

Which kind of knowledge is a public good?

Dynamics of knowledge production and distribution, especially within and for educationally disadvantaged social levels and persons excluded from the working process.

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Which kind of knowledge is a public good?

Is it that kind of knowledge, which is dynamically produced and distributed, especially within and for educationally disadvantaged social levels and persons excluded from the working process?

The conference asked for contributions which deal with the question, whether knowledge is a public good. The thesis of my paper is “yes it is, but the publicity of knowledge depends on how knowledge is defined. Out of this thesis, a research design has to be created to analyse, count, and measure knowledge as a public good in several countries.

The first part of the paper shows some theoretical foundations of the “Knowledge Society” and some theoretical implications about knowledge production and transfer.

In the second part, I try to show you the gap in these theories and I will end with a concept to analyse the potential of adult education in a knowledge society.

1. Transformation of knowledge in a knowledge society

In the environment of the discourse „Knowledge Society“, Bittlingmayer locates a specific modernised form of cultural capital dominating the symbolic field. He formulates the thesis, „dass die Zeitdiagnose ‚Wissensgesellschaft‘ die Wissensformen, Erfahrungen und Deutungsmuster bestimmter herrschender Milieus einschliesslich der aufgestiegenen und modernisierten Mittelschichtmilieus unzulässig verallgemeinert und dadurch symbolische wie materielle Herrschaft produziert.“ (cf. Bittlingmayer 2005, p. 332).

Bittlingmayer shows, the discourse about the knowledge society and the discourse about the distribution of knowledge too are affected by human and governmental power and influence. The definition of knowledge is in this context essential, because the definition of knowledge always is consensual and excludes certain people. Defining what the basic knowledge of a certain society is depends on local practices, the normative subsistence, sense making and selection, the legitimisation as well as on institutional and social contexts.

The Question “Is knowledge a public good?” leads to the Question, whether those who use it should pay for knowledge transmission and knowledge application or not. In this context, it is useful to ask which knowledge is common and popular, and which knowledge accompanies the population in everyday life. To decide whether it is justified that one pays for knowledge or not depends on the degree to which essential knowledge for making daily decisions is shared. In case that essential knowledge is not at one’s disposal, it would be not beneficial if one needs to pay to get the essential knowledge.

For this reason I ask the question: which kind of knowledge is a public good? To put it more exactly: what do people know? How do they get the knowledge they are looking for, which kind of knowledge is chosen, and which kind of knowledge is offered?

It seems, I am talking about two sides. On the one side is the “people”, the “mass”, the human being in general, living in different social contexts and countries in a globalising world. On the other side, there are the scientists, generating new knowledge in universities and industries. At first glance, these two sides seem not to be connected which is not true. In real life there are not dominators on the one side and controlled people on the other. It is important to avoid the binary logic between top and bottom, between dominators and controlled peoples, between science and society, and to compass (“erfassen”) the complexity of life. Any exclusive concentration on the macro-, meso- or microscopic level inevitably leads to

reductions; therefore we have to take into account all of the three levels if possible (cf. Landwehr 2000, p. 20).

Therefore I can formulate the following questions:

In which way and which form is knowledge tried to be implemented in society

How do people react to such attempts?

How do these reactions affect the implementation practice of the Authorities?

And what is to be said about the role of the administration in this context?

These questions show the complexity of the social world and require a special methodological treatment. And besides looking at how the implementation of knowledge and knowledge transfer takes place, we have to look at the actual conditions in the knowledge society: what do people know and how often they attend some adult education?

We have to develop a concept of research by which we are able to analyse the public knowledge and the knowledge transfer in societies.

To construct a critical framework to analyse the development of the social demand for education and participation or non-participation, it is important to take into account that there are agency- (“handlungstheoretische”) and structural aspects on the micro- and the macroscopic level. I will characterise these levels with some theoretical thoughts:

a) Thoughts about the macroscopic level

Out of historical research we may refer to the historical macroscopic level in the social, economical and cultural aspects to the concepts of disciplinary action (“Sozialdisziplinierung”), rationalisation or confessionalisation. Basically, these are authoritarian volitions (“Willensäußerungen”), and it is not really known whether there were social effects and, if so, to what extent. The analysis of the dynamics of knowledge distribution can be understood under the aspect of rationalisation but also as volitions of an authority. But there is no linear and constant conjunction between the volitions of authorities and the actions of people. For the analysis of the knowledge transmission (“Übermittlung”) and the knowledge transfer (“Umsetzung”), it can be productive to see Knowledge as a central aspect of the global dissemination of a capitalistic economy.

b) Thoughts about the microscopic level

With the concept of the Sinus Milieus, a „useful approach to make the socio-cultural segmentations operational“ (cf. Sociovision 2006), Barz/Panyr (2005) analysed the connections between milieu and advanced training. Despite great general interests of the people, only few training was attended. Furthermore, there are questions to be asked: why are the offers so rarely used? Are there financial reasons, such as cost-benefit equations and time management or any other imperative reasons? It is important to analyse the development of the social demand for education and participation or non-participation and the terms and conditions of learning processes. Not only the Sinus Milieus but also a broad measurement of

the competences of a representative group of the population in different countries is necessary to ascertain which kind of competences and knowledge are public.

On the macroscopic, the mesoscopic and the microscopic spheres, the societal, technical and ecological level generate disseminating information. Out of the information, the individual generates knowledge. Perception generally means to have some impression on the cognitive system. Real situations get some meaning, and knowledge results. When people set this knowledge in relation to their aims, communication and cooperation becomes important. The whole of communication does not only contain the comprehension of terms but also the comprehension of contents and interests; cooperation includes accordance, collaboration and agreement not only for self-preservation but also for self-determination (cf. Fuchs/Hofkirchner 2003).

To analyse other competences of the individual we can refer to the indicator system for multidisciplinary competences from Urs Grob and Katharina Maag Merki (2001).

This study focused on multidisciplinary competences as they are described in the curricula.

Two special competences are important for us. First, the motivation to adult education, which is divided into three subcomponents: “Intrinsische Weiterbildungsmotivation”, “Extrinsische Weiterbildungsmotivation: materielle Ziele” and “Extrinsische Weiterbildungsmotivation: äusserer Druck”. Other important competences to analyse could be the learning and working strategies, and the knowledge about environment and politics. For this paper, it is not necessary to explain them exactly.

c) Thoughts about the mesoscopic level

An important aim of a pedagogically oriented Knowledge research is to analyse the structures of the various forms of Knowledge transfers and to reach a classification. We too have to analyse to what extent knowledge transfers imply popularisation and vulgarisation. In such analyses, the forms of transfer may be differentiated into situation, causes, and context (cf. Höhne 2003, pp. 143).

Landwehr does draw in his study „Policy im Alltag“ on Bourdieu’s categories of „social field“ and „social game“. A social field is the social network into which somebody enters according to his special social connections and positions. In such networks, there are power struggles about the implementation of legitimate principles of world perception (cf. Bourdieu 1998, p. 84). As the power struggle shows regularities, Bourdieu adds the concept of „social game“. Being an authority too is an interactive process; authority is constructed according to fundamental principles of “vision and division” (the division between mind and body, for example, or between male and female), or of organizing “laws” of experience. In these fields, people act according to their „feel for the game“.

Between the individual and the structures there are factors and processes of implementation, which are part of the knowledge transfer. Implementation research established since the late 60ies in the social sciences (see Mayntz 1980, 1983). The aim of these researches is the Analysis of the implementation of political programmes. Starting point is, therefore, a political Programme or a declaration, which has a certain intention.

To analyse which kind of knowledge a public good is, which dynamics of knowledge production and distribution – especially within and for educationally disadvantaged social strata and persons excluded from the working process – occur, we have now various instruments: Two instruments to analyse and describe the Knowledge production and the dissemination of information: theories of information and knowledge transfer.

To analyse political strategies and their implementation: theories of implementation. And we have two instruments to analyse the reaction and action of the people concerning the

discourse of Knowledge – society and the knowledge transfer: theories of competences and action theories.

I give you know an example, so I can show the gap in these theories.

2. An example

In the category science and society, the 7th Framework Programme for research and development declares as key activities: a dynamical management of the relationships between Knowledge and society, an enhancement of the forces and a broadening of the horizons, particularly of women and young peoples. The programme does not only communicate the aims, a better networking and communication but also the means to reach these aims. In a changing world, people have to adapt their knowledge about what the world is. So adult education is an important element in these processes of producing views of the world. The National statistic administration recently published the newest data of the educational behaviour of adults in Switzerland. The data show that the more someone is integrated into the working process, the more he takes part in any kind of adult education. With 51% of participation in adult education versus 22%, the working population take 2.5 times more part in adult education than non-active people (cf. Bundesamt für Statistik 2007).

The first question is: why do we find much more working population taking part in adult education? One explanation could be: Perhaps, because these people come much more faster to the point at which they have to get new knowledge. If the directorate of an enterprise decides to get a new computer system, the staffs have to accommodate with it and go to adult education courses. Sometimes these studies are paid by the enterprise, and sometimes only the fear of losing one's job motivates people to learn to handle the new system. Nevertheless, some people lose the job, not only because they didn't learn enough but also because of the new structuring of the enterprise, the outsourcing of certain work to other countries. If one does not find a new job in short time, one enters into the unemployment insurance. Every month, interested staffs are concerned and try to help. But which form of help is offered? For example the "Bieler Kurse für Arbeitslose" offer since 1983 more or less unmodified German-French and Informatics lessons. Informatics includes typing (cf. Stadt Biel 2007)

The RAV (regional employment office in Zürich) finances, besides language and informatics, also job trainings in different professional guilds as hotel and restaurant and other industry. But the main courses are to help people to write better applications for employment. On the other side, programmes are offered to keep the unemployed persons busy. Non-qualified persons can get some experiences in administration, offices, and as henchman in non-profit organisations. This seems to be Lifelong learning for work, but not for a knowledge society. There are other population groups out of the working process, which do not effectively take part in lifelong learning for a knowledge society. These are the elder persons who get pension, handicapped persons, and parents bringing up their children at home as housewives and sometimes housemen.

The second question is: how many people in the western society are out of the working process? As an example, I will take Switzerland:

Statistics shows that almost 2/3 of the Population in Switzerland do not have a job to earn money. Here, the example of the canton Aargau 2000 out of the Swiss Public Count “Volkszählung”:

Arbeitsmarktstatus Kanton Aargau 2000

Erwerbspersonen	306 460
Erwerbstätige	295 937
Vollzeiterwerbstätige	198 413
Teilzeiterwerbstätige	70 794
Lehrlinge	16 544
Erwerbstätige ohne weitere Angaben	10 186
Erwerbslose	10 523
Nichterwerbspersonen	241 033
Nichterwerbspersonen in Ausbildung	19 327
Nichterwerbspersonen und freiwillige Tätigkeit	5 357
Nichterwerbspersonen und Haushaltsarbeit	65 613
Nichterwerbspersonen und Rentner	40 106
Uebrige Nichterwerbspersonen	12 041
Personen unter 15 Jahre alt	98 589
Total Personen	547 493

(cf. Statistisches Amt des Kantons Aargau 2000)

In 2006 1.2 million people in Switzerland received pensions (cf. Bundesamt für Sozialversicherungen: AHV- Statistik 2006), approximately 250,000 persons received pensions as invalids (cf. Bundesamt für Sozialversicherungen: IV- Statistik 2006, p. 12), 320,000 persons received money from the unemployment insurance (cf. Bundesamt für Statistik 2004) and 3 percent of the population in Switzerland got Social Help “Sozialhilfe”, which are 220,000 persons. In Total: Almost 2 million persons are living in Switzerland who are out of the working process and do realise less further education than the others.

What are the reasons for this and what consequences does this have on the capacity to make daily decisions? Which possibilities do exist for the so-called “non-active” population to develop their Knowledge?

How, and why, do they get which knowledge?

An important institution for transferring knowledge from universities to the people is the “Volkshochschule”, a special form of adult education. At the beginning of the 20th century, they were founded out of movements, which attempted to expand the universities, and out of movements to democratise the society, after all in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. In Germany, more than 6.5 million people attended in 2005 such evening classes. Since 2003, the number of courses and bookings has declined. 3 of 4 clients are female, and 28% are younger than 35. Another third are the people between 35 and 50 years, and one third is older than 50 years (cf. Pehl / Rechart / Zabal 2006).

The annual report of the Swiss Association for adult education (“Volkshochschule”) from 2005 shows that 65% of the courses are about languages, culture and creativity, 21% of them concern health, 10% community and only 10% basic knowledge and nature. One year before, there has been one category titled „techniques“ 0%.

Is the offer of the institutions affected more by the choosy behaviour of the people than by the knowledge production of the scientific communities?

In the analysis we have now one dark point: the impact of how people react to information on the administration. How does the knowledge of the people affect the administration and the scientific process?

For the answer to the question, if knowledge is a public good, we have to take into account these feedbacks. Knowledge has in general a collective character and therefore it is created collective. It is important, to analyse these feedback more precisely (vgl. Eckl 2004).

3. A research-design

To get the whole process, we have designed a study of knowledge networking and knowledge management in adult education, to analyse the potential of adult education in a knowledge society. An interesting analysis system could be one, which institutionalises a knowledge management process. In the process of generating knowledge networks between schools, adult education “volkshochschulen”, universities and industries, we can additionally see how people and their knowledge affect the administration.

Adult education centres have, since their founding, been concerned with bringing academic knowledge closer to the people. In the process they have collected experiences, developed strategies and completed evaluations, developed forms of communication and teaching materials. These experiences must be systematically evaluated and made useful for the education of young adults and adult education in general.

Through the connection between adult education, universities, research groups and industry, adult education (“Volkshochschulen”) has an exciting starting point for actions, which will strengthen the connection between school, adult education, universities, research groups and industry. In addition, knowledge transfer should be researched with strategies from knowledge management. In a first phase the potential of adult education in the knowledge society should be evaluated, the development of knowledge should be assessed and the processes of knowledge transfer analysed. A business strategy should be developed and the processes of knowledge use, the availability of documents and the information systems analysed and a culture profile drawn up. From this action options will be developed which will lead into a strategy. The results of these first analyses of the potential and opportunities for adult education in the knowledge society should be made available to the public in a publication.

In the second phase knowledge organisation, system planning and organisational development of adult education will be supported; i.e. knowledge networks will be created, their knowledge processes, knowledge sources and knowledge holders analysed and action requirements formulated. Knowledge should be able to be organised, structured and presented; the system must be planned and the organisation must be developed through incentive schemes and training concepts. The implementation and assessment of the achievement of targets will be documented in reports. At the end of the two phases success will be evaluated at a conference. For this purpose a European database should be available to ease the broader rollout. Thus the cooperation between adult education, schools, universities and research institutions will become institutionalised and a permanent exchange of experience will become possible.

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