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EDITORIAL

The impact of skills and training on local development

Vocational and professional education and training are activities to provide apprentices and other professional newcomers with conceptual knowledge, technical skills, work experience, social aptitude and self-competency. All these activities will enable professional newcomers to accomplish their work tasks while contributing to the learners' personal growth. In this context, "development" means competence improvement and thus relates to the individual's development through learning. Besides such *personal development*, vocational and professional education and training is also considered a means to foster *local development*. Whether vocational and professional education and training really improve local development, and under what conditions, is a largely underexplored field. Lewis (1997) already raised this topic in the First Issue of the International Journal of Training and Development. While Lewis (1997) understood "the local" as the systemic and policy-related institutional level of the nation state, this Special Issue includes further spatial scales, especially on subnational level. This Special Issue collates perspectives of vocational education research and economic geography to explore this field that is relevant for academic debates and policymaking.

The Special Issue endeavours to clarify the question if and how vocational and professional education and training foster local development. To this end, the meaning of local development first needs some specification. "Local development" can mean regional-economic growth, local innovative capabilities, sustainable social change and the ecological transition (Fromhold-Eisebith et al., 2014). Hence, it is always necessary to specify the objectives of local development. At the same time, local development as a theoretical and policy-relevant concept requires a comprehensive approach, comprising socio-economic and ecological development.

If the term "local development" relates to research on regions in the Global South and in emerging economies, critiques from dependency theory and postcolonial perspectives must be involved. Then, the question appears who decides about development objectives and measures, and who is involved in these processes. Academic intervention is difficult and raises the question of legitimacy. Korf (2018) distinguishes two attitudes of (Northern) academics who conduct research in the field of international cooperation. On the one side, they take a position of external critique of the global development apparatus and a distant view. On the other side, there is a position that empathically accepts the productive hermeneutic tension between ethical engagement and developmental practices. The positioning within this field of tensions and contradictions is necessary, particularly in cases of international transfer of vocational and professional education and training.

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Besides the clarification of “development”, it is necessary to specify the “local”. In many contributions, the “local” is simply “here” or “there”; it is not specified explicitly. As political economy significantly influenced the discourse (Crouch et al., 1999; Fortwengel & Jackson, 2016), research on the macrolevel of nations has long prevailed. Furthermore, studies have provided insights at the workplace (Li & Pilz, 2021). Today, there is a growing field of interdisciplinary contributions that provide a perspective on the subnational level of the region (Gessler, 2017; Li & Pilz, 2021; Pilz & Wiemann, 2020).

There are a range of relevant research areas in the intersection of vocational education research and economic geography. The following illustrates some of them.

1. One lively research field considers *social networks and institutional settings*. Locally, these networks and institutions are located in a town, a district of a town, or a rural area. Various studies share this local view, such as studies on clusters (Maskell, 2001), innovative milieus (Maillat, 1998), industrial districts (Boschma & ter Wal, 2007), and regional/territorial innovation systems (Asheim et al., 2007). In fact, there is some evidence that skills and training can promote “local development” (Backes-Gellner & Lehnert, 2021). Skill formation to promote local development requires the commitment of the involved actors, who are regulating, for example, questions of financing, certification, curriculum design and the development of the teaching staff (Li & Pilz, 2017), and who thus create the local “skill ecosystem” (Anderson & Warhurst, 2012; Buchanan et al., 2017; see Wedekind et al. in this Special Issue).
2. A broad stream of literature relates to such organisational actors and particularly analyses *vocational schools and universities* as sites of professional education in cities and rural regions. For example, in economic geography, many contributions have shifted higher education institutions into the focus (Faulconbridge & Hall, 2009; Fromhold-Eisebith & Werker, 2013; Kleibert et al., 2020) as well as non-academic vocational education and training (James, 2012; Phelps et al., 2005). Besides universities and vocational schools, the *company* as additional learning location shifts into focus (Wedekind & Mutereko, 2016). The extent to which companies engage in vocational and professional education and training differs considerably between the different countries and their skill formation systems (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012; Graf, 2021). In many nations, it is common that the company trains pupils and students in internships in a relatively short time span and with a low degree of institutionalisation (Röhrer et al., 2021). Moreover, in countries such as Germany, Austria and Switzerland, there are comprehensive forms of “dual” vocational education and training in companies and vocational schools (Pilz, 2012a). In addition, universities, technical colleges, vocational academies, and so on cooperate with companies in various kinds of dual study programmes.
3. The various actors act on different spatial scales. This requires to follow a *multi-scalar view*, connecting the local scale with other subnational entities, the country and the international level. Even if “scales” are not to be understood as separate and distinct levels, but rather as complex interwoven constructs, the multi-scalar view is helpful in understanding local development through professional and vocational education and training. This is particularly the case for the international transfer of professional and vocational education and training. Such international transfer is a concern for a broad transfer community of multinational companies and international institutional actors, who communicate and cooperate with governments and other actors on the different national and subnational scales (Fuchs, 2020; Wrana & Revilla Diez, 2016).

4. Other contributions discuss the *kind of knowledge* that is relevant for local development. In economic geography, many contributions distinguish analytical (largely codified, academically produced) competencies, synthetic competencies (technology-based, application-oriented, largely tacit) and symbolic competencies (art-based, design-oriented and creative). In the same vein, authors focus on—besides STI (science, technology, innovation) competencies—the doing, using and interacting (DUI) competencies (Asheim et al., 2007; Asheim et al., 2017; Tödtling et al., 2012). The studies therefore consistently emphasise the relevance of practical training in the classes of vocational schools (Boschma et al., 2013; Patel & Pavitt, 1994), universities (Kleibert, 2015; Kleibert et al., 2020), and in related programmes of dual cooperation (Wiemann & Fuchs, 2018). Research in vocational education has long analysed such different stakeholders and their related interests and policies, and those who are affected (the learners and their families). The question “Who profits?” is particularly crucial in the analysis of international transfer activities (Brockmann et al., 2011; Canning & Cloonan, 2002; Pilz, 2012b, 2016).

The Special Issues bundles papers from vocational education research and economic geography, thereby highlighting local development in different parts of the world. The Special Issue starts with studies on regions in the Global South and in emerging economies.

- Volker Wedekind, Presha Ramsarup, Chenjerai Muwaniki, David Monk, Heila Lotz-Sisitka, Simon McGrath and Jo-Anna Russon shift their view on regions in Sub-Sahara-Africa. The authors explore how vocational education and training can be reimagined and redesigned to find new ways towards a responsive “skill ecosystem” of vocational education, which is appropriate for the local context, socially inclusive, and takes the ecological environment seriously.
- In the transition of emerging economies, vocational and professional education and training plays an important role, as it promises socio-economic change in the direction of increased global competitiveness and social development. Promoters of change play a role in this. Marc Schulze and Jana Kleibert critically analyse governments as game-changers by focussing on transnational education for regional economic development in Malaysia and Singapore.
- By continuing the view on regions in emerging economies and by focussing on the Greater Shanghai Area, Judith Wiemann pays attention to an impressively complex setting of actors who are promoting institution-building processes. She argues for the local scale as an important—but too often left aside—level of analysis with regard to studying skill formation.
- Iris Clemens illustrates the emergence of innovations through the encounter of knowledges in “the local”. She takes a view on indigenous knowledges and the circulation of stories. Such knowledge, and related teaching-learning practices, are promoted by narratives in social networks that contribute to transitory processes on a local level. Her study suggests that those who are involved in skill formation are well-advised if they use the productivity and creativity that encounters generate.
- Professional and vocational education and training is also an issue in regions of the Global North. By mirroring the perspective on how actors of countries such as Germany, Austria and Switzerland transfer professional and vocational education and training to countries of the Global South, Martina Fuchs, Johannes Westermeyer, Lena Finken and Matthias Pilz analyse training activities of foreign direct investments in Germany. They find different ways in which foreign investors participate in local training activities and thereby connect to the German skill formation system. Institutional settings, which characterise the German skill formation system, are partially adopted here.

- *Bastian Lange* illustrates how universities' third mission (the knowledge transfer to the local environment) can be realised by collaborative learning of practitioners and academics. The concept of "field configuring events" has initiated inspiring discussions on the relevance of temporary social events and how such encounters generate new relevant knowledges.

The following contributions of this Special Issue are only some examples of emerging topics in the vibrant research field outlined above. They specify some upcoming pathways of the ongoing research within this field.

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