The Function of Social Work

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Abstract

- *Summary*: The author uses the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann to provide a concise description of the evolution of the forms of social help from the level of *interaction* (archaic society) to that of *organizations* (modern society).

- *Findings*: The most important result is that social work can be seen as a *social system (function-system) with its own exclusive function* that cannot be replaced by any other (function-) system. The reason for this is that every function-system of society occurs as a special kind of communication. Through the identification of an exclusive code of communication the present work demonstrates that professional social work is an essential function-system of society. Social work expands self-referentially, and without internal constraints, by continuously scanning the environment for those already in need as well as for potential new cases of need.

- *Applications*: Modern social workers have to reflect their daily actions. This can be shown with the help of some historical and sociological knowledge of the forms of mutual help. By integrating some of the discoveries that are introduced here into the research and curricula of social work, the present work raises the level of the current debate and provokes a detailed discussion of the future of social work in modern society.

Keywords   social help   social work &msp; social work research
sociology   systemic social work   systems theory of Niklas Luhmann

From the Question: 'What is That?' to 'How Does it Work?'

For some time now, social work research, particularly in Germany (perhaps because it is a recent academic discipline) has more or less successfully tried to clearly identify the parameters of the discipline 'social work'. How can the subject of social work be determined? Can social work be defined in terms of individual problems that social workers seek to resolve? Obviously not, because

such a general definition would set dangerous limits to any claims of social work to cover all aspects of need, as well as to restrict its perspective on societal conditions. Furthermore, in claiming to be a profession, social work is then in the difficult position of competing with other sciences such as psychology, psychiatry, and anthropology for the sovereignty of its subject matter. Or is it the solution of social problems, such as unemployment and poverty, to which social work should be committed? Certainly not, because social work would then surrender its autonomy as a specific academic discipline, as well as a clearly definable and identifiable profession. This would mean that any socially constructed predefinitions might be able to determine the subject of professional social work, and social work might then be described as a mere stopgap social science with the attendant negative connotations. Of course, one can pragmatically say that the main topic of social work is psychosocial problems. But in this way one merely displaces the problem through inquiring about the best 'fit' of an individual person (or behavior) within their social context. But instead of this, one could ask, how does the particular social context, with its implicit logic, make the person depend on professional help and assistance. But first we believe that it is useful to understand the history of mutual help – and we mean from a more sociological point of view.

Searching for Functionally Equivalent Solutions

In order to avoid this sort of dead end, a new approach has emerged that establishes a more plausible and non-normative alternative access to social work; one that observes how social work operates under 'real' conditions. Ironically, by using this approach social workers can reduce the extreme complexity of the questions involved in the theory and practice of social work by employing one of the most complex theories found in the social sciences: the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann.[1] In the last decade a continuously growing number of German-speaking teachers of social work in Switzerland, Austria and Germany have developed very interesting investigations of social work based on Luhmann's actorless[2] systems theory (see Baecker, 1994, 2005; Eugster, 2000; Fuchs, 1999, 2000; Hafen, 2005; Kleve, 1999; Merten, 2000). All this work is based on the idea that every problem presents a contingent solution to another problem. From this standpoint one is interested in finding various possible solutions to a specific societal problem.

As a productive consequence of these different investigations, we propose to change the approach towards and focus on social work to that of functional analyses. As a starting point there is always the question of the maintenance of the existence of social systems. Every contingent social system – whether consisting of action (Talcott Parsons) or of communication (Niklas Luhmann) – may be seen simply as an answer to a specific, concrete problem, above all as an attempt to reduce the complexity of the environment.[3] Otherwise it dissolves back into the environment it emerged from. It disintegrates, so to speak, back into entropy.[4]

Functional analysis uses relations to comprehend what is present as contingent and what is different as comparable. It relates what is given, whether that is states or events, to perspectives on problems, and seeks to solve a problem in one way or another. The relation between the problem and its solution [. . .] serves as a connecting thread to questions about other possibilities, as a connecting thread in the search for functional equivalences. (Luhmann, 1995: 53)

The method of functional analysis proposed here is both simple and revealing. The interesting questions for the observer as well as for the social worker are: 1) with reference to which problem does the observed operation or structure present a solution?; and 2) are there other possibilities of solving the observed problem? The second step is the search for functionally equivalent solutions. The following figure tries to show the steps in functional analysis. One can also see that from this point of view any solution produces further problems that have to be solved, and so on.

Here we would like to propose to use this intellectual approach not only for general societal or sociological problems, but also for our social work practice, for example, for everyday work with organizations, families, couples and groups. Thereby we can break away from traditional, static ways of thinking in order to evoke a more suitable answer to a problem within the social system we want to support.

Let us start from the assumption that every social system solves a specific problem in society. By using this approach we can investigate societal processes
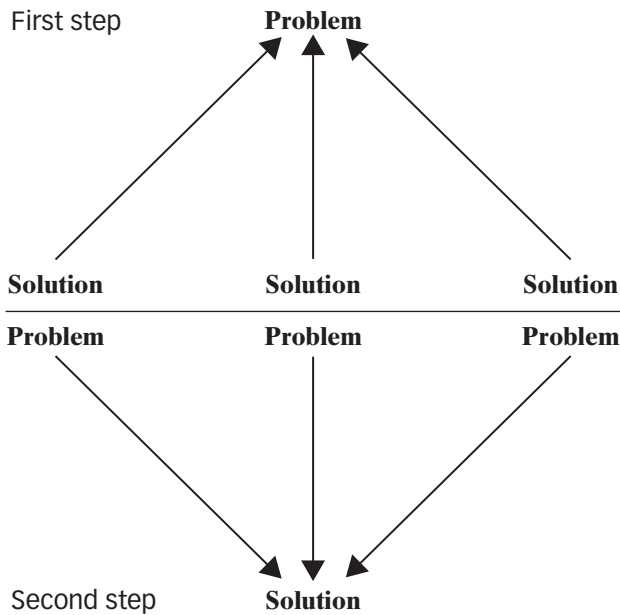

Figure 1

and discuss other functionally equivalent solutions to certain problems. Here of course we want to take a look at professional social work in modern society. What function does social work fulfill in our society? And why is this interesting for professional social work?

The question of the function of social work is thereby of vital importance for a variety of reasons: 1) in order for the discipline of social work to continue to develop holistic models of social work theories;[5] 2) in order for the profession of social work to reflect its special competencies and its role alongside other professions in modern welfare societies; and 3) in order to reject the widespread fallacy that other (mostly unpaid) forms of social help, such as 'civil society', voluntarism, and neighborly help, can take the place of professional social work. This view would underrate the complexity and degree of difficulty involved in professional social work, which takes the needs of the service users very seriously.

In order to demonstrate this it is necessary to go deeper into the theoretical structure of the reflections on the forms of social help presented by Niklas Luhmann (and others authors), which for lack of space must be restricted here only to essential points. Let us begin therefore with the observation of the forms of mutual help.

Help in the Segmented Society

Both from an observational standpoint as well as from the perspective of the history of sociology, one can distinguish segmented (units), stratified (strata), and functionally differentiated societies (function-systems) in their regulation of equality and inequality, and as differentiated autonomously. In segmented societies, equality and inequality are organized in terms of descent, cohabitation, or a combination of both. Archaic-symbiotic societies primarily consist of tribal, rural, and familiar groups with little complexity, and which exhibit little division of labor, based on roles founded on sex and age. As a result, they exhibit little indication of differentiating themselves as autonomous. Societal subsystems such as tribes and settlements are equal. Other criteria of segmented differentiation are 'the presence of group members and the attachment to a certain locale' (Weber and Hillebrandt, 1999: 57). This may explain why segmented differentiation means differentiation into groups with the same or similar functions. Segmented differentiation also implies that the position of the individual in the societal order is stipulated and cannot be changed no matter how hard he tries to do this. Fortunately, there are prominent anthropological investigations of the modes of mutual help and assistance in segmented societies (see Mauss, 1924; Mead, 1935). But from a sociological perspective that focuses on the structures of expectations (of expectations), the Luhmann's article 'Formen des Helfens im Wandel gesellschaftlicher Bedingungen'[6] (1973) represents a significant step towards a better functional grasp of help and assistance in general. In this article, Luhmann makes two seemingly simple, but important statements concerning social work:

1) Help is a contribution to the satisfaction of the needs of another.
2) Help is defined and regulated by structures of mutual expectations.[7]

The sociological problem of the function of help always refers, on one hand, to the availability of types of particular expectations (of expectations) and, on the other, to the real situations in which the types of expectations are used. In order to meet particular needs it requires societal institutions that are able to solve the problem of the temporal demands of support. Mauss had found such a societal institution during his investigations at the Tobriand Islands on the east coast of New Guinea with the Kula, and he provides an example of symbiotic help in archaic societies.

The giving of gifts may be observed as the main form of help in segmented societies. 'Symbolic exchange in pre-modern societies is based on the principle of reciprocity; that a gift initiates a gift in return. The economic aspect is taken as implicit' (Eugster, 2000: 34). In these societies there are no gifts by chance or spontaneous gifts like donations; 'pure gifts are unknown' (Luhmann, 1998: 651). Of course, in cases of needed assistance, everyone is helped by their clan. But that form of help is based on personal relationships or is restricted by locale. From this perspective, the gift can be regarded as the first institutional-ized form of mutual assistance. Its indeterminacy turns out to be in fact 'extremely suitable because adaptable' (Luhmann, 1973: 26). But the commit-ment to gratitude remains unspecific. And the less society is ready to provide occasions of mutual help and support, the more it adopts the principle of equivalence of giving and taking. The gift is actually the most important form of help in segmented societies, but not the only one. In general, the interactive forms of help in segmented societies can be identified in terms of:

• a high degree of reversibility of circumstances,
• a high degree of reciprocity,
• the absence of equivalence,
• a horizontal and bi-directional transfer of help,
• the meeting of needs cannot be stretched over time: immediate help is required.

It is the function of gifts in less complex, as well as in interaction-based relatively highly-integrated societies to provide a relatively open and simple context and structure of expectations for dealing with urgent demands for help. But its advantages, viz., its simultaneous indeterminacy and extendibility of gratitude in the face of concrete needs, become a disadvantage when the particu-lar needs become increasingly differentiated, as is the case in more highly complex societies such as stratified societies based on the division of labor. For which special problem of help is charity the solution?

Help in the Stratified Society

Stratified societies regulate equality and inequality primarily through differentiated social ranks, 'of pairs (master and servant; nobility and common people) in terms of systems of estates all the way up to complex hierarchies as in the case of the Indian caste system' (Stark, 2002: 106).

Ranks with similar social status form strata, and equality is realized only within a stratum: nobility marries nobility; peasant marries peasant; servant marries servant, with endogamy as the result. New differentiations develop within the strata with the result, for instance, that upper nobility/lower nobility or large farm-holder/small farm-holder can find a place within them. Stratification is based on inequality. And its acceptance came to an end, as is known, with the French Revolution. Nevertheless, which form of help is dominant in a stratified society? Luhmann believes that charity is the primary form of help in stratified societies and may be seen as 'the prototype of a good deed' (1973: 26).

However, charity destroys the pattern of reciprocity in two ways: the giver gives without expecting a return, and the recipient takes without producing an equivalent in return (see Sahle, 1987: 12). The key moment of motivation for mutual assistance, that is to say, the impending reversibility of circumstances, has been cancelled in stratified societies through the growing division of labor and social stratification. But for reasons of social stability, the reciprocal assistance that has just been canceled must be replaced by a special form that can cross strata. Because help for the poor cannot be realized as reciprocal, 'the societal motivation for assistance must be acquired indirectly, must be accomplished as charity, stylized as virtue' (Luhmann, 1973: 28). The giving of charity becomes a religiously prescribed moral duty. This explains the development of help into an institution that can be reliably expected among different strata (see Bommes and Scherr, 2000). Here is an illustration:

> Don't go up there today, the Baron is out of humour, he's not giving anyone more than a florin. – Why should I give him a florin? What does he give me? (Freud, 1945, quoted in Sahle, 1987: 18)

But essential aspects of help are still unspecified in the giving and receiving of charity. No one asks a) who created the need?; b) how much does the recipient need?; c) why does the recipient need charity?; and d) when should the help come to an end? (see Weber and Hillebrandt, 1999). Georg Simmel[8] contributed the interesting point that receiving charity would exclude the recipient structurally, because he is completely displaced as a justified claimant and as an objective of interests; because the motive for charity is exclusively founded in the significance of giving for the giver (1958; quoted in Sahle, 1987). The logic of help is simply the logic of religious generosity.

In summary, the form of help in stratified – ideally medieval-Christian – societies can be characterized by the following distinguishing features:

- breaking the pattern of reciprocity in two ways,
- irreversibility of circumstances as the structural presupposition of help,
- vertical and unidirectional transfer of help – from higher to lower,
- the giver does not make a demand on the recipient,
- the semantics of help is religiously and morally imbued.

The function of charity in stratified societies is to provide a relatively reliable structure of expectations for charity in the face of and in spite of the growing division of labor, of growing social inequality, and of a growing unequal distribution of social standing. But the exploitation of charity soon ends because help requires a new form that is independent of individual decisions. This brings us to the next important issue: how have the forms of help in modern functionally differentiated societies changed?

Help in the Functionally Differentiated Society

Unlike segmented and stratified societies with their criteria of social meaning (family, stratum, estate and territoriality), the functionally differentiated society organizes itself through functionally related criteria of meaning. As Stark (2002) says, the functionally differentiated society organizes the equality of the different. Society is separated by functions, one could also say by problems of communication in relation to fulfilling particular functions. Socio-cultural processes of evolution produce various function-systems such as the educational system, the economic system, the system of religion, the system of art, the system of science, the political system, etc. A function system (and any societal system such as a family, organization, etc.) consists only of recursive communications that refer back to themselves, that is, are reflexive. This is a consequence of the socio-cultural evolution of societies that develops itself from interaction-based to organization- and communication-based operative structures. Every (function) system is closed and maintains its identity by constantly reproducing its binary-coded[9] communication, depending on what is considered meaningful and what not. For instance, the binary code of the system of science is 'true/not true'. The binary code of the system of law is 'justice/injustice'. The binary code of the system of education is 'good/bad'.[10] 'As a form of social differentiation, functional differentiation emphasizes the inequality of the function-systems; none of those systems enjoys a dominant position [. . .], instead, all function-systems are unequal. Education cannot be replaced by law, the economy by religion' (Luhmann, 1995, quoted in Horster, 1997: 68). Equality emerges as a result of specialization in solving completely different problems. Luhmann argues that 'the whole societal system rejects the model of a hierarchical or any other kind of ordering relation among the function-systems' (Luhmann, 1998: 746). Function-systems take exclusive responsibility for fulfilling particular societal functions, 'with the result of enormously maximising their performance'

(Bommes and Scherr, 2000: 106). Eugster draws some conclusions from this and refers to the following problems (2000):

- problems vary depending on the particular system reference,
- there is no self-limitation: systems make their own perspectives absolute,
- in contemporary societies partial inclusion, not integration, is the only possible operation,
- questions of connection that stem from problems of coupling have to be considered,
- the problem of the environmental adaptation of systems – of the relevance of events in their environments – is decided only within the system.

It becomes clear that a common perspective, accessible to all others function-systems, is completely avoided. Functional differentiation 'leads not only toward a pluralism of functions, toward a multiplicity (in German: *Multiplizität*) of codes, but at the same time toward a multicentricity (in German: *Multizentrizität*), that means, each functional code is the centre of a world for itself . . .]' (Kneer and Nassehi, 1994: 147). And, 'Modern society, through its change to functional differentiation, has become so increasingly complex, that a representation of it as a unity in itself has become impossible. Society has neither a top nor a center, there is no place where its unity can find expression' (Luhmann, 1987, quoted in Merten, 2000: 181).[11]

However this may be, we would like to point out some key aspects of the form of help found in functionally differentiated societies. In contrast to charity with its individual motivational structures, the modern form of help, called 'social work', commits social or public interests to the interest of the poor in eliminating its difficulties. As a result of the general social processes of secularization and the requirements of capital accumulation in the face of functional differentiation, the responsibility for providing charity has been gradually transferred from the ecclesiastical to the public authority. Help, formerly the object of medieval generosity, now becomes a subject of communal social policy. And the antecedent operative pair of 'state help'/'social control' can be included in the semantic topos of help. To this extent, one might in general say that the societal mission of social work was to intercept, to manage and/or to compensate for the destructive consequences of social modernization.[12]

Social Work as a Function-system of Society

Against the background of processes of social modernization, we maintain that social work, as a socially organized activity and a function-system, cannot be adequately described by an interaction-based concept of help based on reciprocity[13] and everyday life. We believe that important questions such as those of the autonomy and legitimacy of social work can be addressed more precisely and more scientifically, or non-normatively, by means of the application of Luhmann's systems theory[14] because we believe that the task of modern social

work is to address the problems resulting from functional differentiation.

The first step, then, must be to consider whether social work may be plausibly described as an autonomous function-system alongside others. What criteria have to be established in order to be able to identify such a function system? As mentioned above, all function-systems operate on the basis of observations and communication-guiding, binary distinctions. These binary codes direct communication within the system. Only by giving preference to one side of the difference (e.g. to truth or to transcendence[15]), can any function system (any system at all) reproduce itself. The system's reproduction, regardless whether this is social, biological or psychical systems, is called 'autopoiesis', using a term coined in cognitive biology by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (see Luhmann, 1995). Keeping in mind this form of communication, which occurs in operatively closed systems, we must consider the following questions (see Baecker, 1997, quoted in Kleve, 1999: 181):

- Which function does social work fulfil for society?
- Which performances does social work carry out for other function-systems?

In light of what has been said above, we can now draw nearer to more plausible self-descriptions of social work in contemporary (post-)modern societies. To be sure, the exclusive function of social work has become clearer. Social work, whether as a function system or merely as a collection of organizations that are closely coupled with, for instance, the law through the special communication code 'entitled/not entitled', has to ensure the chance of inclusion of all persons in all function-systems. As Luhmann says, 'Every person must be able to have legal standing, to start a family, to get political power or at least to exercise control over it. Every person must be entitled to an education, if needed to receive medical help, to participate in economic processes [. . .]' (1980, quoted in Miller, 1999: 80). Of course, inclusion is not only a positive thing. A social worker can consider the case of absolutely isolated persons (for example, strict solitary confinement). He may then be able to detect a mode of strong inclusion (hyper-inclusion) that restricts other important possibilities of inclusion. The well-known return of persons in times of joblessness to their families can also be observed as a beginning form of hyper-inclusion. And of course, it is not only about enabling and arranging inclusion: sometimes inclusion is not possible at all, or at least at that time. Here we take the opportunity to introduce a prominent proposal for the societal function of social work. Michael Bommes and Albert Scherr argue in their book, that the 'function of social work is to arrange inclusions, to avoid exclusions or to manage them' (2000: 107). This observation met with an intense response in the German-speaking literature on social work. Prima facie, it can be seen as ethically questionable, for it implies the tacit acceptance of social work, that there is permanent exclusion in contemporary societies 'in fact'. But this statement could lead to hasty conclusions, because we must also remember that every observation of an event (here 'exclusion') is based on distinctions drawn by an observing system. For the economic system,

exclusion in the form of unemployed persons is a problem only if its (the system's) internal binary communication of paying/not-paying is disturbed. The function of the economic system is only to provide the society with the elementary necessities for the future. It is blind to exclusions in other social systems because of this own communication code. The binary codes of function-systems are effective precisely because they channel all communication into one or the other of the two alternatives. *Tertium non datur*. It is this restricted binary code that increases the effectiveness and efficiency of a function-system on a large scale. However, for such reasons it is crucial that professional social work takes on the job of enabling and arranging (re-)-inclusions of persons into the most relevant function-systems of the modern society: the family, the economic system, the legal system, the political system, the system of education, the health system, the system of art, and the access to mass media too. What can social work do here and how?

Social Work as (Re-)inclusion of Social Addresses

A function-system of society – social work as well – cannot 'see' human beings as a real fact or real phenomenon. It has no eyes and no other physical sensors. It only has its (sense-based) communication code, which 'exists' by connecting internal selections (to selections) – or else it disintegrates back into entropy. The communication of a function-system – for example, paying/not paying (economic system) or legal/illegal (legal system) – operates on the basis of addressable markings. Social systems cannot address the whole man. The rational modernization of our thoroughly organized society is based on this device of including usable parts of the person (e.g. communicable knowledge) and by excluding the rest (e.g. personal opinions and feelings). For function-systems (the family is a special case) only the (communicatively) markable, includable part is interesting. We propose to denote this part as a 'social address'. Social work then does not enable the inclusion of man or human beings. If one could think this thought *strictu sensu* to an end, then he would see its impracticability. Only very few social systems include the whole person, viz., the family/married couples. Social work re-introduces the excluded social addresses for a particular functional communication through including in its own communication. But every social worker has to realize that social work cannot include the social address on its own, for instance, in another function-system, such as in the political system or in the economy. A social worker cannot vote for his clients or go to work for them. He can only guarantee suitable assistance and communication to social addresses who use his services in order to improve their chances at a chance for (re-)inclusion.[16] Peter Fuchs notes that, the specific characteristic of social work might be called 'addressability management' (2000: 167). This interesting proposal is based on the above mentioned observation that every social communication (e.g. a job interview) produces addresses, but cannot connect the addresses. Whether a person is addressed by

a function-system (or by other social systems, such as organizations or his family) or not, is not a mono-causal question of the specific behavior of a single person. But it is definitely a question of the communication that occurs.

Let us now consider the following questions:

- What communication operatively closes the system of social work?
- Is there a binary code for it, and if so, what is it?

We have already touched on the question of observing and indicating the guiding differences (the above-mentioned binary codes) of various self-reproducing function-systems in our society. And both these questions are closely connected. In general, there are different ways of considering the question. One might argue that 'advising/not-advising' or even 'empathy/non-empathy' are the appropriate codes to show how the function system of social work closes itself empirically. But these binary codes would not cover all empirical known forms of social work. Furthermore, these codes can not be distinguished sufficiently from other forms of helping (doctors, therapists, lawyers). We, however, could follow Baecker (1994) and suggest that the binary code of social work, regardless of the contents and situations of communication, is: 'helping/not helping'.

> Helping is the positive value, which, whenever it occurs, produces connections for further help. Not-helping represents the negative value, the value of reflection, which, on one hand, makes it possible to scan all emerging forms of communications in order to identify possible connectors for deficit compensation, i.e., for help, and on the other, makes it possible to describe every occurrence of help as contingent and thus also terminable. (Baecker, 1994: 100)

So far, we can observe that social work is communication that is based only on moving one difference: helping/not-helping. All communication in organized social work is guided by, follows this binary code. And even if it is undeniable that qualified and successful volunteers, who use this code as well, are involved in social work, it seems to us that only professional social work, firmly coupled with the legal right of everyone to assistance and support, can produce the safety and reliability that the other societal function-systems need for their own reproduction. Furthermore, we believe that the justified claim and legal right of all persons to professionally experienced and ethically-based help and support in case of need (through inclusion in the system of social work for a certain time) is one of the greatest goods of our modern welfare society. It is precisely this achievement that makes social work an indispensable function-system of society.

Although social work maintains itself as a social system through the processing of this fundamental code, one may also say that this represents both its strength and weakness because it is precisely this highly effective reduction of complexity that produces at the same time an operational blindness to the rest of the world. However this may be, there is a reason to adopt this observa-

tion, viz., a system always creates a negative, a so to speak 'shadow-version' of meaning for itself. 'Of course, any choice implies the negation of its counter possibility. [. . .] Thus it is open and closed at the same time' (Luhmann, 1995: 445). This is important in gaining a useful, holistic perspective on social systems. But for our daily practice of social work we have to keep both sides of the distinction in mind. It seems to us that 'not-helping' is often 'helping' too. Professional social workers are intimately acquainted with this daily balancing act. But not-helping, although regularly applied in social work, is treated with reservation, even seems to be the black sheep of the social work family, in theory as well as in practice. In accepting social work as a communicative system, perhaps it is better and more practical to say that social work represents the unity of the difference of helping/not-helping.[17]

What Sociological Systems Theory Offers Social Workers

By integrating some of the discoveries indicated above into the theory and practice of social work we can improve both the professional education of future social workers as well as the social understanding of social workers at work today. The current form of professional social work can only be understood when we take a look at the earlier forms of social help that offered specific solutions to the problems of society. A heuristic model such as the sociological system theory outlined here, which operates without individual actors, promises to describe the process of social evolution and its consequences for modern forms of mutual help. We can also inquire into the societal conditions of the individual decisions that are based on the demanding expectations of the modern function-systems and that lead to individual neediness. This theoretical approach has at least two useful advantages: 1) it provides the theory and practice of social work with a non-normative, contingent perspective on society, social work, and their most important functional operation, viz., the offer of reliable and professional help and support. Social work – whether professional or voluntary – has to ensure that persons and families get the best professional help and assistance that they are legally entitled to receive in order to bring their condition of need to an end as soon as possible; and 2) by adopting the functional method, that is, the search for functionally equivalent solutions to a specific problem, we can create new possibilities of solutions by shifting our perspective from an ontological to a more constructivistic one. Our final proposal then is that when think about a particular social event or social process we always have to do it with reference to the system problem to be solved by it and to its functionally equivalent solutions.

Notes

1. Niklas Luhmann (1927–98) developed a holistic approach often called 'sociological systems theory', that is, a new and sophisticated theory of systems that consists only of events and operations. According to his later works, social systems consist only of communication, psychic systems consist only of thoughts and biological systems consist – of course – of life. The really special thing is, that all systems operate by moving distinctions within themselves.

2. The human being – especially the body – is understood as outside the social system that communicates differences only via meaning.

3. The environment is always more complex than the system, because it contains more possibilities than the system can observe and realize. Complexity is the main problem of systems.

4. Social systems use their communicative operations only to keep going, which means that unless they internally process irritations from outside, they run down and disintegrate (see for a different view, Payne, 2005).

5. See for German theories among others Engelke (1998).

6. In English: 'Forms of Help Under Changing Societal Conditions'.

7. A sociological investigation of helping must not start from a moral or psychological position. The investigation should not be to argue that and under which circumstances human beings ought to help each other, nor try to explain the motivation for help through recourse to the psychical structures of experiential processing (Luhmann, 1973).

8. Georg Simmel (1858–1918) was one of the first German sociologists.

9. Why binary? Luhmann's argument here is that all communication in function-systems consists of binary, organized differences. Social systems always draw distinctions and use indications (e.g. 'doctor' in difference to 'client' or 'mistress' instead of 'wife', 'helper' in difference to 'needy person', and other similar distinctions).

10. The societal function of the education system is the allocation of careers.

11. So far, we have been clarifying some of the aspects of functional differentiation. In our opinion it seems to be difficult to overlook its heuristic capacity for theoretical applications in social work.

12. The acceptance of the obligation to provide social help by local authorities, which resulted not least of all from the mass pauperization brought about by early capitalistic conditions, leads directly to the professionalization of help through the introduction of the professional education of social workers. The name of the first German professional 'social worker' (official job title: *Armenpfleger*, a kind of carer of the poor) was Daniel Timm. He attended the educational institution Das Rauhe Haus, which he left in 1849, and worked 50 years in St Georg, a district of Hamburg (see Dießenbacher, 1984).

13. One can say, *strictu sensu*, that social work is based on the refusal of reciprocity (Baecker, 2005).

14. At the University of Bielefeld Niklas Luhmann held a professorship for many years.

15. The binary code of religion is transcendence/immanence. To this extent, immanence belongs to its environment.

16. The term 'welfare state' is a social construction of the political system. The concept of welfare state can be characterized by the attempt of the inclusion of all in the political system.

17. Social policy plays not a role here, because social policy is a subsystem of the political system. The political system is a part system of the functional differentiated

society operating with the code superiority/inferiority. That means that social work and social policy work with very different codes.

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