2 The Resource Theory perspective as a theoretical framework

2.1 Resource Theory (IMTM) at a glance

Resource Theory (IMTM), which is presented in the following, looks at the possibilities for individuals' action that result from the resources available to them. For this purpose, the approach considers resources such as income (money), education, health, psychological and social resources, etc. The resources available to individuals are not equal. Unequal resource endowments are associated with unequal opportunities for action and unequal social positions, which is why this *Resource Theory* can be used to describe social inequality in terms of the sociology of inequality (multidimensional). As a *sociological theory of inequality,* the *Resource Theory* presented contributes to explaining the emergence, maintenance (persistence) and reproduction of social inequality. However, it goes beyond theories of inequality and also represents *a socio-political theory.* As such, it focuses on how socio-political interventions affect the individual endowment with resources and on which "mechanisms" the distribution/allocation of resources is (socio)politically organised.

The *Resource Theory* presented here is interdisciplinary, multidimensional, transformational and multilevel in conception and is referred to in short form as *Resource Theory (IMTM)* (see below) to distinguish it from other approaches, such as theories on social justice or psychological resource theories. It was sketched in my dissertation thesis on "*Quality of Life. A Resource Theory and Power Analysis of the Welfare State"* (Knecht 2010), outlined in some smaller writings (Knecht/Buttner 2008; Buttner/Knecht 2009) and subsequently elaborated – in particular through joint editorship (Knecht/Schubert 2012; Schubert/Knecht 2012a, 2016) and authorship (Schubert/Knecht 2012b, 2015)- with Franz-Christian Schubert as well as with other colleagues (Knecht et al. 2014) and in several individual contributions (Knecht 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2016). In this context, *Resource Theory (IMTM)* was integrated into the context of social work – as well as poverty research (Knecht/Schenk 2023). Resource theory was conceived with reference to the discussion of resources in different disciplines. In overcoming a reduced economic concept of resources (cf. Schubert/Knecht 2012b; Hanesch 2012; Sen 1992, 1985; Dworkin 2011), it also draws on sociological theories, Amartya Sen's *capability approach,* as well as psychological and social work theories (see below and Knecht/Schubert 2020) and political theories (see below). In this respect, this Resource Theory is an *interdisciplinary theory* (even if it can be seen as a specific sociological theory of social inequality and social policy due to its expla-

natory potential and its functionality (see chapters 2.3 and 2.4)). Furthermore, it represents a *multidimensional theory*, since – like other approaches to poverty research[13] – it depicts social inequality (and poverty, if applicable) multidimensionally by including various resources. The different dimensions are not seen as independent of each other, but in their interaction, i.e. in the way resources are transformed into other kinds of resources (this is especially important for describing the persistence and reproduction of inequality). Resource theory is therefore also *transformation-related*. Last but not least, it looks at the emergence of individual resource endowments in the (socio-)political multi-level process. Therefore, the *Resource Theory* presented here is referred to as *interdisciplinary, multidimensional, transformational and multilevel Resource Theory* – or *Resource Theory (IMTM)* for short (Knecht/Schenk 2023). According to its functions, it can also be called the "resource theory of social inequality and social policy" and furthermore serve as an umbrella theory for social work. In the following, for the sake of simplicity, we will only refer to *Resource Theory,* as there is no danger of confusion with other resource approaches or theories. In chapter 2.2 *Resource Theory* is presented as a multidimensional theory of inequality. The chapters 2.3 and 2.4 focus on its usefulness as a socio-political theory and as a multidimensional inequality theory, respectively.

2.2 Resource Theory (IMTM) as a multidimensional theory of inequality

In general, resources are understood as means, conditions, characteristics or properties that serve to pursue goals, cope with requirements, carry out specific actions or complete a process in a goal-oriented manner (Knecht/Schubert 2020). Resources open up individual scope for action; therefore, the endowment with resources can be regarded as an indicator of the ability to act. My attempt to develop and elaborate a social science theory of resources that is grounded in both inequality theory and socio-politics aims to examine the resource endowment of actors multidimensionally at the individual level. These resources include income/money, education, social resources, health and psychological resources. Depending on the focus of the analysis, different resources can be in the foreground. For example, space and (the availability of)

13 In addition to the living-situational approach ("Lebenslagenansatz"), which is widespread in German-speaking countries but whose spectrum of dimensions used is not theoretically well-founded, a broad discussion on multidimensional poverty research has become established internationally, especially with regard to the multidimensional description of poverty (see e.g. Alkire et al. 2015).

time can also be understood as resources.[14] In the case of time as a resource, it is not only absolute durations that are important, e.g. of working hours, but also issues such as pace, plannability, synchronisation and time sovereignty (Jorck et al. 2019). Resources can be incorporated, attributed to a person (e.g. property) or located in the (wider) environment of a person (Knecht/Schubert 2020: 314). While the consideration of the former has a firm place in the sociology of social inequality, considerations of unequal health tend to be made in the context of a special social-epidemiological discourse (remote from politics); a discussion of an unequal endowment with psychologic/mental resources according to socially unequal positions in society hardly exists in the context of the sociology of inequality. Even in psychology the relevance of social inequality is often neglected.

In *Resource Theory (IMTM)*, on the other hand, the availability of psychological/mental resources is described with reference to psychological resource approaches as an essential factor for action (ebd; Schubert/Knecht 2020; Knecht 2016; Schubert 2016; Knecht/Schubert 2012; Schubert/Knecht 2012b; Schubert 2012). I refer to various psychological resource theories that have emerged since the 1970s. Foa and Foa, for example, looked at the exchange of resources, e.g. of couples, within the framework of *resource exchange theory* (Foa/Foa 1976; Törnblom/Kazemi 2012). Other early approaches addressing psychological/mental resources mostly dealt with coping with stress under psychological demands and thus also established links to psycho-social health concepts (Lazarus/Folkman 1984; cf. Schubert/Knecht 2015). Resilience theories (e.g. Werner 1977; cf. Schubert 2012) and the salutogenesis model (Antonovsky 1987) ask about resources as forms of coping. Thus Antonovsky (1987) considers the sense of coherence as a "hinge resource" for the ability to process stress and for the establishment or maintenance of mental and physical health. Hobfoll's theory of resource maintenance (Hobfoll 1988; 1989) examines the effect of stressful, stress-producing life situations on the resource situation of individuals. In his theory of resource conservation, he focuses on the perspective of the longer-term management of resources. Apart from addressing material resources, he refers to the individually different perception and cognitive processing of stress as well as to individual experiences of effectiveness. Together with his colleagues, he considers the possibility of preventing stress on a societal level, among other things through community-oriented coping, to be essential because the significance of the individual's resources always has to be seen in the socio-cultural context (Buchwald/Schwarzer/Hobfoll 2004; Hobfoll/Jackson 1991).

Resource Theory (IMTM) also draws on the concept of types of capital of Bourdieu (1992), who famously shows how individual actors use social capital and cultural/educational capital, in addition to financial capital, to protect or

14 See also Knecht/Schubert 2020. On the resource of time, see Klammer 2012 and Muckenhuber 2014.

secure their social status and privileges. Like resources, types of capital generate possibilities for action (cf. Meulemann 2004: 131f.). However, for an adequate development of a resource-theoretical approach, I consider it necessary to bring to the fore the potential for action bound up in the capitals or in the resources (Knecht/Schubert 2020) instead of the cultural anchoring of inequality through habitus and subtle distinction (Bourdieu 1984) and the importance of their strategic use for maintaining the social status quo, or to target the idea of hoardability and accumulation inherent in the concept of capital. Resource theory therefore reinforces the argument of the transformability of types of capital/resources, because a considerable endowment of resources often leads to the endowment of further or other resources, which tends to lead to the stability of inequality structures.

In addition to taking the importance of each individual resource into account, *Resource Theory* takes a particular look at the transformations of certain resource types into other resource types, which are based on very different inequality mechanisms (Knecht 2012c, 2011). For example, statistically speaking, higher education is also associated with higher income and better health (on these mechanisms in the context of *Resource Theory*, cf. Knecht 2012c: 53f., 2011: 591). Conversely, poor health leads to lower income (see ibid.). The connection between mental resources and health is discussed, among other things, within the framework of the salutogenesis approach (Knecht 2012c: 58). The social coping approach in turn shows how social resources have an effect on health (see for transformations Knecht/Schubert 2020: 314; Knecht 2012c: 165f., 2011: 591, 2010).

Since resources – and the scope for action they open up – are socially unequally distributed, *Resource Theory* functions as a *theory of social inequality* (Knecht 2010, 2011; Knecht/Schubert 2020) and is thus connected to other sociological theories: Giddens (1995) uses the concept of resources in structuration theory, distinguishing between allocative resources, which denote access to as well as appropriation of and use of natural livelihoods and material objects, and authoritative resources, which describe control over other actors and thus emphasise the meaning of relativity (see also Knecht/Schubert 2020: 310). In his "political sociology of social inequality", Kreckel (2004) connects this distinction by Giddens with Bourdieu's theory of types of capital. On the one hand, he cites two 'aggregate states' of inequality – unequal distribution of goods and asymmetrical relations (ibid.: 19). On the other hand, he develops a system of four 'strategic resources' (ibid.: 20): material wealth, symbolic knowledge, position in hierarchical organisations and participation or membership in a "selective association" referring to Marx's and Weber's concept of class. According to Kreckel, the first two resources are distributed (in an absolute way), while the latter two (representing two aspects of Bourdieu's social capital) lead to relational inequality, i.e. are not to be understood as 'more' or 'less' but as 'above' and 'below'. Therborn formulates three different

inequalities: Resource inequality (income and education), vital (health) inequality, and a third type of inequality, existential inequality. The latter deals with the "unequal allocation of personhood, i.e., of autonomy, dignity, degrees of freedom, and of the right to respect and self-development" (Therborn 2013: 49). With their conception, the various authors aim at the potentiality of resources and their significance for the structuring of social inequality in society. The availability of these resources creates socially unequally distributed opportunities. At the same time, the authors use their distinctions to make it clear that in addition to the inequality of the (absolute) endowment with resources, questions of (relative) hierarchisation, distribution of power and unequal recognition must not be lost sight of (see also Knecht/Schubert 2020).

The unequal distribution of resources analysed by the various authors refers, on the one hand, to those resources that individuals have at their direct disposal or have generated themselves (through resource endowment and individual transformation) and, on the other hand, to those resources that they have received through society or through others. Therefore, inequality of distribution also depends on socio-political structures. For example, it has been shown that multi-unit, early-tracking, highly segmented school systems not only moderate social inequalities, but also reinforce and produce them (e.g. Becker/Lauterbach 2016). Cross-country comparisons show that countries that strive rather for social equality – such as the Scandinavian countries – tend to support weaker pupils, whereas those countries that emphasise inequalities in school performance – e.g. through grading, selection in transitions to secondary schools and separation of "elites" – perpetuate and reinforce inequality (see e.g. Becker and Lauterbach 2016; Solga 2014; Allmendinger/Leibfried 2003; see for discussion in the context of the resource approach: Knecht 2016: 849; Knecht/Schubert 2020: 317). In the resource-theoretical approach, I therefore try to conceptually highlight inequality-theoretical and socio-political questions to visualise the ways in which different resource endowments may come about. In particular, the multi-level approach examines how the different types of resources are allocated through processes at the structural level (macro-level) and institutional level (meso-level) and how they are developed and distributed at the individual level (micro-level).

Thus, with the help of the *Resource Theory* presented here, questions of justice can also be discussed in a new way (Knecht 2012b). In the philosophical discourse, questions of justice are still discussed today in the categories of exchange justice and distributive justice following Aristotle. From the perspective of *Resource Theory*, other questions arise: What about educational justice, if education is given to those who already have many resources? What about health equity when people with low incomes have a life expectancy that is up to ten years shorter than that of people with high incomes? What about equity when living in deprived neighbourhoods is associated with environmental burdens that are harmful to health, such as increased particle and noise pollution,

or with other, more complex socio-ecological impairments? What about social capital equity, in the event that the multi-tiered school system (of the German-speaking countries) plays its part in splitting society into people with many opportunities and resources and people with few opportunities and resources, who have little interaction with each other? A contribution of *Resource Theory* to the philosophy of justice or social ethics could thus consist in a critique of theories of justice. For example, the notion of a just minimum endowment by Rawls (2005) strongly focuses on the importance of monetary resources for the establishment of justice. Walzer's notion of separate spheres of justice (Walzer 1998: 49) needs to be rethought in light of the strong correlations between different resources.

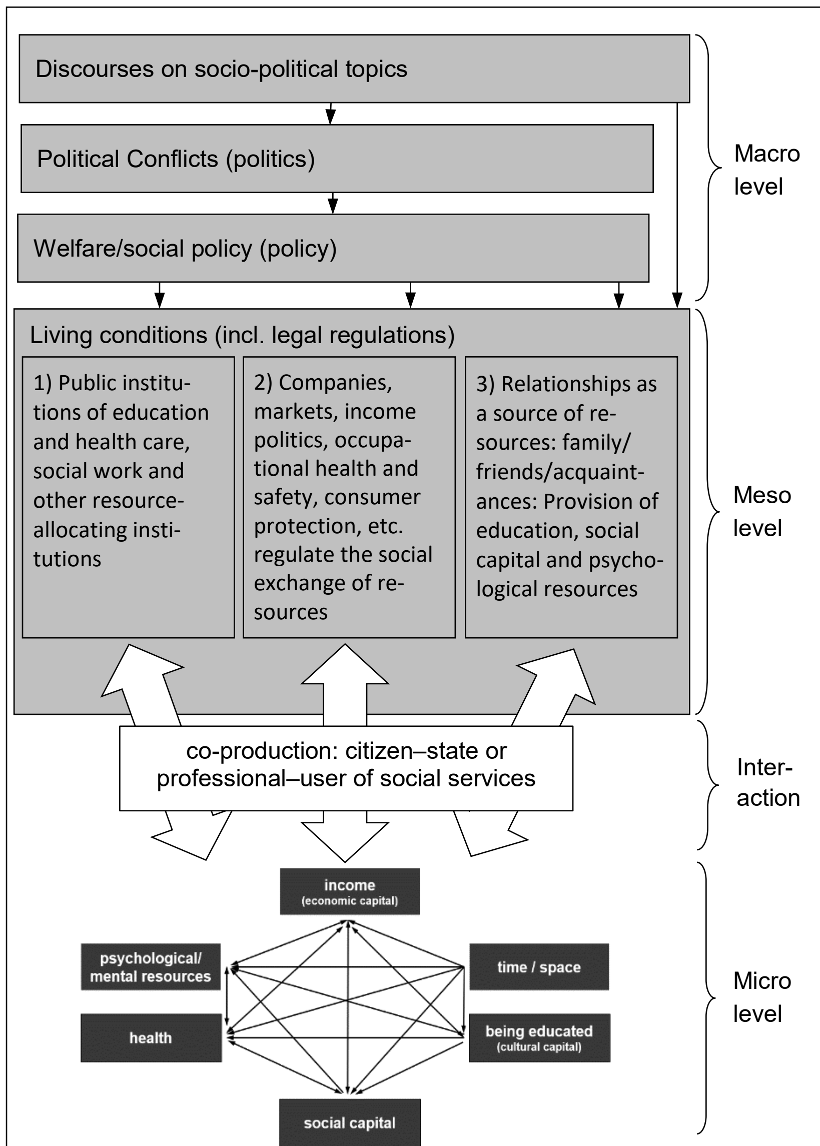
2.3 Resource Theory (IMTM) as a socio-political theory

With the interrelationships discussed above, *Resource Theory* (IMTM) *as a socio-political theory* refers to the (socio)political processes that determine the occurrence of resource distribution (Knecht 2012b; Knecht/Schenk 2023). The multilevel approach describes the political processes that influence the distribution of resources.[15] In political processes at the macro level (politics), for example, ideas of justice and legitimacy are "cast in form" through laws and decrees, which determine the institutional design or the further development of institutions. Social policy measures are then implemented within the framework of institutional regulations at the meso level (policy), e.g. concretised as service provision – whereby resources are allocated or the provision of resources is determined. In Figure 1, however, other areas of society are also mentioned that are significantly involved in the distribution or allocation of resources: on the one hand markets or companies, which are regulated, for example, by labour (protection) law, and on the other hand families, which themselves distribute resources in many ways, but are also themselves subject to a variety of legal regulations (Knecht 2010: 220f.).

The *Resource Theory* represents an extension of Bourdieu's theory of types of capital, among other things because of the broader spectrum of resources taken into account (cf. Schubert/Knecht 2012b; Knecht 2010) but also an extension of Amartya Sen's capability approach (Knecht 2012a, 2010), which focuses on income, education and life expectancy (as indicators of health) as inequality indicators. Sen's *capabilities* (and *functionings*) describe the possible uses or transformations of (material) resources into scope for action, whereby *functionings* describe individual possible uses, and *capabilities* are

15 On multilevel models, see also: Finis Siegler 2018; Boeckh et al. 2015b; Knecht/Schubert 2020; Knecht 2010.

Figure 1: Multi-level model of Resource Theory (IMTM)



Source: Own representation based on Knecht 2010: 218.

bundles of such functionings, which – figuratively speaking – represent achievable spaces or – mathematically speaking – matrices (Knecht 2010, 2012a: 62f.). Individuals can use the resources to shape their lives in the way they consider valuable (see also Acconcia et al. 2017: 252; Sen 1999). In contrast, the (external) conversion factors represent, among other things, structural/society-dependent background variables that influence the importance and use of individual resources (Knecht 2012a: 67).

The capability approach is fruitful on an abstract level, as it represents a shift from the discussion of redistribution of material goods prevailing in the philosophy of justice towards the question of the social conditions of action and emphasises the importance of education and educational inequality in the discussion of justice. However, the operationalisation of *functionings*, *capabilities* and *conversion factors* has proven problematic:

While Sen presents individual *functionings* and *capabilities* in various texts, a complete description of possibilities for action proves to be almost impossible. Furthermore, Sen describes various dimensions and conditions of freedoms on a macro-level[16], failing, however, to establish a concrete relationship to individual *capabilities* (ebd; Knecht 2012c). He claims that democratic processes should determine which *functionings* (and resources) should be considered in social and political contexts (Sen 1999; cf. Robeyns 2005: 106). This is important and comprehensible for practical application, but it should not constitute a ban on thinking regarding scientific application in the sense that approaches that are comprehensible from a scientific point of view, but possibly not (yet) discussed socially, are excluded a priori (cf. Knecht 2012a). If the participatory involvement of those affected can be a meaningful strategy – e.g. also in participatory research and action research – social research should also be able to develop questions e.g. from research itself. *Resource Theory* (IMTM) thus represents a necessary concretisation and further development of the capability approach through 1.) an interdisciplinary, multidimensional view of resources, 2.) a focus on the transformation of resources to investigate inequality-generating and inequality-maintaining mechanisms, as well as through 3.) a multi-level view to link (socio)political processes with their concrete impact (ebd; Knecht 2012c, 2011).

Aspects of the *Resource Theory* presented here have already been received and applied in different empirical contexts: Metz (2016) uses the resource approach to examine the consequences of migration from Russia in a sociological analysis. Finis Siegler (2018) uses the multi-level approach to discuss the delivery context of social economy. Rose (2018) uses it to discuss the importance of the reproductive regime. Röh (2013: 231f.) uses aspects of the theory, in particular the idea of resource transformation, to develop a justice approach to

16 Sen lists freedom of expression, economic freedoms such as free access to markets, and access to education, health and basic social security as “freedoms” (Knecht 2011: 589, 2010: 53).

social work and thus takes up the approach of describing social work action within the framework of the *Resource Theory* (Knecht/Schubert 2012; Schubert/Knecht 2012a).

2.4 Resource Theory (IMTM) in social work

The *Resource Theory* developed here shows itself to be compatible with resource orientation, which is regarded as an essential conceptual guiding principle of social work.[17] Dieter Röh (2012), for example, takes a look at three theories in his remarks on the concept of resources in social work: The lifeworld orientation according to Thiersch (Thiersch/Grunwald/Köngeter 2012), the emergent systems theory (e.g. Staub-Bernasconi 2018), and the socio-ecological theory (e.g. Germain/Gitterman 2021). Röh shows that the theorisation of social work in its history was already strongly oriented towards the needs of the clients, which represents a form of resource orientation, and that such a viewpoint also found a counterpoint in social work that was mainly concerned with the adaptation of its clientele to social requirements. In the concept of *lifeworld orientation,* central resources for living one's one life are recognised in the certainties of action, relationships and routines of everyday life, but also in the antagonistic pressures (cf. Thiersch/Grunwald/Köngeter 2012; Thiersch 2014). However, this is linked with the criticism of a technocratic "resource management" without a concept of resources being formulated in detail (cf. Röh 2012). According to Staub-Bernasconi social work encompasses a wide range of social problems and she understands "the development of resources" as its "oldest method" (Staub-Bernasconi 2018: 316), which focuses on problems of "physical endowment (disease, epidemics, disabilities, anorexia such as obesity ...), socio-economic endowment (educational hardship/job suffering, the problems of the 'working poor' ...)" and "socio-ecological endowment (human-wasting workplace conditions, lack of or unreasonable as well as inadequate socio-spatial infrastructure in the field of health, work, physical and psychological security ...)" (ibid.: 273). Staub-Bernasconi points to the overly broad use of the concept of resources without, however, restricting its use herself (ibid.: 317). Thus, in her work, the term remains shimmering between an economic definition and a broader understanding. In the further development of Geiser's (2015) approach, the concept of resources is more closely aligned with Antonovsky.

The socio-ecological theory formulated as a "life model" by Germain/Gitterman (2021) is essentially based on the stress research of Lazarus/Folkman

17 This section largely follows the presentation in Knecht and Schubert 2012: 312–313 and 316.

(1984) and the socio-ecological research of Bronfenbrenner (1981). Life management is understood as a socio-ecological interaction between the demands and resources of the individual and the environment, whereby demands and resources are in a complementary relationship. Life management, developmental transitions and satisfaction of needs are thus to be understood as a continuous coping process for which the person needs individual and environmental resources. Here, too, there is a strong connection to psychological resource theories. However, in this approach "the political impetus of a resource orientation [...] tends to be lost" (Röh 2012: 197). Wendt (2010) takes the socio-ecological concept of resources further. In his eco-social theory, resources are "assets" that should be used by both the individual and the community for human well-being and should also be nurtured (Schubert 2013). This happens in social work "both as individually effective resource work and through supra-individually effective resource management" (Röh 2012: 198). The transactional resource concept of Schubert (2016) takes up these socio-ecological approaches and formulates them on the basis of a stress-management model of the interdependence of lifestyle and resource use.

Whereas resource orientation describes a fundamental attitude of social work action (Möbius/Friedrich 2010), intervention-related techniques such as work on the personal networks (Straus 2012), resource-oriented counselling (Schubert/Rohr/Zwicker-Pelzer 2019) or resource activation (Schubert 2021a) are methods that are based on a complex resource perspective and include different types of resources and their interactions.[18] Resource diagnostics records which resources are present in an individual and in his or her social and material/economic environment (Schubert 2021b; Glemser/Gahleitner 2012; Buttner/Knecht 2009).

The concepts presented suggest that the different resource approaches should be brought together across disciplines to make the *interdisciplinary, multidimensional, transformational and multi-level resource theory* or *Resource Theory (IMTM)* usable as an umbrella concept of understanding the meaning of resources in social work. The use of the concept of resources and the already broad reception of various resource concepts and references also show a high connectivity in social work. However, in some places the references to the concepts remain less transparent and systematic, in some cases they are not even made explicit (cf. Möbius/Friedrich 2010). The concept of resources itself also appears to be inconsistent and theoretically little elaborated. Against this background, it is worth bringing together the different theoretical strands.

The field of social work can also be aptly described with an elaborate concept of resources. For problems that are linked to the loss of individual

18 See specifically on resource endowment in and resource work with young people: Eberhard 2012; Sabatella/Wyl 2018; Dommermuth 2008; Düggeli 2009 and Drilling 2004.

resources, help is usually available from specialised professional groups such as doctors, psychotherapists, teachers or tax advisors, while responsibility for multidimensional problems, i.e. when resources from several relevant dimensions are affected, is often seen in social work.[19] Social work is particularly in demand when the socio-political distribution or allocation of resources is not provided solely through monetary benefits, but face-to-face through a psychosocial process (Knecht 2012b: 85). This results in an interdisciplinary and multidimensional reference to resources in social work.

For social work, taking transformability into account means that the whole spectrum of resources, including their interactions, must be considered (Knecht/Schubert 2020: 316). Social work counselling of the unemployed, for example, must not refrain from including not only material and social problems, but also the psychological problems of those affected (cf. Knecht 2016; Klevenow/Knecht 2013). If resource-oriented work succeeds, the development and interaction of personal, external and economic resources is sustainably set in motion (Knecht/Schubert 2020: 316). Often, resources only emerge when interacting: A stable relationship of trust and recognition is a necessary basis for building self-efficacy and motivation in clients. In an assessment or in profiling at the beginning of a counselling process, a resource situation can therefore be determined only provisionally (ibid.). For analyses in the field of social work, taking several levels into account also means asking where structural exclusion of resources, resource use and resource transfers take place. By looking at resources, inequality and hierarchisation can be brought into view: In addition to material poverty, problematic relations of recognition and their effects on psychological/mental resources, for example, must also be taken into account (Fabris et al. 2018). Personal problems and inadequately successful lifestyles must not be understood solely as the effect of personal deficits or as deviant behaviour on the part of the individual (see also Acconcia et al. 2017: 252; Schubert 2016). In terms of interventions, taking multiple levels into account means understanding the importance of processes at the political level for clients and, if necessary, intervening at this level as well. Concepts such as political empowerment (Herriger 2014) the triple mandate[20], the discussions of other social work mandates (e.g. Röh 2013) and the reception of concepts such as policy practice (see also Burzlaff/Eifler 2018; Rieger 2016) perpetuate the political claim that has always accompanied social work, namely the intention to improve the social conditions and socio-political circumstances that are partly responsible for the problems of their clients. However, this work does not only require social workers who are aware of the importance of the framework conditions of their clients' lives and of their own professional actions (Staub-Bernasconi 2018) but also corresponding organisations that implement

19 Schubert/Knecht 2012a: 10; Knecht 2012b: 85; Knecht/Schubert 2020: 316.
20 … including the mandates of the client, the state and the profession (Staub-Bernasconi 2018).

such approaches. In this respect – following the *resource dependence theory* (e.g. Neumayr 2012) – the resources of (social) institutions must be questioned. The question of the enforceability of *weak interests* also refers to the importance of power processes and corresponding power resources (Ostheim/Schmidt 2007). The concept of resources presented here also forms a bridge between social work concepts of resources and power resource theories of interest enforcement (Knecht/Schubert 2020).

2.5 Understanding the mechanisms of resource distribution by analysing discourses and institutions – the role of political guiding principles and mission statements

It has been shown how the life situations of individuals can be described or assessed using an elaborated resource concept, the *Resource Theory (IMTM).* The resource endowment of an individual depends on the allocation of resources by the persons and organisations in the environment, which takes place by means of various types and forms of human-environment interactions. The question of how the distribution, redistribution and allocation of resources occurs in political processes is of great importance. Within the framework of the multi-level model, the *Resource Theory* developed here looks at distribution-relevant (socio-political) discourses on the one hand; on the other hand, it examines the concrete institutions and mechanisms of distribution and allocation (Knecht 2010: chapter 3 and 4). Discourses and institutions are not to be understood as two different realities, but as different parts of social reality that can be analysed in different ways (Reckwitz 2016; Opielka 2005b).

With reference to Foucault, discourse is not understood as the linguistic representation of reality, but rather as the reality of language and linguistic representation (Hajer 2008: 212; Knecht 2010: 157). "A dialectical relationship emerges between discourses and the social structure forming their context: both act reciprocally as conditions and effects. Discourses constitute the world – and conversely they are also constituted; they (re)produce and transform society; they perform the construction of social identities, the production of social relations between persons and the construction of systems of knowledge and belief" (Keller 2004: 28; s. a. Diaz-Bone 2018). Discourses hold fundamental conceptions of the world. Established discourses represent *orders* of knowledge (Keller 2006: 126) that are difficult to question.

Within the framework of *Resource Theory*, the focus is on the significance of discourses in the distribution of resources. An analytical distinction can be made between different levels. In discourses *on the macro-level*, such as the topics of the mass media and parliamentary debates, fundamental decisions are

made that help to determine the socio-political distribution of resources (Knecht 2010: 161). Studies *on macro-level discourses* also deal, for example, with attitudes of political elites, organisational cultures or socio-political implementation research (cf. chapter 3.2 below). *At the meso level*, for example, adopted laws, ordinances, decrees, etc. (all of which are recorded in the form of language!) are implemented, whereby the organisations have room for manoeuvre ("discretion" of the street-level bureaucracy; Lipksy 1980). The scientific and professional discourses that are received and partly produced by the professionals are an essential part of the meso-level discourses (cf. chapter 3.3). The meso level also has an effect on the macro level through the definition and description of problems. At the micro level, discourses come into play, for example, in the communication between clients and employees in social institutions or at public offices. Here the question arises which ideas professionals have about the realities of the clients' lives or how these clients feel to be perceived (cf. below, chapter 3.4.).

For the development of a theory of resources that focuses on socio-political processes, the reconstruction of discourses is important because (socio-political) discourses not only determine which resources are due to whom and how they should be distributed, but also because discourses determine which resources or which aspects of resources have which importance or appear to be particularly important. For example, the importance of education has changed greatly in the last twenty years. Studies such as the PISA study can be seen as an indicator that education and education policy are increasingly seen as part of social policy (Opielka 2005a; Finkeldey 2007). Unequal education is seen as a central mechanism of reproducing social inequality and equal educational opportunities as a way to curb increasing income and wealth inequality. Therefore, social policies and educational activities increasingly focus on the development of early childhood skills and competencies in order to improve future employment prospects and ensure the sustainable integration of young people into the labour force (Atzmüller/Décieux/Knecht 2019: 108). In the context of this change, the understanding of education is also changing, as activities are shaped by the concepts of competence building, employability and human capital formation, which are seen as a means to align productivity and competitiveness with social inclusion (ibid.).

In the context of this paper, the approaches relevant in (social) policy discourses – such as the social investment approach, activation policy and neoliberalism – are considered as guiding principles ("Leitbilder") or mission models and analysed in the context of a resource-theoretical allocation policy. Guiding principles represent types of attitudes, values and related policies (ibid.; see also below). They focus on certain principles of justice (such as distributive justice, needs-based justice, merit-based justice, productivist justice, exclusionary justice, etc.; cf. Ebert 2015) and justify positions on social policy areas or model topics (familialism, scope of care and insurance benefits, equality

policy, accuracy, activation, obligation, conditionality of aid, discrimination, participation, economisation, dualization/hierarchisation, privatisation; cf. Boeckh et al. 2015a). Guiding principles can represent different aspects of political processes. Thus, mental guiding principles (as patterns of imagination) can be distinguished from manifest (verbalised) principles, as can abstract, propagated and idea-dominated guiding principles from guiding principles in practised models (see Fig. 2.).

Figure 2: Overview of guiding principles

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Appearance
Effectiveness in work</td><td>Mental guiding principles
(patterns of imagination)</td><td>Manifest guiding principles (verbalised)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Propagated guiding principles
(desirable, potential)</td><td>self-supported</td><td>Ideas with mission statement potential
(e.g. politics/discourse analysis on intentional politics)</td><td>Explicit mission statements
(e.g. party programmes)</td></tr>
<tr><td>external</td><td colspan="2">imposed guiding principles</td></tr>
<tr><td>Guiding principles in practice
(internalised, guiding action)</td><td></td><td>Implicit guiding principles
(e.g. policy analysis on realised policy)</td><td>Explicit guiding principles
(e.g. policy analysis of policy formulated through legislation)</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Own representation based on Giesel 2007: 39.

Policy analyses often use guiding principles to typify policies in practice. For example, various authors divide social policy approaches into different models. For example, Morel et al. (2012) and Leibetseder (2016) divide policy approaches into “Keynesian social policy”, “neoliberal social policy” and “social investment”. Boeck et al. (2015a) distinguish between economically liberal, compensatory and activating welfare states; Laruffa (2018) distinguishes between neoliberal social policy and the social investment approach and the capability approach. However, terms such as neoliberalism are also used in the policy itself. Therefore, it must be noted that scientifically reconstructed

guiding principles are related to the guiding principles of political discourses, but are not congruent (see Fig. 2 and Giesel 2007). A look at the difference between discursively disseminated mission statements (e.g. in election programmes and public statements) and the guiding principles reconstructed from the observation of political practice can point to typical implementation patterns and problems as well as to actively or offensively used strategies of concealment.

Compared to a classification with the help of welfare regimes, analyses of guiding principles are predominantly focused on political discourses or the relations of political discourses to institutional changes. This makes them more suitable for observing and explaining short-term changes. In the following, four central academic guiding principles of current policy analyses are presented and briefly introduced as central scientific mission statements of current policy analyses: (1) neoliberalism, (2) social investment, (3) the capability approach (CA) and (4) the right-wing populist/extreme-right social policy mission statement. The different models place different resources in the foreground of their considerations and focus on different mechanisms of resource allocation.

(1) Neoliberalism. The term neoliberalism stands for a "doctrine that has emerged since the 1930s that absolutizes the market as a regulatory mechanism of social development and decision-making processes" (Butterwegge/Lösch/Ptak 2008: 9). In political research, however, the term and the concept of neoliberalism have only played a greater role since the mid-1990s. In research, too, there is no single neoliberal approach, but a rather multitude of thinkers whose ideas and attitudes overlap. The politics of neoliberalism are characterised by the liberalisation of market-based regulations, privatisation, the globalisation of markets, the economisation of administration and criticism of welfare state security. Unlike the "old" liberal policies of the 19th century, "neo"-liberal policies do not consist in a retreat from the market and a dismantling of statehood, but in extending market logic to all spheres of society and providing the framework for people's actions (cf. Fischer 2020: 380; see also Foucault 2004; Hammerschmidt 2014). Accordingly, as already mentioned above, neoliberal reform projects, such as in Great Britain under Margaret Thatcher or in Germany under Gerhard Schröder ("Hartz IV"-reform in 2002–2005), did not so much have a dismantling of the welfare state in mind, but rather a change in wage relations and the re-commodification of labour power through a far-reaching "neo-social" (see above) transformation of individuals and their ability to work (Atzmüller 2014; Jessop 2018; Bröckling 2007).

From the perspective of *Resource Theory*, the narrowing of the neoliberal image of man to the supposedly calculating and self-interested character of man – in the sense of "homo oeconomicus" – is central (Ptak 2008). According to this idea, people can be controlled primarily by financial incentive mechanisms. Therefore, the distribution mechanisms of material resources (and

especially the design of financial incentives) are at the forefront of neoliberal policies. In self-descriptions of neoliberalism, the focus is on the alleged efficiency of financial incentive mechanisms, which are to be used in more and more social sub-sectors organised along market lines and would thus solve efficiency problems of all kinds. As already mentioned, the market is seen as having a quasi-pedagogical function. Therefore, people who are assumed not to be sufficiently controlled by the market are activated and disciplined. Thus, the unemployed – under the assumption that there must be enough jobs, if only wages were flexible enough – are accused of being too demanding and inactive.

Measures such as cuts in transfer benefits, a stricter sanctions regime and the activation of job placements oriented towards the work-first principle aim to secure the work ethic of the unemployed and to (re)integrate them better into the flexible and precarious segments of the labour markets. (Atzmüller/Décieux/Knecht 2019: 111; Stelzer-Orthofer/Weidenholzer 2011). In the European version of neoliberalism, workers in particular are increasingly exposed to markets or quasi-markets ("commodification"), while companies are granted locational advantages through positive incentives such as subsidies.

A resource-theoretical view of neoliberalism also addresses the distributive consequences of neoliberal/neosocial policies as well as the psychological burdens and effects on psychological/mental resources. For example, the social and emotional consequences of the marketisation of society and the threatening and sanctioning measures of neoliberal policies, understood as activation, must also be kept in view and the question must be raised whether – viewed comprehensively – they do not themselves lead to suboptimal results (even in the sense of neoliberal goals).

(2) The concept of social investment was propagated in reaction to the establishment of neoliberal thinking and its penetration of political and public discourse, first by the British Labour Party and then by other, mainly social democratic, parties in Europe; central to this was Giddens' work "The Third Way" Giddens 2000). The concept quickly found its way into the rest of Europe (Leibetseder 2016) – among other things through the basic paper published in June 1999 by the two chancellors Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder (Schroeder/Blair 1999). Social investment policies (Kohlrausch 2014; Solga 2012) aim to make social policy more effective: through measures such as improving "human capital" through training and qualification, through the promotion of research and development as well as through the expansion of childcare (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002; Hemerijck 2013; cf. Knecht 2011). Proponents of the social investment concept claim to be able to reconcile (assumed) economic requirements (e.g. securing competitiveness) and social needs so that they mutually promote each other. The expansion of childcare shoud, among others, improve women's opportunities to participate in the labour force. However, the measures are justified in particular by the need to ensure that children

and young people from disadvantaged families (in terms of access to education and the labour market) can be educated as early as possible ("early promoting state"; in German: "Frühförderstaat"; Knecht 2011), but also throughout childhood and youth (Knecht 2012c) as this is considered to be the best way to avoid unemployment, poverty and criminality later on (Esping-Andersen 2008).

In fact, in Austria, too, a policy has recently prevailed in which entitlements are reduced and transfer payments are linked to the counter-performance of the unemployed in order to increase their allegedly low willingness to participate in the labour force (Atzmüller 2014, 2009; Atzmüller/Krenn/Papouschek 2012). Critical studies of these developments point above all to the repressive tendencies of activating transformations and reconfigurations of social policy (Gray 2004; Wyss 2010). They identify these tendencies as a prerequisite for far-reaching processes of recommodification of the commodity labour power through flexibilization and precarisation (Scherschel/Streckeisen/Krenn 2012; Pelizzari 2009), which are associated with changes in the government of the subjects (Lessenich 2012; Bröckling/Krasmann/Lemke 2000).

From a *Resource Theory* perspective, social investment policy can be understood as a policy that focuses in particular on the resource education. However, education is limited to its functional significance for income generation: employability (Kraus 2007). As far as the distribution of resources and patterns of inequality is concerned, the social investment concept is often associated with hopes for an improvement in equal opportunities through higher participation in education – however, the logic of the investment calculus corresponds to a concentration on worthwhile investments. This can lead to a stronger focus on meritocratic logics to legitimise inequality and selective access to different educational pathways (Müller 2015; Solga 2005). According to this logic, all individuals should be given (formal) access to educational activities, but at the same time this access remains selective and, in the context of increased human capital orientation, is primarily geared towards marketability (Atzmüller/Knecht 2017a). Social investment activities are then primarily directed towards those groups of people who prove themselves in terms of meritocratic logic and who succeed in building a more or less stable life based on employment histories; other groups are also denied support if necessary (cf. Büschken 2017). In particular, recipients of so-called "unproductive measures/ interventions" (e.g. pension payments, care for the elderly) run the risk of having to cope with reduced benefits.

Although the guiding principle of the social investment state has repeatedly been presented as an alternative to neoliberal policies, there are nevertheless overlaps between the two models (cf. Hemerijck 2013; Morel/Palier/Palme 2012; critical: Cantillon 2011). In particular, it became apparent that the social investment concept is also characterised by activating measures (Atzmüller/Knecht 2017a; Peck 2001). In Germany in particular, the restructuring of the welfare state was – at least superficially – driven forward along the slogan

“demanding and supporting” (in German: “fordern und fördern”), which can be translated in terms of content as “activation policy within the framework of a social investment approach”.

Analyses of these developments emphasise that ideas of individual self-responsibility, which can best be realised by pursuing one’s own interests on the (labour) markets, are linked with ideas according to which the working capacity of individuals represents a human capital whose permanent change and adaptation mutates into a moral requirement in the context of self-responsible subjectivity. This conception of the subject, which focuses on adult, ‘mature’ individuals, is shaped by certain expectations of rationality, which are based on ideas of the *entrepreneurial self* (Bröckling 2007; Rose 2000) as an updated version of the individual utility maximiser (Foucault 2004) capable of acting autonomously and freely in the marketplace (cf. Atzmüller/Knecht 2017a).

(3) The third central guiding principle is the *Capability Approach* (CA), which goes back to the philosophers Amartya and Martha Nussbaum. It has already been discussed above as the starting point of the resource approach; however, it can also be seen as a socio-political model developed from theory, which is often referred to in the academic discourse of educational science, social pedagogy and social work (see footnote 22). Capabilities refer to the amount of room for manoeuvre that people have at their disposal (overview: Knecht 2010: chapter 2.2, 2012a). The extent of scope for action is described as being equally dependent on individual characteristics (e.g. skills and competences, physical and monetary resources) as well as on social circumstances (Knecht 2011; Kuklys 2005: 11). With reference to development policy considerations, Sen discusses political and economic freedoms, “social opportunities” such as those provided by education and health care, more extensive basic security through social insurance, among other things, as well as protection against arbitrariness and corruption.[21] Although elements of social policy are hereby presented as essential for the individual’s scope of action, political measures to create them are discussed neigher in sufficient detail nor concretely within Sen and Nussbaum’s original approach. While Martha Nussbaum presented a list of desirable basic freedoms (Nussbaum 1999: 57) of which, however, not all are socio-politically accessible, Sen pointed out that the question which capabilities should be improved by society in which way should be answered within democratic processes (Sen 1999). Already in the formative phase of the CA, Sen pointed out that philosophies of justice should be called into question on the basis of their *informational basis of judgement of justice* (abbr.: IBJJ) (Sen 1990; see also Knecht/Kuchler/Atzmüller 2014; Atzmüller/Knecht 2017a; Sen 1999; Otto et al. 2017). Depending on which aspect is brought to the fore (such as equality of opportunity, distribution,

21 Sen 1999; overview and discussion: Knecht 2010: 53f.

capabilities, benefits, resources, satisfaction of basic needs, subjective satisfaction, distributional outcomes), judgments of justice arrive at different results.

Before CA was received and further developed in educational science and social pedagogical research[22], it has served as an approach to justice philosophy and development policy (Robeyns 2005). By addressing the importance of public institutions for the empowerment of individuals (Sen 1999), the CA opened up the socio-political discussion of the philosophy of justice to the question regarding the significance of policy-making and youth policy have for the concrete opportunities of every individual young person (Knecht/Kuchler/Atzmüller 2014). Especially in the transition to adult or working life, inequalities between young people manifest themselves in a limitation of educational opportunities, e.g. due to a lack of resources and offers or discrimination (see below). Social crises further reduce the choices and opportunities of disadvantaged young people (Sting 2011: 40). This connection can be well illustrated within the framework of Sen's capability approach (see e.g. Knecht 2014; Knecht/Kuchler/Atzmüller 2014). In addition, the CA also offers references to the importance of democracy, participation, co-determination, empowerment, and the development of a sense of community (see also Knecht 2014) and autonomy (cf. Bothfeld 2017; Betzelt/Bothfeld 2014).[23]

(4) The fourth model is the right-wing populist/extreme right model of an *exclusion-oriented social policy*. Many of the European right-wing populist/extreme right parties originally advocated authoritarian-neoliberal positions

22 On the development of the CA's relationship to the educational sciences: Walker 2005; Otto/Schrödter 2007; Otto/Ziegler 2010a; Otto/Ziegler 2010b; Röh 2013; Clark/Ziegler 2016; Otto et al. 2017; Okkolin et al. 2018; Otto/Walker/Ziegler 2018.

23 From a resource theory perspective, the capability approach also has some weak points: The fact that capabilities describe "doings and things" at the same time leads to ambiguities as to whether they are intended to describe the use of resources or possible outcomes of actions (for a critique, see also Knecht 2010: 67). Secondly, as already mentioned, there is a gap between his empirical studies with highly aggregated data and the theoretical argumentations strongly aimed at the individual person on the importance of resources as well as on the importance of the ability to use resources. This missing link can be called the micro-macro gap (Knecht 2011: 592). Thirdly, it is to be criticised that in his contributions he very strongly emphasises the ability to use resources, but in doing so loses sight of the importance of the resources themselves (ibid.). As mentioned above, this also corresponds to a weak point of various socio-political argumentations that rely on influencing inequality structures in the direction of greater social equality through educational policy measures alone (Solga 2012, 2014; Kohlrausch 2014). Fourth, he neglects to discuss power structures that lead to unequal distributions. His approach that more resources lead to greater agency (and freedom) is sociologically uninformed because it does not consider that more resources imply new distributional struggles and new methods of distinction (Knecht 2011: 592). Sen thus does not address the relational meaning of inequality.

(Hall 1986; Bruff 2013) and this is also how the current policies and projects of some right-wing governments, e.g. in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic or Slovenia, can be categorised (Atzmüller 2022, Lendvai-Bainton/Szelewa 2020; Stubbs/Lendvai-Bainton 2020). Various studies (Röth/Afonso/Spies 2018; Lefkofridi/Michel 2017) have shown that governments with authoritarian-populist participation (or tolerance) of the extreme right have not or hardly reduced the level of spending on social policy, but the quality of social policy measures has changed. Indeed, since the mid-1990s, various authoritarian-populist and extreme right parties have begun to develop independent social policy ideas to broaden their electoral basis (Swank/Betz 2019). This justifies considering a separate right-wing populist/extreme right social policy model. In social science debates, the socio-political programmes are often referred to as welfare chauvinism (Ennser-Jedenastik 2018a, 2016; Keskinen 2016). This refers to policies based on the belief that welfare state benefits should be primarily targeted at the 'native' group, defined by citizenship, ethnicity, race or religion. In contrast, members of the non-native out-group should receive limited, if any, social support (Fischer 2020). Ennser-Jedenastik (2016, 2018a) with reference to Austria, emphasises nativism in this context as the most important organising principle of extreme right social policy. In order to demonstrate this, the social policy changes must be seen in a broader context; it is not enough to look at the changes in individual measures. Thus Atzmüller/Knecht/Bodenstein (2020) point out that welfare chauvinist policies are often embedded in a broader authoritarian, right-wing elitist project that opposes emancipation and political participation, stands for renationalisation, and additionally fosters traditional family structures, gendered division of labour, pronatalist policies as well as punitive, educational and also explicitly exclusionary measures in a wide range of social policies (s. a. Biskamp 2019).[24]

This kind of policy-making can be combined with the repression of the democratic actors of civil society, the workers' movement and the social partners, as well as of the political and public control bodies (media, independent courts) while pushing an economic and national productivism that deepens inequalities and promotes the national middle classes (Atzmüller 2022). Right-wing populist and extreme right parties in various countries use the criticism of welfare state benefits (and especially those that benefit non-citizens) to discredit the welfare state as a whole and in this way legitimise and enforce the dismantling or restructuring of the welfare state (Fischer 2020). Social policy

24 For Lehner and Wodak (2020) right-wing populism includes, first, nationalism/nativism/anti-pluralism, second, anti-establishment/anti-elitism, third, authoritarianism/hierarchical society and, fourth, conservatism/historical revisionism. This position goes back to the discussion of the 1930s and 1940s about the "authoritarian character" who wants to be part of a strong, authority-led collective, which, however, can only be established through demarcation from an imagined "other" (Biskamp 2019: 97). This attitude is related to the advocacy of punitive and activist policies.

measures that aim at restricting freedoms by limiting individual gains in autonomy along national, religious as well as class- and gender-specific structures and cementing or deepening social inequalities are part of this strategy. The socio-political measures give shape to the conservative to extreme far-right ideas of gender, family and population policy intentions that justify them, which are usually underpinned by culturalist-racist or genetic-racist argumentations (Butterwegge 2018; Atzmüller 2022; Tálos 2006; Rosenberger/Schmid 2003). From a resource-theoretical point of view, this is not only about cutting benefits or allocating resources, but also explicitly about using measures (or deliberate inaction) beyond social policy to prevent people from using the resources they have.

Often, these reactionary policies enforce measures "designed to discipline (or at best incentivise) poor people's behaviour through segregated (and low-quality) delivery systems, often in punitive ways" (Fischer 2020: 381, translation: A.K.).[25] "This is regularly presented as promoting the rights of the poor, whereas this often does not correspond to the function of the measures actually implemented" (ebd; s. a. Biskamp 2019). Alongside the disciplining of one population group (e.g. the unemployed or those affected by poverty) are policies that do not discipline people but push them to the margins of society (Atzmüller 2022). Examples of this marginalisation (Biskamp 2019: 100f.) which often goes hand in hand with spatial segregation, are the banishment of people to camps such as asylum camps or deportation centres, but also marginalisation on the labour market, e.g. through the establishment of substitute and secondary labour markets (e.g. special labour markets for seasonal workers, temporary work permits, 24-hour care, etc.), through the displacement of homeless people and beggars from the inner cities or also within the framework of a women-at-the-stove policy. In extreme cases, these exclusionary policies force the criminalisation of particularly disadvantaged groups of the population (e.g. homeless people in Hungary; see also Lindberg 2020). At the same time, the laws that are enacted within the framework of these policies are conspicuously often beyond the limits of what is legally permissible.[26]

Comparing the approaches, it can thus be said that the CA – similar to the neoliberal model – discusses access to markets as an expansion of individual opportunities, but it incorporates the importance of societal and socio-political circumstances in a very different way. Both the CA and the social investment approach the emphasis on education for the development and advancement of people. However, in the social investment approach, the importance of

25 "[S]uch interventionist and segregationist impulses [...] fit comfortably well with the similarly segregationist impulse of illiberal right-wing populism. While the latter targets its discipline at racial or other groups rather than generic categories of poor people, the fact that poverty is often racialized allows for a smooth transition between these two conceptual targets." (Fischer 2020: 381f.).

26 For Austria: Sallmuter 2002; Verfassungsgerichtshof 2021, 2019.

education is largely limited to its vocational usability for income generation (Bonvin/Galster 2010) whereas the CA discusses education in its functional meaning (also for democracy) as well as in its "intrinsic" meaning, i.e. as a value in itself. Sen sees the importance of increasing agency in its enabling people to pursue goals, "they have reason to value" (Sen 1999: 63). He thus clearly distances himself from the idea of activating measures, which are part of neoliberal and social investment measures.

The right-wing populist/extreme right ideology has some overlapping points with the neoliberal ideology, but differs strongly in the attitude towards migrants and asylum seekers, who are seen as potential workers in the neoliberal worldview and are seen as others to be excluded in the right-wing populist ideology. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser point out, however, that populism in general remains indeterminate with regard to many issues and therefore partly overlaps with other ideologies (Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2019).

Resource theory provides the framework for the coming analysis. The focus is on the two areas: the analysis of discourses on the one hand and the institutional changes on the other one. The guiding principles serve to keep in mind the modes of allocation or the combination of policies of resource allocation. They thus establish a link between discourses and institutions. The field of employment promotion can be analysed as a network of the multidimensional allocation of educational resources, material resources, and psychological/mental resources (interdisciplinary). Institutional changes in the field of employment promotion accordingly also lead to changed individual constellations of resource endowments. The phase of finding a profession and entering the labour market can also be seen and analysed as a concretisation of the idea of transforming educational resources into monetary resources. The guiding principles listed above serve as a basis for the analysis of the change in discourses in institutions in the field of employment support for disadvantaged youth. The ideological content and meaning of fragments of discourses as well as individual measures and the change of these measures can be clarified in their overall context by assigning them to the guiding principles – and, if necessary, enables making fractures between widespread discourses and institutional analyses visible.