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## CRISIS OF EUROPEAN IDENTITY – CRISIS OF INSTITUTIONS: CAN INTERACTIVE INSTITUTIONS HELP?

**Abstract:** In view of the problems in Europe, we need to start with practical work to develop clear identities and a clear common identity as a premise. On the basis of a balanced relationship (neither complete identification with the institution nor estrangement), identity and interactive institutions can be developed and refined. Working towards adequate institutions initially means working on individual and collective identity. The method is explained using a ‘three-phase-model’ of value development.

**Key words:** *Interactive Institution, Identity, Extreme Situation*

### INTRODUCTION

Our time is characterized in many ways by an unclear tension between individuals and institutions. Institutional structures originally evolved in order to make various forms of human existence and values clearer, safer and more predictable and to safeguard order by means of public authority.

However, institutions also create problems for individuals, because they do not solve all the problems, which people expect them to do, but rather always leave some problems unresolved. This is why the emotional pressure, which causes stress to individuals, is increasing. If it is not possible to find solutions, i. e. new *personal* and *institutional regulations*, which allow people to realize the values that are most important to them, then the social dynamics is heading towards a critical point. Eventually, this might lead to a dynamic derailment, or in other words to a crossing of a borderline, with consequences which are hard to predict and might in some extreme cases lead to catastrophes. Common theories of institutions consider mainly *structural* aspects, but neglect *dynamic* aspects and emotions.

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Currently, when politicians in Europe act as crisis managers, they act as if they had to solve mainly a *crisis of the institutions*. Often they do many things for the sake of doing things from Brussels to New York. They try to make us believe that it is possible to solve all the problems by differentiating and developing institutions, thus tightening regulations, laws and controlling systems, making them more and more sophisticated. But the problems that are still causing stress to people are leading to public anger and disappointment due to failures in the realization of values.

Common political practice shows that this approach – starting with the institutional side – is not working. The reason is that we can realize a *crisis of identities*, personalities and collective identities on all levels, globally, in Europe and also in Germany, of course. The result is an estrangement, a decoupling of governments from the people, more precisely, an alienation of public institutions from the individuals being related to them and living with them.

Current problems are not so much a result of a deficiency of dynamics or even a mistake of institutional structures in Western democracies. Rather they are a result of unclear or questionable identities and therefore of unjust, unfair behavior of persons within given institutions, who undermine, disrespect and abuse such structures due to a destabilized or questionable personal identity, always resulting in a sort of ethical inferiority or an ethical risk at least.

## 1. DIALECTICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDENTITY AND INSTITUTION

Fragile and destabilized personal identities however have deep and long lasting consequences concerning the relation of the people to the institution, namely by destroying the dialectics of the relation between identity and institution, which is of central significance. As a result of this, individuals suffering from such disturbed identities lose their scope of freedom, which is necessary to be creative and to exert influence. The result is either an exaggerated identification with the given institutions, which goes with the loss of their *personal identity*, or a decoupling of the person from the institution, based on a deception and self-deception to be someone one really is not. This corresponds to certain, formally correct, but in fact unscrupulous users of institutions. Such individuals are not really concerned by the institutions, but they use them arbitrarily and only to serve their personal advantage.

Now, what are the consequences of such considerations? The identity of individuals and peoples are to be further developed and to be strengthened. Only in this way another clearer and better attitude to institutions will evolve. Main objective is the interactive institution. What is the difference between an interactive institution and a conventional institution? Neither the individual person nor an isolated institution stands in the focus of our considerations, but rather the *relation* of the individual to the institution as a chance of developing them. Inversely, the transformed or at any rate developed institution as an integrative element may exert a positive feedback effect on the development of the individuals (Figure 1).

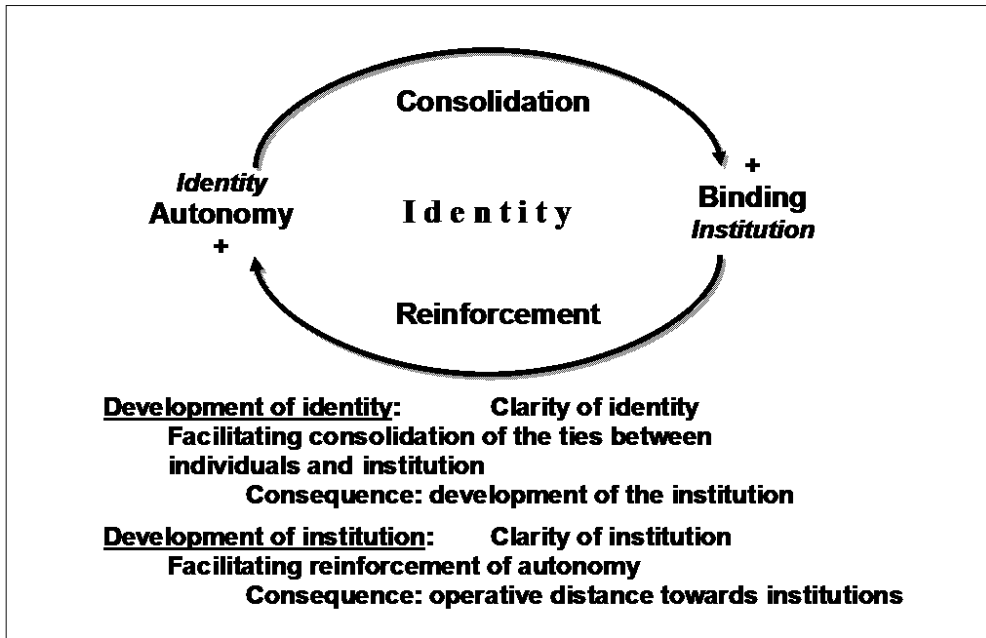


Fig. 1. Dialectical relationship between identity and institution

There are historical examples of exaggerated entanglement and freely chosen or enforced dependence between citizens and institutions, as e. g. partially in historical Prussia or certainly in the totalitarian systems of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. However, currently there also are examples in Western democracies, including the Federal Republic of Germany, where the distance between the people and the institution seems (to be) too large. Naturally, the question is: How is it possible to get people in an adequately close relationship which enables them to interact with the governmental institutions? From a pragmatic point of view, we have to deal here with questions about the development of a representative democracy towards a greater participation of people at the base within the political processes of decision making, as e. g. by the means of direct popular votes. Of course, many aspects and details are to be considered here, as e. g. the risk of increased irrationality, simplification and polarization.

## 2. CRISIS AS LIMITING SITUATION. THE THREE-PHASE-MODEL

Social problems are – pre-critically – a source for an increasing dynamic pressure inasmuch as they cannot be solved within the given situations and institutional frameworks. The *dynamic pressure* is the decisive factor of *destabilization*, but also of the *positive development* of the individuals and their institutions as well. This dynamic factor arises from unsolved social problems and this always means un-

solved human and ethical problems, such as problems of justice in view of allocation and access to resources, etc. In most cases appeals to a further sophistication of institutions are heard exclusively, but which can only be realized under the condition of a clear collective identity which consists as such in individual identities. Individual identity however may neither be codified as a plain fact, i. e. as reification being based on a certain unreflected ideology, nor decline to mere appearances without any authentic relevance (Erik H. Erikson 1959) [1].

Clear and mature identities maintain a dialectic relation towards institutions, meaning that they maintain a stable relation towards them, which is based on an ethics. Such clear identities, achieving a dialectic relation to institutions, are able to keep up an *operative distance* towards them. This very operative distance is a precondition of *orderly contest* and thus the basis of any responsible development of individuals and institutions. In other words, where there is no rigid dependence of persons, or to be more precise of identities from institutions, chances for a fruitful dispute with the institutions are growing. Reversely, there are repercussions from the development of institutions towards personal identities, appearing as a wider awareness concerning the meaning of law or the meaning of institutions, the meaning of a common political order and of social conventions all in all as a wider awareness of the ethical basis of the *conditio humana*. This is the *conception of a socially interactive institution* that is able to capture, adequately express, and justify the implicit ethical values, which have historically grown within them. In this way, it is also open for a dialogue about controversial values. A liberal and constitutional democracy keeps up the chances for such dialogue provided that it is honestly practiced and not abused by merely formal respect or even by so-called political correctness.

The definition of limiting situations (*Grenzsituationen*) according to Jaspers' General Psychopathology is: "Inasmuch as there are final situations, although hidden within everyday life and not realized, which unavoidably determine the whole of human life (like death, guilt, and struggle as unavoidability), we are speaking of limiting situations. Now, finally let us speak about the most critical and dangerous point of the whole process. The great and well known German philosopher Karl Jaspers has seen this very clearly: "What human beings actually are and are able to become, is originally and finally growing out of the experience, adoption and overcoming of limiting situations." (Jaspers 1965, p. 271) [2].

(Figure 2) A society is entering such limiting situations if homogeneity of opinions is enforced and a monopoly of opinions is construed either by postulating absolute values, dictatorial repression, or even only by virtue of a pseudo-democratic political correctness. This can be shown very well within the *three-phase-model* (Kick 2005, p. 74) [3]. Enforced changes and injured identities are leading to destabilization, traumata and despair, in philosophical terms, are leading to a crisis as a limiting situation. What does this mean?

If this borderline within the limiting situation is reached and even crossed, then there arises the risk of entering into a circle of hate and revenge, which might culminate in all sorts of revolts, civil war, or revolution. In terms of our *approach of process-dynamics* this is a *post-critical catastrophic development*, a *dynamic derail-*

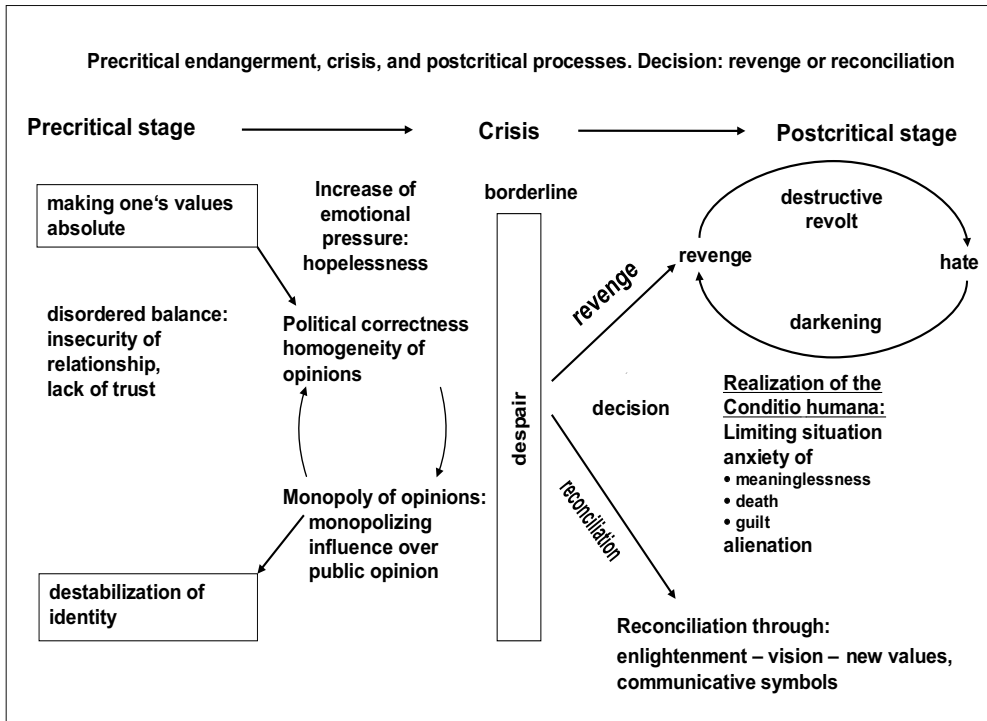


Fig. 2. Crisis as limiting situation. Three-phase-model (Kick 2005)

ment (Kick 2005, p. 81) [3] as a *vicious circle*, which cannot be controlled and regulated by the devices of the conventional system as such. It is accompanied by destructiveness of behavior *and* darkening of recognition.

## 2. 1. LIMITING SITUATION AND NEW VALUES

However, if within the decisive moment of the limiting situation a decision is made towards reconciliation by inclusion of a discovery, i. e. a realization of the *conditio humana* – *conditio humana* means the basic conditions all human beings have in common – then chances are given for a creation of new values. What happens is a creation of a new symbol of communication in analogy to the creation of a new work of art. This politics as a form of art usually evolves in three creative steps (Hermes A. Kick 2009) [4]: opposing the *fear of danger* there needs to be a *courage* being based on *faith* (Paul Tillich 1952) [5], in opposition to a *painful quarrel* there will be a *loving struggle*, always under the vision of hoping for a solution being conducive to living (Table 1). Solidarity with the suffering of human beings of this world will be realized as a removal of contradictions by means of an extraordinary deed and in the new form as an encounter of love. In this sense, the further development of institutions and identities is a search for a vision and a truth serving life

Table 1. Limiting situation and new values: postcritical process and reconciliation

	<b>Proximity</b>	<b>Distance</b>	<b>Integration</b>
<b>Level of recognition</b>	<b>Concern</b>  <b>after realization of the <i>Conditio humana</i></b>  <b>Enlightenment</b>	<b>Contest</b>  <b>polarization</b>  <b>Vision</b>	<b>Reconciliation</b>  <b>Ethical position:</b>  <b>New values</b> <b>Expansion of identity</b>
<b>Level of action</b>	<b>Courage</b> <b>In reply to despair</b> <b>based on faith</b>	<b>Loving struggle</b> <b>based on hope</b>	<b>Encounter</b> <b>Integration of conflicts</b> <b>Discovery of a common value</b> <b>based on love</b>

and survival, which starts with the development and realization of a clear identity. This clear identity can evolve into some reliable framework for the formation of dialogue and the search for peaceful and peacekeeping forms. In such a way, a new culture of social and political thought and action can arise, something in fact we most urgently need. Certainly, we should neither provoke the rise of limiting situations nor bring about an ill-considered struggle for existence.

However, there are situations in which the problems are culminating to such an acute point that the struggle for existence becomes an inevitable necessity and therefore has to be accepted. Under such circumstances we have to speak about a limiting situation according to Karl Jaspers, in which values have to be radically questioned. For in a crisis and in limiting situations the political ethics and the identity of political persons involved have to stand the test, because institutional frameworks are gone and people have to decide completely on their own. (Max Weber 1919) [6].

## CONCLUSION

The three-phase-model including the particular features of extreme situations (Karl Jaspers) enables clear identities and interactive institutions to be developed as the basis for an anthropologically consistent orientation, i. e. conducive to living, and for making the European community of nations viable for the future.

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