

Abstract

At a time of knowledge becoming increasingly relevant to social and economic development, governments worldwide aim at the creation of country-specific types of k-society, i.e. 'information societies', 'knowledge societies' or 'knowledge-based economies'.¹ This book redraws the processes of constructing k-societies in Germany and Singapore and offers an empirically based definition of k-society which has been missing until now. Based on the conducted research, I argue that k-societies are created by collective actors in society and are not – as often assumed – merely the result or logical consequence of the technological developments in the information and communication sector, the growth of the service industry and the high profit margin of knowledge intensive goods. I empirically focus on the activities of the state as collective actor who massively pursues the creation of k-societies in Germany and Singapore. The remaining subsystems engaged in the construction process – economy, scientific community, civil society and the media – are merely assessed with regard to their influence on state activities.

The process of constructing k-societies can be divided into (a) the development of the theoretical, categorically defined concepts of k-society; (b) the construction of a vision of self-emerging k-societies; and (c) the creation of country-specific k-societies as stages of social and economic development. At the beginning of the construction process stands the development of the idea of k-society by the international scientific community. Multiple, categorically-defined concepts of k-society as well as a manifold terminology were developed. The interchangeable use of terms to label the many k-society definitions nevertheless resulted in a rather blurry picture of k-society. Accelerated by the common assumption of the rise of k-societies, this created a fertile ground for the construction of a vision of a self-emerging k-society. This thesis outlines the role of the German and Singaporean governments in creating and utilising this vision. Most political programs which aim at the creation of a k-society as a stage of development justify their existence by pointing to the apparent rise of a k-society that should be monitored. Yet in actual terms, it is these programs that call the envisioned k-society into existence. Consequently, these government programs inherently (re-)define country-specific k-societies. By assessing these procedural definitions of k-society, this thesis offers clarity to what k-societies actually are: they are what they are defined as by the actors creating them. Theoretically this is based on Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality (1984), defining knowledge, as what is regarded as knowledge by society.

Germany and Singapore, the countries of investigation, share the commonality of being modern and aiming at developing into k-societies. At the same time, the structural realities of both countries differ markedly which is precondition to the analysis. The wide differences make it possible to show that (a) k-societies are not only created as political idea and stage of development but furthermore (b) the definitions of k-society and the paths taken to create them, highly depend on the structural realities and dominant definitions of knowledge in each country. Consequently, there is not one k-society, but multiple, country-specific k-societies.

Nevertheless, the data also illustrate that k-societies do not only vary in different countries but that k-society as construct was in both countries in the beginning clearly an economic and technological programme. But over time, it became more and acts in Germany and even more in Singapore today as economic and technological programme, as well as a new focal point of collective identity offered by the state in order to reduce felt insecurities. As such, the suggested concept of multiple k-societies has to be interpreted within Eisenstadt's concept of multiple modernities, which leads me to answer the initial question, what k-society actually is by stating: k-society is to the second modernity, the time of multiple modernities what 'industrial society' was for the first, western modernity. K-society is a theoretical concept created by academics and scientists. K-society is a vision that legitimises and accelerates action towards its own realisation. K-society is a stage of

¹ The wide range of terms describing societies/economies increasingly based on knowledge, information and information and communication technologies is in this thesis subsumed under the term 'k-society'.

development in which knowledge forms the center for social, cultural, economic and technologic development. K-society is a new focal point of identity in the second modernity. And finally, k-society is a social construction of reality that will shape our future to come.

Empirically, this thesis is based on (a) qualitative expert interviews conducted in Germany and Singapore; (b) a quantitative analysis of the participation of subsystems in commissions and boards of directors; (c) a quantitative analysis of the k-society terminology; as well as (d) a qualitative analysis of government programs, action plans and final reports of government commissions contributing to the construction of k-societies.