

# **Disability Studies in German-Speaking Countries: An Introduction**

Prof. Dr. Anne Waldschmidt,  
University of Cologne

&

Swantje Köbsell,  
PhD candidate, University of Bremen

Disability Studies Association Conference  
18th – 20th September 2006  
Lancaster University

1

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

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

2

## The German Disability Movement (1)

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

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

3



**Rallye  
against the  
„Frankfurt  
Judgement“  
(1981)**

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

4

## The German Disability Movement (2)

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

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

5

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



Source:  
private

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

6

## “Cripples’ Tribunal” (1981)



© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

7

## The German Disability Movement (3)

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

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

8

## Legal Activities

- 1986: Activists visit the United States
- 1994: Amendment of the German Constitution: "No person shall be disfavored because of disability"
- 2001: Establishment of a ministerial working group including two lawyers from the movement
- 2002 "Federal Act on the Equalization of Disabled Persons"
- 2006: Civil antidiscrimination law

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

9



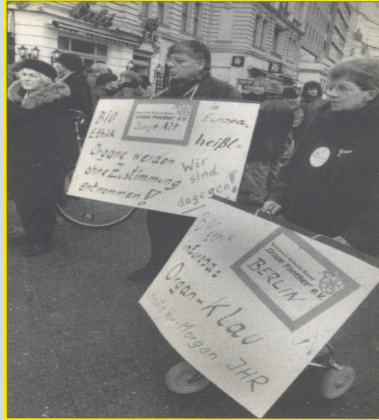
**UNSER LEBENSRECHT  
IST UNDISKUTIERBAR !**

**„Our  
right to  
life is  
indis-  
putable!“**

Source: die  
randschau,  
1989 (2/3)

10

**WIDERSTAND  
GEGEN DIE  
BIOETHIK-  
KONVENTION**

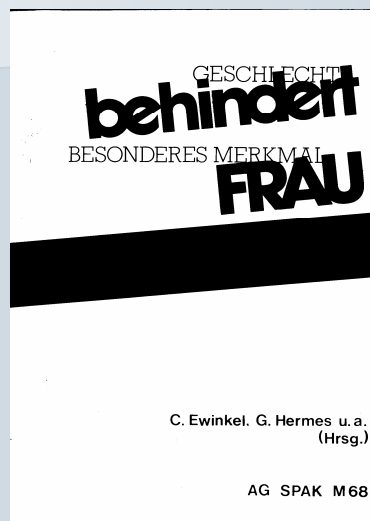


Resistance  
against the  
„Bioethics-  
Convention“

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

11

First German book written by disabled women  
(1985)



© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

12

## Weibernetz e.V.



National  
disabled  
women's  
network

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

13

## Conclusion 1

- Since the late '70s Germany has witnessed an active, creative and successful Disability Rights Movement.
- It fights against segregation and discrimination and aims for self-determination, accessibility and equal rights.
- Its agenda ranges from legal change to bioethics and gender issues.

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

14

## Critique of Science

- “Partial science from and in the interest of disabled people, i.e. a science of cripples ('crippology') does not exist.” (Mitglieder der Bremer Krüppelgruppe 1980, 6)
- “... [A]ny science of disability, which does not aim to control or govern disability should be subordinated under the goal of the political emancipation of disabled people.”  
(Horst Frehe 1980, 44)

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

15

## Some issues of the critical disability discourse

- Historical research of eugenics, racial hygiene and human genetics
- Bioethics of the present
- Self-Determination as a paradigm for disability policy
- Gender Studies: “double discrimination” of disabled women
- Disability culture

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

16



## No German model of disability, but...

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

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

17

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



Quelle: Stiftung Deutsches Hygiene-Museum / Deutsche Behindertenhilfe - Aktion Mensch e.V. (Hrsg.). (2001).  
CD-ROM zur Ausstellung: Der (im-)perfekte Mensch. Vom Recht auf Unvollkommenheit. Dresden (Deutsches Hygiene-Museum).

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

18

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

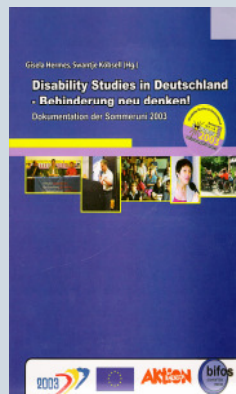


© Bifos 2003

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

19

## German-speaking Disability Studies: first editions



© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

20

## ... establishing Disability Studies in German-speaking countries

- Working Group „Disability Studies – We do research ourselves“ (founded April 2002)
- International Disability Studies Research Unit - iDiS (University of Cologne, 2004)
- Centre for Disability Studies - ZeDiS (University Hamburg, 2005)
- Swiss Society for Disability Studies (Zurich, 2005)

## Why did Disability Studies need impulses from the outside?

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

## Conclusion 2

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

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

- **Köbsell, S. & Waldschmidt, A.:** Guest Editor's Introduction
- **Köbsell, S.:** A Short History of the German Disability Rights Movement
- **Maskos, R. & Siebert, B.:** Self-Determination: The Other Side of the Coin
- **Waldschmidt, A.:** Normalcy, Bio-Politics and Disability
- **Degener, T.:** The Definition of Disability in (German and) international Discrimination Law
- **Naue, U.:** Governing Disability in Austria
- **Bernuth, R. v.:** Imaginations of Natural Folly
- **Dudek, S., Jeschke, K. & Lehmkuhl, U.:** Homosexuality in Residential Facilities for People with Cognitive Disabilities

[www.dsqsds.org](http://www.dsqsds.org)

## For further research see

- [www.disabilitystudies.de](http://www.disabilitystudies.de)
- <http://www.hrf.uni-koeln.de/de/sozbeh/angeagl/>
- [www.zedis.uni-hamburg.de](http://www.zedis.uni-hamburg.de)
- [www.disability-studies.ch](http://www.disability-studies.ch)

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

25

## Contact

- Prof. Dr. rer. pol. Anne Waldschmidt  
Universität zu Köln  
Soziologie in der Heilpädagogik,  
Sozialpolitik und Sozialmanagement  
Fragenheimstr. 4  
50931 Köln, Germany  
Email [anne.waldschmidt@uni-koeln.de](mailto:anne.waldschmidt@uni-koeln.de)
- Swantje Köbsell  
Universität Bremen  
Fachbereich 12, Studiengang Behindertenpädagogik  
Badgasteiner Straße, Sportturm, Raum C 5110  
28359 Bremen, Germany  
Email [koebshell@uni-bremen.de](mailto:koebshell@uni-bremen.de)

© Anne Waldschmidt & Swantje Köbsell

26