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RESOURCECULTURES

Sociocultural Dynamics and the Use of Resources –
Theories, Methods, Perspectives

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The structure of SFB 1070 using a rotary model (Graphic: SFB 1070).

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Contents

Editors' Preface	7
 I. Theories, Methods, Concepts	
<i>Roland Hardenberg, Martin Bartelheim and Jörn Staecker</i> The 'Resource Turn'. A Sociocultural Perspective on Resources	13
<i>Roland Hardenberg</i> Dynamic Correspondences. RESOURCECULTURES	25
<i>Hans Peter Hahn</i> Kinds of Resources and Ways of Perceiving. Anthropological Reflections on a Contested Category	35
<i>Hartmut Leppin and Christian A. Müller</i> Discourses of Weakness and Resource Regimes. Preliminary Remarks on a New Research Design	45
<i>Karina Iwe, Jeanne Féaux de la Croix and Susanne Fehlings</i> Theoretical Promises and Practical Implementation. Interdisciplinary Encounters between Archaeologists and Ethnologists in a Collaborative Research Centre (SFB)	57
 II. Resources and Processes of Social Change	
<i>Norman Yoffee</i> Prolegomena to the Study of Collapse, Resilience, and Sustainability. How do 'Cultural Resources' Help Us Understand the 'Fate' of Ancient Cities and States?	73
<i>Ingo Schrakamp</i> Ressourcen und Herrschaft. RESSOURCENKULTUREN im Reich von Akkade (2300–2181 v. Chr.)	81
<i>Daniel T. Potts</i> Resource Origins and Resource Movement in and around the Persian Gulf	133
<i>Tobias L. Kienlin</i> World Systems and the Structuring Potential of Foreign-Derived (Prestige) Goods. On Modelling Bronze Age Economy and Society	143
<i>Erich Kistler, Birgit Öhlinger, Thomas Dauth, Ruth Irovec and Benjamin Wimmer</i> Archaika as a Resource. The Production of Locality and Colonial Empowerment on Monte Iato (Western Sicily) around 500 BC	159
 III. Resources and Spatial Development	
<i>Martina Neuburger</i> Geographical Approaches on Territorialities, Resources and Frontiers	179

<p><i>Gisela Grupe, Stefan Hölzl, Balazs Kocsis, Peer Kröger, Markus Mauder, Christoph Mayr, Eirini Ntoutsis, Wolfgang Schmahl, Frank Söllner, Anita Toncala and Dominika Wycisk</i></p>	
<p>Isotopic Mapping and Migration Research Based on Bioarchaeological Finds. The Interdisciplinary Project ‘Transalpine Mobility and Culture Transfer’</p>	195
<p><i>Jadranka Verdonkschot</i></p>	
<p>The (Dis-) Advantages of a Flood in Your Living Room. Landscape as a Decisive Factor for Wetland Settling in Neolithic Europe</p>	209
<p>IV. Resources and the Symbolic Dimensions of Cultures</p>	
<p><i>Steffen Patzold</i></p>	
<p>Variability of Tangible and Intangible Resources. The Example of Monastic Communities in Medieval Germany</p>	233
<p><i>Richard Borshay Lee</i></p>	
<p>Resources, Material and Symbolic and Exchange Relations. An Example from the Kalahari</p>	243
<p><i>Sabine Klocke-Daffa</i></p>	
<p>ResourceComplexes, Networks, and Frames. The <i>Sambatra</i> in Madagascar</p>	253
<p><i>Ulrich Müller</i></p>	
<p>Contested Identities. Die Nevada Test Site, Nevada, und das Welterbe Le Morne, Mauritius.</p>	269

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JÖRN STAECKER

The ‘Resource Turn’ A Sociocultural Perspective on Resources¹

Keywords: resources, cultural turn, cultures, materiality

Abstract

Cultural studies have so far not developed a concept of resources that can be used in the analysis of cultural dimensions of life across time and space. When used, the word ‘resource’ remains firmly rooted in economic approaches. Resources are identified as natural products, means of production, signs of wealth or forms of subsistence. We argue for a resource turn in cultural studies to be achieved by widening the concept of resources as an analytical category to cover intangible dimensions, by replacing an essentialist with a constructivist perspective; by shifting analysis from individual actors to wider relationships, networks, institutions and systems; and by highlighting historical contingencies and cultural meanings in the identification of resources.

1. Introduction

What are resources? In everyday discourse resources are usually understood as raw materials, necessary for industrial production or for satisfying human needs. This point of view, rooted in economic reasoning, is also the base for common

definitions of the term ‘resource’ in dictionaries like the Collins English Dictionary: ‘1. Capability, ingenuity, and initiative, [...] 2. (often pl.) a source of economic wealth, esp. of a country (mineral, land, labour, etc.) or business enterprise. 3. A supply or source of aid and support; something resorted to in time of need’ (Sinclair 1995, 1319).

Economists have developed more differentiated approaches and study resources from a variety of perspectives. Müller-Christ distinguishes definitions of ‘resources’ based on *Produktionstheorie* (input-transformation-output theory), on *Wettbewerbstheorie* (resource-based view) and on *Systemtheorie* (means-end continuum). According to the first definition resources are factors of production; according to the second they are organisational requirements for economic success; according to the third they comprise different means used to maintain systems (Müller-Christ 2011, 167–170). In this approach the distinction between tangible (land, tools, capital) and intangible (knowledge, relations, structures) resources is fundamental (Storberg 2002, 469). In recent years economic studies focussed on intangible resources (e.g. Mohladasch 2007) and show a tendency to expand the definition. In sociology as well, Giddens distinguishes between authoritative and allocative resources, as means and abilities to dominate and control others on the one hand, and the access to tangible aspects of human existence on the other (Giddens 1984, 258). Bourdieu understands resources in a more comprehensive way. Besides economic capital he includes cultural capital, such as incorporated abilities, titles or aspects based on social capital, defining them as: ‘the sum of resources that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised

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relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu/Waquant 1992, 119).

Some anthropologists define resources as means to facilitate activities that are necessary for social practices including processes of inclusion and exclusion (e.g. Schlee 2006). Psychologists have expanded the definition of resources beyond economic contexts as well. Psychology of work distinguishes among temporal resources, financial resources and control, all of which are embedded in social contexts (Greenblatt 2002, 179).

The concept has been little discussed in the humanities, although there has been a growing interest in 'cultural resources' recently, especially stimulated by the UNESCO conventions on 'World Heritage' and 'Intangible Cultural Heritage.' These ideas are mainly routed in concepts of Western modernity (Bendix et al. 2007, 9). Discourses about the concept of 'resources' from a sociocultural perspective are hardly to be found in this literature. In the comprehensive study 'Cultural Theory – The Key Concepts' (Edgar/Sedgwick 2002) no separate paragraph about resources can be found, just as in the 'Handbuch der Kulturwissenschaften' (Jaeger/Liebsch 2004) of more than 1500 pages or in the widely-used handbook 'Archaeology – An Introduction' (Green/Moore 2010) currently published in fifth print. Collections such as Barnard and Spencer's all-encompassing 'Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology' (Barnard/Spencer 1996), the 'Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie' of up to now thirteen volumes, or the recently completed 35 volume 'Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde' have no entry covering resources. Textbooks, like the 'DTV-Atlas zur Ethnologie', explain resources in a conventional way under the headings 'environment and adaption' and 'economy' (Haller 2005, 135, 156). In 'Cultural Turns – Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften' by Bachmann-Medick (2006) a variety of 'turns' or changes concerning different topics are documented, but none about 'resources'.

2. Resource Turn

What conceptual shifts are necessary to induce a 'resource turn'?

First, we should consider developments in economic and social sciences and expand the idea of resources to cover the intangible dimension.

Second, the essentialising perspective of resources has to be replaced by a constructivist one, which means that something cannot be considered to be a resource 'by nature' but through its place or meaning in a specific context. A resource is not a thing or matter but a means related to certain cultural ideas and practices.

Third, resources are important not only for the survival of individuals, but for the emergence, continuity and transformation of actors (individuals and groups) as well as their relations, networks, institutions and systems.

Fourth, contingency and variability of socio-cultural phenomena, should be taken into account. Culture cannot be reduced to certain necessities but has to be seen as a spectrum of potentials, a diversity of beliefs, and forms of organisation and practices. Resources and their social surroundings are affected by cultural complexity, which includes raw-materials and natural products (e.g. water, timber, land, food) that are essential for human survival, yet always culturally defined.

Given these four points we offer a working-definition of resources: **'Resources are the means to create, sustain and alter social relations, units and identities within the framework of cultural ideas and practices.'**

1) Resources are an Analytical Category

Examining different times and regions, we ask how others are or were perceiving and categorising resources. Given this question, resources are not a fixed object of research, but a category of analysis, applicable to phenomena formerly not included in this semantic field. This 'transformation from a matter into an analytic category', according to Bachmann-Medick, 'is accompanied by a decisive change of the categorical level or even a conceptual leap' (Bachmann-Medick 2006, 26). The question now is: What cultural and social practices turn something into a resource?

2) The Transformation of Resources

Resources are based on a cultural interest. Thus, the question 'what is a resource' depends strongly on the cultural context, including practices and

interpretations of the social actors. This context shifts not only because ideas and values change but also because new technologies, new practices and new social contacts emerge. As Niemann states, the notion of a 'resource' is 'variable in time as well because of continual social, cultural, technological and economic changes, also the individual actor constantly has to redefine resources' (Niemann 2006, 9).

3) ResourceComplexes

Resources do not exist as isolates but in combination with other resources as a ResourceComplex, which consists of a combination of objects, persons, knowledge and practices. A specific resource requires other resources for its preservation, distribution or use. ResourceComplexes have a specific history of appearance and dispersion, affect each other and are evaluated or hierarchized in relation to each other. Our notion of ResourceComplexes approximately corresponds with the concept of 'Base' used by Gudeman: 'Consisting of entities that people appropriate, make, allocate and use in relation to one another, the base is locally and historically formed. In the Latin American countryside, a farmer considers as base his house, land and crops; a university's base includes its library, laboratories, offices, communication systems and concepts linking researchers [...]', (Gudeman 2005, 97).

4) Resources and Reserves

The word resource is derived from the Latin *surgere* (to pour out from something). It describes something, unrelated to its use, that is fed from a natural source, which may run dry (Niemann 2006, 7). In geo-sciences and economics this notion led to a focus on issues related to 'exhaustible natural resources' (such as oil or coal). The terms 'potential of nature' or 'potential of physical region' are used to describe the totality of the potential of a geographic region (Barsch/Bürger 1996). To express that the potential of a region is proven and can be exploited with the given technical facilities the term 'reserve' is used (Wacker/Blank 1999, 3 f.). In this sense resources are 'the totality of existing raw-materials on earth, in which human society has an interest' (Niemann 2006, 11). For an approach in cultural studies, these definitions are of rather limited use, since from a sociocultural point of view resources

not necessarily have to be taken from nature and cannot be reduced to their economic function. In contrast to their definition in geosciences or economics, for cultural studies resources are not only a naturally existent potential, but defined by cultural concepts and accompanied by culture-specific actions. The focus of study therefore has to be on resources or ResourceComplexes that are of central importance for essential social relations, units and identities. By this, the term 'reserve' as well obtains new meaning within the context of cultural studies. It no longer describes just resources that are not (yet) economically exploited, but instead elements of a local culture, for example specific networks or religious practices, that can be put into use during emergencies or ambiguous circumstances. Or in Preissing's words: 'Die Reserventheorie wendet sich gegen die allgemeine Richtung der Globalisierungsforschung, die die Regression lokaler Kulturen im Zusammenhang mit dem ‚Kampf der (Groß-) Kulturen‘ proklamiert. Vielmehr stellt sie fest, dass trotz aller realen Auswirkungen der Globalisierung und der Einbindung in globale Zusammenhänge auf lokale, materielle und immaterielle Kulturgüter zurückgegriffen wird.' (The theory of reserves objects to the general tendency of globalisation-research, proclaiming the regression of local cultures in relation to the 'clash of (major-) cultures'. Instead, it detects that in spite of all the effects of globalisation and the integration into a global context, there is a fall back on local tangible and intangible cultural assets) (Preissing 2009, 69). Phenomena of globalisation aside, this definition of reserves can generally be applied by the collaborative research centre on situations of foreign rule, such as colonisation and others.

5) Social Relations and Actors

From a biological point of view, resources provide the basis for human life. They 'are needed by organisms, to sustain their vital functions, their growing and their reproduction' (Hertler/Karl 2006, 21). Our study instead, focuses on resources that are not primarily relevant for the organic, but for all social aspects of life. Anthropologists for example frequently describe societies, in which social actors may be both, human or non-human. Latour (2008) pointed out that the separation between nature

and culture is artificial and often maintained on an ideological level, while neglected in practice. He stressed the point that objects as well are ‘vocal’ and possess their own agency and representation, thus advocating a ‘symmetric anthropology’. Based on ethnographical studies, Ingold also argues against an ontological separation between man and nature. According to him, the field of social issues does not only cover the relations between human actors, but also between humans and animals, plants, ancestors, gods and other beings, to whom a social agency is assigned (Ingold 2000, 46).

6) Social Units

Following Gudeman (2001, 25; 2012, 63 f.) we may understand the social units, within which these relations are acted out and imagined, in the broadest sense. Taking the differences between the source material and the epistemological traditions of different scientific disciplines into account, a distinct conceptual separation between community and society does not seem feasible for interdisciplinary studies. To facilitate interdisciplinary comparison the terms ‘community’ and ‘society’ are used in a polythetic way. They stand for a number of possible social distinctions that may have relevance for the comparison. This includes for example distinctions between homogenous and heterogeneous, real and imagined, predetermined and acquired status, territorial limitations and trans-local networks, as well as distinct group-identity and conceptually ambiguous individual identities.

In conclusion, taking a ‘resource turn’ into account, the working definition for resources given above can be expanded as follows: **‘Resources’ may be understood as a category for analysis, serving to expand the semantic horizon of the term by the use of a comparative perspective. Resources generally are seen as means to create, sustain and alter social relations, units and identities within the framework of cultural ideas and practices. It is assumed that resources are variable not only culturally, but chronologically as well, and are affected by historical change. Resources often occur in ResourceComplexes, each having its own specific history of origin and distribution. They are bearing reference to other ResourceComplexes and are evaluated or hierarchized in their relation to each other. Acting**

on the fundamental assumption that resources (and ResourceComplexes) based on a culturally constructed interest, go along with learnt practices and do have social relevance, resources (and ResourceComplexes) that are used and are of practical significance can be studied. The use of resources implies the actions of social actors, taking into account that a number of societies also see non-human beings, such as animals, plants, ancestors or gods, as actors with social relevance. These actors can be assigned to very different social units, distinguishable by categories, such as homogenous or heterogeneous, real or imagined, predetermined or acquired, territorially and socially limited or un-limited.

3. Cultures

‘Culture’ is amongst the most central, as well as controversial concepts in cultural studies. Used in a very broad sense by public as well as academia it can refer to the arts, just as to consistent characteristics of people of common origin, or to shared customs, traditions and beliefs of specific societies (Beer 2012, 54 f.). With a particular focus on the ‘resource turn’ another definition of culture is most relevant: Culture seen as a scientific concept (Beer 2012, 55), allowing certain perspectives and ways of interpretation related to resources.

Recently a number of papers and books appeared, trying to provide an overview over the different definitions and the critical discussion about the concepts of culture (e.g. Beer 2012; Bernbeck 1997; Brather 2001; Edgar/Sedwick 2002; Fröhlich 2000; Hammel 2007; Reckwitz 2004).

Attempts to classify different concepts of culture are especially helpful. Reckwitz for instance, distinguishes between culture concepts that are ‘normative, totality-oriented, based on differentiation theory, or significance oriented’ (Reckwitz 2004, 3). Approaches are divided into those that focus on either structures, subjects, discourses or practices as central for the concept of culture (Reckwitz, 2004, 14–19). Bettina Beer as well points out the different concepts and perspectives within the debate about culture and distinguishes between ideational (or mentalistic) and materialistic concepts. She also refers to combinations of

these approaches (Beer 2012, 60–62). Even more comprehensive is the classification of approaches by Haller (2005, 31–37), identifying nine different opposing pairs or 'ideal types'. It is essential to respect the plurality of perspectives, in order to facilitate the input of differing points of view into the interdisciplinary discourse. On the other hand, a specification seems necessary, because assumptions about culture are fundamental for our definition of resources explained above.

What are the basic assumptions, underlying these concepts? For an analysis of the cultural aspects of resources the interpretative or meaning oriented discourse about the definition of culture seems to be of special relevance. According to this point of view human beings during all their history existed within a world of meanings (Geertz 1973) expressed through language, knowledge, objects, bodies, symbols, as well as through a wide variety of practices and performances (Reckwitz 2004, 7). Meanings consist of ideas and practices. They are learnt and in various ways shared or put into action. This world of meaning is not chaotic, but ordered and regulated or systematically interconnected, to result in a 'more or less structured whole' (Beer 2012, 56) or a 'meaningful whole' (Reckwitz 2004, 7), which in turn is affected by changes and processes, caused by the interaction of actors (Haller 2005, 31). Of special significance is the assumption that these structured worlds of meaning are contingent, or as pointed out by Reckwitz: 'Entscheidend ist nun die Einsicht, dass sämtliche Komplexe von Praktiken der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart [...] erst vor dem Hintergrund der jeweiligen, sehr spezifischen Sinnhorizonte und Bedeutungscode möglich sind, 'normal' und 'rational' werden oder gar als 'notwendig' und 'natürlich' erscheinen.' (The significant insight is that all complexes of practices in past and present [...] become contingent only by their respective, very specific horizons of reason and codes of meanings, thus becoming 'normal' or 'rational', or even appearing as 'essential' or 'natural') (Reckwitz 2004, 8). Acting on the basic assumption of cultural contingency the term 'culture' should always be used in plural.

Based on these considerations the following tentative working definition may be used: **Cultures are contested systems of meaning,**

learnt, shared and negotiated in various ways, and are expressed empirically for example by language, writing, texts, knowledge, objects, bodies, institutions, symbols and a wide variety of actions.

In order to apply this definition within an interdisciplinary environment of cultural sciences, this definition requires a number of additions.

1) Materiality

Many resources studied by classical and ancient studies and cultural anthropology are of a material character. Analyses of materiality used to address physical characteristics of different artefacts (Ingold 2007, Fowler 2010, DeMarrais et al. 2004). During recent decades, the symbolic and social meanings of objects, artefacts or consumer products found more and more attention (Miller 1987; Hahn 1996; 2005; Tilley 2007). In analyses of material culture tangible objects are put into relation with other objects, landscapes or individuals and their actions. In this respect in classical and ancient studies, as well as in anthropology, a tendency towards materiality seems visible, to contextually changing meanings of tangible objects, to their similarities and differences, to their places of origin, production processes and sedimentation areas (Tilley 2007, 18). In particular the writings of Latour (2008) and Ingold (2000; 2007) influenced a discussion (e.g. in Tilley 2007) about the relationships between the characteristics of tangible objects, human representations and social relations. It has been argued that ideas and meanings are not only assigned to objects, but originate only through the contact with tangible objects (Renfrew 2001, 127). Ingold points out the necessity to include practical know-how in dealings with the tangible world (such as the cutting of trees) into the analysis of tangible culture. Conceptually he questions the separation between tangible world and social relations, because human beings themselves are part of the tangible, animate world and in constant interaction, i.e. in social relation, to other objects (Ingold 2007, 7). A crucial point in this discussion is the question, to what extent the tangible characteristics of objects have their own agency. This leads to further questions, such as which options or limitations tangible things have for human beings or why only certain characteristics of objects

influence their lives, while others do not (Tilley 2007, 20).

2) Basic Functions of Existence

The cultural dimension of resources does not exclude the fact that resources of social relevance can possess a basic function for the survival of human organisms as well. But the hypothesis of contingency stresses the point that the resource use is not determined in a predictable or inevitable way by this existence related function, as was highlighted especially by studies of the cultural variability of food and drink (e.g. Douglas 1987; Germov/Williams 2008; Macbeth 1997). On the other hand especially by anthropological studies (Leach 2003) it became clear, that both, functions essential for survival and practices, necessary for exploitation, distribution and consumption, are of enormous social relevance. Thus, nutrition can be used to express social hierarchies, to construct kinship or cosmology related connections, to assign moral codes or to exchange messages. In short: Nutrition can be used to construct 'personae' (e.g. Carsten 2004). Subsistence related activities, just as practices of distribution and consumption, are frequently the cause to shape, renew or change social relations between genders, generations, age or ethnic groups and many others. For a cultural studies approach this means that there is no contradiction between the subsistence related functions of resources and their cultural construction, since frequently the resources relevant for subsistence and the practices related to them, are the ones to which cultural meaning is particularly assigned.

3) Comparability

Amongst other things, the interpretative turn in cultural studies caused a fundamental questioning of methods and categories for comparison (Hardenberg 2008; Holy 1987; Osterhammel 2004). According to Holy, most important was the understanding that social matters cannot be viewed in the same way as objects, because they do not exist except through human action and are inseparably connected to the process of assigning meaning. Due to this interpretative turn, all the monothetic categories of comparison became questionable that were formerly thought to be 'airtight' and used to compile complex typologies of societies (e.g. the Human relation Area Files by Murdock) or

to establish controlled 'cross-cultural' comparisons (see Mace/Pagel 1994). They had to be replaced by Needham's (1975) concept of 'polythetic classes', loosely based on Wittgenstein. Also, the singular concept of culture was increasingly replaced by a less rigidly defined concept, placing diversity, differences and contestation into the focus of analysis. As Holy (1987) states, following the interpretative turn the method of comparison in anthropology nowadays serves to formulate and illustrate differences by contrasting case examples. Thus, comparisons are mainly of heuristic value and refer to aspects, undetectable when studying single cases. On the other hand, comparisons can serve to point out formal similarities, such as analogical courses of action or repetitive principles of composition and structure.

What is the focus of such comparisons in cultural studies? Generally it will be on phenomena and processes, some of which may be connected in terms of place and time, while others occur completely independent from each other. According to Osterhammel 'transkulturelle, über Kulturgrenzen hinausreichende Vergleiche [sind] erforderlich und möglich, wenn man die Vergleichseinheiten nicht als unbewegt gegeben voraussetzt, sondern sie selbst als historisch veränderlich und ,verhandelbar' betrachtet' (transcultural comparisons, extending over cultural borders [...] are reasonable and feasible, if the units used to compare are not regarded as fixed constants, but instead as historically changeable and negotiable) (Osterhammel 2004, 62).

For cultural studies especially the comparison of transcultural processes will be of relevance. Specific processes, relevant in relation to resources, such as social development, spatial development, value creation, conflict, sacralisation or 'resource-curse' are compared, in order to elaborate differences as well as formal similarities.

4) 'The Social' and 'The Cultural'

A number of approaches in cultural studies, especially those influenced by Talcott Parson's AGIL paradigm (Parsons 1970), make a clear distinction between the social system of integration on the one hand, and the cultural system of assigning meaning on the other. This approach tends to systematically separate political, economic, social

and cultural aspects, and subsequently to use these aspects as causes or effects in the explanation of certain phenomena (e.g. of change). 'The Social', especially observable social relations, here is understood as real, 'the Cultural' on the other hand, as an ideological means to sustain the social system. This view may be contrasted with a more holistic perspective, such as developed notably by Sahlins who argues: 'In all its dimensions, including the social and the material, human existence is symbolically constituted, which is to say, culturally ordered' (Sahlins 1999, 400). The term 'sociocultural' as used by the SFB expresses this assumption, i.e. the idea that resources as well as the social relations, units and identities affected by a specific use of resources are symbolical constructs in contested cultural orders.

According to these considerations, the working definition of 'cultures' can be specified as follows: **Cultures are contested systems of meaning, learnt, shared and negotiated in various ways, and are expressed empirically for example by language, writing, texts, knowledge, objects, bodies, institutions, symbols and a wide variety of actions. The aspects of these systems of meaning are interrelated and result in a more or less meaningful whole. These systems of meaning are assigned to the tangible world, but a strict dichotomy between tangible and intangible has to be avoided, because human beings themselves are part of the tangible world. The fact that the contextually changing characteristics of objects and matters (including resources) affect the emergence of systems of meaning and their related practices has to be kept in mind. Cultures are contingent, their respective ideas and practices, and the ways these change, cannot be reduced to general or natural conditions, but instead are a result of specific horizons of meaning. Presupposing cultural contingency, comparisons in cultural studies use polythetic categories and are focused on the understanding of cultural difference as well as on the investigation of formal similarities, such as analogical courses of action or repetitive principles of composition and structure. The assumption of contingency does not imply that the importance of resources for basic human needs is denied. Instead, it stresses the point that the perception**

and resource use is not determined by general or natural principles. Still it is assumed that especially resources needed for human subsistence and survival as well as practices related to them, are those to which cultural meaning is assigned. The perception and use of resources leads to dynamics referring to social relations, units and identities that are always constructed symbolically beforehand.

4. RESOURCECULTURES

The elaborations above lead to the following assumptions: First, resources are always defined within cultural systems of meanings, in other words they are shaped by ideas, values and practices that are learnt, shared and contested in various ways and are often subject to change in the course of time. Second, the use of resources, their exploitation, production, distribution, consumption and representation, is specific and unique for every cultural context as well. Third, resources are used by socially interrelated people for specific, culturally constituted interests. Fourth, resources affect the organisation and constitution of social life. They are a means for creating, sustaining or altering of social interactions.

To coin a term encompassing all these issues, connections and interdependencies we suggest RESOURCECULTURES. RESOURCECULTURES are models consisting of a number of variables: the resources, the social determined ways to use them (ideas, values, practices), and the social relations, orders and identities. RESOURCECULTURES are not static, but affected by specific sociocultural dynamics. These dynamics are not deterministic or inevitable instead they are multidimensional and open.

This view takes into account two mutually related dynamics: that societies change because of their specific kinds of using resources and that social processes effect the ways to use resources. The interest in resources, culturally constructed, leads to processes of spatial development and resource acquirement, which in turn influence the existing social orders and units. Symbolic representations of resources have an effect on the identification of resources and the way to use them, but also have the potential to turn into resources themselves.

In summary: **RESOURCECULTURES may be understood as specific, dynamic models connecting certain resources, social forms of use, social relations, units and identities in a contingent, yet meaningful way.**

5. The Collaborative Research Centre SFB 1070 RESOURCECULTURES

The considerations elaborated above are the fundament for the work of a collaborative research centre that started its work in the fall of 2013 and is funded by the DFG (German Research Foundation). This centre unites a variety of cultural sciences, working both in ancient and in present times, and includes methods and expertise of natural sciences as well. Collectively the researchers participating in SFB 1070 RESOURCECULTURES are working to reach four major objectives:

- A new conceptualisation of the term ‘resources’ from a cultural studies perspective.
- The realisation of diachronic sociocultural and political developments.
- An understanding of processes of spatial development and identity-creation.
- Insight into the symbolic dimensions of resources.

These four objectives will be targeted by a close cooperation of different archaeological disciplines (Prehistory, Medieval Archaeology, Scientific Archaeology, Classical Archaeology, Near Eastern Archaeology, Biblical Archaeology), philological disciplines (Classical Philology, Near Eastern Philology), historical sciences (Classical Studies, Medieval History, History of Economy), geosciences (Anthropo-Geography, Physical Geography and Pedology), and Cultural Anthropology. The shared concept of RESOURCECULTURES is meant to be applied and improved, in order to facilitate a better understanding of diachronic changes and conflicts of societies, processes of migration and expansion, and complex phenomena of symbolisation.

The further development of the concept will be based on the work of researchers from a wide variety of academic disciplines to ensure a general relevance for cultural studies. It has to cope with cultural diversities, but also has to be specific enough to allow clear definitions and classifications. In the

long run, the concept will help to identify and integrate new interdisciplinary topics for research. The concept of resources together with the related hypotheses, approaches, models and objectives is designed to facilitate the understanding of related processes occurring in different times of history in a meaningful way. In particular, a better comprehension of the interrelations between resources and the emergence, maintaining and transformation of different political or public orders over longer periods is in the focus of our interest. With special reference to resource related questions, this concept will help to understand a variety of processes of spatial movement, development and appropriation, such as migration or colonisation.

In order to reach these goals, a scientific approach has to:

- a) Identify resources in natural as well as in cultural landscapes.
- b) Consider different ways of exchange of tangible and intangible resources.
- c) Analyse the potential as well as the limitations of different spaces.

To comprehend the symbolic dimensions of resources, the concept has to take the multidimensionality of cultural systems of meaning (e.g. Kertzer 1988) into account. This includes condensation, when individual resources simultaneously unite several interacting meanings; multivocality, for example when resources are interpreted in different ways within a society; and ambiguity, which may be used politically to reach consensus in spite of difference in the meaning of resources.

With these considerations the collaborative research centre SFB 1070 RESOURCECULTURES contributes to current discussions about resources in public and academia, opening new perspectives and insights.

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