

Abstract:

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“Closing the gap? America as inspiration and anti-model in post-war German industrial organization and innovation”

Using case studies from energy and privatization policy, this article argues that post-1945 developments in the western part of Germany were shaped heavily by three major bundles of factors. Perceptions of America and American practice constituted one of the most important. Many West Germans looked toward the United States for inspiration in aspects of business, technology, and the economy, although what they took from the United States was often based more on what American institutions and practices may once have been rather than what they had become. A second complex of factors, however, involved German traditions and institutions, many of which survived war and defeat and flourished in the altered postwar world: fundamental aspects of the German firm and its governance remained persisted from before 1945 through most of the postwar period, remaining very different from firms and their governance abroad in spite of globalization. Finally, the growing importance of Europe and the European Community in German thinking deserves attention, not least because German decision-making ability and eventually legislative and regulatory capacities were limited and shaped by its European responsibilities. In many ways, the European dimension at least partially supplanted the American one in shaping industrial organization and practice in Germany.

None of these bundles of factors was unambiguous, and all of them were and are in potential conflict with one another. The result of their interaction has been the

non-straightforward development of German economic patterns and relationships, which have been subject to processes of Americanization, globalization, Europeanization, but which remain in very many ways still very German.