

# **Luhmann Conference 2020**

## **„Moral communication. Observed with social systems theory“**

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### **„The birth of social work as a withdrawal phenomenon of moral coding in sociology“**

The leading hypothesis of my contribution will be that social work emerged as an applied science when sociology tried to free itself from value judgements as a sign of moral communication. - The social sciences emerged at the end of the 19th century. This was triggered by massive social problems resulting from the dynamic differentiation of society. The economic system, companies and factories intensified their production in a very self-referential way. Politics, and especially social policy, evolved in response to the reflection on mass accidents at work, child labour and inhumane working and living conditions (Christoph Sachße 1984; 2005). National economics, sociology and social work only gradually began to differentiate themselves from each other. It is remarkable that the founders of social work in the USA as well as in Europe were outstanding sociologists. Jane Addams, for example, was considered one of the most important sociologists of the time in the context of Chicago University (Eberhart 2009). Alice Salomon was awarded a doctorate in national economics in Berlin in 1906, even though she had no high school diploma. Her dissertation was published under the title "The causes of unequal pay for male and female work". On October 15, 1908, she founded the "Soziale Frauenschule" in Berlin-Schöneberg, which was the first interdenominational social women's school in Germany and was practically the beginning of the state-recognized scientific education of social workers. In the year 1887, Ferdinand Tönnies published the first study in Germany establishing the current subject sociology, "Community and Society". Max Weber wrote "The Objectivity of Sociological and Socio-political Knowledge" in 1904 and later "The Sense of Value Freedom of the Sociological and Economic Sciences" (1917). In Germany, the first full professorship for sociology and theoretical economics was filled in Frankfurt in 1919 by Franz Oppenheimer, Karl Mannheim's predecessor. According to this, a scientific system formation can be recorded, which is based on different knowledge problems

and interests in the environment. The decisive new formation between sociology and social work has, as my contribution will show, its starting point not in the founding of schools or departments, but in the question of the location of the observer. For Weber, the famous "freedom of value judgement" does not mean "mindless" or even "unconditional" science (Weber 2016). It is exactly the other way round: the postulate of freedom of value judgement should take into account the finding that social science knowledge is inevitably "bound to 'subjective' preconditions". These "subjective" preconditions are primarily not of a social and knowledge-sociological nature, but concern the conditions of the possibility of cognition. Every development of knowledge in the cultural sciences presupposes a relevance mark, i.e. criteria according to which observers consider the investigation of certain areas of reality to be noteworthy. Social work describes itself as a social system that aims at social change of unjust social relations and circumstances. Its programmes sort communication morally, for example when professional/unprofessional action of social workers has to be addressed. In deep contrast, since Max Weber, sociology has not been concerned with the moral evaluation of its activities, but with the factuality of morals and norms in social contexts. This is the meaning of the freedom of value judgement of the social sciences postulated by Max Weber. This difference in - morally coded - self-reflection is the difference that separates sociology and social work. The search is obviously for a third position that would be located beyond self-righteous moral judgement and simple duplication of the perspective. Maybe this position is allowed by a transdisciplinary systems theory of Niklas Luhmann (1984).

## Ressources

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