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THE LOGIC OF THE SOVIET ORGANISATIONAL SOCIETY

POLITICAL CONTROL, THE SOVIET VILLAGE, AND WORLD SOCIETY

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The paper describes and discusses the variant of societal differentiation that evolved under the Soviet regime. My argumentation starts with the assumption of Socialism as a program with a universal, function system-exceeding claim for validity. The implementation of the Socialist program may be perceived as an effort to create structures, which allow complete inclusion in the sense of an all-encompassing political addressability. In this regard, the political leadership tried to set up the society as a hierarchically structured organisation. The example of Soviet agriculture and the structures of Soviet villages, however, show that notwithstanding an all-encompassing degree of organisation, strictly 'organised' forms of economic communication coexisted with and were interrelated to 'unorganisable' and even ideologically deviant forms of agricultural production by personal smallholdings. Such niches of functional differentiation did not only provide compensation for the inability of the political leadership to cope with societal complexity, but also created connectivity in the world society and could hardly be oppressed without putting the stability of the regime at risk.

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Der Aufsatz analysiert die Variante gesellschaftlicher Differenzierung, die sich unter dem sowjetischen Regime herausbildete. Der Ausgangspunkt der Argumentation ist ein Verständnis von Sozialismus als Programm mit gesellschaftsweitem Geltungsanspruch. Im Rahmen der Programmumsetzung sollten Strukturen geschaffen werden, die Vollinklusion im Sinne einer umfassenden politischen Adressierbarkeit ermöglichen. Die politische Führung versuchte, die Gesellschaft als hierarchische Organisation einzurichten. Am Beispiel der sowjetischen Landwirtschaft und der dörflichen Strukturen lässt sich zeigen, dass ungeachtet eines hohen Organisationsgrades 'organisierte' Formen wirtschaftlicher Produktion mit 'unorganisierbaren' und regimefremden kleinbäuerlichen Produktionsformen nicht nur ko-existierten, sondern beide wechselseitig aufeinander angewiesen waren. Solche Nischen funktionaler Differenzierung kompensierten die Defizite der politischen Führung bei der Bearbeitung gesellschaftlicher Komplexität und generierten Anschlussfähigkeit in der Weltgesellschaft. Mit politischen Mitteln waren sie kaum zu unterdrücken, ohne die Stabilität des Regimes in Gefahr zu bringen.

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1. INTRODUCTION

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From a systems-theoretical point of view, the Soviet Union may be observed as one of the most far-reaching attempts to disconnect a considerable part of the world within the modern – and that means: functionally differentiated – world society. The disconnection would be made possible by imposing particular societal standards on this region. As repeatedly argued from a systems-theoretical perspective, one major cause for the eventual breakdown of the Soviet regime was its sharp structural contrast to modern world society (Hayoz 1997; for the former GDR see Pollack 1990; 1994; cp. also Luhmann 2000b: 384f). Notwithstanding the failure of the Soviet experiment, however, we must be aware that it succeeded in maintaining its distinct and at least from a Western perspective highly non-transparent order for seventy years. It is essential to comprehend this Soviet variant of differentiation not least in order to understand the societal structures that have evolved in the former Soviet states since the early 1990s, because this new order is built “not *on the ruins* but *with the ruins* of communism” (Stark 1996: 995),

Despite the almost hermetic closure of the Soviet Union towards the rest of the (non-socialist) world and all consequent discrepancies between the “East” and the “West”, systems-theoretical categories – in particularly the logic of and relation between function systems and organisations – may be applied to describe the Soviet variant of differentiation. In doing so, its specific conditions of reproduction may be grasped not as a theoretically intangible outlier, but as a part of world society. In this regard, my argumentation starts with the assumption of Socialism as a program in a systems-theoretical sense, which differs from usual function system-oriented programs (see Luhmann 2008 [1986]: 59f) in its universal claim for validity (2). The implementation of the Socialist program may be observed as an effort to create structures that allow for complete inclusion in the sense of an all-encompassing political addressability (3). In this respect, the political leadership tried to set up the society as a hierarchically structured organisation, consisting of two types of organisations: The Communist Party on top of the hierarchy, effecting internal dedifferentiation of the political system; and mass organisations which rendered membership factually inevitable and led to far-reaching organisation of most social spheres under political control (4). The all-embracing degree of societal organisation and the political addressability of virtually everyone, however, did not necessarily imply, that politics – or rather the Communist Party – captured system-specific forms of communication in a similar comprehensive way. Instead, as the example of Soviet agriculture illustrates, strictly ‘organised’ forms of economic communication, which were realized through the collective farms, coexisted with and were interrelated to ‘unorganisable’ and even ideologically deviant forms of agricultural production by personal smallholdings (5). Such niches of functional differentiation within Soviet structures did not only provide functional compensation for the inability of the political leadership to cope with societal complexity, but also created external connectivity in the world society and could hardly be oppressed without putting the stability of the regime at risk (6).

2. SOCIALISM AS A PROGRAM AND THE PROGRAM OF SOCIALISM

With regard to function systems, programs potentially affect two levels: They may act as conditioning supplements to function system-specific codes on the code level, and on the material level they may influence to which objects communication may refer to.^[1] With regard to the *code level*, one should bear in mind that function systems differentiate and draw boundaries against their environment by developing system-specific forms of communication, which often, but not necessarily take the form of binary codes. In this context, programs are conditioning mechanisms which set up rules and criteria to regulate the assignment of the code values to operations (Luhmann 2012 [1997]: 217ff; 2013 [1997]: 91f; 2008 [1986]: 59f) and as such supplement and specify the “highly abstract schematisms“ of binary codes (Luhmann 2008 [1986]: 59) (e.g. theories and methods for the medium of truth or laws for the medium of law). Within the frame of a program and by its variations, function systems are able to enlarge their possible set of environmental references and to increase their adaptability and learning capacity (Luhmann 2012 [1997]: 218f; 2008 [1986]: 60). Codes, in contrast, cannot be changed without changing the identity of the system (Luhmann 2012 [1997]: 217).

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On the *material level*, programs may occur as mechanisms to regulate the scope and the mode of how the code is applied within system-specific communication. In this vein, the initially excluded may be re-included in the system by the program – as Luhmann states, for instance, with regard to the arts system: “A work of art must satisfy its own code as coherent/incoherent or, in traditional terms, as beautiful/ugly. But in choosing the subject, one can ‘politicize’ or keep an eye on marketing potential” (Luhmann 2012 [1997]: 227). In contrast to the code level of programs, the material level is not a necessary supplement to the system-specific code, but theoretically optional. The arts system, to stay with Luhmann’s example, may operate and reproduce itself with or without ‘politicised’ or ‘commercial’ subjects (and respective programs) as long as the code level remains untouched and system-specific communication generates connectivity.

The two program levels differ in their handling of external references: Criteria for the assignment of code values are usually self-referential. If external reference still occurs, it must be translated into system-specific operations and has to remain latent – i.e. occur as self-reference – to be part of the program. In science, for instance, the reference to current power relations in order to qualify a statement as ‘true’ would immediately jeopardize the scientific value of the statement. Instead, the (internally constructed) theories and methods have to provide appropriate criteria for the code value (even if factually political forces play the pivotal role: see Kneer & Nassehi 2000: 133f). This claim for latency, in turn, usually does not apply to the material level, where the initially excluded may be more or less openly re-included. The scientific value of a research project, for instance, is not necessarily contested if it is justified with reference to funding or political relevance. Problems for the science system, however, occur if those results communicated as ‘true’ appear politically desirable or economically

[1] See Luhmann (1996) for a similar distinction between the operative and the semantic level.

useful. At this point, the logic of *dedifferentiation* becomes obvious: Dedifferentiation takes place as soon as external references directly penetrate the code level. That is, criteria for the assignment of code values no longer evolve from the respective system itself, but are fixed by the environment. The code values are externally undermined, even if they semantically persist.

Against this background and as a first approximation, Socialism as it was implemented as the main principle of social order in the Soviet Union may be conceived as a program. As such, however, it did not confine itself to a single function system, but aimed to set up the conditions of societal reproduction *in general* according to principles stemming from the Marxist-Leninist ideology (Baecker 2006: 124; also Koenen 2012: 83). The self-conception of the Socialist program resulted first and foremost from the rejection of the capitalist order and its alleged tendencies towards exclusion, which were primarily ascribed to the existence of private property mainly of means of production and market coordination of production and distribution of goods. Under the condition of functional differentiation, the social mechanism to deal with the problem of material reproduction is based on the double codification of scarcity - first by property (and the respective distinction of property|non-property) and second by payments (payment|non-payment). The communication of scarcity in the medium of money renders property liquid and facilitates the reproduction of the economy, as money permits to solve the paradox of scarcity by duplicating scarcity: The scarcity of goods is contrasted with the scarcity of money (Luhmann 1988: 197). Given the double codification of scarcity, inclusion in the economic system does not exclusively take place by tagging the positive side of the code. Instead, precisely the distinction of the two sides and the option of crossing generate different possibilities for connecting operations (that is: payment options) on *both* sides of the distinction (Luhmann 1988: 189).

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With regard to this distinction, Socialism chose another form of observation. Instead of focussing on the unifying aspect (i.e. the *symbolon*) it emphasized the separating aspects (i.e. the *diabolon*) of the medium of money (Luhmann 1988: 258f). According to the Socialist perspective, the difference between rich and poor or property and non-property, respectively, first and foremost enhances the accumulation of power on the side of capital and inevitably leads to the exploitation of workers (Luhmann 1985: 122f). Inevitable consequences are exclusion and the neglect of the interests of large social groups. According to Luhmann, the Socialist ideology replaces the gradual difference between rich and poor by a dichotomy, which may then be translated into capitalists and workers as distinct and opposing social classes (Luhmann 1985: 123f; 1988: 161).

The Socialist conviction to overcome the observed deficits of capitalism by establishing equality and social justice led to a self-conception which placed itself morally and economically above the capitalist order. Furthermore, it was linked to the postulate that the positive effects of Socialism were to change the people itself, so that 'capitalist' properties such as egoistic profit seeking would become more or less automatically subordinated to the pursuit of collective welfare (Kornai 1992: 52). The Socialist program aimed to transform societal structures according to its ideological principles *and* to re-educate the people living within these structures. The new 'Soviet man' was meant to embody comprehensive acceptance of the socialist program and intrinsic conformity with socialist values (von Zsolnay 1968; Koch 2002: 119): "The 'new man' - the Bolshevik specialist, engineer, or functionary - came to represent a new code of

social ethics, which was sometimes simply called *kultura*“ (Scott 1998: 195). In a co-constitutive process, he ensures the unfolding of the economic superiority of Socialism.

3. COMPLETE INCLUSION AS POLITICAL ADDRESSABILITY

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The implementation of the Socialist program was based on two claims: *Firstly*, the self-conception of socialism relies on the key distinction of exclusion and (complete) inclusion (Baecker 1998 [1997]: 128). Within this distinction, socialism pretended to tag the positive side, i.e. inclusion, and thus assigned exclusion to capitalism: Everyone should participate in the implementation of the new social order and no one should stay apart. *Secondly*, the Communist Party put itself at the very core of the socialist order and claimed for an “ideological monopoly” as well as for a leadership position in the process of societal transformation. Officially, its legitimacy was based on an “organic view of society” according to which the interests of every member of society were inextricably linked to the interests of the collective. And “[b]ecause there can only be one common interest – the creation of a communist society – there can only be one political party“ (Hahn 1988: 81).

Taken these two claims together, it turns out that the socialist understanding of complete inclusion did neither imply the ability of every person to take part and be addressable in *any* function system nor did it refer to the inclusion of everybody in *all* function systems: The former would be trivial as complete exclusion of a person from all function systems – i.e. from society – is hardly thinkable; the latter might be theoretically possible, but highly improbable in practical terms (Stichweh 2000b: 89). Instead, the form of complete inclusion envisioned by the Socialist program may be best described as an all-encompassing *political* addressability: Everyone should be reachable for political communication and every communicative operation should be interpretable and attributable as political communication.

Seeking for appropriate conditions to realize this claim, the political leadership obviously could not count on the logic of function systems, which are indeed directed towards inclusion, yet not able to steer it purposefully (Stichweh 2000b: 89f). Instead, the political leadership set up the society as a hierarchical structured organisation (Pollack 1990; Baecker 1998 [1997]: 128). In contrast to function systems, organisations are able to exercise control in all three meaning dimensions: In the *factual dimension*, they rest on decisions as basal elements. To enable an organisation to reproduce, decisions must connect to previous decisions – „Man entscheidet, weil entschieden worden ist oder damit entschieden werden wird“ (Luhmann 2009 [1978]: 398). By using decisions, the organisation binds itself – and this entails: its members – in the sense of committing itself to some few possibilities while suspending others by means of hierarchies, routines or goal setting (Baecker 2007: 116f). In the *temporal dimension*, organisations are the only social systems which are able to follow their own purpose and hence to fix their own future, while “[a]lle anderen Ordnungen der Gesellschaft müssen stattdessen die Zukunft als offen behandeln“ (Baecker 2007: 118). Not least this ability increases their attractiveness for their members as well as for the society observing them (Baecker 2007: 118f). By differentiating between members and non-members, organisations define their boundary to their environment in the *social dimension* (Luhmann 2013 [1997]: 141ff). In doing so, they are able to purposefully

moderate inclusion and exclusion by deciding on who takes part and who does not.

As a further relevant feature, organisations address particular expectations to its members, which usually claim no validity outside the organisation [2] (Baecker 2007: 114). By joining an organisation, members are expected to accept membership rules and to respect the organisational purpose and program largely irrespective of their individual interests. Against this background, one may distinguish organisations according to the relation between organisational purpose and membership motivation: While both coincide in so-called conjoint authority systems (e.g. associations or trade unions), they fall apart in disjoint authority systems (Coleman 1994: 72ff; Stichweh 2000a: 25). For this reason, the latter usually create a zone of indifference by providing compensations to its members, typically in the form of a pay-cheque. Within this zone, members are willing to contribute to the purpose of the organisation without questioning the content of given directives or challenging underlying authority structures (Barnard 1971 [1938]: 168f; with reference to Barnard see Luhmann 2009 [1978]: 19). With or without compensation, however, members always give up control over their choice of action for the organisational sphere (Stichweh 2000a: 25).

[2] An exception are normative organisations according to Etzioni's (1975) classification.

4. THE ORGANISATIONS OF THE ORGANISATIONAL SOCIETY

Socialism cannot be thought of without referring to organisations: “For Lenin, organisation was an indispensable adjunct to ideology. He did not believe that he could win power by propaganda alone. Rather, he urged the need to forge a group which, beginning with an ideological commitment, would use whatever means available to influence decision in society” (Selznick 1952: 8). Concretely, the implementation of a socialist-style “organisational society” was based on two types of organisations, the Communist Party (CPSU) and mass organisations.

The Communist Party and internal dedifferentiation of the political system

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Among the institutions of ‘actually existing Socialism’, the Communist Party is probably the most often described and most deeply analysed one (see for many Gill 1988; Hough & Fainsod 1982; Sakwa 1998: esp. 83ff). At this point of my argumentation, I refrain from a detailed account of the party and its pathologies, but focus on two structural features which prove to be particularly relevant for my argument, namely the political duplication of administrative structures and the use of party membership. In conjunction, both eventually provoked the internal dedifferentiation of the political system.

Within the political system, the Communist Party’s claim for societal leadership was reflected in a tripartite hierarchy, which extended from the highest (national) level down to the local level in the villages. It consisted first of the party itself (and its sub-national branches), second of the “Soviets” (councils) as – formally – representative and legislative institutions, and third of the executive committees. While this institutional structure at least on paper suggested a separation of powers with the Soviets as bodies of mass participation, it was factually dominated by the Communist Party and its directives (Altrichter 1986: 163ff; Ross 2009: 28ff). Boundaries between administration and politics were blurred in favour of the latter in the social as well as in the factual dimension: Each incumbent of state administration was supplemented by a party functionary, who controlled and in case of doubt ruled administrative decisions (Campbell 1995: 149). Furthermore, party committees played a key role in decisions on the appointment, promotion and dismissal of administration officials (Kornai 1992: 37f). Elections, if conducted at all, were at best reduced to “decorative elements” of the regime.

Party membership was used to implicitly control and influence the decisions of state administration. In this sense, the Party may be described as a normative and highly pervasive organisation, whose claim for universal validity of and commitment to socialist principles explicitly exceeded its boundaries and extended to all spheres of its members’ lives [3] (see Etzioni 1975: 264ff). In the villages, for instance, in 1985 roughly 40% of the members of local soviets and 67% of the local executive committees were party members, while their share on higher administrative levels like the district or the region often exceeded 90% (Hahn 1988: 110). Against this background,

[3] The church usually holds a similar claim towards its members, what accounts for the strict incompatibility of socialism and religion.

membership proved to be an effective instrument to exert influence on administrative decisions in addition to formal structures.

As a consequence - and this is a common feature of totalitarian regimes -, the circle between voters (the public), politics and administration, which Luhmann (2000a: 257; 2010: 139) identified for democratic systems, was reversed and its effect perverted: "Der politische Führer, seine 'Einheitspartei' und seine Polit-Technologen sagen dem Volk wie es zu wählen hat, und die Verwaltung setzt sich beim Publikum durch" (Hayoz 2007: 167). The possibility of an unplanned change of power was factually abolished and the political code of government|opposition was undermined (Hayoz 2007: 168; Luhmann 2002: 98).

There is no doubt that this inversion and its implications are to be sharply criticised from a liberal-democratic perspective. However, it is *as such* not necessarily problematic for the functionality of the political system, i.e. its capability to set up collectively binding decisions. In this latter respect, it is not primarily the anti-democratic implications of internal dedifferentiation of the political system which come into focus, but rather the direct and indirect undermining of administrative autonomy by the Communist Party. Autonomy refers to the ability of a (sub-)system to self-determine its own premises within the boundaries set by other (sub-)systems. While the capacity of the upper part of a hierarchy – e.g. the political leadership – to cope with complexity is always limited, unresolved complexity may be absorbed by autonomous subsystems (Luhmann 2010: 141). Consequently, the internal complexity of the system increases and so does its capability to cope with environmental complexity. In the Soviet case, the opposite happened: The internal complexity of the political system was restrained due to the claim for control of the Communist Party and by the same reason could not be increased, as every step toward subsystem autonomy would inevitably be at the expense of controllability. In doing so, however, the political system's capability to cope with environmental complexity significantly decreased.

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To ensure the persistence of the political system under these conditions, the societal environment had to be 'captured' in order to minimize the probability of changes and to become observable for the Communist Party. At the same time, however, the environment had to remain environment, i.e. it could not become part of the system itself. What sounds self-evident makes clear that the objective of complete inclusion could not be realized by the party alone: If it was to keep its vanguard role, not everybody could be included and membership had to remain a privilege – and this holds true even for a mass party like the CPSU, [4] whose "[r]ecruitment policy was based on the idea that the party represented the cream of Soviet society" (Sakwa 1998: 84; also Hough & Fainsod 1982: 320f). Consequently, Weick's (1979) statement that "[o]rganizations paint their own scenery, observe it through binoculars, and try to find a path through the landscape" (attributed to Tom Lodahl: cited by Weick 1979: 136) does not only hold for the Communist Party as well, but gains particular vigour due to its superior position in society, which enables it to reach out to its environment. To adapt the party's environment to its own observational capacities, environmental complexity had to be reduced. At this point, mass organisations come into play.

Mass organisations as ideological "transmission belt"

Despite their omnipresence, *mass organisations* are a widely neglected phenomenon in analyses of the Soviet regime (among the few exceptions are Kornai 1992: 39f; for

[4] In 1986, the CPSU had 19,04 million members, what corresponds to 10% of the adult population or 7% of the total population (Sakwa 1998: 84f).

the GDR: Stephan et al. 2002). Ideologically and according to Lenin, they were intended as a transmission belt to spread socialist principles among the population, which was addressed in the form of individual 'target groups' like workers, youth, artists and so on (Kornai 1992: 40; also Selznick 1952: 8ff). Examples for mass organisations were trade unions, cooperatives, the Soviets ("councils"), youth organisations, cultural and sports associations and so on.

With regard to the logic of the socialist organisational society, three aspects appear noteworthy: *Firstly*, mass organisations were explicitly adjusted to function systems and thereby carried the claim for a function monopoly on the respective societal field, i.e. the complete integration of certain operations into organisational structures (Kornai 1992: 39; also Mähler 2002: 105f). *Secondly*, mass organisations were formally distinct from the Communist Party in terms of membership, i.e. membership in both types of organisation neither implied nor excluded each other. *Thirdly*, they were nevertheless hierarchically subordinated to the Communist Party and hence subject to its directives with regard to decisions and purpose (not least again through party membership of their leaders). Taken these aspects together, the implementation of mass organisations can be regarded as the attempt to imitate functional differentiation under political control.

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In the Soviet villages, one specific mass organisation was predominant: Collective farms (*kolkhoz*, pl. *kolkhozy*) were not only established for agricultural production, but also intended to build an ideological bridge to the rural population (Meissner 1985: 65) and act as "school of communism for the peasantry" (Lindner 2008: 75f). Most of them emerged from the politics of mass collectivisations since 1929, when peasants were deprived of their property in land, cattle and machinery and forced into the collective enterprises, while many of them – in particular supposed "kulaks", large-scale farmers considered as class enemies – were severely repressed and even deported. By means of the *kolkhozy* (and the comparatively few *sovkhozy*, i.e. "Soviet farms"), the political leadership tried to integrate the sphere of agriculture into organisational – and hence controllable – structures with the collective farms being the main and usually the only employers in the villages.

Beyond that, the collective farms were supposed to act as providers of local public services and as such should contribute to the modernisation of the villages and satisfy the material and cultural needs of the *kolkhoz* members (Art. 2, Third Standard Charter, cited by Brunner & Westen 1970: 148). Although the respective passages of the "Standard Charter of the *kolkhoz*" [5] were less binding than, for instance, the targets of economic production plans (Lindner 2008: 81), collective enterprises usually fulfilled a broad range of such infrastructural tasks: They built kindergartens, schools and libraries, maintained the roads in the village, provided medical care and the like (Lerman 2002: 43f; Ross 2009: 33).

Given these functions of collective farms, the full range of strategies and mechanisms to foster inclusion, to bind members to the organisation and thus to create the basis for political control becomes obvious: *Firstly*, the *kolkhoz* was simply inescapable in everyday life and made it rather unlikely to circumvent participation by practical reasons alone. Membership was the key to get access to all usual social fields – be it with regard to work, leisure activities, local infrastructure or education. As a consequence, the collective enterprises were factually congruent with the municipalities not only in spatial, but also in social terms.

[5] In the Soviet Union, the Standard Charters of the *kolkhoz* were standardised patterns, which had the force of law and defined the general principles for the internal structure and the duties of the collective farms (Altrichter 1984: 195; Lindner 2008: 72).

Secondly, sanctions were used to increase the internal bonding force both in the positive and negative sense: Positive sanctions were applied in the form of awards, material and immaterial symbols of recognition and the granting of individual benefits (as, for instance, extra monetary payments, additional vacation days, the stay in a holiday camp or the like). A similar logic was reflected in so-called “socialist competitions” (*socsorevnovanie*), which were conducted between individual workers, departments or even between whole farms. The winner was awarded with benefits as well as – this goes without saying – socialist prestige. The underlying idea was to motivate non-members to participate and to enforce the engagement of actual members. Vice versa, negative sanctions came into play as an extensive set of punishments like admonitions, reprimands or even exclusion from the *kolkhoz* (see Humphrey 1998: 111).

Thirdly, the effect of both positive and negative sanctions was intensified due to the enforced absence of convertibility barriers. Under the condition of functional differentiation, convertibility barriers avoid the transfer of achievements in one function system to another without friction (Stichweh 2005: 175). It would indeed be naïve to assume that convertibility barriers were in practice as rigid as theoretically suggested – not even in so-called Western societies. Yet if permeability is observed in the latter, particular justification is usually required and a society-wide superior status of a single person is highly improbable (Stichweh 2005: 177). Under the Socialist program, in contrast, the almost universal convertibility of political capital – to use Bourdieu’s terminology – was a common and widely expected phenomenon, rendering cross-organisational careers rather common (Kornai 1992: 38f). Conversely, the absence of convertibility barriers increased the probability of exclusion chains: The ubiquitous structures of mass organisation not only allowed for credible threats of exclusion within one organisation, but permitted to link exclusion from one organisation (or social field) to follow-up exclusions from other societal fields via the respective organisations. Among the instruments facilitating such transfers was the so-called personal employment record book (*trudovaja knizhka*), which was issued for every worker. In the book, a worker’s fines and misdemeanours were documented which adversely affected not only opportunities of promotion within the same enterprise, but also upward and downward mobility in the party hierarchy or possibilities of transferring to other jobs (Humphrey 1998: 111).

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Taking these features together, mass organisations provided structures which allowed the Communist Party to solve the problem of preserving its power by offering personal degrees of freedom within (politically) controllable structures: The loss of individual autonomy as well as missed opportunities for participation were not only compensated by access to a large set of benefits from the extensive Soviet welfare state, but membership became the key prerequisite for almost *any* personal options.^[6] Conversely, those who refused to obey political demands had to expect to be pushed to the margins of the society (Pollack 1990: 294).

Moreover, membership could even be used as an indicator of – otherwise unobservable – acceptance of Socialist values and hence the educational success of the program. Organisations allow to treat (and assign) every operation taking place within them as a decision – “Organisationen sind insofern *soziale Systeme*, die sich erlauben, *menschliches Verhalten so zu behandeln, als ob es ein Entscheiden wäre*” (Luhmann 2009 [1978]: 410) – and to refer to it in subsequent decisions (Baecker 1999: 144f). As a consequence, every *kolkhoznik*, if he wanted or not, could be tied down to the commitment to socialist principles.

[6] For empirical evidence for the link between system loyalty and social mobility see Solga (1994). Zaslavsky (1982: 142ff) describes politically controlled opportunities for social advancement as a main instrument to ensure “organised mass consensus”.

5. FUNCTIONAL DIFFERENTIATION ,UNDERHAND': PRIVATE PRODUCTION IN SOVIET AGRICULTURE

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What I have argued so far concerns organisations, but leaves the level of function systems and their basal forms of communication unaffected yet. What did the tight network of Soviet organisations imply for functional differentiation? May the observation that virtually everyone was politically addressable be equated with the political capturing of function-system specific forms of communication – as the Communist Party obviously intended to? There is some evidence that this undertaking eventually failed. For illustration, I will draw again on the example of Soviet agriculture, as it proves instructive for the coexistence and even close interrelatedness of organised (i.e. politicised) and unorganisable forms of agricultural production and economic communication.

The 'organised part' of Soviet agriculture is made of the collective farms and gives indeed evidence of dedifferentiation.^[7] As the general argument is well known in the literature on the Soviet economy (see for many: Berliner 1957; Kornai 1992; Olson 2000), I will put it very briefly: With regard to the economic function of the *kolkhozy* as agricultural producers, the political leadership did not only access the material level of the program of the economic system by indicating the sort and amount of production via plan targets. Moreover, it accessed the code level by undermining the meaning of payments. Even though payments existed within the Soviet economy – workers received wages, enterprises sold their production to the state and realized profits or losses during the production process –, the persistence of a farm was virtually decoupled from its ability to pay. Decisions on the allocation of input factors and thus on "life or death" of an enterprise were taken on superior administrative levels of the planning hierarchy and mostly followed intransparent criteria (Kornai 1992: 115). Thus, "[f]irms with losses were about as likely to obtain resources as firms with profits" (Olson 2000: 147) and sometimes even unprofitable farms were considered as successful (Birman 1978: 159). Thus, in a process of substitution, money was replaced by power and payments did not imply the communication of scarcity, but of political decisions.

In the village context, however, the collective farms were far more than simple executing institutions at the lower end of the planning hierarchy. While they were indeed subordinated to and controlled by the party committee on the district level, the power structure was factually reversed in the villages not least due to the all-embracing welfare function of the farms. The local organs of state administrations, which were actually responsible for welfare and infrastructural tasks lacked not only financial and material means, but – as they were situated at the lowest level of both the administrative and the party hierarchy – also the appropriate competences to exert them adequately. Factually, the *kolkhoz* assumed these tasks and its chairman became by far the most influential figure in the village, who took all relevant decisions not only in

[7] I am referring to collective farms here, but the argument also holds for other types of Soviet enterprises.

the economic realm, but also with respect to social policy and local infrastructure (Wädekin 1969: 178ff and 300ff; Humphrey 1998: 328): “In Soviet times, the head of the *Selsovjet* [local administration] had no authority at all. It was a formal authority, but it had no power. The chairman of the *kolkhoz* was the most influential power on the territory. And after him came the secretary of the local party organisation” (local mayor, author’s interview, 08/08/2008).

The local inversion of power relations set the stage for peasant – and as such “anti-socialist” – modes of agricultural production, which officially had been eliminated by mass collectivisations in agriculture. In contrast to official assertions, however, private production was never completely abolished in Soviet villages. Instead, estimates suggest that in the mid-1980s the private sector accounted for roughly one quarter of overall food production and at least half of the monthly income of the *kolkhoz* workers (Wädekin 1989: 547f). The formal background of this phenomenon goes back to the initial stage of collectivisation: As a reaction to peasant resistance and out of the fear of social unrest (Merl 1990: 257ff), since 1935 the “Standard Charter” entitled every *kolkhoz* member to work on a small piece of land (max. 0,5 hectare), to keep a limited amount of livestock (especially small livestock like pigs, sheep, goats and poultry) and to sell the production for their own account (Art. 42, Third Standard Charter, cited by Brunner & Westen 1970: 158ff).

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The collective enterprises actively supported the so-called personal subsidiary farms (*lichnoe podsobnoe chozjajstvo*) through the provision of technical equipment for private purpose and the supply of inputs like fodder, fertilizer or seed at low prices or sometimes even without charge as compensation for unpaid wages. Some regulations of this kind were also part of the Standard Charter (Art. 4, Third Standard Charter, cited by Brunner & Westen 1970: 149), but the usual practice mostly exceeded the formal frame (e.g. Grossman 1977: 26) and even theft of input factors was often ignored by the farm managers (e.g. Ledeneva 1998: 136; Goehrke 2005: 96). The reason for this unexpected generous attitude of the *kolkhoz* leadership can be attributed to the symbiotic relationship to the smallholdings which inevitably tied these two forms of agricultural production together: The latter were not only essential as an income source for rural households, but also played a pivotal role for the collective farms, who were often not able to fulfil the plan targets by own force (that means: based on the centrally allocated equipment and input factors). Hence, they used private production to improve their operational results (Goehrke 2005: 97f; Wädekin 1973: 185f). The extent of this practice varied: In extreme cases, the collective farms acted merely as a formal umbrella for private production and agricultural products stemmed entirely from the smallholdings, while other enterprises fell back on private production only in times of crises or in order to over-fulfil the plan targets (Grossman 1977: 31; Nove 1980: 128). In the same vein, the terms of sale (at usually relatively low prices) to the collective farms ranged from factual enforcement to voluntary agreements (Humphrey 1998: 169f; Lindner 2008: 86). In any case, however, Soviet agriculture depended to a considerable degree on the smallholdings.

Thereby, it is important to emphasize that peasant production operated according to principles which were inherently distinct from the Socialist program mainly in two respects: *Firstly*, the smallholdings factually operated based on the logic of private property, although the land which they worked on legally belonged to the collective enterprises and was only temporarily left to the rural households. Thus, the assignment of the code values property|non-property, i.e. the connecting inclusion and exclusion

in terms of access, was relatively clear in case of the personal subsidiary farms and thus stood in sharp contrast to the property structure of the collective enterprises, where this boundary was ambiguous and nobody could be accounted responsible for anything (Kornai 1992: 75). *Secondly*, the decision criteria of the smallholdings only indirectly derived from the societal hierarchy in the sense that *kolkhoz* membership was the condition to be entitled to the land plots and that input factors predominantly stemmed from the collective farm. Instead, the availability and prices of input factors as well as sales opportunities towards the collective farms and on the *kolkhoz* markets [8] were – next to the household's own needs – pivotal for decisions on production. It would probably be exaggerated to consider the smallholdings as capitalist agrarian enterprises within the Soviet regime. Nevertheless, in order to reproduce they had to cope with scarcity instead of political power.

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On part of the political leadership, in turn, the pure existence of the smallholdings – not to mention their economic importance – caused serious problems in terms of ideological legitimisation. To formally accept the smallholdings and thus to openly admit that the regime economically depended on a “deviant” mode of production was not an option, as this would inevitably imply the admission of shortcomings of the Socialist program. In this respect, the slightly liberalised policy towards the personal subsidiary farms in the 1980s may be observed as one of the first signs of disintegration of the regime (see Wädekin 1989: 547; Osteuropa-Archiv 1989: A 284). Thus, the only practicable way out seemed to be a strategy of latency: Official self-descriptions of the regime aimed to systematically de-ideologize and trivialize the smallholdings and to dismiss them as a transitional phenomenon on the way to complete collectivisation (Merl 1990: 258; Wädekin 1973: 2). Moreover, the term ‘private’ (*chastnyj*) in connection with the smallholdings was officially banned and replaced by ‘personal’ (*lichnyj*) to bridge at least semantically the ideological gap and draw a boundary against capitalist modes of production (Wädekin 1973: 10).

[8] The urban *kolkhoz* markets were initially intended for the sale of surplus production of the collective farms. Due to the high price level, these markets were an attractive opportunity for the personal subsidiary farms as well, but often difficult to reach in spatial terms (Wädekin 1973: 127ff).

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE REACH AND LIMITS OF THE SOVIET ORGANISATIONAL SOCIETY

Neither do I want to overstrain the example of Soviet agriculture nor to maintain that the structures of the Soviet village are the key to understand the operating mode of the Soviet organisational society in all its idiosyncrasies. However, bearing in mind the theoretical considerations on programs, codes and organisations outlined above, it allows for some tentative conclusions with regard to the Soviet variant of societal differentiation and its position in world society.

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As I have argued, the formal structure of the Soviet regime was characterized by the combination of the Communist Party on the top of the societal hierarchy and the subordinated mass organisations, where factually almost everybody was a member and thus politically addressable. The latter, so the intention of the political leadership, should provide for an effective 'function monopoly' of politically controlled organisations for almost every social sphere and thus create societal structures in which membership in at least one politically controlled organisation was inevitable for citizens. The withdrawal of the membership status factually equalled the deprivation of addressability in the respective sphere of communication. Moreover, the high degree of organisation was the condition that the Communist Party might not only program societal function systems with regard to the material level, but also access the code level of function systems via its impact on the respective organisations. The society-internal environment should be set up in a way that participating systems could not bypass politics (or the Communist Party, respectively). As the example of the collective farms illustrates, this strategy seemed to succeed at least with respect to some societal spheres.

However, the assumption that the complete inclusion of everybody into some organisation would more or less automatically imply the elimination of function systems and full control on communication proved to be misleading. In this regard, the Soviet village stands as one example among others for a communication context that gained certain autonomy within the structures of the formal societal hierarchy. In this context, politically organised and thus dedifferentiated structures and – from the perspective of the socialist program – deviant forms of communication not only coexisted, but were tightly coupled and mutually dependent. There is some evidence, as one may conclude, that functional differentiation did not only occur within the Soviet organisational society but significantly even contributed to its operation mode and its ability to reproduce.

Taken together, one may identify at least two “entry lines” of functional differentiation: *Firstly*, one main reason for the emergence of ideological “deviant” forms of communication against all odds lay in the complexity overload of the authorities as a result of the attempt to bring and keep forms of communication specific to function systems under political control. The political leadership was unable to cope with the underlying problems in a way which made societal reproduction possible. As a consequence, communication eluded the formal structures of the regime to find solutions in deviant forms – and that obviously meant: within the logic of function systems. Private production in agriculture is one example for this mechanism; other phenomena from the sphere of Soviet shadow economy (see e.g. Simis 1982) or the several forms of underground art (e.g. the so-called *samizdat* or ‘self-publishing’ to reproduce dissident literature) give further evidence that system-specific forms of communication nevertheless made their way and reproduced by own discretion in the few politically unobserved or tacitly tolerated niches.

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In addition to this internal cause, a *second* entry line was triggered by the structures of world society: Notwithstanding all rhetorics of confrontation and demarcation, the socialist program could hardly be thought of without reference to world society. Drawing boundaries and decoupling always took place in form of the construction of competition within the horizon of world society. In this vein, mass collectivisation and the establishment of collective farms – to keep with the example of agriculture – were intended to prove the superiority of Soviet agriculture compared towards the rest of the (capitalist) world (see Koenen 2012: 85) (similar intentions existed for other societal fields). To give evidence of this supposed superiority, one had to take part in global communication contexts, and that means: to create connectivity by adjusting to functional differentiation as a major *Eigenstructure* of the modern world society (Stichweh 2006: 241ff). In this regard, Soviet natural and engineering sciences, for instance, did not only achieve internationally visible successes, but were also embedded in the communication beyond the borders of the Soviet regime (in terms of citations or conference participation) – what in turn did not prevent successful scientists from internal political persecution (Graham 1994: 173ff). The same holds true for other function systems like sports, where Soviet athletes were among the leaders in many disciplines worldwide, or – with reservations – also in arts.

The catalysing impact of both functional shortcomings of the Soviet regime and of world society as the horizon of self-observation on functional differentiation generated considerable momentum, which could hardly be suppressed by political means, if the regime did not want to put at risk neither its stability nor its position in world society. Eventually, its possible reactions were limited to the correction of symptoms *ex post* (like, for instance, the withdrawal of persons from crucial positions, the arrest of persons and hence their exclusion from certain forms of communication). Furthermore, the regime could only try to adjust ideological semantics to the obvious structures (as the example of agricultural smallholdings shows), running the risk, however, to get inevitably caught up in paradoxes.

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