

Ulrike Notarp

Cultural Differences in Concepts of Life and Partnership

A Comparative Study
on Lifestyles in Europe

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Contents

Acknowledgements	9
1. Introduction	10
2. Theoretical Framework	19
2.1 Historico-Genetic Theory of Culture	25
2.1.1 Human intellectual and socio-cultural life form	26
2.1.2 Subject logic	29
2.1.3 The historic development of culture	31
2.2 Implications of Evolutionary Epistemology	38
2.2.1 Structures and classes	42
2.2.2 Patterns of order	45
2.2.3 Socio-cultural patterns	47
2.2.4 The four causal forms in the socio-cultural system	54
2.3 Gender Roles	56
2.3.1 Love and gender roles	57
2.3.2 Power and gender relations	63
2.3.3 The development of power in gender relations	67
2.3.4 Gender relationships today	71
2.3.5 Current research on gender relations	74
2.4 Comparative Culture Studies – Implications of Modernization Theories	78
3. Reasons for a Society’s Specific Set of Values	89
3.1 The Relative Level of Prosperity	89
3.2 The Role of Religion	91
3.3 Economic, Political and Social Development after 1945	94
3.3.1 West Germany after 1945	94
3.3.2 East Germany after 1945	99
3.3.3 The Czech Republic after 1945	105
3.3.4 Poland after 1945	116

4. The Text Type “Personal Advertisement”	128
4.1 The History of Personal Advertisements	132
4.2 Personal Advertisements as Research Objects in Cultural Science	134
4.2.1 Peter Kaupp: Wedding banns in social change (1968)	134
4.2.2 Christiane Gern: Gender roles: Stability or change? An empiric analysis of personal advertisements (1992)	137
5. Empirical Data and Research Methodology	140
5.1 Database	142
5.2 Content Analysis	144
5.3 The Category System	146
5.4 Data Analysis	149
6. Results	153
6.1 Character and Values/Virtues	153
6.1.1 Character traits and values/virtues – West Germany	154
6.1.2 Character traits and values/virtues – East Germany	159
6.1.3 Character traits and values/virtues – the Czech Republic	163
6.1.4 Character traits and values/virtues – Poland	167
6.1.5 Intercultural comparison of the ideal character and values/virtues	173
6.2 Outward Appearance	175
6.2.1 Outward appearance – West Germany	175
6.2.2 Outward appearance – East Germany	178
6.2.3 Outward appearance – the Czech Republic	181
6.2.4 Outward appearance – Poland	184
6.2.5 Intercultural comparison of the ideals of beauty	187
6.3 Age	189
6.3.1 Age – West Germany	189
6.3.2 Age – East Germany	191
6.3.3 Age – the Czech Republic	193
6.3.4 Age – Poland	195
6.3.5 Intercultural comparison of age	197
6.4 Acquired Status	198
6.4.1 Acquired status – West Germany	199
6.4.2 Acquired status – East Germany	203
6.4.3 Acquired status – the Czech Republic	206
6.4.4 Acquired status – Poland	209
6.4.5 Intercultural comparison of acquired status	212
6.5 Expectations on Relationship and Family/Children	216
6.5.1 Expectations on relationship and family/children – West Germany	216
6.5.2 Expectations on relationship and family/children – East Germany	219

6.5.3 Expectations on relationship and family/children – the Czech Republic	221
6.5.4 Expectations on relationship and family/children – Poland	223
6.5.5 Intercultural comparison of expectations on relationship and family/children	227
6.6 Leisure Time	230
6.6.1 Leisure time – West Germany	231
6.6.2 Leisure time – East Germany	232
6.6.3 Leisure time – the Czech Republic	233
6.6.4 Leisure time – Poland	235
6.6.5 Intercultural comparison of leisure time	236
7. Concepts of Life and Partnership	238
7.1 Concepts of Life and Partnership in West Germany	238
7.2 Concepts of Life and Partnership in East Germany	241
7.3 Concepts of Life and Partnership in the Czech Republic	243
7.4 Concepts of Life and Partnership in Poland	246
7.5 Intercultural Comparison of Concepts of Life and Partnership	248
8. Lifestyle	251
8.1 References to Lifestyle in Personal Advertisements	255
8.2 Lifestyle in West Germany	272
8.3 Lifestyle in East Germany	282
8.4 Lifestyle in the Czech Republic	290
8.5 Lifestyle in Poland	299
8.6 Intercultural Comparison of Lifestyles	307
9. The General Cultural System	316
10. List of Tables and Graphs	320
11. Literature	323
Appendix	335

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1. Introduction

The central question of the present study revolves around the existence of the phenomenon “culture.” Can we safely assume that a phenomenon, which we denominate with the term “culture,” exists? Or is there nothing in our world that should carry that name? Can we understand the world as a stratification structure – with physical, biological and social systems that build on one another? And does the social system include phenomena, which can be labeled as “cultural” and go beyond the basic characteristics of the social system?

The present study aims to answer these questions by observing the cultural specifics of social communities that only become apparent in comparison with other communities. The observation of cultural specifics led to my interest in searching for a systematic description of culture, and to the development a *model of cultures* that enables us to fully grasp the phenomenon “culture.”

The starting point of the present study is the assumption, that social groups develop certain characteristics in different areas of social life that then distinguish them from other groups. These characteristics can be empirically proven and summarized under the concept of “culture.”

Considering the multitude of different concepts and definitions of the term culture (see Baumhauer 1982, Fleischer 2001, 2003, Inglehart, Welzel 2007, Kuße 2012), I refer to a concept of culture that considers the particularities of thinking, feeling, and (communicative) acting of a given social group, which distinguish them from another group, and thus allows for a pertinent description and explanation. In line with *dimensional analysis* in Comparative Cultural Studies, I understand “culture” to be value-based (see also Vinken, Soeters, Ester 2004, Inglehart 1989, 1990, Inglehart, Welzel 2007, Javidan, House 2002, Triandis 2004,

Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner 1994). I posit that all decisions made in the social sphere are based on values. Decisions made in the private and the public sphere (in politics, in economics, in court, etc.) are based on the core values and beliefs of a given society. *Cultural values* are key elements in (guiding) culture, or in a culture's *worldview*. Cultural values are verbally mediated communicative objects that form the basis of our patterns of thinking, feeling and acting. They control a culture's communication, and form the general perspective and characteristics of a culture.

In line with Michael Fleischer's Constructivist Culture Theory (2001, 2003, 2006), I understand *culture* to be a *sign-based phenomenon*, an *operational and organizational mode of the social world* that is based on communication. We have to differentiate the *general socio-cultural system* from its very concrete manifestation, also called *second world* (Fleischer 2003, p. 18). A concrete social community, such as the Czech, Polish or German community, establishes a *second, sign-based world* by using linguistic signs and communication, which is based on the first world (the reality). In communication, a community establishes the *second world* according to their communicative and cultural criteria, and in line with the conditions of the first world. The *second world* helps to guide its members through their reality (both in the first and in second world) by organizing and controlling their actions and their communication.

“Culture is (...) the world of the signs. (...) it covers all phenomena and affects all aspects that are based on signs. Whenever signs and therefore meaning (...) occur, whenever discourses are generated and worldviews function, we are dealing with (...) culture.” (translated¹ from Fleischer 2003, p. 31)

Further, I consider culture to have an object-like character. All elements of culture (values, norms, standards) not only have a sign-based character but also always have an object-like character. They refer to characteristics and features of individuals and social communities, they become visible in their actions, and they unfold in the natural and in the social world (in the first world).

This study focuses on Western and Eastern Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland. This region in Central Europe is the point of intersection between West and East. Differences in core values and basic attitudes in Western and Central Europe come to light when comparing these four cultures.

1 All citations are translated by Kristina Förster.

Even though there is a multitude of studies comparing value systems in Western and Eastern European countries (see for example Andorka 1997, Gerhards, Hölscher 2006, 2005, 2003, Klingemann, Fuchs 2006, Inglehart 2006, Jacobs 2001, Arts, Hagenaars, Halman, Moors 2003, Krawietz 2012), many questions regarding cultural specifics and the ensuing problematics, e.g. in regard to immigration, remain unanswered.

This problem manifests itself most blatantly when it comes to European integration. The crises of the European Union that began in 2008/2009 and was reignited with the refugee crises in 2014/2015, revealed fundamental structural shortcomings of the “House of Europe,” which not only pertain to the economic difficulties of a few member states but rather point us to fundamental differences in value systems.

The initial excitement gave way to disillusionment, or even skepticism and disapproval, especially among the “young” member states of the union. In Central and Eastern European member states, the general preconception prevails that their voices, and the voices of their representatives, remain unheard or are not respected, and that they are expected to adapt to European – meaning German – value systems. There is a general mistrust against all decisions made in Brussels, and economic competition with other member states is understood to be a threat rather than an advantage. In their disappointment, many have turned away from the European concept and consider themselves to be foremost Poles, Estonians, Greeks or Slovaks rather than Europeans. Here, one of the most fundamental shortcomings of the process of unification comes to light: a lack of equal social and cultural integration based on mutual trust and respect that could lead to the dissolution of national and cultural boundaries.

Even though it is commonly known that shared economic interests are not enough for the unification of the European Union, and that the union can only prevail if there is deeper integration on a cultural and social level, it remains unclear how such integration can be achieved. The present study addresses this issue by explaining the existence and the function of culture in general and that of Western and Eastern Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland in particular.

The content analysis of personal advertisements placed in the print media in Western and Eastern Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic in 2006 and 2007 provides the empirical base of this study. The analysis of personal advertisement allows for the reconstruction of specific concepts of life and partnership in each culture and can help us to understand the predominant mindset of its members (Notarp 2013, p. 124). Fur-

thermore, it allows for the reconstruction of a specific set of lifestyles for each culture considered here.

The comparative study of material derived from several, different cultures not only enables us to compare the cultures; it is also the premise for our *perception* of cultural characteristics. The reconstruction of concepts of life, partnership and lifestyle in the four cultural spheres considered is the precondition for the goal of this study: To *explain* cultural characteristics, and the reason behind their specific differences. I want to find reasons which draw light on why the concepts of life and partnership in the four cultural areas differ. I posit that a society's predominant attitude in different areas of life, and thus, the concepts of life reconstructed in this study, express the value preferences of that society. The question at the core of this study is thus why a society has a particular set of values.

A thorough explanation of the phenomenon "culture" needs to address the *functions* of culture. We have to understand the function of culture in and for a social community, and how that culture developed historically. Thus, I do not only consider particular specifics of a single culture, but also the structural similarities of cultures in general. The structural commonalities present culture as an *operational and organizational mechanism*, which exist in all social communities (in Spain, in Finland, in China in the 19th century) and organizes our coexistence in communication. The present study thus aims not only to describe cultural characteristics but also to explain them with the help of general models.

According to Aristotle (2003, Book Five, p. 211, 1876), we can grasp the world in four different ways, and we have to explain all four primal causes if we want to describe and explain an object. The *causa materialis* describes the material of an object. The *causa efficiens* describes the *energy*, or *driving force*, the agent behind a phenomenon. The *causa formalis* describes the *form*, the *pattern* or *blueprint* of an object. The *causa finalis* describes the *aim*, *goal* or *function* of an object. Rupert Riedl explains Aristotle's four primal causes with the construction of a house:

"The construction of a house (...) requires first force, sweat, money or power, *causa efficiens*, second suitable material, *causa materialis*, third a plan that specifies the positioning of all materials, (...) a shape-forming selection principle, *causa formalis*, and fourth, an intention, a goal or program that calls for the construction, *causa finalis*. None of the four conditions is dispensable." (Translated from Riedl 2000, p. 163.)

Thus, the present study wants to develop a *general model of socio-cultural systems* on the basis of empirical data taken from personal advertisements, by alternating perception and gradual explanation of phenomena in a spiral process of increasing knowledge. Such a model designates and describes

- a) the *material* of socio-cultural systems (such as cultural values, norms, basic attitudes)
- b) the specific *form*, or socio-cultural pattern (such as ideals, gender roles, concepts of life and partnership, lifestyles)
- c) the *cause* behind the specific shape of socio-cultural systems
- d) the *function* of culture in general, and the mechanism behind its development.

After the analysis of *material* (a) and *form* (b) of the four cultural areas considered here, and the description of concepts of life, partnership and lifestyle, I analyze the *cause* (c) for the specific shape of a culture's characteristics. I hope to find causes that can explain the particular value set in each culture considered here.

In empirical cultural studies, Ronald Inglehart most notably ties a culture's value system to the standard of living in that society. Inglehart posits that a culture's fundamental values depend on the given level of prosperity. He further assumes that the characteristics of a value system are subject to the historic, cultural and philosophical heritage, and to the constitutional past of a society (Inglehart 1989, 1990, Inglehart, Halman, Welzel 2004, Inglehart, Oysermann 2004, Inglehart, Welzel 2007).

Building upon Inglehart's hypothesis, and hoping to find an answer to the question regarding the reason behind specific value systems in Eastern and Western Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland, I consider the level of prosperity in all four countries and interrelate it with the value systems. This allows for careful consideration of the correlation between the *material status quo* and the cultural *awareness* (the value system) of a society, already asserted by Karl Marx. It further allows for a close look at the interdependence of a society's *second world* – their culture – and their first world, their reality.

Further, I consider the importance of the historic-philosophic and the national heritage – in this case, especially the democratic or communistic past – for the formation of value systems in the four societies considered here. Can they serve as *one* possible explanation for the specific value systems of each culture? I present important economic, political and social factors of the post-war development in Western and Eastern Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland, and then correlate these factors with

the respective value systems, in order to present the current formation of a culture inter alia as the final product of its historic development.

The examination of value systems in Eastern and Western Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland – insofar as they are represented in the personal advertisements – and their aggregation in *Concepts of Life and Lifestyles*, does not only offer insights into the particularities of these concepts but also forms the basis for their explanation. Examination and description of an object always precede the object's explanation (Riedl 2000, Poser 2001). The description of value systems is the premise for their explanation. The present study considers the value systems both from the bottom up – starting with the society's material conditions – and from the top down – starting with the society's historic-philosophic traditions, its constitution. A culture's values and fundamental attitudes comply with the possibilities and the conditions of the lower system, and at the same time correspond to the higher system – the historical-philosophical world-view of the culture (Riedl 2000, see also Notarp 2013, p. 124).

Given that every human society always leads to the formation of culture, we have to consider the *function* of culture (d). What makes culture necessary for the continued existence of a society? This question leads to the structural similarities between the four cultural spheres considered here. I hope to find the reason for the existence of the phenomenon *culture* in these structural commonalities. I posit that *culture* and *worldview* take on important guiding- and control functions – independent of their specific shape. They level our communication, and, at the same time, come to existence through communication, and they organize a community's social life. I further posit that the particular shape of a (single) culture is the product of adaptation to internal and external conditions and opportunities of the respective society.

In order to explain the specific shape of a culture (its value system, its world view) I will take an object-theoretical approach. In order to explain the existence and the function of the general guiding and organizing modus “culture” I will take a more theoretical, abstract approach. We can explain the reason behind the existence of the phenomenon *culture* – as organizing modus – and its function when we consider structural and functional commonalities of different cultures, when we see these commonalities with regard to the phenomenon *culture* itself (as subject in science), and when we make use of theoretical approaches that allow us to consider single cultures from a general point of view.

Taken as a whole, the present study builds on analytic philosophy and modern empiricism (Stegmüller 1978, Vol. I, Chapter X; Notarp 2006,

Finke 1982, Kuhn 1993). According to modern empiricism, a scientific explanation is only valid “when it has empirical content, meaning that it can be validated in reality. But scientific theory (...) also relies on abstract principles and theories that we cannot observe empirically. Scientific hypotheses cannot be verified directly – at least not in their entirety – and we have to find ways with which we can test them” (Notarp 2006, p. 41). To infer general theory directly from empirical observation is thus impossible. The only way out is a gradual rapprochement of empirical observation and explanatory theory in a multistage process of increasing or decreasing abstraction (Poser 2001, p. 101). With increasing abstraction, the observation of an object has to be conceptualized in language. The description becomes more and more general and finally turns into theory. The result of such a process of abstraction is a number of statements that based on empiric observation finally turned into theory. These statements claim to describe and explain real phenomena according to the current state of research. At the same time, existing theories can only be verified in a process of decreasing theoreticity. This process, however, is often only partially possible; we can only verify parts of the hypotheses and not the entire theory (Stegmüller 1978, Vol. I, Chapter IX, p. 409, Poser 2001, p. 101, Notarp 2006, p. 52).

In order to bridge the distance between empirical observation (of the personal advertisement) and the general model of culture in the present study, I turn to a multistage process of convergence to provide the missing link between the empiric and the theoretic approach to culture.

To find this missing link is one of the central objectives of the present study. I want to connect empirical research of culture (see Inglehart 1989, 1990, Inglehart, Welzel 2007, Hofstede 2001, 2005, Gerhards, Hölscher 2006, Klingemann et al. 2006, Arts et al. 2003, Vinken et al. 2004, Kra-wietz 2012) to the explanation of culture as a *basic organizational mode of the social world* based on general theory (Fleischer 2006, 2003, 2001, Dux 2011, 2008, 1997, 1994, 1994a, 1982, Riedl 2000, 1990, 1984, 1984a). The objective of the present study is to connect empirical and theoretical approaches to the study of culture by making both fields of research productive for each other.

The mutual dismissal and indifference of theoretical deductive research on one hand, and empirical inductive research in cultural studies on the other hand, comes with disadvantages for both sides. Abstract, theoretical models that cannot be validated, run the risk of being written off as aesthetical constructs without any practical relevance. Empirical studies that only describe and interpret phenomena and that cannot be

framed in a larger theoretical framework, limit their epistemological value to the respective object they describe and add little or nothing to scientific progress. If we could bridge the divide between empirical and theoretical research, both directions of research could find their corrective and their justification in the other.

Given that the present study aims to connect empirical and theoretical findings, I have to provide theoretical models of culture that are accessible for empirical research, meaning that can be validated in reality. Further, the theoretical background has to be appropriate for the object of study in that there have to be points of intersection that help to organize the findings and to explain them in a larger context. Finally, the theoretical background has to be up to date in order to reflect present knowledge in cultural studies (Poser 2001, Notarp 2006).

To begin with, I need a *realistic theory of culture*, based on the assumption that we can gain real knowledge about culture. I need a theory that starts with the empiric existence of a culture that developed under certain circumstances, that has a systemic connection, and that has a specific impact and function. Such a theory is based on systemic and procedural logic. Second, I have to consider culture as a sign-based phenomenon, given that culture is based on linguistic signs, and that its operational mode is communication. Finally, I have to keep in mind that culture as a socio-cultural system is always subject to evolution, and in the specific form of a particular culture, subject to the historic change. Historico-genetic theory of Culture (Dux 1982, 1994a, 2008, 2011, Meinefeld 1995), Constructivist Culture Theory (Fleischer 1996, 1997, 2001, 2003) and Evolutionary systems theory (Vollmer 1984, 1990, Riedl 1984, 2000) are theories that answer to all the above-mentioned requirements. They form the theoretical framework for the present study.

The empirical section consists of content analysis of the personal advertisements. My interpretation of the data is based on Ronald Inglehart's object-theoretical approach (Inglehart 1990, Inglehart, Welzel 2007). Inglehart's approach starts with empirical observation, facilitates the description and interpretation of data and works as a mediator between empirical and theoretical research. His approach allows for predications that are general enough to be part of a general theory.

I will then consider my findings at the level of the individual culture deductively, from a general systems- and cultural theory perspective, as well as from a historic-genetic perspective. The empirical results thus turn into an *object* of study on a general, systematic level. This allows me to come to the core of structural commonalities in all four cultural

spheres considered here. The theoretical model of socio-cultural systems will thus be verified by the results of my empirical analysis. At the same time, the empirical results will be explained with the theoretical model of socio-cultural systems laid out in the theoretic chapter of the present study. Inductive and deductive methods will jointly form a spiral of increasing knowledge, and empiricism and theory will converge.

Contrary to comparative, empiric cultural studies, the present study is not based on survey data² (see for example Inglehart, Welzel 2007, Gerhards, Hölscher 2006, Klingemann et al. 2006, Arts et al. 2003, Vinken et al. 2004, Esmer, Pettersson 2007). I posit that the core values and basic attitudes can be found in actions, in communication, and in *texts* of the members of a culture, and that cultural characteristics captured in writing can be analyzed more precisely than when the analysis is based on survey data.

The content analysis of print media is a novelty in comparative cultural studies. My material and methods not only allow the consideration of the *quantitative* dimension of a culture's value system that research based on survey data is usually restricted to but they also enable us to see the *qualitative*, content-based dimension of value patterns and larger cultural structures. My data gives insight into the prevalence and content of value systems in all four cultural areas considered here.

² World Values Surveys: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>.
European Values Surveys: <http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu>.

2. Theoretical Framework

The fundamental concern of this study is to close the gap between empirical cultural studies and their concentration on singular cultures on the one hand, and theoretical cultural studies and their goal to formulate general models explaining culture on the other hand. The body of research that forms the foundation of this study has been chosen accordingly.

This study takes both an inductive and a deductive approach and alternates between internal and external points of view since both offer different and specific insights into cultural systems. The empiric, inductive, internal perspective allows for a description of particular cultural characteristics, which builds upon Inglehart's research and Dux's Historico-genetic theory.

The *Historico-genetic theory of Culture* (Dux 1982, 1994, 1994a, 1997, 2008, 2011, Holz, Wenzel 2003, Meinefeld 1995) stands in the tradition of the systemic and processual logic of cognition. Dux theory describes the beginning, the existence, and the development of socio-cultural systems in consideration of the conditions and possibilities that form each cultural system. Thus, Dux theory offers a general framework for Inglehart's approach. The internal descriptive perspective or *thought of the priority of nature* opposes a mode of *thought that proceeds from the priority of an absolute mind*. The internal perspective allows us to describe distinct cultures in detail, and to consider the economic and historic reasons behind certain cultural structures. The current culture is thus seen as the final product of a historic development, which is subject to certain conditions (Dux 2008, p. 68, 2011, p. 55).

Evolutionary Epistemology (hereafter EE) (Volmer 1984, 1990, Riedl 1984, 1984a, 2000) assumes that there are two ways to gain knowledge: the method of perception, of induction, and the method of explanation,

of deduction. They are two sides of the same coin of knowledge (Riedl 2000, p. 7). One is based on observation and experience, and the other is based on theoretical expectations, examination and modification but they depend on each other and can only jointly lead to knowledge. The present study makes use of both methods.

Evolutionary Epistemology or Systems Theory looks at (living) systems and their evolution in general. The present study will apply Riedl's Evolutionary systems theory (1984, 1984a, 2000) to the area of "culture." In combination with Fleischer's constructivist theory of culture (2001, 2003), I develop a general model of socio-cultural systems that will serve as a structural framework, and that I assume to be the base of modern cultures in general.

Constructivist cultural theory focuses on the symbolic and constructive character of culture and describes the cultural system explicitly from an external perspective, as a cognitive, sign-based construct. Fleischer posits that the relevant mode of organization for a cultural system is communication (2003, p. 22). Constructivist cultural theory allows us to describe culture as a system that divides into subsystems with different elements and control mechanisms, most importantly *worldview* and *discourse*. The *cultural values* – that are central to this study – can be integrated in this concept and their significance and function in the socio-cultural system can be ascertained. However, Constructivist cultural theory is limited to explaining the communicative part of a cultural system. Communication is explained through communication. External factors, such as material conditions or historic changes cannot be taken into account to explain the specific shape of a culture. In other words, Constructivist cultural theory cannot connect the cultural system – built upon signs and communication – to the relevant non-symbolic systemic (spatial) and historic (temporal) environment.

Thus, Constructivist cultural theory faces a fundamental problem that Holger Kuße (2012) addresses in his book *Kulturwissenschaftliche Linguistik (Cultural Linguistics)*. Kuße describes the problematic relationship between language and culture and asks if culture can be a purely symbolic phenomenon, if language is a fundamental part of culture, and if culture is always reflected and realized in language (Kuße 2012, p. 13). While sociologic, comparative cultural studies (Inglehart, Welzel 2007, Dux 2008, Hofstede, Hofstede 2005, Parsons 2003) do not pay much attention to the linguistic-symbolic character of cultures, concentrate on content, and presume that language (in communication) is the vehicle for culture, without putting emphasis on language itself, semiotic (Eco

1985, Lotman 1986, 2010, Posner 2003), discourse-analytic (Foucault, 1982, 1995, 2002, 2003, Link 1986, 1986a, 1992, Fleischer 1996, 1997, Kuße 2011, 2012) and constructivist cultural studies (Schmidt 1987, 1995, 2003, Fleischer 2001, 2003) focus on the symbolic character of culture. Sociologic Cultural Studies understand *cultural values* and *basic attitudes* as indicatory benchmarks that influence a culture's specific shape, while semiotic, discourse-analytic and constructivist Cultural Studies understand *values* and *attitudes* as signs with a culture-specific meaning that align and direct communication.

Cultural Linguistics divides into two lines of research that put more or less focus on the linguistic aspect of culture. One line of research builds upon the thinking of Wilhelm von Humboldt and is called *Humboldtian Linguistics*, the other one is the so-called *discourse-sensitive linguistics* (Kuße 2012, p. 21). Humboldtian Linguistics considers a nation's culture and its language as a unity. Thus, according to Humboldt's *principle of linguistic relativity*, our thinking, and thus our worldview, is defined by language. Language structures thinking and defines our worldview.

“Humboldtian is not only the idea of a close relationship between language, thought and feeling, but above all the thought that a nation or a people is differentiated by a common culture and a common language from other people and cultures. And Humboldtian is (...) the belief that these peoples and nations can be considered as cultural units (...) that have developed common linguistic behaviors, patterns of thinking, values and mentality.” (Translated from Kuße 2012, p. 48.)

Humboldtian Linguistics considers language to be an expression of a social community's (a people's, a nation's) world view. Their mentality, their values, their patterns of thinking and their conventional behavior – their culture – is reflected in their language. The examination of language is thus always also an examination of a community's culture (Kuße 2012, p. 46). In this regard, Humboldtian Linguistics is similar to sociologic Cultural Studies, focusing on cultural content, and stands in opposition to a discourse-sensitive approach, focusing on the internal differentiation of a culture in communication domains. From a discourse-sensitive perspective, the key concept and the research object is *discourse*:

“Discourse is the symbolic and communicative forms and contents of the single communication areas, which can change (...) over time, both in their forms and in their respective social relevance.” (Translated from Kuße 2012, p. 22.)

Cultural Linguistics thus differentiates discourse according to domains of communication, such as the *political* discourse, the *religious* discourse, the discourse of *law*, the *economic* discourse and the *scientific* discourse. Each discourse is subject to discourse-sensitive analysis. This analysis presents key features of a given discourse, it describes the specific use of linguistic units in discourse, as well as its historic development, it compares discourses of different cultures (Kuße 2012, p. 125).

The term “discourse” also plays a key role in *Constructivist cultural theory* (Fleischer 2001 and 2003). Contrary to Cultural Linguistics, Constructivist cultural theory defines discourses as characteristic for *subcultures*. A discourse is a *specific way to talk*, with which a specific group, or subculture, differentiates itself from other groups and thus guarantees the group affiliation. Each discourse is part of a larger *inter-discourse* that connects and integrates all discourses; the inter-discourse is the integrative part of a nation’s culture. Political, religious or economic discourse is understood as *specialized discourse*, reserved for particular communicative settings.

“Discourse is the specific communicative way in which a subculture expresses itself, that is, the way in which it communicates itself in the national culture and ensures its cohesion. (...) The discourse creates the semiotic and cultural reality of a subculture (...).

Discourses fulfill their function with regard to a given subculture and with regard to the supra-system of the national culture. A discourse ascertains the existence of the subculture that created it (...), ensures its cohesion, controls the subsystem of special discourses (...).” (Translated from Fleischer 2003, p. 36f.)

Both discourse sensitive and constructivist cultural studies understand culture as a symbolic phenomenon. The specific use of signs in a discourse creates the (sub-) culture of a social community. This means that culture is, in principle, a constructive phenomenon.

The present study is neither a linguistic nor a discourse analytic study of texts (in this case personal advertisements) from different cultural areas. I am not interested in the linguistic or discursive characteristics of the texts. Rather, I understand them as a *linguistic medium*, carrying content that is of importance in the respective culture. The objective is to identify key terms (values), to consolidate them into a telling overall image (concepts of life and partnership), and thus to partly reconstruct a *culture’s worldview* that can be compared to the worldview of other cultures.

I then consider each individual culture through the lens of cultural systems theory and from a historic-genetic perspective. Such a general approach allows me to identify structural commonalities of all four cultural areas that are part of an overall socio-cultural system. I adapt the general model developed in chapter two to my empiric results, and, at the same time, I explain the empiric results with the help of this general model – the structural blueprint of modern cultures. The inductive and deductive approach – perception and explanation – alternate.

Building upon discourse sensitive and constructivist research, the concept of culture developed in the following considers culture to be a phenomenon based on signs and semiotic processes, with communication as its operational mode. I follow the triadic model of signs developed by Charles S. Peirce (1983). Peirce describes a linguistic sign as consisting of three semiotic components: *sign-medium*, *sign-object*, and *sign-interpretant* (see also Fleischer 1990, p. 91, Notarp 2001, p. 26). According to Peirce, a linguistic sign is connected to reality through the *sign-object*. In communication one linguistic sign is connected to other signs through the *sign-interpretant*. The *sign-medium* itself is arbitrary and realized differently in each language (love, Liebe, láska, miłość). Every language has linguistic signs that carry a specific meaning and function. They are of *cultural* importance because they describe qualities and features that play a key role in that culture; they are of particular importance and value. Such signs are *cultural values* (see the definition in chapter 2.2.3) and *collective symbols* (see Fleischer 1996, 2001), that form *cultural norms, conventions, rites* and *cultural standards* (see Thomas 2003) and thus structure and organize the communal life of a society.

Contrary to the theoretical concepts mentioned above, I posit that the smallest units of culture are not only the linguistic signs (bearing cultural meaning), but at the same time empirically observable features and characteristics of objects and events, that are denominated by the linguistic signs. Features and characteristics are always expressed in language (as such, we call them *class concepts*), however, they are part of an a-semantic structure of reality – they are anchored in a *real structure* – without which the corresponding linguistic signs could not function in the semiotic world. The present study thus places special emphasis on the connection between the linguistic sign (through the *sign-object*) and the respective object (characteristic) in the first reality.

By way of illustration: a given culture considers *blonde hair* to be beautiful, blonde hair is part of that culture's ideal of female beauty (as a valid and effective construct of that culture). The attribute blonde hair

is a linguistic sign (*class concept*) that appears in texts, such as personal advertisements, or conversations about beautiful women, in which the linguistic sign carries cultural meaning, namely a feature of female beauty. The sign points to a real object, a *real structure*, which is considered to be beautiful in the *second reality* – the culture. These features and characteristics of objects and events are – when transferred into language – considered to be the smallest units of culture. Some of them are of particular importance in a social community, they carry special cultural meaning, and they give directions to conventions, standards or rites.

Abstract terms such as *honesty* or *love* are also connected to a reference object in the real world, without which they could not function in communication, meaning that a speaker could not use them adequately. Even terms such as *idea* or *spirit* that have no reference object in reality can only function in the semiotic world because most other terms in a given language have reference objects. Even abstract meta-language in science, in which general theory and propositions are formulated with terms (concepts) that have no reference object in reality, can ultimately only function in communication when the abstract terms (of theoretical concepts and propositions) can be translated step by step through decreasing abstraction to terms with a reference object in reality. Put another way, the *second reality* of linguistic signs can only function on the basis of the first reality. Without connection to the first reality, the objects of the second reality – the signs – lose their meaning and become arbitrary. They cannot fulfill their function – that is to help a speaker to organize the surrounding world in a way that he or she can cope with it.

Considering Fleischer's assumption (Fleischer, 2006 p. 19 and 179), and in accordance with Dux' Historico-genetic theory of culture (2008), the present study does not consider culture to be an independent system (as defined in general systems theory), but rather a *mode of organization of social systems*. Society, and its organizing culture are two sides of the coin of human existence, both result from the other, both are mutually dependent. Culture represents the semiotic-discursive side, and society represents the objective-social side of the socio-cultural system (see also graph 2, chapter 2.2.3). The social system generates culture as its organizational mode, building on cognition, language and communicative interaction. When talking about a general system, the present study uses the term *socio-cultural system*, or *culture* as the organizational mode of society. When looking at cultural characteristics of specific cultures, the present study talks about Czech, Polish and German culture.

Culture is a structuring and organizing mode of social systems that is based on linguistic signs and communication. Culture communicatively organizes communal life. As worldview, culture is a general mechanism that normatively regulates communication through cultural values, norms, standards. Communication then regulates and organizes communal life. A single, concrete culture is always the product of a social community's adaptation to their living conditions. The orientation framework "culture" in its concrete manifestation can thus only organize communal life in the community that the respective framework results from. Our culture thus operates our world, orients us in our reality so that we can get by, and, at the same time, our culture is a product of our society's adaptation to the conditions, possibilities, and necessities that our society is subject to.

I posit that the German, Czech and Polish terms, found in the personal advertisements, will demonstrate similarities in semantic and cultural meaning, and that they can be translated into English, but I will also quote the original terms. The present study accepts the loss that necessarily happens during the process of translation. When the meaning of a term in a certain language/culture is very different from the meaning in English, I will address and highlight the differences (see for example the concept of "love" in Polish culture, chapter 6.5.4).

2.1 Historico-Genetic Theory of Culture

Historico-genetic theory as the general epistemological framework of this study has two main goals: First, to explain how the human mind came into the world, and why and under which circumstances socio-cultural forms of life developed in a nature devoid of all mind (understood as *intellectual constructive autonomy*).

"The question is: on the basis of which constellation of conditions was it possible, following upon the natural-historical evolution of the human constitution, to develop intellectual, socio-cultural life-forms?" (Dux 2011, p. 30)

Historico-genetic theory aims at explaining the conditions necessary for the development of human cognitive abilities from the point of view of the evolutionary history of man. Historico-genetic theory is interested

in the process of enculturation, the transition from a natural history of homo-sapiens, to a cultural history of mankind.

The second central question builds upon the question of enculturation and focuses on the development of society and culture, respectively on the intellectual socio-cultural existence of mankind in history and its underlying logic of development.

“The more clearly the development of all of history comes into view, the greater the contrasts that become evident between past societies and ours, the more urgent the question becomes why people acted and thought in early societies differently from their counterparts in later societies, and why these later societies were able to develop out of these earlier ones.” (Dux 2011, p. 118)

2.1.1 Human intellectual and socio-cultural life form

The first, basic question regarding the beginnings of intellectual socio-cultural forms of life as a specific, human form of existence is that of enculturation. Both *Historico-genetic theory* and *Evolutionary systems theory* answer that question with the constraints that lead to enculturation.

According to *Evolutionary systems theory* (Riedl 2000, p. 20), gaining knowledge has always been part of life in general. Even on a chemical level, cells exchange information with their surroundings. Every living creature can extract relevant information from its living environment and use it for its benefit. This form of communication, based on the use of specific codes, has always been essential for survival. Without it, an adequate adaptation to the living environment would not be possible. As an automatic consequence of life itself, the abilities of cognitive gain improved and refined, since a growing cognitive faculty meant a higher chance for survival. Cultural forms of existence that are based on a conscious mind, on language and communication – as an emergent achievement of human beings – evolved in the course of such a development (Riedl 2000, p. 40). Compared to other species, these cultural forms of existence offer an enormous advantage in the struggle for survival.

“(…) organic developments that are capable of increasing the efficiency of interaction with the external world produce a reproductive advantage and thus that which in biology is registered as fitness maximization. And this is precisely the increase that occurs in ongoing enculturation in the development of hominids. The development of brain and instruments of speech – and the

process of enculturation it inaugurated – were advantageous for system – environment interactions, such that the evolutionary process advanced in the direction of the constructive autonomy of the anthropological constitution. (...)

The evolution from pre-human anthropoids and hominids to humans is an evolution from a genetically pre-established autonomy to a constructive autonomy.” (Dux 2011, p. 45)

Thus, a species developed that organized its existence radically differently, namely culturally, with the help of communication and linguistic signs. The specifics of human forms of life unfold on the base of – and alongside – nature, they build on our biological “equipment,” our anthropologic constitution, which, thanks to the constructive autonomy of our brain, allows us to autonomously create our world and form of life.

“The constructive autonomy of the human form of existence presents itself as a comprehensible development in the evolution of the species. It lies along the same line of development as that in which the basic constitution of life, the autonomy of the interrelationship of the internal and external, was able to develop into constructive autonomy.” (Dux 2011, p. 48)

According to Historico-genetic theory, the phylogenetic development of the human mind, or intellect, happened on the natural base of a sufficiently complex brain and in the interaction of a subject with its environment, and lead to a *constructive autonomy* of the human brain. Thinking can be described as *an active construction of cognitive structures on the foundation of a subject’s interaction with the world* (see also Meinefeld 1995, p. 136). Thinking is a specific problem-solving competence unique to mankind that developed thanks to our reflexive action competence. We construct our own cognitive reality by extracting relevant information from the outside world and by organizing that information in cognitive structures that are crucial for the struggle for survival. This construct of the world has its material base in the connection of neural pathways in our brain (Dux 2011, p. 50–54; 2008, p. 63, see also Niedenzu 2003).

A socio-cultural organization of our existence that is based on consciousness is impossible without a symbolic medium – it depends on language and the communicative interaction with others. Of course, there are forms of communication in the animal kingdom that are based on the interactive use of symbols. However, the organization of social groups in the animal kingdom is to a large extent genetically determined.

Communication happens on a genetic and on a behavioral level, never on a cultural level. The cultural organization of existence that builds upon the constructive autonomy of the brain is unique to mankind and is always connected to language and communication (Riedl 2000, p. 23).

Around the age of two, and parallel to the acquisition of language, children become aware of their action competence and therewith also aware of themselves. With language acquisition, children develop the ability to think about themselves, their action and the world. Children transfer themselves, their action in the world and the world itself into the symbolic-mediumistic world of cognition and their reflexive awareness begins to take form. Reflexivity is the prerequisite for the formation of a cognitive, socio-cultural form of existence since we need to position ourselves in opposition to the world in order to create a cognitive, socio-cultural form of existence on the base of language and communication (Dux 2011, p. 64, p. 134; 2008, p. 79, p. 172).

“The point of constructivism here, too, is that the modes of competence, means, and procedures first develop in the process itself. There is a systemic aspect to the production of language and reality in that each has the other as its condition of possibility. This process takes place by means of communication. (...)

The key to understanding enculturation phylogenetically and ontogenetically is the realization that the process of constructing the world takes place in the triangle of communication between communicants, ego and alter ego, and their interaction with an external reality. (...)

(...) the point of constructivism in the process of enculturation is to gain structures in the construction of the world in a pre-categorically experienced world. Completely elementary access to nature is secured via the senses; its construction, its structuring, takes place socio-culturally by means of the constructs with which we know nature.” (Dux 2011, p. 67–68)

In his *Genetic Epistemology*, Jean Piaget (2003) [1970], bases our brain’s ability to construct, on our active interaction with the world. Piaget explains the prerequisite for a cognitive construct of reality with a naturalistic base and active subjects. Knowledge develops when subjects actively interact with their world.

“Knowledge is constantly connected with actions or operations, that is, with transformations – from the most basic sensory-motor actions (such as pushing and pulling) to the most complex intellectual operations, which are internal-

ized mental actions. (...) Knowledge originally arises (...) neither from the objects nor from the subject, but from – initially inextricable – interactions between the subject and these objects.” (Translated from Piaget 2003, p. 44.)

Ontogenetically, new maturing members of the species thus have to construct their own world out of the cultural zero position of their anthropological constitution. They have to develop the cognitive-cultural form of their own existence according to the concrete, material, socio-cultural conditions of the time they have been born into. The process of enculturation thus lies in early ontogeny of each member of a given society (Dux 2011, p. 50; 2008, p. 60). Since the structures that develop in early ontogeny have always been informed by the same elementary circumstances, they are the same in all cultures, they are universal (Dux 2011, p. 49; 1994a, p. 189). In all societies the cognitive structures of the adult world build upon the basic structures formed in early ontogeny, they are an advancement of the basic structures.

“The point of discovery of ontogenesis for the understanding of enculturation lies in the insight that the “constructor” of this form of existence is the new, maturing member of the species. And this is always and everywhere the case: in every society, and at all times. The later-born members of the species always start the constructive process from anew and always start this process from the cultural position zero of their anthropological constitution.” (Dux 2011, p. 50)

2.1.2 Subject logic

As a consequence, the structures of our thinking have to be similar to the structures of our world, and they must have a subjectivist logic, given that the key figure for the maturing members of the species, the person with which they make first experiences, is always the caregiver. This generally more competent other accompanies the child and is an important influence and an active agent. The significant events in a child’s early life originate from this other, and therefore, the child’s constructs have an active, acting quality. In early ontogeny, children consider objects always as alive and acting (Dux 2008, p. 82, 117, 1994a, p. 185).

“Precisely because the caregiving, significant others are the predominant objects in the environment of the maturing member of the species and because the absolutely significant events in his or her life originate from these others,

it builds the structure of action into the objects and events in its world. (...) For this reason, I term this logic subject logic and the explanation, accordingly, as subjective.

Subject logic and subjective logic thus try to denote that explanations of that which is found to exist and occur in the world are gained as if these phenomena were brought forth by an acting subject or as if they had been brought forth from out of him.” (Dux 2011, p. 92–93)

In early ontogeny, children create their socio-cultural world by developing cognitive patterns that help them to understand events and objects in their daily life. In this constructive build-up of the world, they form structures that determine how they see and understand the surrounding world. These structures inevitably have a subjectivist or material logic. It is thus not surprising that early societies followed such a logic and that they explained the world and its phenomena exclusively with such a logic (Dux 2011, p. 92; 2008, p. 116).

The subjectivist logic originates in the conditions to which the members of the species are exposed in early ontogeny and under which they form the basic structures of cognition. Since the crucial objects that surround a child in this developmental phase are acting objects and the child provides the cognitive constructs it creates based on the objects of the surrounding world with a moment of action. But how does subjectivist logic function and how did it influence the world view of societies throughout history? During early ontogeny, children learn that all relevant events and actions are connected to a subject. The acting subject initiates the action; the action turns into an event and finally reaches its objective. In this two-part relation, the course of action is directed from the subject towards the objective. The subject is interconnected with both the action and the objective produced by the subject.

In subjectivist logic, however, the *process of explanation* runs in the opposite direction: Thinking proceeds from the phenomenon and attributes it to an agent, or a subject, thus, it explains the phenomenon by finding its cause in the subject that it produced (Dux 2011, p. 95; 2008, p. 120).

“In a two-part relational logic in which occurrences are accounted for in the way depicted above, the explanation lies in the beginning of the process. And that is where it stays. The occurrence is brought forth from out of the beginning. The beginning is an absolute beginning and, as such, an origin. (...)

Crucial in understanding subjective logic as an absolutist logic is the circumstance that the explanandum already resides in finished form in the absolute as unrealized potentiality. Explanation consists in providing that which is with a foundation in the absolute.” (Dux 2011, p. 95)

In the course of early ontogeny, children are forced to develop cognitive and socio-cultural competences that allow them to survive in the society they have been born into. The caregiver, who has already adapted to that society, guides the child at the beginning. Thus, the basic cognitive structures and their inherent subjectivist logic, that are the same in each and every child, advance according to the state of development of the given society.

If that is the case, the historic development of societies originates always in the zero position of the maturing members of the species. The structures that are considered to be transitional stages of ontogenetic development in our own society are encountered in historical times as final stages (Dux, Kumari 1994, p. 436). In other words, our ontogenetic cognitive, socio-cultural development mirrors the historic development of our society. For a society’s historic development, or for the development of intellectual history as a whole, this means that there are different stages of development in the socio-cultural organization of our existence, which have been formed by the necessity to adapt to the real and social world by developing action- and problem-solving competences.

“Human species develops (...), by improving its action-competence and creating an external world in action-relevant organizational forms. Exactly this process continues in history. History (...) means that humans strengthen their organizational competence over the external world – nature as well as the social world (...). The epochs of history represent forms of this organizational competence that have led to new structures of the societal organization.” (Translated from Dux 1994a, p. 200.)

2.1.3 The historic development of culture

The second crucial question that *Historico-genetic theory* tries to answer revolves around the historic development of cultural forms of organization, or the development of cultural history, and, respectively the logic of development at its base. To link history to external events is not sufficient; Historico-genetic theory rather wants “to trace the develop-

mental process of culture, and especially of thought, in history, and in so doing, to make its developmental logic comprehensible” (Dux 2011, p. 98; 2008, p. 125).

According to Historico-genetic theory, the developmental logic inherent in history can only be understood from a processual point of view, which allows recognition that the historic development of culture and society is the manifestation of adaptation to certain internal and external circumstances and possibilities and that historic development takes place in order to guarantee the survival of a society. We can only understand the socio-cultural organization – the culture – of a society, once we understand the logic behind it.

Consequently, we have to reveal the structural logic behind a society’s symbolic constructs. In view of the present study, we have to uncover the general structures behind the concepts of life and partnership of the four cultural spheres considered, – or to speak in Historico-genetic terms – we have to uncover the structural pattern behind their socio-cultural organization – that means to reconstruct the conditions that formed these structures (see also Dux 2011, p. 129; 2008, p. 166).

The characteristics of a given culture – its symbolic-medial form of organization – is always subject to a society’s materialistic and historic conditions and possibilities (see Inglehart, Halman and Welzel 2004, Inglehart, Welzel 2007), and the form of organization of human existence – culture in general – always develops under the material and historic conditions that the society is subject to at all times. First, it is our anthropologic constitution, the constructive autonomy of our brain that allows us to create constructive worlds with the help of language and communicative interaction. Second, it is the existing reality, both natural and social, that forms the symbolic-medial forms of organization, and that helps to match our constructs to the world in which we live in (Dux 1994, p. 181).

“The history of the socio-cultural life-forms is the real history of the species. And history of the species means: by virtue of the constructive autonomy that distinguishes it, the organizational form of human existence undergoes a development that allows it to take on ever new historical forms. (...)

No one can escape the realization that for each of the presently existing societies and cultures there were preceding societies and cultures that were preconditions for their own development. (...)

Every society and every culture has its own history; nonetheless, all of them are encompassed by the one history that makes up the history of the species.” (Dux 2011, p. 85)

In early societies of hunters and gatherers, and in simple agricultural and archaic societies, the subjectivist logic manifests itself in the society’s understanding of the world. The world is understood to be full of gods, ghosts, and demons that take the role of acting subjects, which cause events and objects in reality. This acting subject brings forth all phenomena (Dux 2011, p. 93; 2008, p. 117).

“In early thought, the world is understood via subjective structure. The subjective structure is the dominant structure in the understanding of the world up until modernity. And as the predominant structure, it defines each of the categorical forms: substance, causality, time, space.” (Dux 2011, p. 94)

It would go beyond the scope of this project to describe the development of our cultural and intellectual history starting with earliest societies, covering different ages – such as early high cultures, ancient Greece and the Middle Ages (see Dux 1994a) – in order to demonstrate how the organizational competence of mankind grew and thereby enabled mankind to achieve higher forms of societal organization. The present study is interested in the early modern era that made way for a scientific revolution in the 16th and 17th century and therewith changed the general understanding of the world. Up until the early modern age, subjectivist logic was dominant, both in philosophical and scientific thinking. It was believed that everything is determined from the very beginning, and that everything can be explained by a final, absolute divine (Dux 2008 p. 29).

With the discoveries and findings of Galilei, Kepler, Descartes, and Newton, a new worldview gained acceptance. The universe and our world were now understood as energetic systems following immanent rules that contradict teleological occurrences (Dux 2011, p. 24; 2008, p. 30). An absolute, divine spirit that creates and explains the universe, the world, human beings, and that has its origins in a subjectivist logic of thought, is no longer necessary to explain events and phenomena, and with the scientific discoveries, even becomes suspicious.

“The revolution in the natural sciences consists in having eliminated subjectivist logic from the understanding of nature and having replaced it with a functional-relational, i.e., a systemic logic.” (Dux 2011, p. 23)

Consequently, philosophy had to fundamentally change its explanations of the world and was forced to an enhanced reflexivity. With Descartes and Kant's "Copernican Turn" leading the way, philosophical thinking in modern times focused on *convergence*, *constructivity*, and *historicity* in an attempt to explain the world (Dux 2011, p. 32; 2008, p. 41).

The concept of *convergence* of world and mankind posits that the world is always only the mental construct of man. Both man and his worldview change over time, they stay correlated, however, they match, they are convergent (Dux 2008, p. 41).

The concept of *constructivity*, the understanding that we can only perceive and understand the world as we perceive and understand it, is the most fundamental change in the thinking of modern times. Thinking that follows a logic of identity and that defines knowledge, thinking and being as one, thinking that attaches knowledge about an object to the object itself and is thus brought to us by the object, is replaced by transcendental thinking that understands the human mind to be the creator, or rather the designer of our knowledge of the world, and thus recognizes that all knowledge, even scientific knowledge, is a construct. Kant's assertion that *human's rationality can only perceive what it itself creates*, reveals that even transcendental logic attains the *thought of the priority of an absolute mind over nature*. The absolute divine spirit was replaced by an absolute human constructive mind. Transcendental logic keeps the mind, and thus our knowledge about the world, as an *a priori* absolute final, and therefore follows a subjectivist logic (Dux 2011, p. 34; 2008, p. 43)

"One cannot as simply discard a logic of understanding the world as one can outdate substantive knowledge. (...) It is thus all too understandable that philosophical reflection, in its efforts to take epistemological measure of the modern consciousness of convergence and constructivism, remains in the grips of traditional logic. In it, however, something can only be explained by positing that the explanandum is already inherent or intrinsic to the explanation: that man's mind results from mind." (Dux 2011, p. 88)

The awareness of constructivity not only leads to a radical change in our understanding of nature, but also in our understanding of society. The normativity of social order was no longer seen as prescribed by god's order, but rather as created by men (Dux 2011, p. 35; 2008, p. 44). Finally, our understanding of *historicity* changed. For the first time, history was understood as a history of developing social forms of