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Knowledge: The New Frontier for Crisis Resolution and Creation

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In recent years, institutions of education have been transformed through an upsurge of policies and reforms. While such reforms have historically developed along various trajectories, more recent reforms have chiefly been advanced by two major aims. On the one hand, these reforms support the transformation of economies that have suffered from crisis. For instance, the OECD has declared that: "Knowledge is now recognised as the driver of productivity and economic growth" (1996, p. 3). On the other hand, the production of knowledge and research should tackle the "grand challenges"[1] of our time posed by globalization – e.g. the energy crisis, limited resources, or climate change – essentially linking it to sustainability policy.

Europe has been at the forefront of these recent processes with agendas that have specifically articulated targets and goals for resolving ecological and economic crises. Some of the key instruments for directing these aims have been the Lisbon Strategy,[2] the Bologna Process for establishing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the Ljubljana Process for developing the European Research Area (ERA), and various other joint study programs, exchange programs, and agendas for creating

a “European area of lifelong learning.” These new initiatives have formed what researchers and policy-makers refer to as a “new Renaissance” in Europe, a paradigm shift in society and politics as profound as the transition from agrarian/feudal to industrial society (European Commission 2009a, p. 8). In particular, the realization of an “Innovation Union” (European Commission 2010, p. 3) should support freely moving research and knowledge as cornerstones for sustainable growth.

The goals of the Lisbon Strategy were elaborated in a 2005 policy paper, which states that: “To be a genuinely competitive, knowledge-based economy, Europe must become better at producing knowledge through research, at diffusing it through education and at applying it through innovation,” referring to its own policy scheme as a “knowledge triangle” (Commission of the European Communities 2005, p. 3). Europe’s threefold strategy is significant for one, because it has created a new model for intensive production, including the turnover of wealth, innovation, and growth of emerging forms of immaterial commodities in times of ecological/economic crisis, which will be examined in more detail in chapter two. It has also provided a new space for extensive spatial expansion through the emergence of these enclosed knowledge economy areas, which promote maximal mobility inside their respective borders, which will be examined in more detail in chapter three. These developing knowledge economy areas can thus compete with other (emerging) knowledge economy areas such as the Maghreb or Australia. Europe aims to spearhead these processes by taking the most aggressive approach to reforming higher education and other institutions of knowledge production. And as these new spatial constellations have allowed Europe to transform its approach to filtering access to universities through

differential inclusion that extends to its borders, higher education has become inextricably linked to the issue of migration in Europe.

The intensive and extensive transformations of structures and institutions of knowledge production should allegedly provide a new "immaterial" and thus post-industrial, non-resource-based sustainable frontier for capital within the context of material and spatial limits and their related ecological/economic crisis. However, the following chapters maintain that when knowledge is integrated and applied within such paradoxical practices, its emancipatory potential and its potential for just sustainability become diminished. It instead merely introduces new technologies for further displacing crises. This is the main argument of part I of this book. Part II juxtaposes radical grassroots practices in which I was involved that present an entirely different perspective by supporting the notion of immaterial knowledge-based social transformation for socially just change. Because part II was the motivation for this research, it ultimately merges with and contests the material in part I, thereby supporting the gravity of the perspectives in part II all the more.

To this end, the following chapters will outline key markers for how higher education has transformed under the influence of the neoliberalization of capitalism and the emergence of Postfordist cognitive capitalism. Part I will outline historical processes that primarily focus on transformations taking place within the European knowledge economy. These examples will also extend to cases of how other world regions have been affected by those transformations in Europe, how they have implemented their own reforms for competing with Europe, and how their histories have influenced European knowledge policies. That recent phase of transformations will be introduced through a brief overview of early links between commercialization and higher education in the

following section. This will be expanded through an examination of transformations of knowledge production through the Cold War era in order to critically analyze the nature of contemporary reform processes.

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1 This term has been developed within both US and EU policy agendas, and has seen widespread use in initiatives that seek to use innovation for solving issues of environmental and economic sustainability.

2 The Lisbon Strategy was a development plan created in 2000 for making the EU the "most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth" by 2010 (Lisbon European Council 2000, n. pag.). It was followed up by the Europe 2020 strategy for another 10-year period starting in March 2010.