

REGULA JULIA LEEMANN, RAFFAELLA SIMONA ESPOSITO  
AND CHRISTIAN IMDORF

## Governance Mechanisms in the Institutionalisation of Upper Secondary Education in Switzerland. Insights from the Policy Debates on the Status of VET and General Education

**Abstract:** Despite international trends towards the academisation of education, VET has remained the dominant chosen pathway at the upper secondary level in Switzerland. To understand this phenomenon the chapter focuses on governance mechanisms in the process of institutionalising upper secondary education in Switzerland from the 1970s onwards. Referring to the concept of path dependency and four social mechanism of institutional reproduction and change – utilitarian, functional, power and legitimation (Mahoney, 2000) – we analyse the policy debates between relevant actors on the status of VET and general education. More specifically, we analyse the institutionalisation of the specialised school (SpS) as the third federally recognised educational pathway on upper secondary level that challenged the segmentation between general education and the system of apprenticeships. The SpS prepares today in certain fields (e.g. health) for applied studies in higher education. Our results show which mechanisms, despite strong forces of inertia, allowed for a certain change in the established relationship between VET and general education, which resulted in the institutionalisation of the SpS.

**Keywords:** apprenticeship, general education, specialised school, governance mechanisms, path dependency

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Upper secondary education in Switzerland is characterised today by three federally recognised educational pathways. Nearly two thirds of young people begin in 2020 a vocational education and training (VET) programme, the majority of which are organised as apprenticeships. The remaining youth enter general education: around a quarter attend a baccalaureate school and around 5 % attend a specialised school (SpS).

Despite international trends towards the academisation of education (Harwood, 2010; Rauner, 2012), in the last three decades the proportion of young people beginning a VET programme has decreased only slightly, from 77 % to 68 %, while the proportion entering general education (baccalaureate school and SpS) has risen from 23 % to slightly over 30 %. Two thirds' participation in VET programmes is high compared to the situation in other countries (OECD, 2015). Furthermore, no country is anywhere near reaching the quota of 60 % of young people starting an apprenticeship.

In order to understand this relationship between general education and VET, this chapter examines governance processes in the development of the upper secondary education system. To this end, we reconstruct social mechanisms of the coordination of action between actors in general education and VET in the political process of institutionalising a post-compulsory school level beginning in the late 1960s. Most research on governance in the development of upper secondary education has focused either on VET or general education<sup>2</sup>, but only very few studies have analysed the relationship between the two systems (Criblez (2001, 2002) and Kiener (2007) are among the exceptions).

---

1 We would like to thank Regula Bürgi and Carmen Baumeler for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. The text was translated from German by John Koster for SocioTrans - Social Science Translation & Editing.

2 Philipp Gonon and team (University of Zurich), Lorenzo Bonoli (Swiss Federal Institute for VET), and other researchers such as Marius Busemeyer, Christine Trampusch, Rita Nikolai and Christian Ebner have provided the research on VET, while Lucien Criblez and team (University of Zurich) investigated general education.

VET has been the dominant post-compulsory educational pathway since as early as the end of the 1960s. Around 46 % of 19-year-olds at that time completed an apprenticeship, 6 % a baccalaureate school and 2 % a SpS.<sup>3</sup> At that time, however, VET and SpS were not yet integrated into the federal education system. VET fell within the purview of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, which was responsible for enacting training regulations (Gonon & Maurer, 2012), while the legal foundation of VET is a clause in the Swiss constitution for the promotion of trade (Wettstein, 2020). At the end of the 1960s SpS were a very heterogeneous type of schools in larger cities and not yet recognised by the federal government. Triggered by the expansion of the education system and international pressure on the Confederation and the cantons to clarify and coordinate the various educational pathways, their profiles, diplomas and opportunities for further education, there now began a process of institutionalising a post-compulsory school level, which lasted for the following four decades (Criblez, 2001, 2002; Zulauf, Gentinetta & Kübler, 2000).

This situation led to a new demand for cooperation between the responsible actors. However, these actors represented two different systems embedded in different institutional contexts (Harney & Zymek, 1994; Baethge, 2006) – general education, whose organisation was school-based and governed by the cantons, and VET, which was primarily organised on a dual basis and governed jointly by the Confederation, employers' organisations and the cantons. Due to the nature of the systems, the representatives of the two educational pathways pursued different interests and were guided by different values and logics. The new coordination requirements also necessitated the establishment of structures and committees for negotiating between different institutions and levels of action.

This chapter focuses on governance in this process of institutionalising upper secondary education. The leading question is *which social mechanisms of the coordination of action are responsible for the fact that, despite international trends towards the academisation of education, in Switzerland a vocationally oriented, dual educational pathway*

---

3 Own calculations based on BFS (1971, 1972).

*has remained dominant in comparison to a more general school-based pathway.*

To this end, we analyse how, in the disputes over the positioning of the various post-compulsory educational pathways, representatives and advocates of dual VET defended themselves against actors in the more general education-oriented and school-based education sector and attempted to limit its significance. The study examines the dynamics and controversies in the negotiation process concerning the institutionalisation of the SpS as a third federally recognised educational pathway at the upper secondary level, the function and continued existence of which was repeatedly called into question by representatives of VET.

For the analysis of this reform period, which was decisive for the relationship between general and vocational education, we rely on the concept of educational governance (Altrichter, 2015; Maag Merki & Altrichter, 2015). Complex models are required particularly for the Swiss education system, whose governance structures are characterised by federalism, state subsidiarity and, within VET, by corporatist educational governance (Wettstein, Schmid & Gonon, 2017). These require a broad actor model, a social science-based notion of governance as a reciprocal coordination of action, the consideration of institutions and structures, a conception of different levels of action and the inclusion of conflictual results of governance (Altrichter, 2015; Maag Merki & Altrichter, 2015).

To analyse the social mechanisms of the coordination of action that underlie these educational policy debates, we make reference to neo-institutionalism and the path dependency theorem (Edelstein, 2016). Specifically, we apply the social mechanisms and logics described by Mahoney (2000) – utilitarian, functional, power and legitimation, which can explain both reproduction and path-dependent development as well as institutional change – to the analysis of governance processes. With this, we aim to contribute to the research on various mechanisms of educational policy and politics in the relationship between general education and VET. With respect to our object of investigation, we analyse two historical situations central to the process of institutionalising the SpS in order to answer the following questions: (1) Which social mechanisms of the coordination of action explain the persistence and reproduction of the specific relationship between general education and

VET? (2) What were the driving forces that enabled, despite the resistance of representatives of VET, a certain change that ultimately led to the institutionalisation of the SpS?

To answer these questions, we lay out in Chapter 2 our theoretical framework, data corpus and evaluation procedure. The empirical part in Chapter 3 includes a brief description of the SpS and the historical context of the situation at the end of the 1960s that led to this reform process. Subsequently, the outcomes of the two historical cases of the institutionalisation of the SpS are presented by reconstructing the social mechanisms underlying the coordination of action between actors in general education and VET. The chapter concludes in Chapter 4 with a theory-driven reply to these questions, which contributes to the examination of the significant relationships between governance in VET and the education system as a whole.

## Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In order to examine the question of persistence, but also of change, in the relationship between the two systems of general education and VET, we make reference to various aspects of neo-institutionalism as well as to the concept of path dependency, which have proven fruitful for the analysis of educational policy (Edelstein, 2016). On the one hand, they make it possible to understand why, despite postulated trends towards the international convergence of educational institutions, national institutional arrangements often remain stable and change only within historically established paths. On the other hand, they also make it possible to analyse situations in which change becomes possible.

The theory of path-dependent development presupposes that, at a certain historical moment, ‘contingent events set into motion institutional patterns or event chains that have deterministic properties’ (Mahoney, 2000, p. 507). These early historical events are contingent in the sense of that they are not determined by prior events or initial conditions. For our object of investigation, this means that, at a ‘critical juncture’ (ibid., p. 513), there were indeed alternatives available for

selection, but that on grounds of contingent conditions, the models of order inherent in the two systems of general education and VET and their relationship to one another proved dominant.

As for the question of a critical juncture in the institutional relationship between general education and VET, according to our research there have been no empirical studies on Switzerland. Some clues are provided by the analyses of Harney and Zymek (1994) as well as Baethge (2006), which trace how, at the beginning of the 19th century in Germany, two distinct, integrated systems emerged – general education and VET – each with its own specific instructional principles, topics of instruction, milieus of socialisation, training providers, professions, professional careers, funding bases as well as political governance and supervisory bodies, that is, their own institutional logics and self-conceptions.

According to the concept of path dependency, a causal process has emerged – starting from this initial decision. In self-reinforcing sequences these ‘initial steps in a particular direction induce further movement in the same direction such that over time it becomes difficult or impossible to reverse direction’ (Mahoney, 2000, p. 512). Mechanisms of reproduction can result in a ‘lock-in’ of a given institutional pattern, although institutions may be less efficient than previously available alternatives. Harney and Zymek (1994) and Baethge (2006) point out in this context that the institutional orders of general education and VET establish lasting interests and perspectives that can become a barrier to reform.

The present study focuses on the historical development and dynamics in the relationship between the two institutional paths of VET and general education from the end of the 1960s onwards. According to Harney and Zymek (1994), at this point in time the viability and functionality of these system structures came to an end in Germany because their potential for expansion was exhausted, and they could only continue expanding internally and against each other (*ibid.*, p. 418). With regard to the institutionalisation of an integrated system of post-compulsory education in Switzerland, we assume that there were disputes about system boundaries and responsibilities and that solutions had to be found in the form of compromises.

We are interested in the social mechanisms underlying the coordination of action of the various actors in the process of institutionalising the SpS. To this end, we will refer to four mechanisms and logics that Mahoney (2000) has proposed for the analysis of path-dependent reproduction and change in institutional orders, which have been applied in various studies on educational policy reform processes (e.g. Blanck, Edelstein & Powell, 2013; Edelstein & Nikolai, 2013; Leemann, Imdorf, Fischer, Esposito & Hafner, 2019). The mechanisms illustrated below are to be understood as analytic dimensions; in reality, however, they are all interwoven and can reciprocally support or hinder each other.

*Functional explanations* explain institutional reproduction by the functional consequences for a larger system within which the institution is embedded. The stabilisation of established paths results from mutual dependencies and complementarities, in particular from the dovetailing between the educational institution and continuing education and the world of work. Those responsible for education want to avoid destabilising the entire system. However, this functionality can also erode and force the system to adapt, for instance, when developments in the labour market or reforms in the higher education system that builds on upper secondary education result in changes to qualification requirements.

*Power explanations* are based on political and social power relations and interest-driven politics and coalitions. Social groups and classes that benefit from the existing arrangement have sufficient power of definition to maintain relations to their own advantage. Thus, in Switzerland the social elite in science, administration, business and to some extent also politics reproduce themselves by way of the baccalaureate and academic pathways (Bühlmann, Beetschen, David, Ginalski, & Mach, 2015), the middle class by way of VET (Falcon, 2020). The central representatives of business, the employers' organisations, have a major interest in the continued existence of VET, among other reasons because this allows them to exert a direct influence on the qualification and socialisation of the future workforce (Baethge, 2006). Change is possible when hitherto influential actors lose power while others gain influence, for example, through the empowerment of reformers.

*Legitimation explanations* emphasise the importance of culturally established principles for the practices of actors in governance. They

refer to values, orientations and beliefs of broad segments of society that they consider justified and appropriate. VET, for example, is firmly anchored in Swiss society as a reliable institution (Cattaneo & Wolter, 2016) and continues to attract young people who perform well in school. Moreover, the social status of VET has not diminished in recent years (Bolli, Rageth & Renold, 2018). It is supported and reinforced by key players in the business community, in educational policy and in academia, particularly on the grounds that it does a better job of integrating young people into the labour market than school-based training (Strahm, 2014; Bolli, Oswald-Egg & Rageth, 2017). However, the legitimacy of institutions can diminish as new social values and standards prevail and exert moral pressure for change, for example, by placing greater emphasis on general education and theoretical-systematic knowledge or equity.

*Utilitarian explanations* of coordination of action are based on the rational cost–benefit logic of economists. Actors involved in VET and SpS have invested in their institutions for many decades and therefore have a deep interest in maintaining the status quo. Special training institutions have been created for teachers and instructors. They have specialised in particular fields of activity and have developed professional identities. Each educational pathway has developed its own pedagogy and didactics. Educational administrators and managers have established routines and partnerships. Changes are costly, organisationally complex and threaten the continued existence of the profession. Nevertheless, increased competition between educational tracks or learning processes can lead to institutional transformation.

We will reconstruct, for two situations of central historical importance, the social mechanisms and logics that underlay the coordination and negotiation processes between general education and VET around the institutionalisation of SpS as a third educational pathway.<sup>4</sup> The first situation concerns the 1970s, when the institutionalisation of the SpS

---

4 All data were collected as part of the research project ‘The Upper-Secondary Specialised School as an Independent Educational Pathway alongside VET and Grammar School – Processes and Outcomes of Its Positioning and Profile Development’, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF-100019\_162987) 3/2016–8/2019.



was initiated by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (*Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren; EDK*)<sup>5</sup>. The second situation concerns the 1990s and 2000s, when the relevance of the SpS was again under discussion in the context of major reforms in VET and the higher education system. Here we will focus on education in the field of health as the disputes between the actors of the two institutional pathways were very pronounced. In addition to developments throughout Switzerland, the dynamics in two cantons (Zurich, Ticino) are examined in greater depth.

In order to reconstruct these social mechanisms, we consulted existing literature and analysed documents such as the minutes of meetings and conferences, reports from panels of experts including surveys, models and recommendations, as well as political statements, resolutions, the results of legislative consultation processes and decrees of the cantonal council. In addition, 7 interviews were conducted with experts who were involved in this process as educational policy observers or functionaries. The data were evaluated according to the theory-driven qualitative content analysis proposed by Gläser and Laudel (1999, 2010).

## Governance Mechanisms in the Process of Institutionalising Upper Secondary Education

After a brief description of the specialised school, we provide an outline of the historical context at the end of the 1960s, when the Swiss education system was faced with growing demands for coordination of action between educational institutions. This is followed by an analysis of two historical situations in which the SpS was institutionalised,

---

5 'In Switzerland, the main responsibility for education and culture lies with the cantons. They coordinate their work at the national level. The 26 cantonal ministers of education together form a political body to carry out this work: the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK)' (<https://www.edk.ch/dyn/11553.php>).

whereby we reconstruct the social mechanisms of action coordination between representatives and advocates of general education and VET.

### *The Specialised School*

In the 1970s, there was no vocational training at the upper secondary level for professions in the fields of health and social work. Young people, mostly girls, had to wait until they reached the age of 18–20 after completing compulsory education, before they could start college programmes for professional education and training (PET) (Joris & Witzig, 1987). From the beginning of the 20th century, the SpS located in larger cities took on an important bridging function by providing young women with an extended general education for two to three years to prepare them for these PET college courses. However, the schools did not award any federally recognised qualifications and did not offer any formally guaranteed access to continuing educational paths. From the 1970s onwards, the schools underwent a three-decades long process of transformation during which they changed from these very heterogeneous urban schools for young women to an upper secondary level education path that was also open to young men (Criblez, 2002; Leemann & Imdorf, 2019). 2004 saw the introduction of occupational fields, including professions in health, social work and education. These fields are chosen in the 2nd year of schooling and prepare for vocational training at the tertiary PET level in the respective professional field. The school is completed with a diploma that qualifies for PET colleges, or with a baccalaureate as a means of qualifying for admission to universities of applied sciences or universities of teacher education (Esposito, Leemann & Imdorf, 2019). SpS is therefore a pre-professional educational pathway and – in contrast to VET programmes – it does not provide a labour market entrance qualification.

### *New Demands on the Coordination of Action in the Late 1960s*

The expansion of education in the post-war period in Switzerland between 1950 and 1970 resulted in a doubling of post-compulsory

certificates. The increase in the proportion of students attending baccalaureate schools led to concerns that students who were more successful in school might no longer be interested in VET and attend baccalaureate schools instead (Criblez, 2001; Gonon & Maurer, 2012). At the same time, there were fears that the dual system of vocational training, particularly in technical fields, would no longer adequately prepare learners for rapid technological change (Nyikos, 1967). On the baccalaureate side, representatives warned that the further expansion of the baccalaureate school would lead to a decline in the level of baccalaureate education and create an excess of graduates unsuited for the labour market (Nyikos, 1967; Meylan, 1996).

This mutual observation and referencing of the two educational institutions reflected the increasing pressure on nation states to modernise their educational systems, which can be observed on a global scale from the 1960s onwards (Rosenmund, 2011). Structural issues became increasingly relevant, that is there was a need to clarify the distinction between the pathways and learners' leeway to move and choose among them (permeability), as well as the relationship between general education and VET, the recognition of qualifications and the possibilities for subsequent further qualification. As a result, there was an increase in educational policy demands on the coordination of action in the governance of each respective type of education and its relationships to other education sectors (*ibid.*). This meant that those responsible for general education and VET, who had previously operated in separate worlds, had to interact with each other (Zulauf et al., 2000; Criblez, 2002). In this context, the EDK initiated a process at the post-compulsory level to review the relationship between general and vocational schools, to analyse reform approaches and coordination problems in the post-compulsory education sector and to draft recommendations. In particular, it recommended clarifying the development and coordination of the SpS as an educational type positioned between baccalaureate schools and VET (EDK, 1977, p. 51). The next section focuses on this initial phase in the clarification and negotiation process.

*Beginning Institutionalisation of the SpS in the Early 1970s*

At the beginning of the 1970s, on the VET side a commission of experts drew up proposals for improvements in apprenticeship training (Expertenkommission, 1972a). This was a reaction to an initiative by the baccalaureate school to introduce a 'school for middle management' between baccalaureate and VET (Criblez, 2001, 2002). The most important measure proposed was to expand school-based general education within apprenticeship training by establishing a vocational upper secondary school, 'so that apprenticeship training can be considered a real alternative to attending baccalaureate school' (ibid.) and become more attractive for gifted young people. The vocational upper secondary school was intended to recruit talented young people for management positions in companies. It explicitly did not pursue the goal of obtaining university entrance qualifications. Nor was its main purpose to provide a pathway to PET or to engineering colleges in particular.

In the wake of the proposal for a 'school for middle management' a commission of experts tasked by the EDK also drew up a proposal for the reform of general education at the upper secondary level along with a first outline of the possible future position and function of the upper secondary SpS (Expertenkommission, 1972b). Contrary to the previous tradition of preparing students for paramedical, social and early-childhood education training programmes, the SpS diploma was now also supposed to qualify students to transfer to PET colleges in the fields of technology, economics and the natural sciences.

The EDK set up an SpS commission to look more closely at the future position and profile of the SpS within the overall education system. Between 1973 and 1977, the commission convened several meetings (Studienkommission Diplommittelschule, 1975–1976), organised an informational event in 1974 (EDK, 1974) to which representatives of VET in particular were invited, conducted a survey on the state of schools at the time, developed guiding principles and models, evaluated a legislative consultation process on these drafts and drew up a final report (EDK, 1977a).

The following section reconstructs alongside the four social mechanisms the central logics underlying the coordination of action between the actors from general education and VET in the negotiations on the

future position of the SpS, which can explain both the persistence and change in the relationship between the two systems.

The perspective of the *power-based mechanism* makes it clear that each group of actors tried to secure the continued existence of its own institution and did everything it could to maintain its power of definition for its own area. On the one hand, the representatives of VET from the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, the conference of cantonal VET offices as well as various professional organisations, for example the conferences of directors of vocational schools and of engineering colleges, commercial and trade association or swiss employers' association categorically rejected the suggestions for the further development of VET made by actors from general education and professional fields receiving the graduates of SpS – EDK, conference of directors of baccalaureate schools, headmasters of SpS, professional association in the health sector. For example, they refused to grant access to their educational pathway without a say in the matter by rejecting the concept that SpS could lead to PET colleges for technology, economics and the natural sciences. On their view, the SpS ought to 'most certainly keep away from the technological sector and limit itself to those few areas with demonstrated needs' (Studienkommission Diplommittelschule, meeting minutes 2.7.1975, p. 3).

On the other hand, the expert groups and commissions mentioned above were almost exclusively staffed by representatives of their own institution. As a result, the actors from VET repeatedly criticised their exclusion from the developmental stages of work and the disregard of their objections to the SpS while firmly demanding a seat on the SpS commission. However, the EDK did not accept this and justified its decision on the basis that it would be difficult to define the function of commissioners who categorically reject the SpS (EDK, 1977a, p. 58). This strengthened the position of the SpS.

The common thread running through the negotiations of the two groups of actors is the question of the quantitative allocation of young people to the two institutions, as the following quotation illustrates.

The harmonious balance between the three post-compulsory education paths — apprenticeship, SpS and baccalaureate school — is of the utmost importance for the economic and social development of our country. If this balance is disturbed, for example, in favour of the baccalaureate school, there could be

a surplus of university graduates but a shortage of qualified people in the other sectors. In Switzerland, there is currently an increased demand for graduates of PET colleges [...]. (Expertenkommission, 1972b, p. 40)

The argument invoked in the quotation – that complementarities between the individual educational pathways and various positions in working life could fall out of balance – is based on *functional logics*. Various votes at the 1974 information event advocating for reform through the establishment of SpS to maintain this balance explicitly referred to the potential of the SpS to redress a currently emerging imbalance. The school, it was supposed, would fill a ‘gap’ in the overall institutional structure. It was intended for PET that, while not requiring a baccalaureate, it would require a high level of general education and a minimum starting age of 18. For those young people not yet mature enough to choose a profession or who failed to complete baccalaureate school, the SpS would offer an alternative path and an ‘honourable transition’.

The commission justified the plan to reposition the SpS as a pathway to the engineering colleges on the basis of the requirements of permeability and gender equality, which can be attributed to the *legitimising mechanism*. The idea had been that there must also be an educational path subsequent to the SpS open to boys if the SpS was now being introduced for both genders. However, the aim was not to take learners away from VET but to differentiate general education, which would relieve the burden on the baccalaureate school.

This latter reference was in response to repeated criticism from VET that young people were increasingly fleeing the workplace and migrating to the middle schools, with ‘devastating consequences for the economy’. To support their argument about the dysfunctionality of the SpS, the VET actors at the information event and in the legislative consultation on the SpS emphasised VET’s thus far proven track record. Playing a central role in this were the deeply rooted cultural convictions that breathing ‘workshop air’ as opposed to ‘schoolroom air’ was an indispensable prerequisite for the future exercise of a company management function. In this context, the representative of the engineering colleges made it clear at the information event that the practical apprenticeship would be retained as the pathway to these colleges. The SpS could therefore not serve as a basis for recruitment.

The repeatedly voiced objections of ‘schoolification’ and ‘upward pressure’ in the training of young people were based on the fear that ‘intellectuals are regarded with more interest’ than graduates of apprenticeships and that this would lead to their increasing social devaluation. By leaning on the conviction, anchored in broad sections of society, that company-based practical experience is what counts for good training, the actors in VET attempted to push back against the growing significance of general education and theoretical-systematic knowledge and thereby ensure the legitimacy of VET.

As the following statement by an actor representing VET shows, the issue of the social value of the various educational pathways is closely linked to the social structure of society and to the question of which educational pathway is capable of recruiting which learners, and of how the social elite and the middle class reproduce themselves.

Therefore, the longer it goes on, the less acceptable it is that [the apprenticeship] should have to content itself with being second tier, while on the other hand, one is stubbornly trying to hoist the first [tier] onto the conveyor belt to the university. (VET representative in EDK, 1974, p. 3)

The *power-based mechanism* in the coordination of action thus comes full circle. From this perspective, in the context of expanding education, the social elite was interested in protecting the baccalaureate path for its own intergenerational reproduction by keeping it narrow. This is supported by the introduction of the SpS as a means of reducing the number of students that would be opting for the baccalaureate pathway. In the eyes of the representative of VET quoted above, however, this would mean that gifted young people (‘first tier’), who previously would have chosen VET, would now prefer the SpS and thus also take this less strenuous path into the academic world. As a result, VET would be left with only the less gifted young people (‘second tier’). This fuelled the fear that VET as an institution would in the long run lose its importance, power and influence in society.

Accordingly, the representatives of VET were intent on preventing a competitive relationship between VET and SpS. In particular, they feared that the institutionalisation of the SpS as a preparation for PET colleges could mean the end of the vocational upper secondary school and a waste of the investments made in it. Within this *utilitarian logic*,

the VET actors pointed to the five times higher cost of the SpS compared to the existing vocational upper secondary school. The members of the SpS expert commission attempted to counter these concerns and resistance by means of information, dialogue and persuasive elucidation of the benefits of the SpS. In doing so, it was important to avoid giving representatives of industry, trade and commerce the impression that ‘the SpS was a competitor to the existing apprenticeship training’ (EDK, 1977a, p. 15).

After a process that took nearly two decades and involved ongoing disputes over the status and profile of this third pathway the SpS was officially recognised in 1988 (EDK, 1989, p. 3). With the aim of understanding the dynamics between the SpS and VET after this first step of official recognition, the next section is devoted to a second historical stage in the institutionalisation of the SpS, in which the school came under fire once again in the context of major VET reform. These dynamics were very pronounced with regard to education in the field of health.

### *Reform of Apprenticeships in the Health Sector (1990s–2000s)*

Only a few years later, a major reform process began at the upper secondary level and in the tertiary system, which lasted until the mid-2010s. Among other things, the new Vocational Training Act of 2002 (see Strebel et al. in this volume) transferred the professions in health care, which had previously been regulated at the cantonal level, into the regular VET system and introduced corresponding apprenticeships at the upper secondary level<sup>6</sup>. In the field of health care, this was the basic vocational training for health professionals (Federal Certificate of Vocational Education and Training Health Care Assistance). It was

---

6 The new Vocational Training Act has established apprenticeships as the standard form of training. It has assigned the full-time school-based form of organisation a subordinate role, and this form of training has become particularly important in the French-, Italian-, and Romansh-speaking cantons (SERI, 2019). In the following, we use the term apprenticeship for a better understanding of the argument.



also at this time that the first universities of applied sciences for health care were founded. During these reform years, it was unclear what the introduction of apprenticeship in the health sector would mean for the traditional educational task of the SpS and whether the SpS would also be recognised as a path to the newly created universities of applied sciences for health. Below we describe the social mechanisms underlying the coordination of action between representatives and advocates of general education and VET in the occupational field of health care.<sup>7</sup>

With the integration of the health care professions into the Vocational Training Act, VET was able to expand and strengthen its position within the *power-based logic*. With the newly attained power to define the structure and content of health care training at the upper secondary level, the VET actors were able to revoke basic training principles of the traditional health care training programmes, which were predominantly school-based (Kiener, 2007): The minimum age of entry was reduced from 18 to 16 years, and the hitherto central importance of general education was reduced to a level customary for apprenticeships. The justifications that were relevant in the coordination of action can be assigned to the perspective of the *legitimation-based reproductive mechanism*. They tie in with the culturally anchored convictions regarding the importance of hands-on professional practice, which is considered the actual ‘school of life’, in contrast to the school where one learns ‘only from the textbook’ (interview with a representative of the Task Force for Vocational Training in the Health Care System). As the actor quoted below emphasises, the apprenticeship is a form of vocational training of whose quality a large part of the population is firmly convinced, and which guides the coordination of action as an unquestioned standard.

The path [via an apprenticeship] is of course also anchored in the populace. People know the apprenticeship. And the fact that there is now suddenly an apprenticeship [in the health care sector] has naturally met with a very positive response from many people. (Representative of the Task Force Vocational Training in the Health Care System)

---

7 The data is based on the dissertation of Raffaella Simona Esposito (Esposito, 2020).

With the decision to integrate the health care professions into the uniform framework for all VET courses, the new apprenticeship was embedded in an existing overall institutional structure. Together with the already existing vocational baccalaureate, a coherent and educational offering was created that also permitted advancement to the tertiary education level. Due to its on-the-job training element, the Health Care Assistant Apprenticeship was from the very beginning also considered well integrated with the professional world. In keeping with the *functionalist explanatory context*, the actors in VET were able to strengthen the apprenticeship as a training concept and thus continue on the previous path of development. With regard to the *raison d'être* of the SpS, the actors in VET henceforth took the firm stand that,

we no longer need the SpS, at the latest from now on if we ever really needed it at all. Precisely because we have now rounded out vocational training, we have sorted it out, what is the point of having some SpS in between? [...] That at least was the tenor of the reaction on the vocational side. (Interview with EDK representative)

From the point of view of certain VET representatives, competition between the two educational pathways, which possibly could have led to an erosion of VET's path-dependent position of strength, should be prevented. Important actors in the health care sector (e.g. professional associations) (*power based mechanism*), on the other hand, advocated for maintaining the school-based general education path via the SpS as an alternative to VET. Their justifications were based on *utilitarian motives* regarding the institution's benefit and its *functionality* for the health care professions in view of the demand for skilled workers. The more in-depth general education and personality development offered by the SpS, they argued, made it an optimal preparation for tertiary level health training, which is important for the ramified professional hierarchy of the health care system and its demanding levels of responsibility. Encouraged by these arguments, the advocates of the SpS pursued the goal of extending the development path of the SpS and consolidating the institution.

As the in-depth analyses in two cantons show, at the beginning of the 2000s there were concerted efforts on the part of the advocates of VET within the cantonal government and parliament to close the SpS.

However, this *power-based reproduction mechanism*, which would have strengthened the VET path enormously, was prevented by considerable resistance from the teaching staff, the student body and civil society through political instruments such as demonstrations and petitions. It was partly thanks to these actions that the planned abolishment was averted. The forces for the retention of the SpS based their arguments on societal expectations of equality and integration, which fall into the realm of the *legitimising mechanism*.

However, in one of the analysed cantons the representatives of VET continued to take action against the SpS in order to prevent a competitive situation. Benefiting from cantonal cost-saving measures they succeeded in hindering the expansion of the school by greatly reducing the number of classes allowed and by directing it to abstain from drawing too much media attention to their offerings. Their position was officially defined as subsidiary, that is, as a complementary, and in no way a competing offer to the newly introduced Health Care Assistant Apprenticeship. In return, the government promoted the Health Care Assistant Apprenticeship, for example by requiring state facilities (hospitals, homes) to offer apprenticeships (Maurer, 2013). Today, it is the second most frequently chosen apprenticeship in Switzerland (SERI, 2019), and with more than 4000 graduates annually, it awards around four times as many degrees as the SpS in the occupational field of health care.

The dispute concerning the institutionalisation of the SpS came to a head over the question of whether the school should be recognised as a formal path to the university of applied sciences in health. For the continued existence of the SpS, it was essential that it could, in the educational paths that were being established to the higher education system, award a qualification *functionally* equivalent to the vocational baccalaureate. In this key question, too, the SpS representatives based their justifications on the need for skilled workers. Furthermore, they referred to the transnational proliferation of ideas of equality and European compatibility (*legitimising mechanism*), and to the long-standing experience and expertise of the SpS in preparing young people for higher education (*utilitarian mechanism*).

Yet in the eyes of VET actors, experience-based learning in on-the-job practice remained the uncircumventable paradigm that could

*legitimise* access to higher education. An apprenticeship coupled with the vocational baccalaureate was supposed the “royal road” to the university of applied sciences (Gonon, 2012, p. 136). Nevertheless, in order to meet the growing demands on general education for further vocational training, VET circles pursued the idea of making use of the expertise of the SpS by integrating it institutionally into VET. By transforming the SpS into a school-based VET programme with the possibility of obtaining a vocational baccalaureate, it could have provided the skills required in the labour market. This plan to “incorporate” the SpS was stopped, however, by the VET side itself since the strongly school-based model threatened the very idea of the vocational apprenticeship.

As a central actor in general education, the EDK has taken up these expectations in terms of vocational and practical training and called in its recommendations for the further development of the SpS for ‘increased integration in VET’ (EDK, 1991, p. 1) to be a central educational goal for the SpS. It can be assumed that some concessions and compromises had to be made to the *power-based* demands of VET because the universities of applied sciences fall within its purview. The 2004 reform of the SpS introduced various occupational fields (including health care) and, with the specialised baccalaureate, an SpS curriculum that involved initial work experience in order to legitimise admission to the universities of applied sciences in specific occupational fields.

## Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has endeavoured to examine governance processes in the development of the education system at the post-compulsory level from the late 1960s onwards. The starting point was the dominant position of the vocational path, both then and now. The object of investigation was the social mechanisms of the coordination of action between actors in the then separate worlds of VET and general education as they were attempting to clarify the future position of the Specialised School

(SpS), officially located within general education, in relation to VET. As the analyses show, the representatives of VET vehemently spoke out against and fought the institutionalisation of SpS from the very beginning. They feared that the apprenticeship would lose importance and that young people who performed well in school in particular would take the general education route. The study attempts to explain two findings that are interesting from today's perspective. First, vocational training was able to hold on to its dominant status during these decades. Second, despite considerable resistance from the VET side, the SpS succeeded in establishing itself as the third federally recognised educational pathway to the universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education.

For the theory-based analysis of governance processes, we have relied on four social mechanisms that are able to explain both the path-dependent development in the relationship between general education and VET and the change in the form of the institutionalisation of the SpS. We have thus aimed to contribute to the examination of the significant relationships between governance of VET and the education system as a whole.

In the context of the new demands for coordination of action between the two historically established systems, VET and general education, each group of actors was keen to reproduce its own institution along the lines of the *power-based mechanism*. While they did not want to lose their influence on its design, they also sought to shore up the established ways of reproducing the social classes they represented. For the actors representing VET, this meant using all their influence in politics and administration to prevent the expansion of the general education path by recognising the SpS and, if necessary, incorporating it into VET. For the actors representing general education, this meant preventing the total marginalisation or even abolishment of the SpS in order to preserve the institutional status of the baccalaureate school as the elite recruitment path. Moreover, the SpS received support from the EDK and from the tertiary educational institutions and professional fields receiving the graduates of SpS as well as from teachers, the student body and civil society, which made use of democratic instruments such as demonstrations and petitions.

Both groups of actors based their efforts on the *legitimising mechanism*. The consistent leitmotif of the actors in VET during these decades was the conviction that practical on-the-job experience is decisive for soundly training future professionals who can compete in the labour market. The concept of the apprenticeship served as a lasting standard for the coordination of action, which may explain its dominance today. In these decades, however, new values such as academic education, equality and permeability spread through the international framework. The advocates of the SpS were able to benefit from these and demand their institutionalisation on moral grounds.

From a *functionalist perspective*, the representatives of VET referred back to its integration with the world of work. The royal road with the apprenticeship at its core – supplemented where necessary by general education in the vocational upper secondary school and later the vocational baccalaureate – has so far guaranteed the smooth functioning of the economy. The creation of apprenticeships in areas for which the SpS had traditionally prepared learners, and which subsequently saw a rapid expansion in their numbers, further strengthened the function of apprenticeships at the beginning of the new millennium. The representatives of general education advocated a change in the structure of the post-compulsory school system by pointing out a gap that the SpS would fill. Only by this third way could a harmonious and ongoing balance be achieved between university graduates and qualified professionals. The need to close the gap before the age of 18, the surplus of university graduates and the shortage of skilled workers were important arguments justifying the function of the SpS.

In the 1970s, VET actors saw the investments just made in vocational upper secondary schools at risk if the SpS were institutionalised and pointed to its higher costs. Time and again, they vehemently refused to compete with the SpS and demanded that it be restricted to an area of training that was not covered by VET. Within this *utilitarian logic* they wanted to prevent a competitive situation that might have led to a change in the relationship between general education and VET. This competitive situation with VET indeed plunged the SpS into one crisis after the other. However, it has at the same time given the representatives of the SpS the opportunity to prove its usefulness and

demonstrate its potential for training and integration, thanks to many years of experience and expertise. However, the school had to supplement its training profile with key vocational training components and reduce its costs by limiting the number of classes.

Putting these results in both international and national contexts allows us to formulate the following additional questions and conclusions. In view of the Swiss government's efforts to present VET as an export model and opportunity for other countries, our analysis suggests that, beyond the necessary economic conditions to implement dual VET, a successful VET export requires certain power-based and legitimising mechanisms in the coordination of action in the target country that do not necessarily exist. Who, for example, has the power to define what constitutes a 'harmonious balance' between general education and VET? What is elsewhere the origin of the conviction, deeply-rooted in Swiss society, that on-the-job practical experience is indispensable for a good vocational training? Which social classes and stakeholders may have a markedly interest in apprenticeship training in the respective country? At a national level, our analysis points to ongoing challenges of Swiss VET despite its high current legitimacy. In the context of globally proliferating guiding principles such as upskilling and academisation, as well as employability in increasingly highly skilled labour markets, Swiss VET may become contested. As long as the proportion of vocational baccalaureate holders remains stagnating at around 15 % of an age cohort, and as long as the respective pathway to higher education remains limited to a relatively small number of apprenticeships (Meyer & Sacchi, 2020), or put otherwise, as long as the VET system prepares for far fewer qualifications at the tertiary level than the labour market demands, its social mechanisms of functionality and legitimisation may be challenged and general education pathways such as the SpS may be strengthened.

## Sources

- EDK Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren. (1974). Protokoll. *Über die Informationssitzung betreffend Diplommittelschulen vom 18. Februar 1974 im Bundeshaus Bern.*
- EDK Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren. Kommission für Mittelschulfragen, Studienkommission Diplommittelschulen. (1977a). Diplommittelschulen. Bericht verfasst im Auftrag der EDK. *Informationsbulletin, 11a.* EDK.
- EDK Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren. (1977b). Thesen betreffend Schulkoordination und Schulreform vom 20./21. Oktober 1977. Printed in Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren (EDK) (Hrsg.) 1995, *Empfehlungen und Beschlüsse*, 51–52.
- EDK Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren. (1999). *Empfehlungen zur Weiterentwicklung der Diplommittelschulen (DMS).* EDK.
- Expertenkommission. (1972a). *Schlussbericht über die Arbeiten der Eidgenössischen Expertenkommission für die Verbesserung der Berufslehre* (Autor: Grübel A.). Bern.
- Expertenkommission. (1972b). Bericht «Mittelschule von morgen». *Bildungspolitik: Jahrbuch der Schweizerischen Konferenz der Kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren*, 58. Huber.
- Schweizerische Direktoren-Konferenz gewerblicher Berufs- und Fachschulen. Resolution zur Diplommittelschule am 11. September 1975; (veröffentlicht am 25/26.9.1975).
- Studienkommission Diplommittelschule. (1975–1976). Sitzungsprotokolle.



## References

- Altrichter, H. (2015). Governance – Steuerung und Handlungskoordination bei der Transformation von Bildungssystemen. In H. J. Abs, T. Brüsemeister, M. Schemmann & J. Wissinger (Eds.), *Governance im Bildungssystem. Analysen zur Mehrebenenperspektive, Steuerung und Koordination* (pp. 21–63). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Baethge, M. (2006). Das deutsche Bildungs-Schisma: Welche Probleme ein vorindustrielles Bildungssystem in einer nachindustriellen Gesellschaft hat. *SOFI-Mitteilungen*, 34, 13–27.
- Blanck, J. M., Edelstein, B., & Powell, J. W. (2013). Persistente schulische Segregation oder Wandel zur inklusiven Bildung? Die Bedeutung der UN-Behindertenrechtskonvention für Reformprozesse in den deutschen Bundesländern. *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 39(2), 267–292.
- Bolli, T., Oswald-Egg, M. E., & Rageth, L. (2017). Die duale Berufsbildung bereitet die Jugendlichen besser auf den Arbeitsmarkt vor. *Schweizerische Gesellschaft für angewandte Berufsbildungsforschung*, 3.
- Bolli, T., Rageth, L., & Renold, U. (2018). Der soziale Status der Berufsbildung in der Schweiz. *KOF-Analysen*, 3.
- Bühlmann, F., Beetschen, M., David, T., Ginalski, S., & Mach, A. (2015). Der Wandel der Eliten in der Schweiz. *Social Change in Switzerland*, 1.
- BFS Bundesamt für Statistik. (1971). *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Schweiz 1971*. Bern: BFS.
- BFS Bundesamt für Statistik. (1972). *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Schweiz 1972*. Bern: BFS.
- Cattaneo, M. A., & Wolter, S. C. (2016). Die Berufsbildung in der Pole-Position. Die Einstellungen der Schweizer Bevölkerung zum Thema Allgemeinbildung vs. Berufsbildung. Aarau: Schweizerische Koordinationsstelle für Bildungsforschung.
- Criblez, L. (2001). Bildungsexpansion durch Systemdifferenzierung – am Beispiel der Sekundarstufe II in den 1960er- und 1970er Jahren.

- Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Bildungswissenschaften*, 23(1), 95–116.
- Criblez, L. (2002). Gymnasium und Berufsschule – Zur Dynamisierung des Verhältnisses durch die Bildungsexpansion seit 1950. *Traverse – Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 9(3), 29–40.
- Edelstein, B. (2016). Stabilität und Wandel der Schulstruktur aus neoinstitutionalistischer Perspektive. Überlegungen zur Schulpolitik unter Bedingungen der Pfadabhängigkeit. In B. Hermstein, N. Berkemeyer & V. Manitius (Eds.), *Institutioneller Wandel im Bildungswesen. Facetten, Analysen und Kritik* (pp. 47–70). Weinheim und Basel: Beltz Juventa.
- Edelstein, B., & Nikolai, R. (2013). Strukturwandel im Sekundarbereich. Determinanten schulpolitischer Reformprozesse in Sachsen und Hamburg. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 59(4), 482–493.
- Esposito, R. S. (2020). *Allgemein- versus Berufsbildung als Vorbereitung auf tertiäre Gesundheitsausbildungen – andersartig, aber gleichwertig? Ein konventionensoziologischer Vergleich zweier konkurrierender Bildungswege in der Schweiz*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Basel.
- Esposito, R. S., Leemann, R. J., & Imdorf, C. (2019). Establishment of a school-based pathway to universities of applied sciences in Switzerland. Conventions of higher education access in vocational and general education. *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 44(3), 337–358.
- Falcon, J. (2020). The Swiss EI Dorado? Education and social mobility in twentieth-century Switzerland. In R. Breen & W. Müller (Eds.), *Education and intergenerational social mobility in Europe and the United States* (pp. 150–172). Stanford California: Stanford University Press.
- Gläser, J., & Laudel, G. (1999). Theoriegeleitete Textanalyse? Das Potential einer variablenorientierten Inhaltsanalyse. *WZB Discussion Paper*, 1–24.
- Gläser, J., & Laudel, G. (2010). *Experteninterviews und qualitative Inhaltsanalyse als Instrumente rekonstruierender Untersuchungen*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

- Gonon, P. (2012). Entstehung und Dominanz der dualen Berufsausbildung in der Schweiz. In M. M. Bergman, S. Hupka-Brunner, T. Meyer & R. Samuel (Eds.), *Bildung – Arbeit – Erwachsenwerden. Ein interdisziplinärer Blick auf die Transition im Jugend- und jungen Erwachsenenalter* (pp. 221–242). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Gonon, P., & Maurer, M. (2012). Educational policy actors as stakeholders in the development of the collective skill formation system: The case of Switzerland. In M. R. Busemeyer & C. Trampusch (Eds.), *The political economy of collective skill formation* (pp. 126–149). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harney, K., & Zymek, B. (1994). Allgemeinbildung und Berufsbildung. Zwei konkurrierende Konzepte der Systembildung in der deutschen Bildungsgeschichte und ihre aktuelle Krise. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 40(3), 405–422.
- Harwood, J. (2010). Understanding academic drift: On the institutional dynamics of higher technical and professional education. *Minerva*, 48, 413–427.
- Joris, E., & Witzig, H. (1991). *Frauengeschichte(n). Dokumente aus zwei Jahrhunderten zur Situation der Frauen in der Schweiz*. Zürich: Limmat-Verlag.
- Kiener, U. (2007). Anders? Gleich? – Grenzziehungen (in) der Berufsbildung. In M. Chaponnière, Y. Flückiger, B. Hotz-Hart, F. Osterwalder, G. Sheldon & K. Weber (Eds.), *Bildung und Beschäftigung. Beiträge der internationalen Konferenz in Bern* (pp. 487–503). Zürich: Rüegger.
- Leemann, R. J., & Imdorf, C. (2019). Praktiken der Valorisierung in der Educational Governance. Zur Institutionalisierung der Schweizer Fachmittelschule in den 1970er Jahren. In C. Imdorf, R. J. Leemann & P. Gonon (Eds.), *Bildung und Konventionen. Die 'Économie des Conventions' in der Bildungsforschung* (pp. 427–459). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Leemann, R. J., Imdorf, C., Fischer, A., Esposito, R. S., & Hafner, S. (2019). Die Fachmittelschule als 'Mädchenschule'!? Eine Bildungsinstitution der Sekundarstufe II zwischen Reproduktion und Transformation der geschlechtertypischen Berufswahl. In E. Makarova (Ed.), *Gendersensible Berufsorientierung und*

- Berufswahl: Beiträge aus der Forschung und Praxis* (pp. 48–67). Bern: hep Verlag.
- Maag Merki, K., & Altrichter, H. (2015). Educational governance. *Die Deutsche Schule*, 107(4), 396–410.
- Mahoney, J. (2000). Path dependence in historical sociology. *Theory and Society*, 29(4), 507–548.
- Maurer, M. (2013). Berufsbildung und Arbeitsmarkt zwischen Tertiärisierung und Fachkräftemangel. Herausforderungen für das duale Modell. In M. Maurer & P. Gonon (Eds.), *Herausforderungen für die Berufsbildung in der Schweiz. Bestandesaufnahme und Perspektiven* (pp. 15–36). Bern: hep Verlag.
- Meyer, T., & Sacchi, S. (2020). Wieviel Schule braucht die Berufsbildung? Eintrittsdeterminanten und Wirkungen von Berufslehren mit geringem schulischen Anteil. *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 72, 105–134.
- Meylan, J. (1996). Die Erneuerung des Gymnasiums und die Anerkennung der Maturitäten – Stationen der Debatte 1968–1995. In Erziehungsdirektorenkonferenz EDK (Ed.), *Von der «Mittelschule von morgen» zur Maturitätsreform 1995* (pp. 7–45). Bern: EDK.
- Nyikos, L. (1967). Eine Schule für mittlere Kader. *Gymnasium Helveticum*, 22(1), 32–46.
- OECD. (2015). Focus on vocational education and training (VET) programmes. Education Indicators in Focus. *OECD Publishing*, 33.
- Rauner, F. 2012. Akademisierung beruflicher und Verberuflichung akademischer Bildung – widersprüchliche Trends im Wandel nationaler Bildungssysteme. *bwp@*, 23, 1–19.
- Rosenmund, M. (2011). Bildungsföderalismus in der globalisierten Bildungsinstitution – Das Schulsystem der Schweiz. In K. Kansteiner-Schänzlin (Ed.), *Schule im gesellschaftlichen Spannungsfeld* (pp. 33–46). Baltmannsweiler: Schneider Verlag.
- SERI State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation. (2019). *Vocational and professional education and training in Switzerland. Facts and figures 2019*. SERI.
- Strahm, R. H. (2014). *Die Akademisierungsfalle. Warum nicht alle an die Uni müssen*. Bern: hep Verlag.

- Wettstein, E. (2020). *Berufsbildung. Entwicklung des Schweizer Systems*. Bern: hep Verlag.
- Wettstein, E., Schmid, E., & Gonon, P. (2017). *Swiss vocational and professional education and training (VPET)*. Bern: hep Verlag.
- Zulauf, M., Gentina, P., & Kübler, C. (2000). *Die Sekundarstufe II hat Zukunft: Schlussbericht der Projektgruppe Sekundarstufe II. EDK-Schriftenreihe «Studien + Berichte», 9*. Bern: EDK & BBT.