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Why Does Dual-VET Have such a Strong Position Compared to School-based General-education in Switzerland? Insights into Governance Mechanisms in Upper-secondary-education

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Despite international developments towards academisation of education, around two-thirds of young people in Switzerland begin a VET program at upper secondary level, mainly organised as an apprenticeship. The remaining youngsters enter school-based general-education in baccalaureate schools (25%) or in upper secondary specialized schools (SpS) (5%).

Several factors are responsible for this high proportion of VET. In many cantons, places in the two schools are rationed and access is controlled by means of selective regulations. In this way, apprentices are directed into VET. Furthermore, apprenticeship training is firmly anchored in the Swiss population as a widely accepted model of skills provision (Gonon & Maurer 2012). It is supported by important stakeholders in economy, education policy and academia, defended in the media and strengthened by means of campaigns. The formal permeability between initial-VET and higher education with the introduction of the vocational baccalaureate in the 1990s is a central argument in this context.

Already in the 1970ies, VET was the dominant post-compulsory educational pathway (Gonon 2012): 46% of 19-year-olds had completed an apprenticeship, 6% a baccalaureate school and 2% a SpS. However, VET and the SpS were not yet integrated into the federal education system at that time. VET was part of the economic system. The SpS was a very heterogeneous type of school and not yet recognised by the Confederation. During this period, the cantons and the Confederation came under international pressure to clarify, coordinate and harmonise the functions, qualifications and entitlements of post-compulsory education (Rosenmund 2011). A process of institutionalisation of an upper secondary level of education began.

In this paper, we examine how, in this institutionalisation process of upper secondary education from the 1970s onwards, advocates of VET defended dual VET against more general, pre-vocational and school-based education and limited its significance. We consider this topic to be important in the context of the international debate on the "academisation of VET or the vocationalisation of academic education" (Rauner 2012, among others).

To do so, we analyse the dynamics and controversies in the governance process, i.e. in the steering and coordination processes surrounding the institutionalisation of the SpS as an alternative educational pathway at upper secondary level. We focus thereby on the field of health education. Until 2004, there were no offers for health professions in the VET system (see Esposito et al. 2019). Young people, mostly girls, had to wait for several years after compulsory schooling before they could start health training, especially nursery, at the age of 18. The SpS took on an important bridging function by preparing young women for these higher vocational training courses for 2-3 years by means of extended general education. At the end of the 1980s SpS was institutionalised as the third federally recognised educational pathway. Today this school-based path is quantitatively small, but it is an important access route to VET in health, especially nursery at tertiary level.

However, the school, its function and significance were repeatedly challenged by representatives of VET in this process of institutionalisation of upper secondary education and questioned as being in contradiction to the distinction between dual VET and general education in baccalaureate schools and therefore superfluous.

The aim of the paper is to analyse the social forces underlying the educational policy debates surrounding the position of VET and SpS. Which actors were involved, with which functions and positions? Which social forces played a role in the steering and coordination processes of the institutionalisation of upper secondary health education? Which forces were decisive for the path-dependent development of VET and SpS? Which social forces also enabled change and prevented that the school was abolished?

Methodology, Methods, Research Instruments or Sources Used

For the analyses of the social forces underlying the coordination of action in the governance process of the institutionalisation of upper secondary education, we refer to the theory of neo-institutionalism, and here to historical institutionalism, as well as to the path dependency theorem (Edelstein 2016). Specifically, we attempt to make use of the social mechanisms and logics described by Mahoney (2000), which can explain both reproduction and path-dependent development as well as institutional change. Mahoney distinguishes analytically between four social mechanisms and logics, which realistically are intertwined and can support or hinder each other.

Legitimation explanations refer to values, orientations and beliefs of actors that guide their actions. When social values alter, change becomes possible. Power explanations are based on political power relations, interest politics and coalitions. Change happens when new interest groups gain power. Functional explanations assume the stabilisation of chosen paths through functional interdependencies, e.g. in the interdependency of educational institutions and occupational fields. Developments in the world of work can lead to dysfunctionalities and cause changes. Utilitarian explanations are based on cost-benefit logics. Path-dependent developments can be broken up if the costs of previous arrangements are too high and the benefits too low.

Data come from a research project financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation that investigates the contested institutionalisation process of SpS. We gathered various documents that allow this process to be traced (consultations by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education, surveys and reports on the school, guiding principles for the school, parliamentary instruments). Furthermore, we conducted interviews with experts as well as with educational policy makers and school actors who were and are involved in the processes of establishing the SpS. We analyse the data on the theoretical framework of the social mechanisms and logics of coordination of action mentioned above.

We will trace the dynamics and discourses from the 1970s to the present. What social mechanisms and logics in the governance processes limited and inhibited the establishment of an alternative path for vocational training in the health sector that is school-based and includes more general education? Which social mechanisms made it possible to maintain the SpS despite the resistance of representatives of VET?

Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings

As early as the 1970s, representatives in the VET sector were against the institutionalisation of the SpS, arguing that school-based education was not suitable for preparing youngsters for the demands of the world of work. We interpret this as mechanisms of the legitimation explanation that further secured the hitherto powerful position of VET. However, professional associations in the care

sector advocated institutionalisation, as otherwise the prior education could not be achieved for access to vocational training at tertiary level. We consider this a mechanism of functional explanation, which supported the continuation of the school and its institutionalisation in the late 1980s in a path-dependent manner.

In the 1990s, the school came under renewed pressure to save-guard its position. The introduction of the vocational baccalaureate and the founding of the universities of applied sciences opened up for VET a direct route into the higher education system. With the planned introduction of VET for health, the two educational paths now effectively came into competition. In these policy negotiations, VET proponents suggested transforming the SpS in the health education into a type of VET and subject it to the governance competence of the VET sector, and thus disempower the school. This is in line with the power explanation. However, there were also advocators of the SpS who pointed to important values and functions of the school, e.g. the integration of girls (legitimation explanation), or the relevance of an additional path in view of skill shortage (functional explanation). In this phase, the school was again able to secure its position. However, its quantitative importance was always kept marginal compared to VET. The further path of institutionalisation since 2004 indicates that the position of the SpS is still challenged. Utilitarian motives, interwoven with power-based motives, are dominant: School-based training is more expensive than dual VET.

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