

1.1 Name, institution, and contact details of the author(s)

Regula Julia Leemann
University of Teacher Education Northwestern Switzerland
Hofackerstrasse 30
4132 Basel-Muttenz
regula.leemann@fhnw.ch

Sandra Hafner
University of Teacher Education Northwestern Switzerland
sandra.hafner@fhnw.ch

Raffaella Simona Esposito
University of Teacher Education Northwestern Switzerland
raffaellasimona.esposito@fhnw.ch

1.2 Title of the presentation

Politics and policies on governance of access to baccalaureate school – How politicians in two Swiss cantons justify change and maintenance of admission regulations

1.3 Disciplinary field

Sociology

1.4 3 to 5 keywords

1.5 • A summary (max. 500 words) with key statements on the research question, methodological approaches, and discussion points

Politics and policies on governance of access to baccalaureate school – How politicians in two Swiss cantons justify change and maintenance of admission regulations

In Switzerland, baccalaureate school is the royal road to universities. Due to Swiss federalism and diverging regional cultural norms, the value of academic education as well as the governance mechanism to regulate access to baccalaureate school widely vary among cantons. Moreover, research shows that social origin influences the chances of access.

Over the last years politicians in the cantonal parliaments criticise that the existing admission regulations are not appropriate for selecting the 'right' and the 'right number' of baccalaureate school students. By procedural requests they demand and initiate evaluations and reforms that bring about measures and new regulations. Other politicians resist changes and see no need.

The aim of the paper is to examine how in cantonal parliaments politicians from different parties coordinate their interests and actions for improvement, change or maintenance of admission regulations to baccalaureate school. What are their central positions, worries and justifications? What measures and reforms do they claim for or resist to? How can cantonal differences be explained?

Theoretically we refer to the methodological standpoint and concepts of the "Sociology of Conventions" (SC). Conventions are socio-historically established principles of action, worth and justice that actors refer to and rely on to coordinate in situations. SC assumes that situations are governed by a plurality of coexisting conventions. Referring to discourse analyses and sensitizing concepts of SC we analyse how in the cantonal parliamentary debates on change or maintenance of admission regulations, the value of baccalaureate school as well as educational justice in access to baccalaureate school is addressed, negotiated, and justified.

Our data is based on publicly available documents (procedural requests; statements of the government; verbatim records of the statements in the cantonal parliament; political decisions; reports, evaluations) and interviews with representatives of the educational administration. We focus on selected coordinating situations during the last two decades, when access to the baccalaureate school has been a recurring issue. Selected cases are two cantons which differ among theoretically relevant characteristics of social and economic context and among admission regulations.

The results show that in their coordination politicians rely on specific conventions. A broad consensus exists in both cantons and among all political parties that performance must guide selection and that baccalaureate school should remain a path for a small elite especially so as not to weaken vocational education and training (VET) – a compromise of market and industrial convention. However, the two cantons differ in their understanding of how exactly equity in performance is achieved. The main topics of claims for and critiques of measures concern either the structures – school year of transition, tracking, structural permeability, and maximum quota of baccalaureate students –, or the type of performance testing – access to examination, grades, form of and preparation for the examination – that should enable a 'fair' selection procedure. In the first case, the principle of justice underlying the politics in the parliament is primarily industrial, and civic in the second case. In the 'civic' canton, discussions on social inequality in access – is it existing and relevant or not? – is always present, whereas in the 'industrial' canton it is hardly ever brought up. On the contrary negotiations on change or maintenance of admission regulations between the opponents are mostly based on efficiency, functionality, plannability, and standardisation.

We conclude that due to varying social, economic, and historical conditions and circumstances of the cantonal educational system, politicians mobilise disparate and plural moral beliefs and values in debates on the necessary changes and maintenance in education. Cantonal differences can be explained by the path dependency theorem. Contingent decisions in the historical past lead to the institutionalisation of rules, norms and beliefs that are formatting situations of educational polity.

1.6 • Reference list (5 to 10 references) following APA guidelines

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