

Socialist Ideology and the Contraction of Higher Education: Institutional Consequences of State Manpower and Education Planning in the Former East Germany

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Sustained expansion of formal schooling worldwide over the twentieth century indicates the depth to which mass schooling has become politically institutionalized within society (Garnier and Hage 1991; Fuller and Rubinson 1992). Here we examine the countertrend of contraction of higher education in the German Democratic Republic (official name of former East Germany, hereafter the GDR). We argue that it was caused by a complex shift in socialist ideology, an important change in the makeup of the political elite over the course of the nation's history, and the inability of the society to fully develop the idea of education as an individual civic right versus the more limited idea of a collective necessity. Underpinned by the practice of manpower planning, these factors resulted in a rupture between higher education and society that led to contraction of enrollment rates (Farrell 1997).¹

The politically motivated contraction of enrollments in higher education clearly diverges from a larger world trend (Schofer and Meyer 2005). Full enrollments in primary schooling, achieved in economically developed nations during the first half of the twentieth century, were followed by steady growth in secondary school enrollment rates in the second half of the century. In Third World nations this same pattern has occurred, lagging only a few decades behind the growth in enrollment in wealthier nations (Baker and Holsinger 1996). Extensive analyses of this growth show similar trends across most nations regardless of political, social, and economic conditions.² Demand created by this expanding secondary enrollment is leading to a pattern of widespread growth in enrollment rates in higher education (Windolf 1992; Windolf and Haas 1993; Ramirez 2002).

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¹ Following Farrell (1997), we recognize that "manpower" is no longer considered an appropriate term. However, this antiquated label is used in this article because that is how the model and practice are generally referred to in the literature.

² Only some nations in sub-Saharan Africa and a few other nations, all of which are suffering from extreme poverty, health crises, and political turmoil, have not been able to expand education beyond full primary enrollments.

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