

UNIVERSITÄT LEIPZIG

Institut für Finanzen, Finanzwissenschaft

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Arbeitspapier Nr. 17

Juni 2000

ECOVIN-Arbeitsbericht Nr. 11

Workshop-Paper:

“Towards a learning society”

a seminar on socio-economic research

and european policy –

Guincho, Lisboa, 28-30 May 2000.

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ISSN 1437-5761

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1 Introduction

From May 28 till May 30 2000 the seminar „towards a learning society“ was hold in Quinta da Marinha, Guincho near Lisboa in Portugal. The seminar focused on „Innovation and competence building with social cohesion for europe“.

The starting point is the finding, that the success of people, firms, nations and regions depends upon their 'capability to learn'. Skills and competencies are to be renewed more often than before.¹

The ECOVIN project, an ADAPT-project run by universities in Nottingham (UK), Aalborg (DK), Essen, Jena and Leipzig (D), focusses on the innovation capability of Small and Mediumsize Enterprises (SME). Each of the local projects aims at a certain step in the innovation process or a certain aspect of the innovation process as a whole. Thus, the comepetence to learn, to build new skills and knowledge in SME is the main field of research and coaching done in the ECOVIN project.²

In Leipzig and Essen, the ECOVIN-project teams develop and apply a concept aiming at training „Innovation managers in SME“. Having an expert keeping track on the innovation projects in a SME could help to run such projects more efficiently and resolutely. The training of Innovation managers might strengthen the ability of SME to learn and to develop and apply new knowledge and might thus be seen as a contribution to the learning society.

¹ All information given in this working paper is taken either from the conference materials or from notes taken during the seminar.

² The ECOVIN-project in Leipzig is directed by Professor Dr. Thomas Lenk, Institute of Finance, University of Leipzig. For information see <http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~iffwww>.

For that reason, two members of the Leipzig ECOVIN project team took part in the Seminar. This paper reflects their impressions.

The seminar was attended by both researchers and policy makers on European and national level to develop common understandings on the fields of research that should be supported by the European Community and that the European Community would expect decisions from.³

2 Objectives of the Seminar

The seminar aimed at a cross-disciplinary debate based on European socio-economic research. Three aspects were to be discussed.

The field of **Science, technology and innovation policy** points out, where the driving forces of a Learning society are to be found. An economy based on growth both in financial aspects as in aspects of knowledge and complexity demands educated and skilled people from the Labour markets, especially people able to learn and to adapt new knowledge and skills. These abilities are also to be shown by enterprises as a precondition for competitiveness. Taken the perspective of innovation systems, regions or economies have to build up and maintain their capability to develop and use knowledge.

Concerning **New skills and competencies building** there are contributions to be given by education science and policy.

The frame for all activities is the perspective of **Social exclusion and social integration**. Promoting the unhampered development of the learning economy

³ For an overview on the seminar program and the speakers, see appendix.

results in the exclusion, or increase in relative poverty, of slow learners that in the long run may undermine the social sustainability of the learning economy.

The Seminar aimed at establishing communication between scientists and policy makers on these three fields that relate to innovation, competence building and social cohesion. It should, as one result, help to set the agenda for future socio-economic research.

3 Fields of discussion

3.1 Introductory session: Europe and the learning society

The first paper was presented by BENGT-ÅKE LUNDVALL.⁴ The title of his paper was „Europe and the Learning economy – on the need for reintegrating strategies of firms, social partners and policy makers“.

In the beginning he pointed out the basic hypothesis on a new context of accelerating change, both of knowledge creation and knowledge destruction. This change demands individuals and firms rather to be able to learn than to have access to a certain stock of knowledge. In his opinion, the learning economy calls for lateral thinking and for reintegration of perspectives and strategies that by now lead economy and policy makers separately.

⁴ Department of Business Studies, Aalborg University, Denmark.

The new economy is based on learning on individual, organizational, regional and national level. Since learning is a process based on trust and social capital, in the learning society the importance of the ethical dimension and social capital increases. An economy in which economical success is based on the ability to learn and to use knowledge, people, firms and regions who have this ability will benefit. On the other hand there will be a trend to social exclusion of those peoples, firms or regions who don't have that ability.

Fields of actions are to be seen on several levels. On the level of the firm, there should be affords to develop them to learning organizations. On the level of Industrial relations and Trade unions there should be a concertation between government, business and labour that might be a comparative advantage of Europe. On the European level, there could be affords in several fields of politics. National or regional differences must not be ignored by developing policies that might cover social and distribution policies, labour market policies, education, science and technology policies and industrial policies.

The next topic was brought up by JAMES K. GALBRAITH⁵ who presented his paper „European Unemployment: What is the solution?“

By comparing developments and actual situations he mentioned several fields where Europe could learn from USA.

In his opinion, the – compared to the US – european wage inflexibility is not the source of unemployment, increasing flexibility would rather increase unemployment than reducing it. In education, Europe should emulate the American university

⁵ University of Texas at Austin, LBJ School of Public Affairs, USA.

system, e.g. by creating some pan-European universities and by combining public and private money in budgeting the universities.

Europe needs to develop the post-war national mechanisms of the welfare state to a continental scale.

The possibilities of European Regions in helping firms in generating learning was the topic of the next contribution. BEATRIZ MUÑOZ-SECA⁶ presented „Towards a Europe of Knowledge: Policy spaces to generate learning“. In her point of view, there is a need for a consistent frame of reference enabling policy makers to act consistently upon the the requirements of European workers and firms in knowledge generation.

The spaces to generate learning within firms are thus: The **person space**, containing the factors related to the person's need of adaption and change: People have to build up inference competencies which enable them to structure both their knowledge and the learning process, and technological competencies that enable them to manage their present work.

The **innovation space**, containing elements related to the company's need to change.

The **enhancer space** containing the enablers of processes that might not be generated in the enterprise itself. One field is Technology that might be used in firms while it was developed outside. Training of managers, employees and firms might becoming a critical competitive factor for Europe.

⁶ Operations and Technology Management, IESE – University of Navarra, Spain.

Finally a **control space** containing the elements the Administration has to generate and contribute. The maintaining of awareness in society or economy might be a task politics can do. The provision of access to information might be another.

3.2 Second session: Institutional and organizational innovation

„The policy relevance of the national systems of innovation approach“ was the title of the paper presented by ANTHONY BARTZOKAS⁷.

National systems of Innovation may have several kinds of influence on innovation activities: They provide the opportunities to acquire unexploited knowledge; they establish forms of distribute incentives to innovate; they distribute resources available to invest in innovation; they are related to the capabilities of the relevant organisations to develop innovation strategies and manage the process of innovation.

Policy-oriented research should provide a flexible though robust framework that identifies policy objectives and defines rationales for policy actions. Once such a framework is established, policies should be monitored and improved. Co-ordination between national, regional and local authorities helps to reduce duplications and inefficiency. Finally, the ways of making business and industry policies should be brought together with other policies: governments must be ready to learn and to change.

EDWARD LORENZ⁸ dealt with „Knowledge in the economy and organisational change“, followed by JAMES WICKHAM⁹ on „Organizational change, work and ICTs“. Both

⁷ UNU/Intech, Maastricht, The Netherlands.

⁸ Centre d'Etudes de l'Emploi, Noisy-le-Grand, France.

stressed the importance of an integrated approach to technology and innovation policy, coordinated with labour markets, education and training. They wonder if the role of trade unions and other employe-representation mechanisms are still an adequate mean in managing the learning economy.

3.3 Third session: New skills and competence building

The first speaker in the third session was JEAN-PAUL REEFF¹⁰, talking about „Competence Building and Education“.

He pointed out that concerning the Education System several steps should be taken: First, educational goals have to be defined, leaving space for national and regional choices and considering the priorities set by politics and business. Second, scientific basis for socio-economic and educational research has to be built and educational interventions have to be watched. Finally, research on assessment and evaluation of the goals and policies has to be established.

The paper „New skill needs and competence building to promote social cohesion“ by HILARY STEEDMAN¹¹ dealt with implications of technological and organisational change on social cohesion.

Moving towards a knowledge-based economy brings about the exclusion of large parts of the labour force from the process of wealth generation due to their inadequate levels of skill and competence. Social skills found out to be important in Labour markets of different European countries are: The ability to **learn**

⁹ University of Dublin, Ireland.

¹⁰ Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, Luxemburg.

independently; the capacity to **react to and deal effectively with uncertainty and unpredictability** in the work environment; the capacity to **manage interpersonal relations** successfully; the ability to **manage time and own work**.

„Competence building in organisations“ was the title of the paper by **Michael Kuhn**¹², presenting research activities of seven TSER (Targeted Socio-Economic Research) research projects related to the field of competence building in organisations.

3.4 Fourth session: Social structures and changing working patterns

„Unemployment, Work and Welfare“ were the subject of the paper by DUNCAN GALLIE¹³. The most important finding was that greater financial benefits (connected with a generous welfare policy) provides people with the resources for more careful job search and for job search over a wider labour market while financial pressures may succeed in pushing people more rapidly into any just available job but at the cost of low employment stability and recurrent unemployment.

Social cohesion was also the main topic in the papers of CHIARA SARACENO¹⁴ and ALISON BOOTH¹⁵ („The local perspective on social exclusion: what we may learn from TSER research“ and „Prospects for trade unions in western Europe“).

¹¹ Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics, United Kingdom.

¹² University of Bremen, Germany.

¹³ Nuffield College, United Kingdom.

¹⁴ University of Turin, Italy.

¹⁵ University of Essex, United Kingdom.

3.5 Final session: Socio-economic research towards future

In a final session the chairpeople of the sessions summarized the discussions.

Attention was paid to the question, what tasks are to be done by the socio-economic research community to keep Europe fit for the learning society.

4 Conclusion: The Training of Innovation Managers in SME in a learning society

4.1 The concept of „Training Innovation Managers in SME“

The concept of a Training of Innovation Managers in SME was developed and tested during the 30-month ECOVIN-project at the Universities of Leipzig and Essen.

The Training consisted of three parts. First, there was a phase of **Seminars** in which the fields of Innovationmanagement were presented and discussed. These seminars were hold in the whole group of the people to be trained.¹⁶

This phase was followed and completed by a series of **Coaching-Sessions**. These Sessions took place right in the SME of the participants, dealing with actual innovation-projects of the enterprises.

Additionally there were some Workshops who covered special topics related to the management of innovations.

¹⁶ Delegates from 8 SME have been trainend within the ECOVIN-project at Leipzigs University.

4.2 Contribution to the objectives and discussions of the Lisboa-Seminar

As mentioned in the first chapter, there were three aspects to be considered at the seminar.

Referring to **Science, technology and innovation policy**, the Training of Innovation Managers in SME might be seen as an element of an innovation system that can, from the perspective of policy, help single people and enterprises to strengthen the ability to learn, to create and use knowledge.

As to **New skills and competencies building** the Training, again, might be interesting, since it combines seminar and coaching and thereby offers the opportunities both to give overview on the whole field of innovation management and to apply certain instruments on managing real innovation projects in the enterprises. The concept could play an role in **social integration** if the participants of the Training are unemployed. The training could enhance their chances to become a new job, since their capabilities on innovation management might be looked for by SME.

Appendix

Seminar-programme

Session 1. INAUGURAL SESSION

- Bengt-Aake Lundvall , Aalborg University, DK: "Towards the Learning Society: challenges and opportunities for Europe"
- James Galbraith, University of Texas at Austin, LBJ School of Public Affairs, USA: "Technology, Inequality and unemployment in Europe and America"
- Beatriz Munoz-Seca, University of Navarra, Spain: "The Learning Age: towards a Europe of knowledge"

Session 2. INSTITUTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL INNOVATION

- Anthony Bartzokas, The United Nations University, INTECH, NL: "Systems of innovation, Challenges and Policy issues"
- Edward Lorenz, Centre d'Etudes de l'Emploi, Le Descartes I, FR: "knowledge in the economy and organizational change"
- James Wickham, University of Dublin, IR: "Organizational change, work and ICT's"

Session 3. NEW SKILLS AND COMPETENCE BUILDING

- Jean Paul Reeff, Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, LU: "Competence building and Education"
- Hillary Steedman, London School of Economics, UK: "Low skills - a social problem in Europe"
- Michael Kuhn, University of Bremen, DE: "Competence building in Organisations"

Session 4. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND CHANGING WORKING PATTERNS

- Duncan Gallie, Nuffield College, UK: "Unemployment, work and welfare"
- Chiara Saraceno, University of Turin, IT: "Local strategies to enhance social cohesion"
- Alison Booth, University of Essex, UK: "Public Policies towards Social cohesion"

Session 5. CLOSING SESSION: SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESEARCH TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Summary of thematic sessions:

- Benjamin Coriat, Centre de Recherche en Economie Industrielle Intl. Paris, FR: "Institutional and Organizational Innovation"
- Roberto Carneiro, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, PT: "New Skills and Competence Building"
- Hans-Peter Blossfeld, University of Bielefeld, DE: "Social Structures and Changing Working Patterns"
- Luc Soete, MERIT, University of Maastricht, NL: Closing paper.

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