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DOES SOCIAL SUPPORT DISRESPECT PEOPLE? THE CASE OF FOOD BANKS IN GERMANY

In German media food banks are gaining attention in the battle against poverty, precarisation and social exclusion. By means of voluntary work and with a local orientation they try to help directly adjacent to governmental social security systems. They distribute food, no longer of any use within the food retail industry, to people in „need“. The enormous growth of food banks within the last fifteen years to up to nearly 900 food banks in Germany and numerous similar organizations as well as the rapidly increased amount of users to up to 1.000.000 regular users are seen as an impression of their success. The enormous amount of 50.000 volunteers within the food banks in Germany are – especially within the political debate – discussed as a role model for a vivid civil society.

Contrary to the media and political debate my assumption is, that the rise of food banks in Germany are a sign and result of a mayor reinvention of the social. This reinvention is accompanied by a transformation of the welfare system in Germany. It changes the relation between the affected individuals and the larger part of the society. Furthermore it changes the role and the identity of modern social work.

Within my presentation I will focus especially on the new relation-arrangement in which users of such institutions find themselves in. With theoretical considerations of recognition theory, I will show that this new pattern of relationships is characterized by a new form of unilateral dependence and that the institutional setting of food banks can be understood as structural forms of disrespect.