

Knowledge cultures in subjectivation-processes of disabled people since the 1970s

The modern saying “knowledge is power” goes back to the English philosopher and pioneer of the scientific revolution Sir Francis Bacon and has become a social and political consensus. This consensus expresses the existence of a strong interdependence between knowledge on the one, and power on the other hand, which is the crucial hypothesis of this investigation.

Transferred to the subject of the new social movement of disabled people this PhD-project aims to explore practices and processes of knowledge-production, analysed as a setting up of resources, during a subjectivation-process. The project acknowledges social movements in general, and the new social movement of disabled people in particular, as central forces of social change. Regardless of the degree of target achievement the (new) social movements have provided cultural changes, which can be identified also in the knowledge-cultures which influence(d) the social status of disabled people. Knowledge cultures can be defined as the practices, mechanisms and principles which define knowledge itself, and control the way it will be expanded – not only in scientific contexts but also as underlying conditions of social behaviour. The PhD-project tries to identify changes in disability-regarding knowledge cultures like Law, Pedagogics, Rehabilitation, Sociology, Cultural Studies etc. and the influence of members of the disability-movement onto these changing-processes.

One example for a succeeded establishment of the disability-perspective in a knowledge culture is the academic field of Disability Studies. This interdisciplinary approach emerged in the 1970s in the US and England and intends to work scientifically based on the so called “social model of disability”, which considers disability as a social construct. In this way the academics, which partially have a social-movement-background, try to increase the quality of life and the social and legal status of people with disability. One crucial place of focus of German academics doing so was the University of California in Berkeley, which has had a pioneer role in the US-American landscape of handicapped accessible universities since the establishment of the first Centres for Independent Living on their campus. To understand better what attracted those German students to come to Berkeley there is planned a research visit at the UC during this PhD-project. To explore the establishment of the Disability Studies in the German academic landscape in a manner of History of science is the central aim of this work, which is funded by the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation.