**Integration through activation?**

**– Unfolding paradox for mobilizing will to self-help–**

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# Abstract

This paper addresses the question of how the activating welfare state carries out the paradoxical agenda of “help for self-help” in practice. Applying Niklas Luhmann’s concept of “inclusion”

to local strategies of activating, i.e. “integrating” migrants in Munich, Germany, I articulate the following: the activation of individuals is fundamentally an excessive task for social intervention. Inevitably, it encounters a considerable amount of uncertainty, which is not controllable by social or external measures. Attempts to eliminate all uncontrollable elements are empirically unattainable, whether imposing coercive punishment or making use of an entire engagement

of volunteers. To the contrary, social systems depend on whether they can develop mechanisms to maintain room for *uncontrollability* in their communication. Social workers play a mediating role in this constellation by enhancing the *sensitivity* of organizations, thus opening them up for multiple inclusions instead of a unified, normative integration.

Key words: activation, inclusion, integration, systems theory

# Introduction

Contemporary social policy reforms in Europe have been given many labels: “from welfare to work” (cf. Gueron & Pauly, 1991), “social policy for the market” (Homann & Pries, 1996), “welfare in competition” (Streeck, 1998), “the productivistic/productivity revision of welfare states” (Nullmeier, 2003), and most generally, “from the active to the activating welfare state”. Despite variations, the recent European policy moves share a common factor, that of a reinforcement of the “rights and duties” requiring a contribution to society in exchange for social and unemployment assistance. In the Federal Republic of Germany, which forms the basis of this study’s considerations, the activation policy was introduced under the formula of “Fordern und Fördern”, i.e. emphasizing both a demanding individual effort (Fordern) and enabling or supporting provisions for jobseekers (Fördern). However, the activation agenda seems not to be merely “reciprocal” as it is supposed to be. German scholars of the welfare state argue that the activation of labour market policy is *coercive* rather than *empowering* because it aims to promote personal responsibility through “sanctions” such as drastic cuts in unemployment benefit payments (cf. Walther, 2003; Völker, 2005; Lessenich, 2005).

This paper *does not* start with the ordinary question of the extent to which the activation policy could be coercive and empowering, as the answer always involves a positioning in between. Instead, this article highlights an intrinsic *impossibility* in the activation project, with the fundamental assumption that personal commitment or individual will, which the activating society is eager to mobilize, is actually something that society *cannot* secure in a causal, technical way. Instead, the activation policy involves wide-range consequences that cannot be reduced to mere programmatic changes in terms of unemployment benefits or entitlement criteria for benefits and services during spells of joblessness. Therefore, so is my argument, *it recalibrates the communicational order* under which the welfare state is related to individuals. So the questions to be dealt with in this article are as follows: How does the

welfare state manage to carry out the activation, i.e. creation of motivated good citizens, which seems fundamentally an excessive task for social intervention? How is it able to sustain such a paradox? And what types of changes are emerging on implementing the activation ideals?

To address these questions, this paper applies Niklas Luhmann’s theory of inclusion.

Among all contemporary theories of inclusion, his theory is conspicuous for its communication-centred constitution*.* Expecting that it provides us a heuristic framework for analysing communicational changes in practice, this paper examines three organizational activities in Munich, the third largest city in Germany*1*: job placement in a job centre,

1 The case studies consist of a part of an ongoing research about the local praxis of the activation policy, particularly in the field of migration i.e. integration assistance. This article is based on 16 interviews conducted by the author from 2008 to 2011, including interviews with five managers and forepersons, six coworkers, three long-term jobless migrants and two more supplementary interviews with migrants engaged in voluntary work. As for the analytical framework and procedures, see footnote 10.

cooperation with mothers and teachers in elementary schools and bridging attempts between public institutions and local residents in socially disadvantaged districts. Each activity

was either newly established or strongly influenced by the activation policy, and they also have in common that the *activation of immigrant residents* is the central concern. This is meaningful for this study in two aspects: Given that immigrants are situated on the border, where membership in the receiving society is continuously questioned, they are good for testing the ideals of the activation scheme. Moreover, it is especially significant in Germany, where the paradigm shift of the welfare policy took place parallel to that of the immigration policy, in which the fundamental logic of the activation is—as will later be shown—well engrained.

This paper begins with a brief sketch of the two-fold paradigm shift in Germany: embarking on the activation agenda and an awakening of the immigration or “integration” policy (2). The paper then moves on to articulating continuums in the underlying logic

of both political changes (3). Referring to the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann, this study clarifies the paradoxical structure of the activation project (4) and elaborates on a conceptual framework by reconstructing his concept of “inclusion” (5) (6).*2* Applying these concepts to the case studies in Munich, this paper considers how social work unfolds the paradox of the activation strategy in practice (7). At the end, some conclusions are drawn and a possible relationship among activation, integration, and inclusion in the welfare state realignment is conceptualized (8)(9).

# Activation and integration: Two strings of a paradigm shift in Germany

After the stumbling progress of the 1990s, a decisive shift toward activating labor market policies in Germany occurred through four successional acts that were enforced between 2002 and 2005. Under the fourth act, widely known as Hartz IV, the German Federal Government abolished the earnings-related, status-oriented unemployment assistance that had characterized the country as the prime example of a “conservative welfare regime” (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Instead, Germany introduced a means-tested, flat rate basic income system, which was obviously combined with the “Third Way” policy in England *(cf. Blair & Schröder, 1999)*.*3* Subsequently, recipients of long-term unemployment

assistance were required to take on any job provided by a job placement scheme or engage in vocational training as a condition to obtaining the provisions. Through the Hartz reforms, the German welfare state set a rather late but crucial departure from the “benevolent” conservative welfare regime to a new, Anglo-Saxon and more severe “workfare” scheme.

Parallel with the labour market reforms, Germany experienced another radical change related to the immigration policy. In this area, the country’s most decisive move was the establishment of the Immigration Act (officially the “Law to regulate and limit immigration and to regulate the residence and integration of EU citizens and foreign nationals”) in 2005. As its official name declares, the Immigration Act has two objectives. The first is limiting and regulating new migrants from outside Germany, while the second is to promote the integration of migrants living in Germany. The Immigration Act strongly restricted the new immigration of low-skilled labour and reinforced security measures against terrorism, whereas it favored the skilled elite and experts through simplified procedures to obtain permission to work and for permanent residence. As to integration, the Federal Office for

*2* The necessary procedure here is to expand the concept of inclusion. Since Luhmann’s argument is restricted at the extremely abstract level of functional systems, it needs to be modified at the level of organizations to opera- tionalize it for empirical observations.

*3* However, the reform was basically restricted to long-term joblessness of more than one year. Otherwise, people can still receive earning-related unemployment assistance as before. Therefore, Germany got off the conservative welfare regime, though it cannot be characterized as having the “liberal” type.

Migration and Refugees (with the German initials BAMF) was founded following this act. Among all its duties, the BAMF is in charge of the development of the basic structure and content of the “integration course”, which was established to enhance integration by providing an introduction to German language, history and culture to newly immigrated

persons and migrant residents in need (cf. German Immigration Law, §75). Furthermore, the Immigration Act anchored the National Integration Plan (NIP) issued in 2007 by the cabinet post of Federal Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration, which encompasses more than 600 integration measures to be implemented in cooperation with the federal states *(Länder)* and local municipalities. The opening note of the NIP declares in a very enthusiastic and encouraging manner that “Germany is also a pioneer in integration policy” (Die Bundesregierung, 2007: 9).

# Functionalization of individuals and revaluation of social work

Indeed, these two radical changes over the last few decades in Germany took place through an independent route of discourses and respective procedures for legitimation. Nevertheless, certain continuums underlying the fundamental logic of both policies can be highlighted and are articulated with three accents:

First, a strong emphasis on “*willingness*” of individuals is identified.

Hartz IV stands out through its clear-cut criterion of entitlement for unemployment benefits for long-term joblessness. In this scheme, many criteria that were counted before have lost their primal significances. How much one previously earned or whether he/she is a German citizen or a migrant no longer matters. Instead, the principle is whether one is employable, especially whether one is *willing* to be employed. The “will to work” is, so to speak, the centre of the activation programme.

The emphasis on individual will is clearly seen in the NIP as well, which says:

*Decisive is the migrants’ willingness to get involved with life in our society, to unconditionally accept our Basic Law and our entire legal system and, in particular, to visibly demonstrate the belonging to Germany by learning the German language. (Die Bundesregirung 2007: 13, cited from the corresponding part of the English brochure of NIP)*

The NIP even adds, “such migrants who neglect integration efforts must expect sanctions” (Die Bundesregierung 2007: 12). Supposedly, the NIP is a catalog of visions and duties that the government will deal with. However, what is remarkable in this statement is the manner of requiring migrants’ *will to integration*, which is largely congruent with the new welfare strategy that calls for the *will to work* of a long-term unemployed person.

Second, and related to this point, the activation concept brought about a complete change in how the welfare state considers individuals. We can say that the image of an individual is *functionalized* through the activating provisions. What counts in the new perspective is primarily not the person’s previous status or salary, but his or her contribution to economic and social good in the future. An individual is now defined through his or her functionality, rather than through their status or origin. The relevance of the distinction “German/not German” is decreased, while the distinction “capable/not capable” or “competent/not competent” is applied generally (Bommes, 2008). Such a functional understanding of individuals is also imprinted in the migration policy, which restricts low- skilled labour through harsh criteria while favoring experts, professionals and entrepreneurs as new immigrants.

Third, social work has increasingly gained a social political significance. Until recently, social policy and social work in Germany had little interest in each other (Dahme & Wohlfahrt, 2005: 6ff). Social policy found its responsibility in providing structural solutions to the economic and political problems of the welfare state, whereas social policy was not

interested in face-to-face consultation or close cooperation with clients. On the contrary, social work is principally rooted in interactional practice in the everyday world, and has developed its own expertise (*Sozialpädagogik*). From the perspective of social work, the main concerns of social policy, e.g. conditionals for social inequality or the socio–legal legitimacy of public assistance, are instead for “extraneous” matters (Dahme & Wohlfahrt, 2005: 6).

However, such indifference is radically revised by the activation agenda. The formulae of activation policy, including “empowerment”, “preventive measures” and “help for self- help” are actually nothing new in the field of social work. The novelty of such concepts lies in that the practical logic of social work has been moved to the centre of *socio–political* considerations. Regarding integration policy, interest in the local activities of social work is declared by the formula, “Integration takes place on site (*Integration findet vor Ort statt*).” The NIP stresses:

*Integration decides on site! Encounters of people with and without migration background take place in neighbourhoods, districts and quarters in the cities and towns. Whether integration succeeds or fails becomes apparent in local municipalities. The success of integration as well as its problems is most evident here. Therefore, integration must be arranged in the place of residence, in local administrations, in workplaces, in schools and in day-nursery centres for children (Kindertagesstätte) with the involvement of immigrants. (Die Bundesregierung, 2007: 24)*

Obviously, the NIP is directed towards improving local communication with the migrant population, rather than towards formal conditionals for permanent residence, work permission and citizenship. As is the case with the activation policy, what is critical for the integration policy is to cultivate local communication through social work.

Given all logical continuums between the activation policy and the integration policy, we can point out that, in short, the German integration policy intends an *integration through activation*.

Our question then is what the aforementioned changes mean for the traditional settings of the welfare state. In the following sections, we will inquire about this point by referring to Luhmann’s study of a welfare state.

# Paradox of the activating strategy

In Luhmann’s systems theory, the state is not a political system itself, but instead a self- description of the political system (Luhmann, 1987: 74ff). Above all, the welfare state is a self-description of the political system that claims more responsibility than what it can politically regulate (labour, health care, childcare, pension, i.e. the life course of the

people). Hence, the welfare state inevitably relies on some external media to transmit the binding power of political decisions. Traditionally, it can utilize *law* (medium of the law system) and *money* (medium of the economic system) for this purpose (Luhmann, 1981: 95). Otherwise, it could resort to violence, though that is limited to extreme cases, because it would deprive the communicational potential of the political system to induce people to behave in a certain way despite the possibility that they can behave differently. The “power” (a symbolically generalized medium of the political system) is therefore distinguished from “coercion” (Luhmann, 2012[1975]: 16).

This mechanism is maintained in the activation policy as well; the political decisions are legitimated by the Hartz acts and regulated by the payment of—or, in the case of punishment, by the cutting of—unemployed assistance benefits. Nonetheless, limits on the conventional instruments of law and money are becoming obvious in the activation arrangement. The activation policy aims at mobilizing, or more precisely, “moulding” self-responsible, well-engaged and motivated individuals through political measures. The fundamental difficulty of this notion is that an intervention using law and money cannot

guarantee the achievement of that aim. The external instruments of law and money may promote a certain type of behaviour in individuals, but they cannot ensure that individuals act as expected in the end. “What cannot be reached through law and money is the change of person itself. […]The entire social area that we are discussing today in terms of ‘people processing’ is not to be controlled by law and money in a causal-technical way” (Luhmann, 1981: 97). At this point, we can clearly see the paradoxical character of the activation project, as it is a project aimed at controlling what it cannot control. Given this difficulty, why social policy increasingly counts on the interactional measures of social work is also understandable. Social work makes up for what law and money cannot reach: It enables the activation policy to operate in the direct surroundings of the people and to enhance the possibility of successful implementation of the provisions. In other words, social work is the third limb of the instrumental strategy of the activation welfare state.

# Inclusion as communicational relevance

## *5-1. Beyond the ambivalence of inclusion and integration*

Applying Luhmann’s consideration, the intrinsic difficulty with the activation concept (“people’s processing”) is a matter of “inclusion”. He stated that, “the principle of inclusion seems to encounter its border where the people themselves must be changed so that they can use the opportunities offered by the society” (Luhmann, 1981: 97). In this place, Luhmann speaks of “inclusion” in connection with “citizenship” by T. H. Marshal: inclusion as the right to participation and membership in society (Luhmann, 1981: 25ff). This basic idea, which is widely rooted in contemporary discussions of inclusion, leads us to ambivalence. We hold the principle of inclusion on one side and need to limit it on the other side in order to regulate social unity, i.e. to limit the borders of membership in the national welfare state. In this sense, inclusion is an ideal that is actually to be expanded universally, but that cannot be realized

in a welfare state. In this respect, Lahusen and Stark asked, “*How much inclusion can a society tolerate at all, so that it can still be socially integrated?*” (Lahusen & Stark, 2003: 355); society must give up its boundaries if it allows too much inclusion. Such a contradiction between inclusion and integration seems irreconcilable if inclusion is understood in this way.

## *5-2. Inclusion as operation*

In the mid-1990s, Luhmann introduced a new definition of inclusion and made fundamental revisions to his former considerations.*4* The new definition of inclusion refers not to status

or membership, but only to communicational order. “Inclusion” merely means to be “relevant” in a certain context. By contrast, “exclusion” means not to be thematized in the communication of the moment. The very advantage of such a definition is that it allows

us to think apart from the ordinal understanding of the society, an ontological space with decisive boundaries marked through shared values, social cohesion, formal conditions of membership and solidarity*5*. On the other hand, the communicational definition of inclusion assumes society as an *operational* unit whose identity is continually reproduced (or gradually changed) through the connectivity of communication and nothing but of communication.*6*

4 As for the “career” of Luhmann’s concept of inclusion, see Göbel and Schmidt (1998). This concept is not by any means free from inconsistency, even after the decisive revision in the 1990s. Regarding constructive critics for conceptual strictness, see Nassehi (2006), Merten (2004) and Kronauer (2002).

*5* Another advantage of this definition lies in its simplicity that enables us to avoid the troublesome question of “how much exclusion do we need to recognize an ‘exclusion’?” or “where is the boundary between inclusion and exclusion?” Regarding the critical argument of the sociological untenability of the normative understanding of exclusion, see Nassehi (2002, 2008).

*6* The theoretical gain of the communicational revision of the definition is that it enables a consistent application of the concept throughout the entire structure of the systems theory, throughout functional systems, organiza-

## *5-3. Inclusion as the source of problem and solution*

Taking Luhmann’s concept seriously, the scenery of inclusion and exclusion changes significantly. For example, a bankrupt person is “included” in the economic system to the same extent as a millionaire, insofar as he/she is relevant to economic communication through a bailout or by execution of a penalty for not fulfilling the terms of a contract.

Similarly, the jobless are not excluded from the economic system, but they are only possible in terms of the economic concern. A jobless person is even included in the care system,

as he/she is a recipient of unemployment benefits and social assistance. Moreover, a criminal is “included” in the legal system insofar as he/she is legally relevant through legal proceedings in court or through control in prison. In systems theory, it is not the point *if* someone is included or not; rather, the question is *how* he/she is included. Since inclusion in this meaning is not a normative purpose, but merely an operative *fact*, inclusion does not necessarily mean the solution of a problem (Nassehi, 1997: 398). Instead, almost

all cases ordinarily explained as “exclusion”, i.e. social inequality, poverty, discrimination and precariousness appear as (undesirable type of) “inclusion”. What is excluded from communicational relevance could also be a “problem”, though it is not thematized, at least at present, within the system. Social problems are problems of inclusion, not exclusion.

# Communicating uncertainty: Inclusion in the activation scheme

## *6-1. Activation and inclusion mechanism of functional systems*

How can we then understand the activation type of inclusion in relation with the functional systems and organizations?

In the activation society, the inclusion mechanism is strongly influenced by an increasing awareness of the individual will, which is reflected in each functional system from its

own concern. For example, the political system increasingly recognizes that utilizing the willingness of individuals is crucial for better governance. The following description shows how the arrangement of political relevance has significantly changed:

*Successful solutions are made through the willingness and strengths of those affected, which relate to their own circumstances, and thereby give rise to chances to integrate them [into regular employment]. (Budde und Früchtel, 2006: 54 emphasis in original) The activation model looks on the will as a power station that supplies energy to action. It can overcome impediments and sometimes even move mountains. (ebd. 31)*

For the political system, what is to be governed is willingness and the strength of individuals, while the medium of power is directed towards mobilizing motivated individuals to obtain “successful solutions”.

From its perspective of legality, the same concern is imprinted in the legal system. Through an amendment in 1998, the Second Book of the German Social Security Act/Sozialgesetzbuch II (SGB II) defined the unemployed as only those who are searching for a paid job. In other words, it is no longer enough to lose your job and become an “unemployed person”. In legal terms, you have to prove that you are willing to work to be counted as being jobless. The legal system regards the will to work as the very criterion for an unemployed person.

In the activation scheme, the care system principally helps those who help themselves. The fact that you are in need is no longer the only determinant to receiving help, as you also have to demonstrate that you are willing to be independent and help yourself. “Care”, the symbolically generalized medium of the care system, is dealt out on the basis of willingness, and not merely because of poverty and the troubles that one faces.

The economic system is also added to the functional systems that relate to the activation

tions and interactions, all of which are composed of communication.

scheme, and sees an individual as an “object of investigation”. In the activation scheme, the inclusion mechanism of the economic system is regulated by whether the person

can demonstrate his/her willingness to work successfully. If a long-term unemployment assistance recipient (Unemployment Benefit II recipient) refuses to participate in vocational training or take a job given by a job replacement scheme without any substantive reasoning, the provision is reduced.*7* The will of unemployed persons functions as a precondition under which further unemployment benefits are or are not ensured.

All these observations indicate that the functional systems allow increasing references to the extrinsic moment (“individual will”), which originally had no room in the communicational concern in each functional system. This leads us to one assumption: The functional systems may allow a considerable amount of uncertainty to enter into their own communication because individual will is an extrinsic moment that can irritate a smooth reproduction of communication in functional systems. How can such irritations, or “vagaries” be managed to the extent that the systems can continue their operation? Before

moving on to case studies, I would like to further go through Luhmann’s implication on the organizational level.

## *6-2. Activation and inclusion mechanism of organizations*

According to Luhmann, organization is not a part of a functional system, but an autonomous entity with its own mechanism for reproduction.*8* Regarding inclusion and exclusion,

the regulative mechanism is not based on a monophonic (i.e. only a political, economic, legal, pedagogical) concern, but on a “programme”, which defines the activity of each organization. For example, welfare organizations include people by regarding them as being in need and eligible for certain services and assistance. However, they exclude people whose needs do not correspond with the programmes that define the activities of the organization. Each organization can only handle the cases that meet its conditions for

welfare programmes, as all of the cases that do not conform to programmes are not handled. Therefore, a social service organization is an institutional instance of inclusion, while at the same time being a mechanism of exclusion (cf. Luhmann, 1975: ff.142).*9*

To inquire about how the activation strategy is implemented in organizations is not a theoretical question any more, but an empirical one. According to the preceding consideration, we set four variables along which the following empirical cases are to be

7 For example, during the first stage, unemployment benefit payments are reduced by 30%. Individuals under 25 years of age can no longer rely on unemployment benefit payments. Instead, they receive only actual expenses for housing and heating, as well as coupons for foodstuffs (cf. Völker, 2005: 75).

*8* Organization is defined as a social system reproducing itself through making decisions in connection with the former decision (Luhmann, 2005[1975]: 9ff, 2011). Andersen (2003) highlights the different mechanisms of a functional system and organization concerning their communicational form. Communication in functional

systems is “monophonic”, meaning it is closed around only one code, whereas communication in organizations is “polyphonic”, applying various codes of functional systems according to the case concerned. For example, local administration not only applies to the political code, but it also considers costs and uses in relation to the economic code and the legitimacy of certain measures in relation to the legal code. Similarly, a university pertains not merely to the scientific code of being true or false, but applies the economic, legal, political and educational codes to make decisions as an organization.

*9* In this short article, Luhmann focused on the cognitive aspect of organization that selectively pays attention (or selectively does not pay attention) through its own programme. Generally, inclusion in an organization is discussed as a matter of *membership,* which is also the case made by Luhmann (cf. Luhmann, 1994; Nassehi/ Nollmann, 1997). In my opinion, however, we should apply this concept exclusively in relation to the commu-

nicational relevance, as well on the level of organizations as with functional systems. It is logically untenable to discuss the membership of an organization as a matter of inclusion, while giving up discussing the entitlement of membership in a society. As with the case of a functional system, an organization is not an ontological space, but an operative entity of communication. Moreover, the conventional equation of inclusion with organizational membership is also not *empirically* tenable because inclusion and exclusion should be discussed on the side of clients (“Publikumsrolle”), and not only as a question of professionals (“Leistungsrolle”).

articulated*10*: (a) Formation of a programme (What are the task, target, service and founder of the organization?); (b) Formation of recognition (In what way do they perceive problems? How do they relate to the clients?); (c) Formation of practice (How do they encounter individual will in practice? How do they deal with that?); and (d) Formation of changes (Are there any recognizable changes? If any, in what way?)

# Unfolding the paradox in practice

## *7-1. Case 1: Enhancing sensitivity to the clients -- Job center*

The German job centre, or “ARGE” consortia, was founded through the Hartz reforms as a joint body of the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesamt für Arbeit, BA) and the

municipalities. The BA agencies are responsible for the payment of unemployment assistance benefits and all activation measures, whereas the municipalities are in charge of social assistance payments and debts, drugs and socio–psychological counseling. As a joint body, the job centre represents a central organization to implement the on-site activation strategy.

The will of the clients appears quite diversely during the practical activities of job centres. Especially remarkable is that this will often appears in a “negative” way, such as through a breach of an agreement on incorporation measures (*Eingliederungsvereinbarung*) made between the client and an employment agency or by “fading out”, where they simply no longer visit the job centre. In fact, a male jobless migrant in his late 50s responded during his interview that he considered vocational training “nonsense” because he believed that he could not compete with younger generation workers, regardless of his effort. He also criticized the standardized measures of the activation policy, saying that he could not get on with “disciplinary” vocational training, and that authorities could/would not control him in such a way. Such voices clearly contrast with the “will” discussed in functional systems. There, individual will is recognized only insofar as it obediently follows the offered welfare programmes and willingly cooperates to carry them out, while the “negative” will expressed by clients is mostly dismissed or labeled as “laziness” or “idleness”. However, practitioners in the job centre sharply encounter the will of their clients as they refuse to comply with the professionals’ programme. In this sense, the job centre creates an interface where the assumed will in the activation programme clashes with the various forms of will in practice.

The job centre is likely using two strategies to handle such “disobedient” types of will, to clear the limit of its responsibility on the one hand and to improve its cognitive sensitivity on the other.

As for the former strategy, a manager of the job centre (ARGE) *11* stated the following:

*In the end, sanction comes by law. If it works? It cannot be said. But for ARGE, it doesn’t matter at a point in time, because if the help was given and the client didn’t come to [obligational] work, then….if I speak malicious now, our contract is still fulfilled. It is not in the sense that they moved into a regular job, but…well, […] we don’t know why they don’t come [any more]. They are just gone.*

*10* The following analysis is primarily based on the *qualitative content analysis* (Gläser & Laudel, 2006; Mayring 2008). As I see it, the very charm of this method is its compatibility with theoretical considerations. It requires theoretically well-concerned questions with which the analysis of empirical data should be carried out. Such methodological procedures ensure us that we will bring the result back to the theoretical framework and, eventually, make a contribution to the original one, not in an arbitrary manner, but in a methodologically well- grounded way. The four variables formulated in this article were derived from the theoretical consideration, and elaborated in relation to new aspects identified during the careful reading of the transcription. It means that the variables were fixed through an interaction between theoretical conception and the empirical materials. As for the detailed procedure, see Gläser and Laudel (2006: 191ff). All interviews were conducted in a semi-struc- tured way, giving priority to allowing the informants talk about what they are involved in.

*11* This interview was conducted on July 31, 2009. The ARGE consortia in Munich was named the job centre as of January 1, 2011.

In this statement, the manager mentioned a formality of the organizational programme (“our contract is still fulfilled”), and drew the line on how far it must take responsibility. The task of the BA agency is principally restricted to handling only individuals who come to the office, thereby relieving the job centre of the excessive task of calling on every person to mobilize him/her.*12* The job centre recognizes what needs to be handled and what must be dismissed on the basis of its own programme. In this sense, the organization programme provides a shield for the organization to help deal with the uncontrollable environment.

The other way to deal with the vagaries in the environment is to enhance the sensitivity of the programme. Since the 1990s, the city of Munich has conducted an organizational reform called “intercultural openness”, particularly in the social affairs and youth welfare department offices. Its implementation was dramatically promoted after the NIP employed this concept as its main objective, and obligated all public institutions nationwide. Since 2007, the city of Munich has provided intercultural training to personnel working in all of 13 Social Citizens’

Houses (*Sozialbürgerhäuser*), where the job centre of Munich is placed.*13* The central aims of intercultural openness are to sensitize public organizations to the cultural differences of

minorities and to provide them with “needs-oriented” services. Intercultural training aims at not only promoting the linguistic competency of the personnel, but also at improving the background knowledge about various lifestyles and customs to help give minority residents access to the public organization without hesitancy. The concept of intercultural openness was originally developed through the critical reflection that organizations should promote their sensitivity to

the extent that they flexibly respond to individual needs since clients are highly heterogeneous individuals and their needs cannot be covered by more or less standardized services (Handschuck & Schröer, 2000). The manager of a job centre recognized the most conspicuous change caused by the intercultural opening, insofar as they got to notice the issue at all:

*It also took a long time for us to recognize we need an immigration law. And the theme that we are dealing with under the intercultural openness or the theme migration is quite new. […]So I think, the success lies in the fact that we perceive the issue at all. The fact that we acknowledged the theme as an important theme. This has changed. It is indeed just a beginning, but quite an important beginning.*

Given the twice as high percentage of migrant jobless compared to Germans, migrant residents have been a theme in job placement schemes. However, they were not recognized as being a subject to be dealt with flexibly. Such a perceptional change could be a tiny step in the entire structure of the activation provision, although it *is* a decisive change in practice because all subsequent communications take place on the basis of it.

## *7-2. Case 2: Improving institutional accessibility for and by migrants*

The second example of the activation practice is an empowerment project *for* and *by* migrant women living in a socially disadvantaged area. This project, which is named LIGA (“*Lotsinnen und Lotsen für Ingegration, Arbeit und Ausbildung*”), was started in 2009 and funded by the city of Munich and the BIWAQ programme initiated by the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs.

*12* Regarding this point, complementary support is given for those who are not able to join vocational training or take over part-time jobs assigned from the job centre—primarily because of alcoholism, drug addiction, the burden of child care, and a generally desolate lifestyle. For such cases, a cooperative measure is carried out in a triad at the job centre: a social worker in charge of a local district (*Bezirkssozialarbeiter*), a benefit administrator who is respon- sible for each client (*Leistungssachbearbeiter*) and an employment agency for job placement (*Arbeitsvermittler*). If the benefits administrator judges that the client needs special support preceding the job placement, the administra- tor first sends the client not to the employment agency but to social workers for consultation and care. Only after this type of hindrance (*Vermittlungshemmnis*) has been cleared can job placement operate effectively.

*13* The city of Munich plans to complete intercultural training for all personnel of the Social Citizens’ Houses (ca. 1,800 persons) by the end of 2012 (Sozialreferet München, 2010: 68).

The central aim of this project is to promote accessibility to public institutions by giving migrant residents an orientation as to what services are available and how to apply for them. Sometimes, it provides initial help in filling out application forms and accompanying people to official institutions. LIGA identifies its function as a “one-stop counseling centre” that helps migrants avoid being lost in the jungle of public institutions while guiding them to appropriate welfare organizations.*14* All of the staff members for this project also have a migrant background, which significantly reduces the hesitancy that migrants may have when visiting the office. The staffs are socially engaged, and generally have a rich experience

in voluntarily helping their friends and neighbours. At the beginning of the employment, they were trained on the structures of public institutions in Germany and Munich and the services offered by these organizations. Including the training phase, they are paid 400 Euros in a week for 15 hours.

The staff recognizes the will of their clients as they visit the office, insofar as the clients coming to seek help. However, what was often reported in their interviews are cases in which the needs of clients come to be escalated. Because the staff are living in the same area as their clients and they have sometimes known each other, it is not easy to maintain a clear boundary between formal help as a job and informal help, which they were used to giving before. A member explained that she made a “mistake” in giving one of her clients her private phone number in relation to the client calling her at 10 at night and asking for

help. This is actually a typical embarrassment that voluntary workers can encounter during a certain phase. A Turkish woman who helped her Turkish friends for a long time told me how she was becoming devastated by the almost endless needs of the people.

*I recognized that it has become so much for me that I myself would need help. So I said: it is over. I must respond immediately now, otherwise I need help. [Recently] I get angry when they come, because they actually don’t want “help” from me, but they just want me to do their things. […] And gradually I understand that I’ve done not a good thing if I helped them in this way.*

Her statement points how voluntary help can increase to the extent that it overloads the person involved. Moreover, it shows that volunteering has an ambivalent consequence of promoting dependency instead of independence in people. At the same time, the effort of the involved person is gradually depleted as he or she becomes burdened over the long run. The members of LIGA, knowing the problems from their own experiences, take advantage of the “formality” of the project. A member explained how she gradually learned to “switch” her attitude by shutting off her business mobile phone after working hours.*15* She utilizes the tool to confirm the mental boundary between the public and private spheres. Another member said that the fact that she was paid and helped people within the framework of

the project enabled her to restrain the engagement in a decent way, though with more responsibility. The LIGA project functions as a catalyzer to enhance the accessibility of public institutions *and* as a mechanism to further the care relationship in a sustainable way.

## *7-3. Case 3: Covering perceptional gaps in elementary schools*

The third example is a project introduced into some elementary schools in Munich, especially in those areas with a high percentage of an immigrant population. This project was founded to promote cooperation between teachers and migrant parents and to strengthen their educational competency, particularly for those mothers with a migrant

*14* This is the reason in particular why the staffs are named “guides of integration (*Integrationslotsen*)”.

*15* There was a gap between the manager and the staff members concerning what the business mobile phone is to be used for. The manager equipped them with a business mobile phone with the intension that it could improve the mobility and accessibility of their clients. The members, however, took advantage in ways that the manager had not necessarily expected.

background. Originally, it was designed in 2000 by AWO (*Arbeiterwohlfahrt*), one of the five main welfare associations in Germany. It started independently of the nationwide establishment of the integration policy, but it was strongly pushed since the NIP obligated the schools to take concrete measures for intercultural openness.

In public discourses, parents with migrant backgrounds have often been criticized for not attending parents’ evenings, and that they are not interested in their children’s formal education. Moreover, they are also blamed for being less motivated and uncooperative.

However, the person in charge of this school project regards it as a one-sided perception:

*Well, when I talk with the mothers about why they haven’t just the courage to enter the school, they say: “Ah, Miss X [the manager], do you know what? We cannot attend parents’ evening. We don’t speak the language, we don’t know what they are expecting from us, we don’t know what is going on there at all. And I think, if I speak with my broken German, nobody would listen to us anyway.” They say “it is demotivating” and “we haven’t that courage, we just haven’t that.”*

She understands that migrant parents behave in this way not because they are indifferent to school education; instead, they are confused because they are unable to do what they are actually willing to do. She recognized the problem, after all, not as a question of “will” and “will not”, but as a matter of “can” and “cannot”.

To reduce such hindrances and cover the perceptual gap between schoolteachers and migrant mothers, the project gave lectures for both sides. It opened up a “morning café” inside the schools that provided a place for mothers to talk with one another after they dropped off their children. The aims of the café are to reduce the fear and hesitancy that mothers face over entering a public institution in the first place, as well as to make them aware of the German education system by giving them instructions. The project gave lectures for teachers to help promote their sensitivity to the different customs and behaviours of migrant families. For example, many Turkish parents prefer to begin talking about daily issues before they come to the point of what they really want to say. Such communicational considerations seem quite trivial when taken individually. However, such a habit is a great hindrance to successful communication in practice. Improvement takes place in a slow and subtle way, although the project manager sees some positive changes:

*It was amazing what I got from all principals as feedback: “Miss X [the manager], I’m greeted by the mothers quite differently as previously. I feel I’m perceived pretty differently.” One said “I’m hugged by mothers. This was not imaginable before!”*

Once such access is built, it supplies a condition under which further communication can happen that enables further changes. So the manager emphasized the importance to

approach things in a “low threshold” way and to act in the field where the clients form their everyday life:

*Because the opposite is not imaginable, that they come to us. I think the most important thing for social work is, on beginning counseling, to look for access to the people at first. Because they are not the clients who are used to seeking help, but the help must be given on their side. The help must be arranged so that they take it up. Only in this way, can certain measures be taken onward.*

Such a strategic move does not expect that the clients will change immediately. Instead, a change must be made in services and the arrangement of communication, as the “activation” takes a roundabout way in practice. However, only such an approach can find

“access” to the people, with the manager explaining the reason for their approach in a very brief statement, “…*because we cannot change those people. We cannot upend them”.*

# Promoting disintegration for multiple inclusions

Regarding these organizational activities, I would like to consider four implications in light of the system’s theory, especially in relation to the aforementioned question of how the systems deal with the uncertainty that emerges with an increasing awareness of individual will and, finally, the comprehensive question of this paper: How does the welfare state manage to carry out the paradoxical agenda of the activation at all?

First, we can point out that the attempts to eliminate all uncontrollable elements are not empirically sustainable. In the case of the job centre, the difficulty lay in that the activation scheme cannot be coerced. From a systems theoretical point of view, this difficulty particularly depends on that the coercion erodes the essential fertility of the political communication (see Section 4). If the medium of power turns to coercion, the political system considerably depletes its communicational potentiality. It functions as long as the medium of power does not become “inflated” and does not resort to forcing

individuals to act in a certain manner. The same logic can be applied in the project “for and by” migrants. If the medium of “care” is overloaded until it turns into an entire substitute for the activity of the cared person, it can exhaust the care relationship itself. The care relationship can only be sustained insofar as it does not turn into a takeover of the tasks that the cared person actually has to cope with. In both cases, the excess of the communication medium leads to a malfunction of the social systems. This leads us to further insight: the operation of the social system does not actually depend on the ability to carry through its project in its entirety, but on the ability to maintain uncertainty in its communication. In other words, what matters in praxis is not the question of how it can cover the uncertainty

of communication, but the question of how it can leave room for incompleteness. For communication, what is indispensable is not certainty, but *uncertainty*.

Second, organizations cope with the paradoxical task of “controlling the uncontrollable” in a reflexive way. They do not coerce their clients to change in the way they expect. Rather, they change their way of communication, either through giving intercultural training to the personnel, improving the accessibility of public institutions or taking a very low threshold approach in terms of the circumstances that the clients are living in. They are not aiming at immediately engaging in “people processing”; instead, they are just focusing on modifying the communicational conditions upon which they recognize their clients and vice versa.

Thus, the welfare organizations are becoming self-referential in their activation practice. They change what they can change: the services and structures of themselves. This reflexivity is the exact mechanism that enables the activation of the welfare state to operate despite the very paradoxical agenda of help for self-help. The organizational social work functions as a buffer by selectively dealing with vagaries in the environment and, in this way, keeping the activation scheme operating as a whole.

Third, as a result of this reflexivity, organizations are changing their *modus operandi* of inclusion and exclusion, i.e. in the way that they see what is relevant. We have seen that migrant clients are recognized in the job centre not merely as the jobless, but as clients with highly differentiated backgrounds, which must be considered during the interaction. We have also seen that migrant parents are recognized in schools not as uncooperative, indifferent and irresponsible persons, but as potential partners whose involvement is, unfortunately, inhibited by linguistic difficulties and/or fear and hesitation. The guiding project tells of a necessity of a more or less institutionalized framework that supports the engagement of the motivated persons instead of just making use of an entire engagement of volunteers. Such perceptional changes are not the success registered in political documents or publicly announced, but almost makes the decisive step in practice. If an issue is bypassed —say “excluded”— from the relevance of organizational communication, any measure is not likely given for it. However, if once recognized as an issue or even an important issue, the organization deals with it in some way. As a result, public organizations are on the way to sensitizing their perception of a variety of their clients.

Fourth, and to the final point, the activation society is not an integrated unit; instead, its dynamic lies in that it contains various *discrepancies*. The most conspicuous discrepancy is that which is between functional systems and organizations, because organizations create the interface where the activation ideal meets individual will in reality. Here, individual

will takes various appearances that are sometimes communicated in the manner of holding one’s own autonomy against an imposed inclusion, sometimes communicated as a matter of “can/cannot” and not merely “will/ will not” or sometimes even in a paradoxical way for the purpose of empowerment. In each case, the organization deals with individual will on the basis of its own programme, and not entirely on the basis of the activation ideal. This reveals that the perceptual differences of the organizations are not disturbing, but help promote

the activation scheme of the welfare state. In other words, the activation welfare state even requires such differences to acquire as much sensitivity as possible, thus enhancing the management capacity and flexibility of the activation strategy. Hence, the question of “how much inclusion a society can tolerate to enable it to still be integrated” must be changed. From the system’s theoretical point of view, the question is formulated as to “how much *sensitivity* a society can equip within its communication to be able to operate despite the increasing uncontrollability of the environment”. Again, here the inclusion highlights an *operational logic of communication in practice,* which is not necessarily observable in

the form of law and money, but consists of the very basis of the implementation of the activation strategy. “Integration” also changes its meaning in this place, as it no longer concerns social cohesion, shared values and unisonous unity. Instead, it practically designates a hollow formula because society can operate as long as it is *disintegrated*, i.e. it holds gaps and frictions of welfare programmes and welfare practices. A society with an activation arrangement is imagined not as an “integrated”, seamlessly united entity, but as an operational enterprise taking advantage of discrepancies generated by autonomous operations of social systems.

# Conclusion

The beginning of this paper introduced the activation ideal, which is ingrained in integration policy in Germany and assumes a functionalized view of individuals. However, as has been argued, the activation society cannot coerce individuals into acting entirely as expected because doing so would undermine the fertility of communication itself. Rather, the paradox of uncontrollability is unfolded *in* the communication and is managed by enhancing the sensibility of the organizations to enable them to cope with a high complexity in the environment. Such a move does not dissolve a paradox, but enables its differentiation.

The entirety of the consequences of the activation programme cannot yet be assessed since the programme remains in progress. Nonetheless, we can conclude that we need to at least follow the mechanisms for how the “integration through activation”—fundamentally an impossible theorem—is managed at the *interface* of the political programme and practical interaction. Only then can we approach a societal reality that is not reduced to political– structural discourses.

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