

Title: A Career as Self-Employed? Exploring educational structures

Contribution:

Current policies strongly promote self-employment as a solution to unemployment and marginalisation. Entrepreneurship education should be taught at all educational levels and permeate all subjects. This study seeks to analyse Swedish and EU policy on entrepreneurship and education and relate it to the structure of higher education and to self-employment among graduates.

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General description:

In EU and Sweden, entrepreneurship and self-employment is viewed as a way to promote unemployment and growth and the low degree of self-employment in Europe is regarded as a problem. Entrepreneurship education is one important way to encourage self-employment among university graduates (European Commission, 2012). The existing structure of higher education in Europe and Sweden rather educate graduates for employment and the evidence of entrepreneurship education leading to self-employment is limited (Dickson et al., 2008) which risk to make support for entrepreneurship education more of an ideology than a policy based on empirical facts (Parker 2004).

EU policy view Education mainly as a source for economic growth, and there are almost no alternative purposes such as developing existing knowledge, critical thinking or developing intellectual growth (Silander & Berggren, 2017). Women are in policy perceived as ‘lacking’, ‘needing’, ‘not knowledgeable’, ‘having problems’ and ‘being risk-averse’. The perspective is liberal, meaning that women and men are equal, they have the same potential, but since the template and the norm is male, women will inevitably fall short (Berggren & Silander, 2017). Results from the large-scale analysis (that the two studies above relate to) showed that self-employment was rare among professionals (aged 30-39 years only around 1-2 per cent). In contrast to policy documents which expect graduates from STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) to be the most likely to start businesses, it is professionals within fine arts/culture (women 16% and men 26%); thereafter, professionals in veterinary medicine and agriculture/forestry who were most likely to become self-employed. In this paper we seek to problematize EU and Swedish policy towards entrepreneurship education and argue that it need to be analysed in relation to existing educational structures and empirical knowledge on self-employment among gradates.

Methods and data:

We analyse documents, produced by the European Union and Swedish government between 2004 and 2017, encouraging students to be employed rather than self-employed and put it in relation to existing educational structure. We take a starting point in Bacchi (2009) arguing that the term policy often come with the underlying assumption of being a good thing; policy serve to ‘fixing things up’ implying that something need to be fixed and that there indeed is a problem. Problems are hence viewed as *exogenous*, i.e. as something existing outside the policy making process. By asking questions about what presuppositions or assumptions underlie the representation of the problem and investigate what is left unproblematic in the

policy it is possible to show that policies are *indogenous*, meaning that they are created within the policy process (Bacchi, 2009).

Expected outcomes/results:

Reviewing EU policy on entrepreneurship in higher education, examples can be found of promotion of a variety of educational initiatives. There are examples of policy promoting shorter business oriented courses or start up training (teaching *for* entrepreneurship) as well as possibilities for internship in order to learn entrepreneurship (teaching *through* entrepreneurship) (European Commission 2008). However, it is clear that the overall EU policy on entrepreneurship education has the ambition to embed entrepreneurship deep into the whole educational system and into higher education curricula in order to make it a natural part of all educational activities (European Commission 2012).

Universities have traditionally had the purpose to educate for work and service within governmental institutions and this is still the case. For professions within teaching and health care, who make up a large part of the student population, their education is directed towards positions in the public sector. Tertiary educated within engineering are expected to be the drivers of innovations and to start businesses. In Sweden there are several large companies; for example, Ericson, Volvo and Skanska. Many engineers are employed within these companies and not self-employed as expected. Women (and men) are not likely to become self-employed unless the labour market does not require it, such as artists who are engaged on project basis (Bridgstock, 2013) or farmers who have their own land to take care of.

Educational institutions and career guiders need to be aware of the meagre outcome of these educational policies.

Intent of publication:

Higher education journals

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