



Introduction

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In the development of modern social sciences, various theories influencing the debate of global development came from European researchers. One of these theories is the social quality theory, which emerged almost two decades ago from Europe but later extended to Asia and Australia, and thus beyond the original boundaries of the 1990s (van der Maesen and Walker 2012). This theory assesses the progress of human societies and makes proposals that are relevant for policy development. With other theories such as human security and social exclusion theories, social quality theory not only aims at the ideal of a “good society” but also provides an analytical perspective for understanding the condition of such societies (Phillips 2006; Therborn 2001). Although critical about many aspects of the European tradition, social quality thinking continues to find itself in the footsteps of progressivism and solidaristic thinking, rephrased in modern terms with a focus on socio-economic security, social inclusion, social cohesion and social empowerment. Although the content, orientation and features of this theory come from a European tradition, the theory can be used to contribute to wider debates in the international social sciences.

In order to underscore the European features of this theory, we should refer to three key factors. First, we must consult the broad heritage of social thinking about the relations between individual and society and between state and market (Beck et al. 1997; Bourdieu 1984). This tradition provides a fertile ground of information and ideas that allows an understanding of the nature of social relations along collectivist thinking. This stream of thinking is reinforced by social policy studies, especially from the mid-twentieth century onward, and often results in a variety of progressive social reforms (Kaufmann 2013; Townsend 1975). Accordingly, we see the impact of a stream of collective thoughts on social development and social quality thinking.

The second factor to be noticed is the strength of the theoretical foundation. Discussing social policy from a social quality perspective has been understood as a

meta-theory, facilitating the studies of social and public policies. This feature is particularly visible when comparing European theories with the American approach of social research. The latter favors empirical studies that back up positivist perception, while the former is especially strong in theoretical thinking or theoretically grounded understandings with reference to philosophical considerations. Moreover, such empirical studies and positivist perceptions are also present in a wide view on the nature of society. This allows for the foundation of a wider societal perspective and institutional analysis.

The third key factor behind the dynamics of the theory's elaboration is the development of welfare state systems. Since the postwar period, the idea of progressivism (as presented, for instance, by "social engineering" approaches) functioned in Europe as a powerful and dynamic force for social development. Later, European states set the laudable goal of establishing "welfare states." This practice presented a challenge for intellectual considerations about how to assess social progress (Titmuss 1974). The debate of the "crisis of the welfare state" (see Pierson 1991) and efforts of looking for policy alternatives further required social researchers to renew their studies of European societies. In all of these perspectives, social quality theory is nourished by engagement in these debates (Walker 2011).

Since the mid-2000s, social quality theory has developed beyond the European world. The engagement of Asian and Australian scholars has made significant steps in broadcasting this theory on a global scope. This expansion provides new inputs for the theory, going beyond the concern of European problems and presenting a qualitative leap in research perspectives (Herrmann 2009; Lin et al. 2009). While the major themes of debates at the early stage had been about contrasting quality of life theories and social quality theory, researchers have more recently emphasized the interaction between the different theories and their complementarities (Gasper et al. 2008; van der Maesen 2012). Previous emphasis on conceptualizing welfare societies for European developments shifted toward a discussion of global issues on development, social policy and governance. Reference to Asian experiences and other parts of the world is of crucial importance, enriching the issues and questions of this theory.

Thus, after more than fifteen years of development, social quality theory has entered a new stage. This is a challenge but also an opportunity to upgrade the theory with new issues, new demands and new problems, all contributing to finding new solutions. These solutions can cope with new circumstances of social change happening not only in Europe but also in other regions worldwide. Such global expansion can generate and stimulate theoretical thinking about society in completely new ways, rethinking not only development studies but general social theories as well. This rethinking is particularly important in respect to methodology and how the theory can more effectively answer issues of everyday life in contemporary societies. The present volume is edited against this background, allowing a review of the past and an assessment of current work in order to foster further developments.

The Origin of the Theory's Development

Social quality theory emerged from policy debates during the mid-1990s among member states of the European Union. Its first manifestation can be found among a 1997 conference held in Amsterdam, when the Amsterdam declaration was produced and subsequently signed by numerous academics, law experts and leading representatives of political administrations (Beck et al. 1997). The signatories of the declaration underlined a need to develop a new perspective on social policy and developmental strategies for EU member states, the fundamental assumption being Europe's need for the vision of a "welfare society." Active citizenship was emphasized as being essential (Ivan 1999; Yeandle 1999), and the need to develop a coherent approach was discussed. These discussions resulted in the establishment of the European Foundation of Social Quality, an organizational framework aimed at promoting research on social quality and disseminating ideas among European researchers, activists and politicians.¹

To be sure, such demands were rooted in the European context of the time. The discussion on social policy reform in Europe created a need for a general view of society, as the debate had not been limited to the field of social policy in a narrow way. The signatories of the declaration came from various professional areas such as economics, law and politics, indicating a consensus among these scholars the need for social quality discussion. This consensus emerged from recognizing challenges to the European welfare states from a manifold of perspectives, requiring the analysis of the whole system (van der Maesen and Walker 2003). The atmosphere stimulating the debate of the time can be captured in a brief outline of the following concerns.

The first concern was about the development of welfare states. Influenced by the international debate in the 1990s, swapping over the (neo)liberal ideas from North America and Latin America, the idea of privatization prevailed in Europe. According to the interpretation of "new right" policies of Reaganomics and Thatcherism in the 1980s (see George and Wilding 1994), and of the privatization experiences in Brazil and Chile in the 1990s (Bertranou and Rofman 2002; Draibe and Riesco 2009), the need for restructuration of the social fabric was also suggested in Europe. This perspective's development, however, led to an emphasis on competitiveness, which generated a debate on the orientation of future development for European welfare states. In many European countries, the ideal of privatization once worked as a guiding principle of welfare state reform, and in the public spheres, measures to reduce public expenditures, or the "reduction of the burden of social expenditure," became the norm.

Though many policy analysts of the right favored the proposed reform strategies of privatization, some social scientists and social policy analysts, nevertheless, raised their voices against privatization policies. In the early 1990s, the ideal of "social Europe" and its associated idea of a "European social model" were proclaimed as potential alternatives. For instance, in the mid-1990s, a set of workshops was organized with support of the European Commission (such as the "Cost 13" series) to discuss these ideas in the wider context of European integration. Against this background, the future of European states was discussed, and strategies of social policy reform were

seen as essential components. A consensus among many scholars toward ongoing privatization emerged, emphasizing the European particularities of different social and cultural conditions, as these European member states should (and would) never go the same way as the United States (Ebbinghaus 1999; Scharpf 2002). They engaged in social policy discussion against the Washington Consensus, and these debates defined the basic context for addressing policy ideas about future developments.

The debates also concerned the relation between economic policy and social policy. In the early 1990s, many European states suffered from increasing unemployment rates and reduced rates of economic growth under the pressure of global competition, thus highlighting the impacts of globalization. This pressure supported liberal-oriented reform for increasing economic vitality. In the discussion of globalization, on the other hand, many social policy scholars emphasized that social policy should not be “annexed” or “adjunct” to economic policy nor subordinated under economic thinking (Abrahamson 1999). Rather, they argued in favor of a balance between the production (of market and economy) and reproduction (of human resource management and daily life). Thus, against the emphasis of the economic rationale of growth, many scholars also valued the significance of people’s everyday lives and livelihoods as part of policy analysis. With this, orientation on promoting collective actions was emphasized against individualist orientation of mainstream policy-making. This emphasis linked to the popular notion of the theory of solidarity, as it had been already promoted by writers like Paul Spicker in the 1980s (1984; 1988). This collective idea should be nurtured by policy measures that encouraged people’s participation, reinforcing social empowerment. In this way, the question of empowerment also links to the social quality factors of social cohesion and social inclusion, and so the fundamental elements of the social quality theory were highlighted.

To expose the theoretical foundation of social quality theory further, we must also clarify the concepts of the “social” and “quality.” In this theory, the definition of the social is understood as the nature of human beings, standing against the individualist interpretation of the nature of society (Walker and Naegele 2009). Presented by van der Maesen and Walker (2012), this definition identifies the social as “the interaction between people (constituted as actors) and their constructed and natural environment” and that “the constitutive interdependency between processes of self-realisation and processes governing the formation of collective identities is a condition for the social and its progress or decline.” Thus, in social quality theory, this definition supports a societal point of view of social systems, which implies a fundamental rejection of the individualist approach toward society.²

The notion of “quality of society” serves as a conceptual instrument against the intention of using economic growth as a standard for assessing the extent of social development. According to the proposed view, the important point for social development should be not only to emphasize the condition of economic growth and employment but also to tackle all aspects of social life and societal issues as essential. This argument implicitly refers to early discussion on the relation between the economic and social systems presented by Karl Polanyi, who urged the development of new ways of understanding this relation in the context of new social developments.

Based on these points of understanding, we can further discuss the central issues of social quality through the selection of a few topics.

The Central Issues of Discussion

The Individual and the Social

There are two lines of social thinking about the nature of society: one supported by liberal views on society, emphasizing the autonomy of individuals and regarding society as an agglomeration of individuals with citizen rights, and the other focused on the collective notion, referring to conservative and socialist ideas that underscore society as an association of individuals living in mutual interdependence. In the latter case, the ideal of solidarity is emphasized, and social empowerment and citizens' active engagement is highlighted (Spicker 1988; George and Wilding 1994). Social quality theory starts its theory from this tension, focusing on the centrality of "the social." However, to emphasize the notion of the social does not mean to deny the importance of individual freedom and autonomy by giving power only to abstract collectives; instead, this idea suggests a relational perspective—that is, as a matter of a dialectical, or productive, tension between biographical and societal development. With this understanding, social quality theory takes solidarity as a central normative factor, social cohesion as a conditional factor and social recognition as a constitutional factor, and sees their interplay as the most crucial issue. This means that the debate on the tension of "individual versus social" plays a major role in social quality debates (Therborn 2001).

Social Europe and Welfare Society

From a practical perspective, social quality theory promotes the idea of a "social Europe." By insisting on the collective nature of individuals, the image for further development is encouraged by this idea as a response to the debate of a European social model that EU institutions had promoted during the 1990s. Following this topic, social quality studies present an idea of a "welfare society" for building up a social Europe, which had been of special importance during the first half of the 1990s when the European economy was in a manifold crisis. This proposal of a welfare society can also refer to the East Asian experience, as Japan and China, for example, presented the ideal in the late 1980s (see Lin 1999). However, the context of this proposal should be understood by considering very different backgrounds in Europe, where the idea was presented in the context of looking for the solutions of welfare reform. The differences between these political ideas are also apparent if we look at the content of the welfare society in East Asia (Rose and Shiratori 1986), which was proposed with the intent of shifting policy away from the productivist line and toward an improvement of people's livelihood and welfare. In the context of social quality thinking, the issue of welfare society is constructed through active citizens in a

democratic setting, by which the European ideas of social participation and social empowerment become major ways to achieve the goals.

Social Indicator Issues

In respect to measuring social progress, social quality studies must take social indicators as necessary instruments for reflecting social quality conditions and, more crucially, as means for monitoring social progress (Abbott et al. 2011). Some early works have constructed a complex system of social quality indicators to describe the conditions of society (Gordon 2005); however, the emphasis on the difference between quality of life and social quality has, to some extent, set up some barriers to this development. The vigilant highlighting of the difference between these theories prevents social quality research from strongly developing this theory. Nevertheless, this orientation changed after the mid-2000s when Asian scholars engaged in the social quality discussion (van der Maesen and Walker 2012). This does not mean that indicators can be employed as measurement instruments in a strict science, but to develop a complex and integrated assessment with reference to indicators, profiles and judgment is the kernel of any assessment.

Welfare Service, Social Policy and Elderly Care

In its early origin, social quality research has a close relation to social policy and welfare services (Herrmann et al. 2007). Issues of redistribution and inclusive social policy are direct policy measures to improve social quality, and community work and social organization were also connected to issues of social participation and empowerment in the context of social quality analysis (Oishi 2007). In this way, the general theoretical discussion about social quality is welded with practical issues of policy-making and service provision, which can be extended from welfare issues toward general well-being. Such development allows us to concentrate our discussion on macro-level issues, such as the future of the welfare state and social expenditure, to the middle-range issues of social services, such as work-family balance, migrant and human rights, and life satisfaction and happiness (Lin 2014). With these applications, social quality research pushes the debate of social development beyond the economic rationale and the GDP-related measurement (Herrmann 2012) to a wider sense of social progress for people's well-being.

Social Exclusion

The issue of social exclusion has been at various points relevant to social quality thinking (Room 2000). Social inclusion and its counterpart, social exclusion, are in their very essence mutually related, although some scholars may argue that phenomena of social exclusion should not be understood as simply the lack of social inclusion (Walker and Mollenkopf 2007), and the close relationship between these two cannot be overestimated. A lot of research has been undertaken on related questions, typically concerning the unemployed, the elderly and minority groups, which have high risks

of social exclusion (Lin et al. 2013). This orientation of research demonstrates how citizenship rights can be protected in different kinds of societies and how excluded groups obtain social services, thus contributing to increased social quality. In Europe, the EU endorsed this orientation when the task of combating social exclusion was highlighted, primarily since the late 1990s (Berghman 1995).

Sustainability

The context of discussing sustainability in the perspective of social quality has changed several times. In its early stage, this discussion was relevant to the compressing issue of “the crisis of welfare states,” raising an ideal of “welfare society” for the sustainability of the European states (Berghman 1997; Beck et al. 1997). This has not least been an issue of the financial pressure on welfare states and of the problems of shortsighted economic orientations, which limit growth, competitiveness and employment (Huber and Stephens 2001). This context changed in the twenty-first century when discussion shifted toward the sustainability of human society with reference to environmental issues (Giddings et al. 2002). Engagement with questions of human security and development has been hugely relevant in this context, as disclosed by a number of papers on sustainability and environmental issues, as well as on human security and global governance (Thomas 2001). Environmental issues will play a crucial role in policy debates of the global governance, as announced at the Rio Declaration (Panjabi 1997), so the major challenge is searching for a close link to debates on the political economy of social questions.

Urban Development and Local Administration

Being concerned with everyday life, it is logical that the discourse of social quality theory moved from the level of a general theory toward more practical issues in various dimensions, including its application to issues of urban development and local administration. Studies on local administration and urban development contributed to establishing collaborative work at the city levels of Hangzhou (People’s Republic of China) and The Hague (the Netherlands). This collaboration creates a new line of thinking about the application of social quality theory in respect to local practice (Li et al. 2012), involving issues of local policy innovation, urban development and social administration. These efforts led researchers to new ways of thinking beyond welfare states as the policy focus. The results can be presented in a very positive light by comparing the conditions for social quality in different cities, communities and political practices. In this way, social quality theory opens access for contributing to the goal of urban development in relation to topics of local development, employment services, migration issues and social exclusion (Saunders 2003). This corresponds with the need to develop a new understanding of “responsibility”—that is, the responsibilities of individuals and corporate actors, civil society, states and systems of regional cooperation, and the interwoven character of issues relevant for developing perspectives. Issues of economy, culture and lifestyle, sustainability, and the like can only be properly understood if approached by looking at their interconnectedness.

The Aim of This Collection

This volume contains a selection of works previously published as articles in the *European Journal of Social Quality* and the *International Journal of Social Quality*,³ supported by the European Foundation of Social Quality and now the International Association of Social Quality, respectively. The collection reflects more than a decade of collaboration among researchers who gathered for critical dialogue. These journals, which are the most important platforms for academic discussion about social quality research, were the outcome of cooperation with Berghahn Books—a collaboration characterized by the spirit of mutual understanding and support during the editorial process that proved to be extremely valuable for the theory's development. The limit of our selection from these journals allows for a concise overview of the development. In this way of organizing the book, the repetition of some aspects of the “architecture of social quality,” as well as the theory's general assumption and perceptions, could not be avoided. However, careful reading will also show differences in the interpretation of certain facets of social reality with varying emphases on particular issues and thus distinctive stances promoted by individual researchers.

Among the published works in these journals, the standards of our selection are outlined by the following considerations. First, these chapters can help understand the social quality approach by reviewing its origin and relevant backgrounds, although some works also refer to the more recent stage of development with new focus and emphasis. Despite the retrospective orientation, those studies can still help scholars to foresee future development. Second, the selected contributions mostly focus on the theoretical aspects of the theory, that is, on its assumptions, perceptions and methodology, as well as some questions of developing relevant issues. For these reasons, the chapters do not engage in the theory's policy studies but rather in the theoretical dimension. Third, we intend to demonstrate the theory's early work as well as its later development, thus including both the old and the new issues and ideas in response to ongoing societal processes.

Accordingly, the presentation of the chapters is very much oriented on capturing the basic nature of social quality theory. The book consists of two parts, the first focusing primarily on theoretical discussions. While the second part consists mostly of research on individual countries, the selection's intention focuses not on the values of the region-specific case studies but rather on their theoretical implications. For example, in Taylor-Gooby's chapter, the significance for social quality research is not the policy study of the United Kingdom's national health care system but rather the study's explorative discussion on the relation between social trust and health policy. Accordingly, each chapter deals with specific issues of research and provides some information about the relevant theory for the development of social quality theory. At the same time, they still show that for social quality thinking, the national context plays an important role not solely as an institutional issue but also as a complex socio-historical background.

The Contributions in This Volume

The framework of social quality analysis and its rationale is clearly defined by the volume's first two chapters. We begin with a definition of "social quality," as proposed by Anne Fairweather and others, that looks at issues of labor skills, collective goods, services, institutions and infrastructure and matters outside of working life. This first chapter aims to uncover the logic of different social quality quadrants that reflect the "social quality architecture," which demonstrates a clear rationale for each social quality domain through its conceptual inquiry. We then move to the next stage in the history of theory's early development with a report on the outcomes of research conducted by the European Network on Indicators of Social Quality. In this chapter, Laurent van der Maesen and Alan Walker present a rich set of variables of the four social quality quadrants with four tables, which provide a clear vision of the items that should be key to the social quality analysis.

With the infrastructure and intentions of the theory established, the next two chapters then concern the question of how to use social quality theory to analyze social realities within particular socio-cultural contexts. Walker's piece on welfare system sustainability first addresses a theoretical exploration of social quality theory before moving on to its application to European social policy. In the first respect, Walker explores the meaning of the constitutional, conditional and normative factors of the social quality analysis, and in the perspective of the second dimension, he discusses issues of welfare sustainability with reference to East Asia. In this way, Walker investigates the concept of sustainability from the perspective of social quality with the implied social, cultural and economic reasons. The next chapter, on the theory's applicability to Asian societies, emphasizes four approaches of social quality studies in order to reflect four kinds of conditional factors. Ka Lin refers to this social quality theory's European origin and evaluates its meaning of policy analysis. He suggests reviewing social quality as a meta-theory by uprooting the particular European contexts in order to ensure its power as a general theory that can be applied to the analysis of social realities within different societies. In this way, the investigation mediates the need for a general theory and for the cultural analysis of social quality studies.

The following two selections concern the policy aspect and theoretical aspect of social quality studies, respectively. First, Peter Herrmann's chapter illustrates the policy-oriented analysis by applying the theory as a point of reference and discusses the Stiglitz Commission report, which claims an orientation of going "Beyond GDP." However, Herrmann presents a relational appraisal that allows for an understanding of social relationships as the basis of policy-making, against the challenge of economic globalization that deteriorates the degree of social justice, solidarity and human dignity. In this perspective, the investigation emphasizes the need for an integrated approach to analyze trends of economic performance and social progress instead of eclectically combining measurements of different areas. Des Gasper's chapter, on the other hand, engages in a theoretical discussion of the social quality theory, comparing the discourses of quality of life, human security and human development. The author develops this comparison by analyzing their focus, score and guiding values, as well as

by their purposes and standpoints of difference. These discussions disclose the theoretical grounds of social quality thinking through comparison.

The remaining five chapters are dedicated to country-specific issues of social quality analysis. However, in serving the volume's overall goal of presenting the theoretical perspective of research work, these contributions were selected not because of their focus on the selected countries but rather because they enrich the scope of social quality studies in the general sense, which can thus develop new areas of social quality analysis. For this reason, each chapter highlights a unique feature of social quality studies. Through these studies, we can strengthen social quality research from the theoretical level to more concrete aspects of social systems. Accordingly, these five contributions deal with particular issues that are not addressed by the previous chapters of theoretical construction. The intention is also to develop the policy-oriented implications of social quality studies.

Sue Hacking's chapter on Britain and Göran and Sonia Therborn's chapter on Sweden both use the social quality framework to analyze each region's social systems but feature distinctive applications. Hacking adopts the conventional framework of social quality analysis for the case of the United Kingdom, offering readers a most convenient (or "the standard") way of analyzing the sovereign state's social quality. Meanwhile, Therborns' work describes Sweden's social quality conditions by emphasizing particular themes as key factors for the evaluation, including poverty, housing, health care and socio-economic security. In addition, altruism and tolerance, social contracts, networks and identities are evaluated as matters of social cohesion, with citizenship rights, services and social networks as social inclusion, and openness of institutions, public space and personal relationships as social empowerment. These issues represent essential aspects of social quality analysis in the four domains.

The next two chapters reveal new issues of social quality studies from Japan and Russia. As these two countries are not part of the EU, where the theory was generated, they provide enlightening perspectives on the previous emphasis of social quality studies. Interestingly, we observe that Yoshinori Hiroi's work on social quality conditions in Japan emphasizes productive policies and argues that social policy is also a strong driving force for economic development. The author maintains welfare, environment and economy as three sorts of development factors, which interact and mutually support each other. With this outlook, Hiroi reviews the evolution of public and social policies in Japan and highlights policy implications of the Japanese discourse on social development. In other words, we find a development-oriented approach toward social quality. On the other hand, Vyacheslav Bobkov, Olesya Veredyuk and Ulvi Aliyev refer to the instability of employment in Russia, exposing social risk and precarity as the major barriers for the country's development. The chapter presents three kinds of social systems—state-monopoly capitalism, state-monopoly socialism and people-humanistic socialism—and argues that the social quality conditions in these models differ greatly. Currently, in Russia consumption, income and employment become the key factors in social quality assessment, making social quality a labor market issue.

The final chapter comes from Peter Taylor-Gooby and addresses health care system reform in the United Kingdom, referring to issues of the New Public Management. The discussion of health care closely links to social trust, as great emphasis is put on

political pressure of the welfare system. However, through the discussion on health care reform, the author proposes a view of rational choice as an engine of social quality, which connects macro-level observation with individual motivation of the micro-level. Thus, opinion surveys are important instruments to assess solidarity and trust as relevant issues when it comes to the provision of public services and social quality.

Challenges for Further Theoretical Development

There will be many difficulties for the discussion social quality in the future. The first challenge in developing social quality thinking further pertains to its scientific value. We must find effective ways to genuinely link the theory with empirical evidence in order to test the theory's feasibility for explaining social realities. In the past, a lack of observational data was a barrier to moving forward with this work, as many social quality studies stayed on the normative levels or worked with general assumptions (van der Maesen 2000). At the current stage, some important steps of development have been made with empirical data coming from social quality teams of six Asian societies (Lin 2013; Munro 2013; Sub and Shi 2013). Studies based on these data demonstrate the particular features of social quality assessment to study social realities different from quality of life studies. The relation between social quality and quality of life requires further study, both in terms of their differences and similarities (Lin 2014).

The second challenge concerns the need for quantitative studies of social quality. So far, social quality researchers have reached a basic agreement on which indicators to use, though individual cases may differ and some studies may use more indicators than others. This consensus was developed with reference to early work (van der Maesen 2012) and applied to the analysis by late empirical data (Lin 2013). However, how to define the boundaries of each dimension, as well as the division of these indicators into certain domains, still needs further exploration, as some indicators may be relevant for different dimensions at the same time. For instance, education indicators can be used in respect to socio-economic security, social inclusion and social empowerment. In addition, we still need technical measures to reveal the different factors' correlation in order to clearly define the domains. More attention to constitutional and normative factors is necessary because only in the interplay of indicators, profiles and criteria for assessment can essential progress be made, distinctively assessing social quality. Moreover, we can still adopt new mathematical and statistical methods to address the calculation of survey data, allowing an emphasis of the close relation among social quality's four dimensions. Still, to assess trends and mark characteristic issues, we need further investigations of social quality indicators so that they are suitable for providing measurements, not in the strict sense but for predicting the future trends of development.

The third issue relates to extending social quality into new thematic areas. Earlier we criticized methodological individualism as a major shortfall of mainstream social science, but in the present context, we capture a genuine connotation between

individualist policy orientations and social cohesion. The proposed orientation for enhancing social quality is to adopt the social orientation as matter of relationality. Indeed, social quality theory understands human actions as part of a complex socio-relational system for individual actions based on collective values (Berghman 1997). Thus, we need to highlight the meaning of cultural codes in determining social actions and, therefore, to explore constitutive factors within the settings of different cultures. Strengthening the cross-national comparative perspective will also foster further development of social quality thinking (Lin 2011) and help relevant research to go beyond the original European context. In light of practical implications, we should study different developmental patterns through social quality analysis in order to understand different policy solutions.

A fourth major difficulty is how to assess social change. Social development can happen in both incremental and revolutionary ways, and policy measures can be geared to one or the other way of social transformation. Further discussion is required for how social quality thinking can be used in the context of revolutionary change, not only allowing a reflection of the consequences of such change but also providing analytical tools to develop *ex ante* relevant policies. This has been an important issue for Russia and eastern European countries (Herrmann et al. 2014), where rapid social change has been accompanied with social dumping, affecting many aspects of people's living standards in extremely harsh ways—but the exact overall impact of these changes will only be visible after several years. We need to investigate whether the social quality theory can be useful for assessing social progress by telling us more about social trends, not simply reflecting on the given situation at a specific moment in time. This question is also important when it comes to Latin America and Africa, where we have seen major changes in democracy within short periods of time, without having yet sufficiently considered thinking about social quality.

Finally, we must expand the scope of social quality research by way of systematically comparing this theory with various other relevant social approaches that are currently prevalent in social (development) research. Since social quality studies refer to social inclusion and social cohesion, an essential task is to discuss theories of social stratification, class relation, social capital, marginalization, social exclusion and the like (e.g., Bobkov et al. 2013). Moreover, comparative studies of indicator systems with underlined perceptions from quality of life studies, the human development index and environmental indicators and indicators of political systems (e.g., the corruption index) can be expected to bring about many unpredicted findings (Noll 2002). We also need to think about how to develop the theory itself by way of its remodeling, reshaping and reconstructing. In order to do so, we must adopt new issues of those in the global scientific community devoted to these discussions and dealing with issues such as good governance and social innovation, which are currently high on the EU agenda. Migration is still another important issue for both Europe and Asia, the place of immigration for the former and emigration for the latter. The discussion is often led by employing the human security theory, but we must also apply the social quality approach to meet the need we are facing by these processes.

Taking this all together, there is much space for further theoretical development on social quality issues. In order to meet this demand, we need to recognize the

theory's special features, differences from other theories, key issues and focus (Vogel 1997). And not least, it is important to establish the capacity to apply the theory to the analysis of social problems. We must develop a clear awareness of the approach's reach, that is, define those questions this theory is able to answer and those to which it is unable to provide satisfying insights. This also means that we need to remove some barriers for its further development. Some of the barriers are imposed by self-constraint or even bias, and others come from the debate of the orientation on a rigid counter-positioning of approaches. This does not mean to overlook the fundamental differences from other theories such as the quality of life approach with different ontological and epistemological points of reference. However, one can keep an open mind in order to work for concepts that are able to provide a comprehensive analysis of present global problems and allow developing answers that are able to work toward a generic social sustainable development.

Notes

1. See www.socialquality.org.
2. Basically, this means the rejection of methodological individualism, which had been so far more or less accepted as uncontested foundation of social science.
3. The *International Journal* is the successor of the *European Journal*, which was published until 2006.

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