

Political System (*Politisches System*)

The political system is a subsystem within the functionally differentiated society [→*Differentiation of Society*], the function of which is to guarantee the capacity to make collectively binding decisions.

The political system is closely linked with the holding and use of →*power*. However, not all political communications are uses or threats of power: this is not true of, for instance, parliamentary debates and discussions within political parties. Yet a political system is only differentiated when power is able to motivate the acceptance of binding decisions. The code of power (inferior/superior) enables political communication to be reproduced.

The medium of power and the political system develop simultaneously: the political function needs the medium of power, and power needs a political system. The differentiation of the political system allows the concentration and generalization of resources of power, but the society as a whole is not dependent on a central political power. For instance, the economic system, the scientific system, the religious system are not based on the medium of power, but instead operate on the basis of other media and codes, such as money, truth, belief. Power is differentiated and fixed through state offices. The distinction inferior/superior corresponds with the distinction between holders of public office (the rulers) and the people addressing them (the ruled). Formally holding power through state institutions secures control over the use of power. Against this background, confusing person and office does not count as a deviation, but as corruption.

Since someone holding an office excludes others from holding the same office, the structure of state offices is given by the distinction between government and opposition: whoever holds the offices and the power governs, and whoever holds no offices or power is in the opposition. Thus, the distinction government/opposition is an additional code of the political system, which means that the →*code* of power can be technologized: thanks to this

secondary coding, we can change directly from inferiority to superiority and vice versa. This secondary political code is a preferential code: for the system, the government and the opposition are equally relevant, but the government represents a positive value (connective value) and the opposition represents a negative value (reflective value). Through this code, the political system can observe itself and can reach a point at which it can attribute all decisions, to the government or to the opposition.

The distinction government/opposition is the basis of the form of the political system called democracy: democracy can be defined as the distinction between government and opposition, which divides the top of the political system. The top becomes the starting point for producing alternative possibilities, as the rulers can be replaced. Holding of public office is contingent; it is the result of a selection of persons and programs, and this selection is periodically revised. A lack of opposition means a lack of democracy because society becomes politically stratified (i.e. it becomes a dictatorship): lack of opposition limits differentiation in the political system because, with the loss of one of its values (the opposition), the political code disappears. The code is replaced with a reference to organization (the state, a single party).

In the political system, holding power must be legitimized. Legitimation is carried out through the processes permitted by the code government/opposition: elections are the most important of these processes. Political elections and a legitimate formation of government are the processes that the code and political programs coordinate together. There are government programs and opposition programs. The democratically elected government designs the program that has preference in the political system, in the sense that this program instructs communications that lead to collectively binding decisions.

Codes and programs are also linked through a further code: the code progressive/conservative. Through this distinction, points of view (values) can be determined for the selection of whatever can be bindingly decided for everyone. Its weakness, however, is that it cannot keep up with the dynamics of social change: conservatives suggest new programs of opposition and become progressive; progressives defend the decisions made whilst in government and become conservative. Thus, the connection between code and programs, in place of this confusing distinction, is provided by the distinction between expansionary state (or welfare state) and restrictive state.

The welfare state is characterized by the attempt to include [*→Inclusion/Exclusion*] everyone in the political system. The attempt to reach generalized political inclusion encounters numerous difficulties, however, since the political

system is limited by two external codes: →*money* and law [→*Legal System*]. These codes cannot be used for generalized political inclusion, for instance for the treatment of people through therapy or education. Additionally, these codes impose strict limits on political intervention. Lack of legal means and, above all, economic difficulties have led to restrictive notions of generalized political inclusion. Thus, the distinction between expansionary and restrictive state becomes important as a new orientation for the selection of the political programs.

Even if the meaning of the state is obvious for the political system, political system and state are not a one-to-one match. The state is an organization within the political system that is defined by territorial boundaries. The political system of →*world society* is differentiated internally into territorial states. This segmentation into states makes fulfilling the political function easier: through state building, democracy can be realized locally and specific goals can be reached. This differentiation, however, also entails problems because the territorial boundaries can determine local, ethnic or religious conditions of political programs that do not correspond to the needs of a world society.

Aside from the state, there are other political organizations that do not directly produce any collectively binding decisions. Every territorial state differentiates itself into systems according to the pattern center/periphery. The organization of the state shoulders responsibility for the territory and is the point of orientation for all other political organizations (political parties, interest groups) that belong to the periphery. In the center, a hierarchy (inferior/superior) is constructed, whereas in the periphery higher complexity and higher sensitivity to irritations from the environment are reached. The periphery is differentiated by non-coordinated segments (like political parties) with the function of preparing, in a non-binding way, the collectively binding decisions.

However, the political system amounts to more than the mass of political organizations. In general, it can be observed as a unity of a three-dimensional distinction: politics, administration and public. This is not a differentiation into subsystems, but the result of a double distinction: on one side, political offices are differentiated from administrative offices and, on the other side, the unity of offices are differentiated from the public composed of citizens. The interdependence between politics, administration and public is circular—whereby no top and no center can be determined. The state is only the center in terms of the differentiation of political organizations. This makes the internal interdependencies of the political system extremely complex and

they constantly demand second-order observation: politics cannot simply observe the public, but rather must also orient itself to the way in which the public observes politics. [C.B.]

Die Politik der Gesellschaft (2000); Political Theory in the Welfare State (1990); Ecological Communication (1989: Ch. XIII).; Die Zukunft der Demokratie (1986).