



Globalisation, E-learning and the Monetary Pressure on the Educational Field

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Summary

Globalisation, this is my thesis, change first the trade of goods and services, produce a mercantilist pressure on different political fields and affect finally as a consequence effectively our normative comprehension of education. As states will be more and more under pressure to compete on an economic basis against each other they will rank decisions which generate jobs higher than any thing else. Also Education policy is changing its focus. E-learning is a driving force to bring together education, trade of ICT equipment, trade of educational used content and trade of study degrees and to merge the different objectives into effective distribution of knowledge and maximising profits.

1. Globalisation and the crises of the nation

I would like to introduce my article with a definition, explaining how I understand the sociological term globalisation. The German economist and sociologist Franz-Xaver Kaufmann (Kaufmann, 1998) choose a distinction of the term globalisation into three different types of processes: Inter-nationalisation, globalisation and trans-nationalisation. Inter-nationalisation describes the loss of impact of national borders and the increased importance of cross-border transactions, for example in the field of pure financial affairs, as well as in the field of sciences or in private communication.

Globalisation is defined by the emergence of world-wide and real-time communication and the intensification of trade of goods and services across borders and continents with the help of modern communication technologies and transport possibilities. The natural limitations given by time and space become less important for actors.

Following Kaufmann, trans-nationalisation emerge when actors that cannot be controlled by public bodies any more. For example a common strategy of so called "global players" is like that: develop a product in the US, produce it in Pakistan, sell it in Europe and finally pay marginal taxes on profit on the Virgin Iceland.

The sociologist and political scientist Fritz W. Scharpf conclude from the loss of the capacity of political and public institutions to act on the political-economic changes that come along with the globalisation with this very important appraisalment: He says, "The internationalisation of the economics and the system-competition between the states under present conditions will favour the mobile actors and the owners of mobile factors of production and will limit the action possibilities of the states." (Scharpf, 1997)

Table 1: Probable impact of the institutional competition (Scharpf, 1998)

| type of regulation | type of competition | | | |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|------------------|-----|
| | market demand | portfolio investment | national revenue | tax |
| <i>referred to the development and production of products</i> | | | | |
| coordinative | helpful | neutral | neutral | |
| regulative | helpful / neutral | neutral | neutral | |
| <i>referred to the process</i> | | | | |
| environmental protection | corruptive / neutral | corruptive / neutral | corruptive | |
| social policy | corruptive | corruptive | corruptive | |
| <i>taxes on...</i> | | | | |
| consumption | neutral | neutral | helpful | |
| real property income | neutral | neutral | helpful | |
| capital income | neutral | very corruptive | corruptive | |

Such theses, which describe a change in the relationship between the state and the economy, were frequently raised in the recent years and ended often in the judgement of the farewell on the state, as a result of the liberalisation of the global competition or differently said: The consequence of the globalisation is the end of the nation-state. The process of the loss of power of the state is roughly following: The state is an entity, which refers clearly to an area, i.e. it is not mobile. The economy however increases in mobility and loses its limit to a specified space. Due to reductions of costs and acceleration of transport and communication, emergence of new international sales markets, development of extensive sales structures, development of world-wide production and planning competencies, emergence of international standards for the planning, manufacturing, storage, transport and the sale of industrial goods, employment intensive locations do not only become exchangeable for companies but have to be exchanged from an economic point of view. The criteria how a company choose a location for the production, storage or disposal of a good or service has to be weight out from case to case.

Among the reasons for decisions to move or to stay are the expenditure for staff (wage and ancillary wages), the taxation of the profits, the expenditures for the installation and maintenance of an establishment, national regulations (e.g. environmental policy) the proximity to the outlet, availability of sufficient qualified personnel, traffic routes, security and political stability of a region. All this and much more can be decisive, for a choice depending on the form of business organisation. The companies have the spatial choice. The political actors have no choice.

It is up to the public institutions to organise the ancillary conditions, regulations and laws in such a way that a nation increases in attractiveness for transnational companies relatively to other nations. The state has an interest in the occupation of its citizens in private sector companies. The orientation of political decisions on occupation rates led in the past to an increased prosperity of the community. Under the pressure of the mobility of companies and the mobility of jobs, states find themselves in an inconvenient situation of competition against each other.

Under such conditions of competition the possibilities of nations to decide and act, which are connected to questions about the economical attractiveness of their location, are reduced so that sometimes occurs a contradiction between promotion of economy development and public interest.

Fritz Scharpf however knows about the fact that under the pressure of competition nations uses to sell their traditional welfare system under value, with the consequence that an apparently increase of free-market-efficiency can reduce prosperity in the civil society. He even comes to the result that finally the optimally functional market for private goods can produce distribution effects which would not be by any means justifiable according to normative criteria of a socially justified apportionment. In this case this sentence comes not of any ATTAC-collaborator or other left-wing protesters but from the former director of the Max-Planck-Institute for the studies of societies in Cologne. (Scharpf, 1997)

Under these conditions, the phenomenon arise which forces nations to enhance the process of deregulations and the dismantling of the social welfare system under competition conditions between the states. This is also summarised under the key word "race to the bottom". In the US a population is already formed, which works under conditions of lowest employment standards and low wages. There originated the phenomenon of the "working poor": People, closely to the lowest level of subsistence, with substantial loss of socio-political rights (e.g. industrial safety, protection against dismissal, prohibition of union membership) even with one or also several incomes, particularly in the so often praised new service occupation. Driving in the morning a taxi, walking at noon with dogs in a park and working for McDonalds in the evening at the cash box doesn't produce any prosperity, no old-age pension, no additional job-related skills to advance the situation of work.

2. The crisis of the educational policy

The general crisis of the state is thus roughly presented. But political action faces different problems in each political field: the organisation of the public finances, the public security, the health service, the educational system, external relations and others. The globalisation dynamics expresses itself in each of the political fields in a very specific way. Each political field has different restrictions, which the globalisation imposes to it. In the preparation of my article I thought about whether I would like to show the impact the globalisation has on the evolvement of new educational institutions and the political decision taken for them. Part of my article could be to present transnational educational institutions and their way to diffuse educational content and services with a strong market orientated philosophy to a world-wide audience: For example the University of Phoenix offering a wide range of degrees up to PhD level online or the Universidad Obierda de Catalunya as the most competitive European distance teaching university or the many private universities in possession of companies like the Dutch company Phillips with its High Tech Campus in Eindhoven or the Italian energy company ENI with its Corporate University in Milan. There are many examples like that with the effect that the borderline between offering education and selling degrees can become very small even though the market seems to require such goods. Handling the issue of changes in the educational field with such examples is an easy exercise, to show how a school yard becomes a market place with students becoming costumers. A discussion about educational goals in such institutions is completely unnecessary and changes

into the question of functionality of teaching content.¹ In the case of these examples it could be interesting to show how product- and market-oriented education and research cannot be separated any more to the training of product- and market-relevant competences and the direct recruitment of future company employees. A holistic or even humanistic (to be more precise) view of learning as it is often presumed with the life-long-learning motto seems impossible under such conditions.

In connection with this matter the next question to be discussed could be the role of the e-learning technology as a medium and simultaneously as an instructional content and given the information society as something true as an educational objective: How does e-learning, also considering the current evolutions in the GATT-negotiation (WTO, 2005), foster the international trade of educational services and goods and intensify the pressure on national political deciders to deliberate the educational institutions and to change public control into principles of a free market? However, all these changes will not only affect the institutional level but will question also the historically grown educational normative principles, like the humanistic well-founded concept of education as an identity creating process.

3. Market-oriented reinterpretation of educational problems

In an earlier publication I expressed my thoughts about the question, which knowledge and/or which competences are essential for individuals in the future, in order to face the requirements of a society under the signs of the globalisation and to obtain the ability to live, love and work as a self-determined individual (Angilletta, 2003). Here I want to refer to a study financed by the German ministry for education and research the BMBF, entitled "Potentials and dimensions of the knowledge society - consequences for educational processes and educational structures". For this scope more than 500 educational experts and 500 representatives of different scientific disciplines were interviewed. One of the results of this investigation was summarised in a report as follows: "Personal and social competences as well as current (political and social) topics are underrepresented in the education system and it is recommended to expand them in the future." And it continues, "... that it depends in the future strongly on the people and its personal and social competences. Goal of education must become thus not only to disseminate broad and overall general knowledge, but in particular to develop the personality." It exist many studies and surveys with similar results: Softly Skills, learning how to learn and thinking in complex and global structures are supposed to become more and more important.

But political decision makers are under an overwhelming economic pressure and strongly orientated towards a simplified preparation of citizens into "21st century employers". Under globalisation-competition for "more and better jobs" (European Council, 2000) the definition of the term eSkills is a clear expression of a terminology that tries to be educational and to attach to a traditional understanding of self-determined individuals but it cannot hide the strong orientation towards a philosophy of individuals as just working and consuming citizens. The term eSkills tries to summarize the crucial competences of competitive citizens in the digital age. E-learning has to carry in this context the special role as mediator and at the same time as an objective. In a

¹ This development can be observed in the very competitive "educational market" in the US. A funny exaggeration of this development is the story of the Trinity Southern University of Texas, a self declared University hat used to sell degrees without any direct contact to the costumers. This led in 2004 to an investigation by the Pennsylvania federal prosecutor on illegal selling bogus academic degrees. A funny story about this could be read under USA Today (USA Today 2004).

publication of the European Commission, Directorate-General Enterprise and Industry together with the EU financed agency for the advancement of the vocational training CEDEFOP eSkills is defined as follows: „The importance of eSkills: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has considerable impact on the overall economy and a significant effect on productivity growth approaching several percentage points in many countries. The use of ICT throughout the value chain contributes to improved business performance and trends suggest that ICT will continue to be a driver of growth. (...) The term e-skills covers mainly three categories:

1. *ICT practitioner skills*: The capabilities required for researching, developing and designing, managing, the producing, consulting, marketing and selling, the integrating, installing and administrating, the maintaining, supporting and service of, ICT systems;

2. *ICT user skills*: the capabilities required for effective application of ICT systems and devices by the individual. ICT users apply systems as tools in support of their own work, which is, in most cases, not ICT. User skills cover the utilisation of common generic software tools and the use of specialised tools supporting business functions within industries other than the ICT industry;

3. *e-Business skills*: the capabilities needed to exploit opportunities provided by ICT, notably the Internet, to ensure more efficient and effective performance of different types of organisations, to explore possibilities for new ways of conducting business and organisational processes, and to establish new businesses.” (European Commission Enterprise and Industry Directorate-General, 2004)

In summary: the highest goal of the society is the global economic competitiveness by means of individuals which can produce, develop, use and consume digital goods.

4. Definition and indicators for e-learning

I would like to introduce a definition that originates from the European Commission defining e-learning as the "use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration". (European Commission, Directorate-General Education and Culture, 2001) So e-learning could be understood as a method to foster quality in learning settings. Following this the question of the measurement of learning-quality arises which is an issue that is already difficult to answer for schools and universities in classical teaching situations. With eLearning the answers to this question seems to drive particularly beautiful blooms. The European Union constituted the knowledge society as the most important engine for occupation, competitiveness and prosperity for the attainment of the goals, which were formulated on the EU summit of Lisbon in the summer 2000. At the European Council in Lisbon in March 2000, Heads of State set an ambitious target for Europe to become within ten years “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”. (European Council, 2000) In order to make the strategies in the field of education more concrete and to be able to examine the progressions, a number of so-called benchmarks were set up.

If the indicator "number of computers per pupil", still holds doubts if it could be interpreted as an attempt to quantify either the equipment in schools or to retrieve information for the industry how much pc's could still be sold in the different member states of the European Union (Eurydice, 2004), the indicator "data traffic in bits/sec per pupil" excludes all possibility of doubt about the

fact, that educational objectives are not prosecuted with these figures.² The intention is to measure what is measurable as benchmarks have to produce numeric figures to produce something comparable on one hand and on the other to retrieve information about the market capabilities in this field. Just as an example: A short text on one page with standard format covers around 20 Kbytes. A porn in a rather small dissolution about the size of 200x350 pixel and middle quality brings it on more than the double data set. Downloaded by pupils over the Internet, and following the logic of the Eurostat benchmark, the porn could provoke that it has led to a stronger educational use of the internet. In my opinion such figures transform an educational problem into a problem of measurement of efficiency and judgement of market relevance.

Even more certainty arises with a look on the Eurostat Household survey (Eurostat, 2005).

Table 2: Eurostat: Community survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals; ICT Policy indicators, Module D - Question 2

| What types of goods or services did you order over the Internet for private use in the last 12 months? | |
|--|--|
| a) Food / Groceries | |
| b) Household goods (e.g. furniture, toys, etc) | |
| c) Films, music | |
| d) Books / Magazines/ Newspapers/ E-learning material | |
| e) Clothes, sports goods | |
| f) Computer software (incl. video games) | |
| g) Computer hardware | |
| h) Electronic equipment (incl. cameras) | |
| i) Share purchases / Financial services / Insurance | |
| j) Travel and holiday accommodation | |
| k) Tickets for events | |
| l) Lotteries or betting | |
| m) Other | |

The act of learning is in the questionnaire at the same level as the purchase of a book or a magazine and comparable to the purchase of sports goods or tickets for a concert. Learning understood as a good that shall be sold and purchased and is determined under market conditions appear in a longitudinal analysis as an indicator of the European Union. Shall we hope that for the benefit of the Union the figures for this indicator will rise?

Summary

I heard in the past people saying about e-learning that after years of concerted local, national and international efforts a general answer was found. It reads: "The computer". In the future we will have the task to find the fitting question. I would like to call up everyone interested in educational questions to defend the educational issues in evolution of e-learning. Educational scientists have the duty to treat this topic from a society-critical perspective and to research in this field with the

² Compare this also to the 2003 e-readiness rankings - From (The Economist Intelligence Unit and IBM, 2003).

scope to enhance teaching techniques but also to find better ways to strengthen intercultural dialogue between students. If we remain defensive in our discussion about the democratic potentials of e-learning it could be too late to influence it in this way as the economic potentials are already capitalized by the economy with the help of the political decision makers.

The consequences for our understanding of the role of education in our society could be endangered and this could cause irreversibly harms for our social economic and democratic societies.

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