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challenges and reforms in vocational education

aspects of inclusion and exclusion

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The following article takes general considerations about vocational education and particularly the topic of inclusion-exclusion into account. With a focus on Switzerland and its vocational education, a connection from the so-called “social question” to actual problems of inclusion and exclusion is drawn within and also through vocational education. Most notably, the transitions from school to vocational education are shown on the basis of different transitions regimes with a special focus on inclusion and exclusion.

Vocational education and training (VET) from an international perspective is based on a comparative level. The object of research is generally a comparison of educational systems or rather a variety of descriptions that compare similar phenomena in mostly two countries. Differences are perceived predominantly in the context of structural questions and education policies, which are as a matter of fact different, between various countries. Contrary to this, this volume takes up another form of differentiation – the one of inclusion and exclusion – that runs diagonally according to the national systems of vocational education. According to limited resources and a lack of qualifications there are two possibilities: either every VET system is confronted with the question of who should be able to participate in VET or who is excluded from it. VET systems themselves canalize processes of inclusion and exclusion when it comes to both participation in VET and possibilities as well as chances of access to society and the labour market respectively.

Inclusion and exclusion are therefore differentiations that characterize all kinds of systems independent of their national context. They are based on requirements of the system itself, but also on shortages, especially when supply and demand are dehiscent or else when the requirements cannot be met in order to achieve a certain and much demanded good. It is even just a phenomenon that in the age of increased globalisation, processes of exclusion can proceed in an accelerated way or find an abrupt ending: companies transfer their headquarters or their production facilities to another country, special units will be outsourced or new co-operations and fusions take place. Exclusiveness can also affect the corporate culture of a company, for example when English is introduced as the lingua franca or when special academic titles are being established as a requirement for a certain occupation within a company.

The German sociologist Stichweh advocates this categorization in comparison to traditional terms like discrimination, social inequality or poverty because inclusion and exclusion describe a relation and thus should be understood interactively (Stichweh, 2005, p. 51).

On the one hand, the educational system functions according to a meritocratic logic. Educational success and good performances in school enable access to higher education and as a rule make it easier to enter positions in the job-sharing, economic hierarchy. In this respect, education excludes low-achieving youth or rather includes individuals with successful performance certificates.

On the other hand, inclusion and exclusion are results of the interplay of supply and demand and of the availability and accessibility of resources. A restricted supply of apprenticeships and also of university or college places lets corresponding educational opportunities appear to be popular.

In the following contribution, globalisation and its effects upon the VET systems are portrayed and linked with the question whether new phenomena of inclusion and exclusion will result from it. The introducing historical part of the Swiss vocational education ties up to the old and thus often discussed industrial-social debate that discusses the question of social inequality. Here, exclusion is defined as access difficulty or exclusion of social participation. In his study *about marginalisation* (“*Les metamorphoses de la question sociale*”) (1995), Robert Castel described the increasing marginalisation (“*précarisation*”) of work. With that the topic of surplus is given more and more priority that means those people who fall out of the usual parameters and therefore experience some kind of social isolation. While doing this, it is not the same if a whole region gets captured by restructuring measures or for example single representatives in higher hierarchical levels of work. Being dispensable and for that reason superfluous is an experience that does not only affect lower qualified persons how Bude (2008) elaborates it in his volume “*Exklusion*” (*Exclusion*). Even the so-called “baby boomer” generation (Newman, 2008) or later the generation named “internship” are swindled when it comes to the access to jobs with good prospects which are not obligatory related to educational qualifications.

In VET theory, the topic of exclusion has been discussed sparsely. Much literature exists that deals with the support of disadvantaged individuals in general and surely the origin of vocational education efforts are located in the “social question” as well, but altogether, only very few publications relate exclusion to the role of vocational education systematically. Insofar research about social inequality has reached VET finally (Becker & Lauterbach, 2008).