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Seminararbeit

Is the knowledge society an unjust society? About the social selection of german postindustrial education

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Preface

Latest since the “Pisa-Schock” education is a big topic in Germany again. I got the questionable honor at the time of the shock to work as a member of the Hamburger Schülerkammer. In this position I had the chance to deal with this particular topic in an intensive manner. Since then many changes occurred in the Federal Republic of Germany. On the one side sometimes only short-time activism took place. On the other side some problems were solved in a successful way. Such estimation is always subjective due to the political understanding of each person or political/social organization. Education has been a big issue in the German media since this time. Generally education is seen as a solution for most of the social problems of the country. But education is not a solution for all worries. However, on a short-term and on a long-term view, education may be the basis for a solution of nearly all of the problems and for a sustainable improvement. But you have to focus on the frame conditions of the educational systems and of the educational policies. The knowledge society was created by Stehr and others. It offers such frame conditions for a deep understanding on environmental and social topics. Second, it offers a vision for the future and finally an exact encouragement.

It is a pleasure for me to identify myself with such a theory that motivates me to work in a scientifically environment. It also encourages me to learn even more, to get a better understanding of various topics, and finally it gives me the chance to change something. This thesis is actually a co-product of my own interest with this topic. I hope that I can transfer a part of my enthusiasm to the reader.

The knowledge society was created as a fair one. Now it is our responsibility to implement it in this way.

1. What is knowledge?

The definition of knowledge is difficult, the concept itself may be different from different perspectives: philosophically, psychologically, economically (especially when it comes to the discussion of ownership of knowledge), political science (which is mainly interested in the domination and the regulation of knowledge), sociological, etc. Each of these perspectives can be worked out in detail, which is not needed for our consideration. Instead, Stehr's concept of "knowledge as a capacity to act"¹ will be in the center of focus, followed by a brief classification of this concept in terms of possible social advantages or disadvantages the concept within this meaning of knowledge can emerge.

1.1 knowledge as a capacity to act

Nico Stehr defines knowledge as "Fähigkeit zum sozialen Handeln"², ie as a "Modell der Wirklichkeit"³, but the opportunity in itself "die Realität zu ändern"⁴ (and for example differs with models with a simple explanation and interpretation claim). This capacity for social action can therefore only be seen when in fact the possibility - however its nature may be - for a practical implementation is really given. With regard to Max Weber and Karl Mannheim Stehr therefore excludes, for example, bureaucracy, or also even parts of the law (subsumption). Instead, Stehr conceived this ability as a „generalisierte Kompetenz [...] die relativ unmittelbar soziale Vorteile bzw. Nachteile in der Form von Einfluss, Ansehen, Macht und Herrschaft mit sich bringt.“⁵

For a better accountability and to see the place in the overall question of social selectivity in knowledge societies, there should be three versions of this competence to be exemplary, with special focus on those which may have an effect on inequalities in educational institutions:

¹ e.g. Stehr, 2005, page 24

² Stehr, 2000, page 81

³ Stehr, 2000, page 81

⁴ Stehr, 2000, page 81

⁵ Stehr, 1994, page 194

the ability and skill to speak ("Befähigung und Fertigkeit zu sprechen"), says Stehr, "is based increasingly on the skills to mobilize knowledge adequate in relevant contexts and implies a parallel [...] social boundaries against those who are unable to speak"

the ability to use of areas of discretion ("Fähigkeit, Ermessensspielräume auszunutzen") assumes that different social systems have the possibility for a broad interpretation of formal rules or formal, within such as legal or social contexts. This causes the possibility t h a t this areas of discretion "sachverständige Akteure als Kapazität nutzen können, um sich in bestimmten Situationen Vorteile zu verschaffen bzw. Nachteile zu vermeiden."

as a final example is the ability to mobilize resistance („Fähigkeit, Widerstand zu mobilisieren“), which for Stehr means „Fähigkeit, die Praktiken von Experten [...] zu kritisieren“, is certainly also an important factor for adjacent topics, such as the question of participation in knowledge societies and their democratization.⁶

It seems to be clear that these and other skills not mentioned gives the knower an advantage, however, a lack of these skills does not harm the non-knower beyond the lack of positive impact he get. Yet this indirect disadvantage is not insignificant. The political scientist Franz Walter summarized recently in the SPIEGEL results of several new studies on the situation of lower educated classes. I would like to introduce parts of Walters studys, and compare them to by an synopsis to Stehr's concept of "Wissen als ein Bündel sozialer Kompetenzen" (bearing in mind that the different abilities may overlap, are interdependent and complementary; the synopsis calls each the primary / the

⁶ for all competences of Stehr, 1994, page 197 / 198

principal), because it shows the impacts of lack of knowledge in the knowledge society on concrete examples:

Franz Walter	Nico Stehr
<p>„Immer wieder dokumentieren die "Prekarisierten" ihre Müdigkeit und Hoffnungslosigkeit. Selbst die wenigen Freuden, die ihnen geblieben waren, insbesondere das Rauchen, wurde ihnen von denen, die überall das Sagen haben, durch Verbote genommen.“</p>	<p>Fähigkeit Widerstand zu mobilisieren</p>
<p>„Bildung bedeutet für sie [das Prekariat] infolgedessen das Erlebnis des Scheiterns, des Nicht-Mithalten-Könnens, der Fremdbestimmung durch andere, die mehr gelesen haben, besser reden können, gebildeter aufzutreten vermögen.“</p>	<p>Fähigkeit, Ermessensspielräume auszunutzen Befähigung und Fertigkeit zu sprechen</p>
<p>„Daher klammern sie sich stärker als alle anderen Gruppen an den Staat. Zugleich aber beschweren sie sich bitter über die Bürokratie, mit der sie bei ihren täglichen Behördengängen zu tun bekommen, von der sie sich gegängelt, überwacht, schikaniert fühlen.“</p>	<p>Fähigkeit, Ermessensspielräume auszunutzen</p>
<p>„Signifikant ist die dominante Fortschrittsangst. Der Fortschritt bedeutet Bedrohung, übt einen permanenten Druck aus, den man nicht zu bewältigen vermag, der hilflos und klein macht, der die eigene Entbehrlichkeit und Nutzlosigkeit grell ausleuchtet.“</p>	<p>Fähigkeit, etwas zu vermeiden oder auszuschließen Fähigkeit, Schutz zu organisieren</p>

1.2 Does Information mean Knowledge?

After this encirclement of the term and the concept of knowledge in the meaning of Stehr it is now important to delineate knowledge of related concepts; especially the differentiation between knowledge and information plays an important role. As a matter of fact you will find a "schier unüberwindlichen Wust von rivalisierenden Wissens- und / oder Informationskonzepten", which in addition „aus mehreren epistemologischen und ontologischen Perspektiven hervorgegangen sind“.⁷ Particularly suitable for this work is the definition of William F. James, which allows a combination with the idea of knowledge as capacity to act. James describes the distinction between knowledge and information as follows: "I am acquainted with many people and things, which I know very little about, except their presence in the places where I have met them. I know the color blue when I see it, and the flavor of a pear when I taste it; I know an inch when I move my finger through it; a second in time, when I feel it pass; an effort of attention when I make it; a difference between two things when I notice it; but *about* the inner nature of these facts or what makes them what they are, I can say nothing at all."⁸

This introduces the distinction by the idea that information are relatively freely available, relatively few are protected and regulated, and relatively easy to handle / implement. Knowledge, however, has a higher level of recording and processing. Only the knowledge in this hierarchic constellation leads to the capacity to act, while information alone are not (but they are probably in most cases the basis for the knowledge either directly or as an aid in the implementation, usually for a decision-making is both required). So we can see:

⁷ Stehr, 2001, page 112

⁸ James, 1890, page 211 (see Stehr, 2001, page 112)

knowledge is the possibility to act in a social context. This knowledge is central to the content of a post-industrial knowledge society.

2. Towards the Knowledge Society

The emergence of knowledge societies Stehr describes as a lengthy process, which is difficult to observe and is not easy to society or its members („eingefahrene Verhaltensweisen werden gestört, Orientierungen verlieren an Bedeutung“)⁹. Stehr explains: „Wissensgesellschaften sind nicht Ergebnis eines einfachen, eindimensionalen, gesellschaftlichen Wandlungsprozesses. [...] Es sind viele konkrete soziale und politische Wege, die zur Wissensgesellschaft führen.“¹⁰ For this work it is now important to understand the development of societies. This will be done based on the division preindustrial / industrial, and finally the post-industrial society, which here should be seen as synonymous to the knowledge society (other than usual in the literature; the differences are too subtle to allow them to introduce a reasonable extent.)

2.1 Knowledge Society - a Definition

We start with knowledge in the knowledge society: knowledge is the basic resource, and as such knowledge is at least equal to the classical production factors labor and property / capital.¹¹ Two major trends for the emergence of knowledge societies and these conditions are the increase of the general assets in large parts of Europe and other societies, on the other hand, the increased level of education in general.

Let us first consider a tabular outline the three basic forms of society, based on Daniel Bell:

⁹ Stehr, 2001, page 119

¹⁰ Stehr, 2001, 119 / 120

¹¹ see e.g. Stehr, 1994

	Vorindustrielle Gesellschaft	Industrielle Gesellschaft	Postindustrielle Gesellschaft
Ressourcen	Grund und Boden	Maschinen	Wissen
Gesellschaftlicher Schwerpunkt	Bauernhof Plantage	Unternehmen	Universität Forschungsinstitut
Herrschende Position	Grundbesitzer Militär	Unternehmer	Wissenschaftler Forscher
Machtausübung	unmittelbar	indirekter Einfluss auf die Politik	Gleichgewicht technisch-politischer Kräfte, Privilegien und Rechte
Klassenbasis	Eigentum militärische Macht	Eigentum politische Organisation technisches Können	technisches Können politische Organisation
Zugangsbasis	Erbrecht Beschlagnahme	Erbrecht Protektion Bildung	Bildung Mobilisierung Kooperation

Conditions and bases of social inequality: stratification and power based on Bell, cited by Stehr, 1994, page 186

2.2. key factors for the change - a note on

At this point we pass a detailed look at the reasons for the change from one form of society to the next, for our interest in finding it is enough to have a keyword list of factors. First, however, it still should be pointed out that the industrial society and a capitalist society can not be equated, as it often to read. The Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung pointed out that „die kapitalistische und privatwirtschaftliche Ordnung sind offensichtlich nicht identisch mit dem, was wir Industriegesellschaft nennen. Es gibt vielmehr Industriegesellschaften

unter privatwirtschaftlicher und auch unter staatswirtschaftlichen Bedingungen.“¹²

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preindustrial to industrial	industrial to postindustrial
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Urbanization of a large proportion of the population - the economic emphasis is shifting from agriculture to industry and trade - Separation of household and workplace - changing position, shape and function of family - Introduction of a public education / school system - domestic work as the main form of income for the majority of the population - Differentiation of the workforce into different layers, such as staff and workers - Bureaucratization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development and growth of new information and communication technologies and their commercial use - new forms of knowledge production, knowledge as an important driver of economic growth, in addition to labor and capital - increasing importance of school education and training processes - increasing importance of communication and knowledge-intensive services ("knowledge work")

In the already introduced tabular overview after Bell now several important conclusions can be found. Relevant for us is the question of the resource in the form of a given society, and the access to this. Here we can find the access through inheritance in the preindustrial society and in the industrial as the most important access.

For the postindustrial knowledge society, however, access no longer matters. With time, i.e. already in the industrial society hinted, education gets the function of inheritance as the main access off base.

To make this very clear: knowledge is the main resource of our time.

¹² Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (online)

¹³ Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (online)

¹⁴ cf Martin Heidenreich, Merkmale der Wissensgesellschaft (online)

3. Education injustice exemplified Germany

Once we have determined educational as major access for active participation in the knowledge society it is now to analyze the allocation of this key. This has a special emphasis on the current situation in the Federal Republic of Germany, which is empirically known in detail and where in the core of the interpretation of these data there is no controversial.

Firstly, we look at the institutional level of the German educational landscape on its influence on a possible social selectivity. Here we can determine that Germany has a relatively sophisticated and highly structured educational system (nursery, primary, secondary general or vocational school, various forms of higher education, and finally lifelong training), resulting in multiple transitions (from one part of the system in the next / another) leads. This should make the system flexible on any mistakes of teachers, late discovered potentials (or newly discovered motivation) by a change of the kind of school. The writer of this paper can for example remember schoolmates which have changed relatively late, ie in the pre- or during Abitur-time by a school on his high school, while other classmates have left or are changed after the 10th Class of the Gymnasium (which is in Hamburg, which formally corresponds to secondary school) the school. However, the question arises whether the many transitions achieved their real goal - flexibility and fairness in the assessment of individuals - de facto, or whether this remains a theoretical possibility.

Hartmut Ditton describes the problem: „Der Problematik einer vorzeitigen Fixierung auf bestimm-te Laufbahnen innerhalb des stark gegliederten Schulsystems sollte damit [der Möglichkeit eines späteren Wechsels zwischen den Teilsystemen] wirksam begegnet werden können. Diese Rechnung scheint allerdings nicht aufzugehen: Alle internationalen Vergleichsstudien zeigen, dass das System kein hohes Leistungsniveau und auch keinen besonders hohen Anteil an Absolventen mit Spitzenleistungen hervorbringt. Hingegen ist der Anteil an Schülern mit schwachen Leistungen hoch und die Streuung der zum Abschluss der Pflichtschulzeit erreichten Basiskompetenzen (Lesen, Mathematik und Naturwissenschaften) außergewöhnlich groß. Zudem ist die

Koppelung des Bildungserfolgs an die soziale Herkunft in kaum einem anderen Land so eng wie in Deutschland.“¹⁵

For this social injustice Renate Valtin developed four fundamental deprivation as a cause:¹⁶

The *primary* disadvantage is already ahead of the educational institutions, in the family. Here it can be seen that some children are very poorly prepared at home and by their parental environment for educational career, both in a methodological perspective (reading ability) and indirectly (healthy diet, a general model function of the parents).

Secondary and *tertiary* disadvantage is then at the recommendation for graduate school, so at one of the transitions outlined above (its being understood that this first recommendation is a very crucial, since it often has impact to the entire course of further education shapes). At the direction of this initial decision must be established both by the preference of the parents as well as in the actual recommendation by teachers significant social selection takes place. Valtin leads referring to the IGLU 2006 - study: „Die Wahrscheinlichkeit für eine Gymnasialpräferenz ist bei Eltern aus der oberen Dienstklasse bei gleichen Lesekompetenzen und kognitiven Grundfähigkeiten des Kindes 9-mal höher als bei un- und angelernten Arbeitern und fast 6-mal höher als bei Facharbeitereltern. Für die Einschätzung der Lehrer gilt: Kinder aus der oberen Dienstklasse haben eine fast 5-mal höhere Chance, eine Gymnasialempfehlung von ihren Grundschullehrern und -lehrerinnen zu erhalten.“ The reasons are various, and there are statements from sociolinguistic to psychological theories, however, for our consideration this does not play a greater role.

During the first three forms of deprivation can be found in many European countries, Valtin detects a specific *fourth* disadvantage: the early selection of students in Germany. These mechanisms „fördern die soziale Segregation der Heranwachsenden“ and create social environment in the meaning of Baumert /

¹⁵ Zukunftsvermögen Bildung / McKinsey & Company, 2008

¹⁶ cf / cp Soziale Herkunft entscheidet über Bildungserfolg / FES, 2008

Schümer, which again fix existing disadvantages in long-term view: „In Schulen mit hohen Anteilen ebenfalls benachteiligter Schülerinnen und Schüler leisten diese weniger, als man aufgrund ihrer individuellen Lernvoraussetzungen erwarten könnte.“ Finally, Valtin in a total consideration determined that „in Staaten mit Schulsystemen, in denen die Gliederung zu einem frühen Zeitpunkt beginnt [...] große sozioökonomische Ungleichheiten [bestehen], ohne erkennbare Vorteile für die Qualität der Leistung.“ Also, the UN Special Rapporteur on right to education, Vernor Muñoz Villalobos, had in his report to the Federal Government 2006 „den Eindruck, dass das Bildungssystem sich nicht notwendigerweise an der Inklusion der Menschen orientiert, sondern auch an der Aufteilung als Bildungsstrategie. Die Tatsache, dass diese Aufteilung in Folge einer Einstufung in der 4. Klasse, also ab dem Alter von zehn Jahren, stattfindet, bringt eine grundsätzliche Schwierigkeit mit sich. [...] Die Ergebnisse dieser Einstufung, die aus unserer Sicht sehr früh vorgenommen wird, berücksichtigen nicht immer die Notwendigkeit, alle Potenziale der Jungen und Mädchen zu entwickeln. Man kann den Eindruck haben, dass die Ergebnisse dieses Einstufungsprozesses sich eher aus dem System ergeben, als die Bedürfnisse der Kinder zu berücksichtigen. Dies könnte dazu führen, dass dem Prinzip des übergeordneten Interesses des Kindes widersprochen wird.“¹⁷

The problems which had been shown in a very diplomatic way lead to the phenomenon of social selection in the German education system, and can be historically understood: „Das Schul- und Bildungssystem“, writes Peter Fauser, „wird von Strukturen geprägt, die im 19. Jahrhundert entstanden sind. Schulen und Hochschulen sollten die Tüchtigkeit des Einzelnen steigern, nicht aber – von besonders Begabten abgesehen – über Herkunft und Stand hinausführen. Auch wenn seitdem immer mehr Heranwachsende immer höhere Bildungsabschlüsse erreichen, gilt doch: Das Bildungssystem koppelt bis heute Herkunft und Zukunft zu stark. Damit wird es aber den veränderten Bedingungen nicht mehr gerecht [...]“.¹⁸

¹⁷ Prof. Muñoz said this at the press conference about his report in Berlin, 21.02.2006

¹⁸ Zukunftsvermögen Bildung / McKinsey & Company, 2008

4. Conclusion and personal statement

When a knowledge society is based primarily on knowledge, an unequal spreading of knowledge is unfair. Such an unequal spreading can result from an unequal spreading of education as the key to knowledge. If we can state a social selection and an unequal spreading of educational chances resulting from it, then the knowledge society is an unfair society. At least in its actual realization. But the theoretical construction of the knowledge society talks about a high grade of fairness in educational systems. Like shown in the last chapter of my thesis, the German educational system is social selective in a deep manner. Concerning this the spreading of knowledge is unfair. Entry to the knowledge society is offered to more parts the society that a better political and social background.

I have to state that the knowledge society in its realization in the Federal Republic of Germany is an unequal society today.

But this is an analysis of the status quo and not a forecast for middle terms or for long terms. The situation in Germany forces a change under the help of every citizen. Germany will be a knowledge society today and in the future. Therefore, it is important to improve our production and export performances and to use our potential of well-educated young citizens. Ever dropout and non-student is a dismissal for the whole economical environment of the Federal Republic of Germany. Furthermore, our generation has to work with big topics like Terrorism, the Climate Change, Demographics, and cultural change etc. From this point of view it is important that every high potential gets a chance of education. We need every educated input.

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Ehrenwörtliche Erklärung

Ich erkläre hiermit ehrenwörtlich, dass ich die vorliegende Seminararbeit mit dem Thema:

**Is the knowledge society an unjust society?
About the social selection of german postindustrial education**

selbstständig und ohne fremde Hilfe angefertigt habe.

Die Übernahme wörtlicher Zitate sowie die Verwendung der Gedanken anderer Autoren habe ich an den entsprechenden Stellen der Arbeit kenntlich gemacht.

Ich bin mir bewusst, dass eine falsche Erklärung rechtliche Folgen haben wird.

Friedrichshafen, den 20. April 2009

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