Table of Content

1 Generational justice, sustainability, and ethical values

The driving force behind social and cultural change is the ongoing change of generations[1]. Each generation takes over social structures, values, and resources from its predecessors, reinterprets them, and passes them on to the next generation in a modified form. According to Mannheim, since every generation is responsible for renewal, it also bears responsibility for the conditions under which future generations will live. In this sense, intergenerational justice means that each generation makes its social, ecological, and economic decisions in such a way that they do not restrict the opportunities for action and development of subsequent generations.

To translate this generational responsibility into policy, countries have agreed on 17 sustainability goals[2] that they want to achieve within their respective territories to the best of their ability. These[3] goals are integrated, indivisible, and equally important.

The central prerequisites for child development are equal opportunities, health, and growing up without poverty. Safer relationships with parents and the immediate environment, as well as the feeling of being able to move safely within society, play a decisive role in the development of social cohesion. All members of society should have the same opportunities regardless of their gender. Resource consumption in many countries and population growth in others must develop in such a way that the Earth remains liveable for future generations.

The issues of equal opportunities, health, poverty, relationship security, gender equality, and resource consumption were already discussed in detail in the 1970s. The book "*Bildung ist Bürgerrecht, das Plädoyer für eine aktive Bildungspolitik*" (Education is a civil right: a plea for active education policy) was published in 1965. The Limits to Growth was published in 1972. A year later, Alice Schwarzer's Frauenarbeit – Frauenbefreiung (Women's Work – Women's Liberation) was published. The German government's second report on the economic situation of children and their disadvantages, as well as on the importance of family socialisation, was widely read and discussed at the time. Since these works were discussed publicly and politically, and numerous measures were developed to overcome the deficits iden-

1 Mannheim, Karl (1964): Das Problem der Generationen. In: Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, special issue 7, p. 530.

2 https://www.un.org/depts/german/gv-70/band1/ar70001.pdf

3 Today, we proclaim 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 associated targets, which are integrated and indivisible. United Nations, General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1, 2015, p. 1/2 (PDF p. 2).

tified, the question arises as to why the same problems are still being addressed today with almost identical analyses. The analyses at the time were conclusive, widely accepted in research, and contained a wealth of very concrete proposals on how politicians should deal with the issues. Although there were many changes, they were apparently not effective enough to solve the problems mentioned above. This book addresses this question.

The core thesis is that science and, to some extent, politics have stuck to the solutions and analyses of the 1960s and 1970s without checking whether the approaches proposed at the time were correct or can still be used to solve problems today. According to Popper's theory of falsification, scientific theories are only valid as long as they stand up to reality. If you stick to a theory even though reality has disproved it because you are convinced of the good intentions or goals of that theory, you are acting in accordance with the ethics of conviction. The ethical conviction to stick to a disproved theory or certain principles because you are convinced of their moral correctness carries the risk that concrete problems will not be solved but only postponed. The actual challenges remain and are thus passed on to the next generation instead of being addressed responsibly and efficiently in the here and now. Ethics of conviction can thus unintentionally lead to burdens and unresolved problems being shifted into the future instead of creating sustainable solutions. If the active generation does not solve problems for reasons of ethical conviction but instead pushes them ahead, it is acting irresponsibly toward the next generation. It is shirking its responsibility for sustainable solutions and leaving the consequences and burdens of its actions to future generations. This violates the principle of intergenerational justice and jeopardizes the future viability of society.

This is harsh criticism, which is why I decided on a three-step approach when structuring the book and conducting the research: In the first step, the topics covered by the sustainability goals are empirically examined and reviewed. In the second step, this analysis is tested at the level of the social system, and then, in a third step, adherence to certain arguments is critically questioned at a more epistemological level. The hypotheses guiding the analysis for the individual areas are listed briefly below so that the perspective for each step should be clear.

The sustainability goal of education (SDG 4) (equal opportunities)

The sustainability goal of education is to be achieved in Germany by opening the secondary school system. The proportion of high school graduates in each age group has risen significantly. However, inequality of opportunity has remained. More children from educated families have been able to attend grammar school and obtain a university entrance qualification. This expansion is due to the fact that the number of high school graduates has increased, and average grades have risen, even though skills in mathematics and German are declining in all interna-

tional country comparisons. In some federal states, for example, the proportion of high school graduates with grades between 1 and 1.9 has increased significantly over the past ten years, while at the same time the number of young people in the top group in mathematics and German has declined. Inequality has not decreased. Whether the openness hypothesis is correct has not been tested. Empirically, however, it has been disproved.

The sustainability goal of health

No area shows as clearly as healthcare how much the current political generation is passing on all the burdens to future generations. Although people are not only older but also much healthier, and the group of people in physically demanding jobs has become much smaller than when the pension system was introduced in 1957, politicians continue to cling to the misconception that they are doing something good for the older generation by providing a fixed retirement age and early retirement. This assumption has been empirically disproved. Sweden has the highest life expectancy in Europe and the longest working life for men and women in Europe. A hypothesis can be falsified by a reality check, so Sweden is compared with Germany, with a particular focus on the health conditions of young people.

The sustainability goal of avoiding poverty

Until around the mid-1970s, traditional poverty research attempted to document the deprivation of children and young people very carefully and to derive proposals for overcoming this deprivation. Modern poverty research primarily focuses on an indicator that measures the ratio of an individual's income to the median income in a given society. The dilemma of this indicator is easy to understand. As long as incomes in a society follow a certain distribution – be it a normal distribution or another form – this indicator does not measure poverty, but merely inequality in society. Such an indicator cannot measure a lack of access to infrastructure such as kindergartens, sports clubs, or other facilities, nor can it measure deficiencies in parental socialisation that prevent children from developing optimally. This means that as inequality in a society decreases, relative child poverty declines, even though deprivation and children's lack of access to infrastructure may increase.

The sustainability goal of security

Youth welfare is one of the very few areas of society that has undergone radical restructuring as a result of the reform of the Youth Welfare Act in the past. While in the 1970s and 1980s, children with family difficulties were much more likely to be removed from their families and torn from the security of their family relationships, today's youth welfare services seek to support parents by offering a wide range of daycare facilities and parental support services. In difficult cases,

solutions are found through intensive discussion with parents and children so that the security of the relationship is maintained for the children. However, the attempt to develop solutions at the individual relationship level to convey security and trust to children does not mean that processes at the social level are moving in the same direction. At the level of society, the sense of security, especially among young women, has declined significantly. These differing developments must be examined and explained.

The sustainability goal of gender equality

When Schwarzer wrote about women's work and women's liberation in the early 1970s, the classic industrial society with its ideal of the hard-working industrial worker and the housewife who supported him was coming to an end. The crises in the Ruhr industry, the shipbuilding industry, and steel production throughout Germany shaped this period. Women's economic independence from men and the decision about their own life path were central socio-political challenges at the time, as the old economic order with its clear division of roles was slowly but surely disappearing. The demand for equal treatment of women and men – including in leadership positions – was a logical consequence of these processes of change. And today we know from OECD data that without these fundamental changes, the subsequent economic development would not have been possible. The so-called gender paradox is now well known in the literature: a reduction in vertical selection and greater gender equality in a society can also lead to an increase in horizontal selection, i.e., specific career choices. A large part of the gender pay gap can be attributed to this horizontal selection. However, if science, politics, and the public continue to focus almost exclusively on vertical selection, the same thing will happen as we have seen in the education sector. Opportunities are created for qualified and privileged young women who are eligible for leadership positions. However, it is precisely those who, through horizontal selection, end up in professional fields with no career or qualification opportunities who are forgotten in this discourse. This is becoming an increasing problem, especially in a diverse society with many young women from different cultures. For whatever reasons, they then remain stuck in the traditional role patterns rightly criticized by Schwarzer. Groups of excluded people form because they lack the necessary qualifications.

The sustainability goal: Stop climate change.

When the limits of growth and resource consumption on Earth were discussed in the 1970s, the interaction between the lifestyle in wealthy countries and population growth in emerging economies was always a topic of debate. This interaction has largely disappeared from the discussion on climate change mitigation. This is surprising, given that the 1994 World Conference on Women explicitly emphasized

this connection. Education and empowerment of women slow population growth and reduce the burden on the climate and environment. Instead, there is an increasing focus on technical solutions, and industrialized countries, especially Europe, have set themselves the goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. This means reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels and bringing them to net zero by 2050. The strategy focuses primarily on technological innovations and structural adjustments in the industrial, energy, and transportation sectors. In 2018, William Nordhaus received the Nobel Prize for his climate model and his pioneering work in climate economics. This model assumes that the resources for combating climate change must be used in such a way as to achieve the greatest possible effect. A net-zero strategy like the one in Europe, which is expensive, can be bad for the climate if the money is then needed somewhere else. Even though there's probably no climate scientist who seriously questions the Nordhaus model, the German debate isn't about how to allocate resources efficiently, but about sticking to the net-zero strategy. The argument is then no longer scientific or economic but based on ethical convictions. This is also examined in detail, because from a generational perspective, this strategy is not only inefficient but also leaves the problem to the next generation to solve. As will be shown in detail, the argumentation of scientists in this field also follows ethical considerations.

One conclusion that emerges from our analysis of the individual areas is that politicians but also scientists to some extent, have repeated the mistake that Karl Popper highlighted in his book "The Open Society and Its Enemies: An Essay on the Consequences of the Critique of the Reason of Humanity." People sit in the cave, unable to see outside, and believe that the shadows they see on the wall are reality, instead of coming out of the cave and checking what reality looks like. This is not the way to achieve intergenerational justice.

Verification of the theses

Intensive research was necessary to verify the theses. There is a wealth of material available. I did not publish this material in the book itself because it would have made the book three times as thick. Instead, there is a website, kidsdata.de, which contains all this information so that readers can check the entire argument in detail. This site also contains direct links to the sources used, so that the figures can be checked individually. In addition, there is a PDF page on this website and on the publisher's website that can be downloaded, in which all footnotes can be activated. This allows readers to check every table on the screen as they read.

2 The forgotten children

When Georg Picht described the "education catastrophe" in his 1964 book[4] and Ralf Dahrendorf[5] used the fictional character of a Catholic working-class girl from the countryside to highlight the key factors contributing to educational inequality in Germany, politicians across the political spectrum responded with investments and innovations in the education sector.

It is not people who should come to education, but education that should come to people. High schools, technical colleges, and universities were established in rural areas. The educational canon, which at the time was oriented toward the classical educated middle class, was significantly changed and made less elitist. The traditional role of women as housewives and mothers was also redefined in conservative parties as a free choice between career and family.

Willy Brandt's quote, "The education crisis is a disaster for the future of our country," sums up the political assessment and response.

Germany faces a similar challenge today. Depending on estimates, there is a shortage of up to 600,000 skilled workers and craftsmen. This is not only a matter of replacing skilled workers in industry and the skilled trades who are retiring due to age but also of restructuring the industrial base in response to climate change and new technologies, including artificial intelligence. Politicians, the media, and academics agree on the analysis of the shortage.

However, the political response to the shortage varies: politicians and some economists hope to compensate for the shortage by importing skills through migration. No longer are our own children and grandchildren or the children living in Germany seen as the solution to this challenge. From the perspective of current policy, the apparent education crisis, which is described in more detail below, is not a disaster for the future of the country.

The thesis put forward here is that the shortage, which is to be offset by importing skilled workers, is a consequence of insufficient investment in those areas of the education system where basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic are developed. This is substantiated with figures below and a solution to this crisis is outlined. The proposal is based on the perspectives of Willy Brandt, Ralf Dahrendorf, and Georg Picht.

4 Picht, Georg (1965): The German Education Catastrophe. Vol. 349. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.

5 Dahrendorf, Ralf (1968): Bildung ist Bürgerrecht: Plädoyer für eine aktive Bildungspolitik. Hamburg: Nannen Verlag.

2.1 Demographic facts

The import of skilled workers is justified by the declining birth rate and the aging of the German population. However, this overlooks the fact that Germany has seen a population increase of over 4 million people since 1990. While just under 80 million people lived in Germany at that time, the figure today is 84.3 million. The average age of immigrants was and remains significantly below the average age of the German population. Since the majority of immigrants have only come to Germany in the last 10–15 years, the question arises as to why there is still a shortage of skilled workers despite this intensive immigration.

This discrepancy between population growth and the shortage of skilled workers is easy to explain. Many immigrants come from countries where education and training for the younger generation are not as highly valued as in many European countries. Since education is a central goal of sustainability (Sustainability Goal 4), the United Nations (UNICEF) has set up a database[6] in which all countries enter the school years and school attendance of the younger generation. In some countries from which immigrants come to Germany, there is hardly any schooling for girls, and even for boys, the length of schooling is still below the eight years that used to be standard in Europe. In the 1960s and early 1970s, 35% of young women left elementary school to become semi-skilled workers in industry. This was criticized at the time and was constructively overcome through science and politics. Today, Germany is a world leader with an average training period of 13 years.

If we do not rely on importing qualifications but instead focus on developing the skills of the younger generation, as we did in the 1960s, then demographic change offers a great opportunity. The number of children in the younger age groups has risen significantly.

In 2022, there will be 400,000 more children of kindergarten age (3 to 6 years) living in Germany than in 2013. The number of 6- to 10-year-olds has risen by around 400,000 since 2013, and the number of 10- to 15-year-olds by around 100,000. According to Eurostat's population projections, a further increase is to be expected. From a demographic perspective, it can be assumed that between 2013 and 2030, almost one million more children will be living in Germany by the age of 15[7]. The key question is why this potential is not reflected in the demand for apprenticeships.

6 https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f/

7 Bevölkerung – deutsche – ausländische Staatsangehörige https://www.kidsdata.de/die-vergessenen-kinder.html

2.2 The forgotten children and the lack of investment

There are two reasons for this. Both can be clearly illustrated with data from the latest PISA results.

Germany has been a country of immigration since the 1960s. However, immigrant groups have changed significantly over time. Data on mathematics performance in PISA show that immigrants from southern Europe, such as Italy or Spain, perform only slightly worse, at 20% compared to 13% in Germany. The second wave of immigration, which was heavily influenced by Turks, is characterized by immigrants whose home school system already has a 50% share of children and young people who do not reach the lowest levels in mathematics. The most recent wave of immigration, with many immigrants from Arab countries, includes 65 to 90% of children and young people who do not achieve the lowest level of competence in the PISA mathematics test[8]. These poor performances cannot be attributed to poverty in the countries concerned, as even countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia differ only marginally[9].

The countries with very low proportions of children who do not achieve the minimum performance in the PISA test are almost exclusively Asian countries. Hong Kong, Singapore but also Japan, Taiwan, and some regions of China dominate the top of this table. But even Vietnam, which has a terrible colonial history and a long war behind it, has a school system whose results are no different from those of France or Spain. It should be explicitly pointed out that it is not only Arab countries that have considerable problems in these performance comparisons but also countries such as Bulgaria and Romania, where 40% of children do not have sufficient math skills and which have problematic school systems. Although the Federal Republic of Germany is not in the top group, with a failure rate of 13% among children with German citizenship, Germany is on a par with Finland and the Netherlands, while Switzerland, with a failure rate of 10%, is on a par with Asian countries. Compared to other countries such as Finland, Denmark, Sweden, France, and Spain, the German school system is obviously better in some respects for children without a German passport than the school systems in their countries of origin. However, Germany is repeatedly overtaken by Switzerland. These data allow two clear conclusions to be drawn.

The hope of attracting skilled workers from the countries that are currently dominating immigration to Germany is completely unfounded. The challenges facing the school systems in these countries are enormous. One can only hope that these countries will make similar efforts to those made by countries such as Vietnam to educate their own children so that they have the same basic mathematical

8 Mathematics – low performance – PISA (OECD) data 2022
9 https://pisadataexplorer.oecd.org/ide/idepisa/dataset.aspx

skills as children in this Asian country. The challenge for the German system is to reduce the failure rates of children with a migrant background compared to the corresponding failure rates of children born in Germany, while at the same time achieving the rates of Asian countries for all children.

After all, the lower the failure rates, the greater the potential for young adults to choose and learn demanding and challenging professions. Overall, however, the data also show that this is a major and difficult task that no European country has yet mastered. There are also major differences within Europe. Switzerland, at 26%, and Greece, at 52%, are far apart. The data also show that the future of economic development lies not in Europe but in Asia.

If we could achieve the same school dropout rate among immigrant children as among children without a migrant background, there would be 200,000 more well-qualified young people available[10].

In a society with such diverse social backgrounds, languages, ideas about the purpose of school learning, and forms of work, it is not a question of improving transitions in the education system. It is about teaching basic school skills such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and understanding scientific concepts.

The German school system is currently not equipped to do this. Investment continues to focus on secondary schools and universities, while Germany, together with Bulgaria, ranks last in the EU in primary and preschool education, i.e., in the development of these basic skills. Eurostat documents this disgrace every year, and the federal government's education finance report also documents this neglect of elementary education. After all, how are the 400,000 children between the ages of 3 and 6 and the additional 400,000 children between the ages of 6 and 10 supposed to acquire these skills when a system is as underfunded as this part of the system in Germany?[11] However, the PISA data also show that in countries that invest significantly more in this area, the difference between the performance of children with and without a migrant background is smaller. Neighbouring Switzerland is significantly better in this respect.

2.3 Parents: competition, compensation, or partnership

The second family report from 1975 summarized the most relevant research findings at the time on social differences and disadvantages in children's educational opportunities in a concise and clear manner. The analyses from that time are

10 https://www.kidsdata.de/schulabganger-ohne-bundeslander.html
11 https://www.kidsdata.de/grundschule-finazen.html

surprisingly relevant today[12]. The authors[13] explain the serious social differences between social classes with material disadvantage, a lack of social relationships with other socially privileged groups, and the different cultural capital of the various social classes. Politicians have tried to respond to this. Free learning materials, changes to child benefits and the expansion of student financial aid, to name just a few well-known examples, were attempts to alleviate material disadvantage. The attempt in many federal states to develop longer periods of joint learning, the expansion of counseling services for children and parents, and new forms of teacher-parent communication are just a few examples of attempts to make secondary school education more inclusive. The nationwide expansion of preschool care and education for children is also intended to help identify, compensate for, and promote the strengths and weaknesses of individual children as early as possible.

Local authorities, schools, and ultimately the state have considerable scope for action in the area of economic disadvantage but also in the development of social relationships and greater inclusion of disadvantaged children in educational development. In the area of cultural capital, i.e., the potential for stimulation that parents bring to their relationship with their children, the state's influence is limited to providing qualifications for many parents. Here, too, much has changed. Young women have overtaken young men in terms of participation in secondary education, and the average length of schooling and training in Germany is now 13 years, one of the highest in the world.[14]

If we compare children with a migrant background with children born in Germany today, we see that the education system faces the same major challenges today as it did in the 1960s.

2.4 Social inequality and mathematical skills

If we break down the results of the latest PISA study in the same way that performance comparisons between social classes were carried out in the 1970s, we get almost the same results[15].

12 Becker, Rolf (2006): Dauerhafte Bildungsungleichheiten als unerwartete Folge der Bildungsexpansion? In: Hadjar, Andreas/Becker, Rolf (Eds.): Die Bildungsexpansion. Erwartete und unerwartete Folgen. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, pp. 27–62.

13 Bundesministerium für Jugend, Familie und Gesundheit (1975): Bericht über die Lage der Familie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Zweiter Familienbericht. Familie und Sozialisation – Leistungen und Leistungsgrenzen der Familie hinsichtlich des Erziehungs- und Bildungsprozesses der jungen Generation. Deutscher Bundestag, 7. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 7/3502.

14 https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f

15 Lewalter, Doris/Diedrich, Jennifer/Goldhammer, Frank/Köller, Olaf/Reiss, Kristina (Eds.) (2023): PISA 2022. Analyse der Bildungsergebnisse in Deutschland. Münster/New York: Waxmann. www.pedocs.de/volltexte/2024/28666/pdf/Lewalter_et_al_2023_PISA_2022.