

Governance of Transitions in the Swiss Education System. A Study on the Political Regulation of Moving from Primary to Lower-Secondary and from Lower-Secondary to Upper-Secondary Education (GovTrans)

The study applies a *governance perspective* to examine how in the Swiss system of educational federalism the transition from primary to secondary education (transition 1) and from lower-secondary to upper-secondary education (transition 2) is governed – that is, regulated, organised, reformed, and legitimised; how differences in governance between the cantons can be explained; what kinds of tensions arise within and between the cantons as a result; and how these are addressed by the relevant actors involved in the governance process. The study's point of departure is positions in politics, academia, and business that criticise, for various reasons, the cantonal shares of students enrolled in the different pathways of lower-secondary and upper-secondary education. Among the reasons brought forward are inequality of educational opportunities between the cantons, barriers facing children from socially disadvantaged milieus, obstacles to the integration of weaker students in basic vocational training, or the lowering of performance levels in advanced-track upper-secondary education (*Gymnasium*) in some cantons. These positions point out that education has become an important criterion of social order and reproduction in modern societies, which is why we consider the governance of these two transitions to be an important issue.

In Switzerland, these transitions have primarily been investigated from the perspective of individual careers and the underlying factors that influence them. What research has largely failed to examine so far, however, is the institutional perspective of educational provision as well as the rules and processes of distributing students between the various educational pathways. The present study intends to close this research gap by examining (1) the current cantonal *structures of educational provision and rules of distribution*, their roots and reforms, and comparing them in terms of their political-cultural as well as socio- and economic-structural context; (2) the responsibilities, objectives, strategies, and justifications of the relevant governance actors at all political levels (*institutional architecture*); and (3) the dynamic events and activities and the resulting tensions and attempts to resolve them in the coordination of action within and between the various levels and groups of actors in the *implementation of the transitions*.

The *sociology of conventions* provides the theoretical toolbox to analyse the roots of, inertia of, and change in the governance of transitions, identify the plurality of justifications and worth, understand the actors' criticisms and their attempts to solve problems, and investigate the coordination of action and fields of tension that emerge thereby. The federal structure requires examining such governance at the *level of cantons* and *structures within cantons* (regions, municipalities, schools) as well as making *comparisons across cantons*. To do so, we have chosen nine cantons with different provision of lower-secondary and upper-secondary programmes (multiple case study). The process of selection was guided by theoretical and contrastive considerations. This study further requires an analysis of how differences among the cantons are treated at both the *confederate* (intercantonal) and *federal* level. The analytical objective of this research is to reconstruct a convention-based typology of cantonal *governance regimes* of transitions as well as the *underlying political cultures*. The data will be collected via interviews with significant actors involved in governance (political-administrative levels, civil society, business associations) and document analyses (regulations, informational documents, consultations, reports). The planned four-year research project will be the first one to provide a theoretically founded description and explanation of the differences in how the Swiss cantons govern the two transitions. The results will supply useful governance knowledge by enabling us to describe and explain specific constellations, patterns of action, and fields of tension within and between cantons.

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