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Track #6: Bildung: erben, aufsteigen, herrschen?

The economization of education: knowledge transformations in higher education for sustainable development.

This paper analyses processes going on since the 1980s characterized by the capitalistic tenet of economization as a rationalization principle in the work- and production sector, and as transferred to non-economic spheres such as education. Polanyi already noted this process for nineteenth century liberalism and the same tendency can be seen in current times dominated by neo-liberalism, where decision-makers – be it educational, scientific, or other – are pressured to assess how their activities impact financially on the individual, organizational, and institutional levels and/or the (perceived or socially constructed) imperatives of a strong, internationally competitive economy. Economic measures, such as evaluation and indicator controlling systems, are integrated into educational systems and quasi markets are generated, aiming at the economization of education and a constant increase in productivity of education towards whole societies. Consequently, higher education has become one of the key arenas for creating economic advantage in terms of particular knowledge transformations.

On the other hand, the role of universities as educators of new generations of citizens and leaders is discussed as crucial in processes of societal transformation, i.e. challenges to educational purposes and practice brought by contemporary social-ecological conditions of unsustainability, complexity and uncertainty. Implications of these economization processes on higher education for sustainable development are of particular interest in this paper, which tries to answer the following research questions: How do the neoliberal utilization/exploitation logic and capitalistic market dynamics manifest themselves in particular policies concerning higher education? What implications do these policies have on higher education for sustainable development in the context of the marketization of knowledge and science? How are they implemented in the university practice and what strategies are created on local and/or transnational level in the context of these processes?

Based on a systemic policy and literature review, the paper provides a contemporary analysis of processes and policies enabling the domination of capitalism and market

dynamics in the dominant educational paradigm, as well as its consequences in the field of higher education for sustainable development. Underlying structures and mechanisms that influence the processes as well as assumptions and models of education that underpin current unsustainable policies and programs are discussed. As such, the article aims to better understand and meet social, political and economic challenges connected to the process of commodification of educational activities. It provides a contemporary analysis of consequences provoked by capitalistic market dynamics and utilization/exploitation processes in the sphere of higher education for sustainable development.