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Communication and Society: Theoretical Legacy of Niklas Luhmann

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Although he does not for a moment break the connection with the fundamental category of functionalism—the social system, Luhmann articulates the basic elements of his authentic sociological position precisely with the theoretical framework within which he solves the problem of social change through the concept of communication, a problem that has marked the history of sociological theory so far. The categories of system and environment, system and purpose, and internal differentiation of the social system play a special role in that theoretical framework. Luhmann's basic thesis is the position according to which the elementary process that constitutes society as a separate reality is the process of communication. Therefore, any change in the way communication is produced simultaneously means a change in the way society is produced; these changes are evolutionary, which means that they move from a lower to a higher degree of complexity; changes in the level of complexity also change the relationship between the system and the environment; the change in the relationship between the system and the environment affects the internal relationship between the system and the purpose, that is, the differentiation of the system and the establishment of the autonomy of subsystems, which increases the degree of flexibility of society, that is, the ability of society to respond to the challenges of its own environment. The theoretical and practical relevance of this topic is more than explicit—one of the central issues of contemporary social and political practice is the articulation of increasingly rapid changes in complex social structures, so, in our opinion, Luhmann's approach represents a significant theoretical legacy and an effective tool for understanding complex dynamics of the modern world.

Keywords: social system, communication, environment, complexity, flexibility, subsystem autonomy

Introduction: Towards a General Theory of Society

Having experienced himself as a successor (but also a critic) of that theoretical orientation in sociology that was most clearly represented by Talcott Parsons, Niklas Luhmann took on the heavy burden of building a general theory of social systems. According to his own testimony, at the very beginning of his career at the Faculty of Sociology of the University of Bielefeld (Germany), he listed as his only project: the theory of society; project duration: 30 years; costs: none. There is no doubt that Luhmann was quite realistic about all aspects of his ambitious life project: From the beginning of his work at the university in 1969 until his death in 1998, he concentrated exclusively on building a comprehensive, general theory of social systems. During his career, he published 53 books and several hundred theoretical articles. The pinnacle of this incredible production, Luhmann's *opus magnum*, the book *Society of Society* was published shortly before his death in 1997 (Bechmann & Stehr, 2002).

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Luhmann constituted the basic elements of his own theoretical position through a critique of classical sociology, taken to extremes primarily in the version of empirical social science. Without diminishing the contribution of partial, specialist empirical research to the overall expansion of our knowledge about society, Luhmann nevertheless believes that sociology as a comprehensive scientific discipline[1] could not be established within such an orientation. That's why in the first sentence of the preface to the work *Social Systems: Foundations of General Theory*, from 1984, he states that "sociology (...) is in a theoretical crisis" (Luhmann, 2001, p. 27). This general problematization of the entire science of society refers primarily to that (majority) part of the sociological community that has never, in essence, overcome the problem of the existence of a circular relationship towards its own research object. In other words, it is a kind of epistemological paradox because the problem of circularity is immanent in every attempt to analyze or describe society, because every such attempt actually activates and changes social relations[2]. And to the extent that some research observes society, to the same extent that research is observed by society, research gets researched, and observation gets observed. Any definition of an object (society) implies that defining itself is one of the operations of that same object (society). Attempts to overcome this epistemological paradox were mainly, in classical sociology, based on the following premises:

> that society consists of individuals and the relationships between them; that society is constituted by consensus among individuals; that societies are territorially defined units; and that, therefore, societies as groups of individuals situated in a certain territory can be objectively observed from some point outside. (Lee, 2000, p. 321)

However, these premises themselves, according to Luhmann's belief, actually prevent an adequate determination of society as an object of research. Bearing in mind that the theory of society is about the endless self-observation of society, about the infinite fractally structured self-referentiality, it was practically impossible to establish that "external", solid point from which objective observation would be possible, that is, from which it would be possible to establish a general theory. This suppression of general theoretical interest is, in Luhmann's opinion, an undoubted symptom of the deep crisis of social science, a clear indicator that sociologists, opting for a segmentary approach, actually gave up (with the exception of Parsons[3], of course) the search for a comprehensive systems theory of society.

Emphasizing the need to overcome this crisis in sociology, Luhmann opts for the opposite position and approaches the construction of a general theory of society which, in its demand for universality, would have to appear on its own as its own subject and which would have to respond to the old dilemmas of sociology such as individual or society, structure or action, consensus or conflict, evolution or revolution. Of course, it is completely

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[1] There is no doubt that the specialist branching of modern sociology was a kind of symmetrical response to the dynamics and development of modern societies. Classical sociology was characterized by "orientation towards internal units" (Poggi, 1965). However, the consequence of such development is an obvious deficit of awareness and concern for the general theoretical foundation, which has distanced sociology from the initial ideal of a "general theory of society".

[2] Anthony Giddens called this situation "dragon-chariot driving", alluding to the impossibility of a complete understanding of the social world: "The reason for this is the circularity of social knowledge, which primarily affects the social world, not the natural world. In the conditions of modernity, the social world can never be a stable environment, in the sense of introducing new knowledge about its character and functioning. New knowledge (concepts, theories, inventions) does not make the social world more transparent, but changes its nature, pointing it in a new direction. This phenomenon essentially affects that quality of modernity that we have called dragon-chariot driving, and concerns both socialized nature and social institutions themselves" (Giddens, 1998, p. 147).

[3] Luhmann believes that "the only sociological theory that currently exists was developed by Talcott Parsons as a general theory of action systems. It can serve well as a codification of the knowledge of the classics and as an elaboration of the conceptual understanding of action with the help of the methodology of contingency tables" (Luhmann, 2011, p. 21).

understandable that such a supertheory had to be much more complex than anything that had been hypothesized about social science until then.

On the other hand, as an author influenced by Parsons' theory, Luhmann is aware that he has to face the difficult legacy of functionalism, summed up in the understanding that society is a stable system in which all parts are tightly integrated, that each part of the system has a clear function, which contributes to integration, that every social system functions on the basis of consensus on fundamental values and norms, and that any deviation of parts of the system from its functions is interpreted as pathological. Although he does not for a moment break the connection with the fundamental category of functionalism—the social system, Luhmann articulates the basic elements of his authentic sociological position precisely with the theoretical framework within which he solves the problem of social change through the concept of communication.

Luhmann's basic thesis is the position according to which the elementary process that constitutes society as a separate reality is the process of communication. Therefore, (1) any change in the way communication is produced simultaneously means a change in the way society is produced; (2) these changes are evolutionary, which means that they move from a lower to a higher degree of complexity; (3) changes in the level of complexity also change the relationship between the system and the environment; (4) the change in the relationship between the system and the environment affects the internal relationship between the system and the purpose, that is, the differentiation of the system and the establishment of the autonomy of subsystems, which increases the degree of flexibility of society, that is, the ability of society to respond to the various challenges.

This increase in internal complexity makes it possible to form alternatives more easily, that is, to relieve the highest levels of challenges that objectively do not require the engagement of the entire system. Thus, the structure of the system gains the necessary flexibility, and the autonomy of the subsystems becomes a real measure of this change.

The theoretical and practical relevance of this topic is more than explicit—one of the central issues of contemporary social and political practice is the articulation of increasingly rapid changes in complex social structures, so, in our opinion, Luhmann's systemic approach represents a welcome program for understanding (and systematizing) complex dynamics of the modern world.

Social System as Communication

The concept of society is certainly the most complex notion that the social and philosophical theories of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries left us as a legacy. The pluralism of views on society is caused by different schools of thought: from theories of the social contract, according to which society is created by a "contract" in which individuals in mutual relations "give up" their freedom and their natural rights in order to end the state of war of all against all and preserve their own existence; to different sociological trends that explain their subject, society, as a system similar to living organisms, in which the general laws of organic development apply (biologism); as a product of psychic relations between individuals (psychologism); as a system based on social action, that is, the behavior of individuals (behaviorism); as a self-regulating and self-maintaining system of interactions of different roles (functionalism); as the relationship of individual elements in relation to the structure of the social system (structuralism); or, on the other hand, as a permanent conflict of opposing classes (Marxism). These are different examples of reflections on the processes of constitution of modern societies created on the ruins of the Christian-medieval type of order, whose basic principle of differentiation was based on the unchanging hierarchy of social classes, that is, on the belief that everything that happens has its place within the framework of God's

plan. The growth of functional differentiation of modern societies has therefore also initiated different approaches to self-understanding (Đurić, 2016).

Therefore, it is not surprising that Luhmann legitimizes the construction of a universal theory of social systems and, at the same time, a critique of classical sociology with classic questions—What is society? What does it consist of? By what operation is it produced and reproduced? And he gives answers immediately. Society is a comprehensive social system that includes all other social systems. Society is a limited, self-enclosed, self-referential, and self-sufficient system. The self-sufficiency of a society, in this sense, would have to presuppose the institutionalization of a sufficiently wide range of components in order to respond to all important social demands. This, of course, does not mean that all the roles of all members (people) are played within the society, but that a certain society must be able to respond to the elementary demands of its members (people), in different stages of the life cycle.

However, Luhmann believes that society does not consist of people[4], but of communication: "The basic process of social systems that produces the elements from which the systems consist in these circumstances can only be communication" (Luhmann, 2001, p. 205). This is not about the fact that society should, in the process of deconstruction, follow its constitution backwards to some kind of "zero point", nor is this an answer to the question about morphogenesis or about the primordial, first nature of society. And the communication/society relationship should be understood as a simultaneous, continuous, double connection—society is impossible without communication, but communication is also not possible without society. At the same time, Luhmann does not understand communication as information that is transmitted from the sender to the recipient. Because the very notion of transmission implies possession and thus suggests that the sender loses information and the receiver gains it. In contrast, Luhmann defines communication as "the synthesis of three selections, as the unity of information, communication and understanding" (Luhmann, 2001, p. 215). Communication is considered realized when the understanding of the information is confirmed.

Society, therefore, is produced by communication. To that extent, we must understand every change in the way communication is produced as a change in the production of society. If we accept that assumption, it is self-evident that the limits of communication are also the limits of society. Society includes everything social and does not know the social environment: "Because society as a comprehensive social system does not know about social systems beyond its borders. Therefore, it cannot be observed from the outside at all" (Luhmann, 2011, p. 79).

This is already evident in the analysis of the connection between communication media and the structuring of a specific type of society. Oral communication, namely, establishes local, tribal societies. Communication is exclusively related to the immediate interaction of those present. Time and space are inseparable. The world is spatially/temporally concentrated around one inhabited center. Time is experienced exclusively as a personal experience—the past is as accessible as individual memory, a memory that can be activated in direct communication with others. The future is perceived only as a situation conditioned by present behavior. In the case of oral communication, sociability is automatically established: Those who speak and those who listen hear the same content. The understanding of what is being communicated is based on the specific situation, specific space/time, so greater distance always means less relevance for the local community, and therefore a lower degree of moral obligation to others, to strangers.

[4] More about Luhmann's posthumanism in: *Niklas Luhmann and Posthuman Modernity* (Lovasz, 2018, pp. 1-17).

The invention and spread of writing meant a change in the degree of complexity of societies, that is, it meant a multiplication of the distinctions of things, concepts, events, and meanings that a certain society can use and remember. The basic unity of communication is dissolved—the written text can be read by many unknown readers who are absent at the time of writing. "With the letter begins telecommunication", says Luhmann, "the communicative reach of those who are spatially and temporally absent" (Luhmann, 2011, p. 226). Literate culture breaks the direct connection of life with time. Of course, the reader of a text is still in a certain "now" and a certain "here", but the text itself remains fixed in the time that has passed. This enables an additional dimension—temporal and spatial transmission of characters, which leads to an expansion of the number of those that can be connected. A literate culture leads to profound transformations of the social system and provides room for maneuver for the creation of empires, spatially (and therefore temporally) very complex organizations.

The epochal change, however, occurs only with the beginning of the use of the printing press in Europe[5]. It is not only about the quantitative increase in the production of texts, but also the spread of literacy. In addition, a decentralized printed book market is being created. Although at first only the Bible was printed, the offer quickly expanded to include all those contents for which there was an interest of new readers-customers. The spread of printing technology was not governed by a certain privileged content or authority, but by a market principle. For Luhmann, this moment is the true beginning of modernity: "Since books are sold through the market, the claim that they contain new becomes an important sales argument (...) The book market begins to value only what is presented as new" (Luhmann, 2011, p. 258). However, the biggest change is visible in the growing complexity of societies. Texts are printed in vernacular languages, which supplant Latin, as the privileged language of knowledge until then. This meant that the national languages had to be standardized, which became an instrument for the creation of nations, but also enabled individual participation in social communication. Printing technology, accompanied by the massive establishment of public libraries, acquires the function of a technical infrastructure for the operations of self-description of society.

Electronic media (primarily communication satellites and the Internet) are bringing the boundaries of previous communications to a complete breakdown. On the one hand, this means that society in the communication sense becomes dependent on technologically determined structural couplings, and on the other hand, it undoubtedly leads to a technically induced explosion of communication possibilities. The technical possibilities of electronic communication lead to the fact that space and time limitations are reduced to zero. The whole world becomes communicative. In this way, communication (again) depends on real time and space. While the invention of writing meant a spatial and temporal separation of communication, electronic communication merges space and time and thus retribalizes society on a global scale. The Internet dismantles old hierarchical relationships, introducing a state of heterarchy:

> If there are comprehensive trends in the evolution of the media, which begin with the invention of the letter and end in modern electronic media, then summarizing, we can say that these are trends from a hierarchical to a heterarchical order and giving up the spatial determination of social operation. (Luhmann, 2011, p. 273)

This creates prerequisites for the constitution of world society, which calls into question the previous understanding of the relationship between the system and the environment. Namely, every observation of the environment implies an internal activity based on differentiation, i.e., self-observation and self-description, which

[5] Printing technology was known much earlier in China and Korea, but was only used by the ruling administration for the centralized distribution of information.

actualize questions of the self, questions of one's own identity. Both self-observation and self-description are communication operations that "make it possible to communicate in society, though not with society, but therefore about society" (Luhmann, 2011, p. 761). At the same time, the process of self-description of society sets sharp boundaries between the social system and the environment[6].

Differentiation in relation to the environment is a condition for both constitution and survival of the system. Maintaining the border also means maintaining the system. On the other hand, the environment has an extremely relative, unstable status—"it is different for each system" (Luhmann, 2001, p. 55), because each system separates itself from the environment by its constitution. The extraction operation is based on the reduction of complexity (for example: system = environment - n), that is, on the self-description of its own purpose and its own limits. However, the establishment of boundaries between the system and the environment is not an arbitrary undertaking, but the result of a process that takes place within the system itself, and deserves to be considered here separately…

System and Environment

There is no "subject" at the foundation of social systems, but the environment: "The final relationship of all functional analyzes lies in the differentiation of the system and the environment" (Luhmann, 2001, p. 252). However, it should be emphasized immediately that the concept of the environment does not represent only a mere residue; it does not represent only what-is-not-a-system. "On the contrary, the relationship of the environment is constitutive for the construction of the system, (…) the environment is the assumption of the identity of the system, since identity is possible only through differentiation" (Luhmann, 2001, p. 252). In this way, the system-environment relation is not defined from any absolute perspective, but is reduced to a relative, variable, and yet "objective" operation of self-perception from the perspective of the system's presupposed identity. That operation identifies the system, excluding it, at the same time, from the entire environment[7]. Thus, each system actually gets a different environment.

On the other hand, each system is connected to its environment by selective relationships that reduce its complexity; therefore, the entire environment can never be relevant to the system, and the system can never communicate with all events in its environment. In principle, the system simplifies its position in relation to the environment by replacing the objective situation with its own perspective, an operation of self-description. In other words, the operation of the system is not determined by objective reality, but is determined by one's own, subjective idea of reality. The external relations of the system are not ignored, but the identity of the system is, above all, seen as a set of internal relations, which receive their finalization in a consensus about the purpose, the goal of the system. This operation revalidates areas of varying complexity. The asymmetry is obvious: The environment is always more complex than any system, because more events are possible in it than in the system

[6] In this sense, we will consider a system (including a social one) as "…any real being that is kept the same partly on the basis of its own order, partly on the basis of external circumstances, in a completely complex, changing environment that cannot be completely mastered" (Luhmann, 1998, p. 5). Systems, therefore, must be understood as identities that are maintained in a complex and changing environment by the operation of distinguishing between interior and exterior. Here we should recall Parsons' position that "at a very general theoretical level, there is no difference between the processes that maintain a system and those that change it. The difference lies in the intensity, arrangement and organization of the 'elementary' parts of certain processes, and in the state of the structures on which they act" (Parsons, 1988, p. 50).

[7] "On the level of reflection, the system determines its own identity that differs from everything else. The decline of complexity here takes its purest, most abstract form; identity as difference from everything else is basically nothing more than determining and localizing the decline of complexity" (Luhmann, 2001, p. 261).

itself. Compared to the environment, the system excludes at least one, but usually many more, possibilities, reducing the complexity of the environment and thus creating an order with fewer possibilities within which the system agents can more easily orient their own actions.

However, this asymmetry simultaneously handicaps the system, making it unable to adequately respond to unplanned events in its environment. In the perspective of the continuous intensification/acceleration of global communication, the unfathomable complexity of the environment appears as a growing series of (un)expected challenges that must be evaluated so that the operation of the system can be organized and coordinated. For any system that wants to maintain its own identity, that wants to survive, the extreme complexity of the environment is always presented as a problem, as a series of challenges that should be answered. The question that logically follows is: What elements and resources would the system have to mobilize and keep ready in order to constantly be able to respond adequately to environmental challenges? Moreover, no system can be open to all possible options all the time. The system tries to compensate for this deficit, this latent inability to respond adequately to unforeseen environmental challenges, by stabilizing the selection criteria, "planning" which problems it will react to and in what way. Of course, the system's desire to stabilize its own instability is completely understandable, however, such an intention should not rely on pre-prescribed, "predictable" processes, which fundamentally block possible alternatives. The pre-selected model of response to environmental challenges is characterized by low flexibility and low integrative capacity. In this way, the system is prevented from maintaining a high level of sensitivity, that is, self-correction. In other words, any rational projection of future states, any "planning" is only an attempt with an extremely uncertain outcome, since the complexity of the environment is practically unlimited, so any long-term prediction is impossible[8].

System and Purpose

The concept of purpose, in systems theory, means those consequences, that is, a complex of consequences that should justify an action. At the same time, "… action should be understood as any meaningfully oriented, outwardly effective human behavior" (Luhmann, 1998, p. 5). A system of actions represents a set of concrete actions of one or more persons, which is limited in relation to some environment by meaningful relations between those actions. That is, "it is immanent to the system of action that the action is normatively oriented" (Parsons, 2009, p. 86). In this way, the problem of order is actualized, and the problem of the nature of the integration of stabilized systems of social interaction is reduced to the synthesis of motivation and normative cultural standards, which form patterns of value orientation. Such an understanding of action understands the purpose, the goal, as an integral part of the structure of action, as the part that gives meaning and justification to the whole. For the actor who acts, the purpose is both the reason and the measure of his action.

Luhmann does not want to argue with that understanding, but only to transfer the concept of purpose from the theory of action to the theory of systems. The reason is simple and obvious: There is no system without a purpose. "Uselessness is", as Norbert Wiener already noted, "by its very nature transitory" (Wiener, 1973, p. 57). That is why orientation to the purpose within the system is one of the main points of reference for Luhmann's research. On the other hand, in the theory of the organization, the purposive thinking was particularly

[8] This is confirmed by the history of communist countries with the so-called "planned economy". It has been shown that the intensification of central planning is, essentially, directly proportional to the increase in inflexibility, rigidity and, therefore, inefficiency of the system.

strengthened[9]. It is generally accepted that only an organized system that fulfills its purpose is rational. Setting the purpose and subordinating the means to the purpose meant, at the same time, always narrowing the value horizon of the action itself, which reduced it to the level of an instrument of the system.

This was not a problem in earlier periods of stable conceptual configurations. However, today we know that no purpose, no goal, any longer claims absolute truth or universal validity[10]. In the universal plurality of narratives, no one has the status of a privileged repository of truth. The totality has been replaced by separate elements that cannot claim the interpretation of the whole. The emphasis is on the perspective from which a certain phenomenon is analyzed, and not on some stable, objective truth. The constancy of purposes, therefore, has become only a systemic relative constancy that does not exclude the possibility of its own change. Bearing in mind that purposes are no longer immutable, they have become only relative points of view to which the acting subject is oriented[11].

This differentiation and destabilization of the structure of action is the reason for the differentiation of the theory of action itself. In the old tradition, systems have always been defined as wholes that consist of parts, but are more than the sum of their parts (a good example is, for example, theories of the social contract). In this sense, if we project the purpose/means scheme onto that conception of the system, then we are very close to considering the whole as the purpose of the system, while the means would be its parts. With a certain combination of means (organization), something is created that is more than the sum of its parts—the fulfillment of a purpose.

The whole-parts relationship represents a static model for a complex state of affairs; the purpose-means relation is based, on the contrary, on a dynamic causal model of action. This brings us to a thesis that is characteristic of organizational theories: The identification of the purpose/means principle with the whole/parts scheme dominates as a basic principle. Accordingly, the hierarchical order of the system is an order of ends and means. In this order, the purpose dominates the means, that is, the top of the system represents the purpose, and the lower levels represent the means for its fulfillment. The highest instance determines the purpose of the system. All below are instruments for achieving such a defined goal. After all, this differentiation was also the basis for the industrial division of labor. The division of industrial labor was possible, namely, only between different means, but not between the purpose and the means, because the decision about the purpose could not be made without prior knowledge of the possible means. Hierarchy based on the purpose/means scheme rests on the assumption that the functional division of labor makes sense only as a horizontal separation of different subtasks. That is why the prevailing understanding today still sees hierarchy as a generalization, as a rise from concrete, specialized, towards general tasks or decision-making situations.

At first glance, this does not seem problematic. Only the top of the system can legitimately communicate with the environment—everyone else just acts on behalf of the top. But, precisely in such an overstabilized

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[9] About the kind of ignoring of Luhmann's theory of social systems by authors from the field of organization theory, see more in the text "Bright, Excellent, Ignored: The Contribution of Luhmann's System Theory and Its Problem of Non-connectivity to Academic Management Research" (Baralou, Wolf, & Meissner, 2012, pp. 289-308).

[10] At one time, Jean-Francois Lyotard also noted this in his *Postmodern Condition*.

[11] Criticizing the ontological tradition, Luhmann frees the concept of purpose from naturalistic-teleological connotations (purpose as something naturally given, true, binding, constant, etc.). The purpose is no longer the final cause and criterion for the selection of adequate means, that is, the rational cause of the joint action of individuals, but becomes the subject of subjective selection. This, of course, opens up a new dimension of complexity, because if one subject can choose its own purpose, then so can others. This also renders unusable the generally formulated purposes that should serve to create specific programs of action (for example, the ideologies of political parties). They, in this sense, cease to function as a framework for developing and respecting a predetermined meaning.

situation lies the weakness of this model. Namely, system structures must be problematic; they must possess internal tension, in order to be able to take over problems from the environment and integrate them into the system. This is especially important in large systems. Otherwise, repressed problems appear elsewhere, in a modified form. Thus, there is a need for an autonomous reaction of certain parts of the structure, and the top of the system, for its part, reacts by introducing additional controls, loyalty monitoring, etc. This immediately follows the necessity of additional coordination, which should solve the problem of inefficiency of the system. In the theory of action, this is perhaps understandable and justified. In system theory, it is, however, an undoubted sign of centralization. Classical organization theory interprets, therefore, the system as a whole consisting of parts, that is, the whole as a purpose and the parts as means. In doing so, it is understood that the internal relationship is specified as a hierarchical organization of positions with commanding relationships. However, this gives an extremely simplified picture of a closed organizational structure. And it is precisely in this direction that Luhmann's doubts are directed. Because excessive simplicity must be suspect. Thus, the moment has come to dethrone the concept of purpose and to include it, as a variable with specific functions, in a more comprehensive theory of organized social systems…

Internal Differentiation of the System

Therefore, in order to be able to solve such problems at all, the system must develop certain forms of autonomy within its limits, which would consist in the ability for parts of the system to communicate independently and selectively process problems. That is why the only remaining effective strategy is the strategy of internal differentiation of the system, that is, the creation of subsystems[12]. "Creating subsystems", according to Niklas Luhmann,

> means improving the ability to adapt, which is often critical for survival: harmful environmental influences can be localized and stopped in parts of the system in this way; they are not transferred without further ado to other parts, therefore not to the whole, because due to the partial independence of the parts from each other, there are only the transmission of effects that are functionally meaningful or that exceed a certain threshold of disturbance, so they are rare in a given environment. (Luhmann, 1998, p. 131)

In this way, the system gains time. Internal differentiation enables quick adaptation, that is, increasing the flexibility of the system, because to increase the number of possible reactions it is not necessary to burden the entire system.

With this internal differentiation, the system is able to process much more complexity of the environment than would be the case in a centralized, undifferentiated system. However, each part of the system that processes a certain aspect of the complexity of the environment assumes certain purposes, goals, which serve as a framework. That framework must be determined and, at the same time, undetermined: determined—so that it could, as a decision-making premise, lead to the selection of problems to which it then reacts; indefinite—so that

[12] "The development of society is often described as progressing towards greater differentiation of the system. This position is correct, but it needs clarification. It would be difficult to compare all kinds of societies according to the degree of their differentiation, assuming a common measure; societies are too heterogeneous because they use different forms of differentiation. Degrees of differentiation and, relatedly, complexity are produced and mediated by forms of differentiation, and these forms of differentiation differ in the way they establish internal boundaries between subsystems and internal environments" (Luhmann, 1977, p. 32). Here we come to a seemingly paradoxical situation: In order for the system to preserve its own identity, it must differentiate itself from the environment; on the other hand, in order to respond to changing challenges from the environment, the system must introduce certain elements from the environment into its own structure. In this way, we arrive at the internal differentiation of subsystems.

it could absorb as much complexity and variability of the environment as possible without changing the structure. It simply means that the system is not fully planned in detail, but only to a certain extent. In this way, the system becomes able to, relatively efficiently, transform external complexity into internal complexity and thereby strengthen its own boundaries:

> Through internal differentiation, an additional right is laid on external boundaries and they are strengthened. Internal system/environmental differentiations converge at the external boundaries and can only be maintained if the external boundaries keep the external environment at bay. The differentiation in relation to the environment will be reinforced once again if the internal differentiation scheme is chosen autonomously, and not in relation to the givens of the environment. (Luhmann, 2001, p. 271)

It is understandable that each of these different, autonomous levels of the system must have its own purposes and goals. Thus, the notion of rationality of the system must necessarily be transferred from a centrally directed rationality to a more complex, inclusive form. This also determines the limits of the effectiveness of each level that these goals create. This change profoundly changes what we meant by the rationality of the system:

> The central theses of the classical science of organization, the interpretation of the system as a whole consisting of parts, the interpretation of the whole as a purpose and the parts as means, and the thought of finalizing a relationship that is necessarily abstracted to the point of indeterminacy, must be concretized by a hierarchical organization of positions with commanding relationships, give in their distinct simplicity the image of a closed, purposeful organizational structure. (Luhmann, 1998, p. 61)

For a long time, the tradition of the western way of thinking understood that a rational choice within a system can only be a choice of means to achieve a single goal, and not a choice of different goals. The initial basis of this belief was, therefore, based on the view that the system is a whole that consists of parts, but that, at the same time, it is always something more than a simple sum of parts. Accordingly, the operation of defining the goal, the purpose, of a system started from the idea that such a goal is actually unachievable for its individual parts.

However, due to increasingly rapid and intense changes in the environment, the constancy of the goals is being challenged more and more often[13]. Therefore, the category of purpose, goal, loses its significance as a symbol of a single system, and the possibility of setting several different goals, or purposes at the subsystem level, is introduced into the game. In this way, the production of possible orders in the system is achieved, that is, the system-environment relationship multiplies—each of the differentiated subsystems views other subsystems as its own environment, which results in a general increase in system flexibility. This kind of internal transformation makes it possible to overcome the simple and sharp binary schematism system/environment (we/them, friend/enemy, etc.), which ultimately creates conditions for strengthening the capacity of the social system in the process of solving new and more complex challenges.

Conclusion

Starting from the thesis that the peculiarity of the facts of social life, i.e., a kind of circularity of knowledge about society, affects that this same society constantly eludes us, Luhmann reconstructs the very way of determining the subject of sociology: He postulates society as a comprehensive system that includes all other social systems. In this sense, society is a closed autopoietic system that is self-produced through communication.

[13] Although changes are undoubtedly taking place more and more rapidly, what is unchanging is the fact that these are areas of different complexity: The environment is always more complex than any system; more states and more events are always possible in the environment than in any system.

At the same time, communication as a basic autopoietic operation determines the boundaries of society and its environment. And it is precisely in the relationship between the social system and its environment that the most important relations that affect the state of the social system are acquired: The imperative, namely, of every system is to confirm itself by mastering the complexity of its environment.

Therefore, our intention in this work was to, from the perspective of the importance of Luhmann's theoretical legacy, form a cognitive interest in the concept of communication in order to emphasize its role in the process of internal differentiation that enables society to overcome problems arising from the immense and dynamic complexity of its own environment. These problems put on the agenda of contemporary social theory and political practice the question of society's capacity to adequately respond to growing challenges.

Attempts to solve these problems by stabilizing the system by blocking free communication and strengthening centralization had clear consequences—the systems would become sluggish, inflexible, inefficient, and devoid of the potential for social learning and (self)correction. The idea of a social system, as a structured whole in which the action of the constituent elements has as its only purpose the survival of that system, becomes, therefore, in the conditions of the acceleration of global communications, simply outdated and outmoded. That's why Luhmann analyzes the concept of purpose, instead of from the point of view of the entire system (which is the classical functionalist position), from the perspective of the elements of the system.

With this approach, the problem of the system's flexibility deficit in relation to the extremely changing environment was made obvious. Because, in systems where only the top of the organization defines its own purpose (and the elements are limited to the internal success of the maintenance of those systems), every problem from the environment that is transferred through the entire structure strongly burdens the system, making it inefficient and slow.

The system's ability to maintain itself in a complex and changing environment is thus threatened by its own structure—centralized organizations gradually lose the capacity to organize the production of adequate alternatives. Attempts to solve this problem by anticipating and planning at the system level possible challenges and models of response to them have proven to be unequivocally inferior. Another way to respond to the growing complexity of the environment was the autonomy model of differentiated subsystems. This model (actualized in practical politics as the principle of subsidiarity) implies the competences of the lower structures of the system for making certain decisions. As we have already mentioned, it was a way to bring the level of solving problems closer to the level at which they arise.

In his theory, Luhmann went a step further in order to radicalize the relationship between the whole and the parts, that is, to question the level at which purposes are defined. This means that it was necessary to abandon the tradition of classical functionalism in which it was assumed that rational choice, at the subsystem level, can only be the choice of means to achieve a purpose, and not the choice of the purpose itself. Through the operation of internal differentiation of the system, the subsystems gain autonomy, which includes the possession of their own purposes. Thus, a new complexity is released in the system—the differentiated subsystems become capable of communicating with the challenges of the environment and producing alternatives by themselves, without engaging and jeopardizing the entire structure.

Luhmann's work on the construction of a general theory of social systems, regardless of the frequent remarks that it is a too complicated and difficult to understand text, represents a huge contribution to the history of sociology. With his complex theory, Niklas Luhmann, one of the most important sociologists and theorists of communication in the 20th century, left a deep and lasting mark in the fields of sociology, systems theory, and

communication. His theoretical legacy is certainly essential for understanding the dynamics of society and communication in the modern world.

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