Hunger as a topic in the German Society?!
Food skills and eating behaviour of people in social neediness – and societal and political reactions.

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1. Paper background and approach
2. Quantitative hints on nutritional poverty
3. Alimentary participation e.g. eating out
4. Qualitative insights on coping

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Poverty Dynamics and Labour Market

Funded by Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.
January 2006 – December 2012

Research Institutes:
IAB Nürnberg (Institute for Employment Research)
HIS Hamburg (Hamburg Institute for Social Research)
ISF München (Institute for Social Research Munich)
Poverty Dynamics and Labour Market

Project aims on the processes of...
formation, hardening and overcoming of neediness among persons able to work

in terms of SGB II:
ALG II (so-called Hartz IV).

Hunger and food shortage
were no initially intended issues.

Qualitative Longitudinal study

Biographic-narrative interviews at home.
Starting interviews about 3 hours.

4 waves in 4,5 years.
3 of 4 interviewing waves completed.
Actually 329 interviews and 86 „living“ cases.

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<th>1st wave</th>
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There are hunger and nutritional poverty – in the midst of our supposedly affluent society.

Germany

No mass problem, but...
Mostly overseen and neglected...
...existent and spreading,
...in public and scientific awareness.

One reason for that:
No systematic and regular surveys on nutrition in Germany.

Nationale Verzehrsstudie (NVS) (National Consumption Study)
Brombach et al. 2006; Max Rubner-Institut 2008

Only two surveys:
→ 1980s (NVS I)
→ 2005-2007 (NVS II)

main problem / critique

 poorer population strata are largely lacking
 population groups at higher risk of nutritional poverty were deliberately excluded
 unemployed households are underrepresented.

Due to this systematic lack of satisfying data...
...we rely on „circumstantial evidence“
 facts and figures from a variety of resources
Quantitative hints

hunger and nutritional poverty in Germany

Monthly household expenses

≈ 800,000 persons probably living in nutritional poverty and partly experiencing hunger

≈ 5 Mio. people no way to quantify the degree of nutritional poverty in this group

not to forget: 300,000 people without household

Too many people have too less money to spend on food.

ALG-II benefits for food are ridiculously small dimensioned.
Spending on food

- Monthly ALG II 2007 in € (290 GBP)
- Real purchasing power ALG II 2007
- Nominal amount for food/stimulants
- Real purchasing power for food/stimulants
- Total spending on food

\[ £7,400 \]
\[ £4,600 \] = 3.7 GBP

Food banks in Germany

- 100,000 tons of food
- 1,000,000 people
- 848 foodbanks

3 circumstantial evidences

Germany experiences a food bank „explosion“.

There must be hunger and nutritional poverty in Germany.
Eating is a deeply social act, due to our "truly impressive nutritional versatility" (Beardsworth/Kell 1997). The most basic decision is a social one: Is something edible or not?

Food
- bond between culture and nature
- cultural and symbolic sign

Alimentary participation
- most basic and central mechanism of social participation.

Eating out
- great upswing since the 1980s (Beardsworth/Kell 1997; Pinkelbrinck 1999; Memmel 2003)

= point of culmination of alimentary participation.
- where, how, with whom and on which occasions we eat out
- how we dress and what we spend
- which cultural setting we choose
- whether we are in command of appropriate table manners
- whether we know which food is hip
- whether we are able to follow the permanent changes in food trends

determines, reveals and enables our belonging to an individualised and pluralistic society.

Unemployed households' spendings on gastronomic services are way down the average.
Household expenditures 2005

134 €

vs.

37 €

Accommodation/service in hotels and restaurants
Food, beverages, tobacco
Other private consumer spending

On eating out, there is no food choice for unemployed households whatsoever.

Typical ALG II household with around 1,200 € private consumption

37 €

average bill for eating out per person 14,60 €

four persons eating out once

58 €

average bill for eating out per person 14,50 €

food „choice“

Dine out once a month and leave one at home!

Or only every two months with all four?

Or the occasional McDonalds visit with all?
c) Circumstantial evidence 3

The great majority of unemployed households is never ever eating out.

3 circumstantial evidences

ALG-II recipients are systematically excluded from alimentary participation.

Not affording dining out at all

Average eating out occasions per person per year

- 36x per year
- 7x per month

ALG II: 76%


Qualitative insights

Variety of individual coping due to lack of societal/governmental coping
factors for type building

"objective"
- accessibility of food bank
- health condition
- time structure of eating
- sociality
- family and social network

overall attitude
- lifestyle
- eating culture
- health and nutrition
- using food bank

indulgence
- caring for others or be cared of
- relevance and sensefulness of cooking

capabilities
- lifelong eating habits
- alimentary experiences
- sociality

neediness and biography
- turning point for eating behavior

variety of individual coping types

- against the odds
- at least the children
- monthly ups and downs
- embracing nutrition for sense and structure
- abandonment in quality
- abandonment in quantity

societal and political coping

- delegation
- negation
- stigmatisation

- to food banks
- private economy and voluntary work
- 1950s dogma: nobody has to starve
- it can't be what shouldn't be
- bad habits / own fault / food bank parasite
- visualized by use of food bank

living with ALG II means

- risk of nutritional poverty and occasional hunger
- systematic exclusion from alimentary participation (e.g., eating out)
- individual coping strategies instead of societal/governmental ones

⇒ German society and social science are to meet this threatening challenge
Thank you - looking forward to the discussion!