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Organisational Constructions
of the BSE Problem.
A Systems Theoretical Case Study
on the Globalisation of Risk

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RSC Visiting Fellow (1998-99)

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Abstract

Drawing on systems theory and the sociology of risk this paper examines the BSE problem ('mad cows') as an example of the 'globalisation of risk'. It is argued that organisations are of particular importance regarding social constructions of risk in modern society. To determine whether the 'globalisation of risk' is a context dependent social construction the paper emphasises the particular role of associations - as a structural coupling of the economic and the political system. The paper empirically compares the BSE-related risk constructions of five business associations in the German meat industry sector. The results show that risk constructions can be traced back to domain specific provision problems and related horizons of globalisation which business associations - and the firms they represent - face. While the main organisational domains in the German meat industry sector tried to cope with the problem by different means of local market 'closure', one new association, founded in reaction to the BSE problem, took over a 'reflexive' role with regard to the emerging risk communication on BSE in Germany. - Beyond its empirical evidence, the significance of this case study lies in the experimental attempt to link the systems theory of society to empirical research.

I. INTRODUCTION

For a few years now two sociological concepts, each claiming to describe basic structural changes in modern society and thereby challenging current sociological theories of society, have attracted particular attention. The first, and still ambiguous concept, *globalisation*, addresses various transnational social processes in terms of structural diffusion and/or interconnectedness (e.g. Robertson 1992, Altvater/ Mahnkopf 1996, Beck 1997, 1998). Whether referring to political, economic, scientific or even cultural changes, globalisation denotes trends towards the establishment of a world society (Stichweh 1994, 1995; Luhmann 1997). The second concept, *risk*, emphasises 'ecological' problems of society (e.g. Beck 1992, Luhmann 1993, Bonß 1995, Japp 1996, Bechmann/Japp 1997). In a narrow view technologies and their problematic ecological consequences are stressed (Beck 1992). More generally, risk poses the question of how society deals with uncertainties, especially the paradox, that knowledge about society and its environment is increasing and at the same time decreasing (Luhmann 1992, 1995b).

Typical slogans used in these debates, such as 'world risk society' (Beck 1993, Zürn/Take 1996) or the 'risk of globalisation' (Beck 1997), presuppose that globalisation and risk are closely and systematically connected to one another. Although both problems have been reflected in some 'grand theories' of modern society, the relation between globalisation and risk lacks an empirical base. This is true for Ulrich Beck and his argument of the evolution of a 'risk society' (1992) and for Niklas Luhmann (1997), whose theory of modern society is conceptualised in terms of a global 'world society'. However, I will not discuss the structural connection of globalisation and risk on the level of a 'grand theory'. Instead, my interest is to make it accessible to research on the level of organisations. Drawing on an empirical example, I ask what globalisation means in view of risk and what risk means under conditions of globalisation.

The empirical example is the BSE problem (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) as a case of risk that swept the world¹ under headings such as 'mad cow disease', 'Rinderwahnsinn', 'vache folle' or 'mucche pazze'. From recent public debate it is now well-known that the abbreviation BSE indicates an infectious brain disease in cattle, discovered in Great Britain in the mid '80s. The possible connection of this to a new variant of the human Creutzfeld-Jakob disease (CJD), a lethal brain disease, has made BSE a striking example of risk communication (Hacker 1996, Dealler 1996). However, I will not discuss questions of origin, frequency and probability of either disease here.² (Sociology must leave this kind of question to other disciplines.) Nevertheless, it is striking that the BSE problem swept across to most European countries and even to

other continents. Even where – as in Germany – hardly any cows have gone mad, beef sales have drastically declined. new legislation regarding trade with cattle has been passed and even new organisations have been founded in order to manage the crisis.

I will in a first step develop a conceptual understanding of the way in which 'local' risk problems become 'global'. In order to show that the 'globalisation of risk', as I will call it, is a particular application of a striking general connection between globalisation and risk in modern society, I will start with some general considerations derived from the theory of society. Some more case-specific conceptual considerations will also be added to this first part, in order to prepare for the empirical observations.

In the second part I draw on some first results of my empirical research on the BSE case. Focusing on organisational domains in the German meat industry sector (as represented by business associations), I will reconstruct the 'globalisation of risk' as a context-dependent social construction, essentially structured through organisations and their respective orientation towards function systems.

II. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Globalisation and Risk - 'Globalisation of Risk'

Globalisation is still an ambiguous term. No matter in how much detail it is described (see for an overview: Beck 1998; Schmidt/Trinczek 1998), the fundamental theoretical challenge with which it provides political scientists and sociologists has become increasingly clear. Globalisation undermines those sociological concepts of society which have so far taken the nation-state theoretically for granted (see Beck 1997, Luhmann 1997). Thinking of society in the plural becomes inappropriate because theorising about globalisation already presupposes an idea of a world society. Clearly then, if globalisation is a societal process of delimiting the national context (and not an environmental fact), it takes place in one society only (ibid., Stichweh 1995).

In the quest for a concept of world society which allows the problem of globalisation to be addressed, it becomes rapidly apparent that sophisticated and convincing theories are few and far between. In his recent publications on globalisation, for example, Ulrich Beck (1997, 1998a,b) has stressed the necessity of a concept of the world society, although - it should be noted - he has not provided one. Existing ideas of the 'world system' that followed Wallerstein (1974),

instead centre on economic processes (Altvater/ Mahnkopf 1996), but cannot account for other world systems, for example politics (Stichweh 1994, Meyer et al. 1997), law (Shapiro 1993, Teubner 1997) or science (Stichweh 1996).

Against this background, Niklas Luhmann (1970; 1997) has made the only conceptually developed suggestion thus far. He argues that (world) society consists of all communications which are within potential reach of each other. The background for this argument is modern society's functional differentiation. Function systems such as the above mentioned are founded on universalistic codes of communication (Luhmann 1995a, 1997)³. Following the basic assumption that world society comprises communication, I understand globalisation as a communicative phenomenon. More precisely, globalisation is one side of a distinction present in societal communication,⁴ that of globalisation/localisation. Thus, its various communicative uses can be analysed and observed in terms of a more open or closed horizon, whereby both directions connote a time-space dimension (Giddens 1990).

At least two challenging questions derive from this general approach: First, what are the societal contexts that shape the communicative use of this distinction? In regard to this question, my analysis takes organisations - viewed as a distinct type of system-building in modern society - to be a suitable context despite the differences which emerge according to function systems. Second, why is the distinction of globalisation and localisation taken on such importance today? What are the problems with which it deals? In order to answer these latter questions, I analyse globalisation in close connection to risk (see Tacke 1998). This is because processes of globalisation seem to promote the emergence of risk,⁵ and the emergence of risk seems to promote the communication of globalisation *as a problem*.⁶ Thus, the ideas of *globalisation as risk* (Globalisierungsrisiko, Beck 1997) and *globalisation of risk* should be clearly distinguished. Although generally assuming a two-way connection between globalisation and risk, I focus on the latter idea here. Basing the analysis on the assumption, that the globalisation of risk is a communicative phenomenon, I will now turn to the concept of risk and then examine the question of why risks become 'global'.

Scholars of sociology have described risk with reference to three basic dimensions of the social. According to a *temporal dimension*, risk refers to the fundamental societal problem of coping with the uncertainty of the future (Luhmann 1993, Hiller 1993, Bonß 1995, Japp 1996). As in the case of globalisation, risk describes a horizon. In the case of risk this is not a time-space horizon but a horizon of damages which the future might hold. These possible damages are attributed to current decisions. The stressing of decisions here means

highlighting that society's basic problem of handling future uncertainties can no longer be solved either by 'faithful' means of religion or by means of 'secure' scientific authority. This aspect of release becomes clearer when turning to the other dimensions.

In regard to its *factual dimension*, risk stresses questions of knowledge. In phenomenological terms this has already been emphasised by Beck (1992) in his well-known book on the 'risk society'. The difficulties of perceiving risk sensually (such as nuclear fall-outs) led to his supposition that risks are knowledge-dependent. However, the core of the risk problem is not actually a lack of knowledge (which could be compensated for by more knowledge). Instead, risk refers to *non-knowledge* (Nichtwissen, Luhmann 1992, 1995b, Japp 1997). The concept of non-knowledge stresses a process of social construction whereby non-knowledge is dependent on given knowledge as its flip side. Regarding different forms of knowledge, non-knowledge also takes various forms. On this background a fundamental difference between scientific and risk communication becomes apparent (see *ibid.*).

Since scientific knowledge is anchored in pre-existing disciplinary theories and methods, non-knowledge in science has always an already *specified* form (see Kuhn 1970). Available knowledge 'disciplines' the observation of non-knowledge and controls further (disciplinary) research. Even where existing theories fail (as, for example, in the case of the BSE agent), science does not capitulate. On the contrary, empirical research is stimulated, as is the building of new theories. Since observations of specified non-knowledge always lead back to particular knowledge as its flip side, the communication of genuine uncertainty is constrained. In contrast, risk communication is characterised by *unspecified* non-knowledge. Since there is no specified relation to pre-existing securities of knowledge, the effect of this is uncertainty and insecurity. Attempts to lean on scientific knowledge and to learn from experiences of the past are devaluated in societal risk discourses (Bechmann/Japp 1997: 555).

Hence, I do not treat BSE here as though it were communicated in terms of scientific knowledge exclusively and convincingly throughout. Even if scientists signalled low probabilities of infection or gave an 'all clear', the consumption of beef might also be communicated as a 'dread risk'. That is to say, a consumer, connecting BSE to the suffering of people from the CJ-disease, might find his or her observation of danger confirmed when informed about the highly industrialised practices of breeding animals rather than give up his or her concern when informed about low statistical probabilities of the agent's transmission and spread. Any new scientific evidence might indeed be interpreted as

a corroboration of already existing observations of danger. This partial devaluation of scientific knowledge leads to the third dimension of risk.

In the *social dimension*, observations of risk emphasise dissent and distrust. In societal risk debates a distinction comes up between decision-makers (i.e. those who account for risky decisions) and those who are potentially affected by risk decisions (i.e. those who are concerned). Risk communication emphasises possible but uncertain damage, attributed differently to decisions (Luhmann 1993). If one's *own* decision is emphasised as the cause of possible damage (self-attribution), we can speak of *risk*. If the decision of somebody else (external attribution) is seen as the cause of a possible damage, risk is observed as *danger* (Luhmann 1993). If risk is a matter of attribution, addressees for risk observations in society become multiple. Regarding BSE, consumers may attribute risk to agriculture or the meat industry (production practices), industry may find decision-makers in the mass media (misleading reports), the mass media, instead, may refer to political decision-making. Even those who blame others in terms of perceived danger may find themselves being decision-makers (further consumption of beef or not? Production with particular raw materials or not? Export bans or not?). Thus, they may yet be observed by others as risk-actors.

Following from these sociological considerations, risk in modern society cannot be described adequately by referring to statistical probabilities. Causal approaches of risk assessment miss that risk is constructed differently. Its observation cannot be counterbalanced or even eliminated by (scientific) knowledge since confidence and trust is blocked when danger is observed by those concerned (Japp 1997).⁷ For this reason, 'globalisation of risk' should not be confused with the common idea of a (more or less probable) global diffusion of hazardous consequences,⁸ which are causally triggered by processes of industrialisation (Beck 1992). Provided that globalisation is a communicative, this assumption also applies for the globalisation of risk. However, the question is still open as to why risk tends to be delimited. On principle this effect has to be traced back to characteristics inherent to risk communication (see Japp 1997) - even if we will have to specify societal contexts for any empirical investigation. That risk is inherently suitable for globalisation can best be explained by referring to (non) knowledge again.

Scientific communication is generally not limited in regional terms. Due to the universal character of scientific (non-)knowledge, the discovery of BSE has stimulated scientific communication and research world-wide.⁹ Nevertheless, the spread of respective non-knowledge is in this case 'disciplined' from the outset. Albeit risk communication, compared to scientific communication, is

also unlimited, this is not on account of universalism. It is rather due to the fact that unspecified non-knowledge is detached from 'disciplining' contexts of knowledge, so that indicators for danger and respective decision-makers can on principal be found 'everywhere': If 'British beef' has been considered as dangerous, this can equally apply to meat in other local settings. For example, practices of meat production are observed to be similar, channels of trade are obscure, scientific evidence suggests that meat from other animals is also at risk or politicians cannot be trusted to check import conditions. Due to unspecified non-knowledge, risk is spread by means of social, factual and temporal generalisations (Siering/Tacke 1997). These generalisations seem to explain the spectacular spread of risk communication on BSE, which omitted local contexts and national boundaries.

Although the globalisation of risk thus results from characteristics of risk communication, particular societal contexts that constitute, mediate and transform risk (Krücken 1997) have to be taken into account: It is obvious, for example, that BSE could not have become a 'global' risk issue without the intervention of the mass media, including its preference for current affairs, conflicts, quantities and violations of rules (see Luhmann 1996: 58ff.).¹⁰ Even the argument that BSE is mainly a European and not a global issue refers to a particular context, i.e. political boundaries within the world society.¹¹ The empirical context I focus on here is BSE as a problem in meat markets. My main assumption will be that organisations - not only in the economic system but in any functional realm of society - are significant contexts which shape observations of risk and the respective processes of globalisation. I will briefly discuss this assumption below.

2. Organisational Domains as a Context for the Construction of Risk

The cultural approach of risk sociology (Douglas/Wildavsky 1983) has particularly highlighted the contextual shaping of risks. Distinguishing four basic cultures (individualism, hierarchy, egalitarianism and fatalism),¹² Mary Douglas and Aron Wildavsky have described the selection and construction of risk as shaped by cultural features. Although this has been one of the most interesting contributions to the risk debate, the weakness of the cultural approach is that it cannot adequately account for society's core structures (see Japp 1996). It has been argued that society cannot be plausibly divided into four (or more) cultures (Luhmann 1995c, Bommers 1996).

Following this argument, I suggest reconstructing variances in the 'globalisation of risk' with reference to organisations. Departing from the sociology of culture, which builds on social theory, this reference to organisations here

follows a particular theory of society.¹³ My decision to refer to Luhmann's systems theory is based on its capacity to deal seriously with not only function systems (such as politics, economy, law, science, education, religion) but, at the same time, also the level of organisations. Systems theory describes organisations along their respective references towards function systems (Wehrsig/Tacke 1992, Tacke 1999). That is to say, business enterprises orient towards the accumulation of capital, parliaments towards binding decisions, courts towards jurisdiction and so on.¹⁴

The orientation of organisations towards a function system shapes the selection of risks and their meaning in a basic way. In this sense an event like the British government's announcement of the possible relation between BSE and the CJD disease in March 1996 is observed differently according to the functional orientations of organisations, e.g. business enterprises (markets), science (research), governments (political power), courts (law) and broadcasting bodies (news) - and is probably not communicated at all in schools, churches and hospitals.

A context analysis that stresses function systems would have to abstract from the huge diversity of organisations referring to each function system. The reverse approach, which focuses on organisations, allows instead for more empirical variety without suppressing the fact that society is functionally differentiated. To analyse this variety of construction contexts I built on the concept of organisational domains¹⁵ (Thompson 1967; Kerst 1997; Tacke 1997). This concept denotes generalised expectations (hold within and outside any organisation), which circumscribe what organisations, according to their 'core technologies' (Thompsons 1967) and according to their functional orientation, will and will not do. On this basis, the following analysis can clearly distinguish organisational contexts such as supermarkets and butchers, on the one hand, and business firms as distinguished from business associations, on the other.

3. Crisis Vulnerability and Risk Immunity in the Meat Industry Sector

A conspicuous variance regarding the sales problems of beef in various sub-domains of the German meat industry sector during the peaks of the BSE debate are considered in this section. However, it is not courses and variations in sales over time that are central here, but the question why various organisational domains were affected differently (or even not at all) by the risk-rejecting decisions of consumers. Although I refer to empirical evidence to answer this question, the focus is still on conceptual problems here.

Under conditions of delimited risk communication, domains with globalised market activities can be expected to be affected more seriously by sales problems than the more locally embedded organisations.¹⁶ With this hypothesis I follow the argument that globalisation ('disembedding') is accompanied by obscurity and anonymity, whereas locality ('embeddedness'), by way of contrast, allows for trust as a substitute for transparency (Giddens 1990; Granovetter 1985). Taking this argument further, I distinguish a product-related and a transaction-related dimension, assuming that an increase of uncertainty in one dimension can be counterbalanced by certainties in the other. Trust in transaction partners allows customers to buy beef without having control of the product dimension. Conversely, sufficient and convincing knowledge about the safety of a product allows for its acquisition from 'everybody'.

These general tendencies can easily be confirmed looking at the two major consumer-related market domains for fresh meat in Germany. In spring 1996 the sales of beef decreased drastically in the supermarkets (food retailers' domain), which cover most of the meat sales in Germany. As a consequence of this, supplying slaughterhouses reduced their shifts for a few weeks in April. Instead, in the crafts' domain (butchers), covering about one third of the respective market, declines were reported to be less dramatic (see: *Die Fleischerei* 7-8/1996: 4ff.). Representatives of the German Butchers' Association (DFV) explained this by referring implicitly to globalisation:

'A workshop is owner-related, embedded in a socio-demographic environment. The employees belong to the region, the meat generally comes from the region, there is a maximum amount of the individual owners' identification with his products as much as a maximum amount of transparency for the consumer' (DFV, 35f.)¹⁷.

This quite simple description of difference becomes more complex when looking at a third sub-domain. This is the meat processing industry that produces assortments of sausages and other meat-based foods. Although its market activities are highly exposed to globalisation, this industry was only marginally affected by the BSE-related break-down in beef sales (Köhne 1996: 587; *Die Fleischerei* 6/96: 32; *ibid.* 10/96: 6). Whereas sales of fresh meat decreased in the short term, processed meat products were scarcely affected by risk-refusing consumer behaviour. Indeed, quite the contrary seems to be true: sausages and processed meat products were bought as a substitute for fresh meat. A representative from the German Business Association for the Meat Processing Industry (BVFI) reported that:

The consumption of meat products is stable. There was even a slight rise last year (i.e. 1996 - V.T.), since the sale of meat products is subject to other factors than the fresh meat, especially beef at the moment' (BVFI, 19).

The more a meat product was estranged from its 'animal origin', the less was the risk-related decrease in sales. This empirical deviation from the general globalisation thesis as presented above can be explained by referring to the idea of civilisation as presented by Norbert Elias. According to Elias then, the process of civilisation implies that the killing, cutting up, and processing of animals be moved behind the scenes of societal life. In civilised society things and matters causing embarrassment do not disappear, but take place in special enclaves. Thus, the 'art of preparing meat' implies the hiding of the killing process, of the dead animal, the cutting up, the blood and even the raw meat. What humans might perceive as their own 'animal character' is concealed (Elias 1982; Gorski 1993).

Members of these enclaves argued repeatedly in my interviews that the consumer does not want to know about 'all this'. In view of the fact that processed meat was not affected by the BSE-market-crisis, they view this as consumer irrationality (see Issanchou 1996).

'...what was affected was the fresh meat. This was not logical; actually it was entirely illogical. In reality, the processed and unknown products should have been affected. However, the consumer does not think logically' (AGF, 2).

Instead of accusing consumers of irrationality, it seems reasonable to search for the underlying reason (rationality) for this behavior in terms of societal knowledge. We can thus posit, that civilisation describes a particular relation between knowledge and non-knowledge, whereby particular parts of societal knowledge are blocked for communication. They are not communicated. Given this non-communication, access to the communication of non-knowledge is clearly also obstructed. Hence, risk communication - and hence any globalisation of this - remain latent. Compared to those domains whose marketing comprises a high visibility of the products 'uncivil' origin (fresh meat), the meat-processing industry is more immune to the communication of risk, because the 'origin' of its processed products remains highly invisible. Thus, the market crisis merely affected those domains marketing raw beef.

However, beyond product-related sales problems, the whole sector - the meat processing industry included - has complained about a lasting 'image crisis' (see Schmitz 1993, Stutz 1996).¹⁸ Confidence and trust concerning raw beef products and their marketing (see: Lutz 1996: 977) seems to be only one aspect of this crisis. The other is that of legitimacy (Elsbach 1994), concerning the 'rules of appropriateness' (March/Olsen 1989) in an economic sector which has been confronted more than once with product-related scandals. As a result of generalisations concerning the appropriateness of production and quality standards, the whole sector has undergone a legitimacy crisis, expressed in concern

about healthy nutrition and the protection of animals. Even if individual organisations judged themselves to be innocent and affected by someone else's risk decisions (e.g. British farmers or bone meal producers), BSE does express a crisis of trust and legitimacy in the meat industry.

4. Business Associations and the Globalisation of Risk

Even if the focus of this article is on meat markets and the respective organisational domains, my empirical case study on BSE does not give priority to business enterprises. Instead it centres on business associations in the German meat-industry sector (Hilbert 1988). There are two main reasons for this particular focus. The first is pragmatic. Business associations represent economic organisation domains. Hence, risk constructions can be described and understood without referring to individual organisations by asking association representatives about typical domain problems. These typical problems refer to provision relations, that is, foremost, the supply of relevant input and output (factual dimension) and the willingness to accept them (social dimension).

Two corresponding provision-related types of social construction (which are generally maintained in the economic system) deserve particular attention in relation to the risk problem: These are those of the 'consumer' (social dimension) and of 'quality' (factual dimension):

Firstly, then, the *consumer* is not an individual, but a semantic construct. This construct reflects the possible inclusion of individuals into the economic system (Baecker 1988: 107). Using this, the economic system reflects its environment by addressing individuals from the point of view of his/her willingness to pay. At the heart of this reflection is not the problem of binding individual customers to particular organisations but instead of inclusion in economic processes on a massive scale. The particular problem is that 'the consumer' (as opposed to the customer) is the unknown sovereign in the environment of the economic system (see *ibid.*; Douglas/Isherwood 1979). He/she is 'somebody' whose decisions on consumption always will take place in the future. Therefore they are uncertain.¹⁹ Opportunities to include individuals as consumers are reflected according to the internal possibilities of the economic system (and they therefore refer to the past).

In contrast, *quality* emphasises the factual requirements of economic provision relations (e.g. technical, health-related, aesthetic, and organisational aspects). Quality is not only what gives pleasure, but what makes the inclusion of 'the consumer' probable, or even what gives satisfaction to an individual or organised customer. In short, quality is what produces the willingness to pay.

When communicated with customers, the form of bargaining on cost-effectiveness-relations is already implicit in questions of quality (although agreements can nevertheless favour other competitors). Instead, in regard to 'the consumer', quality problems seem to be more uncertain. They are open to construction processes and they show themselves as being more likely to reflect internal interpretations of societal risk discourses.

Beyond the pragmatic argument, there is a second reason for my reference to business associations instead of business enterprises; this is more systematically related to the problem of globalisation. Business associations are not simply representatives of economic organisations but are a type of organisation with their own domain. This domain can be characterised as a 'structural coupling' between the economic and the political system (see Brodocz 1997), whereby the economy must be understood as a global world system whereas the political system is internally divided into segments (boundaries of the nation states). Thus, structural coupling here refers to organisational uncertainty absorption with particular regard to the global - local distinction.

For this reason, I in my case study on German business associations refer neither to a concept of society based on the nation state, nor to a spatial economic region of world society where no mad cows 'exist'. Instead, I refer to national political boundaries that seem to make this assumption symbolically valid or even structurally plausible. The national business associations (Bundesverbände) described in this study refer to a global economy on the one hand and operate in relation to the internal boundaries of the political system (nation states) on the other.²⁰ Since these organisations have in common an institutional reference to the German nation state, from the outset they cannot be neutral in questions of globalisation.²¹

Nevertheless, it is an open empirical question, as to what kind of meaning and importance these national associations attach to the mad-cow problem in the United Kingdom. Regarding economic activities and in terms of risk, the nation state does not establish a fixed boundary. Moreover, the question as to how business associations deal with political and economic attempts to promote globalisation or localisation is empirically open. In the following empirical analysis of domain-contexts I will describe constructions of globalisation and risk regarding particular provision problems as typical for the market domains represented. Methodologically speaking, it is nothing but the common reference of business associations towards one nation state that allows for the comparison of respective horizons regarding the 'globalisation of risk'.

III. GERMAN BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS' CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE BSE RISK

As a result of the first attempt to interpret interview data²² by means of communication analysis,²³ I will now turn to main organisational 'differences that make a difference' (Bateson) in the globalisation of risk. I refer to three German business associations representing respective consumer-related organisational domains on the national level, i.e. farmers (DBV), butchers (DFV), and the meat-processing industry (BVFI).²⁴ In the context of the German Farmers Association I will, moreover, describe the case of a legally appointed organisation, whose task it is to market German agricultural products. This is the Central Marketing Corporation for German Agricultural Economies (CMA). As well as these four organisations, all representing vested interests in the German meat industry sector, a new and unusual association, founded in 1994 in direct connection with the BSE crisis, finally deserves particular attention. This is the Action Committee for German Meat (AGF). In order to treat all these organisations in this article I will concentrate on main differences between them here.

1. Limiting Damage for German Farmers: The German Farmers' Association (DBV)

Without going into details of the complex European system of agricultural policies here, it can however be said that the risk construction in the agricultural domain can be decoded along political references. This political orientation refers to the fact that the agricultural domain derives its income from a gigantic political income transfer (Priebe 1988; Heinze 1992), mobilised on the national level through the activities of the German Farmers' Association, which is a unique and strong association.²⁵

The DBV's key statement is that 'BSE is a British problem and has therefore to be solved where it occurred' (DBV, 10). This corresponds to the associations' general slogan that 'Germany is BSE-free' (Heeremann 1996: 107). However, regarding the consumer, the DBV recognises that this is not the whole truth since risk communication can not be limited easily. Viewed as 'massive damage' for 'our German farmers' (ibid.), the spilling-over of risk communication into German meat markets is described in terms of globalisation, whereby the political system plays a selective key role even here. First, the DBV relegates the problem to the 'surprising announcement' of the British government that a connection between BSE and CJD cannot be ruled out. In this context the British governments' politics of misinformation is stressed (ibid.). Second, the DBV refers to political decision-making, both at the level of the European Union and the German Federal States (*Länder*). It stresses that the

'political power struggle' (DBV, 12f.) transformed 'the British problem' into a global communication of risk and, as a result, affected German meat markets negatively (in spite of their spatial distance from Britain). The political struggle subsequently gave rise to an 'enormous interest on the part of the mass media', resulting in a 'massive panic' at the level of consumers (Heeremann 1996: 107).

Since the DBV describes the BSE-crisis as politically engendered, it demands for political support from the state to solve this problem. First, the DBV asked for direct transfers of income for farmers (market intervention, premium rules, and direct financial aid for affected farmers). Second, it demanded binding political decisions to stabilise the national sales market. Beyond the request for an export ban on British beef, which was common throughout the whole domain in Germany, the DBV claimed new regulations for the trade and transport of animals, especially the individual identification of cattle ('animals passport', 'German ear tag', AGF).

Since the DBV began with the assumption that the national framework was safe ('our farmers are not to be accused of anything'), the battle against BSE - 'in the sense of measures of security' (DBV, 20) - was mainly symbolic. By means of binding political decisions the DBV aimed to remove the consumers' fear of BSE. At the same time the special, uniform and standardised quality of domestic beef ('German origin') as well as the unity of the national agriculture was emphasised.²⁶ The DBV's risk construction was clearly based on constraining uncertainty with reference to the boundaries of the nation state. This seems to have allowed a twofold solution to the observed problem: economic security for the farmer and symbolic security for the consumer.

Nevertheless, the representatives of the farmers' association do not fail to recognise that the precondition of this crisis is not to be found in the political system. A reference to the particular sensitivity of German consumers towards food is used to explain the development of 'mass hysteria' in Germany. This is further explained by referring to the 'consumer's alienation from the production process' (DBV, 4), whereby the argument that the consumer 'has no contact to agriculture at all' (ibid.) refers to the distinction between knowledge (contact) and non-knowledge (alienation) here.²⁷ In this context the DBV concedes a fault of the agricultural domain itself ('but it is not the farmers' associations' fault'). With the depiction of an 'ideal world' in advertisement and public relations 'misleading illusions have been created' and they must be corrected. Reducing the difference between 'modern animal production' (internal reality) and 'museums-like agriculture' (external picture), it should become clear for the consumer that 'milk does not grow in packages' and that 'cows are not purple'. That these descriptions denote more than a lack of knowledge, but instead a problem in the

dimension of civilisation, seems to be clear to representatives of the DBV; however, beyond the political activities already mentioned, work on this discrepancy - such as BSE-related public relations work ('information') and advertising for safe products ('aid to the consumer') - is delegated to other organisations. I will turn to one of them (CMA) in the subsequent section; the other one (AGF) will be introduced towards the end of the empirical descriptions.

2. The Helplessness of Beef-Marketing: The Central Marketing Corporation for German Agricultural Economies (CMA)

The Central Marketing Corporation for German Agricultural Economies (CMA) is very close to the consumer because it regularly ask his or her opinion in its marketing research. As compared to the costumer, the consumer is nevertheless a social construction, used to reflect environments according to sales opportunities and to act on the economic environment with promises of consumption. However, the CMA is not a business association in the narrow sense. If this organisation can be described in terms of an association at all, it seems to be comparable more to a welfare association, which mediates opportunities for the inclusion of individuals into the economic system under state control and regulation. By means of a political promotion of product sales (based on certain law, 'Agrarfondgesetz') the CMA mediates the inclusion of German farmers into the economic system.²⁸ As a result of this tight political link the CMA also has a built-in preference for meat of German origin, which is expressed in its advertisement slogans ('Geniessen auf gut deutsch', 'Fitmacher aus deutschen Landen'). It is not surprising then, that the risk problem is attached to the 'German ancestry' (CMA, 19). Here also the difference between German and British is stressed.

Beyond this, the CMA has become known in Germany for introducing the semantics of 'certified quality' into the meat market (CMA Slogan: 'Certified quality. You can rely on...'). A particular seal (*CMA-Prüfsiegel*) certifies that meat products conform to certain expectations ('product quality') and a set of rules that govern the production process from breeding to the cash-register ('process quality'). The introduction of certified quality meat products was the reaction to a dual problem: On the one hand (and at first) it was a strategy used to differentiate markets following the common belief that even in saturated markets quality products can realise increased sales (CMA-Annual Report 1995: 5) - not only for farmers but also for large retailers market differentiation offered a chance to realise higher prices. On the other hand, the introduction of certificates has become closely connected to the risk communication problem, whereby BSE represents only one among other scandals concerning meat products in Germany.

With its emphasis on fixed standards of production (including, among others, the farming and transport of animals) as with its attempt to reduce anonymity in the production chain (origin of animals and meat), the quality program is attached to the globalisation of risk. Besides the national reference (German meat from German origin) and the market-related structural problem (market differentiation), the CMA accentuates 'security' as a third distinction:

Under the heading 'Safety, Quality, Origin', the CMA's annual report for 1995 specifies that 'consumers' desire for greater *safety*' had developed into an 'increasingly crucial' criterion for sales. Other marketing aspects increased in importance, if they 'corresponded to consumers' expectations of *product quality* as much as *production quality*'. The 'stronger *credibility of domestic products*' thus affected 'consumers' associations positively'. The CMA sealmark of quality and the CMA seal of tested quality are seen as 'two decisive marketing instruments' which 'effectively supported the efforts of agricultural suppliers to *safeguard their market position in view of increasingly difficult sales conditions*' (CMA, Annual Report 1995: 4; my emphasis).

Facing the challenge of BSE the conclusion communicated to the consumer is the following:

'There is no longer any reason to be uneasy with regard to spectacular stories about the British cattle disease. The pedigree certificates now offer a guarantee of safety previously unknown. Moreover, requests for quality can be fulfilled by scientifically supervised quality programs' (CMA Handout on BSE 1996).

Although the 'certified quality' programme suggests that market- and risk-related provision problems can be solved *uno actu*, the CMA portrays itself in its marketing as playing a defensive role. The reasons are again related to aspects of market and risk.

Looking at the mass media on the one hand and consumer associations on the other, the CMA complains about its structural disadvantage according to risk communication. A representative sees that these organisations constitute problems using their own distinctions (media: interesting/non-interesting report; consumer associations: small changes/radical changes in agriculture). Against this background the reforms that were in fact implemented in the whole domain appear to be 'not interesting enough for the mass media' and do not correspond to the demand of consumer associations 'to radically change agriculture from one day to another' (CMA, 11). The CMA's marketing activities tend to become helpless.

'We cannot communicate anything to the outside, strongly enough - at least on a small scale - to counter the negative PR to which the meat industry is exposed' (ibid.).

The weakness of marketing expressed here refers to the distinction between risk and danger, including the problem that occasions to communicate risk cannot be diminished by appealing to expert knowledge. This is the case even if the CMA increasingly uses scientific advice to adapt to external risk concerns and quality demands and judges this development as a 'great success'. However, the distinction between risk (decision) and danger (concern) is reproduced by different forms of connection to existing knowledge. Comparing the German case to other countries, the CMA attributes the lack of consumers' confidence to a 'very complicated German mentality', that is, an unchangeable context. The possibility that consumers might observe the domain (respectively, its marketing) with reference to decision-making and vested interests is overlooked.

The CMA's defensive self-observation corresponds to continuing structural problems on the markets for which it is responsible. As a result of changed habits of beef consumption, the CMA's marketing faces a decreasing and saturated domestic market, with a Common Market characterised by strong competitors, and with the 'intricacies' of non-European sales markets (CMA Annual Report 1995: 4) which are increasingly less reliable as convenient exits for surplus agricultural production (WTO trade agreements).

While a third domain, which I will address in the following section, is able to limit its losses in the crisis by refining products and using the advantages of non-communication mentioned above, the CMA faces the structural liability of having to 'advertise the basic product further on' (CMA, 13). Its responsibility is to ensure large-scale sales for a national agricultural product that has become risk-prone in a dual sense.

3. Parting with Local Traditions: The Federal Association of the Meat Processing Industry (BVFI)

In the case of the meat-processing industry I have already mentioned the slight sales setback in the 'beef crisis'. Nevertheless, this domain is relevant here since its decision horizon is not limited by national boundaries. Moreover, this case is interesting in that it passes through a change in terms of its market horizons. For this reason I consider the relationship between globalisation and risk in this case in greater detail with reference to the association in relation to the variance in its members' domains.

Ranging from small family-type firms to divisions of global players in the food industry the only thing the nearly 220 members of the BVFI have in common is that they process meat as the main raw material (Köhne 1996, Hilse 1996). The majority of members are small traditional firms which produce a

standard assortment of sausages and meat products. The remaining group represents a more recent strategic trend, 'to distance oneself from traditional meat products as well as from products mainly consisting of meat by expanding the product pallet to foods composed partially of meat' (Hilse 1996: 18). Whereas the so-called convenience food sector shows a positive market development, the traditional sector faces a continuous decline of sales. In view of the decline in mass consumption of traditional meat products and the structural problems of the respective sub-domain, the strategic motto of the BVFI is 'refinement is the way of creating added value', BVFI, 2).

In this structural context the BVFI stresses that it 'will no longer be possible to represent particular interests with the backing of the majority of the association's members' (Köhne 1996: 588). Referring to the heterogeneity of its members the BVFI justifies its withdrawal from a classical interest association with a 'cohesive group policy' to a 'service organisation' giving information to members and disposing public relations tasks (ibid., BVFI, 5). Although the self-description as a service organisation suggests neutrality towards particular interests and demands, members are obviously represented asymmetrically. This structural selectivity is expressed in statements about the internal handling of controversial matters. The BVFI thus describes its role in conflict as 'venturing out', 'thinking a little bit ahead' and 'concentrating on the future' (BVFI, 3). This avoidance of present conflict by relying on the future implies not only the discovery of the general market trend described above but also explains the unequal valuation of members. The difference between 'modern, future-oriented firms' and 'traditional production firms' reveals the distinction between future (globalisation/modernity) and past (locality/tradition). According to this time-related distinction the BVFI observes not only the members' supply side but its *own* domain. Due to the structural crisis of 'traditionalists' its future is dependent on the 'modernists' among its members.

In reality, the sales market for processed meat products is still 'very traditional' and 'regionally shaped'. Beyond a few exceptions there are 'almost no products that can be sold on international markets' (BVFI, 7).²⁹ The mediation between the past of local bounded forms of consumption and the future of global markets is attributed not to 'the consumer' but to large retailing organisations. It is this shadow of other organisations that promotes the observation of globalisation in this domain. Retailers are observed to control and change consumption in a factual dimension (special offers, determination of product composition) and to increasingly control it in a spatial dimension (branches abroad). Faced with this situation, traditional firms will have to face the 'danger' of European competition; modern enterprises will instead have the risky opportunity of enlarging sales markets. From the state the BVFI expects a liberalisation

of product-related national regulations in order to be adequately prepared for the European market.

When the BVFI complains of an 'image damage' (BVFI, 19), various consequences resulting from the respective globalisation of risk are emphasised. However, the fact that the meat processing industry is comparatively immune to risk communication explains why the BVFI does not complain about potential damages on the demand side (consumer markets). Instead, it stresses that the supply side produces risk (agriculture). It is argued that the mass media picks up 'weak points' in agriculture, which are seen as 'justifiably unacceptable for consumers' (BVFI, 4). The mass media are emphasised here not as features promoting scandals but as a vehicle for informing and educational advertising. In the BVFI's account the construction of the consumer is used to stress a problem the domain has with the provision of raw materials: 'Just like the consumer we are fundamentally customers' (BVFI, 15f). This problem can be reconstructed further based upon the measures the BVFI took during the BSE crisis.

The BVFI's active measures during the crisis were limited to services such as the periodic distribution of information to members and public relations. Moreover, the association recommended to its members already in 1990 that they no longer process British beef: 'no more; hands off!' (BVFI, 18). With this rejection the BVFI takes the same line as the other associations mentioned here, although it does not support any activities that promote German products. Instead, the BVFI argues that a 'European proof of origin for raw materials' is 'desirable' (Hilse 1996: 18). Compared to agricultural organisations (national) and to butchers (local) this higher de-localisation of 'meat safety' policies can be attributed to the fact that some of the members actually buy their raw material not only in Germany but in European markets such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain.

The demand for European proof of origin, allowing producers to trace back the origin of products to individual producers (Hilse 1996: 18), highlights a problem of responsibility for potential damages, which possibly result from extrinsic decisions in a global and anonymous market. 'A safe division of labour and a rapid flow path of goods in the production process are only achievable if one can blindly rely on suppliers' (ibid.) The denial of consumer-oriented programs, such as the invention of 'process quality' (see CMA above) and the limitation of the requested proof of origin towards raw materials confirms that the domain's main problem is not public risk communication on BSE. Instead, risk connotes an internal uncertainty here about the negative effects of decisions taken by others, expressed in the domain problem of relying on the delivery of uncertainty-laden goods.

One main reason for the BVFI's rejection of national policies on meat safety is its complaint about the quality of meat in Germany. Quality is seen as factually not corresponding to internal expectations and is described as 'better abroad' (BVFI: 2; see Köhne 1996: 18). This indicates that the quality problem is not first of all related to consumption and public risk discourses. Instead, one of the typical problems of technical and industrial processing is the standardisation of materials and products. Regarding this, the German market is supposed to be insufficient. In a global (European) comparison the less homogeneous technical conditions of breeding, rearing and slaughtering and the comparatively small-scale organisational structures of German agriculture are observed as disadvantageous. At any rate it is this context would seem to explain the fact that the BVFI refutes the claims of exclusivity (Köhne 1996) of the German agricultural sector and negates the equation of 'nationality', 'quality' and 'safety'. Instead of constraining uncertainty through local, regional or national boundaries the BVFI seeks safety (for its members) by shifting the responsibility for uncertain damages to preceding domains in the production chain.

4. The Symbolic Advantages of Locality: The German Butchers' Association (DFV)

The butcher trade - especially in big cities - cannot plausibly be described as a local economic domain, de-coupled from globalisation. However, the question as to what extent butchers actually rely on global players in the meat-processing industry (final goods) and on large-scale slaughterhouses (raw materials) will not be answered here. Since local embeddedness is merely the flip side of globalisation, globalisation is communicated in this domain in terms of markets as much as in terms of risk.

As a member of the CMA and, moreover, in accordance with a second sectoral association (the Federal Trade Association for Cattle and Meat) the German Butchers' Association (DFV) agreed with the attempts to handle the BSE problem by means of stressing national boundaries. Hence, the DFV also stated that 'meat of German origin can be consumed without risk' (DFV, 13). Nevertheless, the core of the DFV's risk construction is not built in political terms (nationality). Instead, it refers to differences which were internal to the economic realm: The distinction of locality and globalisation refers in this case to organisational forms of production and marketing. It is reflected in the distinction between 'centralised' and 'decentralised' structures of production and sales (DFV, 39). Domain-specific descriptions of quality and safety are therefore dependent on this distinction.

Concerning technical as well as ethical aspects, centralisation is described as increasing risk potentials and worsening product quality. Long-distance animal transports increase problems with hygiene and require the use of additives to keep products safe. In view of consumers' confidence, centralised structures are criticised as being incomprehensible and anonymous. A particular factor increasing risk is attributed to the production process. In the case of only one infected animal, the cutting up process by way of belt production implies the possibility of a serial contamination of meat. In this case '500 others are contaminated as well' (DFV, 40). While large-scale centralised structures of production are characterised as the epitome of anonymity, obscurity, risk and a lack of quality, decentralised structures are described the other way around. As already mentioned above, butchers' workshops appear as 'embedded' (see II.3.): Personal contacts, a 'maximum amount of transparency' of markets, hardly any problems with hygiene, production without additives, a 'maximum amount of care' through 'work in a weekly rhythm' (DFV, 37).

In this case as well the particular form of observation can be traced back to domain-specific provision problems. In view of the oligopolistic structures in the food retailing sector, butchers face brutal competition for market shares (DFV, 10). Since food retailers are generalists (food), butchers - as specialists (meat) - cannot enter price competition. To bind customers the big food retailers sell meat at throw-away prices. To avoid competition and comparison the butchers' domain has thus turned to a trading-up strategy (DFV, 10). In this context the DFV strategically stresses traditional quality and local service.

'...after all, we sell meat and sausages and therefore have a particular interest in creating a distinctive image with quality products — as we cannot enter price competition. Because of its specific structures our businesses would be ruined. We know this and therefore quality is essential to us' (DFV, 16).

Like the farmers' association, the butchers' association uses political slogans ('Germany is BSE-free') and, moreover, observes political and mass media communication as aggravating the crisis. Beyond this, the DFV's representatives acknowledge the BSE problem comprehensively in terms of natural science, psychological and even sociological aspects of risk. They emphasise that scientists have been trying to find answers to problems ('scientifically looking for a needle in a haystack') (non-knowledge), they highlight the frightening aspects of a disease that affects the brain as the 'very centre of humans' (dread risk), they stress that accidents like the one in British bone meal production are unavoidable, and they observe, last but not least, enduring myths about agriculture as aggravating problems ('die Mühle am rauschenden Bach', 'der Bauer im März den die Rösser anspannt...').

Nevertheless, the discrepancy between 'agro-industrial structures' on the one hand and the marketing of 'a piece of ideal world' (DFV, 26) on the other is not seen as a problem that needs addressing. The business association and the individual butchers are not responsible 'for changing opinions', but 'for fulfilling consumers' expectations' (DFV, 27). The discrepancy between global structures (agro-industry, anonymity) and localising myths (craft, personal relations) is seen as a particular market opportunity to be exploited economically by the individual butcher (DFV, 35). The butchers are expected to accentuate this distinction (DFV, 38).

The DFV's representatives present locality as an ideology, sold as an additional value comparable to a general trend in the marketing of consumer goods. It is argued that in other sub-domains consumers' expectations towards additional symbolic values are covered by other symbols ('pedigree', 'process quality' or even 'ecological production'). 'What is objectively true or right is not decisive; instead what consumers subjectively feel is decisive' (DFV, 37). Nevertheless, the difference between ideology (talk) and reality (action) (see Brunsson 1989) seems to be less clear in its handling than in its functional reflection by the association's representatives. From time to time the individual butchers are forced to supply evidence of trustworthiness and the claimed 'maximum amount of transparency' (signalled as the opposite of anonymity in the production chain). The association advises its members to invite customers and to visit the supplying farmers (DFV, 37). In view of civilised non-knowledge this proof of locality is risky. The following example illustrates that the butchers' association is not always pleased by the way members manage this problem:

'To prove transparency a master tradesman invited pupils to an event "from production to consumption". Well, what did they do? They visited a farmer and looked at the piglets, these pretty little pigs, that ran about to please the children. Afterwards they went to the communal slaughterhouse and watched how and where these pigs were slaughtered. Finally he brought this group to his business, showed his works and offered various products for them to taste..... After this, would you expect anybody to eat something? In this way transparency can fail' (DFV, 32).

5. Observing Strategies of Localisation as Risk: The Action Committee for German Meat (AGF)

One of the most interesting effects of the BSE crisis in Germany has been the establishment of a new business association, named 'Action Committee for German Meat' (AGF). Although attempts for more co-operation were made before in this extremely fragmented field of sectoral business associations (Hilbert 1988), the AGF was founded in 1994 as a result of the first peak of public discussions on BSE and its market consequences in Germany. Associations from all over the meat industry sector - including breeding associations, farmers' association, food retailers' association and even different suppliers' associations - joined this new initiative. The BVFI (meat-processing industry) and the DFV (butchers) did not become members. In view of their particular risk constructions this does not seem surprising.

The name of this association suggests a reference on 'German meat' and a respective national program to constrain uncertainties resulting from the globalisation of risk. This denotation has to be explained with reference to the particular conditions of the AGF's establishment. Its foundation goes back to an initiative of the German farmers' association (and is, in this sense, one more measure of the DBV to cope with risk communication on BSE). Because of the non-tariff restrictions of trade in the Common Market the CMA (as a marketing organisation under political regulation) was not allowed to stress the 'national security' in its advertisement for beef.³⁰ For this reason the AGF was founded as an independent organisation to promote the feature of 'German origin'. An additional reason for a new association was the hope of establishing a co-operative framework with those business associations affected by the BSE topic but not regular members of the CMA. Since 1994 the AGF has become known for its public activities that stress the 'German origin of beef'. Together with food retailers, the AGF conducted in this context a pilot project to invent a system to guarantee pedigree.

Nevertheless, these activities do not meet the core of the risk diagnosis and construction of this new association. One reason for this is that the European Commission was pressed in the heightened BSE crisis to loosen its hold on national marketing policies of beef. For the new association this resulted in an identity problem and a displacement of organisational goals (Selznick 1966). Due to comparatively scarce resources, to an organisational staff of only three, and to the vested interests in the meat industry sector, the AGF was neither able to take over marketing functions (besides the CMA) nor to establish a claim for a 'super association' (besides the DBV).

In its search for an appropriate identity adequate to its resources, the AGF did however manage to find a niche. In considering the risk politics of a highly fragmented domain, the AGF took over a *reflexive function* of second order observation (von Foerster). It observes the domain's risk policies and reflects its feedback effects. It tries 'to convince our own members that their activities must be critically analysed' (AGF, 7). Occupying this niche, the AGF reversed its weakness into a strength.

Referring my empirical insights I want to emphasise here that the AGF attempts to change the 'risk culture' (Nassehi 1996) of the whole domain. This change can be described as one from 'safety' to 'risk'.

Like the other associations, the AGF also views the political system as responsible for generating the BSE crisis. The AGF representative speaks of a 'political mud-slinging', especially between German parties. As well as this, it is particularly interesting, that the aggravation of the BSE-crisis in Germany is observed as a result of communication internal to the domain. This accounts for competition about markets. By using competing guarantees of product safety (local, regional, national) uncertainty has increased.

Some self-appointed marketing experts had the idea, "My god, we could gain 2% more market share, by saying that we never sold British or Argentine beef! We only had German beef; we have the safest of all systems to test pedigree. What can you say about your meat? ..." It was totally incomprehensible. They proceeded with marketing campaigns like "We (in Bavaria, V.T.) are better than all others" and "You cannot trust beef from Baden-Württemberg"....' (AGF, 10f.).

The main problem of the AGF has not been to answer the question which kind or level of 'locality' is appropriate and should be communicated to the consumer. On the contrary, the AGF observes that the crisis is, among other things, generated by a strategic use of localism. The AGF not only 'uses' a particular form of locality but observes the operational effects resulting from this use. In a second order observation, the distinction between globalisation and localisation becomes observable.

In our opinion this panic, these scandals can only evolve if the consumer does not know what reality is, but has false perceptions of reality. Then this fallacy is revealed and normality is declared to be scandalous' (AGF, 4).

The AGF rejects arguments that stress the non-changeable character of the domain's environments, especially those that denote a particular mentality and sensitivity on the part of German consumers. Instead, this organisation searches for clues which are internal to the domain, inducing feedback effects that are capable of amplifying crises. In this context the AGF has to accuse its own

members. Attempting to promote sales, these organisations produced illusory expectations and images of the domain ('the lucky cow under the apple tree'), easily deconstructed as myths and false promises of safety, and thus prone to political debate.

'We do not tend to say, well, the Germans are particularly critical (...). But we look at other countries like Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark or even Great Britain. They do not produce these illusions and therefore do not sink into these kinds of panic. Moreover, they have no organisations like the CMA or the DBV that built up such an image. Seeing the reactions in other countries we became convinced that this is the only reason why BSE was so influential here in Germany...' (AGF, 6).

Instead of supporting the irrationalities of the consumer (marketing), the AGF emphasises the necessity of instructional work (public relations).

'We are convinced that irrational instabilities decrease, when the consumer is well informed' (AGF, 4).

The AGF sees itself as most suitable for the instructional activities because it is not involved directly in marketing. The addressee for these activities is not the consumer or the customer.³¹ Indeed, according to second order observation, the first addressees of the AGF's activities are *organisations* - first of all their own members, particularly those who determine what the consumer consumes:

'Actually it is not true that those forty million, lets say, are simply consumers, go shopping and decide what to buy. Rather there are about a hundred people in the central offices of the food retailing enterprises.... They decide on the assortments and on marketing, on what the consumer thinks he/she must buy. Those forty million do not vote every day, but these people in the central offices decide...' (AGF, 7).

Stating that locality and nature are myths, the AGF stresses 'some basic truths', significant for everybody, regardless of whether they buy German, Irish or Argentine meat from butchers or in supermarkets (AGF, 10). Stating this 'truths', the AGF denotes two related circumstances: first, a reality of modern animal and meat production as opposed to an ideology of locality (manufacturing/nature) and, second the observation that even under conditions of a manufactured locality 'there is no 100% safety' (AGF, 8) but risk (safety/uncertainty). That is to say, globalisation encloses risk.

Both these differences are stressed when the AGF insists on establishing a 'risk discussion'. Knowing about the risk of conducting this discussion with consumers in front of the counter and knowing about the fact that risks are shaped by organisations, the AGF's representative emphasises that this risk dis-

cussion should - first of all - include the respective organisations, ie. its own members (AGF, 8).

One reason given for the necessity of changing societal risk communication from nature to manufacturing is that science has an increasingly diminished capacity to disseminate definite knowledge credibly. 'We have discussed this repeatedly. There are different scientific positions (on the BSE problem). And science is inherently unable to give one hundred per cent definite results' (AGF, 9). Moreover, the AGF saw its position affirmed by the sudden rise of public risk communication on BSE in Germany at the beginning of 1997 when one BSE-infected cow (which was imported illegally) was discovered and threatened the national political dogma of being a BSE-free country (AGF, 9). In the AGF's view this case confirmed the weakness of safety guarantees.

With 'basic truth' and the demand for a risk debate the AGF does not refer to superior claims on truth or expert knowledge. Instead, its representatives aim at a new self-description of the whole domain, expected to be more immune to the societal communication on risk. This presupposes ruling out 'this ideological debate' (AGF, 22), that is, the social dimension of risk communication (decision/concern). One of the whole domain's main weaknesses is its use of naturalising myths and local guarantees of safety towards the consumer. This weakness results from the fact that the opposite side (eg. consumer associations, Green parties, social movements) successfully politicises the domain's communicative use of 'nature', 'safety' and 'tradition' as hypocrisy (Brunsson 1989). Ironically, hypocrisy is observed by those groups then, which use the distinction between manufacturing and nature for their own purposes, although in the reverse order. This is to say, they distinguish between others as 'manufacturing' risky decisions and themselves, who feel concerned about the actual nature, thought of as a realm of safety.

The inverted reference towards 'nature' seems to be one reason for repeated and renewed risk discourses in this domain. In order to disarm the 'green' opponents the AGF insists on 'telling consumers how agriculture really functions, that it is not perverse, that it is not animal torture. It is simply different from how it is imagined, but must not necessarily meet in catastrophe' (AGF, 15f.). The aim of the AGF here is to build up a new and 'congruent image'. In fact, under 'modern' conditions of globalisation, congruence can be mobilised only on one side of the main distinction. As opposed to nature - which is still supposed to be free of risk - this is the manufacturing side which includes it.

It seems obvious that this change in the 'risk culture' of the domain is neither a short-term initiative nor a problem connected exclusively to the BSE-

crisis, but a long-term program for 'organisation'. The AGF knows about the time exposure necessary to establish a reflexive observation of locality in the globalisation process. It is still sure (and may indeed be over-confident) that it can reproduce itself as a new association in the German meat industry sector. The verification of this assumption will in the long run depend, among other things, on the AGF members, since they - and not the consumer - are also expected to pass through a process of change. It cannot be ruled out that this expectation, held by the AGFs organisational core, is perceived by its members as a danger.

IV. CONCLUSION

Concentrating on a particular risk-topic I have in this article explored linkages between risk and globalisation. It has been my aim to show how the theory of society can guide empirical research. Departing from general formulations, as expressed in well-known slogans like '*the* globalisation of *the* economic system', I have demonstrated for the level of organisations, how horizons of globalisation and risk are constructed according to context. Differences were traced back to organisational domain problems, including respective orientations to function systems.

The German Farmers' Association (DBV) and the Central Marketing Corporation (CMA) have shown a risk construction mainly related to their political dependency. Stressing nationality, both organisations coupled the observations of risk (British meat as uncertain) with market opportunities (German meat). However, in view of the characteristics of risk communication 'national closure' - and even the CMA's attempt to cope with its crisis-ridden environment by incremental innovation - have shown to be only in part a successful solution. In the case of the meat processing industry's association (BVFI) I have shown that risk remained latent by reason of the protective role played by 'civilised' non-communication on meat-processing. Instead, the associations' risk problem refer to potential dangers in previous steps in the production chain. To protect the domain against possible damage attributed to agriculture, the BVFI pushes others to accept responsibility (proof of origin for raw materials). This case has, moreover, shown to be a good example for the transition from an identity vouching past to the contingency of an uncertain future. Compared to this, the German Butchers' Association (DBV) is defending its traditional domain, expressed in the leading communicative distinction of centralisation (risk production, anonymity, globalisation) and decentralisation (safety, trust, localisation). The case of the DBV, thereby, made conspicuously clear that structural and symbolic aspects of globalisation and localisation have to be distinguished from each other. Last but not least, the new 'Action Committee for German Meat' (AGF) showed a noticeable tendency towards a reflexive observation of domain problems, particularly the globalisation of risk. Referring to 'second-order observation' the AGF observes the risk of a strategic use of the distinction of globalisation and localisation. Under conditions of industrial production of meat (manufacturing), the use of naturalising myths seems to be risky. This is true because the myths stabilise expectations of security, that are easily disappointed and repeatedly entail market crises in large parts of the whole domain.

With this empirical evidences, I also have pointed out that business associations play a particular role in globalisation processes. Whereas common re-

search on business associations usually starts from a political concept of society and poses question regarding interest representation (economic interests) and the implementation of binding political decisions (political interests). I have suggested broadening respective research perspectives to a more sociological approach. Building on the theory of functional differentiation, which is by definition a theory of world society, business associations become visible not only as a particular type of organisation in society but, moreover, as a mechanism of uncertainty absorption in globalisation processes. The advantage of this perspective is clear and striking in one of the empirical cases presented here, which on these theoretical tenets showed itself to be a reflexive form of association-building under conditions of globalisation.

NOTES

¹ It seems reasonable to argue that BSE has been a problem merely in the "European World". But in fact, the problem has been communicated world-wide - as quests to the Internet quickly show.

² Although there are at least statistical evidences, the agent of the BSE disease as well as the way of its transmission are highly controversial in scientific terms.

³ I cannot introduce the basics of this theory here. However, it should be noted that assuming the existence of a world society does not imply either that processes of globalisation are observed or appraised in the same way the world over nor that standards of living are unique. On the contrary, world society is assumed to be extremely different due to regional specifications, such as degrees of differentiation and local organisational features.

⁴ Communication is nothing other than the drawing of a distinction and marking one side (see Luhmann 1990, 1997).

⁵ Luhmann emphasises that the 'last unbeatable evidence' of the emergence of a world society (stressed in debates on globalisation) is a change in the semantics of time. Arguing that the basic orientation of society has shifted from the past (that is from questions of identity) to the future (that is to questions of contingency) (Luhmann 1997: 149), he implicitly links globalisation and risk, because risk is the secular way of coping with the uncertainties of the future.

⁶ With this assumption I avoid a tautological answer to the question of what the problem of globalisation is. Instead of assuming the problem of globalisation to be that of globalisation itself, the answer refers to risk. This answer is implicit also in Beck's recent publications. Not by accident he at first wrote 'risk society' (1992, first published 1986 in German) and has recently devoted some books to the problem of 'globalisation' (1997, 1998a) and even to 'world society' (1998b).

⁷ In this sense the distinction between risk (decision-makers) and danger (concern) calls attention to a particular (and even new) structural dissent in society. It cannot be compensated for through re-distributions (as typical for 'industrial society', Beck 1992) or more expert knowledge (as assumed for the 'knowledge society', Willke 1997). As far as risk denotes decisions (i.e. observations of contingency) it can be described as a 'secular' form of coping with uncertainty.

⁸ It cannot be sociology's task to decide which assumptions on technical causes are appropriate or not. Sociology has to adequately reconstruct those contexts which are pertinent for different constructions of risk.

⁹ Although research is mostly financed by national bodies, the communication code of this function system (truth/untruth) is universal. Thus, science is oriented towards 'world knowledge' (Weltwissen).

¹⁰ The mass media spreads vast amounts of information world-wide every day, whereby it constitutes and constructs 'news' according to its own selective rules. Risks and 'scandals' have

a high information value. Compared to issues with a lower information value, the mass media thus reinforces the observation of risk in society. Nevertheless, even a risk topic like BSE loses its attraction over time, provided that no new events gain the mass media's attention as 'news'.

¹¹ The political system seems to play a dual role regarding the globalisation of risk. On the one hand, political decisions (like the British governments announcement about the possible risks of BSE in March 1996) encourage the communication of unspecified non-knowledge and thus contribute to the globalisation of risk (Tacke 1998). On the other hand, the political system in particular is able, by means of binding decisions, to prevent uncertainties from abroad - resulting from the communication of unspecified non-knowledge - to affect the national territory. I will discuss this further in section II.4.

¹² They are fundamental since they are constituted through basic forms of social interaction (exchange, obligation, solidarity and marginality) and respective value orientations regarding grid (rules) and group (identity).

¹³ Organisations, moreover, are a focal point of risk analysis since decision is essential to risk. That is to say, organisations reproduce themselves through decisions (see: Luhmann 1981, 1988).

¹⁴ Organisations (such as firms, parliaments, schools, and courts) and function systems (such as economy, politics, law, science, and education) are two levels of system-building in society, which reproduce themselves through different modes of communication. Organisations combine decisions over decisions (see Luhmann 1981; 1988); function systems instead combine payments, power, truth or law on the basis of binary codes (Luhmann 1995a, 1997).

¹⁵ This specification allows us to understand organisations in a dual sense: as social entities, embedded in technology-related environments including function contexts, and - at the same time - as self-referential systems that construct their environmental contexts according to internal rules (Weick 1979). Self-referential reproduction (Luhmann 1995a) and embeddedness (Granovetter 1985, Giddens 1990) are not mutually exclusive but are instead complementary perspectives (Siering/Tacke 1997). Domain consensus (Thompson 1967) is thus a fiction - although an effective one.

¹⁶ The latter holds only for contexts 'distant' from the suggested British origin of risk, e.g. for local butchers in Germany.

¹⁷ For my purposes here, we can disregard the question of whether the butchers' activities are restricted throughout to local markets whereas food retailers operate in a global context. If the difference between global and local activities is communicated as meaningful and real by consumers, it generates its real consequences.

¹⁸ This also holds for butchers (as the 'smaller' losers in the sales crisis): 'Regarding the consumer, this (BSE problem, V.T.) is damage to the image of the whole sector' (DFV, 21).

¹⁹ A 'customer' can be an individual or an organisation. When in direct contact with customers, firms attempt to meet his or her expectations or needs ('The customer is king').

²⁰ By means of the internal differentiation of the world political system in nation states and based on the principle of territorial sovereignty, the political system is capable of producing locality and constraining global horizons in different ways. Trade-bans on British beef and symbolic political slogans such as 'Germany is BSE-free' are striking examples.

²¹ Regarding *risk* the particular role of the political system is stressed in comparison to other function systems (Japp 1996) or even denied (Horwitz/Joerges 1997). The position which denotes the importance of politics is plausible, because the political system is responsible for the production of collectively binding decisions, especially when confronted with structural dissent between risk actors (decision-makers/those concerned) (Schmidt 1997). Regarding questions of *globalisation*, instead, the particular role of the political system is more than obvious because of the spatial reference of political system boundaries.

²² My data basis consists of interviews with representatives of five organisations (see note 24 for details). The interviews each lasted between one and two hours. Moreover, accounts in respective business associations' weekly and monthly journals were analysed and compared by means of 'cross examination'. Throughout the article, citations from interviews (which I translated from German) are indicated by the respective abbreviation of the business association, followed by the page number from the transcript.

²³ Communication analysis here refers to systems theory. Although there are similarities, this approach must be distinguished from the analysis of 'speech acts' (Searle 1969). My focus is not on understanding individuals (intended meaning). Instead, leading communicative distinctions are reconstructed on the level of social systems, whereby interaction (interview communication) and organisation (communication as organisational members) have to be distinguished and related to each other.

²⁴ The full names of the business associations (and my translations used in this article) are the following. DBV: Deutscher Bauernverband (German Farmers' Association); DFV: Deutscher Fleischerverband (German Butchers' Association), BVFI: Bundesverband der Fleischwarenindustrie (Federal Association of the Meat-Processing Industry), CMA: Centrale Marketinggesellschaft der Deutschen Agrarwirtschaft (Central Marketing Corporation for German Agricultural Economies) and AGF: Aktionsgemeinschaft Deutsches Fleisch (Action Committee for German Meat).

²⁵ Even if money is distributed on the European level, the first address of *national* business associations is that of the national political system (state).

²⁶ Nevertheless, unity is obviously not a feature of the German agricultural domain. On the contrary, it is a severe organisational problem for the DBV, and for its representation of an increasingly fragmented agricultural domain (see Heinze 1992).

²⁷ Alienation should not be confused with civilisation here. In the DBV's description, alienation seems to denote a lack of knowledge, and implies the assumption that more knowledge (contact) could solve the problem. As I have already argued, this assumption misses the particular characteristics of risk communication (risk/danger) and even overlooks the protective meaning of civilised non-knowledge in risk communication. In any case, the difference be-

tween contact and alienation indicates a dilemma for the communication between producers and consumers.

²⁸ The CMA was founded on the basis of a certain law (*Absatzfonds-gesetz* 1969) and is financed by tax-like fees, charged for every purchased animal (1995: 159 Mio. DM).

²⁹ Export is marginal (2%) and the market share of foreign meat products is 'well below 5%' in Germany (BVFI, 7).

³⁰ The former EC-Commissioner MacSharry accused the CMA in a 'sharp letter' (Int. CMA).

³¹ ...and not the political system, as one would expect from a business association (AGF, 26).

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