



“Understanding and shaping the transformation of the 21st century”

Founding declaration of the International Karl Polanyi Society

8 May 2018

The future is uncharted territory because it is shaped by people. It is vital to remember this fact in the current period of turmoil. Especially in view of widespread uncertainty, anxiety and resignation, it is the duty of researchers to help make sense of our current society with the aim of bolstering its democratic structures.

The 21st century is one characterised by upheaval, during which habitual practices, institutions and power structures will undergo radical change, in extent comparable to the transition from an agriculture-based to an industrialised society. It is the job of researchers to understand these far-reaching ecological, geo-economic and socio-cultural transformations. Much like the work of Polanyi, this is accompanied by a sense of urgency, as the current upheavals may entail emancipatory or destructive dynamics. There are no guarantees for the wealth of civilisation’s achievements: war, fascism, despotism and colonialism may still rear their ugly heads.

In recent years, Karl Polanyi has become a key figure in research efforts to understand the contradictions inherent to the market economy – one that promises liberation and provokes counter-movements. In the age of the climate crisis, rising social polarisation and looming geopolitical confrontation, Karl Polanyi inspires us to engage with the contradictions of economic “improvements” and sociocultural “habitation” in an emancipatory manner. Polanyi’s thoughts on “transformation”, “embedding”, “fictitious commodities” and “double movement” are the focus of intense debates. Criticism of his concepts and predictions have helped expand the subject area further, be it in transformation research, social economy or cultural political economy – new research fields all inspired by Polanyi.

Karl Polanyi promotes an integrated analysis of complex, conflict-laden phenomena that does not resort to dogma. He was a scholar who maintained a balance between disciplines and between research and society; a man who always focused on the subject at hand, who strove to understand phenomena with the aim of strengthening the scope for action – actions that are now more crucial than ever. Today, Karl Polanyi stands as a figure who inspires an engaged, intrusive form of research.

For this reason, we will be launching the International Karl Polanyi Society (IKPS) on 8 May 2018 during a gala event held at the Vienna Chamber of Labour

with the express objective of understanding and shaping the transformation of the 21st century. The International Karl Polanyi Society

- 1) Will **contribute to the debate on the current transformation of the 21st century** by using an approach influenced by Karl Polanyi to help shape an interdisciplinary and international strategy.
- 2) Will offer space for reflection with the aim of intensifying the **dialogue between various international strands of discussion on a Polanyi-inspired social analysis**.
- 3) Will support the **institutionalisation of Scientific Communities and research fields** that carry out a cross-disciplinary investigation into politico-economic and socio-ecological processes.
- 4) Will promote **transdisciplinary research** that experiments with dialogue-based and democratic forms of cooperation between researchers and social actors in order to understand and shape the transformation of the 21st century.

To bring these aims to life, the International Karl Polanyi Society will

- 1) Regularly arrange **conferences and workshops** in cooperation with existing research institutions in order to establish fixed dates and spaces for Polanyi-inspired dialogue. The first major event will be the International Karl Polanyi Conference on “Processes of Transformation in Europe”, which will take place on 8 and 9 May 2019 in Vienna.
- 2) Set up a **website** and run **social media** pages that enable open access to recent, Polanyi-inspired research projects. The aim is to help foster understanding of the current transformation of the 21st century.
- 3) Release **publications** on Polanyi-inspired analyses of the current transformation processes.
- 4) Award **grants** to provide financial support to research projects.

Kari Polanyi-Levitt, Brigitte Aulenbacher, Klaus Dörre, Maria Markantonatou, Andreas Novy, Claus Thomasberger (founders of the International Karl Polanyi Society)