

# Disability Research in German-speaking Countries

University of Leeds  
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University of Cologne, Germany

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## Introductory Remarks

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



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



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

### Nazi Propaganda



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

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

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## The German Disability Rights Movement: its beginning

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

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Rallye against the „Frankfurt Judgement“ (1980)

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

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



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



Source:  
private



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## “Cripples' Tribunal” (1981)



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## Since 1980s: „independent living“ outside institutions

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

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## Since late 1980s: Legal Activities

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

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## Protest against bioethics



**UNSER LEBENSRECHT  
IST UNDISKUTIERBAR !**

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

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## Gender Issues



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

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## Conclusion

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

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## Some issues of the critical disability discourse

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

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



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



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



© Bifos 2003



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# German-speaking Disability Studies: first editions



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## ... establishing Disability Studies in German-speaking countries

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



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## What is still lacking?

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



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

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



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## No German model of disability, but...

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

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## Conclusion

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

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## Own Research

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



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## Own Research

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



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## Current Research Project (1)

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



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## Current Research Project (2)

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



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## For further reading see

- Hermes, Gisela & Köbsell, Swantje (eds) (2003), Disability Studies in Deutschland – Behinderung neu denken! Dokumentation der Sommeruni 2003. Kassel: Bifos.
- Köbsell, Swantje (2006), The Disability Rights Movement in Germany. History, development, present state. Disability Studies Quarterly 26(2), [http://www.dsqsds.org/\\_articles\\_html/2006/spring/kobsell.asp](http://www.dsqsds.org/_articles_html/2006/spring/kobsell.asp).
- Köbsell, Swantje & Waldschmidt, Anne (2006), Guest Editor's Introduction. International Section: Disability Studies in German speaking Countries. Disability Studies Quarterly 26(2), [http://www.dsqsds.org/\\_articles\\_html/2006/spring/kobsell\\_waldschmidt.asp](http://www.dsqsds.org/_articles_html/2006/spring/kobsell_waldschmidt.asp).
- Lutz, Petra; Macho, Thomas; Staupe, Gisela & Zirten, Heike (eds) (2003), Der (im-)perfekte Mensch. Metamorphosen von Normalität und Abweichung. Köln, Weimar: Böhlau.



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## For further reading see

- Waldschmidt, Anne (ed) (2003), Kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven der Disability Studies. Kassel: Bifos.
- Waldschmidt, Anne (2005), Disability Studies: Individuelles, soziales und / oder kulturelles Modell von Behinderung? Psychologie & Gesellschaftskritik 29(1), pp. 9-31.
- Waldschmidt, Anne (2006), Advocacy Movements: Germany. In: Albrecht, Gary et al. (eds). Encyclopedia of Disability. Volume 1. Thousand Oaks, London, New Dehli: Sage Publications, pp. 57-58.
- Waldschmidt, Anne (2007), Disability as a Social Problem. In: Ritzer, George (ed). The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology. Volume III. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 1168-1170.



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## For further research see

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



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