

A Great Transformation? Global Perspectives on Contemporary Capitalisms

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Since neoliberalism proliferated starting in the late 1980s, the interest in the work of the Austro-Hungarian scholar Karl Polanyi has grown again. His book „The Great Transformation,“ published in 1944, discusses the rise of fascism in relation to unleashed market forces. He argued that the dis-embedding of markets from society was in its consequence endangering societal cohesion. An international and interdisciplinary field of scholars revived Polanyi’s thoughts on the conference, applying his theoretical elaborations to current research, effecting historical comparisons and tracing the evolution of his (economic) ideas. A special visitor was KARI POLANYI-LEVITT (Montréal), Prof. em. of Economics and daughter of Karl Polanyi. She remembered in her talks the reception of Polanyi in Austria and, in specific, a conference on Polanyi in Vienna about 20 years ago. In a very personal manner, she recalled how the collapse of societies at the beginning of the 20th century disturbed Polanyi, which led him to seeking explanations for these developments.

GARETH DALE (London), biographer and author of several books on Karl Polanyi, pointed into the same direction and gave further insights into the „Polanyian endeavor.“ During the presentation of his biography

„Karl Polanyi. A life on the left,“ Dale tried to give some insights into the works Polanyi drew on. Polanyi went back to Ricardo trying to understand the rise of fascism in its relation to liberalism, which he saw as quite extremist ideology. In the same plenary, ANDREAS NOVY (Vienna) stressed the Austrian-Hungarian background of Polanyi, which led him to consider center-periphery dynamics in his work. Polanyi was not a progressivist, but had a dialectic understanding of development. This, as Novy argued, makes him interesting for current debates, e.g. on socio-ecological challenges, as explaining and bringing together these contradictions was his lifelong concern.

In his opening key note, MICHAEL BURAWOY (Berkeley) discussed four different ways of engaging Polanyi: dismissing, canonizing, borrowing or reconstructing his work. He gave several examples of his own research for the third option, such as his analysis of market transition in Russia or migrant labor in South Africa and California. The reconstruction of Polanyi is – according to Burawoy – either practiced as advocating for „Polanyi after Marxism,“ which assumes that after the end of communism remains only the option to (better) regulate capitalist markets. The alternative is the defense of „Marxism after Polanyi,“ mutually reinvigorating Marxism and Polanyi. In this context, Burawoy suggested to relate Gramsci’s work to Polanyi, as the latter lacked a profound understanding of the State. Drawing on Polyanian concepts, Burawoy identified the period of neoliberalization as third wave of marketization, which followed the two waves Polanyi had described and which he never had expected to come. Specific disembedding processes characterized each wave; the current one the commodification of nature and recently knowledge. As Burawoy pointed out, Polanyi was quite euro-centric and did not have the view that capitalism itself was driving commodification, so he thought society would never allow free markets again.

In another strain of debate, several scholars contextualized Polanyi’s ideas in the history of political thought. BOB JESSOP (Lancaster) effected a fascinating comparison between the approaches of Polanyi and Karl Marx. At first

glance, both do not seem to have much in common – which can be credited among other things to Polanyi’s explicit rejection of Marx. However, Jessop proposed to dig further under the surface of Polanyi’s critique of Marx and searched in a Gramsci-inspired way for the leitmotif of the two thinkers. He revealed several similarities, without neglecting their different foci. While Marx focused the mode of production, Polanyi examined the mode of distribution. Marx identified the commodity as *Keimform* of capitalist society – and therefore as starting point of his analysis –, while Polanyi discussed market fundamentalism and the scope for the countermovement. Hence, they had substantially different – yet not incompatible – research projects.

KLAUS DÖRRE (Jena) criticized in his presentation the one-dimensional reception of Polanyi. Surprisingly, he found Polanyi’s notion of class quite compelling and close to the early works of Marx as the 18th Brumaire, which perceived class as dynamic political process of making and unmaking of class identity. Dörre identified, especially in the wake of the 21st century, several movements of the Polanyian type (e.g. Occupy), which are not primarily based on a shared class identity. Meanwhile, exclusive solidarity increasingly characterized today’s struggles of the organized workers. However, Polanyi did not sufficiently elaborate in his work the driving forces of markets and competition. Therefore, Dörre stressed the importance for left academics to (re-)engage with the class as category and develop with Marx, Polanyi and beyond new approaches for a new global working-class-identity.

On Monday evening, HANS-JÜRGEN BIELING (Tübingen), KLAUS DÖRRE (Jena), and BRIGIT SAUER (Vienna) discussed on a public pre-conference event the rise of right-wing populism in Europe from the Polanyian perspective. The application of Polanyian thoughts to current developments in the European Union continued on the conference. In one session, REINHARD SCHUMACHER (Potsdam) compared the Euro regime with the Gold Standard. He pointed out that both shared the main goal, namely to foster the independence of currencies from national markets, and that also the measures applied

to save both in the wake of crisis resembled each other. In a plenary discussion, MARIA MARKANTONATOU (Lesvos) pointed into the same direction, analyzing the European „crisis management“ in Greece during the past years. She also effected the comparison of Gold Standard and Euro regime and stated that the Greek experience proved Polanyi’s assumption that the abandonment of democracy was incubated in market liberalism. Finally, she concluded that in the European Union economic policy has been dissociating constantly from social demands, which endangered society.

BEVERLY SILVER (Baltimore) presented „Forces of Labor Revisited through the lens of the Great Transformation.“ From this perspective, Silver asked for the reasons of the return to market fundamentalism in the last decades of the past century. She maintained that a crisis of profitability and legitimacy led to the current situation, which characterized growing social inequality and spatial (as well as class/status) unevenness of self-protection in society. At the current stage, according to her, we can observe a great variety of morbid symptoms of market liberalism, but also multiple forms of counter-movements causing unrest. Silver pointed out that a partial decommodification could not constitute a solution and advocated that the crisis could only be resolved through the logic of socialism, not capitalism. However, she closed with the questions: „Who, when, why?“

In a plenary discussion, CHRISTOPH DEUTSCHMANN (Tübingen) argued that the double movement-theorem should be elaborated and not be uncritically applied today. He pointed out that nowadays not only national markets are embedded in states and institutions, but that the latter are also integrated in international systems of markets. Therefore, he suggested reading Polanyi „against the stream,“ which led him to the conclusion that world markets can only work well, if national and local institutions are regulating them. He also warned to perceive the Euro crisis as a mere crisis between states, pointing to the unequal accumulation of wealth in Europe. HANS-JÜRGEN URBAN (Frankfurt on the Main) explicated how Polanyi perceived markets and societies in

a struggle with each other, which could be resolved either in a regressive, authoritarian way or through a progressive, democratic solution. Applying this to the current situation in the European Union, he observed that economic stability had been exchanged for political democracy. He called for the restructuring of the institutional setting in favor of society, namely the introduction of economic democracy, and for the struggle against right-wing populism by strengthening social security and democracy. Finally, and similar to Dörre, he posed the question what could be done to create a new inclusive class-identity?

Several presentations applied Polanyian concepts to their current research objects and discussed different forms of decommodification. BRIGITTE AULENBACHER (Linz) approached care regimes with Polanyian concepts and concluded that the pendulum of movement (marketization of care) and countermovement (re-embedding) could be fruitfully applied for analysis. KAI MOSENBACH (Ludwigshafen) showed how health care in Germany commuted between commercialization and re-embedding. FABIENNE DÉCIEUX (Linz) analyzed commodification and (counter)movements in early child care. SABINE FRIEDRICHS (Vienna) elaborated on the relationship between law and market exchange, the former embedding the latter, while both being embedded in society. She argued that law should be discussed in respect to its potential re-embedding function. PHILIPP DEGENS (Hamburg) explicated how community currencies consisted a mean of decommodifying money in different settings worldwide.

Two different plenary sessions covered the relevance and applicability of Polanyi's work to developments in the global South. In the first plenary, SUMEDHA DUTTA (Punjab) departed from Polanyi's conclusion that liberalism requires contrary to its own rhetoric strong state interventions and planning. In continuation, she analyzed three mayor liberalization policies recently implemented by the Indian government. This pushing forward of global capitalism and disembedded markets, Dutta found contested by different forms of counter-movements in a Polanyian-sense, such as NGOs or radical un-

derground movements. VICTOR RAMIRO FERNÁNDEZ (Santa Fe) described the neo-developmental turn in Brazil and Argentina from 2000 on as counter-movement to the neoliberal tide starting in the 1970s. From 2010, Ramiro Fernández observed the decay of the neo-developmentalism, which he attributed to the fact that both development states never completely abandoned neoliberalism.

In the second plenary on this topic, KARIN FISCHER (Linz) concentrated on two central features of uneven development in today's capitalism, namely the geographical relocation of production capacities to the global South and the commodification of land. She emphasized that the commodity chains maintained few or no links to local producers and therefore the integration into the world market would not benefit the poorer in the South. Fischer stated that the dominant trend was not dependent industrialization, but involuntary deindustrialization. The commodification of land, on the other hand, leads to the displacement and dispossession of people. Both trends are results of uneven and combined development, which also causes different types of counter-movements, not only linked to wage labor jobs. ERNST LANGTHALER (Linz) analyzed the commodification of food from the Polanyian perspective. He showed how the different food regimes could be understood applying the double-movement theorem and stated that the resolution of the current agrarian question had to involve the global South, and there especially peasants and smallholders. JENNY CHAN (Hong Kong) talked on the commodification of labor in China. Land grabbing as well as social and economic inequality were drivers of urbanization in China. About 300 million inner-migrant workers exist in China. She introduced the example of Foxconn, which exploited his workers under such bad conditions that some chose suicide as an „extreme form of labor protest.“ It forced Apple to react and to improve the working conditions. Although worker's protests are generally increasing, frequent job swaps and missing alliances between the different sectors complicate organizing. Still, Chan pointed out that the example of Foxconn/Apple proved that

the real power lies in the hand of the workers, if they stand up.

In conclusion, participants of the conference took part in a very interesting event, shaped by a great variety of topics, which vivid discussions addressed. Polanyi's analysis of disembedded markets and the danger they bear for society remains a powerful warning nowadays. For many participants his work represents a crucial starting point to engage with this question. However, as powerful his analysis might be, also some questions emerged regarding attempts to scrape out more general definitions and concepts out of his work. Nevertheless, the application of Polanyian thoughts to social reality leads automatically to the consideration of social movements, protests and transformative power. Therefore, several contributors tried to indicate alternatives to market liberalism. Besides the academic program the hosts had also organized an extraordinary and fascinating program of cultural activities (see below), which altogether contributed to the very familial atmosphere during the conference.

Conference Overview:

Pre-Conference

Market Fundamentalism and New Right-Wing Populism

Hans-Jürgen Bieling (Tübingen, Germany): Die Transformation gebiert ihre Kinder: Rechtspopulismus als Gegenbewegung zum liberalen Kosmopolitismus

Klaus Dörre (Jena, Germany): Polanyi und die neue national-soziale Gefahr

Birgit Sauer (Vienna, Austria): Kulturkampf 2.0? Zur Bedeutung von Geschlechterverhältnissen in der neuen Rechten

Conference

Opening Address & Discussion

Michael Burawoy (Berkeley, USA): Karl Polanyi Today

Session 1

Politics of Crisis I

Reinhard Schumacher (Potsdam, Germany): Fictitious Commodities, Double Movement and the Euro: How Karl Polanyi's Insights can

Explain the Development of the Euro Crisis

Jakob Kapeller, Bernhard Schütz & Dennis Tamesberger (Linz, Austria): From Free to Civilized Trade: A European Perspective

The (Neo)Liberal Creed I

Paolo Ramazzotti (Macerata, Italy): Policy, Empowerment and the Neoliberal Project

Andreas Nölke & Christian May (Frankfurt/Main, Germany): Comparative Capitalism Research in Times of the Financialization Crisis: From an Inter-national to an Inter-temporal Study of Economic Institutions

Timo Walter (Geneva, Switzerland): The Meta-pragmatics of Prices and the Disembedding of Markets

Theoretical Conversations with Polanyi I

Ulrich Brand (Vienna, Austria) & Christoph Görg (Klagenfurt, Austria): Polanyi Meets Regulation Theory: Re-embedding and Transformation as Contested Processes

Ernst Langthaler (Linz, Austria): Food Regime Theory Meets Polanyi

(De)Commodification I

Max Höfer (Potsdam, Germany): Let's Disrupt All Basic Social Niceties and Monetize Them!

Degrowth I

Samuel Decker (Berlin, Germany): Green Capitalism, Social-ecological Transformation and the Financialization of Nature

Matthias Aistleitner (Linz, Austria): Toward a New „Great Transformation“: Perspectives for a Sustainable Automotive Industry

Transformation and (Counter)Movements

Fabienne Décieux (Linz, Austria): A Need for Marketization? Commodification of and (Counter)Movements in Early Childcare

Martin Seeliger (Jena, Germany): Ambivalences in the Countermovement: Does Re-embedding Take Place as a General Move toward More Equity?

Plenary 1: Short Lectures and Discussion

Polanyi and Marx

Kari Polanyi-Levitt (Montreal, Canada): Marx and Polanyi as Complementary Social Philosophers

Bob Jessop (Lancaster, United Kingdom): Marx and Polanyi on the Limits and Barriers to Capital Accumulation

Klaus Dörre (Jena, Germany): Marx and Polanyi on Countermovements and Class Struggle

Plenary 2: Short Lectures and Discussion

Social and Ecological Reproduction: Fictitious Commodities, Marketization and the Imperial Mode of Living

Cornelia Klinger (Tübingen, Germany): NOT FOR SALE?!? Toward an Integrative and Transformative Understanding of Polanyi's Three „Fictitious Commodities“

Brigitte Aulenbacher (Linz, Austria) & Birgit Riegraf (Paderborn, Germany): The Never-ending Story of Marketization!? Care as a Fictitious Commodity and Points of Resistance

Ulrich Brand (Vienna, Austria): Understanding the „Imperial Mode of Living“ and Strategies for a Social-ecological Transformation based on Polanyi's Insights

Session 2

Politics of Crisis II

Susanne Giesecke (Linz, Austria): From Social Innovation to Social Transformation (Exemplified by Housing in Vienna)

Ernst Hollander (Stockholm, Sweden): Financialization, Semi-fictitious Commodities and Other Concepts in a „Polanyian Reading“ of Sweden

Phoebe Zoe Maria U. Sanchez (Cebu, Philippines): History of Cebu's „Tabo-tabo“ (Auction Market): Social Construction of Lexicons of Trust, Redistribution, Reciprocity and Kinship Ranks

The (Neo)Liberal Creed II

Jakob Huber (Linz, Austria): CGE Models as Powerful Artifacts of the Liberal Creed

Philipp Heimberger & Jakob Kapeller (Linz, Austria): Enforcing Economic Liberalism in European Fiscal Policy-making: On the Role

of the European Commission's Potential Output Model

Oliver Prausmüller (Vienna, Austria): CETA, TTIP and TiSA as Rule-making Laboratories: The Political Constitutionalization of (Internationalized) Markets Revisited

Theoretical Conversations with Polanyi II

Rune Møller Stahl (Copenhagen, Denmark): Rethinking the Relation between Neo-liberalism and Classical Liberalism

Paula Valderrama (Berlin, Germany): The Problem of Democracy in a „Market Society“; Friedrich Hayek and Karl Polanyi on Politics, Economy and Freedom

(De)Commodification II

Philipp Degens (Hamburg, Germany): Community Currencies and the Decommodification of Money

György Lengyel (Budapest, Hungary): Double Movement and Double Dependence (Hungary)

Degrowth – Alternative Economies, Social-ecological Transformation and the Post-growth Society: Seeking Utopias and Avoiding Dystopias I

Andreas Novy (Vienna, Austria): In Search of a Polanyian Countermovement of Coordinated Economic De-Globalization

Tone Smith (Vienna, Austria): Building on Polanyi to Strengthen the Social Aspect of an Ecological Economy

Fictitious Commodities I

Simon Derpmann (Munster, Germany): Money as a Fictitious Commodity

David Woodruff (London, United Kingdom): „The Institutional Mechanisms of the Downfall of a Civilization“: Understanding Polanyi's Fictitious Commodities in the Context of the Double Movement

Jakob Feinig (New York, USA): Money and the Promise of Democratization in Karl Polanyi's Great Transformation

Plenary 3: Short Lectures and Discussion

Polanyi Travels South: Global Capitalisms,

Neo-liberalism and Social Movements

Sumedha Dutta (Punjab, India): Beginning with Polanyi: Global Capitalism vs. Civil Society Movements in Neoliberal India

Víctor Ramiro Fernández (Santa Fe, Argentina): From a Post-neoliberal Laboratory to Neoliberal Resurgence: Toward a Creative Revision of Polanyian Double Movement in Latin America

Plenary 4: Book Discussion

Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left

Gareth Dale (London, United Kingdom) & Andreas Novy (Vienna, Austria)

Session 3

The (Neo)Liberal Creed III

Daniel Šitera (Prague, Czech Republic): Embedded Neo-liberalism(s) in the EU's Cohesion Agenda: Bringing the Peripheral Development in (European) Order

Till Hilmar (New Haven, USA): „In This Together“: Post-socialist Transformations to Capitalism in the Realm of Interpersonal Relationships

Martin Mendelski (Trier, Germany): A Polanyian Perspective on Post-communist Transformation

Theoretical Conversations with Polanyi III

Michael Brie (Berlin, Germany): The Great Double Transformation of the 21st Century

Claus Thomasberger (Berlin, Germany): Accumulation, Colonialization, Transformation: „A Critique of Political Economy“ after Polanyi

Degrowth – Alternative Economies, Socio-ecological Transformation and the Post-growth Society: Seeking Utopias and Avoiding Dystopias II

Ernest Aigner & Manuel Scholz-Wäckerle (Vienna, Austria): Social Accounting in a Growing Economy

Katarzyna Gruszka (Vienna, Austria): The Collaborative Economy: What Would Polanyi Say? On the Tragedy of Sharing

Plenary 5: Round Table Discussion

Crisis, Reform, Transformation? Economy and Democracy in Contemporary Capitalisms in Europe and Beyond

Michele Cangiani (Venice, Italy), Christoph Deutschmann (Tübingen, Germany), Maria Markantonatou (Lesvos, Greece), Hans-Jürgen Urban (Frankfurt on the Main, Germany)

Plenary 6: Short Lectures and Discussion

Uneven Development and Experiences of (Ex)Commodification: A View from the Global South

Karin Fischer (Linz, Austria): The Transformation of Global Inequality: Unequal Inclusion or Exclusion

Ernst Langthaler (Linz, Austria): The Commodification of Food: Old and New Agrarian Questions

Jenny Chan (Hong Kong, China): The Commodification of Labor and the Conditions for Collective Resistance in China

Session 4

Politics of Crisis III

Dinabandhu Sahoo & Dhiraj Kumar (Odisha, India): From Polanyi to Gramsci and Foucault: Looking at Polanyian Concepts through the Lenses of Neoliberal Cultural Politics of Development in India

Gareth Dale (London, United Kingdom): Polanyi and the Politics of Crisis

Mauel Rivera (Potsdam, Germany): The Growth Paradigm in Parliamentary Communication

Theoretical Conversations with Polanyi IV

Michele Cangiani (Venice, Italy): Beyond Neoliberalism: Suggestions from Karl Polanyi's Work

Christoph Deutschmann (Tübingen, Germany): Disembedded Markets and Society: Ambiguities in Polanyi's Analysis

(De)Commodification III

Salimah Valiani (Johannesburg, South Africa): Understanding the Universal Mobilization of

Caring Labor in the 21st Century via Polanyi's „Universal Mobilization of Land“

Dhanapala Wijesinghe Mudiyansele (Nugegoda, Sri Lanka): A Study on the Commodification of Religious Rituals and Social Reproduction in Contemporary Sri Lanka

Otto Penz & Birgit Sauer (Vienna, Austria): A Neoliberal Regime of Self-protection: Activation and Affective Subjectivation

Degrowth II

Silke Ötsch (Innsbruck, Austria): The Formal Capitalist and Objective-material Logic of Provisioning in the Perspective of a Degrowth Society

Christoph Görg (Klagenfurt, Austria) & Tilman Sanatarius (Berlin, Germany): Revisiting Karl Polanyi for a Social-ecological Transformation: Technology, Capital Accumulation and Institutional Embeddedness

Thomas Sauer (Jena, Germany): Ostrom Meets Polanyi: A Talk on the Commodification and De-commodification of Ecological and Social Reproduction in the Perspective of Contextual Economics

Plenary 7: Evening Lecture

Beverly Silver (Baltimore, USA): Forces of Labor Revisited

Session 5

Transformation

Cletus Ikechukwu Anah (Owerri, Nigeria): Capitalist Crises and Pathways toward Transformation in Africa: The Role of International Financial Institutions

Frédéric Moulène (Strasbourg, France): Is a New Great Transformation Possible? The Power of Language and Ideology in the Global Economy

Christian Karner (Nottingham, United Kingdom): Austria between „Social Protection“ and „Emancipation“: Negotiating Global Flows, Marketization and Nostalgia

Crisis & Welfare

Markus Griesser (Vienna, Austria): Uneven Waves of Commodification, Decommodifica-

tion and Recommodification

Roland Atzmüller (Linz, Austria): Great and not so Great Transformations in Welfare Policies: Welfare Reconfigurations between Social Investment and Activation

Fictitious Commodities II

Sabine Frerichs (Vienna, Austria): Polanyi's Property: Law of the Land, Law of the Market?

Kai Mosebach (Ludwigshafen, Germany): Making Sense of Health Care Commercialization and Liberal Utopias of Market-driven Health Care

Takato Kasai (Kyoto, Japan): „Socialistic“ Design for the Future based on Karl Polanyi's Theory: The Evolution of Bentham's and Owen's Ideas on Poor Relief

Alternatives

Klara Helene Stumpf & Bernd Sommer (Flensburg, Germany): The Economy for the Common Good: A Social Movement Altering the Relationship between Economy, Society and State?

Leonhard Dobusch (Innsbruck, Austria): Share Economy between Commons and Commodification

Marketization of Knowledge and Science

Brigitte Aulenbacher, Kristina Binner (Linz, Austria), Birgit Riegraf & Lena Weber (Paderborn, Germany): The Entrepreneurial University in the Welfare State from a Polyanian, Feminist and Neo-institutionalist Perspective

Elisabeth Abergel (Montreal, Canada) & Claire Lagier (Munich, Germany): Fictitious Commodities: Marketization of Knowledge and Science

Petra Biberhofer (Vienna, Austria): The Economization of Education

Plenary 8: Conversation

Michael Burawoy (Berkeley, USA) & Kari Polanyi-Levitt (Montreal, Canada): Karl Polanyi's Great Transformation

Introduction: Brigitte Aulenbacher

Lecture about Mauthausen & Excursion

to the Former Concentration Camp Mauthausen

Andreas Kranebitter (Mauthausen Memorial): The History of Mauthausen from a Sociological Point of View

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