

Benjamin Zander

Sport from the Perspective of Peer Groups

Exploring Collectively Shared Knowledge in
School and Leisure During Early Adolescence



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For Veronika, Jakob, Romy and Franz –
with all my love

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Summary

This book examines the emergence of communitisation among adolescents within self-initiated peer groups and explores its relevance for sporting practices. The focus lies on the transition from childhood to adolescence (ages 12–14), a developmental phase marked by profound changes in both school- and extracurricular sport. These changes include declining motivation to engage in sport and increasing withdrawal from organised club sport. The study investigates peer groups' collectively shared perspectives on sporting practices in both school-related and leisure-time contexts – an area that has, to date, received little attention in sport-pedagogical research. The analysis is guided by three central research questions:

1. What collective orientations can be reconstructed in peer groups' sporting practices?
2. What conjunctive spaces of experience can be reconstructed in peer groups' sporting practices?
3. What alignments between collective orientations and conjunctive spaces of experience can be reconstructed in peer groups' sporting practices?

The findings presented in this book are based on data collected for the research project “Sportive Orientations and Body Cultures of Adolescent Immigrants in School and Everyday Life” [German title: “*Sportive Orientierungen und Körperkulturen von jugendlichen Migrantinnen und Migranten im Spannungsfeld von Schule und Lebenswelt*”], funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). The author participated in the project as a researcher from 2014 to 2017. The study was designed as a longitudinal investigation of the 12–14 year-old age group, with the aim of analysing developmental processes during the transition from childhood to adolescence. A total of 16 group discussions were conducted with peer groups of different genders, migration backgrounds, and school types. The data were analysed using the documentary method to identify peer groups' collective orientations and shared spaces of experience.

The study's findings show that peer groups can be understood as multidimensional social collectives that are shaped by both shared orientations and spaces of experience. These social collectives possess implicit stocks of knowledge that significantly influence their sporting activities, both at school and during leisure time. The study identifies five key orientations that influence peer groups' sporting practices: (i) pursuit of a regulated lifestyle, (ii) personal development, (iii) challenge seeking among peers, (iv) sense of community within the peer group, and (v) individual autonomy. These five orientations are analysed in relation to specific spaces of experience, including physical education (PE),

club sport and informal sport. The research further highlights that the alignment between orientations and spaces of experience varies depending on the individual's social affiliations, particularly their educational background, gender and age.

This book makes an important contribution to the further development of sport-pedagogical research and practice by:

- *Closing the research gap:* It offers empirical evidence on a largely overlooked phenomenon—the collective dimension of sport—and sheds light on peer groups' sporting practices. Future research can build on these findings by exploring peer group orientations, spaces of experience, and their alignment across different contexts and age groups. This book lays the groundwork for more nuanced analyses of how collective orientations and spaces of experience in sport emerge and evolve over time.
- *Applying a collective-centred approach:* The study moves beyond the predominantly individual-focused perspectives that characterise much of the sport pedagogy literature, demonstrating that shared stocks of knowledge and social dynamics play a decisive role in influencing adolescents' sporting practices. It provides a foundation for interdisciplinary research in sport science, encouraging stronger integration of perspectives from sport pedagogy, sport sociology and sport psychology.
- *Providing practical relevance:* The findings offer a foundation for the pedagogical design of sport programmes in both school-related and leisure-time contexts that deliberately address peer groups' needs and orientations. The book outlines several concrete pedagogical intervention strategies that can be further developed and refined. For example, these strategies aim to strengthen the peer group as a motivational resource in PE lessons or club sport, with the aim of retaining existing participants and integrating new ones by taking peer group dynamics into account.

This book offers new insights into the collective dimensions of sport during the critical transition from childhood to adolescence. It shows that understanding peer groups as social collectives provides a valuable perspective on adolescents' sporting practices. At the same time, it lays a solid foundation for further research and for the development of diversity-sensitive sport programmes in both school-related and leisure-time contexts that build on peer groups' orientations and spaces of experience.

1 Introduction

Humans are constitutive of sport: they create it and participate in it, typically not in isolation but through interaction and collaboration with others. As inherently social beings, individuals engage in sport as a means to connect with others. When understood as a cultural practice, my research demonstrates that participation in sport—whether collectively in organised team settings (e.g. football) or individually in self-organised activities (e.g. jogging)—embodies supra-individual meanings expressed through shared orientations and collective spaces of experience. These orientations and spaces of experience link sporting practices with specific groups of individuals. *Therefore, throughout this book, sport is understood not only through its social dimension but also through its collectively shared dimension.* By exploring peer groups' sporting practices during the transition from childhood to adolescence, this book highlights the characteristics of sport's collective dimension and considers how these can be leveraged within sport-pedagogical research and practice.

I define the term 'peer group' as a "group of age mates" (Wetzstein et al., 2005, p. 19). Peer groups represent a fundamental and highly relevant area of research for understanding adolescents' development. The issues that emerge from this area of research are multifaceted and intersect with other disciplines such as sport pedagogy, educational studies, sociology and psychology. Examples include informal learning, media consumption, processes of radicalisation, etc. Efforts are currently underway to consolidate this often-dispersed body of research across disciplines into a more clearly defined interdisciplinary field of research (cf., among others, Köhler et al., 2016). *This development reflects growing scientific consensus that peer groups play a central role in adolescents' development.*

Although peer group research has gained increasing attention in Germany since the 1970s (Bünger, 2011), it has not yet, despite its clear relevance, established itself as an independent field of research within sport science: peer groups are widely recognised as a key social setting for participation in sport, offering opportunities for adolescents to engage in sport with like-minded peers (Brinkhoff, 1998). Furthermore, peer groups serve as central agents of socialisation, particularly during adolescence, e.g. by facilitating or restricting access to sport (among others, Burrmann, 2023). Building on this understanding of the peer group both as a social setting for practice and as an agent of socialisation, two central and closely interconnected research themes emerge within peer group studies: (i) *communitisation*, and (ii) *development*. I will contextualise my research around these two themes.

Statements such as "children need children" (Hammes-Di Bernardo & Speck-Hamdan, 2010, p. 8) or "adolescents need age mates" (Hafeneger, 2022,

p. 144) highlight the importance of social relationships with others for adolescents' own *development*.¹ I consider the transition from childhood to adolescence as a shift from familial relationships (which are 'imposed by fate') towards peer relationships that are mostly 'self-selected'. Even though growing up invariably takes place within peer contexts, and drawing on insights from peer, childhood and adolescence research (cf., e.g., Behnken et al., 2010; Eckermann, 2017; Harring et al., 2010; Köhler et al., 2016; Krüger et al., 2022), I assume that family detachment processes during this life stage coincide with processes of integration into peer groups. While this shift is also evident at the level of practice, e.g. in the choice of those with whom adolescents spend their time, their practices are primarily oriented towards their reference groups which, in turn, influence their developmental processes.

Within peer groups, adolescents encounter age mates, actively build relationship networks, and experience themselves as empowered agents through the appropriation of cultural practices, such as learning sport (among others, Meyer, 2025). At the same time, peer groups are associated not only with opportunities for personal development and cultural innovation, but also with a heightened risk of involvement in deviant behaviour (among others, Becker, 2022). Although peer groups are widely recognised as the primary agent of adolescent socialisation due to their strong influence on adolescents' development, relatively little research has examined how peer groups come to occupy this central role. I argue that sport science discourse often overlooks the lived experiences adolescents share within their peer groups and how these experiences are interpreted and transformed into a shared understanding.

In sport-pedagogical research, there is—at least in my view—an almost automatic focus on individual developmental aspects, often without adequately considering individuals' social preconditions. Developmental processes are embedded in forms of *communitisation*: for instance, social interactions provide the foundation for socialisation processes (Grundmann, 2006). To effectively address these developmental questions, it seems sensible to take a step back and examine peer groups in more detail. Peer groups can be understood as complex social spaces within which diverse forms of social interaction—including seemingly mundane practices—take place. Not each and every aspect of these interactions can, or should, be labelled as relevant for development, nor do they need to be monitored and controlled by educators.

Nevertheless, educators cannot simply disregard the peer group. Both general development and, importantly, institutional educational settings owing to their organisational structure are shaped by group relationships. Teachers' un-

1 I use the term 'development' here as a broad umbrella concept that encompasses processes of socialisation, learning, education and upbringing. I will not delve deeper into this complex terminology here (cf. Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of my theoretical approach).

derstanding of peer relationships in the classroom and their pedagogical possibility of influencing these dynamics is considered especially important (among others, Schmitz & Burrmann, 2020). This, however, requires a nuanced understanding of the peer group concept, grounded in robust empirical evidence. With this in mind, I turn to the notion of ‘the group’,² which provides an important framework for understanding individuals’ actions. Research studies that focus on the group, such as Bohnsack (1989), find that shared orientations and experiences emerge within peer groups, linking individuals to social affiliations that are shaped by broader societal conditions.

One of my observations is that these social affiliations are frequently the subject of mass media debates, particularly in today’s individualised and pluralistic society. Despite receiving increased attention, the portrayal of social groups is often one-sided (cf. Becker, 2024). They are depicted as ‘exotic islands’ for ‘special’ individuals, e.g. youth subcultures centred on shared interests. These groups are often represented through narrowly defined (and often negatively connoted, male-dominated) labels, such as gangsta rappers, climate activists or skateboarders. Consequently, the diversity of peer groups, as it exists in school-related and leisure-time contexts, tends to be obscured in everyday perception.

The epistemic focus of my research emerges against the backdrop of discussions on development and communitisation in peer group research: my aim is to investigate the meaning attributed to and the priorities established within peer groups in both school-related and leisure-time contexts. I am particularly interested in group members’ collectively shared perspectives on sporting practices, underpinned by their shared orientations, experiences and affiliations. *Accordingly, I focus on voluntarily formed, self-initiated groups, typically consisting of three to six members aged 12 to 14, which can also be described as friendship circles, cliques or the like.* However, my objective is not merely to investigate a specific group, but to broaden the perspective to capture the multidimensional nature of ‘being’ a peer (peer-being), extending beyond the sporting practices of a single group. This approach provides a deeper understanding of the peer group as a complex process of communitisation among adolescents, shaped by multiple commonalities.

Sport science research at both the national and international level has only rudimentarily investigated the role of peer groups in school and extracurricular sport (e.g. Fusan, 2006; Grimminger, 2012; Kindermann & Gest, 2018; Krieger, 2005; Messmer & Brea-Steffen, 2016; Neely & Holt, 2016; Schmitz & Burrmann, 2020). As early as 2016, Neely and Holt (2016, p. 218) noted that: “Compared to

2 After a period of extensive research in the 1970s and 1980s, Kühl (2021) is adamantly calling for re-establishing the ‘group’ as an important analytical category in the social sciences.

the influence of a coach or parents, that of the peer group in youth sport remains relatively unexplored". Nearly ten years later, little has changed. *Consequently, the reconstruction of shared perspectives within peer groups remains under-researched. This opens up a largely unexplored research field in sport pedagogy that has only partially been tapped into by research groups led by Ralf Bohnsack (among others, Bohnsack, 1989; Bohnsack & Nohl, 2001) and Heinz-Herrmann Krüger (among others, Krüger et al., 2012; Krüger et al., 2016) in related disciplines, including sociology and educational studies.* My approach to investigating peer groups builds on these insightful preliminary studies, particularly those that adopted a cultural-theoretical perspective to explore peer groups' social practices and their collective dimension using the documentary method.³

The empirical foundation of this book draws on data collected for the research project "Sportive Orientations and Body Cultures of Adolescent Immigrants in School and Everyday Life" [German title: "Sportive Orientierungen und Körperkulturen von jugendlichen Migrantinnen und Migranten im Spannungsfeld von Schule und Lebenswelt" (SpOK)], submitted by Prof. Ulrike Burrmann, Prof. Jörg Thiele and Prof. Michael Meuser to the German Research Foundation (DFG). It included quantitative and qualitative sub-studies. This book builds on the qualitative sub-study that was coordinated, developed and implemented between May 2014 and September 2017 by Nicole Kirchhoff and myself as research associates at TU Dortmund University. The SpOK project's objectives and theoretical framework are described in detail elsewhere (Thiele & Burrmann, 2020; Thiele & Zander, 2020) and will not be repeated here in full. The methodology chapter discusses the data collection and analysis methods used in the SpOK project (cf. Chapter 2.2).

Several publications have reported on specific findings from the project (among others, Zander & Thiele, 2020b). This book integrates previous findings from the SpOK project, which are dispersed across various publications, into a cohesive sport-pedagogical investigation of peer groups. At the same time, I place greater emphasis on selected aspects of the research. *This book not only summarises previous work, but also establishes a foundation for further research in the field.* Its significance lies in developing descriptive, foundational knowledge that can enhance our understanding of peer groups during the transition from childhood to adolescence. My research thus highlights how sporting practices in school-related and leisure-time contexts are often shaped by the largely implicit sense-making processes within peer groups. Furthermore, it explores

3 Over the past two decades, the documentary method has become well-established in sport-pedagogical research both as a methodological approach and as an data analysis method (Stamm, Zander, Schiller & Poncet-Rief, 2024), providing a recognised and proven toolkit for my research.

the complexity of peer-being across various dimensions of shared orientations and spaces of experience.

While the relevance of my research does not lie in providing normative instructional knowledge, its resulting analyses carry important pedagogical implications. Unlike previously published contributions, this book draws stronger normative conclusions. For example, it offers initial pedagogical recommendations for how peer groups can be used as a social category for describing target groups of both school and extracurricular sport programmes, e.g. by rethinking the role of students and exploring new possibilities of differentiating them as addressees of peer teaching. I aim to make this topic more accessible to discourses on the practical development of children's/youth sport and school sport.

Based on these considerations, this book has two interconnected objectives:

1. The *first objective* is to examine sporting practices in school-related and leisure-time contexts from peer groups' shared perspectives, and to describe the communitisation of adolescents across different dimensions of peer-being. Building on this analysis, the empirical findings are translated into sport-pedagogical recommendations for designing peer group-based sport programmes.
2. The empirical findings and sport-pedagogical recommendations also underpin my *second objective*, namely to strengthen recognition of the peer group as an independent field of research within sport pedagogy. I aim to unlock the potential of a collective-centred perspective of peer groups, grounded in both theory and empirical evidence, for future projects in sport-pedagogical peer research in school-related and leisure-time contexts.

My book is structured around these two objectives. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 outlines the central theoretical and methodological foundations. Building on this, Chapter 3 presents the empirical findings, which primarily address the first objective; the chapter's structure is justified in Chapter 2 through the derivation of the research questions. Chapter 4 concludes and offers further insights relating to the second objective.

As may already be apparent from this introduction, I have adopted a personal and perhaps somewhat unconventional writing style. My intention is to engage more deeply with the field of peer groups in sport, both as a reflective and an investigative researcher. A book seemed appropriate for achieving this objective, as it allows for a less formalised style. Guided by the motto 'if not now, then when', I used this personalised writing style as an opportunity to revisit the results of the SpOK project from a perspective I was already familiar with. *By making my presence visible throughout this book, I aim to clarify my position within this field of research and, through personalised expressions, to inspire re-*

flections that might not otherwise arise. Any one-sidedness or potential contradictions in the language I use are intentionally embraced as an opportunity to stimulate questions or encourage critical reflections.

2 Theoretical and Methodological Foundations

Peer groups in sport have yet to emerge as an independent field of research in sport science, with only few studies having been published to date. Given this gap, my assumption is that readers generally have limited knowledge about this topic. Against this background, it seems reasonable to begin this chapter with a comprehensive introduction to the topic. The discussion opens with an exploration of the term ‘peer group’ in both everyday use and academic discourse (Chapter 2.1). We then turn to the question of how to theoretically conceptualise the peer group as a social-scientific object in sport-pedagogical research, or more specifically, which approaches I adopted in my work. The book’s research questions are formulated within this context. Building on these questions, I then outline how peer groups are methodologically investigated (Chapter 2.2). The development of a theoretical framework and a methodological approach for studying peer groups in sport are two key contributions of my work, which can be applied in future research, as demonstrated in the book’s conclusion and outlook (Chapter 4).

2.1 Theoretical Framework: How to Theoretically Conceptualise Peer Groups as a Research Topic

In my research, I have deliberately chosen to use the term ‘peer group’. It offers defining characteristics that clarify the essential aspects of my research topic, while also offering a broad scope for interpretation and individual specification – it is more broadly defined than, for instance, the term ‘age mates group’. I also consider ‘peer group’ to not be theoretically preconfigured or normatively biased, making it well suited for conceptual use and for specification through theoretical perspectives in empirical research. I will now take a closer look at the use of the term ‘peer group’.

2.1.1 Conceptualising the Term ‘Peer Group’: Everyday and Academic Perspectives

The term ‘peer group’ originates from the English language. It was introduced in Anglo-American psychology and sociology in the 1930s to describe groups

of age mates (Naudascher, 1977).⁴ According to the Digital Dictionary of the German Language (DWDS), the term is not widely used in German-speaking countries.⁵ The term first appeared in German-language newspapers in 1991 and has become increasingly common since, as indicated by DWDS's word trend curve for 'peer group'. *The following examples illustrate how the term is used in German newspapers, and the topics and contexts with which it is associated (drawn from DWDS, 2024):*

- "Children are primarily shaped by their friends, the so-called peer group". [Berliner Morgenpost, 08/08/2012].
- "During adolescence, the peer group, i.e. the circle of friends, becomes the most important influence, as individuals are most strongly affected by people of a similar age". [Bote der Urschweiz, 10/10/2020].
- "Alcohol is consistently a topic among adolescents, with the 'peer group', their social environment, playing a particularly important role". [Aachener Zeitung, 02/21/2014].
- "14-year-olds no longer necessarily consider their parents to be their primary point of contact, but rather turn to their peer groups". [Berliner Morgenpost, 03/13/2009].
- "Educational researchers at the University of Halle-Wittenberg have studied how peer groups influence children's school performance [.]". [Frankfurter Rundschau, 04/11/2008].

These newspaper excerpts clearly demonstrate that the term 'peer group' is used in everyday language in German-speaking countries to refer to adolescents and their friends and social relationships. They also indicate that the term is often treated as a foreign or technical term; e.g. it is placed in quotation marks and/or accompanied by additional information ('peer groups, i.e. the circle of friends').

-
- 4 "The fact that the USA, in particular, has dealt with this topic for so long is understandable when one considers that the American nation is one of immigrants who mostly originated from countries with different family or economic structures. Immigrant families were therefore primarily concerned with adapting to the new country and could not provide valid answers on many matters to their growing children. This made age mates an increasingly important factor in both education and socialisation." (Naudascher, 1977, p. 14).
 - 5 Currently, it reaches a frequency level of two out of seven. By comparison, the exotic (at least for me) term 'schwurbeln' (to bluster/talk nonsense) also has a frequency level of two, while the word 'sein' (to be) reaches level seven.

According to *Duden*,⁶ the authoritative dictionary of the German language, the term ‘peer group’ is primarily used in psychology and sociology and can be defined in the following two ways:

1. “A group of children or adolescents of roughly the same age, who serve as a primary social reference group alongside the family”;
2. “A group of equals or individuals with the same or similar interests” (Duden, 2024).

These two definitions allow for nuanced interpretations of the term ‘peer group’, which are not mutually exclusive. Thus, it can be understood as a group of age mates and/or of social equals. *As will be elaborated further in this chapter, I treat the two meanings included in Duden as a minimal framework that also serves the pragmatic function of standardising a broad range of related phenomena.* The scientific community—as I do in my approach—employs various definitions and concepts to describe the peer group. I will first review how the term is understood in academic applications of the concept of ‘peer group’.

Even within peer research, the very field in which the concept originates, the term ‘peer group’ is used in diverse ways and can assume several different meanings (cf. e.g. Hoffmann, 2020 for an overview). This can be demonstrated by examining the two components of the actual term itself:

The first component, ‘peer’, refers to a broad spectrum of potential commonalities among individuals, highlighting context-specific forms of equality (among others, Salisch, 2010).⁷

Within the framework of equal partnership, the term ‘peer’ often refers to “people with equal rights and equal status” (Krappmann, 1999, p. 228). Against this backdrop, the (provisional) definition of a peer group as simply a group of individuals of the same age, as introduced earlier, appears insufficient:

“Strictly speaking, age is only one criterion for defining a ‘peer’ in this context. It establishes an external framework for status by grouping individuals according to school grades, semesters, salary levels or life stages. From a psychological and pedagogical perspective, however, sharing the same age does not necessarily imply equal rank. For example, who are the ‘peers’ of a fifteen-year-old girl who has to take care of the household and

6 The *Duden*, which was first published in 1880, is the most authoritative dictionary of the German language and sets the official rules for German spelling, grammar and usage.

7 To answer the question ‘Who or what is a peer?’, Salisch (2010) identifies seven defining characteristics of the peer concept. Hansen (2022) also analyses the concept. Both approaches offer valuable insights for a more nuanced understanding of the peer group; however, in my view, the group dimension receives too little attention in their analyses.

her younger siblings after the death of her mother – her age mates or other individuals dealing with similar problems?” (Naudascher, 1977, p. 13).

The concept of ‘peer’ extends well beyond the notion of a group of individuals of the same age. It is always context-specific and closely linked to individuals’ personal backgrounds. Secondly, the term ‘*group*’ can refer to a wide range of social constellations, which may be organised informally, non-formally or formally, such as a circle of friends, a sport team or a school class. Moreover, various theoretical approaches to studying peer groups can result in different constructions of the research topic within a discipline such as sport pedagogy. Research on social groups offers numerous opportunities for exploring social connections and represents a long-established, differentiated field of research within psychology, sociology and pedagogy (cf. e.g. Homans, 1960; Mills, 1969; Richter, 1972; Schäfers, 1980).

Different characteristic elements and definitional approaches have been developed within the social sciences to capture the unique features of groups as a social structure. Over time, certain defining elements⁸ of what constitutes a ‘group’ have emerged and are broadly accepted (Schäfers, 2010). Typically, a group consists of a minimum of three members and is characterised by sustained and intensive contact and exchange among its members. *Additionally, groups are defined by a shared orientation of practice (e.g. the pursuit of a common task).* This particular element can be illustrated by the following example:

“A group of people using an elevator is [...] not yet a social group. However, if the elevator gets stuck and the passengers are trapped for several hours, this random gathering transforms into a group with a shared task and a common goal, namely to get out of the elevator” (Behnisch, Lotz & Maierhof, 2013, p. 13).

8 According to Schäfers (2010, p. 133), five definitional elements characterise a social group: “(1) A specific number of members, typically ranging from three to approximately 25 in the case of small groups; (2) a common group goal and behavioural motivation for both the group as a whole and for each individual member; (3) a shared ‘us-feeling’ that fosters group membership and cohesion; (4) a system of common norms and values that form the basis for communication and interaction; and (5) a network of interrelated roles (role differentiation) that supports the group’s objectives while ensuring both goal achievement and conflict resolution” (Schäfers, 2010, p. 133).

This example illustrates the ambiguity of the ‘group’ concept, which, in this purpose-rational reading, overlaps considerably with the ‘team’ concept.⁹ Another approach applies the concept of ‘primary group’. Unlike task-oriented groups, primary groups consist of members who are not linked through a shared task. Drawing on Wimmer (2007), a primary group instead focuses on the development of its members’ personalities, independent of any instrumental purpose. Such groups prioritise genuine, personal relationships cultivated independently of any collective goals. In this context, a primary group is also described as the fundamental expression of human sociability (Schäfers, 2010). I agree with this non-purposeful reading of the ‘group’ concept, though I place less emphasis on the degree of individuals’ personal involvement in groups and more on the developmental and societal implications of groups. *My focus lies on social groups that have a shared history and experiences, whose relationship and interaction patterns extend beyond purpose-bound instances of communitisation.*

Accordingly, when I refer to peer groups in the context of my research, I mean close friends,¹⁰ as noted in the introduction (cf. Chapter 1.1), for whom contact with one another is meaningful (cf., among others, Mills, 1969, on small group research). Such groups can be described as small informal groups. Drawing on the concept of the informal group (among others, Scherr, 2010), I emphasise that membership in a peer group is voluntary and is based on the mutual agreement of its participants. Beyond membership, other factors such as the group’s shared interests, as well as the roles or tasks of individual members, are negotiated internally, allowing the group to operate with a high degree of autonomy. The informal group also serves an important social function, which I apply to the concept of the peer group:

“Informal groups allow members to understand the significance and meaning of shared experiences among age mates, providing reassurance that others experience and navigate reality in similar ways as oneself” (Scherr, 2010, p. 77).

Peer groups thus contribute to the construction and reinforcement of a collectively shared interpretation and understanding of the world.

9 Kühl (2021) calls for an in-depth analysis of specific social structures that reproduce themselves through person-related expectations that take shape and sets them apart from their environment. He asserts: “By analytically separating groups and teams [...] a stronger orientation of teams towards the external environment and a stronger orientation of groups towards the internal environment can be identified. By defining groups based on person-related expectations, teams can no longer be understood as a specific form of group” (Kühl, 2021, p. 36).

10 Here, a friendly relationship refers to peer group members who have known each other for some time and generally share a positive bond (cf. Chapter 3.1.1 for details).

Beyond this preliminary clarification of the term, it is important to consider what constitutes the peer group as a research topic and why it is of particular interest to sport-pedagogical research. Building on the introduction, the current state of research will be outlined in greater detail, drawing on various strands of research (socialisation research, youth research, etc.). A central starting point for studying peer groups in sport-pedagogical research is to treat them as key reference groups for adolescents, guiding and shaping their practices. National and international research focuses on the unique characteristics of peer relationships and their specific influence on adolescents' behaviour and development (e.g. Perren, Malti & McDonald, 2011; Younis, 1994; for an overview of sport psychological peer research, see Smith & Ullrich-French, 2020). This is emphasised in socialisation research, particularly in the context of the transition from childhood to adolescence (Baur, 1989; Grundmann, 2006; Hurrelmann & Quenzel, 2012). Unlike family relationships, peer group interactions are typically not influenced by a generational gap which is closely associated with hierarchies or differences in status: "The particular appeal of age mates groups lies in their symmetrical composition" (Hurrelmann & Quenzel, 2012, p. 176). *Unlike in primary socialisation, the symmetrical relationship structure within peer groups allows members to mutually negotiate activity orientations (e.g. sport-related preferences and priorities) during secondary socialisation, thereby providing unique developmental stimuli.*

Learning from and with one another may therefore be particularly pronounced within the peer group, which is relevant in sport-related contexts as well, e.g. in relation to different roles in mediating or organising sport activities in informal settings. Ethnographic studies, in particular, offer detailed accounts of peer-related learning processes in sport (among others, Bindel, 2008; Büscher, 2022; Erhorn, 2012; Müller, 2017). The relevance of the peer group as a reference group aligns with the high value adolescents themselves place on it. Youth enjoy spending time with their friends, and recognition by their age mates carries significant meaning (Hoffmann, 2020). The relationship and interaction structures within peer groups are described here only in ideal-typical terms. Building on empirical findings (cf. e.g. Chapter 3.3.1), the distinct characteristics of individual peer groups are generalised and, particularly in comparison to family or school contexts, may be slightly overstated. Nevertheless, the peer group undeniably embodies a fundamental form of social communitisation and serves as an essential reference group (not only) for adolescents.

An approach based on the concept of the reference group emphasises adolescents' participation in specific contexts and the navigation of developmental milestones, highlighting the role of the peer group in this process. The transition from childhood to adolescence is particularly significant, given the convergence of complex stages of development, especially during puberty which can be de-

scribed as a “stage of self-discovery and radical personality change” (Bastian, 2018, p. 3). In early adolescence, youth experience various *developmental phases specific to this life stage*, during which the peer group may exert influence on the individual, e.g. in terms of coping with the physical changes caused by puberty and developing a positive relationship with one’s own body (among others, Göppel, 2011).

This life stage is also highly significant for sport, as it plays a central role in the development, maintenance or discontinuation of participation in and commitment to sport and exercise (among others, Burrmann, 2005). Participation in organised club sport tends to decline at the onset of adolescence (among others, Mutz & Burrmann, 2015), whereas involvement in informal sport activities generally increases as adolescents grow older (among others, Züchner, 2013). Consequently, the ‘gap’ between highly engaged ‘multiplayers’ and less active adolescents is likely to widen during this life stage (Bindel, 2015). As already noted in the introduction, peer groups can have either a positive or negative influence on adolescents’ development. On the one hand, peer groups can support identity formation or the development of social skills; on the other, membership in a peer group may present challenges, such as heightened competition or pressure to conform (Köhler, 2016). One distinctive feature of peer groups is that adolescents cannot fully disengage from them, due in part to the structural contexts of schooling and compulsory education.

Another starting point for a sport-pedagogical discussion of the peer group is found in research on school and school sport as distinctive social spaces. *School is generally considered a key setting for peer interaction*, as the peer group was effectively ‘invented’ as a social structure for the masses – for the first time in history, children of the same age with similar preconditions were systematically grouped together. This idea is captured in the following quotation:

“Educational institutions work with groups of children. Individual care, individual instruction, or individual support are not the norm; development and education take place in groups. Pedagogy has always drawn on the effects of this social context. Children enjoy spending time with other children, children want to belong, and children learn from one another. Thus, education in a group of children is also always social education” (Hammes-Di Bernardo & Speck-Hamdan, 2010, p. 8).

Due to compulsory schooling until the age of 18 and extended school hours into the afternoon, adolescents are deeply embedded in peer relationships. Peers as socialisation agents gain in significance during the transition from childhood to adolescence, but also exert growing influence on adolescents’ educational trajectory (Krüger et al., 2012). Longitudinal studies provide empirical evidence of how closely educational trajectories in school are interwoven with adolescent

peer groups. Peer groups can serve multiple roles within this trajectory, for example, by forming a parallel or even counter-world to the demands of school (Krüger et al., 2012). ‘Similarity’, which I already emphasised in my definition of the peer group, is crucial in this context: “While physical proximity provides students the opportunity to get to know their classmates, only some of them become close friends. What matters over and above contact is the degree to which students perceive their classmates to be similar to them” (Juvonen, 2018, p. 494).

Beyond school as an educational space, the very notion of schooling shapes our understanding of how adolescents grow up. The life stages of childhood and adolescence must be viewed in terms of their distinct social positioning in relation to schooling, which shapes societal expectations of what is considered appropriate and desirable for adolescents during these life stages. *Not only does school as an institution provide this context; individuals’ educational trajectory, as a socially endorsed framework, assigns peer groups both an enabling and a normative role.* Consequently, a pedagogical perspective on peer groups often focuses on how they relate to adults and the extent to which their members’ educational trajectory meets societal expectations. Societal expectations sometimes clash diametrically, particularly during adolescence as a life stage between moratorium and transition (among others, Neuber, 2007). On the one hand, schooling can serve as a moratorium, shielding adolescents from the ‘tough’ demands of (working) life, allowing for peer-related experimentation and engagement in youth cultural practices (skateboarding, rapping, etc.).

On the other hand, adolescents’ educational trajectory is tied to the expectation of a successful transition into (working) life, an expectation that, amid economic constraints and neoliberal societal developments, is increasingly characterised by growing pressures on adolescents to optimise their life opportunities (cf. Reinders, 2016). School qualification requirements may also be a topic of discussion within peer groups. In other words, peer groups play a role not only during the moratorium but also throughout the transition phase. Even if distinguished only analytically, it is possible to differentiate—particularly in relation to peer group practices—between present-oriented experimentation with lifestyles and future-oriented strategies to manage emerging responsibilities.

Until they graduate, school influences adolescents’ entire life, including their leisure time. The relationship between school and leisure is embedded in a process of change, namely the ‘de-schooling’ of school and the ‘schoolification’ of leisure time (Fölling-Albers, 2000). The boundaries of these two spheres of life become blurred, and the underlying logic of their distinction may even be reversed: school can become a space for leisure, and leisure can turn into a space of instruction (Zinnecker, 2008). *School and leisure, but also peer groups and*

school, and peer groups and leisure, are closely intertwined. How the peer group is constituted within a given context and how it acts within that context are empirical questions I will return to later (cf. Chapter 3.1). According to Zinnecker (2008), one defining feature of the peer group is that its sphere of action extends both within and outside of the school context. Peer groups thus serve as a mediating agent between school and leisure. Their mediating function varies across school subjects. Zinnecker (2008) argues that physical education (PE) draws on elements from adolescents' leisure activities due to its close proximity to youth culture. However, these mediation processes in the context of sport have not yet been explored from the perspective of peer groups.¹¹

PE, precisely because of its spatial and material contexts, offers peer groups a distinct space for retreat where they can act outside the teacher's supervision (e.g. in locker rooms or equipment storage rooms). Additionally, the sizeable space within which PE lessons take place provides considerable flexibility for group activities, which brings me to an important initial empirical consideration: the peer group—particularly during the life stage of adolescence—influences socialisation in both positive and negative ways and also has an impact within the context of school and instruction (particularly in PE), shaping the conditions for students' subject-specific and general education. *Findings from qualitative research on students and school instruction* (among others, Breidenstein, 2006, 2018; Zschach & Pfaff, 2014) *demonstrate that adolescents' participation in class is influenced by the interplay between adherence to both school norms and peer-cultural norms. Given PE's culturally embedded, subject-specific practices within defined spatial and material contexts, peer-cultural norms play an especially important role for students, as existing research on PE demonstrates.*

Two major empirical studies on PE and peer groups in Germany stand out: (i) an interview-based study that reconstructed group identifications and relationships from the perspective of students (Miethling & Krieger, 2004; Krieger, 2005), and (ii) a multimethod study which, among others, examined the influence of peers on participation in class and on acceptance or rejection processes among students (Grimminger, 2012). *Both studies find that group processes in PE are highly relevant for adolescents, influencing not only their perceptions of lessons more generally but also their behaviour in class.* The studies are based on a specific theoretical understanding of peer groups, which highlights certain aspects while omitting others, as I will explain in more detail below.

Studies on peer groups predominantly focus on developmental and socio-psychological perspectives, not only in the context of PE, but also within

11 Previous studies (among others, Albert, 2017; Burrmann, 2005; Bindel, 2015; Gerlach & Brettschneider, 2013; Neuber, 2007), drawing on individual case analyses, illustrate which sport contexts adolescents prefer or avoid, and how participation in school- and extracurricular sport can either complement or conflict with one another.

sport-pedagogical research. By focusing on peer group members as individuals, phenomena within peer groups come to light. For example, most studies focus on individuals' behaviour within a group of classmates, taking role/status-related attributions into account, such as being an outsider. These attributions indicate that the peer group is understood in relation to the individual. Collective perspectives using sociological explanatory approaches, however, receive little attention in sport-pedagogical research.

As mentioned in the introduction, I understand humans as social beings who act within social relationships and, together with others, develop or participate in cultural practices. While the social and cultural dimensions of practice play a more implicit role in psychologically-oriented sport-pedagogical research, where the focus lies, e.g. on personality development, cognition or on students and teachers' individual motives, they represent a fundamental point of departure for social science-oriented pedagogical research. This also applies to the subject- and socio-theoretical considerations of my research focus, the peer group. In the context of social scientific youth research, Bohnsack and Nohl (2001) highlight some key limitations of the individual-theoretical approach:

“This makes access to subtler forms of collective, and consequently also cultural, practices and patterns of orientation more difficult. Above all, it is often overlooked that [...] even highly individualised youth biographies must be integrated into collective contexts and practices to be fully understood” (Bohnsack & Nohl, 2001, p. 18).

I therefore do not consider that peer group research in its collective dimension stands in opposition to the focus on individuals, but that it is a necessary complement to describe, e.g. transactionally interwoven socialisation processes between internal and external factors (among others, Baur, 1989) in a more differentiated way (cf. Chapter 1).¹²

In contrast to individual-theoretical approaches that explain the psychological phenomena of peer group members, sociological studies focus on the

12 Drawing on Hinde (1987), Rubin et al. (2006, p. 575) emphasise that “[c]hildren’s experiences with peers can best be understood by referring to several levels of social complexity—in individuals, in interactions, in relationships, and in groups”. Accordingly, ‘interactions’ describe social exchanges between two individuals over a given period, while ‘relationships’ capture the meanings, expectations and emotions that emerge from those interactions. At the highest level of complexity, ‘groups’ are defined as “collection[s] of interacting individuals who have some degree of reciprocal influence over one another” (p. 578). My research focuses on the group level, while acknowledging that processes at the individual, interactional and relational levels mutually influence one another and cannot be observed in isolation. The authors note that such a multi-level perspective was not always applied in earlier research.

collective nature of peer groups. A central premise of interaction- and communication-theoretical considerations (cf. Bohnsack, 2017 for an overview), is that the peer group is more than the sum of its members. In this context, applying a group perspective to sport-related phenomena can be understood as a “product of collective interactions” (Loos & Schäffer, 2001, p. 65). Educational research on youth also highlights that, within the context of school and instruction, peer groups can be conceived as “autonomous social worlds” (Helsper & Böhme, 2002, p. 588). These social worlds possess collectively shared ‘stocks of knowledge’ that guide group members’ practices. From this specifically social science-informed definition of my research focus, it follows that the peer group itself must be understood as an actor in its own right, operating as a whole in the sense of being a ‘stockholder’ of collective knowledge and an agent of practice (cf. also Schäffer, 2011). Furthermore, peer groups are located on an intermediate level between ‘large’ collectives and ‘single’ individuals (Zander, 2019b). As a social grouping, peer groups occupy a distinct position within society. On the one hand, they bring individuals together into a group; on the other, peer groups are embedded in ‘larger’ social collectives (e.g. school classes or sport teams) and embody various social affiliations (e.g. milieu or gender affiliations). The theoretical approach to studying a peer group understood in this way will be specified in more detail below.

2.1.2 Conceptualising the Peer Group as a Multidimensional Collective

The praxeological sociology of knowledge is particularly suitable for systematically and theoretically conceptualising peer groups as multidimensional collectives, and to empirically investigate the collectively shared perspectives of adolescent peer groups on (sporting) practices in school and during leisure time. This approach, developed by Bohnsack (among others, 2017) building on Mannheim’s work from as early as the 1920s–1940s (e.g. 1980), grounds theory in empirical research. In Bohnsack’s work, empirical studies served as the starting point for theoretical development, with a study on adolescent peer groups serving as the central point of departure. This particular study (cf. Bohnsack, 1989) has had a profound influence on me and my collective-centred perspective on peer groups. It provides a very clear and vivid illustration of what is meant by collectivity (cf. e.g. p. 21–23). *Drawing on this study, I assume that groups develop a collective practice that enables deeply embedded and lasting relationship structures as well as distinct forms of belonging to emerge or for existing ones to fully evolve.* The fundamental assumptions of the praxeological sociology of knowledge that are relevant to my research will be elaborated in more detail below and synthesised into a conceptualisation of the peer group as a multidimensional collective.

The praxeological sociology of knowledge encompasses social-theoretical assumptions and methodological principles for investigating the collective dimensions of social practice. In recent decades,¹³ this approach has become increasingly differentiated, extending, among others, into fields such as the sociology of thought and culture (cf. e.g. Corsten, 2010; Jung, 2007), as well as methodological developments across various fields of research (cf. e.g. school as a research object, Bohnsack, 2023), highlighting its potential within contemporary social sciences. This potential extends beyond research on adolescent peer groups (among others, Bohnsack, 1989; Rosenberg, 2008, Amling, 2015) and has inspired me to further advance peer group research in line with this collective-centred approach (see the concluding chapter for details, Chapter 4).

As a sociologically oriented approach, the praxeological sociology of knowledge is primarily concerned with the social dimension of reality. In this context, 'social' is not to be understood in a normative or evaluative sense, but rather that reality is produced through human interactions and embedded within cultural and social contexts. Social reality can thus refer to linguistic expressions, physical practices or material objects. In principle, it is also assumed that social reality only exists in the plural, manifesting in everyday life as multiple social realities. *Like other sociological approaches that aim to explain the 'social' through the social, the praxeological sociology of knowledge focuses on the social constitution of these social realities.* As a praxeological sociology of knowledge (Bohnsack, 2017), it focuses on the practices through which social realities are developed and enacted. Thereby, it contributes to a theory of practice,¹⁴ which in the context of the so-called '*practice turn*' has also become established within sport-pedagogical research. *From a praxeological perspective on peer groups, the collective dimension manifests in the group's practices, i.e. in the interactions among its members. Both the group itself and individuals' membership within it are established from within through practice.* Here, the praxeological sociology of knowledge is less concerned with the 'what', that is, the content of a given

13 A detailed discussion of this broad application and further development, which is also evident in sport-pedagogical research (cf. Stamm et al., 2024 for details), lies beyond the scope of this book. Instead, I will focus only on those aspects that are directly relevant to my research (see, among others, Zander, 2020a for more details).

14 Practice theories are grounded in several fundamental assumptions: "an 'implicit', 'informal' logic of practice that anchors the social in practical knowledge and 'ability'; a 'materiality' of social practices dependent on bodies and objects; and finally, a tension between routinisation and the systematically justifiable unpredictability of practices" (Reckwitz, 2003, p. 282). Throughout this book, I repeatedly link social practices with the concept of culture. "The fact that practice theory can be understood as a form of 'cultural theory', in which the social world derives its coherence from meaningful orders of knowledge, through collective forms of understanding and meaning, through symbolic orders in the broadest sense" (Reckwitz, 2003, p. 287).

practice, and more with the 'how' to understand the underlying structures that shape people's everyday actions. This 'how' is reflected in actors' implicit, practice-guiding stocks of knowledge.

The main objective of the praxeological sociology of knowledge is to describe the implicit knowledge underlying individuals' practices and to explain how these practices are formed. The so-called 'documentary meaning' (*Dokumentsinn*) lies at the centre of this approach, which becomes apparent only when the various features of a social reality are considered in relation to one another (or more precisely, when this coherence is uncovered by researchers applying the documentary method, see Chapter 2.2). At the same time, the praxeological sociology of knowledge emphasises the existential determination (*Seinsgebundenheit*) of individuals' implicit knowledge. Using the concept of 'documentary meaning' reveals not only the knowledge itself, but also its practical existential background (*Seinshintergrund*) and the process through which it is formed. This formation of knowledge is understood as being rooted in collectively shared experiences that are translated into current practice, much like a biographical legacy of the past. An existential background, such as unemployment, typically extends beyond a single individual, shaping the perspectives of multiple individuals. Drawing on Corsten (2010), who builds on Mannheim's work, this is reflected in two key premises:

- (1) "No single individual in a group can possess all the knowledge that constitutes the group's experience".
- (2) "By their very nature, collective ideas cannot be realised by individual group members" (Corsten, 2010, p. 54f.).

In this context, it is important to note that the validity of collective ideas does not equate to universal truth; rather they are only meaningful for those who use them as a frame of reference. Consequently, the coexistence of multiple collective ideas can be presumed. Moreover, social practice is not guided by a single collective idea, but by a complex structure of several, sometimes competing or overlapping collective ideas.

Within peer groups, such collective ideas manifest in context-specific ways and can be revealed through dimensions of comparison, highlighting differences within shared commonalities and commonalities within differences, as reflected in the collectively shared perspectives of the peer groups under study (cf. Chapter 2.2). For example, differences among adolescents can become a unifying group characteristic when non-club athletes in a school class form their own subgroup based on a shared collective understanding of club sport. *Such contextually emerging connections between individuals are likely the rule in everyday life rather than the exception. These connections dynamically reshape the signif-*

icance of similarities and differences, with peer status being continuously renegotiated. Within existing peer groups, similarities among members are further differentiated along specific group characteristics, such as gender. Consequently, peer groups create homogeneities across multiple spheres, which can be understood as distinct dimensions of peer-being (e.g. classmates, sport club peers, age peers, etc.). In this book I therefore refer to peer groups as multidimensional collectives.

From the perspective of the praxeological sociology of knowledge, the development and enactment of practices through which the peer group manifests as a multidimensional collective should be understood as a fundamentally knowledge-based process.¹⁵ *The analytical distinction¹⁶ between communicative knowledge, which is embedded in the explicit meaning of practice, and conjunctive knowledge, which can be reconstructed through the documentary meaning approach, is central to the praxeological sociology of knowledge.* Communicative knowledge is consciously accessible, while conjunctive knowledge is not readily available for reflection (see the detailed section on orientations below). For example, when peer groups respond to a question about their practices in PE class, they may describe how they perform different sports. At the same time, their accounts also reveal their experiences with the PE teacher's instructional expectations and/or the performance hierarchies that exist among classmates.

The difference between communicative and conjunctive forms of knowledge, each with its distinct meaning, applies to all forms of human practice. Bohnsack (2017, p. 107), drawing on Mannheim (2004, p. 296), describes this as the “duality of behaviours in each individual with respect to both concept and reality”. Accordingly, the development and enactment of social realities are always structured along interrelated dimensions: a propositional component, connected to the immanent meaning, and a performative component, connected to the documentary meaning, which often stand in marked contrast to one an-

15 Focusing on knowledge seemed sensible because I realised how pervasive it is and what it entails. This is well-illustrated in the following quotation: “As the moment one begins to think about something, whether a research problem or an everyday question such as where to find something to do, one is already engaging with knowledge. Knowledge is not only what we ‘carry in our heads’. It is also expressed in physical skills, e.g. when riding a bicycle, cracking an egg, or kissing someone. Knowledge shapes how we experience the situation we are in, in the here and now, in this or that way—be it a work meeting, a flirtation, a lunch—and sometimes all of these simultaneously. Knowledge also enables us to define the present moment and to act accordingly. Nevertheless, it does not preclude the possibility that we may be mistaken or perceive it differently from others” (Keller & Dimbath, 2017, p. 1).

16 This guiding distinction is formulated in different ways conceptually, as illustrated by the following quotation: “The two levels can also be succinctly described as those of habitus and social norm, although the distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge does not align neatly with that between habitus and norm” (Bohnsack et al., 2022, p. 16).

other (Bohnsack, 2017). The interplay of these two forms of knowledge makes the pattern of practice complex, with important implications for research. The praxeological sociology of knowledge provides further analytical tools in the form of so-called ‘meta-categories’.

Meta-categories are relatively abstract concepts that provide a theoretical framework for investigating a wide range of research topics (cf. Bohnsack, 2017). *Their use ensures that the central theoretical premises of the praxeological sociology of knowledge are integrated into the study of peer groups as a research subject. At the same time, meta-categories serve as a heuristic starting point for empirical analyses, guiding the interpretation of these categories, but may extend beyond them.* “The meta-theory of the praxeological sociology of knowledge is not a system of hypotheses. Its theoretical categories primarily function as a tertium comparationis, structuring comparative analysis and demonstrating their value within it” (Bohnsack, 2023, p. 106). Using a praxeological methodology, these meta-categories can be adapted or further developed in relation to the specific research topic. Accordingly, I aim to formulate concrete research questions to describe the peer group as a multidimensional social collective. To this end, I focus primarily on two meta-categories: (i) ‘orientation’, and (ii) ‘space of experience’, which can be studied independently, but which are also closely intertwined in the study of peer groups. I will demonstrate this later when addressing the question of (iii) the unequal alignment of orientations and spaces of experience.

(1) Shared Orientations of Peer Groups

The meta-category ‘orientation’ is closely linked to concrete practices and can be defined more precisely as the orientation underlying a given practice. Its conceptualisation is rooted in a practice-theoretical¹⁷ perspective, focusing on social practices and, through their description, aiming to uncover collectively shared orientations among multiple actors. To this end, this approach builds on the fundamental distinction between the two forms of knowledge and their interplay with the subcategories ‘orientation pattern’ and ‘orientation framework’ (Bohnsack, 2012). Orientation pattern refers to communicative knowledge, which can be described as explicit or theoretical knowledge about practices. In contrast, the orientation framework is shaped by conjunctive stocks of knowledge, reflecting the development of practice in an implicit or non-theoretical manner that can only be uncovered through the reconstruction of documentary meaning (see Chapter 2.1.2). It should be noted, however, that orientation

17 In my reading of the praxeological sociology of knowledge as a theory of practice, the agency of the peer groups interviewed is neither denied nor subordinated to the primacy of practice.

patterns can also guide practice and constitute an essential component of peer group practices. Both aspects of the concept of orientation are therefore closely interrelated; studying the orientation framework also requires interpretive consideration of propositional meanings (cf. Chapter 2.2). The methodological challenge lies in abstracting a collectively shared orientation with its patterns and typical structures from the orientations of individual peer group members. Empirically, it remains to be determined whether, and if so which, orientations are shared among members and to what extent these can be considered group-specific or characteristic of the peer group's practices as a whole. To describe a peer group's collectively shared orientation, which may encompass different components of knowledge, I refer in this book to (group-related) collective orientation patterns or to (cross-group) orientation types.

Research Question: What collective orientations can be reconstructed in peer groups' sporting practices?

Beyond the content- and knowledge-based orientation, it is particularly relevant for pedagogy to examine whether and how such orientations remain constant or change over time. The SpOK study, which provides the empirical foundation for my research, was carried out as a longitudinal study with adolescents aged 12 to 14 who attended the seventh and ninth year at various schools in North Rhine-Westphalia (see Chapter 2.2). The seventh year of school marks the end of the orientation phase and represents the extended transition between primary school and various forms of lower secondary education ('Sekundarstufe I') (Kramer, Helsper, Tiersch & Ziems, 2013). As this transition concludes, the seventh year of school marks the beginning of a school-track-specific educational trajectory and represents a potential turning point in how students perceive and evaluate school. Within this evolving context, both the transformation of existing orientations and the emergence of new orientations towards school-related activities become increasingly likely.

(2) Conjunctive Spaces of Experiences for Peer Groups

The meta-category 'space of experience', just like the concept of orientation, can be understood from a practice-theoretical perspective, while also being connected to theories of socialisation, organisation and society. It focuses primarily on the formation of individuals' practice-guiding orientations, which, according to Bohnsack (2017), are embedded within interactive, organisational or social spaces of experience, and can therefore be examined from different perspectives. Conjunctive spaces of experience do not represent purely linguistic or abstract meanings for individuals; rather, they are rooted in everyday cultures and shaped by concrete personal experiences that are collectively shared in similar ways.

Starting from the central premise that individuals' practices (including their thinking, emotions, wants) are tied to their being, i.e. to their concrete biographical contexts, it can be assumed that the knowledge invoked in adolescents' communalisation into peer groups likewise reflects this connection to their being, manifesting through their participation in specific experiences. "We are communal only insofar as we move together through shared timebound experiences" (Mannheim, 1980, p. 77). While the concept of orientation describes the practice, the space of experience concept explains how orientations are formed through these shared timebound experiences. Both real groups as well as groups of individuals who share structurally identical experiences are carriers of conjunctive experiences. For example, a specific orientation emerges when individuals are included in an educational milieu's space of experience. This does not imply a causal or socially deterministic logic, but rather reciprocal processes of formation: spaces of experience shape orientations and vice versa. In this context, it is important to note that both the formation of orientations as well as their continuity and transformation are linked to these spaces of experience. Furthermore, in this study, conjunctive spaces of experience are intended to capture cultural constructs such as sport or classroom instruction, understood in terms of their practically lived and socially shared meanings. These spaces provide a framework for describing individuals' communities of experience (e.g. the conjunctive space of experience in PE shared by students).

Research Question: What conjunctive spaces of experience can be reconstructed in peer groups' sporting practices?

Peer groups can be studied as interactive spaces of experience, grounded in the shared socialisation biographies of their members. The peer group as a conjunctive space of experience can be understood in two ways: on the one hand, it encompasses the conjunctive experience of membership within the peer group. More formally, this refers to the context-independent experience of being embedded in a group and participating in its relationships, which can be expressed, for example, through feelings of belonging and recognition, and which can also serve to connect different peer groups within collective communities of experience (among others, Amling, 2015). On the other hand, peer group-related spaces of experience can also be defined at the content level, e.g. along sport-related contexts of practice¹⁸ (e.g. PE). Here, structurally identical experiences within

18 A common approach in sport pedagogy is to differentiate sport-related contexts of practice into formal (e.g. school sport), non-formal (e.g. sport clubs), and informal (e.g. recreational sport), or to examine movement, play and sport across different educational settings (see, among others, Bindel et al., 2022). Whether these contexts of practice also constitute conjunctive spaces of experience remains an empirical question.

the respective sport contexts must first be reconstructed to identify a specific space of experience.

(3) Alignments Between Collective Orientations and Spaces of Experience

Members of a peer group simultaneously belong to multiple spaces of experience, as a space of experience “captures a collectivity that is independent of the given group, connecting those who participate in its practices and thus in the knowledge and meaning structures inherent to that space of experience” (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 288). To make sense of the multitude of spaces of experience within peer groups, it is useful to differentiate them along organisational or societal spaces of experience (see above). An organisational space of experience, e.g. can be understood as the conjunctive experience of being a student, which connects current and former students through its obligatory and compulsory nature. In contrast, the gender or social-milieu affiliations of peer group members point to societal spaces of experience. As these examples illustrate, it can be assumed that members of a peer group generally belong to multiple spaces of experience. Drawing on structurally identical experiences, they can share these experiences with others both within and outside their peer group, thereby integrating into other cultural communities. Consequently, different experiences from multiple cultural fields and various contexts of practice always overlap within a peer group, leading to shifts in the relative emphasis of orientations or to specific interpretations of spaces of experience.

Orientations are not always fully realised in all spaces of experience. At the same time, the experience structures within these spaces are not inherently compatible with all peer group orientations, as illustrated by the example of school. Drawing on analyses of the “student habitus” (Helsper et al., 2014; Helsper et al., 2017), it can be assumed that the alignment between orientations and spaces of experience varies depending on the habitus configurations that students ‘bring in’ from outside school and those ‘expected’ by school, as reflected in the structure of field-specific requirements. Linked to this, misalignments can be identified that highlight social inequalities. These differences have real effects, influencing individuals’ lifestyle/life prospects (Bauer, 2012). Misalignments can therefore be understood as mechanisms that generate distinctions that reinforce disadvantage (Hormel, 2012), contributing to phenomena of ex-

clusion such as discrimination and marginalisation.¹⁹ Thus, alignment serves as an additional framework for peer groups' collective practices, shaping both the formation and realisation of orientations and spaces of experience. To highlight social inequalities, my analysis examines alignment within societal spaces of experience, characterising their meanings and relevance in terms of social affiliations such as educational milieu, age and gender. I subsequently refer to these as educational milieu-specific alignment.

Research Question: What alignments between collective orientations and conjunctive spaces of experience can be reconstructed in peer groups' sporting practices?

From an analytical perspective, peer group practices can be characterised by harmonious, ambivalent or antagonistic alignments between orientations and spaces of experience. Harmonious alignments exhibit a high degree of correspondence between a group's orientations and the spaces of experience in school and leisure. Ambivalent alignments involve a partial correspondence of orientations with specific experience structures within these spaces, while antagonistic alignments show no correspondence or even conflicting alignments between a group's orientations and its spaces of experience. The question of changes that occur during the transition from childhood to adolescence, a topic that remains largely underexplored in sport-pedagogical research, is of particular interest here. Concluding this subchapter on the theoretical framework, it is worth emphasising that by employing the praxeological sociology of knowledge to conceptualise the peer group as a multidimensional social collective, I aim to move beyond the partly one-sided perspectives and fragmented areas of inquiry that have characterised sport-pedagogical research on adolescents' school and extracurricular sporting experiences.

Building on previous studies of school and recreational sport, which often divide tasks along disciplinary lines, e.g. sport pedagogy, school sport research, sport sociology, and youth sport research, I aim to promote a fundamental rethinking of both the prevailing research focuses and the premises underlying the role of the peer group. This rethinking should not to be understood as a call for a radical break, but rather as an expansion of existing approaches, which can be outlined in general terms or be deliberately overstated for the sake of clarity:

19 Amling (2015) notes that reconstructive research using the documentary method, particularly through 'milieu analysis', tends to focus primarily on describing differences and needs to be extended for the study of social inequalities. "Linking milieu analysis with a reconstruction of the logics of social fields, as well as with the analysis of discourses or classification systems, seems to me the most promising perspective for praxeologically informed and reconstructively oriented inequality research – although it remains to be clarified how this perspective can be methodologically incorporated" (Amling, 2015, p. 323). Building on this idea, I integrate individual reconstructions of social fields and social discourses into my analysis of alignments.

from the individual to the collective; from a static, homogenised analysis of current psychological states to a dynamic, differentiated reconstruction of the formation of social practice; from an isolated focus on individual sport contexts to an investigation of their relationships with other contexts, including embedded inequalities; and from cross-sectional study designs to longitudinal approaches that capture changes and continuities. This rethinking can serve as the starting point for developing a new line of sport-pedagogical research (cf. Chapter 4), which can be linked to existing approaches that address the same topic.

2.2 Methodological Approach: How to Empirically Investigate the Collectively Shared Perspectives of Peer Groups

As outlined in the introduction, my research project draws on data collected for the SpOK study, which involved 16 group discussions with peer groups analysed using the documentary method. Over the past three decades, the combination of these two approaches has proven highly effective for exploring collectively shared perspectives (cf. Bohnsack, Przyborski & Schäffer, 2010, for an overview). Both the group discussion method for data collection and the documentary method for data analysis share a common developmental trajectory, rooted in the praxeological sociology of knowledge (Bohnsack, 1989). Accordingly, the methodological reflections of the praxeological sociology of knowledge on collective orientations, conjunctive spaces of experience, and unequal alignments are directly tied to key methodological decisions.

The following sections present the data collection procedure (Chapter 2.2.1) and the data analysis (Chapter 2.2.2), both of which were conducted twice within the longitudinal study. The decisions made as part of the SpOK project, on which my research is based, are presented only briefly to provide readers with the essential information needed to understand and critically assess the results. More extensive and in-depth discussions of the methodological approach can be found in Zander (2020), while detailed insights into the data and their interpretations are available in Zander (among others, 2020a, 2020b).

2.2.1 Group Discussion Method for Data Collection

To empirically investigate peer groups' shared perspectives, group discussion methods²⁰ with so-called 'real groups' are particularly useful. Real groups are social groups that exist independently of the research setting, i.e. they are not formed exclusively for the purpose of data collection, and exhibit a relatively homogeneous structure in terms of orientations and spaces of experience (Loos & Schäffer, 2001; Schäffer, 2018). *In real groups, this homologous structure emerges naturally during discussions; while it may also arise in artificially composed groups, it is more difficult to pre-structure at the methodological level.* We contacted various schools to recruit peer groups as real groups. Once the school principals agreed to participate in the study, local teachers assisted us in obtaining parental consent and organising the individual groups. The criterion of the real group was largely²¹ met, as the participating students identified themselves as friends and as peer groups that also engage outside of school.

The groups consisted of three to six friends aged 12–13 (aged 14–15 in the second wave), who participated in 90-minute discussion sessions. The first wave of data collection, conducted in the seventh year at various schools²² across North Rhine-Westphalia, included 16 groups comprising a total of 71 participants. For the second wave, conducted in the ninth year of school, 14 of the original 16 groups were re-interviewed. The dropout rate was relatively low (only 15 students out of a total of 71). The loss of these two groups can be attributed

20 The group discussion method used in this study differs fundamentally from the focus group method or group interviews. Today, a wide variety of approaches to group discussions exists, designed for use in different contexts (cf., among others, Kühn & Koschel, 2011; Lamnek, 2005). Looking at the historical development of group discussions as a method, distinct stages can be identified in terms of their underlying theoretical models (cf., among others, Bohnsack, 2010, pp. 205–209, for an overview). These partly implicit and partly explicit theoretical approaches include (Bohnsack et al., 2006, p. 7): the focus on the individual in public debate (1950s), the informal group opinion (early 1960s), and the interpretive negotiation of meaning (late 1960s). Since the mid-1980s, and in the present study, preference has been given to the model of collective orientation patterns.

21 With a few exceptions, we also refined our 'wording'/our address over time (see detailed considerations in the conclusion, Chapter 4.1).

22 Depending on the specific characteristics of the schools, distinct orientations among students, as well as notable school-related experience structures, were identified (cf. Chapter 3.2 for details). Beyond the differences between the German 'Hauptschule' (general secondary school with a vocational focus) and 'Gymnasium' (academic secondary school preparing students for university), additional features emerged: some schools were located in urban areas, others in rural settings, and some were denominational and/or had a specialised academic focus (sport, music). Although the schools themselves were not the SpOK study's primary focus and mainly served as sites for recruiting and interviewing different peer groups, I nevertheless sought, at least in part, to describe these school-specific characteristics from the peer groups' perspective (among others, Zander, 2020c).

either to organisational circumstances within the school or to interruptions in the students' educational trajectory (such as school transfers).

In selecting the groups, a deliberately heterogeneous sample was chosen to capture the underlying diversity of life worlds, encompassing potentially differing orientations and spaces of experience, and to minimise the risk of (stereotypical) homogenisation in empirical comparisons. Within the sample, care was taken to ensure a balanced distribution across gender (female/male), migration background (present/absent), and school type (Gymnasium (academic secondary school preparing students for university)/Hauptschule (general secondary school with a vocational focus)). These criteria were established with reference to existing research, particularly to account for social inequalities in sport.²³ In addition to all-boy and all-girl groups, there were three mixed-gender groups. Boys attending a Gymnasium were less willing to participate in the study, resulting in an overrepresentation of girl groups. The sample also showed a strong orientation towards sport, with only two female students reporting no engagement in sport during their leisure time. Compared with students attending a Hauptschule, Gymnasium students were more frequently involved in club sport, and dropout rates were lower. Time-intensive participation in competitive or high-performance sport was limited to only a few individuals (cf. Zander, 2020b for details on the sample).

Group discussions conducted according to the methodology of praxeological sociology of knowledge are interactional and communicative processes that typically centre on shared biographical and collective experiences (cf. Schäffer, 2011, p. 76). *A defining feature of this approach is self-direction, which occurs when the group adopts its own system of relevance through narratives and descriptions, rather than (primarily) responding to the discussion leaders' system of relevance (Schäffer, 2011, p. 76).* In this context, discussion leaders acted as guests within the group, listening to the participants' interactions. At the same time, all participants were aware that the discussion served a specific research purpose and was partially structured around predetermined topics. Each group was presented with the same initial question: how they had come to form a 'group'.²⁴ This question sought to explore the connections between group mem-

23 Against the background of particularly relevant empirical findings on the socio-structural differentiation of sport engagement in adolescence, these criteria were selected for the SpOK project as key dimensions of inequality (cf. Thiele & Burrmann, 2020). Another criterion (the degree of activeness in sport) could not be implemented for practical reasons (it was difficult to define and therefore could not be assessed in advance).

24 With the opening question, 'Tell us how you became a group', it was possible, at a relatively early stage of the discussion, to capture the formation of each group and use this as a framework that guided the subsequent discussion and later interpretation. In general, it became evident that the peer groups developed more or less consistent (shared) orientations. This sometimes occurred in very different ways.

bers (e.g. through shared sporting practices). Building on this, a narrative-generating prompt was introduced, focusing on the group's central activities. The aim was to investigate both school-based and extracurricular activities and to identify additional commonalities or dimensions of peer-being. Over the course of the discussion, the groups addressed both topics they chose themselves and topics provided by the discussion leaders. At this stage, the discussion leaders steered the conversation towards PE.

In the second part of the group discussion, the process was extended through the use of visual methods into a 'group work process' (Kirchhoff, 2016, p. 81) to gain a deeper understanding of the physical dimension of social practice (cf. Kirchhoff & Zander, 2018 for details). During this phase, the peer groups were asked to create a picture collage of body-related themes and, at the conclusion, to take a group selfie.²⁵

2.2.2 Documentary Method for Data Analysis

The group discussions were analysed using the documentary method (among others, Bohnsack, 2010). One of the method's strengths lies in its ability to make explicit the implicit knowledge of practice embedded in individuals. By following specific methodological principles and structured procedural steps, the approach reveals the collectively shared dimensions of such knowledge. The method is termed documentary because its analytical focus lies on what the data reveal about social practice. The meanings expressed in the data (e.g. statements in an interview, a group discussion, etc.) are therefore not treated as supposedly 'factual' content extracted directly from the data, nor as subjective truths reflecting individual intentions. Instead, they are reconstructed in terms of the underlying patterns that shape practice (see below). In both the SpOK project and in my research, the data analysis followed four steps (Bohnsack, 2010, pp. 34ff.):

In the *first step*, all group discussions were listened to as audio recordings and paraphrased according to their thematic flow to obtain a general overview of the topics discussed. Large portions of the discussions were subsequently transcribed. While all data from the first wave of collection were fully processed and subjected to extensive analysis, the data from the second wave have not yet been fully transcribed and evaluated. The transcripts were prepared following guidelines developed for the documentary method (Bohnsack, 2010, pp. 236.).

25 Since my primary research interest lies in the sport-related practices of peer groups rather than the physical dimension of social practice, I will not go into detail about this part of the group discussions. Nevertheless, there are many substantive overlaps between the two areas of inquiry. Together with my colleague Nicole Kirchhoff, I analysed selected visual data from the second part of the discussions and integrated the corresponding verbal data into my own findings (cf. Zander, 2019 for more details).

In the *second step*, individual passages were selected as units of analysis according to specific criteria (cf. among others, Bohnsack, 2010, p. 138). This stage is particularly important for studying peer groups' collectively shared perspectives, as the selected passages are primarily those that constitute collective centres of experience for the group. These passages are characterised by a high level of interaction, involving multiple participants and often featuring dramaturgical highlights, e.g. particularly metaphorical/vivid expressions.²⁶ "The more group members participate in the elaboration of a topic, the more relevant the topic is considered for the group" (Asbrand, 2011, p. 8). For each selected passage, a formulative interpretation was then produced, relating to the explicit meaning of the group's practice in terms of patterns of orientation. The analysis focused on what was said during the group discussion, or more precisely, on the themes that emerged. The description of peer groups' patterns of orientation, along with their associated communicative stocks of knowledge, was conducted using a paraphrasing approach.

In the *third step*, a reflective interpretation was produced for the same passages (partly within the scope of interpretation workshops), focusing on a sequential²⁷ reconstruction of the orientation framework. This step exemplifies the distinctive analytical shift in the documentary method from the 'what' to the 'how', based on the methodological distinction between communicative and conjunctive knowledge (see Chapter 2.1.2). The reflective interpretation captures the performative process through which a topic is developed and examines the specific ways in which social reality is constructed at the level of tacit conjunctive stocks of knowledge.

How the group addresses a given topic is of particular relevance, and is primarily revealed through the organisation of discourse. The reflective interpretation can be regarded as the core of the documentary method. In this step, the method fulfils the promise implied by its name: to identify "an identical element

26 This selection process of 'notable' passages also highlights the collective-centred approach's 'blind spot'. It does not systematically examine which topics are not shared by the group or not collectively addressed by it.

27 In this context, three successive discursive movements are analysed in each passage (cf. Przyborski, 2004, for details). A discourse begins with a proposition, which may be argumentative, descriptive or narrative, introducing a new topic or thematic aspect into the discussion, and reflects the group's orientation framework. The analysis focuses on identifying the orientation content conveyed in these propositions. Following this initial discourse unit, the proposition is processed in various ways, e.g. through elaboration or validation (Elaboration: How and by whom is the orientation content developed or expanded?; Validation: Is the orientation shared?; Antithetical differentiation: Is the orientation shared, but modified, differentiated or supplemented?; Opposition: Is the orientation rejected or challenged with a conflicting viewpoint?). The discursive movement concludes with a synthesis or conclusion, addressing how the orientation content is resolved or finalised.

in fundamentally different objective and expressive moments, namely the same documentary element” (Mannheim, 2004, p. 127). To achieve this, both within-case and cross-case comparisons of selected passages from the peer group discussions were conducted to identify empirical counterpoints that highlight the groups’ orientations, both positively (What is the group striving for?) and negatively (What is it distancing itself from?).

The focus was on identifying regularities in the repetition of specific orientations, conceptualised as the so-called ‘orientation patterns of the group’ (cf. previous Chapter 2.1.2). The most salient positive and negative counterpoints for a given orientation pattern were simultaneously used as points of comparison between cases. This comparative analytical approach, grounded in empirical counterpoints, allowed for the identification of both the position of the studied peer groups—and, by extension, the existential structuring of their knowledge—while also enabling the deliberate exclusion or reflexive consideration of my own position as the researcher.

Building on the results of the reflective interpretation, the *fourth step* involved two forms of typology construction, through which cross-case meaning structures were extracted from the data. Sense-genetic typification focuses on the knowledge that guides practice-oriented stocks of knowledge, while socio-genetic typification examines the social formation of this knowledge within conjunctive spaces of experience. The typologies were developed along various thematic dimensions that emerged from the comparative analysis (see step three). In the course of multidimensional typology construction, a single case (i.e. a specific peer group) could be classified under multiple typologies, representing a particular orientation or the experience of a specific space of experience from different analytical perspectives. Within this multidimensional approach, the inclusion of longitudinal data introduces an additional temporal dimension, allowing for the development of a process typology.

For this purpose, three meta-theoretical categories were applied (cf. Krüger et al., 2012; Winter, Niemann, Kotzyba & Hübner, 2019), i.e. (i) dynamic continuity, (ii) partial change, and (iii) fundamental transformation of collective orientation patterns, which were used as a starting point. These categories were conceived as heuristic tools to sensitise us to the processual nature of peer groups’ collective orientations. For my research (and for the SpOK study as a whole), it should be noted that the available results primarily reflect a sense-genetic typification, enriched by initial systematic cross-case comparisons in terms of sociogenesis. Here, as well as for the data from the second wave and the associated longitudinal analysis, further possibilities for interpretation remain to be explored.

In summary, the documentary method, through its focus on different forms of knowledge (including their sometimes tense relationships), provides a nuanced account of how a peer group’s practices develop. Through a multi-step

data analysis, the orientations that guide this practice can be reconstructed, together with the associated spaces of experience and alignments that constitute the peer group as a multidimensional social collective. Comparative analyses serve as the central methodological principle of documentary interpretation, revealing differences within shared experiences and commonalities across divergent ones. These patterns form the various dimensions of peer-being identified in this study.

3 Results: Collective Orientations, Spaces of Experience and Their Alignments

The results of my research are presented across three chapters, each structured around one of the three central research questions. This allows for a differentiated account of peer groups' school-related and extracurricular practices during the transition from childhood to adolescence with a focus on their collective orientations (Chapter 3.1), their conjunctive spaces of experience (Chapter 3.2), and the unequal alignments between collective orientations and conjunctive spaces of experience (Chapter 3.3).

3.1 Collective Orientations of Peer Groups

Whether and to what extent the groups interviewed can be considered peer groups in the sense defined by the study's guiding assumptions was unclear prior to data collection. My initial understanding of these groups relied on self-reports from individual group members and/or on attributions made by external observers, such as teachers. I treated this information as a set of preliminary assumptions about the groups. Questions concerning their status as real groups, their collective orientations and the extent to which members shared similar experiences were addressed empirically only during the data analysis. For this reason, these aspects are presented in the results section of this book rather than in the methods section. The first results chapter examines what characterises a group as a peer group and how members' practices can be understood from a collective-centred perspective (cf. also Zander, 2022a). *The presentation of results follows the members and their relevance structures.* In this context, my goal is to partially map the field of investigation and to illustrate the empirical differences among the peer groups studied as variations of communitisation (Chapter 3.1.1). Building on this focus on variations, the peer groups' practice-guiding orientations are presented in the form of a typology, which constitutes a central result of my research (Chapter 3.1.2). The chapter concludes with an interim summary and outlines initial implications for sport pedagogy (Chapter 3.1.3).

3.1.1 The Group in Focus: Variants of Peer Groups

The responses to the opening question, 'Tell us how you became a group', revealed that some adolescents had known each other for quite some time. In some cases, the formation of these groups dated back to early childhood, emerging in institutional settings (e.g. kindergarten) or in private ones (neighbourhoods or extended family circles). By the time of the interviews, however, the primary

factor shaping group composition was shared school attendance, which either deepened existing relationships and/or facilitated the development of new ones. While some relationships formed in primary school persisted through the transition to secondary school, the majority of students had reorganised into new groups by the seventh year of school, which largely remained intact by the second wave of data collection in the ninth year. The development of peer relationships, considered a key developmental step in adolescents associated with specific demands, e.g. the acquisition of social competencies (Eschenbeck & Lohaus, 2022), was largely achieved in terms of peer group membership between the seventh and ninth year of school.

The stability of belonging may also contribute, over time, to the intensification of relationships between individual members. For instance, in a group of five, two members may engage in deeper exchanges as their relationship evolves.²⁸ Drawing on the theoretical understanding of the peer group as a multidimensional collective, it can be concluded that the groups studied here qualified as peer groups in the sense of a group of roughly age-matched individuals who had shared several years of school experience (cf. Chapter 3.2.1 for a detailed discussion). Although opportunities for contact within a school are broadly distributed, the formation of school-related peer relationships is often confined to shared class or grade contexts. Consequently, the shared experience of being school peers is closely linked to age similarity and common class/grade affiliations.

At Hauptschule schools, however, grade repetitions and school transfers may result in relatively large age differences of two to three years²⁹ within and between the interviewed peer groups. These differences are particularly noteworthy when describing the transition from childhood to adolescence, as even a one- or two-year age gap can significantly influence adolescents' development. At the same time, within the context of normal developmental heterogeneity, such differences do not necessarily lead to divergences in experiences. Consequently, the transition from childhood to adolescence is not only a question of age/school or grade/year, but also concerns the development of practices, orientations and spaces of experience that are specifically child- or adolescent-oriented within the group. This perspective also considers how the peer group defines itself in relation to developmental aspects and how I, as the researcher,

28 This analytical focus on the internal differentiation of relationships within peer groups could be further deepened. The question of how subgroups are formed within a peer group—similar to the issue of membership status of individual group members (who may, in some cases, only 'drop out' of the group in relation to specific topics)—represents a blind spot in my collective-centred interpretation of group discussions.

29 For example, in the seventh year, we interviewed peer groups at Hauptschule schools whose members were between 12–15 years old, or in some cases between 13–16 years old.

can position the group within the broader life stages of childhood and adolescence.

In the SpOK study sample, peer groups ranged from three to six members. Regardless of group size, they could be distinguished along a continuum of relationship quality, from close to loose ties, which is also reflected in different group self-conceptions:

Peer groups characterised by close relationships perceive themselves explicitly as a group with distinct features, clearly defining boundaries both internally and externally. As confirmed by other peer research (Amling, 2015), these boundary constructions are primarily based on comparisons with other age mates. The self-definition of adolescent peer groups is shaped by the negotiation and reflection of normative expectations and is intertwined with a sense of being unique or different. Engaging with these differences provides peer groups with a distinct space of experience in which they can reaffirm their membership and exclusivity of their peer relationships. Close peer relationships are characterised by specific qualities, expressed in valued traits such as friendship, trustworthiness and helpfulness. These relational qualities, mentioned here only as illustrative examples, indicate a certain degree of intimacy of peer-being, which is valued not only by adolescents themselves but also in scholarly discourse. For instance, under the concept of primary groups, such intimacy is regarded as fertile ground for identity development (Schäfers, 2010), and can serve as a more or less explicit ideal model for approaches in sport pedagogy.

Peer groups characterised by loose relationships tend to perceive themselves as part of broader peer collectives. As elements of a social network³⁰ (*Geflecht* – ‘web’), they rarely emphasise group-specific exclusivity; instead, they highlight shared experiences, such as belonging to the same class, grade, school or neighbourhood. Consistent with the distinction between close and loose ties, peer groups can also be differentiated according to whether their understanding of group membership is primarily grounded in shared personality traits of the members or participation in a common context of practice. In the first case, the focus is closely linked to the question of personality compatibility, whereas the second emphasises functional considerations, e.g. whether and how to interact within a given context for a specific purpose. Group processes aimed at cooperative task completion, such as those commonly observed in PE (among others, Wibowo & Bähr, 2018), draw on these context-based functional expectations

30 I use the term here following Krappmann and Oswald (1989), who, among others, studied children’s networks in primary school. They define a network (*Geflecht* – literal translation “web”) as a social structure of six to eight children, from which two or three new relationships repeatedly emerge in the form of smaller pairings and group constellations. According to their study, a network is more temporally stable than a group, as it is less likely to possess the same fixed structures that characterise a group.

and engage adolescents as students of equal status and as members of a class or learning community.

For the further presentation of results, it is important to emphasise that even peer groups characterised by looser relationships engage in discussions that extend beyond purely functional, school-related interactions and often take on a more private character. Furthermore, the group as a whole may address issues raised by individual members. Thus, loose peer groups can also function as spaces of solidarity and mutual support. *Overall, for both types of peer groups, it can be concluded that the group's self-description, together with the analytical classification of relationship structures by external observers, provides important insights into shared orientations and a collective history of experiences among members. This highlights the multidimensionality of peer group practices, which requires in-depth analysis to capture specific dimensions of communitisation. This multidimensionality will be further unpacked and systematically organised in the following results sections.*

Regardless of differences between peer groups, their position on the continuum from close to loose relationships, or whether their understanding of group membership is member- or context-based, the peer groups interviewed demonstrated a keen awareness of social belonging, relationships and group dynamics. In this context, criticism of perceived injustices emerged as a cross-cutting theme, particularly with respect to the behaviour of teachers, and was shared across different peer groups. Moreover, the adolescents shared an appreciation for the positive social relationships within their peer group. Spending time together generates unique opportunities for shared experiences and interaction. Activities such as 'hanging out', 'chilling' or 'going into town' exemplify how peer groups often need very little to make their time together meaningful. What matters most is having topics for discussion, which allows adolescents to form as a group and act as one. Seemingly trivial gestures such as ambiguous glances, jokes or playful teasing both drive and sustain the group's interactions. In addition, shared participation in school, with its wide range of experiences, provides sufficient material for conversation. *In this way, the peer group constitutes a potentially inexhaustible space of collective practices and engagement for adolescents.*

It should also be noted that the peer groups interviewed were fully aware that they are not the only social space in an adolescent's life – parents, other family members, school-related groups such as classes and 'AGs' (German abbreviation for '*Arbeitsgemeinschaften*', i.e. working groups) or recreational groups such as sport teams can also hold particular significance, at least for individual members. However, an important distinction must be made regarding how the peer group perceives an individual's social embeddedness and its expectations of peer group membership. It is necessary to differentiate whether the group

perceives itself as just one of many reference groups or as a 'total institution'. For the purposes of further analysis, it is therefore important to consider the extent to which peer groups acknowledge the multiple memberships and affiliations of individual members and incorporate these into the peer group as multidimensional forms of peer-being.

Over the course of the group discussions, it became clear what the groups focus on and through which topics they collectively define themselves. *From my external perspective as a researcher, the peer groups interviewed generally cannot be adequately described by a single overarching theme.* Instead, members often share multiple topics of interest and are connected through a variety of school-related and extracurricular activities. Especially with regard to developmental steps during the transition from childhood to adolescence (among others, Hurrelmann & Quenzel, 2012), specific commonalities emerged in the practices of the 16 peer groups interviewed: alongside topics such as managing peer relationships and experiences of injustice (see above), the construction of gender identity was also central. These topics shaped the peer group members' practices in school-related and leisure-time contexts, including but not limited to sport. Additional topics included new media and personal appearance. In terms of practice, participation in sport represented only one of many activities for the peer groups; however, sport assumed a key role in the group discussions (also when prompted by the discussion leaders), providing more detailed insights.

A closer look at the sporting practices of the peer groups interviewed reveals a variety of settings and forms of participation (cf. Zander, 2020a; 2020b, for a detailed discussion of the engagement in sport of the 16 groups interviewed). In addition to school-related sport activities in 'AGs', recess and class trips, mandatory PE emerged as the central context for collective action within the peer group. Informal sport during leisure time also provides a valued setting for peer interaction in some groups, whereas organised club sport is typically pursued with other age mates outside the peer group.³¹ No groups that participated in the study were involved in scene sports or professional e-sports. Commercial fitness training in gyms held considerable significance for many groups, particularly as a means of body shaping in relation to prevailing beauty and health norms. However, the members of the 16 groups did not actively participate in such training themselves, citing age restrictions at gyms. Private fitness activities at home were practiced by only a small number of adolescents.

31 Whether peer group members engage in sport together also appears to depend on the adolescents' age. Although there is a lack of relevant studies, a tendency can be inferred from earlier research: "As individuals grow older, their group of friends loses significance as a universal context for engaging in joint physical activities. Particularly during the transition from childhood to adolescence, participation in sport with friends initially declines in quantitative terms" (Brinkhoff, 1998, p. 144).

Overall, the sample can be characterised as sport-oriented, with only two students from one group explicitly stating that they did not engage in any sport during their leisure time. Nevertheless, the meaning of sport varies across the groups and may also encompass everyday physical activities (e.g. walking the dog). Consequently, it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions about the adolescents' level of activeness, including exercise times/intensity. Although sport constitutes the dominant group activity for only some of the groups, activeness in sport emerges as a non-negotiable societal value that holds significance for all groups, at least on a communicative level. For example, all peer groups mentioned the positive effects of sport in discussions with the discussion leaders. However, the groups' perspectives on the benefits of physical activity were not always linked to their own experiences.

Unlike engagement in sport more generally, sport club membership—because it can be more clearly defined in terms of form and extent of involvement—allows for a more differentiated comparative analysis across groups. Here, major differences become apparent: some groups exclusively consist of members engaged in organised club sport, while others comprise members who do not participate in club sport at all (see Chapter 3.2.2 for more details). The orientation of those involved in club sport tends to be homogeneous, aligning with recreational or popular sport despite sport-specific differences. Only one group included an athlete who participates in competitions and trains more than three times a week, a circumstance that surfaced in peer discussions, e.g. in terms of time resources.

Peer group practices, as examined in the context of the SpOK project through group discussions, are primarily practices of conversation. Although these discussions were initiated by the researchers, the interactions often unfolded as largely self-directed within the peer group. During these moments of self-direction, I, as a researcher, had the opportunity to observe how group members interacted with one another, offering valuable insights into how they might behave as a group in more 'natural' settings outside the research setting. Group discussions also reveal how conversations between individuals are enacted in practice. Most peer groups engaged in elaborate narratives covering a wide range of topics, including not only events within the group but also media events. Consequently, mass media figures and the messages they convey became recurring topics of discussion. In addition to famous celebrities from film and music, these discussions also included 'well-known' influencers or even 'ordinary' YouTubers, whose online activities were widely recognised across nearly all peer groups.

When conducted in settings of physical co-presence, the group discussion method reveals the visual dimension of conversational practice. The reception of media discourses simultaneously takes shape as a form of practice, e.g. when

statements, clothing preferences, or even the 'entire' lifestyle of rappers are actively incorporated into one's own repertoire of behaviour. To adequately account for the scope of this conversational practice in terms of the 'what' and 'how', it is crucial to reconstruct peer groups' practice-guiding orientations using the documentary method. Drawing on insights from the praxeological sociology of knowledge (cf. Chapter 2.2, Bohnsack, 2017), it can be assumed that these orientations are embedded in multifaceted forms of practice both within and beyond the discussion setting, shaping the development and execution of practice.

3.1.2 Five Orientations of Practice within Peer Groups

A central focus of my empirical analyses is the investigation of the shared orientations of peer groups' practices. The scope of meaning that constitutes these orientations, as well as their collective dimension, can only be empirically reconstructed. It is also essential to examine their practical relevance, i.e. the extent to which these orientations are related to specific practices in particular situations, or whether they operate across situations and potentially even across contexts. A guiding assumption of this book (cf. Chapter 2.1.2) is that collectively shared orientations cannot be presumed solely on the basis of adolescents' formal membership in peer groups (e.g. attending the same school). This holds true even for shared experiences like participation in a specific school subject, such as PE. *Against this backdrop, one key finding of my research is that collectively shared orientations of practice could be reconstructed for each of the 16 peer groups interviewed across both waves of data collection.*

Practice-oriented knowledge that is relevant across different contexts and therefore not limited to specific activities, such as sport, or to particular settings, such as school, even if it manifests in them, is evident within peer groups of adolescents aged 12 to 14. Thus, the reconstructed orientations relate more broadly to the collective practices of the peer group as a whole.³² Empirical evidence from the group discussions shows that shared orientations provide a relatively robust framework for practice: the contributions of individual adolescents may

32 It is important to note that this practice does not occupy the same space across all peer groups, as there are substantial differences in where and when they engage in such practices. Some peer groups centre their shared practices primarily on school-related events (e.g. recess activities or class trips). Furthermore, the empirical data clearly show that this orientation also extends to activities carried out by individual members, which are subsequently discussed, interpreted and evaluated by all members from the peer group's collectively shared perspective (cf. Chapter 3.2.2). How individuals' practices are articulated collectively within the group would certainly be an interesting research topic for developmental psychology (as such individual-centred group discussions likely influence development). From a social psychological perspective, it would also be interesting to examine how group members talk about one another.

occasionally diverge, but these divergences do not fundamentally alter the overall orientation framework. Orientation as a shared framework for practice can be understood as a dimension of the multidimensional peer group concept. The adolescents interviewed within these peer groups share the same orientation (alongside other similarities).

In addition to shared orientations, my analysis also revealed that these orientations varied considerably *across* the 16 peer groups in the sample. Based on a sense-genetic typification using the documentary method, I identified five distinct types of orientation of practice among the peer groups. These were derived from various publications on individual case studies, group-related orientation patterns and transcript excerpts, and were specified for different contexts (cf. e.g. Zander, 2018; Zander, 2020c; Zander & Stamm, 2020, for school/PE, and Zander, 2016; Zander, 2020b, for leisure/club sport). In what follows, the collectively shared orientations are presented as a typology of orientations that has been abstracted from the individual peer groups and thus assumes an ideal-typical character. Each of the five orientation types can be associated with multiple peer groups within the sample. A longitudinal analysis (cf. Zander, 2020c; Zander et al., 2020) shows that while individual groups may exhibit slight shifts in orientation over time, the five types themselves remained consistent. With regard to the transition from childhood to adolescence, this points to a relatively stable yet substantively heterogeneous spectrum of orientations. During this life stage, peer groups organise their practices around:

1. *Certainty* of a structured life,
2. Personality *development*,
3. *Challenge* seeking among peers,
4. *Community* within the peer group,
5. Personal *autonomy*.

These five types of orientation towards peer group practices are briefly outlined based on key factors, followed by a comparative analysis.

(1) *Orientation Towards Certainty*³³

At the core of this orientation type lies the preservation of established routines and the associated sense of a structured life. For these peer groups, the subjectively perceived stability of their social environment is of central importance.

33 In earlier texts, I also referred to this orientation type as 'orientation towards routines'. Without changing the substantive focus of this orientation type, I have revisited the terminology, as the previous term could be misleading. From the perspective of the sociology of knowledge framework (Chapter 2.1.2), it must be assumed that all peer groups act in a routinised manner.

Family and school, with their predictable routines, exert a strong influence on the group's practices, while individuals in extracurricular institutions (e.g. sport clubs) also serve as key reference points. An orientation towards certainty is particularly evident in leisure time contexts, where it manifests most clearly, although it remains closely aligned with school-based logics. Thus, peer groups oriented towards certainty prefer leisure activities characterised by regular participation and habitual patterns. Weekly engagements in institutional settings play an important role in this regard.

Organised sport is understood as an integral part of leisure time and as a means for structuring everyday life. In contrast, trying out new or more adventurous activities, whether within or outside of sport, plays a subordinate role. Participation in sport club activities is not pursued at the group level but rather individually. Nevertheless, members of such peer groups encounter structurally comparable activities, role requirements and relationship constellations, such as friendships among sport team members. Overall, this orientation is largely past-oriented, as peer groups rely on well-established routines and have little need to continuously reorient their everyday life or actively plan and evaluate activities. In this respect, they stand in clear contrast to the future-oriented orientation towards development.

(2) Orientation Towards Development³⁴

The practices of peer groups associated with this orientation type are primarily directed towards the pursuit of long-term goals. Group members focus on developing and optimising their own personalities through participation in institutionalised activities within and outside of school. This presupposes a heightened awareness of one's abilities and relevant competencies. In PE, e.g. attention centres on the improvement of motor skills. As in the first orientation type, family and school exert a strong influence on everyday life. Individuals in extracurricular institutions serve as important reference points. However, leisure activities are largely pursued individually by the peer group members. What the group shares is a collective understanding of individualised development and optimisation trajectories. This orientation is reflected in their personal lifestyles and becomes evident in the group discussions, e.g. when members naturally report on different activities and explicitly frame these as personal hobbies. In this context, a variety of club-based sport activities is ambitiously pursued and attributed with contributing to personality development. Engagement in sport is also

34 In other contexts, I have described this orientation type in relation to leisure activities as an 'orientation towards optimisation' (Zander, 2020b). Optimisation, in my view, always implies a focus on application, utility or functionality. However, since this orientation is better understood as more open-ended in its outcomes and primarily relates to school, I have chosen 'development' here as the central designation.

understood as a counterbalance to academic demands, thereby indirectly supporting academic success. Informal sport activities complement these leisure activities and are sometimes performed within the peer group (among others, beach volleyball during visits to outdoor pools), promoting playful interaction and shared enjoyment.

(3) Orientation Towards Challenge³⁵

For peer groups that can be classified under this orientation type, the primary focus lies in experiencing challenging situations in which members must prove themselves. In the presence of peers, adolescents aim to demonstrate their competencies and to gain a sense of self. Peers more broadly are the most important reference points for members of such groups, as evidenced in the ways their practices, both in school and during leisure time, are strongly oriented towards earning validation from age mates within and outside their own peer group. In this context, family and school exert only a weak influence on their practices. The orientation towards challenge seeking among peers focuses on performance-related issues and partly overlaps with the previously described orientation type. However, unlike the previous type, the emphasis here is not on the developmental value of performance, but on the visibility of physical and sporting practices, how they are showcased in school as accomplishments and recognised by other peers as markers of special competence. In PE class, group members of this orientation type deliberately demonstrate their motor skills to distinguish themselves from their classmates. In leisure time contexts, the focus shifts towards action, often occurring in high-intensity situations through informally organised peer activities. For some groups, this includes informal sport (e.g. self-organised football games on a kickabout pitch), while others create such high-intensity moments without engaging in sport.

Overall, leisure activities within these peer groups are collectively oriented, with adolescents seeking out challenging experiences together. An orientation towards challenge provides a form of engagement in otherwise 'monotonous' leisure time, as individual recreational activities typically lack structure (e.g. no fixed weekly schedule or commitments). Seeking out and creating performance- and action-oriented experiences thus serves a structuring function for otherwise unstructured time, which the peer groups fill collectively. The practice associated with this orientation is primarily present-focused, as peer groups

35 In other publications, I have referred to this orientation type as 'orientation towards performance and action' (among others, Zander, 2020b). To achieve greater consistency in labelling the five orientation types, I focus here on the aspect of validation, which corresponds to successfully meeting challenges and encompasses both performance and action.

make situational decisions about activities and prioritise the immediate experience of engaging in subjectively thrilling situations.

*(4) Orientation Towards Community*³⁶

This orientation type centres on fostering and experiencing a sense of community within the peer group. Belonging to a stable peer group is the central prerequisite. For the adolescents, the members of the peer group, along with a few close friends, constitute the most important reference points. Life revolves around the relationships among group members and their interactions within the framework of shared group practices. School and recreational activities provide a cross-cutting context for these peer relationships, while parents and other external actors remain largely peripheral. Within school and PE, the orientation towards community often involves reinterpreting or even rejecting school- and PE-specific demands and norms, following the motto 'We're doing our own thing'. Peer groups that belong to this orientation type seek out spaces both within school and during leisure time where they can establish their own rules and ideas. Leisure is understood as freely available time, deliberately separated from adult supervision and expectations. The emphasis is on self-organised recreational activities, with the choice of activities and venues determined collectively by the peer group. While group members may express an interest in sport and participate in sporting practices, the group generally does not engage in sport together. Overall, this orientation is present-focused, centred on the peer group's shared experience of community in the here and now.

(5) Orientation Towards Autonomy

This orientation type is defined by adolescents' pursuit of autonomy in their practices both inside and outside of school. For these groups, sport, regardless of the setting, is particularly appealing when it can be performed as a self-determined activity. While the orientation is collectively expressed by the group, its focus ultimately lies on the individual and their personal practices. At the same time, individual friends and, in some cases, older individuals within institutional settings serve as important reference points in the adolescents' recreational activities. Recreational activities can therefore take place in both informal and formal contexts and across various group constellations, as long as it allows for

36 In other work, a colleague and I refer to this orientation type as 'orientation towards relationships' (Zander & Stamm, 2020), with a focus primarily on practices in PE. In other publications, I examine the same groups in greater detail with respect to their leisure activities (among others, Zander, 2020b). Considering both analyses together, the aspect of community emerges more prominently, which is why it has been incorporated into the current typology label.

the attainment of autonomy. Similar to peer groups oriented towards community, these adolescents want to make their own choices about activities without constraints by others. Family and school therefore exert only limited influence on their recreational activities. The focus lies on each individual's sense of alignment with their own feelings, needs and interests. While independence is a central concern, peer groups with this orientation also acknowledge the boundaries of their autonomy. They understand that in social contexts the preferences and wishes of others must also be considered.

However, when their scope for decision-making is restricted by what they perceive as arbitrary expectations or demands, they respond with resistance, and sometimes even withdrawal from the situation altogether. In this active rejection of imposed expectations, autonomy becomes visible as a form of identity work, an ongoing process through which they reaffirm who they want to be as individuals. Sporting practices are understood as largely non-instrumental in this orientation, valued instead for the enjoyment of movement. Adolescents that belong to this orientation type are open to new experiences and often decide spontaneously which activities to engage in. Their orientation can therefore be characterised as predominantly present-focused.

In sum, the strength of this sense-genetic typification lies in its ability to differentiate the collective orientations of peer groups. Rather than making generalised claims about their practices, the typology offers a nuanced account of the diverse stocks of knowledge that guide peer groups' practices. Viewed through the lens of the five orientation types—(i) certainty, (ii) development, (iii) challenge, (iv) community, and (v) autonomy—it becomes evident that adolescents in peer groups may, e.g. strive for personal growth within school contexts or focus primarily on cultivating social relationships. These five orientation types thus capture the heterogeneity of peer groups' 'inner' experiences across both school-related and extracurricular practices. As a dimension deeply rooted in the peer groups' lived experiences and their shared history as a collective, the groups' shared orientations emerge as a central feature of peer-being. Grounded in a common orientation towards practice, peer-being can—provided that members share structurally similar experiences of thematic dimensions—highlight both the potential and limits of the communitisation of individuals into social collectives that extend beyond their immediate groups. Future research in sport pedagogy should further investigate how such orientation-based forms of communitisation are established and how they expand. Moreover, these orientations provide educators with valuable analytical tools for designing sport programmes, e.g. for larger groups such as school classes and sport teams, as they support both the characterisation of target groups and the assessment of their initial learning conditions (cf. Chapter 3.1.3 for further details).

The typology offers a systematic overview of the similarities and differences in peer groups' orientations. It highlights the complexity of collective action, especially when, beyond the content-oriented focus of practice, additional comparative dimensions,³⁷ such as the significance of reference points, are considered (Zander, 2020b, for details). Through these comparative dimensions, the typology reveals both the shared features within a group and the distinction between groups, including the characteristic content of each orientation. *As a knowledge-based typology, it is not synonymous with the practices themselves; rather, it offers a framework for understanding the conditions under which concrete practices are developed and enacted.* The reconstruction of orientations is based on selective case comparisons, meaning that the different types also reflect the context-specific and aspect-focused approach used to examine the groups' practices.³⁸ What appears in the typology as a clear-cut 'either-or' distinction from an abstract, bird's-eye perspective does not exist in pure form at the level of individual groups. Instead, partial overlaps and point-by-point combinations occur, which can be explored in more detail using this typology. Various overlaps between the five orientation types also become evident through specific comparative dimensions. Some of these comparative dimensions function like poles along a continuum, on which the orientation types can be positioned with varying degrees of intensity. For example, the five orientation types can be mapped along the dimension of recreational activity organisation, ranging from planned to spontaneous activities. This will be illustrated in the second results section using the two modes of action – 'planned recreational activities within institutional settings' and 'spontaneous recreational activities in informal relationship contexts' (cf. Chapter 3.2.2.1).

From the perspective of describing the transition from childhood to adolescence, the question of how collective orientations evolve over time is particularly relevant. Although additional data from the SpOK project remain to be analysed, initial results are already available (cf. Zander, 2020b; Zander et al., 2020, for a comprehensive discussion). These findings focus on the development of orientations and the associated stocks of knowledge between the ages of 12/13 and 14/15. While orientations provide insights into past experiences, their practice-guiding nature makes them primarily relevant for the present

37 In addition to the content-oriented focus of practice, these include the adolescents' points of reference, the social context of their practices, the influence of family/school on their practices, the organisation of leisure or recreational activities, and the temporal orientation of their practices (Zander, 2020b).

38 Here I draw on Mannheim's considerations from Chapter 2.1.2, who emphasises that social practices and understanding always occur from the perspective of a specific group situated in space and time. Applied to research, this implies that every piece of knowledge is constructed from a particular perspective. Knowledge, therefore, cannot be absolute but must instead be examined in terms of how it is produced.

and future. The adaptation of an *orientation should be understood as inherently dynamic (cf. Chapter 2.1.2). Consequently, as peer groups continuously reorient themselves over time, individual orientations may emerge or disappear among group members. Whether and how orientations change over time is an empirical question.*

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the five orientation types remain stable between the ages of 12/13 and 14/15. Based on the cases analysed so far, no new types of orientation emerged, nor did any disappear. However, longitudinal case analyses of individual groups (cf. Zander et al., 2020) show that changes in orientation cannot be classified as either pure continuity or complete transformation. Instead, continuity and transformation occur simultaneously, forming domain-specific trajectories (e.g. within the school context) that intersect and interact.³⁹ *This dynamic complexity makes it difficult to draw general conclusions about changes in orientation type.* To avoid oversimplification, orientations should be examined longitudinally in a context-specific way, rather than reduced to a single overarching framework. This is particularly evident in the increasing adaptation to school values and norms, which varies across different groups. While school-related orientations undergo partial change, leisure-related orientations remain largely constant, highlighting that the positioning of peer groups within them strongly depends on their immediate relevance for the peer groups' members. Changes at the level of orientation are typically subtle and incremental, reflecting the overall stability of the groups' collective perspectives.

3.1.3 Interim Conclusion and Implications for Sport Pedagogy

The findings on the different variants of peer groups and their distinct orientation types can support sport-pedagogical research and practice in better understanding adolescents' peer-related communitisation and practices. The orientation typology, in particular, with its five orientation types, provides an initial heuristic framework for describing specific peer group practices and the associated dimensions of peer-being. As a conceptual differentiation tool, the typology can be applied in future studies and may inspire the development of practical approaches in sport pedagogy. Before exploring this topic in more detail, I would like to first address the scope of my findings.

39 In contrast to Winter et al. (2019), the SpOK study did not identify cases in which crises or acute tensions were observable at the level of group practice. The changes in orientations that we reconstructed are therefore considerably more subtle; following the motto 'constant dripping wears away the stone', these processes tend to be gradual or cumulative. This difference likely reflects the SpOK study's methodological approach, which focuses on reconstructing the collective perspectives of groups, whereas Winter et al. (2019) emphasise the collective perspective of individual members.

The orientation typology provides a structured understanding of peer groups, yet it is influenced by the SpOK study's selective sampling. The SpOK study focused on a specific age group and school- and sport-related contexts. While this allows for in-depth insights, it also points to the potential value of expanding the perspective to other age groups and settings. To more precisely capture the specificities of the transition from childhood to adolescence at the level of orientations, future studies should consider including proximate age groups (see Chapter 4.1 for a detailed discussion). Referring to the distinction between ideal types and individual cases highlighted in the results section, two limitations should be noted. *First*, each peer group shapes its practice in a unique way, making it inappropriate to typify groups entirely along a single orientation. Considering the complex history of experiences of peer group members, it is more useful—drawing on theoretical considerations (cf. Chapter 2.2)—to focus on aspectual commonalities among group members at the level of orientations and across the various dimensions of peer-being.

Consequently, the communitisation and orientations of peer groups are enacted specifically within the contexts of school and leisure (cf. Chapter 3.2 for a detailed discussion).⁴⁰ *Second*, it is important to account for the contingency of social practice, as communitisation and orientations are continuously renegotiated and re-created through interactions.⁴¹ The typology, however, captures this contingency only indirectly. Rather, at the level of knowledge, it assumes a relatively stable and robust structure of orientations that guide the groups' practices. As already noted in the methodology section, it is important to emphasise that the reconstruction of orientations represents a sense-genetic typification, which, within a multidimensional typology framework (among others, Bohnsack, 2013), can also be extended to a socio-genetic typification. A more in-depth investigation into the sociogenesis of the five orientation types within societal spaces of experience has not yet been carried out for the peer groups interviewed (cf. Chapter 3.3 for a detailed discussion).

40 It is important to note that peer groups often exhibit not just a single, but multiple orientations within a given context (e.g. school), as these contexts themselves are highly differentiated (e.g. different subjects, recess and after-school activities). Therefore, the concept of orientation should be understood in the plural, e.g. as school-related orientations. Context-specific orientations can be further subdivided into distinct reference frameworks, contents or dimensions. Future research should investigate which orientations within this complex orientation structure shape a peer group's practice—both within a specific context and beyond. Comparative studies could analyse peer group orientations across different contexts of practice and cultural settings to provide a more precise specification of their orientations.

41 Orientations guide and stabilise practice, even amid disruptions, but may also remain unfulfilled (cf. Chapter 3.2.1.1 for more details).

While I employed the group discussion and documentary methods here, future studies could integrate different methodologies, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of peer group orientations. Peer groups that share similar orientations, e.g. an orientation towards community, may not have made identical experiences, but engage in structurally comparable practices. Based on the five orientation types, larger experience collectives in the sense of, e.g. community- or autonomy-oriented peer collectives, could be conceptualised by aggregating multiple ‘small’ peer groups. Investigating such collectives in greater depth, particularly regarding their formation and their potential to foster peer-being in relation to sport, could also help address the often deficit-oriented assumptions about adolescents in sport science (e.g. labelling them as ‘inactive in sport’) and instead frame these in terms of orientations, such as ‘community- or autonomy-oriented’ adolescents.

If the five peer group orientations in sport pedagogy are accepted as sufficiently developed, their distribution could also be examined quantitatively using a representative sample of peer groups. Such analyses could incorporate peer collectives within multilevel study designs and integrate research at the individual level of group members. In this context, adolescents’ ‘activeness in sport’ could be included as a variable, systematically capturing both their collective and personal relationship to sport. Furthermore, it would be possible to explore whether, and how, specific orientations or combinations thereof relate to particular patterns of participation in sport during the transition from childhood to adolescence.

The thematic emphases of the five orientation types illustrate that the 16 peer groups interviewed experience their practice patterns in distinct ways. Peer groups aligned with a particular orientation type perceive and interpret the world through the lens of that orientation. This becomes evident in their engagement with sport, both at school and during leisure time. Similar to approaches in motivational psychology (cf. Schmid et al., 2024), sport pedagogy must consider which types of sport activities are most compatible with specific groups or orientations. Regardless of orientation, the central question is less *what* type of sport is practiced than *how* it is enacted. Within the framework of overarching orientations, movement, play and sport take on very different meanings. At the same time, specific sport programmes or forms of engagement in sport tend to support particular functions of practice: in the SpOK study, organised club sport was primarily associated with orientations towards certainty or development, whereas informal engagement in sport aligned more closely with orientations towards challenge and autonomy.

These insights into the different forms of peer group communitisation (Chapter 3.1.1) and the orientation types that guide peer groups’ practices

(Chapter 3.1.2) have multiple applications for the pedagogical design of sport in both school-related and leisure-time contexts. At the outset of pedagogical work, it is essential to recognise the diversity of peer group communitisation and the types of orientation, as these reflect highly specific expectations, needs and interests. Frohn (2024), e.g. notes that discussions in sport pedagogy on differentiation have largely focused on aspects such as inclusion and gender. Consequently, peer-related differences often remain unaddressed, despite their significant role in shaping students' practices. *Educators should therefore also consider the peer group-related learning preconditions of their target groups. This can be achieved, for instance, through observations and interviews, drawing on the method of sociometry (among others, Balz, 2023).* Insights into peer group orientations can guide the design of sport programmes tailored to adolescents' tacit practice-guiding knowledge. This raises several questions, e.g. how learning in PE can be structured based on adolescents' existing stocks of knowledge, or how training processes in club sport might be adapted accordingly.

A key aspect of working with peer groups is the active involvement of adolescents in the planning and implementation of sport programmes. To recognise the peer group as a social resource for learning or training in sport, it is essential to promote independent and cooperative forms of work, approaches that are increasingly valued in the school context (Rabenstein & Reh, 2007). *Various strategies can be adopted, differing in the degree to which adolescents act as peers, cooperate with other peers, and exercise autonomy while receiving purposeful guidance from adults.*

Drawing on Liebscher and Fischer (2015), approaches can be distinguished in which peers function as social reference points or role models without receiving formal training for specific interventions. In these cases, they act informally as influential figures within their social group, shaping norms and behaviours. Consequently, they often play a key role in disseminating attitudes and practices, e.g. in health promotion or social interaction. This is particularly relevant in the context of team sport or collectively organised recreational activities. Alternatively, approaches may involve individual adolescents explicitly assuming designated roles within their peer group. In such cases, they serve as facilitators for implementing prevention or educational programmes. For example, in school sport, peer 'experts', i.e. older or more experienced student athletes, can support younger or less experienced ones in learning sport techniques or navigating a new exercise setting. Another goal may be to strengthen social cohesion by emphasising cooperative processes that foster the development of peer relationships and support the emergence of peer groups from within the group itself.

Adolescents should have opportunities to express their personalities, get to know one another, and form friendships and peer groups, especially in educational settings. School, in this sense, must be understood as a social space that

supports these processes (among others, Böhnisch, 1998). Empirical studies on class formation in newly established lower secondary school classes (*Sekundarstufe I*) (among others, Drope & Rabenstein, 2021) indicate that such pathways are already being explored and that school can function as a setting for the deliberate promotion of group cohesion. *Insights from my research on peer group orientations can contribute to fostering group interactions by enhancing a culture of empathetic and horizontal communication in educational settings.* When educators understand peer practices through the lens of the orientation typology and the implicitly practice-guiding stocks of knowledge it uncovers, they can integrate this perspective into their interactions with adolescents. This can support the development of deeper relationships and promote collaborative partnerships grounded in appreciation and trust.

Regardless of the specific objectives, it is essential to emphasise that the autonomy of peer groups must be respected in all educational approaches and interventions. *Educators should not seek to fully control or manipulate peer groups, but instead create spaces and opportunities that enable genuine self-expression.* My findings on peer group orientations presented here are intended to raise awareness of the need to open both formal and informal sport education settings (cf. Bindel, Gerlach & Hunger, 2022) to peer groups and to acknowledge their diverse orientations and associated practices. This process of creating space can be outlined using the five orientation types as an initial guide. They offer practical suggestions for designing school and recreational sport programmes, especially in light of the range of different formats (e.g. PE lessons, sport during recess, club sport) adolescents participate in, whether voluntarily or compulsorily.

Orientation Towards Certainty: In school sport, activities and programmes should help adolescents gradually expand their competences within their peer groups, enabling them to feel capable and secure even when encountering new or challenging situations. Regularly integrating familiar exercises can reinforce previously acquired skills, strengthen self-confidence, and provide a sense of stability. In recreational sport, space should be created for the repetition of familiar activities within stable reference groups, allowing adolescents to consolidate their abilities while at the same time fostering close social relationships.

Orientation Towards Development: In school sport, adolescents should have the opportunity to set personal, realistic goals and pursue them alongside the collective goals of their peers, thereby creating space for individual growth and self-realisation. Project-based approaches or targeted training programmes can be used to harness strong commitment among adolescents and support them in achieving their objectives in the long term. In recreational sport, programmes should enable adolescents not only to deepen their interest in sport, but also to

explore new areas, allowing them to discover and develop personal strengths. Such experiences can positively influence their self-image and personality.

Orientation Towards Challenge: In school sport, programmes should offer adolescents a stimulating and demanding environment in which they can test their limits and push their boundaries together with peers. By integrating controlled challenges, such as a climbing course or intensive preparations for school competitions, adolescents can learn to assess their willingness to take risks and purposefully enhance their performance capacities. In recreational sport, adolescents should have the freedom to pursue new adventures and self-chosen challenges that satisfy their desire for intense experiences and excitement. This may include outdoor expeditions, scene sport or even extreme sport that ignite curiosity, offer thrills and channel their enthusiasm.

Orientation Towards Community: In school sport, emphasis should be placed on the value of collective action, encouraging adolescents to form self-initiated groups and experience their social relationships through targeted tasks. These may include role-playing games, team activities, or group projects designed to strengthen social bonds and promote mutual trust while also developing and deepening sport-related competencies. In recreational sport, programmes should not only provide adolescents with opportunities for physical activity, but also create spaces for social exchange and mutual recognition. This can be facilitated through regular group meetings or team events that prioritise exchange and support within the peer group.

Orientation Towards Autonomy: In school sport, adolescents should be encouraged to recognise their own interests and strengths and develop independently, without being discouraged by external evaluations. Activities that allow for a high degree of self-responsibility and decision-making freedom can be offered within a protected environment. In recreational sport, adolescents should likewise have opportunities to shape their leisure activities and develop free from external pressure and instruction – whether by choosing a sport that brings them joy or by creating their own games and types of exercise that reflect their individual needs and interests.

This outline demonstrates that sport programmes in both school-related and leisure-time contexts can accommodate diverse orientation types, providing peer groups and their members with opportunities to express their interests and strengths within specific practice patterns. This approach aligns with the pedagogical principle of multi-perspectivity (e.g. Neumann & Balz, 2004), though that principle focuses on the individual level, leaving the intersections with my collective approach open for future research. *In concluding this chapter, I would like to reemphasise the importance of fostering productive interactions between different peer groups, particularly given the sometimes substantial differences in their orientations. Effective communication between peer groups*

and educators is therefore essential, and cross-(peer-) group dynamics should be carefully considered in the pedagogical design of sport programmes, a topic addressed in the second results section.

3.2 Conjunctive Spaces of Experience in School and Leisure

We now turn to the second results section of this book, which builds on the first while offering a complementary perspective on the research focus – adolescents’ practices during the transition from childhood to adolescence, viewed through the lens of peer groups. As already outlined in the theoretical section (Chapter 2.1), the meanings associated with collectively shared orientations are assumed to be anchored in specific conjunctive⁴² spaces of experience. At the same time, in the sense of a reciprocal, constitutive relationship, these orientations can be assumed to both generate and shape specific spaces of experience. While the five orientation types discussed in the previous chapter primarily highlighted differences between peer groups at the level of knowledge, emphasising each group’s distinctive characteristics, this chapter shifts the focus to how, in line with peer groups’ orientations, cross-group spaces of experience emerge at the level of practice.

The central focus of this chapter is the description of these spaces of experience. The results are presented with reference to both school-related and leisure-time contexts, as my analysis revealed differences between the spaces of experience in these two spheres. By focusing on each space of experience separately, attention is drawn to the specific experience structures that shape practices within them. For instance, this chapter explores how PE, from the perspective of peer groups, constitutes a distinct school-related space of experience, characterised by its own unique practices. Describing these spaces of experience also offers initial insights into the specific cultures⁴³ present within school-related and leisure-time contexts. These cultures exert influence through the meanings they generate, even if they do not resonate equally with all peer groups (cf. further results in Chapter 3.3). Participation in these cultures introduces an additional dimension of adolescents’ peer-being within peer groups, one that extends beyond the boundaries of individual groups. This can, e.g. be observed in the shared experience of occupying the role of a student in PE. The chapter differ-

42 The adjective ‘conjunctive’ here refers to a specific mode of connection between individuals who share experiences (cf. Chapter 2.1.2 for details).

43 Here, culture (drawing on the woodcut metaphor and the theoretical considerations outlined in Chapter 2.1.2) is understood as a demarcated system of meaning, accompanied by a complex body of knowledge that is practice-oriented among multiple actors. From this practice-oriented perspective, culture is conceived as a social practice, since it does not exist prior to practice, but rather emerges within it as a practical event.

entiate peer groups' spaces of experience across school-related (Chapter 3.2.1) and leisure-time (Chapter 3.2.3) contexts of sport, and concludes with an interim summary and initial implications for sport pedagogy (Chapter 3.2.3).

3.2.1 Conjunctive Spaces of Experience in School and PE

At the outset of this chapter, I would like to briefly clarify the distinction between spaces of experience in school and in leisure time, and outline how these relate to sport. The structure of the results section reflects both the emphasis placed on these spaces of experience in the SpOK project's methodological design and the insights that emerged from the analysis.

The peer groups interviewed can be described as school-based peer groups, as they were recruited and interviewed within that setting. Without this context, many of these groups might not exist at all. The SpOK project, with its broad research focus, thus bridges peer research in schools and research on PE with students, a duality reflected in the discussion prompts used by the discussion leaders (cf. Chapter 2.3.1). *However, school is not only an important methodological context for my research, but also emerges empirically as the central space of experience for the peer groups interviewed. This is also why this results chapter begins with the school context.* Peer group members spend a significant share of their week at school, which offers numerous opportunities for personally meaningful interactions with peers. In terms of the group's activities and concerns, school thus represents an exemplary peer context, both quantitatively and often qualitatively as well. Within this setting, the relationships among the adolescents interviewed surfaced. As an educational institution with its own specific programmes and initiatives, school sometimes assumes either a secondary or a primary role in shaping the practices of peer groups.

Regardless of its specific form, the school context carries considerable, albeit empirically underexplored, significance for peer groups' practices. Drawing on Köhler (2012), I adopt the term "school-framed peer relationships" (p. 17) to emphasise both the constraints and possibilities that shape peer groups' positioning within the institutional framework of school. In this regard, spaces of peer-related experience are not limited to open-ended practices, such as group work during lessons, but also encompass more regulated, teacher-centred formats (such as raising one's hand to be called on). A central question that remains is which particular experiences contribute to peer groups' collectively shared school-related experiences. In other words, what defines school as a conjunctive space of experience that spans across different peer groups?

In the group discussions with the peer groups interviewed, school emerged as a distinct space of experience, clearly differentiated from the leisure time-re-

lated space of experience.⁴⁴ *Sporting activities are present in both spaces of experience. Given the SpOK project's research focus, these serve as the primary empirical data for identifying the respective logics of school and leisure.*⁴⁵ For the peer groups, however, sport, whether practiced within or outside school, represents only one activity among many. Empirically, this need not always be the case, for instance, had we interviewed peer groups engaged in competitive sport, sport would likely have occupied a more central position in their activity hierarchy, raising additional questions regarding the compatibility of educational and sporting commitments.⁴⁶

Building on these preliminary remarks on the structure of the findings, I will now turn to a deeper exploration of the school-related space of experience. My research indicates that, from the peer groups' perspective, school-related practices are highly multifaceted. The meanings adolescents attribute to the institution of school extend far beyond a purely functional understanding of it as a teaching-and-learning setting. The peer groups interviewed presented themselves as experts on everyday school life and readily embraced this self-perception. School is not always characterised by harmony: conflicts, insults, and subtle forms of exclusion are equally part of day-to-day life. As such, school is a multifaceted space of experience that fully (or at least to a significant degree) engaged all 16 peer groups interviewed. A central, cross-group feature of this school-related space of experience is that adolescents cannot escape their role as students. School entails a certain degree of coercion,⁴⁷ which, from the peer groups' perspective, is tied to experiencing teachers' instructions as binding and

44 Although these demarcations can become blurred when attention shifts to the individual group, as is particularly evident when comparing students who attend a Hauptschule and Gymnasium (cf. Chapter 3.3.1).

45 Methodologically, both school-related and leisure-time contexts require a 'key', i.e. a content-based focus, to be accessible as objects of research. In this study, sport was chosen as that 'key', a decision that is certainly debatable. Other alternatives are conceivable and could be explored in the context of practice, yet their relevance is limited by my position within sport science. One limitation of this study, therefore, is that school-related and leisure-time contexts are primarily examined through the lens of sport. This narrow perspective, however, should be relativised when it comes to exploring peer groups, as the group discussions deliberately applied open narrative prompts designed to elicit (general) practices.

46 What is presented here as a thought experiment can be empirically confirmed in the case of competitive sport (cf., e.g. the study by Krüger et al., 2016, in which, among others, peer groups at elite sport schools were interviewed).

47 Here, school is used as a broad and abstract term that encompasses a heterogeneous set of practices. These observations apply particularly to everyday school routines, which (albeit in different forms) largely constitute what is commonly understood as school. As the following results illustrate, school trips, e.g. provide peer groups with opportunities for self-regulated activities.

to the processes of class- and school-based communitisation with fellow students.

In this context, peer groups can also be understood as groups of students who, by virtue of their shared role, hold comparable positions within the school's power structure. *One key finding is that the school-related space of experience, from the perspective of the peer groups interviewed, is shaped by their perceptions and evaluations of the school's actors.* The group discussions revealed that the actions of teachers and classmates serve as important reference points, both positive and negative, for how the peer groups orient themselves within the school context. This applies across subjects, including formal lessons, where the peer groups' evaluations are additionally shaped by the curriculum. Participation in class involves navigating ambivalent power relations (see the detailed discussion of PE, cf. Zander, 2018). Adolescents must find ways—often largely independently—to manage the expectations placed on them by teachers and classmates, while drawing on the support of their peer group. In terms of the shared experiences that constitute the role of the student, adolescents are thus connected through another dimension of peer-being: they collectively experience the presence and guidance their peer group provides in everyday school life.⁴⁸

Within the broader framework of school, adolescents are additionally embedded—in some cases *reciprocally*—within a smaller reference framework that carries its own distinct system of meaning. Membership in a peer group thus becomes a social place for exchange, including on school-related matters. The peer groups interviewed, e.g. share the experience that such groups can offer relief in dealing with challenging school issues by providing a trusted space for discussion. This space assumes a protective function and serves as an emotional buffer against the pre-structured role of relationships with teachers and other students. As the group discussions revealed, it is within this context that teachers' actions, such as sanctions and grading, can be openly criticised, assessments of justified or unjustified decisions discussed, and students can offer one another advice and strategies for coping with problems related to social interactions and other challenges within the school setting.

Beyond the more formal aspects of school experience, school serves as a central context for peer group practice, shaped by a wide range of activities and individual interpretations of meaning. *How each peer group experiences school and the specific content of these relatively formal experience structures, can be described using the five orientation types (cf. Chapter 3.1.2).* Across these orientations, it is evident that adolescents in peer groups strive to pursue personal de-

48 From a methodological perspective, it should be noted that students without any peer group affiliation were not included in the SpOK project's design.

velopment or to maintain social relationships within the school setting. School thus serves as a space of experience for personal growth or social interaction. Some peer groups primarily concentrate on themselves within the school context. Even in these cases, the practice-guiding orientations of individual groups do not necessarily align with the field-specific expectations, norms and rules of school as an institution, which limits the extent to which these orientations can be realised. At the same time, school as a space of experience is also shaped by the orientations of students and their peer groups. Consequently, distinct spaces of experience emerge across different schools that vary depending on school type (cf. Chapter 3.3.1 for details).

The relevance and perception of school differ across the five orientation types of peer groups. Clear distinctions emerge in how peer groups engage with 'typical' school obligations (e.g. punctuality, respectful communication, participation in class). *What constitutes the school-related dimensions of school life and the significance school holds as an educational institution, therefore depends on the peer groups' respective perspectives.* According to Thiele (2020), these school-related perspectives (together with the corresponding practice-guiding orientations) can be located along a continuum ranging from active disengagement from school (de-schooling) to committed engagement with school (dedicated schooling), with intermediate stages representing 'latent de-schooling' and 'adapted schooling'. This continuum, in relation to 'typical' school obligations, reflects the degree to which these duties are accepted or rejected, which are expressed, e.g. in the refusal to participate in class activities. Detailed descriptions of different forms of 'offensive de-schooling' and 'dedicated schooling' will not be discussed here, as they are the subject of the SpOK project (see Thiele, 2020 for details).⁴⁹

For the purposes of my findings, it is important to emphasise that, despite adolescents' structurally identical experience of the formal role as students, four very different school-related spaces of experience emerge. These spaces correspond to the 'pro-school' forms of dedicated and adapted schooling, as well as to the 'con-school' forms of active disengagement and latent de-schooling.⁵⁰ Depending on which of these four school-related spaces of experience peer groups are part of, the adolescents encounter an additional dimension of peer-being. One notable feature of the poles of 'schooling' and 'de-schooling' reconstructed by Thiele (2020) is that they can be located within a mode of life that spans both school and leisure time, and is strongly influenced by social background. As a result, school- and leisure-related spaces of experience may take on a milieu-

49 In my previous publications, school with a few exceptions (Zander, 2020a, 2022a; Zander et al., 2020) plays a more indirect role in PE or leisure time.

50 In a comparative case analysis, Bohnsack (1989), at a methodological level, describes this as the search for 'contrasts in commonality' (Chapter 2.2.2).

specific character (cf. Chapter 3.3.1). These poles therefore offer initial insights into the experience structures that shape the PE- and leisure-related spaces of experience of the peer groups interviewed.

A differentiated description of school-related spaces of experience also allows for an identification of both similarities and differences between individual schools and their respective school cultures. Since multiple peer groups were interviewed within the same school, characteristics of specific school cultures that extend beyond the orientations of individual groups could be identified. For example, I conducted case comparisons of two peer groups attending schools with distinct profiles. This analysis (cf. in detail Zander, 2020c) focused on how a peer group in a wind ensemble class at a Gymnasium and one in a sport-focused class at a Hauptschule perceived and evaluated the specific characteristics of their school's profile. *For these peer groups, their school's distinctive profile added yet another dimension of peer-being, rooted in the shared experience of attending a school with a distinct profile.*

From the peer groups' perspective, an awareness of both inter- and intra-school differences is essential for experiencing the profile-specific characteristics of their own school and, consequently, for the practice-specific constitution of school profiles more generally. *School profiles can be understood as emerging from (evaluative) comparisons and positionings that adolescents establish in relation to their school class, subjects and the school type they attend.* These reference points, which orient peer groups' experiences within the context of distinct school profiles, operate at both explicit (rational) and implicit levels. Explicit knowledge of a class's or year's profile is highly normatively charged. Peer groups perceive school profiles and the experience opportunities attached to them as positively valued deviations from the norm, the 'standard rule', or the established default. Experiencing school in a way that differs from that of other students is considered a privilege by the adolescents.

Another finding from the analyses is that the subject dimension (in this case, music and PE) plays only a marginal role in shaping adolescents' experience of the school-related space of experience and, over the course of schooling, tends to diminish. A longitudinal comparison from the seventh to the ninth year of school shows that the peer groups interviewed position both subjects (despite the specialised profile of their classes) at the periphery. This shift occurs within a broader, cognitively oriented performance logic of schooling, in which the pursuit of formal school qualifications increasingly dominates the students' experience. A closer examination of the specific contexts of action within the school-related space of experience revealed that certain settings, such as recess, class trips, excursions, 'AGs', and even the daily commute function as particularly intensive peer contexts. In these settings, students' practices are shaped more by informal structures, which in turn foster shared experiences within the peer group that were

reported in detail during the group discussions. I have investigated peer groups' experiences on school trips in detail (Zander, 2022b). In this context, 'school trip' functions as an umbrella term for various school-related activities whose defining characteristic, and perhaps the smallest common denominator, is that part of the school community (from individual classes to several grades) leaves the school premises during regular school hours. In addition to park visits or performances, some peer groups described their experiences on sport-related school trips, such as skiing or sailing excursions. These school trips will be examined in greater detail below.

Based on two case studies, I demonstrated that peer groups generally assign a high value to school trips (Zander, 2022b). What they particularly appreciate is the comparatively wide scope for autonomous practice that these trips afford. Leaving the school premises constitutes a temporary 'break' from the routines and structures of everyday school life which many groups experience as monotonous. In contrast to the regular classroom setting, students spend both days and nights together during such trips, thereby creating opportunities for shared experiences in largely self-regulated contexts of practice. Participation in these self-regulated contexts of practice continues to have an impact well beyond the duration of the school trip. The shared memories arising from these experiences give rise to what the peer groups frequently frame as adventurous narratives. These narratives tend to be spontaneous, situational experiences, such as bus rides or informal sport activities at the accommodation.

From the perspective of the peer groups, teachers' actions and the subject-specific content of school trips, such as learning a particular sport, play only a secondary role. Instead, *school trips function primarily as peer-related spaces of experience, marked by a high degree of self-directed activities that blur the boundary between school and leisure time.* Within these spaces, relationships among students occupy a central role. Respect and friendship emerge as key themes, reflecting not only the quality of these interpersonal relationships but also the social norms through which distinctions and belonging are constructed within the group.

A central theme shared by both peer groups during school trips is the interaction with students from other schools. These encounters provide numerous opportunities for establishing both difference and belonging. The two case studies illustrate that school trips encourage processes of reaffirming one's own school affiliation. When students from different school types or countries come together, the adolescents interviewed perceived themselves not only in their role as students but, importantly, as representatives of their respective schools. The peer groups collectively positioned themselves across group boundaries as a unified school collective. This identification with a school-specific collective

can be interpreted as an additional dimension of peer-being, characterised by an explicit mode of communitisation with other peer groups from the same school.

As the analyses of experiences within specialised school profiles have also shown, processes of belonging and distinction gain particular relevance during school trips. This is particularly evident when interactions cross peer-group boundaries, allowing members from different peer groups within the same school to unify, at least temporarily, as a collective that shares a similar class-, grade- or individual school experience. Analyses of peer-group experiences in the context of school profiles and school trips also reveal variations in the quality of peer-being. A distinction emerges between situational or spontaneous communities of experience and more lasting ones. For the peer groups interviewed, peer-being in relation to belonging to a (potentially distinct) school profile appears to have limited lasting relevance for their practices.

3.2.1.1 Focus: PE as a Space of Experience in School

The analytical focus on school-related spaces of experience is further refined by examining PE as a specific example. An initial assumption of my research was that PE, as a space of experience, is characterised by large-scale interactions (e.g. team sport), spaces outside of teacher supervision (e.g. locker rooms), and group-related practices (e.g. dividing students into teams). This creates opportunities for the formation of peer groups and can even bring them to the forefront of the classroom experience. It should be noted, however, that within the peer groups' relevance system, PE does not occupy the highest rank among the school setting's contexts of practice. PE was rarely spontaneously raised by the students themselves and was more often introduced by the discussion leader.

It is unsurprising that peer groups exhibit collectively shared orientations in voluntary contexts, such as recreational sport. In PE, which is compulsory for all students and shaped by the teacher's specific demands as well as classmates' expectations, the dynamics can differ. Not all members of a school-related peer group may be equally passionate about sport or show the same interest in the subject. *A key finding from my analysis is that collectively shared orientations towards PE can be reconstructed within peer groups.* The five general orientation types of peer groups' practices (cf. Chapter 3.1.2) can be specified in relation to PE. For example, an orientation towards development manifests as a focus on expanding exercise skills/knowledge; an orientation towards challenge translates into striving for sporting success, and an orientation towards autonomy becomes a preference for self-directed participation in sport.

Based on the five types of orientation, it becomes evident that PE provides peer groups with highly differentiated, group-specific spaces of experience, which are further shaped by distinct patterns of orientation (cf. Zander, 2018;

Zander & Stamm, 2020, for details). In my research, I also examined how these five orientation types can be systematically applied to practices in PE. *A comparison of these orientations reveals three central reference points for peer groups' PE practices.* On the one hand, this includes two reference points already described for the school-related space of experience, namely 'teacher' and 'classmates' (see Chapter 3.2.1 above) and, on the other, 'sport' itself, understood as the subject matter or content of the given subject, especially in relation to recreational sport. When PE is conceptualised as a cross-group space of experience that encompasses various orientations, it emerges as a mix of experiences structured along these three reference points. In the following, I will examine each of these three central reference points of experience in greater detail (cf. Zander, 2018, 2019b, for details).

The first reference point in the cross-group experience of PE is the teacher, who represents the expectations of the school as an institution. Peer groups orient their experience of PE, e.g. around the teacher's understanding of their role or their conceptions of the purpose of school. This is also reflected at the level of orientation. A peer group's orientation in PE can be directed:

- towards the expansion of exercise skills/knowledge, or
- towards the support provided by the PE teacher.

The second reference point in the experience of PE concerns classmates, encompassing both one's own peer group and other classmates (other peers). Peer groups orient their experience around, e.g. the behaviour of individual classmates or the relationships within the peer group. At the level of practice, these orientations can be observed as being directed towards:

- social entertainment, or
- engagements with classmates who have a similar skill level.

The third cross-group reference point in the experience of PE is sport itself. Peer groups focus their PE experience on sport as the lesson's subject matter, drawing on meanings that may also be present in extracurricular sport contexts, such as the Olympic motto 'faster, higher, stronger' or the 'win/lose' logic of competitive sport. In terms of the experience of sport, orientations in PE practice can be directed towards:

- sporting success,
- physical exertion,
- the thrill of physical activity, or
- self-determined participation in sport.

The way peer groups experience PE can be traced along these three reference points, each associated with specific experience structures. Furthermore, the practice of PE and the space of experience it creates for students are not homogeneous at the peer-group level; rather, they vary according to orientation patterns. Accordingly, these patterns produce highly heterogeneous conceptions of what 'PE' as a school subject entails and what constitutes a 'good' PE lesson. Comparisons between peer groups within the same and across different schools suggest that distinct lesson cultures tend to emerge in PE, shaped by prevailing frameworks of practice-relevant meaning-making. These cultures may be centred around the teacher, peers or the sport itself and encompass the entire class, including multiple peer groups and individual students.⁵¹ For peer relations, *this creates an additional dimension of shared experience within peer-being, depending on whether students participate in a predominantly teacher-centred, classmate-centred or sport-centred PE setting.*

A central finding of my analyses is that, from the perspective of peer groups, PE represents an ambiguous field of practice. At the individual school level, it emerges at the intersection of teacher-, classmate- and sport-related experiences, forming a uniquely configured combination. Initial analyses suggest that how these experiences are structured based on the fundamental meanings attached to teachers, classmates and sport itself, and the prioritisation or neglect of particular experience structures likely depend on type of school and the gender composition of the peer group. For example, among peer groups attending a Hauptschule, a peer-oriented baseline orientation emerges that shapes their practices in both school- and extracurricular contexts (cf. Chapter 3.3.1 for details). *In particular, the sport- and peer-related experience structures connected to sport and classmates indicate that some of the peer groups interviewed perceive PE as a form of leisure time within the school context. For these groups, PE does not carry a distinctly autonomous or binding educational mandate; instead, it serves as a space in which group-specific orientations can unfold.* As regards the relationship between school and leisure time, it is noteworthy that this perception simultaneously generates various points of reference to (sporting) activities in the adolescents' leisure time, although these are not always fully realised in each lesson. Some peer groups would prefer to engage in a competitive football match, as is the case in club sport, while others would prefer to dance like they do at home, and still others would prefer to explore riskier trendy sports they have come across on Instagram.

Amid all the differentiations (five types of orientation, eight orientation patterns, and three experience structures associated with teacher-, classmate-,

51 In addition to the case study comparison (which also sheds light on school type-specific teaching cultures), I also follow the peer groups' concrete descriptions, which partly address PE practices in detail, referring to both general and group-specific aspects.

and sport-centred lesson cultures), the commonalities across all 16 peer groups interviewed should not be overlooked. As a school subject, PE provides students with structurally comparable experiences, even across different schools. These shared structural features allow for an understanding of PE as a space of experience that connects peer groups with one another (cf. Zander, 2018, for details). This space of experience, shaped in particular through adolescents' multi-year engagement with PE as a subject-specific component of school, specifies the three previously introduced experience structures as follows:

- PE as the utilisation of available resources (teacher),
- PE as a multimodal group interaction (classmates),
- PE as a school-mandated sporting practice (sport).

The following section outlines how the practice of PE can be described along these closely interlinked experience structures.

PE as the Utilisation of Available Resources (Teacher)

Sporting practices in PE are defined, guided and assessed by the teacher. For the peer groups interviewed, this creates a perceived need to activate and demonstrate their skills and knowledge. While learning can occur in PE, the group discussions suggest that such learning is the exception; in everyday teaching practice, opportunities for skill development are largely seen as absent. Improvements in practical sporting skills is generally viewed by the peer groups to lie beyond the 'actual' possibilities of PE instruction and thus outside the students' responsibility. This perception is also evident in their criticism of grading practices in PE. Peer groups tend to reduce discussions on learning in PE to measurable physical performance, framing it within ideologies of intrinsic ability and talent myths, i.e. as something that is genetically predetermined. This performance-oriented understanding underpins their perception of PE as the application of available resources, encompassing both school-based and extra-curricular skill and stocks of knowledge. The extent to which these resources can be exploited or enhanced becomes a central criterion for success, polarising the student body along the distinction between those who 'can' and those who 'cannot'. This division, in turn, significantly influences whether the peer groups experience the lessons as enjoyable or not. A smooth lesson flow, built on heterogeneous student resources, is made possible in PE through content choices that consider students' interests in a specific sport as well as their existing skill sets. These pragmatic arrangements effectively construct an 'average' student who only partially corresponds to the peer groups' diverse orientations. Depending on the extent of this alignment, PE carries either a positive or negative meaning for the peer groups interviewed.

PE as a Multimodal Group Interaction (Classmates)

From the peer groups' perspective, PE focuses on physical activity and the repetition of familiar sport formats, rather than the passive modes of 'sitting around' and 'paying attention' that characterise many other school subjects. The use of sport-specific equipment and dedicated spaces expands opportunities for multimodal interaction, expressed through subject-specific behaviours and social practices (e.g. encouraging shout-outs, gestures or supportive touches). Interactions within the class are shaped by the school context (including the student body's heterogeneity) and unfold through various forms of student participation that guide activities in different directions. The strong influence students exert on the lesson creates spaces for peer groups to form, contribute or withdraw. PE practices, shaped in part by organisational conditions, give rise to various side activities, in which the sporting practice itself may diffuse into a range of group-based interactions. The simultaneity of PE practices provides students with considerable freedom to assign meaning and relevance to what occurs in the lesson, while also creating numerous opportunities to incorporate extracurricular experiences from outside school. Consequently, PE supports a wide range of modes of participation, reflecting the diverse ways in which peer groups engage with and interpret the subject.

PE as a School-mandated Sporting Practice (Sport)

Group discussions revealed that peer groups perceive PE as a compulsory sport programme dictated by the teacher. Within the structure of each lesson, sport activities are primarily experienced in a practice-oriented mode of "doing" sport, emphasising autonomous physical engagement (such as 'warming up', 'training', 'playing'). Alongside this highly structured lesson content (largely framed around a specific sport), the peer groups also identify strong conventions that guide the course of the PE lesson. Even the ritual of changing from school clothes into sportswear before the PE lesson marks a transition from the classroom to a sport-related space within school, a transition that is further reinforced by the use of sport-specific facilities and equipment. This transition emphasises the question who is (not) physically active, culminating in the warm-up phase and reinforcing the sport-centred orientation of practice. The teacher organises the spatial, social and temporal conditions for each sporting activity (such as exercises or games) and guides students through the different phases of school-related sporting practices. The meaning of school-mandated sporting practice becomes particularly evident in the final phase of the PE lesson, which often involves competitive games where students face off against one another. These competitions, marked by the clear binary of victory and defeat, frequently elicit strong emotional responses among students. The present-oriented nature of sport is reinforced by the fact that each lesson offers a new opportunity for

success. As a result, PE assumes a distinctive role within the school day: peer groups perceive it as a break from routine, a source of recreation or a form of preparation for the cognitive demands of other subjects.

When the three experience structures are considered in relation to orientation types and orientation patterns, PE emerges, from the perspective of peer groups, as an ambivalent space of experience. While it offers opportunities for expressing group-specific orientations, their translation into practice is limited because several peer groups simultaneously participate in the lesson, and their group-specific orientations do not necessarily align with each other or with the teacher's expectations.⁵² *Consequently, PE constitutes a power-laden space of experience, where the assertion of individual orientations takes place both between different peer groups and between them and their teacher.* On the one hand, students strive to advance their own orientation; on the other, they seek to prevent other peer groups or the teacher from dominating the lesson. Although the subject allows for multiple orientations, the resulting tensions between orientations and the space of experience are often obscured on the surface by the routinised enactment and assessment of sporting practices.

From the seventh to the ninth year of school, participation in PE allows peer groups to gain experiential knowledge of how collectively shared orientations are realised. Groups (up to entire school classes) strive to enact their internally shared orientations in PE, maintaining their (sporting) preferences or interests. When these goals are not fully achieved, individual actors in the lesson (e.g. teachers or other peer groups) are quickly perceived as obstacles. This dynamic can manifest as overt conflict on the 'front stage' of the lesson and/or more covertly behind the teacher's back 'backstage'. *A collective student strategy in PE, therefore, in a sense involves managing those perceived as disruptive, who might limit the group's control or influence.* Experiential knowledge is shaped not only by the self-realised enactment of group-specific orientations but also by observing how other classmates contribute to the lesson's 'what' and 'how'. In this context, peers with particularly 'assertive' orientations, such as those oriented towards sporting success, may dominate significant parts of the lesson's joint activities. Furthermore, the enactment of collectively shared ideas extends beyond situation-specific practices during the lesson and can, in some cases, lead entire peer groups to fully withdraw from participation in the PE lesson.

In conclusion, not all peer groups achieve equal success in realising their respective orientations. These orientations operate within a context of power relations and differ in their alignment with specific institutional requirements. The enactment of group-specific orientations, particularly in PE, therefore re-

52 This is evident not only in the numerous group-specific orientation patterns within a class but, more importantly, in how the peer groups interviewed perceive PE in terms of its practical limitations, often shaped by negative experiences or expectations.

flects patterns shaped by both gender and school type (cf. Chapter 3.3 for details). This dimension of power highlights the need for pedagogical approaches that effectively engage with peer groups in PE. Teachers should move beyond reactive strategies and recognise peer groups as a distinct pedagogical category within PE (cf. Chapter 3.2.3 for further discussion).

3.2.2 Conjunctive Spaces of Experience in Leisure and Recreational Sport

As the findings on PE have shown, school-related practices cannot be fully understood without considering adolescents' extracurricular experiences in leisure time. The reverse also holds true. While leisure time constitutes an independent peer context, it remains influenced by school. For the purpose of this analysis, leisure time is defined as time spent outside of school; however, it should not be seen as entirely independent of the school's influence. For instance, the compulsory nature of school delineates the free time available to adolescents, limiting peer groups' leisure activities to specific, clearly regulated periods in the afternoons and at weekends. What might be read as a rhythmic structuring of everyday life can, particularly as school demands increase between the seventh and ninth year of school, also be interpreted by some peer groups as the school's gradual encroachment on leisure time. Adolescents' daily routines revolve around school, and even after classes end, the demands of the following school day e.g. homework, tutoring, or exam preparation, weigh heavily on their afternoons. In this context, students sometimes arrange peer meetings specifically for school-related purposes. Beyond such activities, the school continues to function as a point of departure for leisure activities once formal classes end. *Consequently, school occupies a central role not only in shaping adolescents' daily routines but also in structuring their integration into peer-based leisure networks.* Daily peer interactions within the school setting can thus be seen both as a means of reinforcing existing peer relationships and as a constraint on alternative peer connections. The student body's homogeneity or heterogeneity influences the range of leisure activity options available, a topic that will be explored in more detail later with reference to social participation and inequality (Chapter 3.3.1).

My analyses (Zander, 2016; 2020a) show that adolescents' leisure activities vary considerably in form, and shared leisure activities within peer groups are not equally accessible to all adolescents. Some groups participate in many activities together, while others tend to act independently or in pairs (cf. previous Chapter 3.1.1). This aspect must be considered when identifying cross-group spaces of experience and the key experience structures in adolescents' leisure time. Beyond the activities shared within their own peer groups, other peer relationships also influence adolescents' experiences, e.g. when they engage with

different peer collectives through sporting or recreational activities. It should also be noted that collectively shared experiences are not necessarily dependent on physical co-presence. *The peer groups interviewed can also constitute themselves as communities of experience in leisure-time contexts, even when individual members' experiences are only structurally similar and/or are integrated into shared narratives.* These processes of shared experience can occur independently of time and place, particularly in the era of widespread social media use (even though peer groups typically reconvene in person by the next school day).

Social media has become increasingly important for adolescents' leisure activities, as recent findings on smartphone availability and use among youth demonstrate (among others, Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest, 2023). However, even during the survey period (2015–2017), social media already played a significant role, as demonstrated in a selective case analysis (Zander, 2019a). Peer groups use platforms such as WhatsApp not only for practical exchange of information, such as sharing school-related information, but also to organise sporting activities in their leisure time. Beyond coordinating joint activities, WhatsApp (and social media more generally) also indirectly shapes the content-related design of specific sporting practices. Communication within peer groups through social media can have (de-)motivating effects on sporting practices, particularly through the sharing of (body) images or videos. *The casual way in which adolescents reported taking selfies and using these technologies in group discussions suggests that the digital sphere plays a significant role in their everyday lives.* These analyses (Zander, 2019a)—some conducted together with Nicole Kirchhoff (cf. also Kirchhoff & Zander, 2018)—suggest that digital technologies create opportunities for cross-group experiences, independent of school type or gender. At the same time, the use of digital technologies should be explored in relation to specific peer communities and dimensions of peer-being (e.g. peer groups whose members play the same computer game). However, more recent and thematically focused studies are warranted.

3.2.2.1 Focus: Sport-related Spaces of Experience in Leisure

From the perspective of peer groups, recreational sport occupies a central place in adolescents' leisure activities. However, in terms of practice, this primarily applies to the level of individual group members. Many respondents reported being physically active outside their immediate peer group—in some cases, participating in activities with other groups. Within the peer groups interviewed, there are notable differences among members regarding the types of sport they engage in. The range of sport mentioned is broad, spanning from commonly practised activities such as football to less frequent forms such as dodgeball or frisbee. The diversity of sport suggests that physical activity within these peer

groups is generally not pursued collectively by all members. This, however, does not present a problem for the peer groups, as shared sporting practices represent only one of many dimensions of communitisation as a group.

At the level of individual sporting practice, peer groups can be distinguished by their degree of physical activity. Some groups are more engaged in organised club sport, while others prefer informal, self-directed activities. Additionally, certain groups talk about sport more than they actually participate in it, e.g. by watching training videos on YouTube. A notable feature across the sample is the high degree of homogeneity within groups, reflected in their shared value frameworks with reference to sport-related events. Even when group members do not engage in sport collectively, they share structurally similar experiences in their engagement with sporting experiences, themes or modes of participation. For example, some groups consist of members who participate in different sports individually but are connected through club membership. The formal structures of sporting practice (club membership) and its associated logic (e.g. regular participation in competitions) can generate specific spaces of experience, such as the shared experience of continuous training.

Peer-being in leisure time—and the associated possibilities of peer group communitisation—is inherently very diverse in the context of sport. Further cross-group analyses that systematically compare different leisure-time sporting practices and conceptualise them as conjunctive spaces of experience with distinct experience structures are not yet available. My detailed differentiations of PE's experience structures can help sensitise researchers to the complexity of such conjunctive spaces of experience in leisure time and provide a potential pathway for future exploration. My analyses of peer groups' collectively shared perspectives on leisure time practices have so far focused on their fundamental orientations and on access to (club) sport within adolescents' leisure activities. Building on my previous analyses (Zander, 2016; 2020a), I now turn to these two areas of research. The five orientation types—certainty, community, challenge, development and autonomy (cf. Chapter 3.1.2)—highlight the plurality of peer groups' leisure worlds at the level of knowledge.

Building on this knowledge level, sporting practices in leisure time carries diverse meanings for peer groups, which, unlike in school sport, do not need to be aligned or even compatible with one another. For the peer groups studied, differences in orientation types are likely more significant for peer-being than variations in forms of practice or level of engagement in sport. Shared orientations connect members of multiple groups as sport-related communities of experience. Within these communities, their perspectives on the backgrounds, effects or ambitions associated with informal or even formal participation in sport converge. Furthermore, shared orientations lead the groups to agree in their assessments of situational events in sport (e.g. evaluating the behaviour of

coaches or teammates). *The specific emphasis of each orientation demonstrates that leisure-time practices, including sport, are not arbitrary. Regular engagement in sport must align with the adolescents' respective orientations.* Within a peer group, members share similarly structured experiences shaped by the type of participation in sport and its (implicit) meaning. Depending on their respective orientation, the question is less about 'what' sport is practised and more about 'how' it is practised.

Engagement in sport is, in principle, interchangeable for adolescents if alternative activities better align with their respective orientation. However, such alternatives are not always available, particularly when the sport club serves as the primary provider of sporting activities. Unlike school-related spaces of experience, leisure-time spaces are generally revocable if a given orientation cannot be realised (although social influences such as relationships with coaches, teammates, or parents' expectations may limit this flexibility). Drawing on the five orientation types, a central finding of my research emerges: leisure time does not constitute a single conjunctive space of experience that encompasses all peer groups. Rather, it is primarily experienced in a group-specific way. However, commonalities do exist between groups which, from the peer groups' perspective, are most apparent at the level of adolescents' general leisure activities.

In my analyses, I reconstructed a major differentiating distinction in leisure activities, associated with two opposing experience structures that constitute two distinct spaces of experience for peer groups during the transition from childhood to adolescence. Specifically, this distinction concerns planned versus spontaneous leisure activities, identified through detailed case comparisons, access to (club) sport, and broader social contexts such as school affiliation (for details, see Zander, 2016). For example, peer groups attending a Gymnasium often had structured commitments in the afternoon (e.g. sport clubs or homework), while peer groups at a Hauptschule generally had greater control over their free time. In the following, I present this distinction, drawn from individual cases and school type (cf. Chapter 3.3.1), as two general⁵³ experience structures:

Planned Leisure Activities in Institutional Programmes

The explicit identification of different leisure activities by members of the peer groups interviewed highlights the high value attributed to personal leisure time. For the groups, the diversity associated with the members' individuality appears to foster mutual interest and intensive internal communication. However, these differences are embedded within a central, collectively shared experience

53 Although derived from two completely contrasting cases, the patterns of leisure activity can be generalised into two ideal-typical experience structures, as individual components of these patterns (e.g. pro- or anti-school orientations) recur.

structure: on the one hand, individual group members participate in a variety of leisure activities, and on the other hand, one particular hobby usually assumes a central role for all group members, reflecting a strong task- or content-oriented approach to leisure time. The group defines a hobby as a regularly occurring, institutionalised leisure activity, such as participation in a club programme. This distinguishes it from other activities considered mere 'pastimes'. Engaging in a hobby is thus regarded as time well spent, a perception reinforced by the social environment. Participation in a hobby is supported not only by the peer group but also by parents, and in some cases, it is initiated or organised by them. The desire to use time meaningfully is coupled with a collectively shared awareness of planning and structuring (weekly) routines.

Group members typically pursue multiple hobbies and therefore often face the challenge of coordinating them within their daily lives and routines. While hobbies are important, they remain confined to leisure activities and, from the groups' perspective, should not compete with school obligations; ideally, they complement school demands, e.g. by providing a balance between cognitive and physical activities. In this context, engagement in sport also gains legitimacy, particularly through parental support. Adolescents enjoy recreational sport because it offers opportunities for success, recognition and identity formation. Sport also enables them to meet like-minded peers, an effect reinforced by the institutional structure of sport clubs (e.g. homogeneity of interests, age and gender). Participation in institutional activities can thus be understood as engagement in educational programmes, as these settings are interpreted by the peer groups as arenas for individual achievement and personal growth. The experience structure of planned leisure activities closely aligns with the orientation type centred on personal development.

Spontaneous Leisure Activities in Informal Relationship Configurations

As previously noted, this experience structure refers to a form of leisure activities strongly influenced by spontaneous, situational events. It emerges among peer groups whose primary focus is joint activities within informal relationship configurations, through which shared experiences are created. Their leisure time is described as a succession of activities resembling a continuous cycle of experiences oriented towards emotions and immediate needs. These spontaneously generated experiences are enacted within the group as exciting activities, with a particular focus on risk taking. The experience structure of spontaneous leisure activities corresponds to the orientation type focused on challenge seeking among peers. These situations often involve encounters with danger and stepping beyond one's personal comfort zone. For example, peer groups may deliberately seek out certain locations, such as remote, restricted areas,

and co-create thrilling situations within their social and spatial environment, e.g. climbing onto rooftops from which other adolescents have previously fallen.

When groups display a strong orientation towards relationships, their central concern becomes how these thrilling experiences are collectively remembered and interpreted, for instance through storytelling within the group. The consumption of alcohol and marijuana, as well as interactions with older peers or peers of the opposite sex, also plays a significant role in peer groups' practices. Leisure time is thus experienced as freely available time within a partly heterogeneous peer world, oriented towards the present and only minimally shaped by family or school influences. When adolescents interact with adults, e.g. with social workers at a youth disco organised in a youth centre, such encounters are only sporadic and carry little pedagogical- or educational significance for them. Peer groups tend to be sceptical of institutional programmes and their structures, which is also reflected in their accounts of skipping school or experiencing conflict with parents. Although sporting practice is not explicitly rejected at either the individual or group level, it plays only a minor role within their leisure-time activities.

To conclude this results section, it is important to emphasise the scope of the distinction between planned and spontaneous leisure activities to understand adolescents' practices during the transition from childhood to adolescence. *This distinction is not only associated with different meanings and functions attributed to leisure time, but also to school.* The analyses show that adolescents' interpretation of leisure and school are closely interrelated. With their cross-situational logics, which can reshape contexts of practice and activate specific orientations, the two experience structures extend beyond leisure activities, and represent a fundamental mode of practice in everyday life. This mode should not to be understood as a choice made freely by the adolescents (which would make it difficult to change), but rather as a socially constructed, biographical product developed over several years. The specific patterns of adolescents' daily lives influence both school- and leisure-related practices within peer groups, insofar as they create a shared space of experience that extends across groups: peer groups' collectively shared perspectives on leisure time can support school-related activities, while in the spontaneous mode, school can become integrated into the broader, leisure-oriented peer world.

3.2.3 Interim Conclusion and Implications for Sport Pedagogy

This section has examined the contexts of practice in which peer groups participate during the transition from childhood to adolescence, highlighting how these contexts constitute conjunctive spaces of experience from the groups' collectively shared perspective. The findings contribute to a better understanding

of school-based (particularly PE) and leisure-time contexts (particularly recreational sport) by highlighting their central cross-group experience structures. In addition to these experience structures, the analyses uncover the dominant forms of practice that shape peer groups' experiences within these contexts of practice. It should be noted, however, that the findings—derived from the peer groups' perspectives—primarily illuminate the meaning-making and knowledge dimensions of practice. Furthermore, based on the data collected from the group discussions, any description of concrete practices is necessarily selective. The full range of practices, including more subtle and fine-grained practices that may undermine the central experience structures and broaden the spectrum of experiences, is not fully captured in my research.⁵⁴

Practice in both school-related and leisure-time contexts offers adolescents with diverse opportunities to renew or even create commonalities, which can be understood as different dimensions of peer-being within and across the peer groups interviewed. Against the theoretical background of multidimensional peer-being (cf. Chapter 2.1.2), my work should be understood as exploratory, aiming to identify cross-group dimensions of peer-being as they emerge in school-related and leisure-time practices. In this regard, my findings also expand existing documentary research on students (Matthes et al., 2024), in which the collectively shared perspective has thus far received little attention. Regarding school, the peer groups interviewed emphasised the dimensions of shaping one's role as a student, attending a class within a school with a distinct profile, and sharing experiences such as school trips. *A key finding of the second results section is that school and PE are, from the peer groups' perspective, strongly structured by the formal logic of schooling. However, this logic is interpreted, processed, and thus practically created in relation to other actors' practices (teachers and classmates).*

The school-related space of experience thus represents a period of intensive engagement with the social environment during the transition from childhood to adolescence, marked by specific relationships, forms of belonging, and dynamics of differentiation within the framework of the student role. It is important to emphasise, however, that although the student role and its associated relationships, modes of belonging, and processes of differentiation may constitute a collectively shared and structurally similar experience, the practical relevance of this experience is likely to vary substantially between peer groups, an aspect that becomes evident when viewed in relation to the different orientation types (cf. Chapter 3.1.2). Moreover, the school-related space of experience must

54 This requires ethnographic/videographic approaches, which I have implemented in other projects (cf., among others, Schiller & Zander, 2024).

be further specified with regard to its social dimension at the level of classroom interaction, as I will illustrate later in this chapter using the example of PE.

From the perspective of peer groups, the 'image' of leisure time initially appears even more heterogeneous than that of school. A wide spectrum of activities pursued by individual group members as well as various forms of engagement in institutional programmes and social relationship configurations must be considered. As a result, commonalities between peer groups tend to fade into the background. *To make sense of the differences between the peer groups interviewed, I introduced the guiding distinction between planned and spontaneous leisure practices.* With regard to peer-being in the context of leisure time, which can be understood as shaped by group members' collectively shared experiences, adolescents in the transition from childhood to adolescence can, along this guiding distinction, be assigned to two central communities of experience.

Based on the findings of my research, the school-related context of practice can be understood as a complex social reality constituted through the interrelation of multiple spaces of experience that, for the peer groups interviewed, function simultaneously. Their layers and the overlap of these spaces frequently give rise to discrepant or even contradictory attributions of meaning. *My analysis demonstrates that participation in PE draws on broader school-related experience structures and extends them through subject-specific content. From the peer groups' collectively shared perspective, however, boundaries between school, the classroom, peer group and leisure cannot always be clearly delineated.* As regards PE, strong connections to an extracurricular sport culture become apparent, which in turn shape the peer groups' specific experiences within the classroom. The school-related space of experience also exhibits subtle subject-specific differences: themes addressed in PE (situated both within peer group affiliations and within broader social relationships at school), appear to draw on an ostensibly natural, content-related frame of reference. Yet this frame is refracted through the peer groups' experiential histories and their sport-related perspectives. Consequently, PE emerges as an experience structure that is collectively shared but simultaneously ambivalent and contested.

In research on students' perspectives in PE (cf. Krieger, Heemsoth & Wibowo, 2021, for an overview), classroom practice has not yet been described in terms of the complex constellation of meanings that are simultaneously shared and contested – particularly at the level of peer groups. Peer groups do not interact on equal footing; rather, their interactions are embedded within hierarchical structures marked by relationships of dominance and subordination. *Although my research is designed to take an open approach to the full range of peer group practices, interpreting them in both positive and negative terms and generating descriptive insights, the dimension of power, in particular, highlights the need for*

pedagogical concepts that support teachers in managing peer groups in PE in ways that prevent marginalisation, shaming or social pressure.

Precisely because peer-to-peer approaches are gaining increasing recognition across various societal fields (e.g. in organisational management, cf. Hensen, 2022), it is essential to resist reducing processes of peer socialisation too readily to their positive effects. Nor can such processes be understood simply as informal learning opportunities that, in the spirit of ‘anything goes’, can be left entirely to students themselves. Rather, PE teachers should treat peer groups as a pedagogical category that is constitutive of teaching. Drawing on my findings, I propose three variants of peer-oriented PE. These variants build on the three previously identified experience structures (teacher, classmates, sport, cf. Chapter 3.2.1.1) and, on this basis, place both the openness of meaning within the subject and the power-laden spaces of peer group influence at the centre of pedagogical practice.

The first variant strengthens the teacher’s role and seeks to manage peer groups’ influence which often goes unreflected in everyday PE practice. Instruction is centred on school-related objectives within standardised movement, game and sport programmes, deliberately narrowing the scope for peer group dynamics and directing students’ attention to solving specific tasks. Examples include fitness exercises, methodical exercise sequences in high-risk areas of movement, or the optimisation of performance in competitive settings. In this approach, the social prestige of sport, its institutional significance (for grading and certification), and the teacher’s expertise are highlighted as key components of PE. Paradoxical as it may sound, the few accounts from peer groups indicate that even this teacher-centred approach can be appreciated and may provide benefits for certain groups of students.

The second variant emphasises the role of students, supporting them in forming and enacting peer groups within the PE lesson, in accordance with their respective orientations and prior experiences. Simultaneously, peer groups are encouraged to constructively contribute to the lesson, thereby assuming an explicitly lesson-generating function that facilitates both teaching and learning. Given that students often share a multi-year history of experiences in PE, it is important to deliberately introduce breaks from established routines. This variant also requires a clearly defined implementation concept that must be explicitly communicated. Inspiration can be drawn, e.g. from peer education models (Heyer, 2010; Nörber, 2003, for PE see also Zander, 2019c) or from cooperative learning methods (Wibowo & Bähr, 2018). The teacher’s role here is primarily in planning and preparing lessons, while remaining actively involved during the lesson, for example by moderating social interactions between different peer groups and guiding social learning processes, which may lead to forms of democratic learning.

The third variant emphasises the subject matter of teaching itself, highlighting the significance of sport as a socially embedded cultural asset. Drawing on a pedagogically relevant subject structure, students are addressed as active participants in sport lessons. By defining sport as a shared field of learning for both teachers and students, a dynamic balance of engagement is established among all participants, depending on the content to be conveyed. This approach may even lead to some peer groups assuming the role of experts, for instance. The subject matter serves as a guiding authority, providing incentives and presenting challenges, while also demanding specific forms of conduct, which are primarily interpreted and communicated by the teacher. Tactical scenarios in traditional sport games that require collective solutions and the individual processing of exercise-specific problems can be addressed.

The three variants outlined here can be applied in alternation or in combination, depending on factors such as target groups, objectives, content, and other teaching-related considerations. A closer look at these three peer-oriented PE variants reveals opportunities to reflect on peer-cultural plurality, while simultaneously raising questions about differentiation strategies within peer groups that support learning. *Such strategies should enable peer groups to assume a constructive, mediating role between individual students and the class, fostering both the learning process and students' personal development.* Implementing this pedagogical approach, however, requires a deeper understanding of how peer groups' collective orientations and conjunctive spaces of experience are formed and transformed over time. To this end, this approach should be grounded in the praxeological sociology of knowledge (Bohnsack, 2017) and complemented by educational-theoretical considerations, which have already been developed in school pedagogy and foreign language pedagogy (Nohl, 2018; Bonnet, 2011). In sport pedagogy, work on this⁵⁵ has also started, but peer groups have so far largely remained outside its focus.

Admittedly, this is by no means a straightforward task. Yet this very challenge may serve as an incentive to engage more deeply with the learning, education and formation processes of peer groups. For example, the praxeological sociology of knowledge conceptualises learning as occurring in the space between understanding and interpretation, or within the tension between conjunctive and communicative meaning structures. Nohl (2018), highlighting the limited success of schools in mitigating social inequalities, characterises the task of overcoming the constraints of the conjunctive space of experience as a Sisyphean pedagogical endeavour. Yet, according to Nohl, this Sisyphean endeavour is indispensable and structurally justified. Learning in school begins

55 Above all, research on the professionalisation of (prospective) PE teachers should be mentioned here (among others, Schierz & Pallesen, 2016; Ernst, 2018; Schiller, 2020).

within the divergences between the orientations of the actors involved in teaching. Bonnet (2011) argues that such divergences should not only be recognised as a structural feature of schooling, but should also be deliberately pedagogically staged within classroom interactions. In his educational-theoretical interpretation of the praxeological sociology of knowledge, classroom interaction is understood as a “marketplace and site of emergence for meaning constructions” (Bonnet, 2011, p. 189).

In parts of my research on the life-world orientations in PE (cf. Zander, 2017), I argued along similar lines. Although framed in partly different terminology, my aim was to describe the encounters between divergent orientations and to investigate the deliberate implementation of such a teaching approach within the framework of subject-pedagogical developmental research. In an exemplary teaching project, where peer groups designed their own sporting practices, teachers enacted the notion of a life-world orientation. *To achieve the dual shift in perspective, adolescent peer groups were encouraged during presentation phases to articulate their ‘own’ orientations while at the same time engaging with their peers’ ‘other’ orientations.* Similar approaches can be observed in other school subjects, such as music: in composition processes or the invention of music (cf., among others, Kranefeld & Voit, 2020). At this point, much more could be said to deepen these reflections and to draw further connections to other school subjects. For now, however, these considerations on the pedagogical potential of sport, framed with reference to the praxeological sociology of knowledge, will be concluded to refocus on the central themes of the interim conclusion.

For me, the decisive point for pedagogy in PE lies in using the present results section to advance an empirically grounded conceptual proposal, namely that both school and leisure time can be understood as collectively shared spaces of experience shaped by peer groups, each with its own specific experience structures. I would like to emphasise the significance of peer groups in shaping school-related and leisure-time practices, while remaining fully aware that the peer group itself is also a conceptual construct arising from my analysis of complex social relationships and represents just one social actor among many. My aim is to describe school and leisure time from a peer group-centred, collective perspective, thereby creating the possibility to meaningfully address pedagogical questions. *My pedagogical view of peer groups also considers the formation of practice, recognising that while school-related and leisure-time practices occur in distinct contexts, they can, nonetheless, be closely interwoven at the level of meaning and experience.* Specifically, it is through the pedagogically mediated interplay of orientations and spaces of experience that unique opportunities and limitations for peer group practices emerge, and thus for the personal development of their members. The next results section focuses on how these opportunities and limi-

tations for development are pre-structured by specific alignments between peer group orientations and spaces of experience.

3.3 Unequal Alignments of collective Orientations and conjunctive Spaces of Experience

In the first two results sections, I repeatedly highlight, both empirically and theoretically, the fundamental differences between peer groups in their participation in school-related and leisure-time practices. As noted at several points in the first and second results sections, orientations cannot be realised per se; in other words, the experience structures within each space of experience are not inherently compatible with peer groups' orientations. This is particularly relevant for practices in the school context (a mandatory setting for all peer groups), where various findings suggest that different peer group orientations align in distinct ways with cross-group spaces of experience. Building on the results on orientation types (Chapter 3.1) and spaces of experience (Chapter 3.2), my analysis can be extended to examine the alignment relationships between individual orientations and specific spaces of experience. Drawing on the theoretical considerations presented earlier, it is possible to differentiate between harmonious, ambivalent and antagonistic patterns of alignment. The findings of this third results section are significant in their own right, but they also serve an explanatory function for the earlier results (Chapter 3.1 and Chapter 3.2) by illuminating the processes through which orientations are formed and specific experience structures develop within spaces of experience.

The third results section represents a significant extension of the previous insights into the similarities and differences between peer groups, as it situates orientations and spaces of experience in relation to social inequalities. By analysing patterns of alignment, it becomes possible to examine the extent to which social inequalities are (re)produced⁵⁶ within and across peer groups, for example along the lines of milieu or gender affiliations. *These affiliations, which extend beyond the micro-level interactions within peer groups and carry relevance at the macro-level, can be understood as societal spaces of experience (Bohnsack, 2017, cf. Chapter 2.1.2).* In my conceptualisation of peer groups as multidimensional collectives, the societal spaces of experience associated with different forms of affiliation can thus be considered additional dimensions of peer-being. Furthermore, the various alignments between orientations and spaces of experience can be understood as unequal alignments when considered in relation to these

56 According to Krappmann (1999), adolescents already develop practice strategies in childhood to interact under conditions of social inequality. Inequality becomes part of their competencies for interaction with peers and is thus reproduced as a system.

additional dimensions, as they shape the development of orientations and participation in spaces of experience (cf. Chapter 2.1.2 for details). The focus here is on the extent to which harmonious, ambivalent and antagonistic alignments, with their respective impacts on development, are embedded within particular affiliations, allowing us to speak of affiliation-specific alignments.

As part of the SpOK study, peer groups (including both male and female students, and with and without migration backgrounds) attending a Hauptschule or Gymnasium in the seventh and ninth years of school were interviewed (cf. Chapter 2.3.1). This pre-analysis sampling already introduced several lines of differentiation among the 16 peer groups interviewed, which required further examination to determine their empirical relevance for specific practices or, alternatively, to be excluded. Migration experience as a line of differentiation is not further addressed here, as it emerged only marginally in the group discussions. *At the current stage of analysis within the development of socio-genetic typification, the following presentations should therefore be regarded as initial results of a hypothetical nature, intended to stimulate further research.*

Nonetheless, these initial findings already highlight the explanatory value that the various, interlinked lines of differentiation can have for understanding differences in peer groups' practices during the transition from childhood to adolescence.⁵⁷ Accordingly, the results on alignments are weighted in accordance with the explanatory significance of these lines of differentiation. The type of school attended emerges as a structuring element in the data and is reflected in many orientations, not only within school and PE, but also in leisure-time spaces of experience, e.g. in recreational sport (see Chapter 3.2.2.1). Age-related attributions are primarily observed in the school context of practice and less so in leisure-time activities. Gender differentiations are evident in PE at Hauptschule schools and, more generally, in themes related to the body (such as beauty).

3.3.1 Socio-educational, Milieu-specific Alignments

Differences associated with attending a Gymnasium or Hauptschule are already evident in the findings on orientation types and spaces of experience, indicating that school type plays a significant role in the practices of the peer groups interviewed. On the one hand, school type is strongly and implicitly embedded in practices at the level of orientations (cf. Zander, 2020c, see also Chapter 3.1.2).

57 Referring to reconstructive approaches to studying the constitution of social inequalities (e.g. Pfaff & Rabenstein, 2018), to which I am committed, this explanatory power should not be misunderstood as an assumption of causal relationships. Rather, it reflects the concept of sociogenesis, which I understand here as the process by which specific alignments give rise to particular societal spaces of experience (such as milieu and gender affiliations), which, in turn, become practice-relevant for peer groups.

On the other hand, it is also explicitly reflected in practices, e.g. when students form differentiating communitisations in their interactions with peers from a different school type (cf. Zander, 2022a, see also Chapter 3.2.1). Furthermore, school type affiliation is closely intertwined with other factors, such as gender, which is why I continue to address it in the following chapters of this results section.

If we take the diagnosis of individualisation or even singularisation in our society seriously (cf. Beck, 1986; Reckwitz, 2019), it appears paradoxical how strongly school type differentiates peer groups' practices, even as differences between individual schools themselves tend to recede into the background, despite considerable educational autonomy. However, school type represents only the tip of the iceberg. As the SpOK study demonstrated through its questionnaire survey (Burrmann, 2020), school type is closely linked, e.g. to parents' socio-economic status. At the same time, schools are repeatedly found incapable of compensating for educational inequalities among students; teachers themselves are often embedded in middle class-specific educational backgrounds and are not neutral with regard to parents' educational backgrounds (cf., among others, Bourdieu & Passeron, 1971; Grundmann et al., 2003). There is, therefore, a risk that schools reproduce the educational milieu rooted in students' family backgrounds.⁵⁸ Accordingly, the following analysis seeks to understand the differences associated with school type also as an expression of the peer groups' specific family-mediated socio-educational milieu.

In relating the five orientation types to the spaces of experience in school-related and leisure-time contexts, it becomes evident that different socio-educational milieu-specific alignments exist. Orientations towards certainty and development, observed in peer groups attending a Gymnasium, tend to align harmoniously with the school context and the range of experience structures it offers. In contrast, orientations towards relationships/community and autonomy, characteristic of peer groups attending a Hauptschule, tend to exhibit an antagonistic alignment with the school-related space of experience. Orientations towards challenge, present in peer groups at both Gymnasium and Hauptschule schools, occupies an intermediate position between a harmonious and antago-

58 By 'educational milieu', I primarily refer to the attitudes/values of social groups that are closely linked to the educational backgrounds of their members (e.g. in terms of completed qualifications). These orientations are often reflected in their professional contexts (and, consequently, in the financial possibilities and constraints that shape their lifestyles).

nistic pattern of alignment.⁵⁹ *The strong polarisation between harmonious and antagonistic alignments in the school context suggests that at least two socio-educational milieus are represented among the peer groups interviewed.* These milieu-specific positions are characterised either by a strong proximity to, or by a considerable distance from, the notion and valuation of institutionally-mediated education.

Within the school-related space of experience, the teacher-centred experience structure, which is associated with student attributions⁶⁰ such as 'punctuality', 'obedience' and 'diligence', is either upheld or contested. Connected to this is the peer-related experience structure, which may, on the one hand, recede into the background of intergenerational interactions, for example through a 'polite and minimally disruptive tone' among students, but may, on the other, dominate classroom dynamics (sometimes conflictually) as peer-to-peer interaction. Similarly, the subject-related experience structure, manifested in factors such as 'interest in the subject' and 'skills', is both constructively invoked to facilitate participation in goal-oriented classroom processes and, conversely, revealed in attributions such as 'demotivation' or 'inability'.

At the extremes of harmonious and antagonistic alignment, differences between school types become particularly salient. *At the same time, the alignments themselves require further specification. A central finding of my research in this regard is that peer groups, even in cases of antagonistic alignment, develop pragmatic strategies to reconcile individual elements of their orientations with the existing experience structures, thereby creating efficient means for realising their orientation.* Empirical findings from student- and classroom-level research confirm this view (cf., among others, Bräutigam, 2011; Kamper, 2015), indicating that peer groups should not be understood as passive recipients of instruction, but rather as co-constructors.

59 Here, it is useful to differentiate the orientation towards challenge into the context- and target-group-specific orientations towards performance and practice: while the orientation towards performance, also observed among students attending a Gymnasium, can largely be classified as harmonious, albeit with some ambivalent features, the orientation towards challenge, found only among students attending a Hauptschule, can be described as an antagonistic alignment.

60 The attributions are used to illustrate the alignments. They are, of course, highly condensed constructions that risk producing black-and-white pictures and do not adequately reflect the complexity of peer groups' practices.

With regard to classroom participation in particular, a minimum level of fulfilling the “student role”⁶¹ (Breidenstein, 2006, p. 11) must be assumed, even if it varies between groups, so that school-typical role structures, comprising teacher-assigned tasks and student completion of these tasks, remain intact, even under antagonistic alignments. Thus, antagonistic alignments do not disrupt the institutional logic of schooling; rather, they manifest through a differentiated emphasis within the experience structure. Within such alignments, constructions of meaning occur that may seem self-evident to individuals from educationally privileged milieus (e.g. recognition of the hierarchy between teachers and students), requiring no explicit reflection, or conversely, may seem so foreign that they are no longer associated with the institution of school (e.g. training or secluded rooms for students with behavioural issues).

The specific socio-educational milieu of these alignments becomes particularly evident through one’s own milieu-related position, perspective and evaluation of what is observed.⁶² Antagonistic alignments, in particular, can prompt personal reflection on one’s own implicit expectations of schooling. They provide insights into the power-laden prioritisation and enforcement of different norms by various actors (teachers, students, parents), and can also offer indications about the quality of instruction, especially in terms of classroom interactions and their sometimes unintended learning, socialisation or educational effects. Finally, the ways in which socio-educational milieu-specific alignments, shaped by attendance at a Hauptschule or Gymnasium, signal broader social inequalities will now be elaborated.

Within the German school system, it is particularly the Hauptschule and Gymnasium that are associated with the system’s selectivity and with criticism of (re-)producing social inequalities. *Since the expansion of education at the end of the 1960s, both school types have faced largely opposing developments affecting, on the one hand, student numbers and, on the other, the social composition of the student body.* Today, the student body of Hauptschule schools has shrunk dramatically and is considered the most socially homogeneous, both in terms of parental background and the social origins of students’ reference persons

61 The designation of schoolwork as a ‘job’ highlights the instrumental and strategic ways in which students respond to academic demands. “Many of the practices that constitute the student’s job are directed towards the production of tangible outputs: completed worksheets, finished tasks and filled exercise books. Ultimately, classroom ‘instruction’ appears to condense into this comprehensive orientation towards production, in which the meaning and purpose of schoolwork materialise” (Breidenstein, 2006, p. 261).

62 This perspective can be further systematised for pedagogical practice and integrated into professional development. For example, Rutter (2021), drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of socio-analysis, demonstrates how teachers’ guiding orientations within schools contribute to the inequalities in school and are intertwined with habitus- and milieu-specific logics.

(friends, classmates) (Solga & Wagner, 2008). This homogenisation is particularly significant for adolescents attending Hauptschule, as has already been shown (cf. Chapter 3.1.2, Chapter 3.2.2.1); these students also spend a considerable amount of their afternoons within peer groups formed at school, thus remaining within these socially homogeneous circles even during leisure time.

The adolescents' reference persons are distributed unevenly across the two school types, especially with regard to leisure time. Two polar forms of leisure activities, each associated with distinct spaces of experience, can be identified: on the one hand, individualised leisure activities in several reference groups (usually family, sport clubs, music school) and on the other, collective leisure activities concentrated within a few or even a single reference group (usually the peer group). What is especially striking is that peer groups attending a Hauptschule attach particularly high importance to peer relationships, even at the level of orientation. The Hauptschule students interviewed exhibited a distinctly peer-focused basic orientation in both school-related and leisure-time contexts. This orientation can be understood as a peer-group response to the problematic situation of students attending Hauptschule schools. The lack of educational and vocational prospects, coupled with experiences of social stigmatisation, heighten the attractiveness of the peer group as a central point of reference, since it is (only) here that the students experience self-efficacy and recognition (Wellgraf, 2012). The strong peer-centred practices of Hauptschule students, sometimes accompanied by anti-school tendencies, should therefore be interpreted less as deliberate self-isolation and more as a consequence of experienced exclusion.

In combination with the absence of family-based activities, encouragement and support structures, the peer group functions as the primary reference group for adolescents, provided they are integrated into it. The peer group is not only an emotional resource but also constitutes a sphere in which their orientations can be realised, particularly in leisure contexts. Among Hauptschule students, these socio-educational milieu-specific alignments in leisure can therefore largely be classified as harmonious (e.g. between an orientation towards relationship/community and 'spontaneous' spaces of experience). For these adolescents, peer-being in their leisure time is characterised by a sense of group belonging and the experience of collective identity. Alongside positive aspects in practice-relevant areas such as trust and support, however, this also reflects a certain one-sidedness in opportunities for social participation.

This one-sidedness is pedagogically significant for fostering holistic personality development. Limited contact with other reference groups means that adolescents have reduced access to diverse experience structures and the developmental impulses they provide, such as opportunities for forming a more differentiated

identity.⁶³ This may include, e.g. organised sport clubs, which are regularly and purposefully attended in peer groups oriented towards development. Due to processes of school- and family-related disintegration, adolescents attending a Hauptschule also lack opportunities to offset negative experiences within the peer group by drawing on experiences in other social contexts. This is particularly important given that the quality of peer-group relationships, when the peer group constitutes the adolescents' only reference group, is fragile, emotionally strained, and associated with negative developmental outcomes. Empirical studies (among others, Hanke, 2003) show that disintegrated male adolescents who spend most of their time within their peer group encounter violent situations more frequently. Harmonious alignments, therefore, cannot be regarded as unequivocally positive with regard to peer groups' developmental and participatory potential, but must also be considered in terms of their limitations.

To explain the differences in orientations and spaces of experience among the peer groups interviewed, educational inequality within the German school system can be understood as a key explanatory factor. An important observation emerging from my research in this regard is that the trajectories of peer groups attending a Hauptschule and Gymnasium rarely intersect in their leisure time. Peer groups from a Hauptschule and those from a Gymnasium not only operate within distinct school environments but also remain separated in leisure-time contexts. Building on this insight, which I will elaborate in more detail later in this chapter, a central inequality-theoretical thesis can already be formulated: if the type of school attended determines the social composition of the school's student body, and if adolescents primarily experience communitisation within peer groups formed in this specific student body, then segregation between adolescents from different socio-educational milieus is both channelled and reinforced through peer groups. *While peer groups are embedded within certain structures, they themselves also contribute to the reinforcement of educational inequality.* The socio-educational milieu into which a child is born through their family is thus reproduced, particularly during the transition from childhood to adolescence, through peer group practices. Among the peer groups interviewed, no evidence of distancing from their milieu was observed.

63 Although the focus is framed differently through an inequality-sensitive lens, this argument also applies, albeit in a more moderate form, to students attending a Gymnasium and their harmonious alignment between an orientation towards personal development and the spaces of experience in school and leisure time. This alignment can be understood as a manifestation of the internalisation of the practice imperatives characteristic of our performance-oriented society. Within the market- or competition-like structures of practice, the subject takes on the form of an entrepreneurial self (Bröckling, 2007). Families from the non-academic middle class, in particular, are affected by this imperative of continual self-optimisation across all spheres of everyday life, as they are constantly confronted with the risk of downward social mobility (Reckwitz, 2019).

In the following, I take a closer look at PE and recreational sport, as well as at the corresponding alignments between specific elements at the levels of orientation and spaces of experience.

Physical Education (PE)

As the analysis of the group discussions reveals, PE lessons at a Gymnasium differ from those at a Hauptschule (cf. Burrmann & Zander, 2017; Zander, 2018b for details). From the perspective of the peer groups interviewed, these differences are particularly apparent in the organisation of lessons, the thematic focus, and the degree to which the lessons are directed by the teacher or by the students themselves. Across these three dimensions, two school type-specific patterns of practice can be identified:

(1) *At the Hauptschule*, PE lessons are typically characterised by a high degree of teacher control combined with significant co-determination by specific student groups. Lessons are usually divided into two phases, 'warm-up' and 'play', each of which is treated as a largely separate unit. Based on this structure, the content focuses almost exclusively on individual sport with an emphasis on endurance, team sport and ball games. Although the content is repetitive, its implementation is renegotiated among the actors in nearly every lesson. The alignment between orientations and the space of experience of PE can be described as antagonistic in this pattern of practice, as neither the particularly sport-oriented peer groups nor those with markedly different interests find their needs adequately addressed or their orientations meaningfully realised.

The format of PE at a Hauptschule, namely sport activities conducted with the class as a single large group, is frequently shaped by individual peer groups into a competitive contest, often against the wishes of other classmates. The resulting (game-related) conflicts could, in principle, provide situational opportunities to foster students' capacity to act in and through sport, but the participants largely experience them as disruptions to the lesson flow or as interruptions of play. These conflict-laden interactions also influence the extent to which different peer groups can participate in the lesson, with some students being pushed into spectator roles. As a result, PE becomes a space characterised by conflict vs. 'mere' physical presence for the students. On the relationship level, both between the teacher and students and among the students themselves, there are repeated attempts to establish a shared, practice-guiding framework that accommodates different orientations (e.g. by introducing rules for social conduct). At the same time, the institutional framework provided by the teacher (e.g. the authority to impose sanctions) is necessary to support this process, yet it is also subject to criticism from students (e.g. as diluting what they consider to be 'real sport'). Alignment is therefore process-oriented, aimed at managing the

next steps of interaction required to create and sustain a sporting activity. PE at the Hauptschule revolves around the interactive construction of conditions that enable the participation in sport of all students.

(2) *PE at the Gymnasium*—in contrast to the pattern observed at the Hauptschule—is not negotiated among participants but occurs within hierarchically structured interactions, giving students little influence over the lesson. Lessons are typically organised by the teacher into three phases – ‘warm up’, ‘practice’ and ‘play’ as part of a coherent sequence thematically focused over several sessions, with the aim of improving students’ physical skills. In this context, highly content-focused student orientations converge with an experience structure that is self-evident to participants, with instructional and skill-acquisition elements taking centre stage. This harmonious alignment is reflected in the flow of teacher-led instruction, where ‘disruptions’ are rare or not addressed. The central format of practice in PE at a Gymnasium could, in principle, provide opportunities to enhance students’ capacity to act in and through sport. However, from the peer groups’ perspective, little improvement in physical skills occurs due to the lack of individualisation in practice. Furthermore, the practice format is fundamentally constrained by the fact that PE draws on students’ extracurricular (club) sport experience, effectively converting these experiences into school performance. In this context, alignment is primarily product-oriented, focusing on the (school-related) benefits of the sporting programme.

These alignments suggest that the peer groups interviewed are exposed to school type-specific educational programmes in PE. Nevertheless, in both school types, the pedagogical implementation of PE is unlikely to fully realise the dual mandate outlined in the curriculum “promotion of development through movement, play and sport, and the exploration of the culture of movement, play and sport” (Ministerium für Schule und Weiterbildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2014, p. 6). The two dimensions of this dual mandate are neither equally weighted nor evenly distributed across school types: *at the Hauptschule, opportunities for promoting development through movement, play and sport predominate, whereas at the Gymnasium, opportunities for exploring the culture of movement, play and sport are more prominent.*

These differences in educational approaches can be explained by various structural factors. In particular, Hauptschule students are disadvantaged compared to their peers attending a Gymnasium (Gerlach et al., 2006; Frohn, 2007; Theis, 2010), as they have fewer PE lessons, are more often taught by non-specialised teachers and participate less frequently in extracurricular sport. My analyses have also highlighted how PE lessons draw differently on the extracurricular experiences of peer groups. At the same time, these extracurricular experiences vary greatly among students, particularly in recreational sport, which is closely linked to school type and will be addressed in the following section.

Recreational Sport

Particularly in leisure time, when adolescents are theoretically free to decide how to spend their time, engagement in sport—at least when practised fairly regularly—must align with the peer groups’ respective orientations. Organised club sport is primarily pursued by peer groups attending a Gymnasium, often alongside other institutionalised activities, whereas institutional leisure opportunities are generally rarely used by peer groups attending a Hauptschule.⁶⁴ The manifestations of their orientations tend to reflect a substantial gap between their preferences and the specific experience structures offered by such leisure activities. *As with alignments in the school-related space of experience, peer groups’ perceptions and evaluations of expectations of adults (e.g. coaches⁶⁵) within hierarchically structured relationships also play a role.* The orientations towards challenge and autonomy of peer groups attending a Hauptschule tend to be in antagonistic alignment with the experience structures of sport clubs and institutions. Informal sport, however, is practised by peer groups from both school types. In informal sport, from the peer groups’ perspective, a wide range of potential activities exists, some of which are hardly distinguishable from everyday exercise (e.g. walking the dog) or media consumption (e.g. ‘gaming’, ‘playing games’), making them difficult to assign to specific spatial or social settings.

Significant gender differences emerge in informal, self-organised sport among peer groups attending a Hauptschule: e.g. girls tend to engage only sporadically and often individually in activities such as running, cycling or dancing, whereas boys attending a Hauptschule regularly participate in sport collectively (e.g. in informal football matches). Unlike club sport, which is largely age mate-oriented (differentiated according to skill level), informal sport often involves siblings, parents or other family members as central participants in joint sporting activities. Within the sample of peer groups interviewed, it is primarily the sport club athletes—predominantly Gymnasium students—who also engage in informal sport together with their families. In this context, the influence of the family on sporting practices and upbringing becomes evident. Although

64 The peer groups interviewed who attend a Gymnasium are frequently involved in club sport (relatively independent of factors such as gender or migration background) and exhibit low dropout rates. In contrast, among the peer groups attending a Hauptschule, participation in club sport is markedly lower, and dropout rates are notably higher (cf. Chapter 3.1.1, for details, see Zander, 2020a; 2020b).

65 With regard to the role of the coach, there are occasional exceptions to the generally hierarchical relationship structures observed in peer groups attending a Hauptschule. For example, some coaches are reported to adopt a particularly permissive and friendly approach. Another example involves a group of girls attending a Hauptschule who participate in boxing, a male-dominated sport, where their relationship with the male coach highlights gender-related attributions.

distinctions between peer groups from different school types are not categorical but rather gradual, it is noteworthy that adolescents who are less embedded within a close-knit family (or whose parents demonstrate relative indifference towards school and leisure activities) tend to attend a Hauptschule. Examining the family's role in leisure activities thus highlights that differences in engagement in sport can, in part, be attributed to processes of family socialisation.

3.3.2 Age-specific Alignments

For the peer groups interviewed, the transition from childhood to adolescence is closely linked to the move from primary to secondary school, which in North Rhine-Westphalia, where the SpOK study was conducted, occurs after the fourth year of primary school. Although the SpOK data were collected in the seventh and ninth year of school, thus creating a temporal distance from this school transition, the peer groups recounted experiences from their primary school years during the group discussions. Hierarchical differentiations between student groups based on class membership and thus age, play an important role in how adolescents experience this transition: *in primary school, they were the oldest, looking 'down' on the younger students in the first to third years of school; in secondary school, they became the youngest, looking 'up' to students in years six to ten, and sometimes being addressed from 'above' by them.*

Although the transition to secondary school represents a change, the new experiences are interwoven with those made in primary school, i.e. the transition blends with memories from primary school. From the peer groups' perspective, this transition is described as a partial upheaval. Following the slogan 'school is school', adolescents are, on the one hand, already familiar with the institution of school through their primary education. On the other hand, secondary school introduces changes in teachers, classmates and school subjects, or at the very least in terms of curricular demands. For example, encounters with 'strict' teachers and increased academic pressure become part of the new everyday school routine. Peer groups' orientations and spaces of experience develop gradually during these initial years at secondary school, and the resulting differences can also be understood as age-specific, as I will now demonstrate.

The initial data under the SpOK study were collected in the students' seventh year of school, marking the point at which students' school type-specific educational trajectories become largely determined, following the completion of the orientation stage, which in North Rhine-Westphalia covers the fifth and sixth years of school. With the transition to secondary school, adolescents encounter new reference groups and must negotiate a new position within the school system. The fact that, within the SpOK study, we engaged with adolescents in peer groups at school and examined their awareness of the school type-specific ori-

entation of their educational trajectory suggests that they were socially integrated into their secondary schools and had adapted to their new roles as students. Although experiences during the transition are difficult to exclusively attribute to late childhood or early adolescence due to the overlap of these stages, adolescents in the seventh year of school face the onset of puberty. From this point onwards, it becomes relatively straightforward to refer to the peer groups as having entered the early phase of adolescence.⁶⁶

In the group discussions, I was particularly struck by the physical differences among the adolescents (including height, body shape, clothing style) and their voices. In some cases, a noticeable developmental homogeneity existed within the peer groups, providing an additional dimension of peer-being. *Shared developmental stages (especially in contrast to other students within the classroom context) generate shared experiences within the peer group. At the same time, entire peer groups in the seventh year of school can be understood as occupying an 'intermediate stage' of development. In the discussions, I encountered adolescents who still retained a childlike quality alongside peers from the same group.* By the seventh year of school, the challenges of puberty, with its physical changes and psychosocial dynamics, become visible. By the ninth year of school, adolescents present themselves as 'small' adults, having left childhood behind and successfully navigated the sometimes lengthy entry into adolescence. 'The challenges of puberty' have, by this stage largely been resolved, and the adolescents exhibit a clearer sense of their identity and goals.

Relatively independent of the reconstructed orientations and spaces of experience, it becomes clear that, from the seventh to the ninth years of school, school occupies a central role in adolescents' lives (cf. Zander, 2020c, Zander et al., 2020; Zander & Thiele, 2020a, for details). *Peer groups perceive school as an indispensable pathway into adult life. This developmental trajectory can be described as increasing socialisation in school, involving the progressive internalisation of, and adherence to, school values and norms.* In the seventh year, peer relationships, especially among peer groups attending a Hauptschule, still exert strong influence, and school-related obligations (such as participating in lessons) are sometimes openly rejected.

66 Despite considerable differences in how 'youth' is conceptualised as a life stage (cf. for an overview, Böhnisch, 2008), there is broad agreement that puberty plays a central role in the transition to adolescence. In Germany, as in other countries of the Global North, the onset of puberty has gradually but consistently shifted to younger ages (Eckert-Lind et al., 2020), prompting discussions about a temporal advancement of adolescence.

By the ninth year, however, peer groups show a stronger adaptation⁶⁷ to academic expectations. For those attending a Hauptschule, the previously antagonistic alignments between 'anti-school' orientations and the school-related space of experience have largely become harmonised. At the Gymnasium, changes in school-related orientations tend to be less pronounced, whereas among Hauptschule groups, this development represents a fundamental transformation (cf. Zander et al., 2020 for details). This shift can be explained, on the one hand, by adolescents' long-term engagement with school and lessons, and on the other, by the approaching end of compulsory schooling.

The transition from the seventh to the ninth year marks the midpoint of secondary education and functions as an implicit milestone, prompting peer groups to consider their future. Specifically, students attending a Hauptschule start recognising that obtaining a school-leaving certificate is essential for their career prospects and that their future success depends on academic achievement.⁶⁸ This observation aligns, at least on an individual level, with findings from other qualitative longitudinal studies, which indicate that students in Hauptschule and lower secondary schools tend to abandon their typically "school-alienated attitudes" (Krüger et al., 2012, p. 62) towards a more vocationally-oriented, future-focused mindset as they approach the end of their schooling.

The period from the seventh to the ninth year of school can be understood as a stage in which adolescents are still able to develop with relative freedom, yet it simultaneously represents an important period for acquiring qualifications relevant to future careers or for transitioning into upper secondary education. Put succinctly, childhood for the peer groups interviewed was associated with a certain grace period from the seriousness of school life, a phase interpreted individually but increasingly overshadowed in adolescence by its qualifications function. *In adolescence, individuals are expected to assume personal responsibility for their future by attaining a (good) school-leaving certificate.*

Although entry into the labour market still lies in the future, the group discussions revealed a dual perspective: on the one hand, the labour market is perceived as a threatening scenario involving a difficult transition in status for which school can prepare them; on the other hand, the adolescents have started internalising labour market expectations and view their school-leaving certifi-

67 This adjustment reflects less a newfound enjoyment of school than a pragmatic acknowledgement of the importance of good grades. The pragmatic dimension of this insight, in my view, lies in the students' recognition that they cannot escape the institution's constraints. They 'submit' to these constraints while aiming to extract at least some benefit from the academic certificates conferred.

68 This pattern tends to be specific to school type, however, there is an interesting exception: a Gymnasium group followed an almost inverse trajectory compared with the Hauptschule peer groups, gradually becoming increasingly alienated from school (cf. group 4, for details in Zander et al., 2020).

cate as a gateway to pursuing their future interests. One dimension of peer-being in adolescence (here, in the ninth year of school) is therefore recognition of the importance of obtaining a school-leaving certificate.

However, the significance attached to a school-leaving certificate varies according to the peer groups' differing orientations (cf. Chapter 3.1.2). For some peer groups, obtaining a certificate and entering the workforce remains a source of uncertainty, while others focus on achieving an excellent grade point average and take for granted that they will be able to realise their career aspirations. Further research examining how peer groups across different school levels and school types anticipate the labour market and professional world would be useful in clarifying the milieu-specific socio-educational characteristics of this transition in status.

Physical Education (PE)

PE should be understood from peer groups' perspective in relation to their orientations. At the same time, PE as a school-related space of experience forms part of the broader school structure (cf. Chapter 3.2.1). Over the course of the seventh to ninth years of school, which coincides with a stronger orientation towards academic performance expectations, the school-specific character of PE becomes more pronounced for some peer groups, while for others the desire to engage in sport during the school day increases as well. As confirmed by other studies (cf., e.g. Schierz & Serwe-Pandrick, 2018), adolescents often perceive PE as a recreational subject that compensates for the growing cognitive demands of other subjects. Individual-level qualitative longitudinal studies (Albert, 2017; Bindel, 2015) report that students in lower secondary school tend to distance themselves increasingly from school sport. In my analyses, however, this trend does not emerge at the collective level of peer groups. Nonetheless, as noted above, the significance of PE improves only marginally. Even in the ninth year, PE remains just one of many spaces of experience within the school context (cf. Chapter 3.2.1.1 for details). The openness of practice to interpretations, one of the subject's defining characteristics, is reflected in the struggle for influence among various, at times competing, orientations and persists through the ninth year of school.⁶⁹

As other studies indicate, PE offers adolescents little support in coping with stages of development (cf. Neuber, 2007). *Instead, participation in PE during the transition from childhood to adolescence often exposes adolescents to negative*

⁶⁹ The relationship between PE and recreational sport is an indication of this. For the period from the seventh to the ninth year of school, three distinct development trends can be identified: stable interconnections, convergence and decoupling (cf. for details Zander et al., 2020).

experiences of exclusion and devaluation on multiple levels. The pronounced visibility of body-related performance and attractiveness norms within the class community frequently leads to behaviour that oversteps personal boundaries, causing psychosocial insecurity (cf. also Hunger et al., 2022). These dynamics stem largely from the uneven implementation of different orientations in the practice of PE, which produces hierarchical distinctions between groups of students (Zander, 2018a; Zander & Stamm, 2020 for details). Unlike peer groups with performance- or development-oriented orientations, who view PE as a highly regulated, physically demanding, competitive activity, which is often equated with 'real sport' in the club context (Bindel, 2015, p. 145), peer groups oriented more towards relationships and autonomy are particularly vulnerable to performance-related exclusion and devaluation. These students align their practice less with the sport itself and more with their personal well-being in sport. Peer groups with an orientation towards subjective experiential aspects of PE, which are often difficult to observe, are frequently dismissed as disinterested in or not particularly strong at sport.

Recreational Sport

The growing relevance of school between the seventh and ninth year of school is also reflected in the peer groups' leisure activities, insofar as these activities do not create an obstacle or even conflict with academic priorities. Under this premise, participation in spaces of experience related to leisure-time contexts shows strong continuity (cf. Zander et al., 2020 for details). In contrast to school, peer groups in leisure-time contexts are less frequently subject to the internalisation of externally imposed values and norms, or to adaptation pressures. The period of transition and the early years at secondary school play a more decisive role in adolescents' sporting socialisation than the period from the seventh to the ninth year of school, as it is during this phase that the foundations for later sporting behaviour are established.

Since initial exposure to (club) sport occurs independently of peer group and the type of secondary school attended, sustaining participation in sport after entering secondary school depends on the interaction of multiple reference groups. *Some adolescents demonstrate an integrative lifestyle at the intersection of family, school and the peer group, which also has a positive influence on their participation in (club) sport.⁷⁰ Other adolescents, however, exhibit a more one-sided lifestyle between the seventh and ninth year of school, with a strong orientation*

⁷⁰ The differentiation of lifestyles across various reference groups and practices should not obscure the underlying uniformity in their spaces of experience. In other words, these peer groups are, to some extent, trapped in milieu-specific patterns with, e.g. a strong appreciation for sporting activity, from which it is difficult to break free.

towards a peer group with limited engagement in sport. Maintaining sporting engagement under these conditions is challenging, as sport-related encouragement, recognition and support structures are lacking.

In exceptional cases, this lifestyle can still foster new engagement in sporting experiences and integration into sport-oriented reference groups (while also disengaging from previous relationship constellations), as demonstrated by a group of girls attending a Hauptschule, who started boxing in a club between the seventh and ninth year of school. Having spent their leisure time relatively passively in the seventh year of school, by the ninth year, they presented themselves as active, self-determined individuals (cf. also Chapter 3.3.3). This peer group not only serves as an (exceptional) example of the formation of new orientations and spaces of experience in a leisure-time context, but also highlights that developmental processes often follow strong internal logics that cannot be fully captured by simple cause-and-effect reasoning.

Given the high stability of alignments between orientations and spaces of experience from the seventh to the ninth year of school, the exaggerated significance of puberty can be questioned from the peer groups' perspective. While puberty is often described at the individual level as a period of profound crisis, involving "radical personality changes" (Bastian, 2018, p. 3), such crises are far less evident at the collective level of the peer group. Instead, peer groups demonstrate remarkable stability and continuity, functioning as a 'safe haven' for members during the turbulent phases of personal development. *Amid individual upheaval and uncertainty, peer groups provide a stable social environment for adolescents at similar developmental stages.* It can be assumed that experiencing puberty-related uncertainties within a peer group fosters a shared sense of security, as all members face similar challenges. Peer-being can thus represent an important psychosocial anchor for adolescents, both at school and during leisure time, potentially supporting them in navigating the challenges of puberty more effectively.

3.3.3 Gender-specific Alignments

Gender-specific alignments between peer groups' orientations and spaces of experience emerged only marginally in my research, and are intertwined with socio-educational milieu and age group affiliations. Before discussing these alignments, I will briefly outline the gender-specific characteristics of both orientations and spaces of experience, and introduce a key consideration for the study of gender affiliations.

Whereas affiliations to a socio-educational milieu or specific age group tend to be debated primarily within small circles of interested actors, discussions about gender are far more prominent. They extend beyond academic debate and

are highly contested, especially in everyday and mass media discourses concerning the positions presented. One example is the introduction of gender-neutral language, which repeatedly sparks heated debates. Given the heightened societal sensitivity surrounding gender, it is important to briefly explain the theoretical perspective and methodological approach I adopt to address this topic (cf. Chapter 2.2 for details). *For me, gender affiliation is a social phenomenon that emerges in group discussions through participants' interactions, e.g. through the assignment of a gender or distinctions made between genders.* This affiliation can also manifest in peer groups' collective orientations and shared spaces of experience. As a researcher, I was involved in these group discussions and was thereby part of the social construction of gender affiliation (this, of course, also applies to the construction of milieu and age-group affiliations, see Chapter 3.3.4).

Based on gendered socialisation, I am perceived as male and addressed as a man, while at the same time, I engage in gendered forms of address myself. I do this routinely, under the presumed security of clear and unproblematic gender relations. At the same time, however, my work at the university has heightened my awareness of individual aspects, such as the number of genders, gendered self-identifications, externally assigned roles and, importantly, the power relations between genders and their contribution to social inequalities. These socially grounded insights influence my actions, provide a starting point for reflecting on everyday practices and inform the presentation of results that follow.

As discussed in the chapter on age, the seventh year of school is often marked by considerable developmental differences among adolescents. These differences are also reflected within individual peer groups, which vary significantly in their practices (particularly in the presentation of their physicality, as observed in my research). Some peer groups appeared more childlike and, in this respect, almost gender-neutral, while others presented themselves more clearly as adolescents or even young adults, positioning themselves more distinctly along gender lines. In this context, I want to emphasise that my aim is not to generalise peer group members' developmental processes, physical characteristics or gender roles. Rather, I am interested in how peer groups perceive the topic of gender and how they position themselves within gender relations, and how they generate gendered self- and external perceptions in close interaction with age affiliation. *While some adolescents embody gender roles in more stereotypical ways through clothing and behaviour, others express their gender affiliation primarily in discussions.*

Within the SpOK study sample, I did not identify overtly queer positions, i.e. those that criticise traditional gender relations and express this criticism through their lifestyle. It is important to note, however, that the analytical perspective used here captures such positions only at the collective level. Furthermore, with a few exceptions, the peer groups interviewed in the SpOK study were gen-

der-homogeneous, having self-selected as a group based on their own definitions. As a result, peer groups formed through voluntary communitisations tend to distinguish between 'boys' or 'girls' during the transition from childhood to adolescence, thereby reinforcing a certain form of gender segregation. Against this background, entire peer groups can be identified as composed of either female or male members, which I will henceforth refer to as girl groups or boy groups. To preserve the constructive nature of these categories and acknowledge the diversity of femininity and masculinity, I will place 'boys' and 'girls' in quotation marks.

While the seventh year of school revealed a wide range of patterns in the construction of gender during the group discussions, often with striking contrasts even between ostensibly same-gender peer groups, this diversity was no longer visible by the ninth year of school. Instead, what emerged were attempts to position 'boys' and 'girls' more clearly as men or women within the cultural system of binary gender.⁷¹ *These efforts can, in the context of puberty, be understood as the peer groups' pursuit of security in navigating the wide expanse of physicality.* The complex and at times contradictory possibilities for practice and identity that puberty introduces become more manageable, and thus more comprehensible, through the adoption of an ostensibly clearly defined gender identity. The period between the ages of 12/13 and 14/15 years marks a turning point for many adolescents in how they perceive and evaluate school, coinciding with a range of other development-related changes (cf. Chapter 3.3.2). With the onset of puberty and the associated psychological adjustments, adolescents face the developmental challenge of adjusting to their changing bodies and forming a new, more sexualised gender identity (Hurrelmann & Quenzel, 2012). It is striking that from the broad range of developmental challenges, these two aspects emerge as particularly central for peer groups in the ninth year of school.

In case-comparative analyses of 'boy' and 'girl' groups, which I conducted together with Nicole Kirchoff, we were able to demonstrate that the presentation of appearance plays a central role in adolescents' construction of gender affiliation. Gender is constructed through perception and representation practices grounded in social comparison among adolescents and oriented towards physical norms associated with femininity and/or masculinity (cf. Kirchoff & Zander, 2016; Zander, 2019a for details). For example, the norm of slenderness applies across all peer groups and becomes particularly salient in situations such as changing for PE, when bodies and physical features are more exposed, thereby

71 This system rests on a set of rules that is taken for granted in everyday practice: "That there are two and only two genders; that every person belongs to either one or the other gender; that gender affiliation is fixed from birth and neither changes nor disappears; that it can be unmistakably determined from the genitals and is therefore a natural, biologically clearly identifiable fact over which we have no control" (Wetterer, 2008, p. 126).

intensifying social pressure. In addition, there are physical norms that apply to both 'girls' and 'boys', but differ in their manifestation and interpretation.

Across all peer groups, a physically attractive body is one that appears well-groomed, with beauty norms reflected, e.g. in hair care. Attention to hair care as a form of physical presentation is evident among both genders, challenging stereotypical gender assumptions that associate body grooming primarily with females. Nevertheless, subtle differences persist between 'boys' and 'girls' in terms of hair length and styling. Long, usually straightened hair is common among 'girl groups' and is associated with femininity, whereas short, often gelled hair is typically worn by 'boys'.

Beyond these subtle differences between 'boy' and 'girl' groups, the data also reveal more fundamental distinctions, particularly regarding their hierarchical character, which provide insight into the construction of hegemonic masculinity within peer groups: while both 'boys' and 'girls' pay attention to their appearance through body grooming, masculinity is also expressed through strong, dynamic body images, as seen in hip-hop culture and sport. Rappers, in particular, are idealised by 'boys' as embodiments of this form of masculinity. These representations cultivate a notion of hyper-masculinity that contrasts a stereotypically passive femininity defined primarily in terms of external attractiveness and stylised self-presentation. *Consequently, some peer groups legitimise a broader range of practices and behaviours for themselves, grounded in their notions of masculinity, than they deem appropriate for females.*

Our analyses further indicate that gender-specific self-assurance is established through reference to negatively connoted gender images. Applying the "principle of feminisation" (cf. Kirchhoff & Zander, 2018, p. 96, for details), we reconstructed a mechanism within peer groups whereby individuals are devalued and excluded through the negative labelling of traits perceived as 'feminine'. Among the 'boys', this was exemplified when a 'male classmate' is called 'pregnant', thereby calling his masculinity into question and marginalising him within the group. This devaluation simultaneously reinforces the male self-image of the other 'boys', who can distinguish themselves from the feminised representation. Among the 'girls', feminisation was expressed through the 'dumb blonde' stereotype, which exaggerates an emphasis on external features and conventional femininity. The 'girls' use this image to distance themselves from an extreme form of femininity, positioning themselves as being 'cooler' and less focused on outward appearance. In summary, peer groups of both genders exhibit a similar tendency to devalue femininity, either to reinforce masculinity or to highlight a more nuanced form of femininity. In my view, these findings cannot be ignored. In the interim conclusion, I will discuss how (sport) pedagogy might address the devaluation of specific images of femininity (cf. Chapter 3.3.4).

Physical Education (PE)

As already highlighted in the chapter on PE as a school-related space of experience (Chapter 3.2.1), various peer group orientations are evident in PE. At the peer group-differentiated level, it is important to recognise that sport-related orientations can, to some extent, be gendered. *While peer group orientations primarily exist independently of gender, they may take on gendered characteristics in PE through their interaction with other orientations.* An orientation towards autonomy allows for different freedoms when gendered, compared with an orientation towards performance, which in sport is linked to a strongly masculinised understanding of competition, emphasising strength and physical power (see above). As suggested by previous research (e.g. Bräutigam, 2011), data from the SpOK study indicate that PE tends to align more closely with the needs and interests of sport-oriented 'boys', even if this alignment is not explicitly intended by the teacher. This tendency is particularly pronounced in PE at Hauptschule schools. Comparing 'girl' and 'boy' groups within a single class shows that their orientations are incorporated differently into central lessons. In particular, the two sport-related orientations towards sporting success and physical exertion strongly shape the respective groups' practices. These orientations can dominate the lesson's 'front stage', even when they are not shared by the majority of students or regulated by the teacher.

In contexts of unstable school order, this can lead to conflicts between individual 'boy' (groups) over control of how the lesson is implemented. Such conflicts reflect an antagonistic alignment between sport-related orientations and PE's space of experience. An orientation towards sporting success may clash, e.g. with the norm of equitable participation for all students in lesson design. However, this norm of PE may be contested or circumvented, meaning that PE is constantly balancing partly contradictory demands and priorities or rather must prioritise the creating conditions that enable uninterrupted sporting practice. This demonstrates how the realisation of collective orientations is embedded within power relations, which, through strategies of exclusion and retention, result in unequal participation of peer groups in lesson design.

The position of individual 'girl' groups attending Hauptschule in the design of PE lessons is complicated, as they have limited or no extracurricular sport experience and therefore derive little benefit from PE lessons. The 'girl' groups interviewed were relegated to spectator roles during such conflicts, choosing either not to participate actively in the lessons or to sidestep the lesson design process by engaging in side activities with friends within their peer group. At the same time, these 'girl' groups cannot stereotypically be classified as 'well-behaved' students. As other research (among others, Oktay, Hippmann & Meuser, 2015) has shown, 'female' peer groups with 'anti-school' orientations may be in antagonistic alignment with PE.

Recreational Sport

Exercise and sport, with their strong focus on the body, are largely shaped by binary notions of gender. Empirical studies show that even in early childhood, gendered attributions function as an organising principle for both parents and children in the context of exercise and sport socialisation (Hunger, 2023). *In our study, this binary gender structure runs like a thread throughout the process of growing up. During leisure time, the peer groups primarily engage in sporting activities within gender-homogeneous settings (cf. Zander, 2020b, for details).* This is particularly evident in institutionalised sporting activities during leisure time, where a separation of genders occurs, either explicitly through distinct classes or implicitly through the reinforcement of gender-stereotyped sporting activities. From the peer groups' perspective, gender relations are therefore rarely discussed in recreational sport, unlike in school sport (see below), where different genders interact more visibly, and gender is closely tied to attributions of performance ability.

In informally organised recreational sport (e.g. sport within the family), where different genders participate together, gender differences are rarely addressed, possibly because performance is not a primary concern for the peer groups interviewed. Nevertheless, even in these informal contexts, it becomes evident that exercise and sport socialisation unfold in a gender-specific manner, as reflected in the choice of sport and how it is practised. Performance-oriented street football played with a high degree of physical commitment in a competitive win-or-lose mode, is typically construed as a male sport. Stereotypical gender notions are also reflected in the preferences for specific sports. These stereotypes become particularly visible in our sample when expectations and attributions regarding 'appropriate' sport is tied to processes of social elevation or devaluation. On the one hand, 'boys' who engage in ballet or dance are rejected or ridiculed by other boys. On the other hand, there are cases in which 'girl' groups appropriate sport such as boxing or football, traditionally considered 'male domains,' and receive recognition for doing so.

The intersections of school type and gender affiliation prove particularly insightful. Some 'girl' groups attending Hauptschule spend their leisure time in public urban spaces, where they come into contact with 'boys' and older adolescents. For these groups, 'going out' and 'hanging out' in the city is especially appealing, as it gives them the opportunity to meet new acquaintances and enter a broader social context. The gender and age heterogeneity of these public spaces serves as a form of 'development accelerator', meaning the 'girls' present themselves early on as young 'women'. These 'girl' groups are also involved in romantic relationships, which occupy part of their attention. They do not participate in sporting activities which, however, should not be misinterpreted as a general lack of interest in sport, but rather understood as a consequence of com-

peting interests, such as romantic partnerships. These are further reinforced by their strong involvement in a peer group that pursues these interests and by the absence of supportive family and school structures.

3.3.4 Interim Conclusion and Implications for Sport Pedagogy

A key finding of the third results section is that the alignments between orientations and spaces of experience vary depending on the peer groups' affiliations with a specific socio-educational milieu, age and gender. In the following, I revisit these affiliations. It is important to reiterate that these affiliations—unlike adolescents' membership in a specific peer group of friends—cannot be revoked through an “intellectual act of will” (Mannheim, 1970, p. 525f.). *Rather, they are tied to “social positions” (Mannheim, 1970, 524ff.) within society, which are relatively static and can therefore only shift in line with broader social developments.*⁷² Despite these limitations, actors have opportunities to interpret and shape their affiliations, which makes pedagogical work meaningful. Without losing sight of these social positions, pedagogical intervention can support peer groups in identifying ways to develop and grow within the framework of their affiliations.

The significance of affiliation with a socio-educational milieu is particularly evident in how peer groups attending a Gymnasium or Hauptschule perceive and respond to the demands of the school-related space of experience in relation to their orientations (cf. Chapter 3.3.1 for details). Notably, school-type affiliation reflects proximity to or distance from institutionalised educational programmes, which allows peer groups from educationally advantaged or disadvantaged milieus to be distinguished by their differing orientations and spaces of experience. In educationally advantaged milieus, e.g. orientations towards academic success are in harmonious alignment with the performance expectations of the school-related space of experience, as the tasks and requirements are addressed and fulfilled almost as a matter of course. In educationally disadvantaged milieus, by contrast, orientations towards community may be in antagonistic alignment with school performance expectations, accompanied by experiences of academic failure and social exclusion. *The characterisation of school as a middle-class institution (cf., among others, Grundmann et al., 2003), which primarily reinforces the knowledge and practices transmitted to adolescents from educationally advantaged milieus, can thus also be observed at the level of peer groups.* Similarly, these socio-educational differences are reflected in both PE and recreational sport, with educationally advantaged peer groups tending to possess greater social and sport-related resources, including encour-

72 One example of this would be the increasing equality between ‘women’ and ‘men’, as demanded by, among others, the women’s movement.

agement, support structures and recognition for engagement in sport within the peer group.

The significance of affiliation with a particular age group is closely linked to processes of self- and other-identification as a child or adolescent, and can be understood through adolescents' positioning within specific developmental phases (cf. Chapter 3.3.2 for details). The transition to secondary school marks the beginning of the end of childhood, and the process of becoming an adolescent unfolds gradually over the following years. Between the seventh and ninth year of school, school gains increasing significance as an institution for acquiring qualifications, and previously antagonistic alignments between orientations and spaces of experience are partially harmonised. The influence of socio-educational milieu must therefore also be considered in the context of age-group affiliation.

As confirmed by other empirical studies (cf. Wopfner, 2012), the transition from childhood to adolescence can be described as an inevitable process, though its manifestations vary considerably both between and within peer groups, especially in the seventh year of school. The 'soft' gradations between still being a child and already being an adolescent gradually become 'hard' criteria of distinct affiliations. The onset of puberty plays a central role, as physical changes and the development of a gendered identity gain significance. During this phase, adolescents increasingly attempt to construct their physicality within the peer group in gender-specific ways, highlighting how affiliation with adolescence is closely intertwined with gender affiliation.

The construction of gender affiliation among adolescents during puberty is accompanied by an increased need for clarity and stability in social relationships (cf. Chapter 3.3.3 for details), which results in partly stereotypical performances of masculinity and femininity within peer groups. These performances are interwoven with peer groups' orientations and spaces of experience, reinforcing traditional gender relations and constraining the range of practice options available to both genders, with female peer groups particularly affected. A hierarchical gender order, in which femininity tends to be devalued, can be observed in both school-related and leisure-time contexts.

Moreover, affiliation with a socio-educational milieu is closely linked to specific notions of age and gender. The socio-educational milieu can thus be understood as a central category that shapes other forms of affiliation. Initial analyses (among others, Kirchhoff & Zander, 2018) suggest that peer groups from educationally disadvantaged milieus display more extreme forms of femininity and masculinity than those from educationally advantaged ones, where gendered behaviours are more overtly performed yet better integrated into the everyday experience of growing up. In this context, accelerated puberty processes may also be inferred which, drawing on Böhnisch (2008), could be interpreted as a

reduction of opportunities during adolescence due to the early anticipation of adult responsibilities.⁷³ However, it is important to not prematurely assume causalities here. Future research should explore the manifestations, expressions, relationships and weightings of social affiliations in a more comprehensive and differentiated manner to adequately capture the complex logic underlying the practical constitution of social affiliations within peer groups.

The reconstruction of differences between peer groups must be critically examined at the methodological level. For example, while engagement in sport may play no role in some peer groups, this does not imply that individual adolescents within the peer group do not participate in sport or are inherently opposed to it. The reasons for sport's irrelevance at the group level are difficult to determine through group discussions, as the data collection method primarily focused on respondents' jointly lived practices and their collectively shared experiences. The group's prioritisation of certain activities is therefore always considered from the perspective of their practices, or rather the lack of relevance is explained by interest in other activities. The scope for participation in school and extracurricular sport programmes (and the potential constraints linked to social inequalities) becomes apparent only in comparison with other groups. This comparison also highlights other forms of affiliation. It should be noted, first, that, as already mentioned above, the analysis of affiliations is not yet complete, and second, that data collection requires reflection on the researcher's active influence.

Thus, as a researcher, I am situated within the coordinates of social affiliations such as socio-educational milieu, age and gender. In this context, I also operate within power relations when interviewing adolescents in group discussions. Beyond constructing a generational relationship in relation to different life stages, power dynamics associated with socio-educational milieu and gender emerge in the interactions between the researcher and participants. The understanding that group discussions are jointly produced interactions underpins this perspective: "The group discussion is a staged, prepared and framed social situation by the researcher, determined by those who conduct it and the participants: whether in the initiation, repeated necessary adjustments of the thematic object or the ending, signalled and enforced by either the interviewer or interviewees" (Tervooren, 2022, p. 201). For transcript analysis, this means that assessment must go beyond the participants' statements, and must also consider the researcher's role in the interaction. This involves self-reflexive interpretation and 'systematic case comparisons to recognise how the researcher influences the

73 In one of my case analyses (Zander, 2016), it becomes apparent, e.g. how members of an educationally disadvantaged girls' group in the seventh year of school present themselves as young women as a matter of course, including through involvement in heterosexual partnerships.

construction of the object', e.g. how they contribute to the solidification of differences between various peer groups.

An analysis of peer groups' affiliation relationships provides valuable insights into the social formation of their respective orientations and spaces of experience. It demonstrates how the communitisation of adolescents is deeply embedded within societal structures (so-called 'societal spaces of experience', cf. Chapter 2.1.2). From the perspective of the praxeological sociology of knowledge (cf. Bohnsack, 2017), this can be understood as social structures shaping peer groups and manifesting in their concrete practices. *This influence is particularly evident in processes of self- and other-perception within the groups, which are closely linked to stereotypical notions and evaluations prevalent in society.* One example is the widely held societal perception of Hauptschule as occupying an isolated and often stigmatised position within the hierarchical school system (among others, Nikolaus, 2019).

Each peer group constructs and reproduces its affiliations within the framework of these stereotypical notions and evaluations, with specific experiences within the group playing a central role. These experiences generate shared knowledge that shapes the group's identity. Depending on which affiliation is emphasised, one can speak of Hauptschule groups, 'girl' groups or children's groups. The construction of affiliations as dimensions of peer-being is inextricably linked to the construction of differences (cf. also the detailed analyses by Eckermann, 2017 for the context of lessons).⁷⁴ In forming a collective identity, demarcations are drawn in relation to other groups, which are often perceived as different or even foreign. This process contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities, as peer groups adopt societal stereotypes that create hierarchies between groups.

Social inequalities, which emerge in peer groups' alignments of orientations and spaces of experience or are stabilised through these alignment experiences, are evident in the socio-educational milieu-specific access to club sport, but also in more subtle forms, e.g. gender-specific participation in PE. Building on the findings of the third results section, the question arises of how a pedagogical approach that understands peer-being (as well as school lessons and participation in recreational sport) as embedded within broader societal structures can position itself as a co-producer of these structures. The creation of, and engagement

74 In his praxeological study on cooperative primary school teaching, Eckermann (2017) highlights the necessary interplay between equality and difference: he observes, for example, that "within the framework of peer culture, differences in physical performance—similar to major sporting events—can be eventised when peers compare their strength in an arm wrestling contest. Here, the peers 'celebrate' themselves as a community and at the same time eventise differences into public events, performed through their performance" (Eckermann, 2017, p. 329).

with, heterogeneity among the student body in PE is related to the professional sphere of PE teachers (Schierz & Pallesen, 2016).

Precisely because pedagogy cannot be neutral, it is essential for prospective teachers to become aware of their own affiliations during their studies. *Reflecting on the significance of socio-educational milieu, age and gender is crucial for pedagogical approaches to effectively recognise and address the unequal distribution of family resources, opportunities for achievement in school, or peer-related identity and recognition options.* In particular, sport pedagogy must play an active role in supporting disadvantaged peer groups. Since no one can choose their parents, familial socialisation should not become a disadvantage for adolescents. This calls for greater openness of schools and institutionalised leisure activities to educationally disadvantaged age mates or peer groups.

The segregation of milieu-specific lifestyles should be offset through deliberately designed exchange formats. It is important that adolescents are addressed not only as individuals but also as “representatives of collectives” (Amling, 2015, p. 323). In the pedagogy of collective affiliations, Nohl (2014, 2024) describes the multifaceted exchanges between different social groups and emphasises the necessity of education as a central element in each group’s development, enabling individuals to transcend the limitations of their own affiliations. Perspective-taking and identity differentiation play a crucial role in this process (cf. also Nohl, 2006), although their implications for work with peer groups in sport remain to be further explored in the future.

Sport can serve as a catalyst between different peer groups, building bridges across different socio-educational milieus. There are some promising approaches, at least at the conceptual level. Over the past decades, sport pedagogy in Germany has become highly differentiated (cf. Hunger et al., 2022, for an overview) and now offers a wide range of diversity-sensitive teaching concepts that, for instance, adopt a broad understanding of sport, acknowledge diverse physicalities, and incorporate differentiated goals (among others, Ruin, 2022). *Within these concepts, the influence of peer groups, often composed of same-gender members, should be given greater consideration, particularly in relation to the transition from childhood to adolescence.* Although sport-specific studies on this topic are limited, research generally shows that same-gender peers, in particular, influence various spheres of behaviour, e.g. the regulation of emotions such as anxiety (Müller et al., 2020) or the decision to attend a secondary school (Webber, 2006). Furthermore, thematic interventions across all milieus may be particularly relevant in sporting contexts, as they can promote greater variance in gender representations and thus help adolescents move beyond stereotypical self- and other-identifications. The objective here is to decisively counteract the devaluation of specific forms of femininity.

Regarding access to school-related and extracurricular sport, peer groups attending Hauptschule are likely to experience more inequalities. In PE, in particular, where compulsory participation means that all students are, at least in principle, reached, enhanced measures are necessary. A partly evasive teaching approach (Kolb & Wolters, 2000) provides a broad scope for peer group practices, which can be especially disadvantageous for 'girl' groups. As my colleague and I have argued in a previous publication (cf. Burrmann & Zander, 2017, for details), the participation of 'girl' groups in PE is likely to increase if lessons are based on an explicitly broad spectrum of practices, participation opportunities, and meaningful experiences across target groups that resist closure by individual peer groups (among others, by reducing standardised ball sport in large group settings). Alongside target group-specific differentiation of the interaction process (e.g. through exercises tailored to individual peer groups), the unequal distribution of knowledge and skills within a class community can be leveraged to promote individual learning pathways. PE could serve as a space "in which the [...] differentiations, transitions and interconnections of sporting and exercise cultural fields are discussed" (Balz & Schwier, 2022, p. 101). Facilitating intra-class exchanges of knowledge and skills during lessons could be especially beneficial in Hauptschule schools, given the sport-related heterogeneity of the student body, to broaden the orientations and spaces of experience for all students.

4 Conclusion and Outlook: Sport-pedagogical Contributions to Peer Group Research in School and Leisure

My research contributes to sport pedagogy within the field of peer research in both school-related and leisure-time contexts. It focuses on three research questions: What collective orientations can be reconstructed in peer groups' sporting practices? What conjunctive spaces of experience can be reconstructed in peer groups' sporting practices? What alignments between collective orientations and conjunctive spaces of experience can be reconstructed in peer groups' sporting practices? In the following, I aim to balance the central research findings in terms of their contributions and limitations (Chapter 4.1). Building on this, the potential for collective-centred peer research in future sport pedagogy projects will be discussed through selected research topics (Chapter 4.2).

4.1 Conclusion on Peer Group Research

As highlighted in the introduction across various thematic fields, peer groups play a crucial role in adolescents' engagement in sport. Peer groups provide an important social setting that enables adolescents to participate in sport alongside like-minded peers (Brinkhoff, 1998). Furthermore, during adolescence, peer groups serve as central socialisation agents, either facilitating or restricting access to sport activities (among others, Burrmann, 2023). Despite their significance for adolescents' engagement in sport, peer groups have not yet been systematically explored as a research object within sport pedagogy. In particular, little is known about how peer groups perceive and evaluate engagement in sport in both school-related and leisure-time contexts. This also means that the group's collectively shared perspective has largely been neglected, even though it is crucial for understanding peer group practices from the angle of the praxeological sociology of knowledge (Bohnsack, 2017; Chapter 2). Thus, peer groups possess collectively shared stocks of knowledge that guide the group's and its members' practices.

This collective dimension of practice has so far received little attention in sport-pedagogical research. Studying peer groups' collectively shared perspectives therefore promises fundamentally new insights into adolescents' engagement in sport and can expand the predominantly individual-centred approaches currently established in sport pedagogy. Like under a magnifying glass, the communitisation of adolescents into peer groups reveals socio-educational milieu-, age- and gender-related spaces of experience that extend beyond the immediate

'small' peer group and shed light on how individuals are integrated into 'larger' societal collectives. Against the backdrop of the aims and potentials outlined here (cf. Chapter 1 for details), my research focused on sporting practices from the perspective of peer groups' collectively shared experiences. This approach highlights the communitisation of peer-being in its various dimensions and provides initial sport-pedagogical recommendations for designing sport programmes.

Differentiated across three results sections, the findings reveal that, first, peer groups share collective orientations towards (sporting) practices; secondly, these collective orientations are embedded within (sporting) spaces of experience in both school-related and leisure-time contexts, and third, misalignments exist between these orientations and spaces of experience influenced by affiliations to socio-educational milieu, age and gender. It is important to note that the concept of the peer group in my research does not denote a term used by adolescents in their everyday lives, but rather constitutes a construct developed by a specific analytical approach. This approach, with its analytical categories (orientation, space of experience, alignment/social affiliation) (cf. Chapter 2.1 for details) reveals the multidimensional nature of the communitisation of individuals into collectives. While extensive parts of the findings are discussed in the respective results sections, the following summary focuses on the central aspects of my research. In line with the three results sections, I will summarise the key contributions.

A necessary prerequisite for my research was that adolescents actually communitise into peer groups and could be interviewed as a group. I identified 16 such peer groups consisting of members aged 12–14, across various schools and conducted interviews once in the seventh year of school and again in the ninth year. Over this period of transition from childhood to adolescence, the composition of the peer groups remained largely the same. The high significance of peer relationships for adolescents was evident independently of sporting practices and engagement in specific sports. This finding aligns with previous research emphasising the importance of peer contexts as central spaces of experience for adolescents, not only in leisure-time contexts but particularly within the institutional setting of school (among others, Krüger et al., 2012).

Against this backdrop, it is important to examine school-related and leisure-time practices from the perspective of peer groups. For me, exploring the meaning that adolescents attach to these practices is of particular interest. In my research, I therefore reconstructed the *collective orientations* that guide both sporting and non-sporting practices of peer groups across school-related and leisure-time contexts. By focusing on the reconstruction of primarily implicit, practice-guiding stocks of knowledge, I sought to provide a nuanced account of how peer group practices are formed and enacted. One key finding is that peer

groups possess collectively shared orientations that serve as general patterns of practice across different contexts, constituting a central dimension of adolescents' peer-being within their respective groups.

With regard to the 16 peer groups interviewed, I was able to reconstruct five distinct types of orientation: peer groups orient their practices towards (i) certainty, (ii) development, (iii) challenge, (iv) community and (v) autonomy (cf. Chapter 3.1.2). While individual peer groups adapted their orientations slightly, the spectrum of characteristic orientations remained constant during the transition from childhood to adolescence. Future research could build on these five orientation types to conceptualise the peer group as a research object. This approach allows for a more refined understanding than simply viewing a peer group as a group of age mates. While peer groups consist of individuals who are of the same age, a distinctive feature of their communitisation lies in the shared, collective orientations of practice, which differentiate their practices from those of other age mates.

In addition, I examined *peer groups' conjunctive spaces of experience in school-related and leisure-time contexts*, within which their collective orientations are enacted. While my focus on reconstructing orientations prioritises individual groups, my investigation of spaces of experience highlights central cross-peer group experience structures, illustrating that my research explores peer group practices through multiple 'lenses'. Within the school-related space of experience, e.g. PE emerges as an ambiguous field of practice that, depending on the teacher's role, relationships with classmates, and understanding of sport, affords different spaces of experience for peer groups. In this context, the teacher, classmates and sport itself constitute the three central experience structures, each interpreted and weighted differently in the enactment of PE practices (cf. Chapter 3.2.1). The insights into these experience structures are important not only for describing peer groups' practices but also for understanding the culturally-shaped practice of PE.

Building on Schierz (2012), who describes the practice of PE as a hybrid of school- and sport-cultural elements, it becomes clear that school-, classmate- or sport-centred teaching cultures can also emerge at the level of peer groups through the three experience structures. With regard to extracurricular spaces of experience, two modes can be distinguished: planned leisure activities in institutional settings and spontaneous leisure activities in informal relationship constellations (cf. Chapter 3.2.2). These findings provide a valuable basis for future research in child and youth sport, as they illustrate how the two modes of experience are linked to different forms of engagement in sport and opportunities for participation.

Building on the research findings on collective orientations and conjunctive spaces of experience, my research explored how the *alignments between*

orientations and spaces of experience vary according to social affiliations such as socio-educational milieu, age and gender. Drawing on Mannheim (1980), this analysis addresses another level of the interconnectedness of knowledge, extending beyond the concrete practices of individual peer groups to focus on belonging to social collectives. These affiliations are particularly relevant for understanding social inequalities in peer groups' sporting practices and are briefly summarised here (cf. Chapter 3.3 for details).

Educational milieu: peer groups attending a Hauptschule and a Gymnasium experience PE and leisure differently, which is reflected in the respective alignments between their orientations and spaces of experience.

Age: between approximately 12 and 14 years of age, the boundaries between still being a child and already being an adolescent become increasingly blurred. During this transition from childhood to adolescence, school-related alignments, in particular, begin to change, as societal expectations of adolescents or rather the dynamics of attribution and recognition that shape prospects for a vocational future change.

Gender: gender-specific norms and role expectations manifest especially in body-related topics as practice-guiding stocks of knowledge, and are closely linked to processes of valuation and devaluation of certain notions of femininity and masculinity.

In both school and extracurricular sport, the gendered alignments of orientations and spaces of experience prove particularly restrictive for female students attending Hauptschule. This finding suggests that the disadvantages experienced by specific groups can be understood through an intersectional intertwining of affiliations (cf. also Zander, 2020b) arising from the interplay of socio-educational milieu, age and gender. Against this backdrop, it would be worthwhile for future peer group research to extend my analysis on alignments more systematically from an intersectional perspective and to examine concrete alignment experiences in greater detail.

Drawing on the three results sections, peer groups can be understood as multidimensional social collectives shaped by the specific configuration of their practice-guiding orientations, their participation in spaces of experience in school-related and leisure-time contexts, and their affiliations with a socio-educational milieu, age and gender. This definition of peer group broadens the research framework and can be applied in studies on school sport as well as on children's and youth sport. A key advantage of this empirically grounded definition is that it harnesses the potential of the praxeological sociology of knowledge. The peer group is not only understood through its multifaceted orientation and experience references, but is also conceptualised in terms of its multidimensional modes of formation. This allows peer groups to be conceptualised as complex social constructs and thus supports a more nuanced understanding of the

communitisation of adolescents. My understanding of peer groups emphasises the dimensions that connect individuals with one another. *The multidimensional conceptualisation provides a starting point to actively promote social relationships and, in particular, encourage previously unconnected individuals to engage with one another.* A shared foundation of orientations and experiences should be considered a valuable resource for shaping social interactions. In times of global crises and media-driven polarisation, in which individuals are often reduced to a single identity, I align with Sen's position (2007). He emphasises:

“The hope for concord in today's world rests to a great extent on a clear understanding of the multiplicity of our human identities and on the realisation that they overlap and thus counter a demarcation according to a single insurmountable division criterion” (Sen, 2007, p. 9).

In line with Sen (2007), my multidimensional understanding of the peer group aims to acknowledge the context-specific intersections between individuals. This requires a practice that creates space for such intersections and renders them visible, both in everyday life and in research.

A key challenge in the study of peer groups lies in the methodological uncertainty inherent in assigning individuals to a specific peer group. The connections within such groups are based on subjectively perceived and socially meaningful relationships that are not always clearly defined. As Hansen (2022) points out, even with a defined set of criteria, it remains difficult to clearly distinguish peers from non-peers. My research addresses this conceptual uncertainty from a different angle. *Instead of analysing the position of individual members, I focus on the collectively shared perspective of peer groups, mapping the full spectrum of communitisation processes among adolescents.* The concept of the peer group I use, understood as a multidimensional collective, enables the identification of connections between adolescents that reach beyond their membership in a narrowly defined group and highlights the diversity of peer collectives. These peer collectives are not abstract entities; their relevance becomes apparent wherever different individuals or groups encounter one another. Such examples can be found in public spaces or, as I have highlighted, within school and teaching contexts. Acknowledging peer groups and their peer collectives offers a novel sport-pedagogical perspective on how the heterogeneity of adolescents can be productively addressed in school sport.

This book highlights the complexity of the peer group as a research object. Peer-being is captured both synchronously (through the simultaneous involvement of actors in school-related and leisure-time contexts) and diachronically (by tracing the development of actors during the transition from childhood to adolescence). *Thus, this book brings together the various dimensions of peer-being that would otherwise have remained dispersed across the individual publica-*

tions of my research. Integrating these individual dimensions yields an analytical approach that necessitates multiple and diverse points of reference along analytical categories such as orientations and spaces of experience (see Chapter 3.1 and Chapter 3.2). These categories must not only be considered in isolation but in relation to one another (see Chapter 3.3 on the alignment between orientations and spaces of experience).

To ensure that the complexity and depth of my research is comprehensible despite its extensive scope, it was necessary in certain sections of this book to choose abbreviations and more focused presentations. The underlying aim of this approach was to clearly communicate the key findings while managing the broader complexity of the research topic. Methodological questions, specifically those concerning the data collection process and analysis, were deliberately only discussed briefly. However, I would like to return to these methodological aspects in the conclusion to outline the limitations of my research and address the methodological challenges that emerged in researching the collectively shared perspectives of peer groups.

Firstly, this concerns the *sample* and survey of peer groups as real groups. This book draws on data from the SpOK project, which was based on a specific and justified sampling strategy (cf. Chapter 2.3.1 in particular). The results are therefore not readily generalisable to other age groups, school types or socio-educational milieus. In peer research, it is particularly important to acknowledge that the data are strongly framed by the school setting. Recruitment of peer groups for the SpOK project was conducted either through personal contacts of project staff with individual teachers and/or by sending official letters to the respective headmasters of different schools. In some cases, this resulted in groups being pre-selected by teachers before the discussion leaders' involvement, meaning that the discussions did not always take place exclusively with real groups, i.e. natural peer groups of friends.

However, this did not represent a serious disadvantage, as the background of the group compositions was used as additional, insightful data. This enabled an investigation of how adolescents—regardless of pre-existing friendships—constitute themselves as a specific group through communicative practices and responses shaped by other experience backgrounds, such as their status as students or adolescents. A major strength of the group discussion method is its capacity to capture and accommodate such open-ended processes, although it should be noted that detailed analyses of the interactions within the groups are not presented here (for this, I recommend, among others, the case analyses in

Zander 2020a), and could be further explored in future research.⁷⁵ My broad and multidimensional definition of the peer group, which extends beyond the real group, proved fruitful for tracing unexpected commonalities. However, to identify these, it is essential that discussions follow participants' own relevance frameworks and that the research setting allows them sufficient space to develop the research topic in line with their own relevance frameworks.

Secondly, this concerns the application of the *theoretical framework of the praxeological sociology of knowledge together with the documentary method* for data analysis, and how this approach informs the study of peer groups as a research topic. The findings of my research demonstrate that this theoretical framing is particularly well-suited to investigating collective practices, as it enables the identification of hidden regularities grounded in implicit, practice-guiding knowledge. The documentary method serves as a central tool in this process, translating theoretical considerations into practical data analysis and theory development. However, the focus on collective types and structures often results in a relatively abstract level of analysis, creating blind spots, particularly with regard to case-specific deviations and situational exceptions.⁷⁶ These aspects are partly overlooked in the abstracted results. Moreover, the various forms of knowledge relevant to the analysis are not always fully conveyed in the presentation, even though they played a critical role in the analysis. The documentary method provides guiding principles, such as the comparative analytical setting and procedural techniques, including formulating and reflective interpretation.

These aspects are closely linked to the empirical object and its theoretical construction. Here, Bohnsack (2010) emphasises the need for self-reflection, which recognises the location-bound and nature of one's own interpretive approach. In this book, I systematically integrated various findings and adopted a broad mapping perspective on peer groups as multidimensional collectives. In doing so, certain limitations of the data analysis receded into the background, such as the absence of longitudinal analyses or a more in-depth investigation of the social formation of practice-guiding stocks of knowledge. These aspects

75 Future research could examine, in a more differentiated way, how these shared understandings are shaped through interaction with external relevance settings, e.g. when the discussion leader introduces topics that are not adopted by the group and thus remain outside the group's collective horizon. In relation to a group's shared understandings, it would also be possible to explore it in a more differentiated way than I did in my research, when and what types of differences exist between members of a group.

76 This should be understood as a general observation. I have also seen these tendencies in documentary educational research conducted by colleagues and myself (cf. Schiller & Zander, 2023). At the very least, once the analysis is complete, the findings tend to be communicated through a highly abstract logic, particularly when the presentation of results involves patterns and types.

could be further explored using the SpOK project's data through an extended socio-genetic typification.

4.2 Outlook on Themes for Collective-centred Peer Group Research

My research suggests that it would be worthwhile to establish peer research as a distinct field of research within sport pedagogy and more broadly within sport science. This area of research should by no means be limited to peer groups during the transition from childhood to adolescence, as peer relationships remain highly significant throughout life. Furthermore, peer research extends beyond school-related and leisure-time contexts, making it a cross-cutting research field that encompasses multiple school-related and/or extracurricular research focuses across different study groups. For example, future research could explore processes of social learning among primary school children in PE, motivational aspects for training of adolescents in organised club sport, or health-conscious lifestyles among PE teachers and the professional development of sport scientists.

Moreover, I see one of the key potentials of peer research in examining emerging phenomena associated with digitalisation, such as dance practices on TikTok or the visualisation of body norms on Instagram, which are evidently co-constituted by peer relationships. Digitalisation, in my view, creates unique spaces for peer interaction, e.g. when like-minded individuals share texts, images or videos in online forums regardless of location and time, or when a game move is jointly planned and executed by multiple players in gaming contexts. These examples demonstrate that the concept of peer groups in peer research is diverse and that it continues to evolve. Practices in digital contexts (cf., among others, Rode, 2021, for details) extend the traditional boundaries of peer groups and open up new forms of interaction and communitisation, which warrant more in-depth investigation in future sport-pedagogical and sport-scientific research. Given the high relevance and topicality of peer group phenomena across different areas of sport, it also seems appropriate to embed this research field more firmly in higher education, e.g. through case-based teaching. The case- and problem-solving-oriented teaching method, as outlined by Scherler (2008, p. 72ff.), already provides concrete starting points, e.g. in the areas of “considering interests” and “dividing the class”.

The timing for establishing peer research within sport pedagogy is favourable, as an interdisciplinary approach to peer research is currently emerging (cf. Köhler, Krüger & Pfaff, 2016). This approach, with its integrative orientation, brings together the previously isolated perspectives from educational science, sociology and psychology. Sport-pedagogical peer research can thus position it-

self as a complementary field within sport science, actively contributing to the integrative aims of peer research, especially given that sport science, as an interdisciplinary discipline, generally provides favourable conditions for such work. This potential is also reflected in my research, which, under the umbrella of sport-pedagogical research, addresses connections to sport-sociological issues such as social inequality. Future interdisciplinary exchanges hold promise for deepening these questions and fostering a more comprehensive understanding of peer relationships.

To illustrate the potential contribution of sport pedagogy to interdisciplinary peer research, I return to my initial considerations (see Chapter 1). My aim is to demonstrate that the peer group can be conceptualised as a collective agent of knowledge and practice. Drawing on the concepts of collective orientations and conjunctive spaces of experience (Bohnsack, 2017), a collectively centred perspective emerges, offering solid potential for generating interdisciplinary insights into educational processes. Following Schäffer (2003), who highlights a traditional division of labour between academic disciplines, where pedagogy and psychology focus primarily on the individual, while sociology and cultural studies focus on the collective, sport-pedagogical research on educational processes often reveals an artificially produced methodological narrowing towards individual-centred perspectives, accompanied by a certain neglect of the collective.

By adopting a collectively centred perspective, I seek to partially transcend these disciplinary boundaries. *At first glance, studying education from a collectively centred perspective may seem counterintuitive, since education is ultimately enacted by the individual. However, education can also be understood as collectively framed, shaped by shared and culturally embedded conditions that make education possible.* In line with Schäffer (2003), I conceive of individuals not as passive recipients of collective influences, but as active and transformative actors. Schäffer (2003), drawing on Mannheim, rejects a deterministic notion of collectivity, emphasising that collectives depend on the active engagement of their members. Collectives, therefore, do not exist independently of others and depend on continuous enactment of human practices.

Against this theoretical background, sport-pedagogical peer research can empirically investigate how shared experiences within peer groups are interpreted similarly or differently, and how these experiences contribute to the formation, continuity or transformation of their orientations. Longitudinal studies (Krüger et al., 2012) show that individual students' educational orientations are collectively framed by their peers during the transition from childhood to adolescence. *The focus, therefore, extends beyond educational processes themselves to the exploration of conjunctive spaces of experience as culturally constructed conditions for education, as well as to the question of which educational processes*

individuals can engage with and within their peer group, both in school-related and leisure-time contexts.

The close interconnection between peer interactions and educational processes calls for a nuanced understanding of education that extends beyond formal institutions, and which forms of education are valued in everyday life (cf. also Grundmann et al., 2003, in this regard). In this context, social spaces, such as an urban district (Amling, 2015), can also be understood as a space of education. Research on peer-related educational processes in both school-related and leisure-time contexts must therefore account for the multiple pathways through which peer groups access educational practices as well as the diverse forms of participation available to them.

As I emphasised in the introduction of this book, peer groups should not simply be regarded as an omnipresent or exclusively positive influence during childhood and adolescence. Rather, they must be examined in terms of their sometimes contradictory meanings and functions, taking the complexity of life courses into account. Hurrelmann and Quenzel (2012), e.g. stress that in adolescence it is not only the peer group but a well-coordinated interplay among all socialisation agents that is essential for successful development. For research, this means that developmental processes should not be generalised, but should instead be linked to the experiences of concrete biographical events, whether in sport or other areas of life.

In the field of education, this requires navigating various areas of tension between individual freedoms and collective expectations, which are closely tied to the logic of societal institutionalisation of education within pedagogical contexts of practice and the implementation of pedagogical processes within organisations.⁷⁷ Comparative analyses of practices across different educational settings could, in particular, reveal the extent to which sport programmes contain tensions or ambivalences from the perspective of peer groups, and how these are interpreted and addressed in practice. Such analyses are especially valuable because educational settings pursue very different goals at the programmatic level, depending on their focus on movement, play and/or sport programmes (Bindel et al., 2022). Comparative analyses could also examine the practices of the same peer

77 Bohnsack, Bonnet & Hericks (2022, pp. 14–15) assert: “This refers to those fields of action or practice that can be described as pedagogical or—more broadly—as people processing, i.e. contexts in which decisions are made about the identity and biography of the focus group (co-decided). The objectives of people-processing organisations are complex and contingent, and rarely align seamlessly. For example, the societal functions of enculturation and allocation in the field of schooling generate contradictory practice demands at the micro level of teaching. In the field of social work, the aim of expanding individual agency and effecting broader societal change exist in tension. In early childhood education, the mandates of relationship-building, education or socialisation interactions, and subject- or rather content-related educational work must be reconciled”.

groups across different school subjects, shedding light on the much-discussed position of PE within the school curriculum and, more specifically, within sport pedagogy (e.g. Hunger & Zander, 2020).

Even within sporting practices in school as a whole, comparative perspectives are valuable. I am referring, e.g. to various school sport settings such as sport during recess or skiing trips which, compared with compulsory PE, involve different peer constellations (among others, Derecik, 2011). With the legal entitlement to full-day primary education coming into effect in Germany in 2026, sport within full-day programmes is likely to become an increasingly important field for peer research.⁷⁸ Sport 'AGs' could provide valuable spaces for communitisation of new cross-class/cross-year peer groups and create opportunities for informal learning.

I do not intend to discuss the normative dimension of peer-related education here; instead, I wish to highlight the broad spectrum of legitimate educational goals. Beyond motor skill development, which plays a central role in sporting contexts, the social-cognitive dimension is also of great significance. This includes the development of an understanding of democracy, the promotion of social participation and sensitisation to health-conscious behaviour. Sport can serve as a medium for these objectives, provided it is appropriately framed and enacted. At the same time, sport as an educational medium should not be overestimated. As my research shows, adolescents' interests extend far beyond just physical activity. *Sport can offer valuable spaces of experience, but should always be understood within the context of a broader spectrum of orientations and in combination with other areas of education.*

My analyses reveal that individual peer groups are rarely reached effectively through standardised school-related and extracurricular educational programmes. Successful work with peer groups requires their active involvement. Various approaches can be adopted, differing in the extent to which adolescents are systematically involved as peers and meaningfully supported by adults (cf. Chapter 3.1.3, Chapter 3.2.3, Chapter 3.3.4 for details). A targeted approach might, e.g. involve training adolescents in workshops to serve as mediators among peers. Drawing on Liebscher and Fischer (2015), the active transmission of knowledge and values by peers can significantly enrich learning processes and build a bridge between formal educational institutions and the informal learning processes of age mates.

The following section illustrates, by way of example, how the potential of a collectively centred perspective in sport pedagogy can be further harnessed

78 "Children and adolescents must be able to see their interests reflected in full-day programmes and be provided sufficient opportunities to participate in designing these programmes and independently create them within full-day school settings" (BMFSFJ, 2020, p. 535).

beyond educational questions (see also Zander, 2019b). These thematic areas build on my research and can, in addition to the group discussion method described above, be explored through biographical interviews or ethnographic studies. This list is intended as a stimulus rather than a fully developed framework; it does not claim to establish any prioritisation or comprehensiveness of topics.

One potential area of research is the study of *peer-related communitisations in sport* that unfold across a variety of social spaces. Future studies could examine peer groups beyond their role as students, considering recruitment not only in school settings, but also in sport clubs or football pitches in city parks. The focus would thus be on sporting peer groups, which may include members from different schools. As noted earlier, in the context of digitalisation, it would be worthwhile to explore how sport-related communitisation occurs in digital practices (e.g. WhatsApp and Facebook groups or intermediary websites such as Spontacts, which facilitate exchanges among individuals).

Future research could investigate the social practices underpinning such communitisations (cf. already Tuckman, 1965), examining different sporting practices and various dimensions of social belonging during early adulthood, a life stage marked by the development of new relationships as a result of moving out of the parental home. Given the frequent emphasis on team spirit in sport, it would also be interesting to explore how individuals collectively become a team. The same applies to the formation of school classes (cf., among others, Drope et al., 2021; Rabenstein & Wicke, 2024), where sport is often ascribed a special community-building role, which can be further enhanced through experimental educational exercise programmes.

As my research focuses on the transition from childhood to adolescence, the following section considers the preceding and subsequent life phases of childhood and adolescence as potential topics for future peer research. In future studies on *peer groups during childhood*, it would be particularly valuable to investigate how peer-related educational and developmental goals related to exercise, play and sport are negotiated, for example, in early childhood settings such as kindergartens. Of special interest in this context would be an analysis of how toddlers are constructed as peers and how practices based on this construction unfold, especially through exercise practices emerging from children's play (see, among others, Mogel, 2008).⁷⁹ It would also be worthwhile to explore how exercise is deliberately encouraged in kindergartens to support the social integration of individual children within the organisation and to strengthen feelings of belonging and community within larger groups. The relationship be-

79 Mogel (2008) asserts: "If there is one common characteristic of play that everyone is likely to agree on, it is its fundamentally physical nature. There is no play that takes place without the physical activity of the players" (p. 8).

tween normative concepts of peer education (“We start with the peer!”, Fink, 2018) and descriptive findings on the exercise practices of children would be particularly interesting in this regard. Future research could examine the extent to which initiating shared exercise experiences serves as a central mechanism for implementing peer education during early childhood. Another promising area concerns how children within peer groups learn gender roles and internalise associated social norms regarding their own bodies. Studies by Hunger (among others, 2023) on early childhood exercise socialisation provide valuable starting points, even though they do not specifically focus on the peer group.

From a peer group perspective, it would be important to investigate how the communitisation of children into peer groups varies depending on gender constellations and how early childhood exercise settings (such as gymnastics for children) contribute to this process. Research could further explore how these norms are communicated to children and negotiated within peer groups. It would also be interesting to consider how targeted programmes in early childhood settings could be designed to create peer-related exercise spaces that aim to reduce gender-based inequalities. In light of broader societal trends towards domestication and social isolation, questions about the role of the family arise and how policy measures could support the development of peer-related exercise spaces for children, particularly in structurally disadvantaged regions. These considerations could, of course, be extended from early childhood through primary school and beyond, providing a valuable area of research.

My research also provides promising avenues for exploring how *peer groups during adolescence* establish relationships of belonging and differentiation through sport-related rituals and styles. Building on previous studies on youth cultures oriented towards trend sports (among others, Schwier, 2023), this raises interesting questions about how such rituals and styles can offer adolescents resources for identity construction, while simultaneously functioning as mechanisms of exclusion. It would be worthwhile investigating how these sport-focused peer groups can either reinforce or mitigate social inequalities. Furthermore, it would be interesting to position members of sport-focused peer groups in relation to other adolescents (as described in the large-scale Shell/Sinus youth studies) and to explore how their orientations differ, e.g. with regard to the value placed on autonomy or the rejection of institutionalised structures. Research could further investigate how adolescents engage socially through sport, e.g. in voluntary activities (cf. Braun, Sielschott & Burrmann, 2022), and what peer group conditions are necessary to foster such engagement, taking the development stage of adolescence into account (see also Farin, 2001, pp. 216ff.).

Another promising area for research is the exploration of how sport-focused peer groups may influence career choices. Well-known pioneers in trend sports, such as Burton (snowboarding) or Titus (skateboarding), illustrate how engage-

ment in sport at the peer level can open up career prospects and new spaces of experience. Participatory research formats could be particularly useful in this context, enabling peers to investigate their own life worlds, e.g. through social space analysis methods (Deinet, 2009). Such approaches allow young people to contribute data from their perspective and disseminate findings within their peer groups. Participatory strategies are especially well-suited for topics that adolescents may find difficult discussing with adults or that carry social stigma, e.g. sexuality or substance use (e.g. Heyer et al., 2012; Wetzstein et al., 2005). These research methods can foster trust and yield new insights, especially into marginalised adolescents who are otherwise difficult to reach, particularly when researchers come from middle-class backgrounds.

These still relatively abstract and exemplary research areas should be understood as potential impulses for sport-pedagogical peer research within an interdisciplinary framework of sport science, intended to inspire interested researchers and to which I myself would like to contribute further in the coming years.

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Peer groups gain particular significance during the transition from childhood to adolescence, as young people increasingly orient themselves towards their friends. Sport provides an exemplary field in which both the importance of peer groups and the possibilities for researching them become visible.

This book explores how communitisation emerges within adolescent peer groups and how it influences their engagement in physical education, club- and informal sport. Guided by three central questions, it reconstructs: (1) the collective orientations that structure sporting practices; (2) the conjunctive spaces of experience in which these practices are embedded; and (3) the alignments between orientations and spaces of experience.

Based on a longitudinal study using group discussions with diverse peer groups, the analysis shows that peer groups are social collectives characterised by shared stocks of knowledge. By focusing on the collective dimension of sport, the book addresses a significant research gap in sport pedagogy and provides a foundation for interdisciplinary research spanning sport pedagogy, sociology and psychology.

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