Disability Studies in German-Speaking Countries: An Introduction

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- Introduction
- The German Disability Rights Movement
- Disability Studies in German-speaking Countries: Debates and Perspectives
- Closing Remarks
The German Disability Movement (1)

- 1950s parents' associations
- late 1960s „clubs“ for disabled & nondisabled youths
- 1978 first „Cripples’ Group“ in Bremen
- 1980 „Frankfurt Judgement“

Rallye against the „Frankfurt Judgement“ (1981)
The German Disability Movement (2)

- Disability activists protest against the UN International Year of the Disabled (1981)
  - Public protest at the official opening session
  - “Cripples’ Tribunal” – conference on the social oppression of disabled people

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

Source: private
“Cripples’ Tribunal” (1981)

The German Disability Movement (3)

- In 1986 the first „Centre for Self-determined Living“ opens in Bremen
- In 1990 a national umbrella organisation is founded
Legal Activities

- 1986: Activists visit the United States
- 1994: Amendment of the German Constitution: “No person shall be disfavored because of disability”
- 2001: Establishment of a ministerial working group including two lawyers from the movement
- 2006: Civil antidiscrimination law

„Our right to life is indisputable!“
Resistance against the „Bioethics-Convention“

First German book written by disabled women (1985)
Conclusion 1

- 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.
Critique of Science

- “Partial science from and in the interest of disabled people, i.e. a science of cripples ('crippology') does not exist.” (Mitglieder der Bremer Krüppelgruppe 1980, 6)

- “… [A]ny science of disability, which does not aim to control or govern disability should be subordinated under the goal of the political emancipation of disabled people.” (Horst Frehe 1980, 44)

Some issues of the critical disability discourse

- Historical research of eugenics, racial hygiene and human genetics
- Bioethics of the present
- Self-Determination as a paradigm for disability policy
- Gender Studies: “double discrimination” of disabled women
- Disability culture
No German model of disability, but...

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

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

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

German-speaking Disability Studies: first editions
... 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)

Why did Disability Studies need impulses from the outside?

- There were only a few activists with limited time, energy and resources
- The German education system is still very much dominated by the segregative approach
- A fear of intellectualisation was present in parts of the movement
Conclusion 2

- In German-speaking countries Disability Studies is ready to be reconstructed, since it has been long practiced.
- Disability Studies can provide the framework for the German-speaking critical disability discourse.

For further Reading see *Disability Studies Quarterly*, Spring 2006, Vol. 26 (2)

- Köbsell, S. & Waldschmidt, A.: Disability Studies in Austria, Germany and Switzerland: Introduction
- Köbsell, S.: A Short History of the German Disability Rights Movement
- Maskos, R. & Siebert, B.: Self-Determination: The Other Side of the Coin
- Waldschmidt, A.: Normalcy, Bio-Politics and Disability
- Degener; T.: The Definition of Disability in (German and) international Discrimination Law
- Naue, U.: Governing Disability in Austria
- Bernuth, R. v.: Imaginations of Natural Folly

[www.dsq-sds.org](http://www.dsq-sds.org)
For further research see

- www.disabilitystudies.de
- http://www.hrf.uni-koeln.de/de/sozbeh/angefl/
- www.zedis.uni-hamburg.de
- www.disability-studies.ch

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