

Introducing a Model for Analyzing the Possibilities of Power, Help and Control

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When looking at questions about the own objectives and the way of reaching them legitimately, professional social work always has to ask in the first place, if she *can* reach these objectives at all. This article concretizes this issue by discussing, which form of “power” actually can be granted to skilled social workers. Especially in settings, where skilled workers aim at promoting individual and/or social change, this question is inevitable. In these cases, the experts’ power to exert influence has to be deliberated to the same extent than the power of relevant protagonists and systems.

This paper deals with the fundamental question, what can be described with the term “power” at all. Therefore, it focuses neither the existence and distribution nor the normative appraisal of power, but the question, whether power always is a construction performed by the affected persons or if there are forms of power, which could take effect independently from the affected person’s own will.¹ There will be a discussion about the potentials and limits of professional social workers and their power to help and control their addressees on the daily level of interaction from an epistemological point of view.

1 Epistemological constructivism – basics about a theory of power

At first glance, the attempt to discuss power phenomena on the basis of an epistemological constructivism doesn’t seem to make a lot of sense: Since constructivist cognition is operating self-referentially, power itself (in terms of controlling human cognition externally) is impossible. Bateson, for instance, expresses this position when banishing the existence of power behind the borders of the subject’s autonomous constructiveness and negating every other claim of existence as epistemological nonsense and treacherous myth See Bateson 1996, p. 625. This article’s objective is to demonstrate that this is not the only possible position deducting an epistemological anthropology and that it’s not solely the powerless’ ascription, power itself is built on. For this purpose, this paper will first of all outline the idea of an epistemological constructivism. Based on that, a theory of power is going to be unfolded, which offers the opportunity to explain power as the capability of influence in human interactions and relations. The crucial question, whether power is nothing more than the result of a constructional process performed by the persons affected or if power can be in force independently as well, will be answered with a “as-well-as-position”, which is contrary to the “either-or-position”, being especially used in epistemological discourses about power theories: Power in its form as “instructive interaction” is a social construct. However, power as potential to destruction and, in consequence, the shortage of possible ways of action is capable of unfolding its effectuality regardless of what the addressed persons want for themselves.

¹ For an overview of different discourses concerning power in the field of social work see Kraus/Krieger 2014.

1.1 The construction of reality and its subjective requirements

The introduced theory of power is based on an epistemological constructivism, which focuses the doubt about the possibilities of human perception (see Glasersfeld 1996, p. 56-97). The possibility of obtaining certainty about the actual condition of an “object” is questioned, because human cognition throughout and merely has access to the results of different perceptual processes, but not to their cause. Immanuel Kant prominently unfolds this thought, when he states that we can’t experience reality directly, but only within the scope of our abilities of perception (Kant 1798, 1800/1968). That’s why, in general, it can not be verified, if the objects as they appear to us (see I.c. BA 26) (i.e. the results of our reception process) correspond with the objects as they are (see I.c. BA 26) (i.e. the process’ cause). In order to achieve this, we would have to be able to bypass our standards of reception by comparing a perceptual process’ results with their underlying perceptual causes without using the affected instruments of perception again. Pre-Socratics already questioned this requirement. Within the constructivist discourse cognition is described as an operationally closed process to emphasize that cognition does not have direct access to the world itself, but only to the own states of consciousness. Thus, the construction of reality may be a subjective accomplishment, but not a random one. This fact can be made clear by considering thoughts about viability and structural coupling.

1.2 The subjective construction of reality and its general conditions

Especially among the popular scientific type of constructivist discourses, it seems that an arbitrariness of cognitive constructivist processes is propagated. This can be considered as an overstatement of basic constructivist conceptions, because it can be disproved even with radical constructivist models. Ernst von Glasersfeld’s ‘viability’ concept points out that, although constructions of reality don’t have to conform to reality in order to be successful, they mustn’t conflict with it either. Glasersfeld borrowed the viability term from biology, where it stands for the functioning of a path, that means a race’s, individual’s or mutation’s ability to survive. Being applied to reality constructions, the term means that constructions are only viable when they permit functioning paths. The environmental conditions relevance for the process of subjective construction is reflected by Maturana’s model about structural coupling (see Maturana/Varela 1987, p. 75 ff.; Maturana 2000, p. 104 f., p. 115 ff.). On the one hand side, this model is based on the idea that a cognitive system’s reaction to external perturbations is structurally determined by its internal state. In this respect, Maturana is describing humans as structurally determined units. What characterizes these units is their informational closure. Information can’t be brought in from outside, they can only be generated inside such a system. On the other hand side and in spite of this informational closeness, living systems are not independent of their environment. Living systems are energetically open (see Böse/Schiepek 2000, p. 175). That’s why they can structurally couple up to their environment and be influenced by it. For this reason it is explainable, that informationally closed systems can influence each other, the creation of “structural congruence” is possible (Maturana/Varela 1987, p. 75; Maturana 2000, p. 121 ff.).

In this respect, it can be seen that a person’s lifeworld may be the result of subjective construction processes. Nevertheless, this result has not only to withstand in a “space void of air”, but according to particular social and material conditions. A person’s lifeworld is correlating with its life conditions in the same way than subjective experience and objective

reality (see Roth 1997, p. 316; Stadler/Kruse 1986, p. 75-98). The lifeworld is the result of a subjective construction process in interaction with the available life conditions.

Thus, the human structural development is subject to a categorical double bond: On the one hand, a person's *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld) is its own subjective construction. On the other hand, this construction is not arbitrary. In spite of all subjectivity – because of the human's structural coupling to its environment, this construction is influenced and limited by this very environment.

2 What is power?

Facing the question about the possibility of power in the context of constructivist thoughts, it first seems that there can't be anything like power. If cognition is operating self-referentially and can be irritated at best, but not determined, how should human controlling be possible then?

When defining power in Max Weber's words as every chance within a social relation to put through the own will, also against reluctance and no matter on what this chance is based (see Roth 1997, p. 316; Stadler/Kruse 1986, p. 75-98), the question is raised, how the own will could be put through when instructive interactions are considered as impossible. As far as the constructivist discourse is concerned, Dell has substantively identified instructive interaction as myth (see Dell 1990) and von Foerster has described humans as nontrivial machines, being mainly and above all characterized by their non-controllability (see von Foerster 1996). In reference to these principles, Portele concluded that, on closer examination, there is no power at all, but only social phenomena. They appear to be power, but they only come about through the subjugation of the powerless (see Portele 1989). Now there's no coercive need to deduce these implications from constructivist anthropology. Despite the assumption of cognitive self-reference, there are social phenomena which may be described as power and do not lie within the responsibility of the persons subjugating and those being subjugated. The already mentioned double bond of human structural development is essential therefore (see Portele 1989). With this concept it is possible, to stick to the paradigm of cognitive self-reference but still to develop a power model that can describe categories of power, which unfold their effectiveness independently from a human's self-will. Therefore, the splitting of the power term itself into "instructive power" and "destructive power" is crucial (Kraus 2014).

Let's think of an example to make this differentiation clear. Let's suppose there is an imbalance of resources between two persons, because, for example, person A is armed with a revolver and is standing face-to-face with unarmed person B. In this scenario, the distribution of power seems to be self-evident. On closer examination however, the question is raised, whether person A is actually able to "(...) put through the own will, also against reluctance (...)" (see Weber 1972, p. 28)? This question cannot be answered with "yes" or "no", but with "as well as" so with "yes" and "no". As long as person A's will aims at *restricting* person B's opportunities, the answer is "yes". If A, for example, doesn't want B to leave the place, she doesn't need the subjugation of B to put through her will and the success is independent from person B's self-referentially operating cognition's own will. To put across this will it is sufficient to shoot B. If person A's will aims at *instructing* person B though, in order to *determine* a certain way of behaviour or thinking, then the answer is "no". This objective could fail due to person B's own will. Although A can reduce B's opportunities drastically, the valuation of these reduced opportunities ultimately remains in the hands of B. Even the threat of shooting only has the quality of a perturbation. The reaction to it is just as less predictable than determinable. If power is aiming at an instructive request, this request

always only has the quality of a perturbation. The decision how to react to this perturbation remains in the hands of the person reacting, so in the hands of the alleged powerless. Even the alleged powerless can deny any request, albeit – as shown in the portrayed example – for the price of being shot.

At this point it's getting obvious that there's a difference in quality between instructive and destructive efforts regarding the exertion of influence. This difference in quality is made clear by the possibilities of refusal. It is conceptually defined by the comparison of the terms 'instructive interaction' and 'destructive interaction' as well as the corresponding distinction of the power phenomenon into instructive and destructive power. This distinction expresses that destructive power is restricting a person's opportunities, whereas instructive power is aiming at instructing another person. It is crucial that for the "powerless" refusal of instructive power is possible, whereas refusal of destructive power isn't. This difference in quality necessitates a linguistic differentiation of the power term:

Instructive power means the chance to determine a human's thinking or behaviour. (Instructive power as chance for instructive interaction is dependent on the instructed person's own will, which ultimately can refuse instructive power.)

Destructive power means the chance to restrict a human's possibilities. (Destructive power as chance for destructive interaction is independent of the instructed person's own will, which can't refuse destructive power.)

In terms of this definition, destructive power against a human being can be exercised "also against reluctance". The defined destructive power doesn't need any kind of subjugation from a constructivist point of view either. It though has to be differed from instructive power, which requires subjugation.

It is important to mention that this differentiation does not implicate any normative rating (see Kraus 2013, p. 136 ff.; 158 ff.). Also, instructive power should not be conceptualized as the opposite of destructive power. Both categories of power are solely focussing on the condition of the possibility of power and allow to sophisticatedly analyse enforcement potentials.

2.1 Destructive power versus body and cognition

For further clarification, let's distinguish between body and cognition as fields destructive power should be exercised on. The opportunities of destructive power created through the control over a human body seem to be obvious. Organisms are not independent of their system environment; moreover they are structurally coupled to it. The possibilities of influence arise from being in control of variables allowing to reduce an organism's options. This happens either directly by using violence, or indirectly by holding back or taking away goods, which are relevant for the organism (food etc., for example). This only involves the chance for reducing the possible courses of action though, not for instruction. So, however much the opportunities are reduced, as soon as the application or the threatening of this kind of power possibilities is linked with attempts of instruction, they only have the quality of a perturbation. The reaction upon this is defined by an operationally closed, and therefore not instructable, human cognition.

Insofar, chances of exercising destructive power over the cognitive field are unlikely. How should it be possible to exercise power on a human's cognition with this cognition being operationally coupled?

At this point, it is important to bear in mind that the construction of a cognitive "subjective reality" needs a system environment ("objective reality"). Individuals may be responsible for the valuation of perturbations, but not for their cause. The construction of the subjective "lifeworld" may occur according to the system's operational conditions. But this system needs a system environment, which provides stimuli for further processing. Holding back information would be an example for one possible form of destructive power based on the reduction of opportunities. In his argument about the hidden mechanisms of power, Bourdieu has stated that there have always been monopolies on the linguistic market, whether this involved sacred languages or those reserved to a caste, or secret languages like the scientific language (see Bourdieu 1997, p. 81). These monopolies turn into means of destructive power since the detention of languages necessary for the access to certain discourses results in the possibility to prevent participation in exactly these discourses. Here again, it turns out that it sure may be possible to prevent the "powerless" from certain thoughts or actions by holding back necessary stock of knowledge. Nevertheless, certain actions or even thoughts can't be determined in this way either.

Thus, there are ways of thinking about forms of destructive power exercised over body and cognition as well, with their effectiveness being independent of the persons' affected own will. These forms of power merely require control over the material and immaterial factors and not the subjugation of the "powerless".

2.2 Instructive power – a social construction and its relevance

Instructive power is a social construction, which – unlike destructive power – requires subjugation. Nevertheless, we have to consider this form of power. Although being only a construction, it still is effective in social relationships, providing orientation for plans for action in terms of reciprocally organized expectations. Instructive power can be defined as social phenomenon within concurrent areas. If the "powerless" was following the powerful's instructive desires against his own desires by attributing him the necessary power, we would have to speak of instructive power. At least from the powerless person's point of view, the powerful person then can "(...) put through the own will [in a social relationship], also against reluctance" (see Weber 1972, p. 28). Instructive power can be effective as social construction, although the instructed persons eventually could be able to refuse any instructive efforts. That's why the possibilities of instructive power in interpersonal relationships in general and in relationships between social work professionals and their addressees (whether clients or third person policy-makers) should be reflected in particular. Especially in the professional field, those who power is attributed to – following the resulting opportunities – can be attributed responsibility as well.²

To get this more concrete, we will apply these thoughts on the question about the possibilities of help and control within social work.

² Concerning the conditions for attributing responsibility see Kraus 2013, p. 158-172, especially p. 164 ff.

3 What is help, what is control?

Although there were and still are arguments about the question, to what extent social work is contributing to stabilize societal states of injustice (see e.g. Otto/Scherr/Ziegler 2010; Hosemann/Trippmacher 2003; Pfeifer-Schaupp 2006), help and control still and indisputably rate among important functions of social work (see Bommers/Scherr 2012, p. 70 ff.; Staub-Bernasconi 2007). Prior to raising the question about these functions' possibilities, they first of all should be specified. On closer examination, the seemingly evident differentiation turns out to be complex and of little accuracy.

3.1 Help and control – a distinction with two sides

Therefore, let's have an exemplary look at one of social work's main purposes: supporting a "gelingenderes Leben".³ On closer reflection, even the category of help itself becomes doubtful. Even if the objective to support addressees to lead a "succeeding life" may appear as a help service at first glance, the questions arise, (a) who and (b) based on what kind of authority is allowed to decide whether a life is defined as more or less successful anyway. Who decides on the paths on which this "succeeding life" is reached best? The power of decision-making often seems to be placed on the specialist side. But is it appropriate to categorize this kind of service as help service? Even if social work professionals' intents aim at providing help, the act of conveying adequate aims and paths of achievement always is linked to attempts to "instruct" the addressees. Forms of help in which the professionals predetermine the objectives could therefore also be labelled as "instructive control". In this context, it is not decisive if pressure is exerted or not. By selecting the options worth any support or the information communicated, there is an orientating influence on the addressee.

When can we talk about help then? Can services only then be called help if the addressees define their objectives on their own? Regarding practical work, this question isn't easy to answer, since within the field of social work, it has to be decided, who the addressee is at all. The placement in a stationary institution for youth welfare, for instance, may be a help service for the abused child, while being a controlling intervention in the eyes of the abusing parent. Differing between help and control can be further complicated by the fact, that the abused child can experience this "help service" as "control" or even as punishment. These kinds of services now could be defined as forms of help, which are provided against the will of the person the service should support. It certainly is more consequent to describe these kinds of services as a form of control aiming at supporting the controlled. This description accommodates the fact that the last decision over the service being assigned to be helpful remains with the skilled employees.

This special form of help-focused control can be found in practice, when children are removed against their will from settings being identified as imperilling or drug addicts being detoxicated against their will. Looking at all elements of a service, it is very hard to tell, which parts are help and which are control from whose point of view. Above all and independent of the skilled employees' intentions, there are help services coming along with controlling elements and reciprocally there are efforts of control being associated with helpful elements.

³ Engl.: succeeding life. See Thiersch for "gelingenderen Alltag" (engl.: succeeding everyday life) 1992, p. 275 ff.; 2006, p. 43 ff.

In all this complexity, what criterion should be used to distinguish between help and control? The crucial criterion for distinguishing help and control results from the question about decision-making authority: Concerning help, it rests with the ones seeking or receiving help; concerning control, the decision-making authority remains with the skilled employees that exert control.

3.2 The power to exert help and control

If cognition is operating self-referentially and therefore is not controllable externally, it should be discussed, whether addressees can be supported or controlled methodically by skilled employees at all. To answer this question, it would be gainful to transfer the logic applied in the explanations about power on to the terms help and control.

Let's first have a look at the control category. It can be asserted that it is aiming at complying with legally legitimated and professionally justified standards. This is especially the case in areas in which there are societal and professional decisions about right and wrong. Every time social work is exerting power in order to protect thirds, it becomes clear that the decision over what is right and wrong is neither left to the persons being controlled, nor to the ones that should be protected by this control. If skilled social workers identify a child being threatened in its well-being, they act in place of the society, which rates this kind of threat as negative one. By reviewing this example, it also becomes obvious how strong the need for interpretation really is – even for indisputable protection standards. The definition of a child's well-being and the duty to protect it are the results of a societal discourse. Additionally, the decision, whether the child's well-being is threatened or not, depends on the assessment provided by qualified persons. The lesser extreme and clear the divergence from defined standards is, the harder is the assessment. The fact that these assessments can't be absolutely true from a constructivist point of view neither impedes the possibility to provide such an assessment in a professionally justified manner, nor does it excuse from the responsibility to do so.

Decisions concerning control have to be and can be made – whether these decisions can be enforced however, depends on the necessary power. Assessing the different functioning guarantees requires the distinction between instructive and destructive power. The application of these differentials on the control term led to the categories of “instructive control” and “destructive control” (Kraus 2013, p. 126; 2014, p. 109 ff.).

Efforts of control, which aim at instructive interaction, are called instructive control. Efforts of control, which in contrast work by reducing opportunities, are called destructive control. Instructive control represents attempts aiming at effecting certain reactions, whereas the prevention of behaviour by means of destructive interaction is rated among destructive control. In this respect, instructive control relies on instructive power and destructive control relies on destructive power. The distinction between instructive and destructive control depends on whether actions can be actually enforced respectively prevented against an addressee's reluctance and not on whether actions are rated as desirable or undesirable. Instructive control can aim at preventing undesirable actions as well as at the exertion of desirable actions. Destructive control however can always and only force the prevention of undesirable actions. Everything that applies for the required forms of power applies to instructive and destructive control as well – the refusal of instructive control is as much possible as the refusal of instructive power, whereas the possibility of refusing destructive control is just as small as the possibility of refusing the necessary destructive power.

Instructive control aims at the exertion of desirable and/or the omission of undesirable behaviour. Addressees can refuse these control attempts in the same way they can refuse instructive power.

Destructive control aims at preventing undesirable behaviour. The possibility to refuse these control attempts is just as small as the possibility to refuse the applied destructive power.

3.3 The practice of exerting control – intrusion or seduction?

The question, whether social work can accomplish its controlling task or not, will be used in the following to further concretise the introduced differentiation between instructive and destructive control. Again and again, there are cases of children being neglected or mistreated to death although there were contacts to social work professionals. Thus, questions about the legal and professional justification of this responsibility are raised as well as questions about the experts' capability to handle it professionally (see Kraus 2013, p.141 ff.). How can social work professionals, just to give an extreme example, prevent the death of a child caused by its legal guardians? The safest solution is the coercive spacial separation of the child and its legal guardians for example by stationary accommodating the child in a youth welfare facility. This kind of procedure is one form of destructive control based on destructive power, requiring the professional not only to have the knowledge about and the legal competence for the case, but also to possess the necessary means of destructive power to enforce the destructive control. The effectiveness of this kind of control results from the circumstance, that it does not need any kind of subjugation or approval from the legal guardians in order to be exerted. As the spacial separation effectively prevents mistreatment, the legal guardians' will is not relevant at all.

The given example makes clear, that destructive control can solely enforce the omission of certain undesired activities but never the determination of desired activities such as a loving care and an affectionate relationship between legal guardians and their child.

What other ways of preventing undesired activities can we think of? Could destructive control also be exerted by means of indirect material power such as the announcement to cut social service depending on the legal guardians' educational behaviour? In the field of social work this way is part of the every day practice when it comes to exerting control. Help, support and social benefit are announced, but only granted if certain requirements are fulfilled. The requirements can be the omission of undesired activities on the hand side, but also the demonstration of desired activities on the other hand side.

Another way of influence would be the professionals' effort, to convince the receivers of the advantages being connected to the professional's ideas and propositions. The offer of material and immaterial social service as well as the attempt of conviction can be described as seduction. With the objectives of this kind of intervention being predetermined by the social work professionals, it can be identified as a form of instructive control. Even if the experts aim for the addressees' cooperation or subjugation in order to prevent certain activities, we can call this instructive control. The only possible case of destructive control is the one, where intrusions aim for the reduction of the addressees' possibilities.

According to this, it is an instance of instructive control, when benefits or sanctions are announced to the legal guardians in order to impact on their educational behaviour (no matter if this happens to prevent violence or to effect the desired behaviour). What keeps being risky is the fact, that this form of control is a social construction still being heavily reliant on the

legal guardians' cooperation or at least their subjugation. All instructive efforts are only perturbations, which can be cognitively assessed and rated solely by their addressees. Destructive control however, grants the strongest guaranty of success, because it relies neither on approval nor on cooperation. The simple enforcement is enough, for example by intruding into the parental care and coercively preventing the contact between legal guardians and their children. In either case it should be borne in mind, that destructive control may grant the highest safety, but it can (legally) and should (professionally) first and only be used as an ultima ratio.

3.4 Help practice between “costs” and “benefit”

In the field of social work, help is provided for objectives, which are at least societally tolerated and in most cases even desired. Nevertheless, the power of decision in the help sector remains with the addressees respectively the users. The limitations and chances of help are in accordance with the chances and limitations of control: On the one hand side, experts also cannot determine the development of addressees looking for help. On the other hand side, there are still possible ways of support. Apparently help is possible in the area of life conditions, as far as these are changed by granting goods and services (e.g. money or housing space). It's getting much more difficult with help services aiming directly for the addressees' lifeworld or being expected to align to it. In this case, it is imperative to consider the general limits of all interpersonal processes of comprehension and communication (Kraus 2013, p. 67-118). In doing so, the professionals not only face the challenge to capture their addressees' concerns, perspectives, living conditions and life concepts. They also have to rate them, when deciding about the destinations and paths of support. Especially in the field of help, the decision about “correct” or “succeeding” life concepts cannot be made reclusively by social work professionals. The problem of complexity arising from these kind of decisions is best illustrated with the consideration, that every change as well as every omission of a change is connected to costs and benefit. Costs and benefit in this context do not only describe material aspects, but immaterial ones as well, which can refer to individual and social perspectives. At this point it is essential to understand that not only every life concept has its pros and cons and every conduct of life has its benefits and costs alike, but moreover that, considering the inalienable subjectivity of life world perspectives, the judgement on these costs and benefits can ultimately and only be done by the affected persons themselves. Every “costs-and-benefit-calculation” is subject to impassable subjective criteria. Thus, the consequences occurring from supportive-meant changes in the life conditions for a person's lifeworld always have to be critically questioned by communicating with the supported persons. This sort of communication is exactly the one, the professionals are capable of. Beyond that, there are still further ways of support.

The professionals may not be able to make the subjective costs-and-benefit-calculation representatively for their addressees, but they should be methodically skilled in professionally assisting them at their subjective reflexion. The assistance can consist in pointing to possible costs and benefits the affected persons are not aware of by themselves. The knowledge that only the persons concerned can decide about the relation of costs and benefits necessitates a high level of self-reflectiveness and the capability to professionally observe the counterpart. Although the fact that everything has pros and cons appears as a matter of course, the consequent alignment to this presumption in practice is highly challenging. Even the attitudes and perspectives being described as problem by the help seeking persons are linked not only to disadvantages, but also to advantages. In the same way every aspired solution involves benefits and costs alike – no matter how well-founded the solution was. Sometimes the costs

of a help service may exceed the costs of the problem identified as subject of change. And vice versa the advantages being related to the problem should be considered just as well, because they might get lost with the problem being solved successfully.

From a methodical point of view, the understanding that the addressees' subjective reality can actually neither be realized nor captured, brings about some further advantages: It reduces the risk of hastily assuming that expressions, attitudes or situations of life have been conceived. This facilitates the adaption between the addressees' life world construction and the communication with the professionals. Furthermore, the danger of incapacitating the addressees, debasing their behaviour and their life world and in consequence putting the involved persons' willingness of cooperation at risk, is diminished.

From a constructivist point of view it's neither necessary nor allowed to conclude the professionals' inability to act and decide. It sure is highly pretentious, if professionals want to make the one and only right decision. But in contrary, it would be just as exaggerated to derive a total inability to develop and communicate ideas of a succeeding life from the respect of the addressee's autonomy. It is self-evident that there can't be total knowledge, but there sure are viable knowledge models, which serve the addressees' orientation and just as well provide conjoint points of reference for the interaction with the addressees. Of course it is impossible to decide from a constructivist perspective, which is the right way to live. But it sure is possible to develop and communicate ideas about more or less promising life concepts. After all, social work professionals should have a relevant advantage in knowledge and know how to use it responsibly. This advantage of knowledge has to be obtained and steadily updated. Moreover it should not be limited to contents, but in particular include methodical skills as for example the professionals' communicative performance. There is a "surplus of power" (ger.: "Machtüberhang"; Wolf 2014) accruing from these possibilities, which should be treated responsibly. Without it, however, not only the experts professionalism would be called into question, but also their benefit for the addressees in general.

4 Balance

In this paper the focus was placed on the question about the possibilities of target achievement. Therefore, a constructivist differentiation of the power term into instructive and destructive power was unfolded and applied on questions about help and control.

If power is defined following Max Weber, as every chance within a social relation to put through the own will, also against reluctance and no matter on what this chance is based (see Weber 1972, p. 28), its possibilities depend on whether the objective is instruction or destruction. If the "own will", which has to be "put through (...) also against reluctance" aims at preventing certain actions or thoughts, then the chance to exert destructive power results from the chance to reduce possibilities. If the "own will" in contrary aims at instruction, it is possible to refuse this will because of the human cognition's self-referentiality. By looking at the possibility or the impossibility of refusal, the qualitative difference between instructive and destructive power becomes clear.

By using the distinction of instructive and destructive power, not only the direct level of interaction but also the societal level can be reflected theoretically (see as well Kraus/Krieger 2014; Hosemann 2014; Merten/Scherr 2004). Destructive power becomes socially relevant with the deprivation or the withholding of material as well as immaterial values. For example, withholding of financial means and withholding of education are socially relevant phenomenon of destructive power. Consequently, neoliberal efforts, which try to

individualize the responsibility for how life can be lived in an inappropriate exclusiveness, can be criticized even from a radical constructivist point of view. In spite of the ascription of cognitive autonomy, it would be an overstatement to consider a person as limitlessly self-dependent. Due to the structural coupling of a human to its system environment, the environment's conditions are crucial for the construction of a subjective reality of life. That's why a person is responsible for the selection of the available alternatives, but only for the alternatives, which are actually at her disposal. Nevertheless, it wouldn't be inappropriate to delegate the responsibility to the ones who dispose of the environmental conditions, because the responsibility to choose from the alternatives necessarily remains with the individuals.⁴ To finish, it should be emphasized again that there are no moral judgments connected with the categories of instructive and destructive power. Both categories can be rated positive as well as negative. Destructive power, for instance, can aim at both, oppression and protection. The question whether and how power is rated as positive or negative has been discussed just as little as current power relations have been analyzed. The objective was to provide preconditions for a sophisticated occupation with questions about power, allowing the analysis and creation of implementation potentials of professional social workers.

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⁴ See Kraus 2013, p. 165 ff.

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