and economic orientation. Resistance, however, is emerging from civil society and new social movements, which militate for a transformation of society in the direction of more sustainable and more just forms of life. But how can such change get concretised? And what role do social innovations play in the process?

Transformative Communities as Innovative "Problem-Solving Instances"

A first response runs as follows: In order for social innovations, which will be theoretically discussed in greater detail below, to be able to be concretised and to create a space for the realization of new forms of life, communities play a decisive role for initiatives and projects. They are, so to say, fields of experimentation in new forms of life. Such communities can, in general, be characterized as *functional communities (of choice)*, whose aim is a different form of socialization. What is at issue in them is the attempt to establish a mode of collective production and consumption that goes beyond the coercive pressures of the market and capital, as well as those of state distribution, and to make as many people as possible familiar with it.[18]

Randolph Haluza-DeLay (2008) succeeds in making Bourdieu useful for the social innovations approach in a very specific way. Precisely because the *habitus* and hence actions are strongly shaped by pre-rational attributes of the practical sense, they have to serve as starting points for change. The cognitive perception of problems remains the point of departure, since otherwise how could we know about them? Such a changed perception involves information on ecologically-tolerable life practices, which assure the functioning of the ecosystem, and criticism of structures that make ecological action more difficult.[19] Haluza-DeLay stresses,

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[17] Jürgen Habermas already noticed this in the mid-1980s, cf. Habermas (1985): Die neue Unübersichtlichkeit. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
[18] Elinor Ostrom (2012): The Future of the Commons: Beyond Market Failure and Governance Regulation. London: Institute of Economic Affairs.
[19] Randolph Haluza-DeLay (2008): A Theory of Practice for Social Movements. Environmentalism and Ecological Habitus, in: Mobilization. The International Quarterly.13, 2. pp. 205-218 (here: 214).

however, that it is not enough to become aware of social and environmental problems; the knowledge acquired, rather, has to flow into practical action and new routines have to be formed. In other words: It is not enough to inform oneself and others, because although cognitive knowledge is indeed a necessary condition for changing practices, it is not a sufficient one. In order to implement such change, "communities of practice" are required[20]: which is to say, groups that experiment in ecological forms of life. What is important here is the realisation that by way of the creation of "communities of practice" – for instance, in the form of social innovations like co-housing initiatives – social practices become possible that get manifest in a new habitus and alternative forms of life. This can, in turn, be understood as an important contribution to overcoming the barriers between knowledge and action and creating the possibility that future-oriented forms of life will be realised: "The challenge is to help people to recognize how the existing order co-creates their experiences (via their habitus) and to help them internalize new dispositions. Since habitus is contextual, such learning would be best accomplished within an alternate order in which the altered habitus 'makes sense'".[21]

Transformative communities are the vehicle with which changes – from an internal point of view, among other things, residential projects – can be not only tackled, but conceptually grasped. These forms of community borrow from the "communities of practice" and the "intentional communities": "An intentional community is a relatively small group of people who have created a whole way of life for the attainment of a certain set of goals."[22] Transformative communities are not necessarily exclusive inasmuch as they shut themselves off; rather, they aim at a different form of socialisation. A differentiation into three perspectives on these (alternative) forms of life already resulted as innovative moment from the tight interconnection of theoretical reflection and empirical insights.

(1) *Internal Perspective:* The initiatives studied by us do not always define themselves as (classical) communities, such that the question of self-definition has to be posed. Rather, in their own self-understanding, they often appear as "intentional communities", which are distinguished by common objectives and the will to bring about change.

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[20] Wenger, Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner (2015): Communities of practice: A brief introduction. http://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/07-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf (18.08.2017)
[21] Haluza-DeLay, A Theory of Practice for Social Movements, p. 214.
[22] Barry Shenker (1986): Intentional Communities: Ideology and Alienation in communal societies. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 6.

(2) *External Perspective:* From the perspective of our research project, we certainly describe these initiatives as communal formations, which can be analytically grasped, above all, by way of processes of communitarisation and socialization (on which Max Weber already provided a fundamental treatment[23]).

(3) *Diffusion Perspective:* With respect to society, the initiatives studied can be understood in the sense of an innovative transformation of society. The concept of "transformative communities" is intended to and must include this aspect of diffusion and be able to explain it.

Already by virtue of the chosen terminology, transformative communities point to social change and, at the same time, they are to be understood as agents of such social change. On the meso level of the initiatives, it would be important to find out what "transformational knowledge" these groupings possess and/or what "transformational knowledge" they are in a position to generate.[24] Likewise from a macro-theoretical perspective, we grasp the initiatives studied as actors and innovators of social change, which can be understood as diverse efforts to bring about a transformation of capitalist societies in a "post-growth" direction.

3. Social Innovations: For a "Praxeological Understanding of Innovation"

The (German-language) debates on social innovations, which in recent years have gained steam precisely in Germany,[25] on the one hand, suffer from a frequently observable normative exaggeration of the concept and, on the other, social innovations risk deteriorating into a fashionable buzzword, tending toward a premature labelling of projects, initiatives, etc. as "socially innovative".[26] Behind this development is to be found a strategic-monetary interest: for example, in being able to lay claim oneself to funding, recognition and success. Despite this problematic, I insist on a concept of social innovations or, more precisely, on a "praxeological understanding", which I will explicate further on.

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[23] Max Weber (1980, originally 1921), Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der Verstehenden Soziologie. 5th, revised edition, prepared by Johannes Winckelmann. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, pp. 21f.

[24] Transformation research has been experiencing a clear upswing in recent years.

[25] Cf. Howaldt, Jürgen und Michael Schwarz (2015): Innovation neu denken – „Soziale Innovation" als Kern eines neuen Innovationsverständnisses. In Sozialwissenschaften und Berufspraxis 38/2: 159-176; Blättel-Mink, Birgit. 2015. Diffusionsprozesse sozialer Innovationen erforschen. Sozialwissenschaften und Berufspraxis, 38:2, 177-192.

[26] Cornelius Schubert (2016): Soziale Innovationen. Kontrollverluste und Steuerungsversprechen sozialen Wandels. In Innovationsgesellschaft heute, Eds. Werner Rammert, Arnold Windeler, Hubert Knoblauch, Michael Hutter, p. 403-426. Wiesbaden: Springer.

Social innovations are undoubtedly difficult to delimit as concept or conception. The wide variety of efforts to do so in the literature bear eloquent witness to this fact.[27] A "praxeological understanding of innovation", which remains to be presented here in greater detail, tries, however, to avoid the "traps" just mentioned. My thesis is that this can succeed, to the extent that a tight interconnection between theoretical reflections and empirical insights is strived for. There are numerous points of contact for such an approach within the literature. Thus, a usable definition is provided by the innovation researcher Geoff Mulgan: "Social Innovation refers to innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly diffused through organizations whose primary purposes are social. Business innovation is generally motivated by profit maximization and diffused through organizations that are primarily motivated by profit maximization."[28] The distinction between "market-based innovations" and "grassroots innovations" that Seyfang & Smith have proposed[29] is capable of being connected to Mulgan's definition. In the case of the former, social innovations start at the level of the market economy and strive for change precisely at this level, whereby, at the same time, they work as companies driven by the profit-motive and are financed by way of the income generated by commercial activities. In contrast, "grassroots innovations" react to social needs within the social economy. Using this (alternative) form of social innovations, they attempt to make other values and convictions possible in certain niches which also means that these models are not so easy to transfer and to diffuse in society. Moreover, they are principally financed by way of public funds and voluntary donations and sometimes out of real-life constraints. Interestingly, Seyfang & Smith emphasize that as regards social innovations, a niche existence of projects does not necessarily represent a disadvantage. On the contrary: "Niche situations (e.g. unusual applications, demonstration programmes, and social movements) provide space for new ideas, artefacts, and practices to develop without full exposure to the range of processes channelling regime development."[30] The niche functions as an opportunity for realisation or at least as a space of possibility, in order – as "fields of experimentation in the communal" – to be able to develop alternatives while taking critical distance from the societal mainstream.

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[27] As one representative example among many: Jon Sundbo (2015): Innovation, Theory of, in: International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, 2nd edition, Volume 12, 169-174.

[28] Geoff Mulgan (2006): The Process of Social Transformation, in: Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization, vol. 1, issue 2, p. 145-162. (here: 146).

[29] Gill Seyfang & Adrian Smith (2007): Grassroots Innovations for Sustainable Development: Towards a New Research and Policy Agenda, in: Environmental Politics, 16:4, 584-603 (here: p. 592).

[30] Ibid., p. 588.

In their *International Handbook on Social Innovation*, Moulaert et al. also highlight this sort of explicit social critical dimension: "Social innovation thus appears as the foundation for an alternative to the neoliberal societal vision. Favouring solidarity over individualism, integration over sectoralization, and collaboration over division, it distinguishes itself through epistemological, ethical and strategic approaches."[31] In order successfully to bring about a transformation, solutions are needed that can advance this change and that are tied to (collective) actors. When Moulaert et al. (2015) speak of social innovations, "[they] refer *to finding acceptable progressive solutions* for a whole range of problems of exclusion, deprivation, alienation, lack of wellbeing, and also to those actions that contribute positively to significant human progress and development."[32] For the thesis to be defended here, however, in order to realise these solutions to social problems that are hardly to be denied, the level of social practices must, above all, be made the focus. This is precisely what is accomplished by the German innovation researchers Jürgen Howaldt, Ralf Kopp and Michael Schwarz (2013),[33] inasmuch as they understand social innovations as an interplay of three different aspects/perspectives, which can be broken down as follows. *Firstly*, it is a matter of a "re-combination of social practices", which (can) draw on existing routines and types of behaviour. *Secondly*, following the re-discovered French sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1921),[34] the "imitation and repetition of social practices"[35] is ascertained, and, *thirdly* and finally, recourse is made to the aspects of diffusion, hence to the successful dissemination of social practices.

Thus, the "praxeological understanding of innovation" developed here starts from the level of practices and discourses, which Howaldt, Kopp and Schwarz brought into play. This is because what is at issue is rendering analytically accessible the innovative character of both social practices and discourses – for instance, in the form of narratives in stories, guiding principles and other documents – without deciding in advance they are "really" social innovations. Among

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[31] Frank Moulaert et al. (2015): The International Handbook of Social Innovation. Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar (here: p. 11).

[32] Ibid., p. 16, emphasis mine.

[33] Howaldt, Jürgen, Ralf Kopp and Michael Schwarz (2013): Social innovations as drivers of social change – Tarde's disregarded contribution to social innovation theory building, in: http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/content/original/Book%20covers/Local%20PDFs/99%20SF%20Howaldt %20Kopp%20and%20Schwarz%20Social%20innovations%20as%20drivers%20of%20social%20change%2020 13.pdf (17.08.2017).

[34] Gabriel Tarde (1921): Les lois de l'imitation. Étude sociologique. Paris: Félix Alcan.

[35] Sundbo (2015: 169) summarizes the findings of Tarde as follows: "He developed a theory stating that societal changes are introduced by individuals who start behaving in a new way or use new tools. These individuals are imitated by others, who again are imitated by others. This is done via communication and social interaction that defuses [sic!] the change more widely throughout society. Tarde saw this as a complex social process that included resistance to the new phenomena, social conflicts, and problems. The new behavior and the structures they result in are, perhaps, advantageous to some individuals and social groups, but disadvantageous to others."

other reasons, this is also significant since – as George Krücken (2006) makes clear – the construction of (social) innovations comes about not only at the level of material practice, but also by way of their discursive construction. "While novelty, innovation and uniqueness are being played out on the visible part of the stage, backstage processes of copying, imitation and structural adaptation are principally taking place."[36] This suggestion can, in turn, be understood to mean that we should illuminate the different levels of practices: not only focus on concrete practices in their temporal and spatial structuring,[37] but broaden the perspective to include also narratives, i.e. the discursive practices by way of which the projects are presented. For the study of the communal-cooperative forms of housing that are here the focus, this means not looking, in isolated fashion, at the concrete practices, the forms of housing, the ideas and models of communal living involved in the most recent projects. Rather, we need precisely to inquire into how the concrete practices are integrated into narrative and thereby discursively come to bear.

In order for social innovations to (be able to) be concretised, they must not only be analysed at the level of (discursive) practices; rather, they also require a space for the realization of new forms of life. Intentional or transformative communities/initiatives offer an appropriate vehicle to this end: one, moreover, that has evolved out of the critique of social relations and that aims to circumvent traditional practices and alternatives. According to our thesis, a praxeological understanding of innovation, such as we have already developed in greater detail elsewhere,[38] can help to understand alternative forms of living as initiators of a social transformation. The most recent generation of Swiss housing cooperatives connect up with proven and well-established structures and organisational forms in a publicly effective way. The focus on the interconnections between the discursive level and social practice allows us to thematise how, by virtue of this fact, they contribute not only to a *renaissance of the cooperative movement*, but also to the perception of the latter as an innovative actor on the housing market, which aims to bring about change.[39]

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[36] Georg Krücken (2006): Innovationsmythen in Politik und Gesellschaft. In Kluges Entscheiden. Disziplinäre Grundlagen und interdisziplinäre Verknüpfungen. Eds. Arno Scherzberg, Tilmann Betsch et al., p. 259-274. Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck. (here: p. 11).

[37] Berger, P. L. and T. Luckmann (1966), The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge, Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

[38] In greater detail, cf. Wetzel, Dietmar J. und Sanna Frischknecht (2018): Wohnen als soziale Innovationen deuten? Gemeinschaftlich-kooperative Wohnformen in der Deutschschweiz, in: Franz, Hans-Werner, und Christoph Kaletka (Hg): Soziale Innovationen lokal gestalten. Band 1 der Reihe „Sozialwissenschaften und Berufspraxis", herausgegeben vom BDS; Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

[39] Peter Farago (2006): Wohnbaugenossenschaften in der Schweiz. Ergebnisse einer schriftlichen Befragung im Jahre 2004.

4. The Practice of Cooperative Forms of Housing from an Innovation-Theoretical Perspective[40]

Several observers have noted a *renaissance of communality* and the need for *new forms of living together ("convivialité")*,[41] which are also reflected in our housing arrangements. Communal housing arrangements are as a much part of the trend as car-sharing, time-exchanges, etc. In Switzerland too, a renaissance of communal forms of housing can be observed since the 1990s at the latest.[42] There are traditions can be drawn upon in this connection, since communal-cooperative forms of housing are by no means an invention of the 21st century. Rather, they go back to the 19th century and they have their roots in the cooperative movement, on the one hand, and in the ideas and visions of social utopians, on the other.[43] Communal-cooperative projects, which for the most part take the legal form of cooperatives, are particularly active in the development of alternative forms of housing. Communal planning and development, as well as communally-organised living, are important elements in this connection. Now, it could legitimately be asked: But what is the point of it all? And how can this discourse be situated in a larger context?

Communal forms of housing are not, or not only, conceived for the sake of communal living; rather, by way of a communal and democratic organisation, they attempt to address current social, ecological and economic challenges. Communitarisation is thus not affectively conceived,[44] but rather it is directed toward social-political goals and hence is, for the most part, intentional. One is pursuing a common goal. Hence, as Matthias Grundmann writes, it is a matter of "forms of living-together [...] that, while they are intended by individual actors, are 'regulated' communally".[45] We take here the examples of those projects that are established by neighbourhoods or settlements that have a certain number of apartments available. Thus, what is at issue here is less a residential project for ten or maybe twenty persons, but rather projects that simply by virtue of their size already possess certain creative possibilities for

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[40] This chapter is an expanded version, which includes the essay by Wetzel/Frischknecht (2017). The empirical data is taken from the sub-project on alternative housing forms by Sanna Frischknecht.

[41] Cf. the Manifest der Konvivialisten, online at: http://www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-2898-2/das-konvivialistische-manifest

[42] See for Switzerland the earlier projects like the "Freidorf" of Hannes Meyer (1919-1924), "Schorenmatten", Basel of Schmidt & Artaria 1927-1929, Neubühl, Zürich, Schmidt & Artaria, Haefeli etc.1930-32 (with "Wohnbedarf"), Siedlung Halen near Berne (1957-61) of the Atelier 5 and also Siedlung "Kalkbreite", Zürich, Müller & Sigrist, 2009ff.

[43] For example, Finistère etc., see, among others, Stumberger 2004.

[44] For a fundamental treatment, cf. again Max Weber (1980, orig. 1921), Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, loc. cit., p. 21.

[45] Matthias Grundmann (2011): Lebensführungspraktiken in Intentionalen Gemeinschaften. In: Hahn, Kornelia/Koppetsch, Cornelia (Eds.): Soziologie des Privaten. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, p. 275-302 (here: p. 279).

neighbourhood development. But the form of cooperation is not only evident in the social practice or the organisational structure. Rather, such aspects are already taken into account in the conception and in the architectural design and combined with social elements.

4.1 Design Contents: Social Innovation as Social Practices

Consideration of cooperatives via the heuristic lens of social innovations has shown that these projects, on the one hand, reconfigure and renovate existing practices by referring to traditional cooperative practice, but reconceive this practice on the background of their roots in the youth movement of the 1980s. And it is precisely thanks to this taking-up of what already exists that social practices are further developed and changed (here again echoes of the innovation of Tarde can be heard). Thus, the projects experiment with alternative forms of housing and with very different forms of participation. In combination with their publicly effective presentation as alternative, superior and more sustainable forms of housing and sorts of neighbourhoods, they help to bring about a renaissance in both the legal and organisational form of the cooperative and its social practice. The practices of imitation and repetition studied by Tarde, moreover, play a key role. On the one hand, the practices associated with the projects, as well as the fact that they are copied and adapted, shows that they are capable not only of calling into question what exists, but also of irritating and even of breaking-up what is presently to be found. On the other hand, there are already imitations and repetitions of practices in the still recent history of alternative cooperatives. What is of significance for this is not their interlinking, but rather, above all, their conception as learning platforms? This is significant precisely with respect to the further development of the practices in new projects. In this connection, the size in which the most recent projects are conceived is an important factor leading to a transformation of the cooperatives. This can be described as a tendency to little-formalised structures, which have been initiated from the bottom-up and whose goal is self-help. The resulting change, moreover, extends to professional actors, who develop whole neighbourhoods and depend on complex methods and different participatory planning formats.[46]

4.2 The Structural/Institutional Dimension

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[46] With regard to international debates on new forms of housing, see Dick Urban Vestbro (2000): From Collective Housing to Cohousing – A Summary of Research, in: Journal of Architectural & Planning Research 17, 164-178; Sargisson, Lucy. 2012. Second-Wave Cohousing: A Modern Utopia? In: Utopian Studies, 23:1, 28-56.

From an institutional perspective, which focusses, at the same time, on structural aspects of housing cooperatives in Switzerland, a *professionalisation* can be observed. A change in structures of participation is also associated with this. The latter constitute a key element of alternative cooperatives and are always present, albeit in different forms and dimensions. But everything is also to be found in individual projects: from participatory democratic procedures by way of collaborative workshops to participatory events, which seldom go beyond the level of general exchange of information. There is no agreement, however, on what, in general, is meant by a participatory procedure. Participation can, for example, mean voting in a general assembly, discussing housing utopias in a workshop, oneself collaborating in a work group, or taking part in so-called echo chambers, in which architects present their current work and get feedback from future residents or interested members of the public. Whereas participation is from the start particularly emphasised in self-help projects, in day-to-day housing matters, participation is gaining significance in those projects that are planned by professionals. Precisely in larger projects, positions are being created for participation officials or so-called settlement assistants, by way of which professionalisation has also advanced into the domain of the social.

Moreover, the projects also display striking similarities, which is sometimes a result of the coalescence of alternative cooperatives into a network, a scene or an entire cooperative movement, providing an outstanding basis for the imitation and duplication of the ideas and models. This becomes particularly evident in the case of the "mehr als wohnen" cooperative, which presents itself additionally as an "Innovation and Learning Platform for the Cooperative Movement". Hence, it already makes clear in its name that is expressly conceived to set learning processes in motion and to be imitated and copied. Here too an innovative moment can be seen, inasmuch as existing forms of communitarisation and socialisation are taken up and repeatedly put into practice. Institutional linkages are sought and networking opportunities are actively pursued. By way of participation in competitions, a social orientation is exhibited that aims at a broader effect in the public domain. Here an intertwining of bottom-up and top-down perspectives comes into play, whereby, empirically, precisely the "grassroots innovations" (Seyfang/Smith 2007) – i.e. those originating from below – are more important. On the meso level, municipal and (local) political requirements and regulations, which get in the way of the realisation of alternative housing models, especially prove to be limitations.

4.3 The Social Level: Questions of Diffusion

We can, in principle, following Seyfang/Smith, distinguish between *own (intrinsic) benefits* and *diffusion-oriented benefits* in housing cooperatives.[47] In recent years, the cooperatives have experienced a veritable upsurge with respect to their self-understanding. The resonance of their ideas should not be underestimated, especially as large parts of the population are becoming more aware that concepts like "multi-generational housing" can be a real alternative to loneliness and poverty in old age or at least an attempted answer to the problem.[48] As the Cooperative of Cooperatives ("Genossenschaft der Genossenschaften") makes clear, there are now a wide range of projects, i.e. 'mehr als wohnen ' and 'wohnen und mehr'. Up until today, the field of alternative housing cooperatives has been diversifying; the housing available has expanded and the concepts have spread. Moreover, the projects have become accessible to broader population groups. But this also has, in part, unintended consequences: for instance, when cities promote such projects in a manner that is not entirely uninterested: using them as shining examples for their own development policy or attractiveness as a location.[49] Precisely unintended consequences – or the, in the final analysis, uncontrollable paths along which diffusive innovations move – are given too little attention in the innovation debate. This is presumably due to a conception of innovation that has emerged in the wake of modernisation-theoretical considerations and that still permeates a large part of the current (German-language) debate. In this debate, the focus is almost always placed on the practice of inventing or developing something new and better in the emphatic sense; and though diffusion is an integral part of the definition, up till now, this claim is seldom empirically borne out on the level of (social) practices.

5. Summary and Conclusion

As we have seen, the Swiss housing projects build through social innovations new forms of a social identity in a communal context. Their members are searching for an (alternative) identity and new forms of collective membership in a transformative or intentional community. One promise which lies behind the cooperative housing movement is the establishment of new forms of authenticity, i.e. the strong will and desire for building forms of social identities which are often based on the search for an "authentic self" and more "authentic ways of life". Behind this

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[47] Seyfang & Smith, Grassroots Innovations for Sustainable Development, pp. 593f.
[48] Christiane Feuerstein and Franziska Leeb (2015): Generationenwohnen. Neue Konzepte für Architektur und soziale Interaktion. München: Detail.
[49] David Habit (2013): Regieren durch Wettbewerb. Zur Logik urbaner Wettbewerbsformationen, in: Tauschek, Markus (Hg.), Kulturen des Wettbewerbs. Münster: Waxmann, p. 195-216.

lies the well-known diagnosis of alienated ways of life which often is a strong motivation for the people of the left-alternative milieu in Switzerland to engage in "commons", and sometimes in utopian ways of a better life. It is in these "experimental" contexts that alternative groups try to invent more authentic, simple and social forms of life.

Our initial question was whether a concept of transformative communities helps us to understand new initiatives – here especially with respect to communal housing cooperatives – as innovative and alternative forms of life and with their claim for authenticity, social identity and community building. Arguments in favour of such a perspective were provided on both the theoretical-conceptual level and the empirical level. The result of our findings is a conception of social innovations or, more precisely, a "praxeological understanding of innovation" that can, in turn, be differentiated according to dimensions and fields. Thanks to such a differentiation, additional spatial, temporal, institutional, and also social aspects can be better clarified. In tabular form, such a concept can be presented as follows:

Praxeological Understanding of Innovation: Dimensions and Fields

Dimensions	Field of Action	Facilitating Factors	Limitations
Content-Related (micro-level)	practices of reconfiguration/imitation/diffusion	drawing on traditions/existing knowledge/experience	conflicts and resistance in the (self-)organisation, habitual ties
Structural/ Institutional (meso-level)	intentional/transformative communities (communities of practice); networks	bottom-up and/or top-down (linkages); institutional links	requirements, regulations legal restrictions, milieu-specific peculiarities
Social (macro-level)	diffusion: niche and/or mainstream (changes and criticism by way of comparison)	political and legal framework conditions (cooperatives); promotion of alternative values and attitudes	size, power constellations (lobbies), lack of capital, priority of consumption-oriented ways-of-life

Before summing up, I would like briefly to elaborate upon these dimensions and fields.

1. *Directed to contents*, the first dimension is located on the micro-level: The focus is on aspects of the "reconfiguration of social practices", of imitation and repetition, and of diffusion. In this connection, attention has, in particular, to be given to existing traditions

and resources that are present in the alternative cooperatives and that have proven themselves over a long period. Drawing on experience and accumulated knowledge, they facilitate an implementation of social innovations on the level of social practices. Conflicts and forms of resistance in the (self-) organisation can emerge as obstacles. Nonetheless, in their very ambivalence, they can also be regarded as a strength of such, for the most part, participatory-democratic "grassroots innovations".

2. On the *structural* or also *institutionally-oriented meso-level*, the (housing) initiatives studied appear as intentional or, more precisely, transformative communities. They are to be conceived as "communities of practice" (in Haluza-DeLay's sense), since they do not only depend on cognition, but rather attempt by way of practices to affect the habitus of their members with respect to a common goal. In classical form, moreover, they act from a bottom-up perspective, without, however, necessarily wanting to remain stuck in this perspective. Strategic linkages and networks with other initiatives, whether to learn from the latter or also to transmit one's own knowledge, serve the purpose of *facilitation* and realisation of the community's own ideas or the ideas of others that are appropriated for the community's own needs. They are hindered or restricted in their action by requirements and legal regulations (restrictions).

3. On the *social macro-level*, the principal question is that of successful or, vice-versa, failed diffusion.[50] Here, it turns out – perhaps somewhat surprisingly – that precisely the niche positioning of many projects can also provoke an innovation-diffusing moment. More precisely, this happens by virtue of the fact that change and a critique take place by way of comparison with mainstream practices. Facilitation is provided by political and legal framework conditions (association statutes, contract law), which are, above all, the basis for the revival of cooperatives in the present context. This can lead to the promotion of alternative values and attitudes, which, at least in many initiatives, aim at diffusion by way of a clear social orientation. Thus, the lack of size is less of an obstacle than, above all, power constellations (lobbies), lack of capital and, last but not least, the priority of consumer-oriented ways-of-life.

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[50] For a fundamental treatment, cf. the work of Everett Rogers, Everett (1995): The Diffusion of Innovations, New York, NY: Free Press.

Conclusion: Communally-organised housing cooperatives can be grasped and interpreted with the "transformative community" concept both from an internal and an external perspective. As has been shown, the new developments that have been set in motion by the transformative communities are certainly social innovations, but not in the emphatic, normatively-exaggerated sense of "inventions". Rather, they can be described as "grassroots innovations"[51] that arouse interest by virtue of the reconfiguration and renovation of practices, their imitation and repetition, and practices of diffusion. There are numerous signs of a diffusion of new, alternative forms of housing in society. But it goes without saying that there are powerful opponents (hyper-individualism, possessive thinking, and the power of the (real estate) markets). I conclude my presentation – and thereby add to it a normative-political evaluation – with a plea for a *competition of forms of life*. This is to say that forms of life – unlike in still hegemonic and supposedly ethically-neutral political liberalism – should be exposed to criticism and it should be possible to evaluate them according to specific criteria. These criteria have to be established in a participatory-democratic process and must be continually re-assessed. Only thus can we ultimately take the path to a more sustainable future: i.e. a future that is ecologically, socially, and economically more tolerable.

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[51] Seyfang & Smith, Grassroots Innovations for Sustainable Development, pp. 593f.