

“Amerikanisierung” deutscher Unternehmen: Wettbewerbsstrategien und Unternehmenspolitik bei Henkel, Siemens und Daimler-Benz (1945/49–1975) [“Americanization” of German companies: The competitive strategies and corporate politics of Henkel, Siemens, and Daimler Benz (1945/49–1975)]. By *Susanne Hilger*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2004. 314 pp. Illustrations, tables, figures, bibliography, notes. Cloth, €60.00. ISBN: 3-515-08283-2.

Reviewed by Christian Stadler

Susanne Hilger starts her fine book on the Americanization of German companies by drawing attention to the dominance of the United States after the Second World War. At that time, the challenge for German companies was figuring out how to “catch up with the Americans,” who were propagating modern management knowledge, technical know-how, and organizational abilities as the ingredients of success. A strength of the book is its attempt to present a holistic picture of business developments. The author has based the term “Americanization” on historian Harm Schröter’s definition of the process as an adaptation to values, behaviors, processes, norms, and institutions common in the United States (p. 11). In Germany, there is an ongoing debate over Americanization, which is seen as both a blessing and a nightmare. Hilger enlightens this debate with her thorough analysis of archival material from Henkel, Siemens, and Daimler Benz, including an impressive collection of travel protocols and minutes from meetings of top managers and company board members.

She also identifies instruments and conditions that supported knowledge transfers between U.S. and German companies. The former took the form of business trips, joint ventures, license agreements, and consultancies, and the latter included the establishment of U.S. subsidiaries and the presence of American competitors in Germany. Changes in mental models and values also became important in the transfer of knowledge, as the new generation that took over after the war was more open to U.S. methods than previous business leaders. The younger managers often developed close personal relationships with American experts and corporations.

In two critical chapters, Hilger describes how product sectors and strategic management became Americanized. While both chapters reflect the fine scholarly work that has gone into this book, the chapter on product sectors is poorly structured. Separating the discussions of investment and consumption products is not helpful, as the resulting analysis covers only a small number of products in the two categories. Concentration on each company would have been more useful. On the other hand, the chapter on strategic management is clear and forthright, describing most of the topic's important aspects.

The most obvious shortcoming of the book is its narrow focus, as the coverage extends only from 1945 to 1975. Such a limitation would be understandable in an examination of the Sovietization of German companies, but it makes less sense in a discussion of Americanization. Hilger explains that, after the Second World War, German companies became increasingly oriented toward the world market, making this historical moment a logical starting point for her research. She chose the mid-1970s as her endpoint, because the onset of recession and the arrival of the competition from Southeast Asia marked the end of the American age; by this time German industry had fully absorbed American methods. Although Hilger is correct in her assertion that the decades she has selected were crucial, one could argue that earlier and later periods were equally significant. Hilger herself, in an overview of the debate, draws attention to the earlier experiments of Taylor and Ford, which had a profound impact on German manufacturing. Even though some companies decided not to take up their ideas, many—including Daimler Benz and Siemens—devoted considerable energy to discussions of the effects of Taylorism and Fordism and to considerations of their methods.

The most recent period, often termed “the age of globalization,” is an even more important chapter in the Americanization of Germany corporations. Never before has U.S. business been so critical to these firms. Siemens, which was listed on the New York Stock Exchange in 2001, has relocated eleven of its business units to the United States, where its workforce numbers 70,000. The company has also bought several large U.S. corporations, including Westinghouse. Daimler Benz pursued an even more dramatic course in taking over Chrysler—one of the Big

Three in Detroit. These U.S. engagements occurred during the 1990s, the most crucial decade in the Americanization of German business practices. However, Hilger misses the opportunity to pursue this part of the story, which included the decision by Siemens to create separate sales divisions that reported directly to the Board.

Hilger has conducted solid research on three perfect case studies, allowing her to develop a convincing argument that Germany did not adopt the American model in its entirety. Her book is an important contribution to the debate over Americanization and a good read as well.

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