

zhb Higher Education Research Colloquium Series



Guest Talk:
Prof. Dr. Francisco Ramirez
(Stanford Graduate School of Education, USA)

The Socially Embedded American University

The preeminence of American universities in multiple international rankings has led to their deployment as benchmarks in global educational discourse. An idealized model of the socially embedded American university is dramatized by “world class” metaphors and disseminated by consultants without borders. The latter identify “best practices” in the pursuit of excellence and portray these practices as portable. The message is that all universities can learn to be excellent by adhering to these best practices, and further, that the boundaries between university and society should be more permeable, leading to greater flexibility with respect to funding, curriculum, governance, and other organizational dimensions.

The global preeminence of American universities is currently theorized to emphasize both their social embeddedness and their organizational character: they are imagined to be more attuned to the real world and to be more organizationally effective. These virtues, of course, become vices from the perspective of their critics; they are imagined to be corrupted by real-world (often corporate) influences and to no longer adhere to a distinctive institutional mission.

This talk will identify and discuss three dynamics in the development of the American university: (1) increased entrepreneurship linked to institutional advancement goals, (2) increasingly empowered individuals linked to ideas about individual rights and human potential, and (3) increased legalization as cultural adaptation to increased entrepreneurship and empowered individuals. These trends are manifestations of the intensification of the socially embedded university.

Prof. Dr. Francisco Ramirez is Professor of Education and (by courtesy) Sociology at Stanford University where he is also the Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs in the Graduate School of Education. His current research interests focus on the rise and institutionalization of human rights and human rights education, on the worldwide rationalization of university structures and processes, on terms of inclusion issues as regards gender and education, and on the scope and intensity of the authority of science in society.

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Vogelpothsweg 78 (CDI-Building), Room 114

Professorship of Higher Education

Contact: anna-lena.rose@tu-dortmund.de