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Deutschland in Nahaufnahmen

Sozialreportagen aus dem Land der Sozialen Marktwirtschaft

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Insights into German reality

We began by asking: “How’s it going, Germany?” wanting to explore the state of our society. Though simply formulated, the question is far from simple to answer. Indeed, shrill voices often dominate current debates, the nation’s self-image is made up of the very poor and the very rich, the happy and the desperate – resulting in media images of our society that are all too easy to caricature.

This book offers an alternative to this. In eight reported pieces, young journalists, all of them students at the Technical University of Dortmund, tell stories about ordinary people representative of the normal Germany.

Several of the pieces follow an intergenerational arc: In his piece (“Because Nothing Stays the Way It Is”), Ben Schröder shows how different regions are handling structural change, comparing developments in the city of Sonneberg with the city of Leverkusen. In her text (“Being Better Than My Father”), Mona Ameziane depicts three women from three generations who together illustrate the expansion of education in recent decades. In “Street Credibility,” Judith Koch depicts the societal consequences of reunification through the portrait of a single street in Leipzig. In her text (“Life At the Bar”), Jil Frangenberg tells of the past 50 years of changes in the life of an initially prospering city.

Some of the pieces focus on phenomena at the margins of today’s society. Laura Bethke’s contribution (“At the Edges of the Boom”) explores how, in an era of skilled-worker shortages, millions of people can still be unemployed or underemployed. In “Beyond Feuchtwangen” Claudia Wiggenbröker describes the contradictory feelings driving fears of globalization. Because neither society or an economy can function without businesspeople, two of the stories deal with this group. In her text (“The Drama of Daily Life”), Anjoulih Pawelka follows the daily working lives of two self-employed people, identifying what motivates and concerns this group, which is so central to our economy and society. Finally, with “The New Hope-Bearers,” Daniel Schmitz asks if social entrepreneurs – those who aim to make money while solving social problems – can help if the state finds itself overwhelmed by societal challenges.

These pieces are bolstered by photojournalist Besim Mazhiqi’s pictures, which add a visual language that is as powerful as it is laconic.

Taken together, these reports show a society in motion that is far from resting satiated on its laurels and comprised of members who take their futures actively into hand. It is the portrait of a diverse nation that sometimes regards itself in bewilderment because it has changed so much – and yet nevertheless recognizes itself. Truly an encouraging result.