

Werner Hennings: Development Research. Sāmoa and other Pacific Islands between Modernisation, Dependency, Subsistence, Sustainability and Globalisation. Apia: National University of Sāmoa, Centre for Sāmoan Studies, 2011.

Using the independent South Pacific country of Samoa as an example, the author of the present monograph takes 50 years of development policy as the basis for a stocktaking of development research and its theories and methods. The five established development theories – Modernisation, Dependency, Subsistence, Sustainability, and Globalisation – are examined in terms of their “obvious insights” and thus their usefulness. In addition, the transformation of the country into a modern state is to be outlined empirically. The author bases his analysis on both macro- and micro-data collected by means of field research. The analysis is extended by comparing the results with nine other South Pacific states. The author considers Samoa an almost classic “laboratory case” because the country offers an easily understandable network of local, national and global structures and relationships. In addition, there is sustained resistance to acculturation, accompanied by willingness to modernise.

The introduction to the book sketches out the natural environment and social or communal structures. The micro-state, which belongs to the Polynesian cultural group, is characterized by a homogeneous culture and a strong shared identity. Village and family groups form the foundation of the society which, as yet, has experienced neither a rural exodus nor any wealth gap worth mentioning. The most important actors and guarantors of continuity are the people bearing the title of chieftain (*matai*); they guarantee that economic preconditions for survival are in place by making available and distributing land – the means of production. The existence of the elected “chief” is justified by the unself-serving increase in prestige and wellbeing of the person’s own extended family, which brings honor, prestige and respect.

An examination in terms of modernisation theory and thus of the market economy orientation shows that Samoa has the status of a pre-industrial, non-developed society. Cultural traditions in connection with land rights are identified as a restraint on the development of productivity precisely in the crucial agricultural economy, where scarcely any progress can be observed. The dependency-theory perspective on the interaction between urban centers and the dependent periphery also identifies no indices of autonomous development, but instead relatively egalitarian, widely distributed wellbeing. The Bielefeld application approach based on the link between the monetary sector and subsistence economies, the relevance of which was established in three differently situated villages by means of field research, in turn confirmed the huge significance of self-sufficiency in supply, which occupied 50% of working time. To this can be added remittances from labor migration, which amount to a constant 20% of gross domestic product or almost €1,500 per year per household and are responsible for the significant increase in the standard of living over the past 20 years. In addition, elements of a polarization of the social structure are identified, which confirm the transition from person-oriented (Marshall Sahlins’s “big man” type) to financially determined (“business man”) values and behaviors.

The ecological perspective is introduced through the sustainability approach. From this point of view, a high level of environmentally oriented action by Samoa and the other Pacific states studied is required. The threat to the ecosystem, which ranges all the way to its destruction (Bikini Atoll, Nauru), is estimated to be significantly higher in the Pacific than in industrialised Germany. Finally, globalisation theory and its skeptical counterpart, the theory of fragmented development according to Fred Scholz (2006), are used to clarify transnational socioeconomic transformation processes in the region. Here too, hardly any development impulses can be identified, which is attributable not least to the lack of attractiveness of the island states for international economic relationships. More still, the majority of the South Pacific states can be classified as belonging to the new periphery which are dis-

playing, instead of positive development, a tendency to impoverishment. By contrast, Samoa can still escape from this “sea of poverty” (239) as a result of its specific land rights, reciprocal social relationships and subsistence orientation.

A closing comparison of Samoa with in each case three Polynesian, Melanesian and Micronesian states hardly permits any conclusions to be drawn because of the inadequate statistical material. In all three economies the agricultural continues to be the dominant sector. Except for French Polynesia and Fiji, which are also experiencing the beginnings of industrialisation, economic modernisation has made little progress. In summary, the study’s conclusion that only a multiple perspective approach permits differentiated insights is hardly surprising. Consequently, the author sees lasting value in the Bielefeld application approach, which links the macro- and the micro-levels. The theory of sustainable development, by contrast, is neglected or completely ignored in most of the approaches based on theories of development. A point of view based on dependency theory modified by globalisation is confirmed. According to this, except for individual projects no sweeping successes are to be expected as long as development policy reflects political interests, the supremacy of the north continues “almost without exception” (242) and the world market structures determined by it display no basic changes. Consideration of social consequences and of the ecological dimension remains subordinate to economic goals. A continuation of development policy seems necessary on humanitarian grounds alone.

The analysis, based on 25 years of work on Samoa and frequent participatory observation, is convincing. In addition, the insistence of the author on justice, participation and broad increases in wellbeing, which is critical of the capitalist system, arouses sympathy. Ambivalence about the traditional social structures, which are accepted, preserve social peace and stability and guarantee human beings a life of dignity, but also function as the central constraint to modernisation, becomes more than obvious. Samoa may well be one of the few countries in the world to be classified as a “least developed country” while at the same time displaying a high level of education, no refugees and almost no poverty, complete electrification and interaction with the industrialised nations that is open to everybody.

Something which must be criticized is the image of “the third world” with its “constantly worsening development conditions” (131), which results from dependency theories and permeates the whole book. The shift in focus and differentiation of the world economic order to the emergent, especially Asian, newly industrialised countries is not brought out, nor is adequate attention paid to the already emerging negative internal dynamics (inflationary use of the *matai* title, existential conflicts between village authorities and individuals returning from overseas). In addition, it is inappropriate to describe the labor migration of Samoans to New Zealand (instead of badly paid, local cash crop production) as a successful dissociative strategy. It is a result of the specific postcolonial relationships of the country, and in terms of development policy can neither be propagated nor generalized. Finally, the statistical material, which the book repeatedly promises from the publisher but which has not appeared, could have been posted on the university homepage of the author without any great difficulty.

Comment: This translated review was published in the journal *SOCIOLOGUS* in 2010 and reviews the original German edition of the book *Entwicklungsforschung. Eine Bestandsaufnahme am Beispiel Samoas*, Frankfurt am Main/New York, Campus 2009.

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