

WORKSHOP 10:

The Politics of Skill Formation: Institutions, Actors, and Change

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Abstract:

Despite the recent upsurge of interest in skill formation expressed by policy-makers, scholars of political science have long neglected the study of the politics behind systems of skill formation. The goal of the workshop is to close this research gap. With a special focus on post-secondary education (vocational training, higher education, and lifelong learning), the workshop pursues two goals: 1. To establish and develop a typology of skill regimes that is sensitive towards institutional complementarities between skill formation, labour markets, industrial relations and the welfare state. Building on established typologies like “Varieties of Capitalism”, “worlds of welfare capitalism” and “families of nations”, we would like to significantly enhance our understanding of skill regimes and their underlying institutions and political coalitions. 2. To understand and assess the degree of change that systems of skill formation are going through in the wake of de-industrialization, liberalization and internationalization of economies. In particular, we are interested in finding out whether processes of change in skill regimes are driven by endogenous (domestic politics) or exogenous (globalization, EU) forces and whether we can observe convergence or continued divergence across the OECD world. The workshop would like to contribute to the establishment of a particular political science perspective on education and skill formation. We welcome papers from different theoretical and empirical perspectives (qualitative case studies, historical analyses, quantitative micro and macro level studies).

Outline of the Topic:

Systems of skill formation (vocational training, higher education, and lifelong learning) can be regarded as the result of political, economic and social developments as well as conflicts of interest. Deeply ingrained into national identities, education systems exhibit a high degree of stability. At the same time, qualification systems are highly relevant for the competitiveness and social cohesion of local, regional and national economies. This is why skill formation and lifelong learning has been put at the top of the agenda of policy reforms in many countries during the last years. The transformation and reform of education and qualification systems has also gained more attention on the international and supranational level. Debates have centred on the problems of reform in higher education, youth unemployment and the transformation of the skill base of industrial economies to the needs of a service and knowledge economy. However, as a topic of political science, skills systems and their change have so far received only minor attention and the significance of the current changes in this field remains widely unexplored. The proposed workshop seeks to constitute a forum where research on the issue is concerted and further developed, also in view of outlining main lines of future research. It focuses on the topic "politics of skill formation: institutions, actors, and change" in the industrialised world, inviting participants studying skill systems of different countries, in comparative perspective and from different theoretical and methodological angles. Hence, the workshop is clustered around two topics:

I. Typology of 'skill regimes' and institutional complementarities

Here, the primary goal is to capture and explain the variation and institutional diversity in education and skill formation systems in advanced industrial democracies. The current typologies to be found in the literature emphasize the stratification and structuring of education systems and their connection to labour markets (Allmendinger 1989; Müller / Gangel 2003). But they blind out institutional and political complementarities between the education system and the welfare state as well as the underlying political coalitions and constellations. Building on approaches in the literature (Varieties of Capitalism, Worlds of Welfare Capitalism, sociology of education, "families of nations"), we would like to develop a more fine-grained political science-based typology of 'skill regimes' (Thelen 2004; Thelen/Bussemeyer 2007; Anderson/Hassel 2007). Institutional complementarities between skill formation and welfare states, industrial relations, labour markets, and production regimes are the building blocks of such a typology (Estevez-Abe et al. 2001; Iversen 2005). In addition, we would like to know more about the actor constellations, the political coalitions underpinning skill formation systems, the division of labour between the public and the private sphere in the financing and provision of skill formation, the impact of political institutions and state structures (federalism, veto points, corporatism), the role of firms in skill formation as well as partisan forces and the influence of interest groups and associations on education systems. Furthermore, we are interested in the consequences of skill regimes in terms of the ease of transition from school to work, the type of skills provided (general or vocationally specific?) as well as social cohesion and equality of opportunity.

II. Political and institutional change in skill regimes and the role of domestic (endogenous) and international (exogenous) factors

The second section of the workshop is concerned with processes of institutional change and transformation of skill regimes. First of all, we would like to capture the degree of change observed in skill formation systems. Are education systems really undergoing serious transformation or do we observe overall stability with minor changes? What is the relationship between exogenous (international) and endogenous (domestic) factors? Is change driven by the forces of globalization, tertiarisation and deregulation, or are domestic, political forces more important in explaining the transformation? What are the mechanisms of change, i.e. do policy-makers promote institutional change through pro-active policies or are policies a reaction to changes happening within the wider socio-economic system? In how far are national developments spurred or mitigated by the EU, WTO or GATS? Can institutional complementarities between different spheres of welfare production regimes help to explain the dynamics of change? How are governance mechanisms and the division of labour between the market, the state, and associations changing? How is the role of the state as a provider of skill formation changing? Do we observe convergence of skill regimes across countries or persisting divergence? What is the role of processes of diffusion in terms of ideas, actors and institutions?

Relation to Existing Research

The prime motivation for this workshop is to contribute to the establishment of a political science perspective on education and skill formation. Up to now, this research area has been dominated by approaches from education sciences, economics and the sociology of education. In political science, vocational training, higher education and lifelong learning are chronically under-researched. More recently, however, the topic has gained more prominence in the field of comparative political economy (Estevez-Abe et al. 2001; Thelen 2004; Iversen 2005; Anderson/Hassel 2007; Culpepper 2007; Thelen/Busemeyer 2007), studies on education financing (Schmidt 2007; Busemeyer 2007), and the internationalization and Europeanization of education policy (Martens / Rusconi / Leuze 2007; Trampusch 2007, 2008). The workshop aims to focus these currently unconnected strands of research in order to develop a common research agenda.

Participants and Type of Papers

We would like to contribute to the establishment of a particular political science perspective on issues of vocational training, higher education, and lifelong learning and to offer a platform to concentrate and catalyse the recently found interests in these topics. Therefore, the workshop is open for participants coming from a range of subdisciplines in political science as well as sociology. Participants coming from fields like institutional analysis, public policy, political parties, comparative political economy, international relations or EU and Europeanization studies are as welcome as colleagues coming from empirical research on labor markets. Especially, we invite participants who are interested in the discussion on linkages between these different subdisciplines in studying skill formation and skill systems. We also appreciate papers, which apply specific

theoretical approaches (diffusion studies, principal-agent approaches, constructivist and rationalist approaches) to the topics at hand. The workshop is open to various methodological approaches (qualitative case studies, historical analyses, quantitative micro and macro level studies). In attracting participants, we can rely on an international network of scholars engaged in the research of education and training that has been founded and established by us last year.

Biographical Notes

Christine Trampusch (Prof. Dr.) is Assistant Professor for Comparative Politics Institute for Political Science, University of Berne, Switzerland. Her research interests include comparative political economy, theories of institutional change, Europeanization and qualitative methods. She has published in *Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, *German Politics*, *Journal of Social Policy*, *Journal of European Social Policy*, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, *Social Policy & Administration*, *Swiss Political Science Review*, *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, *Zeitschrift für Sozialreform*, and *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*. She is currently working on a comparative project on the Europeanization of vocational education and training policy in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Norway.

Marius R. Busemeyer (Dr.) is researcher at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (Cologne, Germany). His past research includes studies of the political and institutional determinants of education spending in OECD countries and the financing of education in the USA in particular. Currently, he is involved in a research project with Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Thelen on processes of institutional change in the German vocational training system. He has published, among others, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, *West European Politics*, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, *Zeitschrift für Sozialreform* and *German Policy Studies*.

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