The productive potential and limits of landscape conflicts in light of Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory

Olaf Kühne, Florian Weber, Karsten Berr

Abstract. Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory posits social conflict as, under certain circumstances, productive. Working from a constructivist view of language, we ask to what extent this applies to the conflicts currently arising around the social construct of «landscape», either from different interpretations of that concept or from different evaluations of the physical manifestations of human activity to which it refers. Are such conflicts socially productive? How can they become so? Our theoretical premises are clarified in a review of recent empirical inquiries into the German energy transition, a national undertaking which – following the political decision to exit nuclear-powered energy production by 2022 – has turned into a central field of social conflict, due to the ensuing massive growth not only of alternative power plants but also of electricity transmission networks. Regarding controversy in this context as normal, and eschewing simple solutions, we argue for the importance of recognizing opposing interests as legitimate, not categorizing opposition as per se immoral, agreeing rules of procedure, and accepting decisions that abide by those rules. Conclusions are drawn for both theory and practice.

INTRODUCTION:
«LANDSCAPE CONFLICTS» AS POTENTIALLY PRODUCTIVE

Conflicts involving the term «landscape» – whether with regard to alternative energy sourcing (wind power, biomass, photovoltaics) and its transportation, or to suburban expansion, the development of airports, highways, and railroad facilities, and the extraction of sand or gravel – have recently gained new social relevance (Kühne and Weber 2018 [online 2017]; see also e.g. Bues and Gailing 2016; Gailing and Leibenath 2015; Weber et al. 2018; Kühne 2018b). While advocates of such projects frequently argue that they are «landscape compatible», opponents tend – often vociferously – to see them as destroying or defacing «landscape» and «homeland».

Starting from an empirical analysis of patterns of argument, and applying a distinction based on Ralf Dahrendorf's theory of the normality of social conflict, we ask whether and under what circumstances such «landscape conflicts» can be deemed productive and, conversely, when they must be regarded as socially dysfunctional (Dahrendorf[1]* 1957, 1969b, 1972, 1992

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[1] For reasons of economy, references to Dahrendorf's publications are cited hereafter by year and page only.

[in German], 2015 [1959], 2017 [in English]; see also: Kühne 2017b, 2018a; Gratzel 1990; Matys and Brüsemeister 2012; Niedenzu 2001; Horowitz 2001 [1985]). Following Dahrendorf's (1972) reflections on this point, we further inquire into the conditions for establishing rules governing conflict procedure in *landscape disputes*.

In the tradition of social-constructivist landscape research (see e.g. Greider and Garkovich 1994; Cosgrove 1984; Kühne 2006, 2008b, 2018d; Fontaine 2017; Kühne 2018b; Weber 2016), we view landscape as an individual construct based on social patterns of interpretation and evaluation extending to both symbols and their material objects. Accordingly, the concept has (1) social, (2) individual, and (3) physical-material levels, which in any combination may cause conflict. The clash of irreconcilably different evaluations, each compelling from its own logical perspective, may well generate more heat than light. In these circumstances conflict theory can offer more productive perspectives.

After this brief introduction into the issue and its conceptual framework, we will first outline Dahrendorf's theory before presenting the conflicts arising around the concept of landscape in the German energy transition. Reflecting Dahrendorf's emphasis on practical rather than purely theoretical thinking (see e.g. 1972: 10), his axioms will then be applied to that context. Finally, the functional and dysfunctional potentials of current landscape conflicts in Germany will be examined, highlighting the topicality of Dahrendorf's insights and the unique value of his legacy.

DAHRENDORF ON SOCIAL CONFLICT

Active not only as a sociologist, but also as a politician, university manager, and many-sided journalist (2002; Brietzke 2010), Dahrendorf frequently faced conflict situations. One far-reaching conclusion he drew from his experience was that «present-day liberal societies» tended to overlook the value of conflict (1972: 20). He developed his theory in opposition both to the structural functionalism of Talcott Parsons (1991 [1951]) and to Karl Marx's interpretation of conflict as inherently revolutionary (2014 [1872]). For Dahrendorf, the structural functionalist view of society as «a relatively stable system of parts playing a predetermined role within that system» ignores «the element of movement, conflict and change», and hence «fails to do justice, on the theoretical-analytical level, to the essentially processual nature of social reality» (1968b: 238-239; see also Staubmann and Wenzel 2000). In effect, it overlooks both the changeability of society and the forces driving it onward

(1996: 279; see also e.g. Münch 2004: 347). Dahrendorf shares Marx's view of conflict as in principle productive, but criticizes his concept of society and the way conflicts develop (1952, 1961, 1968b, 1969c, 1972), specifically the idea that the path to communism via (bloody) revolution, as «the product of natural force or divine providence», is inevitable (1952: 13). As a liberal, Dahrendorf rejects communism both for its propagation of a classless society – which as such lacks the conflict that enables both social and individual development – and for its belief that fundamental social conflict can only be resolved by revolution and bloodshed. For Dahrendorf, only non-violent conflict is productive. Moreover, he rejects the concept of an «oppressed class» as reductionist (1968b: 289). In contrast to both Parsons and Marx he sees society as continuously subject to change and therefore – given the immanent factors of power and political governance and the differences in office and rank these entail – to conflict; conversely, (non-violent) conflict is productive when it generates useful change (1961: 210, 1972: 30, 1996: 284; see also Bonacker 1996: 65; Gratzel 1990: 19; Münch 2004: 348). Dahrendorf sees the root cause of social conflict in the antagonism between forces advocating continuation of the status quo and those seeking progress (1957; Bonacker 2009; Kühne 2017b). At the core of such conflicts are two opposing drives: on the one hand to gain and on the other to obstruct electoral opportunity, access, and choice. Conflict is about «the right to participate and to enjoy the goods and activities on offer» (2007: 44; see also e.g. 1957, 1972).

Social conflicts vary in *intensity* and *violence* (1972). Intensity – a measure of social relevance – «is high when, for those concerned, a lot depends on the outcome and the price of defeat is high» (1972: 38; see also 1965b). A conflict will, therefore, grow in intensity the more importance is attached to it. The violence of a conflict can range from peaceful discussion to revolution and world war:

> *War, civil war, and armed conflict imperiling the lives of those involved probably marks the one extreme; conversation, discussion, and negotiation observing the conventions of politeness and open argumentation the other. Between them lies a multiplicity of more or less violent modes of group conflict – from strikes, tournaments, venomous debate, and fisticuffs, to trickery, threat, and ultimatum etc. etc.* (1972: 37; see also 2004: 21).

Of particular intensity as well as violence, according to Dahrendorf (1972), are conflicts conducted across various dimensions, for example when economic, political, cultural/religious, and educational aspects converge

– e.g. relative poverty with political disempowerment, religious differences, and barriers to full participation in the educational system. The classical example for Dahrendorf was the Northern Ireland conflict (1968b), but many similar conflicts exist today, especially in societies with clear majority/minority relationships. Other essential aspects of a conflict are its *complexity* and *spatial range*: the more groups and institutions are party to a conflict, and the more spatial levels, from global to local, it embraces, the harder it is to gain a clear overview of the issues and processes at stake (1972; Kühne 2017b, 2018a; Weber 2018a).

These four factors – intensity, violence, complexity, and spatial range – serve Dahrendorf as conceptual tools with which to differentiate and analyze conflicts at any specific point in time. But social conflicts do not arise out of nothing, they have a history, and Dahrendorf (1972) distinguishes three phases in their genesis:

1. Taking up a concept of Talcott Parsons (1991 [1951]), he sees the structural origins of a conflict in the development of latent (quasi-)interest groups, as yet without formal organization, whose members share the *expectation* of opting for one side or another of a specific issue (1972: 35).
2. As awareness of the interests in question grows, the quasi-groups will become more distinct and structured; they will make demands, develop programs, and formulate goals. Classical examples of such interest groups are associations, political parties, and trade unions (1996).
3. As goals become more concrete and interests intensify, the level of organization of the various parties will increase, and with it their «visible self-identity» (1972: 36). The conflict issue will dichotomize, and at the same time cause internal divisions in the parties involved (1972). The conflict will now be «open and visible» (1972: 36) and can gain ever greater relevance for the society (or societies) concerned.

When it comes to procedures for dealing with conflicts, Dahrendorf (1972) notes three distinct approaches, only one of which, however, he considers potentially productive. Suppression of a conflict removes neither the issue itself nor its cause, as to prevent the formation of conflicting groups and the expression of their interests will only enhance the virulence of the conflict and the danger of violent escalation. Likewise, complete dissolution of a conflict entails removal of the social differences underlying it; but this is neither feasible nor desirable, for differences in rank and order are – as noted above – essential to the dynamism of society. Dahrendorf (1972) therefore favors a third approach: conflict regulation. This has four aspects:

1. Basic rights: social conflict is normal and legitimate and no party should be denied the right to express and pursue its lawful interests.
2. Concretization: the focus should be on the immediate manifestations, not the underlying causes or overall social framework of a conflict.
3. Organization: regulation can proceed more efficiently with conflicting parties that are well organized, with spokespersons, agendas etc.
4. Rule-keeping: based on acceptance of the right of the opposing party to hold and express their different view, conflicting parties should agree potentially fruitful rules of procedure excluding, for example, insistence on unattainable maximum demands.

The «rational control of social conflicts» is, for Dahrendorf, «one of the central tasks of politics» (1972: 44). It operates on two levels: the national political, in the resolution of conflict by peaceful change of elected government in a constitutional democracy, rather than by violent revolution; and the general, in the framework provided by politics for the regulation of social conflicts outside the immediately political sphere (1992, 1990, 1972; for further comments on Dahrendorf's conflict theory see e.g. Niedenzu 2001; Bonacker 1996; Lamla 2008; Kühne 2017b).

The non-violent regulation of conflicts is, according to Dahrendorf, closely bound up with the liberal democratic mode of governance, for this enables social demands to be transformed into political action. Following Max Weber's definition of power as the opportunity to impose one's will even against opposition, he sees the specific quality of governmental – as opposed to general – power in «the sustained institutionalized action of a superordinate in relation to a subordinate person or group, […] presupposing a minimum of acceptance and compliance» (Imbusch 2002: 172; see also Dahrendorf 1972). The superordinate actor is expected to control the behavior of the subordinate, including sanctioning deviation from social norms; for effective governance itself presupposes:

a system of legal and quasi-legal norms» (1972: 33). An advantage of liberal democracy, in this view, lies precisely in the way it enables power to be transformed into governance, regulates governance itself by checks and balances, and legitimates it by free, individual, and secret ballot (1980, 1987, 2003): «Authority is never good […]. But it is more tolerable the clearer the source of its actions and its controlling instance (Kreuzer, Hayek and Dahrendorf 1983: 69).

The analytic as well as practical potential of these fundamental reflections on conflict, power, and governance will be illustrated in the following sections with
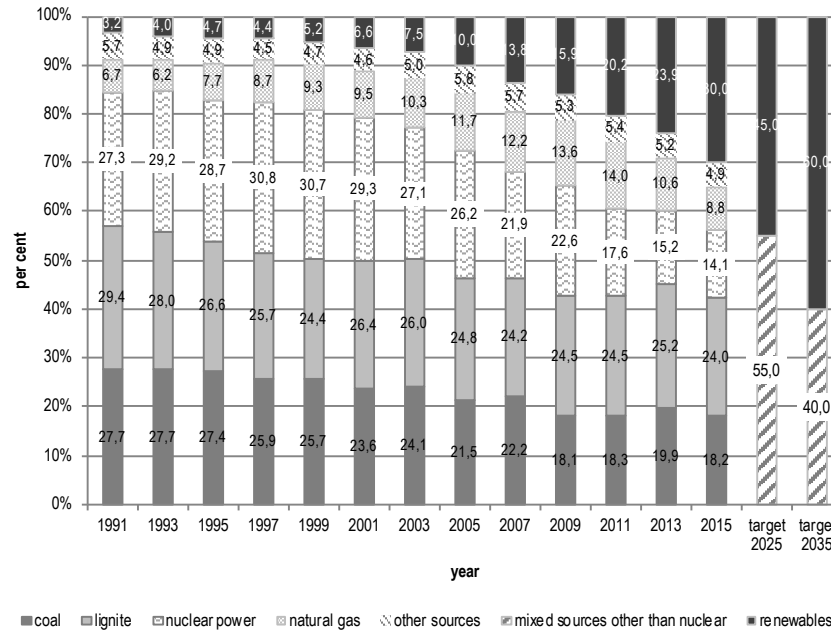
Figure 1. Gross electrical power generation in Germany since 1991 by energy source, with goals for 2025 and 2035 (Weber et al. 2016: 221)

reference to conflicts invoking the concept of landscape in the context of the German energy transition.

LANDSCAPE AS A SOURCE OF CONFLICT IN THE GERMAN ENERGY TRANSITION: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Introductory remarks

After the Fukushima reactor disaster of March 2011, Germany took the political decision to run down its nuclear power stations by 2022. Renewably sourced energy types – hydro, biomass, wind, photovoltaic, and geothermally generated electricity – had already long been supported by the provisions of the Grid Feed-In Tariffs Act of 1991 and the Renewable Energy Sources Act of 2000 (see e.g. Gochermann 2016; *Economist* 7.27.2012; Gailing and Moss 2016). Now, however, energy transition goals became more ambitious: renewables were to provide 40-45% of the country's electrical energy requirement by 2025, and 55-60% of the total by 2035 (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy 2016: 6). A glance at Fig. 1 shows the massive change this has caused in the country's electrical power generation: in 1991 renewables contributed only 3.2%, by 2001 this had more than doubled to 6.6%, and by 2015 it had risen to 30.0% of the total. Over the same period coal, lignite and nuclear generated power dropped accordingly.

The energy transition has brought with it a countermovement to the Fordist focus on big centralized power stations in the form of a decentralization of electrical energy production. A small number of large companies has given way to a large number of smaller, more scattered providers (Klagge 2013; Plankl 2013) based especially in rural areas. According to the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development, in 2011 more than half of all photovoltaic power, almost 70% of that from biomass and biogas, and just over three-quarters of all wind generated power came from plants situated in rural areas that were classified either as «sparsely populated» or as «undergoing incipient population growth» (Plankl 2013: 12).

Moreover, to transport (especially wind generated) electricity from North to South Germany, new power transmission lines are needed. In accordance with legal prescriptions and resultant planning targets – both before and increasingly after Fukushima – some 8,000 km are already under construction or planned, either as overhead lines or as buried cabling (see Neukirch 2014; Riegel and Brandt 2015; Weber et al. 2017b; Federal Network Agency 2017).

Projects of this order have wide social impact. Their highly visible manifestations – especially wind farms and new overhead grid lines and pylons – are unsettling to many people and have engendered growing resistance and conflict. Institutions, project managers, and municipal authorities face civil protest directed either against

the energy transition as such against or its local forms, or advocating alternative forms of realization – e.g. wind energy for the windy north, photovoltaics for the sunny south, and grid extension only with buried cabling (for further details see Kühne and Weber 2018 [online 2017]; Weber *et al.* 2017a).

Objections raised in the course of this protest regularly refer to the concept of landscape and the physical changes to which it is subjected, and the allied concept of homeland or home environment – a conjunction around which feelings readily escalate, but are correspondingly difficult to pacify. Our investigation of this complex focuses on the impact of these emotionally charged concepts on the argumentation of CIs (citizens' initiatives), and the consequences that arise for the regulation (in Dahrendorf's sense) of ensuing conflicts. For grid extension, our focus is on 123 CIs whose website or Facebook profile was identified in a Google Internet search of May-June 2017 (cited here as CI-G-001–123). For wind power, we surveyed a total of 280 CIs in December 2015-January 2016, of which we use 270 that oppose various projects in this area (cited as CI-W-001-270; for greater detail see Weber 2018a: section 5.3.2). To enhance the detail, and with it the cogency, of these results we further present interviews from two case studies whose protagonists take a fundamental stance against key aspects of the German energy transition:

1. *Hormersdorf–Mittelfranken (Bavaria) CI against grid extension*: case study based on a March 2015 interview with a representative of that organization (cited as CI-G interview) and scrutiny of their May 2017 website (cited as CI-G website).
2. *Citizens for Transparency and Justice (Bavaria) CI against wind farm extension*: case study based on an October 2016 interview with a representative of that organization (cited as CI-W interview) and scrutiny of their May 2017 website (cited as CI-W website).

Landscape and homeland in the argumentation of CIs

In both contexts – grid as well as wind farm extension – the conjunction of arguments based on considerations of *Heimat* (≈homeland) and *Landschaft* (≈landscape) is very high in comparison with other arguments presented on the web or Facebook pages of CIs (see Figure 2, and in greater detail Weber 2018a, 2018b). Only in the wind farm context do arguments based on ecological and environmental considerations occur more frequently. «Landscape» and «homeland» are cited in more than 80% of the argumentation against grid extension, and here ecological and environmental considerations can be interpreted as masked grounds for the preserva-
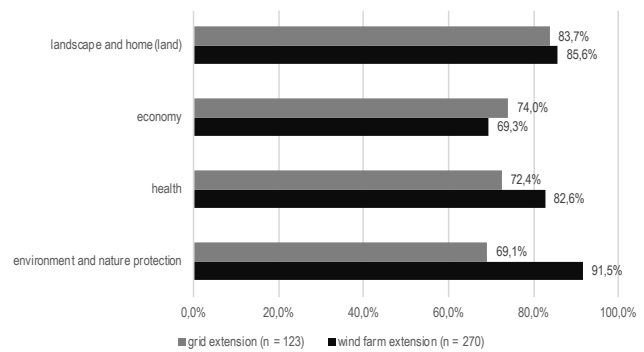

Figure 2. Key areas of argumentation of CIs against grid and wind farm expansion (own survey and chart)

Excerpt from the website of CI *Sinngrund* (CI-G-040):
«Just come and look at our <u>richly wooded landscape between Rhön and Spessart</u>, whose characteristics and future your existing South-Link plans seek to <u>permanently damage</u>».
Excerpt from the website of CI *Sulztal-Mühlhausen-Opf gegen Stromautobahn* (Sulztal-Mühlhausen-Opf against the grid superhighway: CI-G-013): «The corridor will lead to <u>total destruction of our high value landscape profile.</u> […] The <u>topographical situation</u> of the narrow Sulz Valley, already under excessive pressure from the Sulz floodplain and from a protected landscape area to the west, <u>cannot cope with any further major incursions into the landscape</u>».
Excerpt from the website of CI *Pro Erdkabel Neuss* (Neuss for buried cabling: CI-G-104)
«Technically, <u>buried cabling</u> is no problem, even for high and ultra-high voltages. With it, the <u>landscape</u> would survive grid extension <u>optically unharmed</u>. […] Current plans […] entail a <u>massive incursion into our landscape profile</u>».
Excerpt from the website of CI *Fuldatal* (CI-G-054):
«We want to stop this <u>madness</u>. […] <u>Profit alone</u> is driving grid and power corporations to <u>destroy our homeland</u>».
Excerpt from the website of CI *Gegenstrom Elfershausen* (Elfershausen against grid extension: CI-G-008):
«We want to preserve our <u>homeland</u> and its <u>cultural landscape</u>».
Excerpt from the website of CI *Altmühltal unter Strom* (Altmühltal electrified: CI-G-036):
«We specifically reject the <u>unnecessary South-East DC power corridor</u>, because […] its huge pylons (more than 80m tall and 40m wide) and massive scarring of the <u>landscape</u> will <u>destroy both our landscape and homeland</u>».

Text box 1. Citations of «landscape» and «homeland» on websites of CIs against grid extension (own compilation and emphasis)

tion of a physical space seen as integral to «home» and its received, familiar landscape. Landscape and homeland have, then, rapidly assumed a central position in the conflicts emerging from the German energy transition. In the setting of a modern industrial country, where on the one hand an adequate electrical power supply is of existential importance and on the other citizens enjoy – not least in this instance due to the work of Ralf Dahrendorf

(see 1968a) – expanding educational opportunities and a corresponding ability to create powerful and articulate lobbies, conflict positions tend to harden into irreconcilable confrontation (see Kühne 2019 [forthcoming]).

In the grid extension context, the protection of the homeland and its familiar landscape from the intrusion of overhead power lines is proposed as a mainstay argument both by CIs urging radical structural change in the form of a decentralized regional energy transition (Weber *et al.* 2016) and by others content with propagating the idea of buried cabling for the planned north-south transmission corridor (see Text box 1). Behind this argumentation lies the sort of dichotomous construction Dahrendorf (1972, 1994 etc.) sees as typical of advanced conflicts (see also Kühne 2018a; Weber 2018a, 2018b): «our» attractive «home landscape», our «living environment», is arbitrarily threatened by power lines whose rationale is purely economic (never ecological!). Some of the terminology used here is also particularly revealing: *Heimat* and *Landschaftsbild* (≈landscape profile or character) imply respectively a normative and a stereotypical concept of landscape (see Kühne 2018b), and the latter term, drawn from the expert vocabulary of landscape professionals – Burckhardt (2004) calls this "officious" language – indicates, in Dahrendorf's eyes, a desire to be recognized by the opposing party as of equal status and as defending a serious cause in the conflict.

Similar arguments are adduced in the wind farm context (see Text box 2), with a focus on the preservation of a physical space interpreted as «cultural landscape» – a phrase also taken from expert vocabulary, with little bearing on everyday usage. In effect, the landscape is here objectified into an entity endowed with an essence, developed over many generations, that is so deeply disturbed by the presence of wind farms (also essentialist objects) that no renaturation measures can save it. Such positivist conceptions of landscape and homeland occur regularly in the argumentation of CIs, creating an irreconcilable, dichotomous picture in which local farming practice is assimilated to the conceptual complex of nature-landscape-homeland and wind farms are seen as an inherently transitional form of industrial energy production. The personal involvement of those directly affected enhances the intensity of the conflict and is reflected at times in the highly emotional language in which positions are expressed (see Text box 2).

Landscape and homeland in the argumentation of Cis: two case studies

The following case studies provide a sharper focus on regional situations in Southern Germany. Based on

Excerpt from the website of *Volksinitiative Rettet Brandenburg* («Save Brandenburg» people's initiative: CI-W-078): «Destruction of landscape and nature […] in excessive and unprecedented measure».

Excerpt from the website of CI *Bad Marienberg, Westerwald* (CI-W-235): «The former profiles of the locality and landscape will be irreplaceably destroyed […]. No renaturing program, however many millions it might cost, will be able to restore this unique protected landscape area. Marienberg Heights would be lost forever».

Excerpt from the website of CI *Gegenwind im Oderbruch* (Oder Basin against wind power: CI-W-086): «The Oder Basin is a unique cultural landscape worthy of preservation. These high wind turbines break up the wonderful wide-open spaces and will lead to the run-down of tourism in this region.».

Excerpt from the website of CI *Gegenwind Obergrombach-Helmsheim-Kraichgau* (Obergrombach-Helmsheim-Kraichgau against wind power: CI-W-034): «Generations of us have worked to create our cultural landscape […]. We have the privilege of living in it and the duty to preserve it for coming generations. But we do not have the right to erect wind generation plant that will turn it into an industrial location and thus destroy it irremediably».

Excerpt from the website of CI *Gegenwind Meckenheim-Rheinbach, Rhein-Sieg-Kreis* (Meckenheim-Rheinbach, Rhein-Sieg district against wind power: CI-W-204): «These wind turbines destroy our landscape – our home – our living space».

Excerpt from the website of CI *zum Schutz des Hochschwarzwaldes* (High Black Forest protection CI: CI-W-033): «The landscape of the Southern Black Forest and Upper Bregtal today is the fruit of centuries of cultivation and forest use by the local farming population. Over time, this has grown into an impressive cultural landscape, a mosaic of open fields and woodland that is characteristic of the Southern Black Forest. Today the area is one of Germany's most beautiful and most sought-after destinations for vacationing and recuperation: deep valleys, age-old farmsteads, flowering meadows, and dense forests – a unique blend of nature, culture, tradition and homeland […]. The plan to erect yet more gigantic, 200-meter-tall wind turbines immediately next to the Upper Bregtal is the greatest threat this cultural landscape has suffered for more than 100 years: it would destroy it forever».

Excerpt from the website of CI *Windenergie Böhmfeld* (Böhmfeld wind energy CI: CI-W-050): «We must not allow wide expanses of our homeland to be turned into a landscape devoted to the industrial generation of electricity».

Text box 2. Citations of «landscape» and «homeland» on websites of CIs against wind farm extension (own compilation and emphasis)

interviews with representatives of CIs, they show striking argumentative shifts that may significantly impact conflict regulation.

(1) **Hormersdorf−Mittelfranken (Bavaria) CI against the South-East grid extension corridor**. The CI website explicitly sets the national energy transition in

its current form – with new transregional grid corridors – against the background of the homeland-landscape complex of arguments: «We seek to preserve our landscape and are convinced the energy transition can work differently» (CI-G website). A related meeting bore the heading «Homeland without monster power lines – for a real energy transition» (ibid.). Both texts show a clear positioning in favor of a new energy economy, but one with decentralized, regional production and storage of electricity (see Sontheim and Weber 2018) that would render long-distance north-south grid corridors obsolete.

A similar passage combines concern for the loss of homeland – conceived as an essentialistic object – with other frequently cited arguments (see Figure 1): «The CI has misgivings about the destruction of the homeland, the danger to the drinking water supply, the unknown impacts on health, and even the total economic loss threatening those most affected» (ibid.). The economic argument in particular has two sides: on the one hand the feared devaluation of property (often the only substantial investment of local residents) along the planned grid corridor, and on the other the interests of big energy and transmission players and their investors. Two further passages present this argument powerfully:

We will continue to fight this monster grid corridor [...] that threatens to destroy our natural environment, our homeland, the very basis of our lives, and in many cases our livelihoods. [...] The main motive behind the planned corridor is to maximize profit for monopolists and lobbyists. We will not tolerate this at the cost of our health and landscape (ibid.).

And, even more emphatically: «We will not permit our health and landscape to be jeopardized so that coal-sourced power can be sold abroad and the profits of a few energy corporations and their investors maximized» (ibid.). Here the local environment and way of life, symbolized in an objectified landscape, are set against the national/international system of big business and its profiteers—a dichotomy that unites leftist with traditionalist critiques of capitalism (see Vicenzotti 2011; Kirchhoff and Trepl 2009; Kühne 2015; Bärsch 1981) and explicitly confronts an entrepreneurially organized energy transition with a conservative/neo-Marxist alliance.

Significantly, a strategic shift in the argumentation of CIs – irrespective of their underlying motivation – took place when they realized the (lack of) impact of specific arguments. This cognitively based shift is demonstrated in the following interview: «Landscape protection [...] or the devaluation of property and related assets: these are arguments we have always proposed. But we have seen that they cut no ice with specialists or

politicians» (CI-G interview). So «landscape aspects are still brought in», but no longer play a central role (ibid.). The central role is now a legal one, and what the law listens to is legal arguments based on nature and environmental protection: e.g. «The planned measures acutely threaten and endanger sensitive, protected landscape and ecosystems» (CI-G website). The real interests and fears of the protagonists may be related to their social environment, but the conflict requires that their arguments be legally cogent.

(2) *Citizens for Transparency and Justice* **(Bavaria) CI against wind farm extension**. In the context of wind generated energy, the economic argument on the one hand questions the legitimacy of central government subsidies for wind generated power and on the other solicits donations for the campaign against it, also citing the concepts of landscape and homeland:

There is heartbreaking evidence of people who have lost home and health [...] We urgently need your help and solidarity to stop this crime against Germany, its citizens, and our homeland. We call on your trust: we have moral integrity and decency on our side and we will use your donations conscientiously (CI-W website).

The claim to defend the moral high-ground from the (political) adversary already suggests a conflict of high intensity (see Luhmann 1996, 2017 on «moral communication»), and the same tone pervades the argument from economics and health:

Financial greed is taking over and destroying our homeland. What people in North Germany have already suffered now threatens us. The 10H rule [that wind turbines must always be at least 10 times their height away from dwellings] is constantly abused and people are left to their fate. The politics of the Federal Coalition and the Green Party are responsible for the greatest threat to citizens' health and property that Germany has undergone since WW2. Homeland and nature are simply sacrificed to affluence. There are alternatives, but the wind-power lobby has politicians in a stranglehold (CI-W website).

Another passage presents species protection as an argument for solar rather than wind power: «In contrast to photovoltaic arrays, wind turbines spell death to many birds, and destruction to the biodiversity of forests, which they transform into an industrial landscape. Good-bye homeland!» (ibid.). Again, the concept of homeland as a living environment is seen as subjected to economic interests entailing «wide-scale destruction of landscape» (ibid.). The same essentialist interpretation of physical space in its interplay with humans is evident in an interview: «We've grown together with the landscape

and we need it like our daily bread» (CI-W interview). Another interviewee rejects wind turbines on both spatial – for their impact on his own (vs. others') living space – and economic grounds:

> *[…] we're destroying something very important: our homeland and landscape. 'Cos I don't know if you've ever travelled through Northern Germany. I've often been up there, and you only have to hit the hills beyond Würzburg and you'll get dizzy. There's no landscape any longer you'd want to live in, and whatever's made it like that is completely ignored by the other side – it runs into billions* (ibid.).

Finally, the migration of the rural population to the cities is linked with loss of the normative landscape of home: «So it'll have a massive impact on the landscape and drive people into the cities» (ibid.) – the conflict, then, is not only intense, its outreach extends throughout society.

THE INTERPRETATION OF LANDSCAPE CONFLICTS IN LIGHT OF DAHRENDORF'S CONFLICT THEORY

The issue immediately arising from these empirical findings is: What do they mean in Dahrendorf's terms and how can the conflict they enshrine be regulated? Social differentiation tends generally to increase the set of landscape conflicts, because it multiplies claims on physical space, as well as the patterns of logic, interpretation and evaluation they generate. But conflict is a normal sign of the adaptability and dynamism of a developed democracy, and of its productivity in broadening the scope of its citizens' opportunities.

The individual evaluative and interpretive patterns behind such normative concepts as *homeland* and *stereotypical landscapes* are rooted in processes of socialization: the former in familiarization, from childhood on, with physical spaces and their symbolic and emotive connotations; the latter in corresponding familiarization with the aesthetic and cognitive attributions of schoolbooks, advertisements, films, Internet etc. (for further detail see e.g. Kühne 2008a, 2017a, 2018b; Nissen 1998; Stotten 2013; Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff 1983; Lyons 1983; Cosgrove 1993, 1998). Accordingly, any object seen as disrupting the homeland environment will be regarded automatically as transgressing the norm, whereas an object seen as disrupting a stereotypical landscape will only be so regarded if it contradicts stereotypical social standards of beauty or appropriateness. If a wind farm, for example, is perceived as impacting one's homeland, it will be rejected out of hand, because it creates obvious, irreversible change in the (emotion-

ally) unchangeable. If, however, it simply transgresses a (e.g.) West European stereotype, it may be perceived as ugly, but might also be seen as a modern cultural-technological enhancement of the landscape (Kühne 2018c). Here too, conflicts can be seen to have their roots in social attitudes of openness or resistance to change – whether in landscape as a social construct or as physical space. Such conflicts can vary in intensity according to the size, influence, and networking (*inter alia*) of the affected groups. Disputes can range from academic debate about concepts of landscape (see e.g. Vicenzotti 2011; Hokema 2013) to violent protest (as e.g. in the case of Stuttgart's new train station).

Democratic states by definition incorporate different – at times conflicting – interests, and landscape is no exception. In Germany, the legal principle of balanced interests prescribes the participation of different parties in spatial planning (see Brenner 1997). To dissolve such conflicts altogether would entail the removal of their social cause, which would curtail the social dynamism that underlies landscape change in both its senses. Conflict may sometimes be avoided, for example by keeping environmental change below the horizon of perception, or by camouflaging it – as in the new Los Angeles County Jail, which so cleverly fits its surroundings that it can be mistaken for an office block, shopping mall, or multi-story parking facility (see Kühne 2012, 2013; Weber 2017).

Applied to the German energy transition, Dahrendorf's preferred solution, conflict regulation, entails:
1. mutual acceptance of standpoints as the expression of legitimate interests for/against physical manifestations of the energy transition;
2. focusing on concrete projects (grid corridors, wind farms), not on the underlying rationale of the energy transition;
3. compliance with procedural rules agreed by all parties, with clear accountability for decisions;
4. organization of all parties, with legitimate, reliable spokespersons – for CIs often a challenge;
5. involvement of an independent arbitrator whose regulatory competence is accepted by all parties – typically, for Dahrendorf (1991) as a liberal politician, the state.

Dahrendorf (1994: 69) further stipulates «the autonomy [in the sense of independence from a center of power] of the many institutions and organizations» involved – i.e. CIs should not, in landscape conflicts, serve as the mouthpiece of political parties. And he finally notes the need for politeness, tolerance, and non-violence in the conduct of debate (1994).

The actual course of landscape conflict (at least in Germany, but also in other parts of the world) is often

far removed from these requirements. At times neither party recognizes the legitimacy of the opposing standpoint or of its representatives; the organization of the parties is often diffuse, with frequently changing representatives; and the level of institutionalization – and even stability – of CIs varies widely. Given their fundamental difficulties in gaining recognition, CIs opposing planning measures at times resort to polarizing or moralizing argumentation that undermines fair play (see below). Moreover, the role of independent arbitrator cannot be played by the state (as Dahrendorf stipulates) when the state is itself a conflicting party – which is generally the case in the German energy transition.

Finally, the legal framework of these disputes in Germany is unclear and open to interpretation. The very number of court cases dealing with the evaluation of landscapes shows that the concept of «natural beauty» – as protected by the Federal Nature Conservation Act – cannot, in a diversified society, be univocally defined (see e.g. Roth and Bruns 2016). Moreover, the accountability of decisions is often obscured by the tangled structures of political and administrative interests, as well as that of primary and secondary contestants – for example when CIs opposing project companies and/or grid providers are joined by nature protection associations, sports clubs, local history and activities groups etc. (see Gailing 2015; Hoeft, Messinger-Zimmer and Zilles 2017; Walter *et al.* 2013; Weber *et al.* 2017a; Kühne and Weber 2018 [online 2017]). Although the expanding educational opportunities of post-1960s Germany have undoubtedly heightened organizational competencies, with potentially beneficial effect on conflict regulation, the increasing differentiation of interests, from species and geotope protection through landscape aesthetics to the concerns of dog owners, kite flyers, geo-cachers, bathers etc. thwarts efficient organization and the effective presentation of a case. Against this background the actual issue, the changing use of physical space, transmutes into an aesthetic, moral, political, and administrative nightmare. Hence the frequent appeal to the authority of the courts, which in principle contradicts Dahrendorf's idea of productive conflict regulation.

A specific problem that often arises in landscape disputes is the claim (whether explicit or implicit) to possess moral, aesthetic, or otherwise evaluative truth. In the first place this fuses (or confuses) moral goodness and rectitude with evaluative goodness, in the sense of beauty or sublimity (Hofmann-Riedinger 2011: 387), often against the horizon of individual aspirations to the «good life» (*eupraxia*, Hubig 2007: 128) – a tendency already observed by Kant in the «ambiguity of the term GOOD» (Kant 1983 [1793]: 135) and read-

ily extendable to the ambiguity of the term «beautiful» with its parallel convergence of evaluative denotations. Then, too, along the lines of the classical ideal of personal conduct (*kalokagathia*), this melding of the good with the beautiful readily assimilates the third limb of the classical triad, truth, to establish an unreflected assumption of irrefutable argumentative superiority (see Max Weber 2011 [1919]; Habermas 1994: 183-184). In the landscape conflict, what is felt to be beautiful and good will soon be found right and true and will be presented as the better knowledge, a priori immune to dissenting critique, which will, conversely, be stigmatized as false, bad, and (in its preferred objects) ugly. And irrefutability is catching: if one side assumes it, both sides will. Polarization is then complete, the concept of fairness goes by the board, and any real chance of regulating the conflict is lost.

Calling on the tradition of Popper, Weber, and Kant, Dahrendorf reminds us, however, that human knowledge is fallible and incomplete: no one knows at any given historical moment whether a specific tenet is right or true. Dahrendorf speaks of the «enlightened skepticism of Immanuel Kant» (2004: 141) in the face of unconsidered or excessive claims to truth. After all, the human standpoint is finite and historical, its knowledge contingent and particular. Hence it is ill-considered to undermine the variety of convictions in an argument: it is the very breadth of different viewpoints that subjects one's own beliefs to critique and potential change. What Max Weber calls «the polytheism of evaluative systems» (2011 [1919]) – or in general the pluralism of modern scientific and social discourse – should, with Dahrendorf, be seen as an integral aspect of Kant's «faith in human ability to use [the faculty of] reason» (2004: 328). All we can ever do is ensure «that error does not harden into dogma» (1984: 117). The irreducible uncertainty of knowledge should not, however, prevent necessary decisions; what it should prevent is the "quest for final solutions" (1965a: 197) or the absolute truths on which to rest them. Given the hypothetical status of its propositions, human argument, like human discourse, has its own «moral maxims [...]: the conventions of science, codes of political procedure, in general maxims of private and public behavior» (1972: 313), for «the ethics of uncertainty is the ethics of freedom, and the ethics of freedom is the ethics of conflict, of antagonism played out on a fair and level field» (1972: 313–314). Applied to landscape conflicts and their regulation, Dahrendorf's conflict theory can be considered «a stabilizing factor» (Mittelstrass 2004: 259) indicating pathways and offering methods of «practically applicable reflection» (Berr 2018b: 50).

CONCLUDING SUMMARY: PRODUCTIVE LANDSCAPE
CONFLICTS, CHALLENGE AND OUTLOOK

How topical is Ralf Dahrendorf today, in 2019, ten years after his death? His conflict theory, we have argued, has both analytic and practical potential – the latter not least for the challenges it elaborates with respect to the regulation of present-day landscape conflicts (Kühne 2018a, 2018b; Kost 2013). These have to do, for example, with the increasing differentiation of society, the expansion of educational opportunities, and the multiplication of interests that has inevitably followed, along with the enhanced ability to organize and articulate those interests. Specifically, landscape issues have tended to fragment, and the resultant micro-disputes have, at least initially, evinced relatively low intensity and little violence. However, given the level of social networking in our world, intensity as well as violence can quickly increase.

Dahrendorf rejects, as ill-befitting a democratic and pluralist society, the attempt either to suppress or to dissolve social conflicts: the former process disregards people's needs, convictions, and emotions and can only lead to violent eruptions; the latter disregards their diversity and inevitably induces social leveling, and with it a lethargic uniformity. In contrast, Dahrendorf's preferred solution of conflict regulation does justice to the dynamism and variety that is the life-blood of democracy (see Kamlage, Nanz and Fleischer 2014; Hülz and Kühne 2015). In practice, however, this process must overcome some perceptible hurdles. Among these, in the case of landscape conflicts, are on the one hand lack of organizational competence (paradoxically, the presence of a German umbrella organization of CIs against wind power tends to enhance rather than diminish the intensity of conflict), and on the other a predilection for moralistic polarizing of the issues and concomitant discrediting of the opposition in terms that can at times be distinctly unproductive (Spanier 2006; Kühne 2008c; Berr 2018a). It has even happened that advocates of a disputed energy measure, accused of being «destroyers of homeland and landscape», have turned on their adversaries as «destroyers of the future of the human race» (see Kühne and Weber 2015; Renn 2012).

Another difficulty is that both in ordinary speech and in legal terms the concept of landscape (whether stereotypical or homeland), lacks specificity. German law does not define what the term «landscape» – let alone «beauty» – concretely means, and in practice the problem is, therefore, evaded by masking objections to planning measures in other terms, frequently, for example, the more clearly defined legal notion of species protec-tion. That in many current disputes the German state is both protagonist and arbiter is, again, scarcely conducive to satisfactory conflict regulation.

Nevertheless, landscape conflicts can be seen, in light of Dahrendorf's theory and its prescriptions, as potentially productive for society. Above all, far from deviating from the normative construct of a «common social consensus», such conflicts demonstrate the engagement of a society in processes of development that will create continuous opportunities for its members. This should be recognized by all parties to a conflict. In the landscape context this means that all parties should acquaint themselves not only with the position, reasoning, and values of their opponents, but also with their own automatic, unquestioned – what Berger and Luckmann (1966) call «sedimentary» – patterns of interpretation and evaluation (for greater detail see Kühne 2018b). This in turn presupposes the readiness of the conflicting parties not to claim moral superiority for their own position. Moreover, the regulation of conflicts calls, here too, for an institutional framework with concrete procedural goals and clear guidelines for their achievement. That this is not an appropriate matter for a court of law is demonstrated by the frequent cases dealing – and doing so in standardized fashion – with the evaluation of landscapes. Such landscape assessment methods assume the possibility of using quasi-scientific quantifying methods to find *the* "correct" design or use of landscape for the particular purpose. Experience shows, however, that this merely leads to a leveling of landscapes (Körner 2006, Kühne 2018d) and their underlying individual and collective constructs, values, and convictions. Appealing to the courts in such matters amounts to suppressing the conflict, not regulating it, which in a pluralist 21st century society is an inadequate – not to say dysfunctional – approach to the problem. As the great social conflicts (e.g. the class conflict) gradually subside, the chances for successful conflict regulation in issues of use of space and landscape should in principle improve – so long as the arguments adduced on both sides remain on the factual level and there is a basic will to achieve agreement about what is to be done. However, this requires the development and institutionalization in Dahrendorf's sense of conflict resolution procedures that take into account both longstanding democratic structures and human susceptibility to conflict and error. The authors of this article are united in their conviction that Dahrendorf's ideas and suggestions for a practicable implementation of this task are still applicable and available.

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