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ANALYSING THE  
TWO-LEVEL GAME  
INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL  
DETERMINANTS OF CHANGE IN  
EDUCATION POLICY MAKING

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Staatlichkeit im Wandel • Transformations of the State  
Sonderforschungsbereich 597 • Collaborative Research Center 597



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**Analysing the Two-Level Game  
International and National Determinants of Change  
in Education Policy Making**

**ABSTRACT**

Education policy making is often considered an exclusive domain of the nation state in western industrialised countries. Since the 1990s, however, international organisations (IOs) have started to play a greater role in the field of education by developing new forms of governance. As a consequence, the predominance of the nation state in education becomes an increasingly contested issue. Yet, it is not clear what kind of effects IO governance will have, whether it brings about greater convergence among national education policies by promoting uniform solutions for commonly shared problems, or whether national institutions continue to follow their own logic, thereby hindering equal responses to IO governance. In order to develop a better understanding of the dynamics in this two-level game, this paper sets out to develop an analytical framework for examining the interplay between international and national determinants of change in the field of education. We argue that IOs apply different *governance instruments* by which they seek to influence national education policy making. However, the degree to which nation states will respond to these international stimuli is likely to be mediated by national *transformation capacities*, most prominently veto players and nationally rooted ideas of education. Based on these basic assumptions, we develop a parsimonious model in which we assess the influence of IO governance on national education policy making mediated through national transformation capacities.

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## ***Analysing the Two-Level Game International and National Determinants of Change in Education Policy Making<sup>1</sup>***

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education is often considered an exclusive domain of the nation state in western industrialised countries. Since the rise of states in their modern form, national governments incorporated education into their canon of public goods: they began to actively regulate individual behaviour, to grant monetary transfers, and to provide services in a wide array of social and economic spheres ranging from healthcare to social security, from labour markets to education. As a consequence, education has become a „normative good” (Hurrelmann et al. 2007: 3) of the modern state. Today, it is the nation state which prominently decides over the structural set-up of education systems, mainly finances education for its citizens, and is often accountable for any achievements and pitfalls related to this field.<sup>2</sup> This tight coupling between statehood and education has become dominant even on a world societal level (Meyer, Ramirez and Soysal 1992) and is almost a taken-for-granted condition.

Since the 1990s, however, new actors and new forms of governance have begun to emerge in the field of education, which are likely to challenge the nation state’s authority in educational matters (Leuze, Martens and Rusconi 2007). In particular, international organisations (IOs) have started to play a greater role in this field. IOs already active in education widened their scope of action and undertook new activities, while IOs not previously engaged in this field prominently included education in their agenda. UNESCO, for example, has been one of the oldest and most wide-ranging organisations active in education policy. Since its foundation in 1945, this United Nations’ special agency has developed and proposed conventions, resolutions and recommendations for its member states in the field of education (McNeely and Cha 1994). Today, UNESCO also shapes policy concepts by promoting lifelong learning or by establishing world-

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<sup>2</sup> Historically, the high responsibility of nation states for education matters is only a young phenomenon. In the middle ages, for example, education governance took place under the canopy of the Christian curriculum and institutions, while the state was not at all involved (Weymann et al. 2007). Today, education is still provided to some extent by religious and / or private providers; yet, their share is comparatively small, even in the US (Sackmann 2007) and the overall responsibility of education policy lies in the hands of national governments.

wide applicable quality assurance systems (Hartmann 2007). But also IOs, which traditionally did not have a mandate for education, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) or the World Bank, are today engaged in education projects through activities ranging from their own training centres to educational consulting to financing education reforms in the developing world (Jones 1992). The rising influence of IOs in the field of education is not restricted to a particular geographic area or specific sector of education but presents a widespread phenomenon: the number of participating countries in *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2006* has, for example, increased to 57 states, including 27 non-members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); membership in the Bologna Process also transcends the EU boundaries and today covers 46 countries, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, or Moldova. IOs have thus led to an increasing *internationalisation* of education by widening their scope of action, by shifting the cognitive horizon beyond national borders and by providing regionally or universally applicable models for education.

As a consequence of these new international developments the predominance of the nation state in education becomes an increasingly contested issue, leading to major reforms of national education systems. So far, empirical studies indicate that IOs primarily result in changes of national education *policies* and *politics* due to the specific nature of strategies applied as well as due to the special role of education for national identities (Martens and Wolf 2006).<sup>3</sup> The combination of these two dimensions encompasses what we define as *education policy making* on the national level. First of all, IOs strongly influence the content of educational debates and reform projects and therefore have the capacity to initiate changes of national education policy, be it the overarching *goals* that guide policy in the field of education, the techniques or *instruments* used to attain those *goals*, or the precise setting of these instruments (see Hall 1993). For example, IOs create new policy *goals* by initiating new debates and by promoting new ideas in the field of education. Most prominently, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has triggered major debates about the effectiveness and efficiency

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<sup>3</sup> According to the three classical dimensions of policy fields (Alemann 1994; Böhret, Jann and Kronenwett 1988; Rohe 1994) politics refer to the procedural/actor dimension, policy to the content dimension, and polity to the institutional dimension of policy making. IO governance in the field of education currently only affects the first two dimensions, since soft governance capacities, such as discursive idea dissemination, administrative and logistic support or financial resources, lack the impetus of changing a country's overall institutional framework of policy making, be it constitution, organisation of legislative and executive systems or juridical independence. Nevertheless, the overall institutional framework of national states has been changed in other policy fields due to the influence of IOs, which are not as tightly bound to national integrity and identity, e.g. human rights and economic policy.



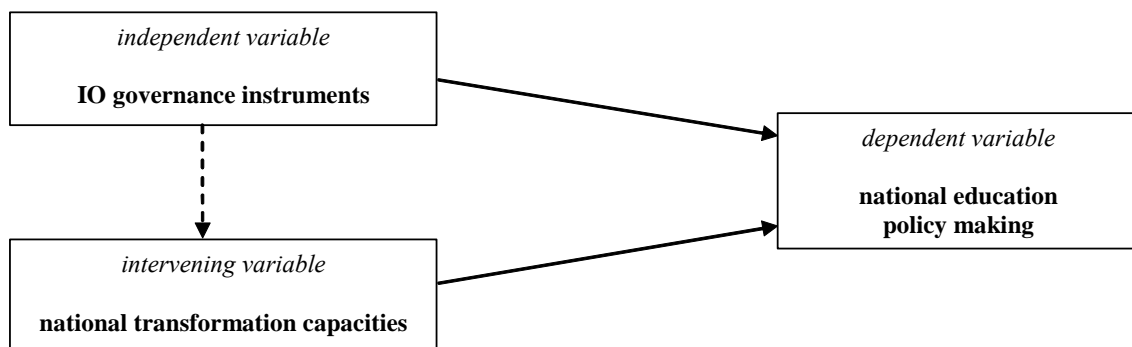
of secondary schooling in different countries with the launch of its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Enders 2006; Martens and Wolf 2006; Rinne, Kallo and Hokka 2004). Moreover, new *instruments* and *settings* may evolve from IO standard setting and benchmarking. The Bologna Process and the closely related Lisbon Agenda of the European Union (EU) not only influenced national policy goals, but clearly affect policy instruments and settings by proposing a completely new structure of higher education systems throughout Europe (Balzer and Rusconi 2007; Corbett 2005; Walkenhorst 2007).

Yet, by promoting new policies in the field of education, IOs have also the capacity to change the very nature of domestic education *politics*, i.e. the decision making process, the actors involved in the decision making process, and the nature of the formal and informal procedures that are followed to reach a decision. In addition to national policy makers, IOs today increasingly initiate and prepare policy in the field of education. At the same time societal actors, such as professions and trade associations, become more strongly involved in education decision making processes. The Bologna Process, for example, led to a stronger inclusion of international actors like the European Commission as well as of civil society such as the European Students' Union (ESU) or the European University Association (EUA) in higher education policy. But the emergence of new political actors also implies changes in the process of decision making itself: IO activities such as conference organisation or standard setting, have important steps of the preparation of education reform projects onto the international level. The most remarkable example of rising IO activity in education politics is the European Commission, which in the course of a few years has become the principal coordinating agent of the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Agenda (Balzer and Rusconi 2007).

By and large, IOs have gained greater influence in education policy making. So far, however, these new actors in the field of education are only emerging; their impact on education policy making has just begun. Yet, although the nation state has lost its exclusive position, it is unlikely that these new actors will govern this policy field alone. It is therefore not clear what kind of effects this internationalisation of the field of education will have: Will IOs bring about greater convergence among their member states by promoting uniform solutions for commonly shared problems? Or will the stimuli given by IOs be mediated by national institutions, which follow their own logic, thereby hindering equal responses to IO governance? In order to develop a better understanding of the dynamics in this two-level game, this paper sets out to develop an analytical framework for examining the interplay between international and national determinants of change in the field of education. The first section deals with the various forms of IO governance and how these are likely to affect the national level. We will argue that IOs

apply different *governance instruments*<sup>4</sup> by which they seek to influence national education policy making. These instruments range from soft mechanisms, such as discursive dissemination of new education goals, to technical and financial support, which are comparatively harder forms of compulsory regulations. As a consequence of the same international impetus, we assume that IO governance would, if unfiltered, result in convergence of education policy making among IO member states since it provides the same stimulus for all countries. Yet, the convergence argument neglects the country-specific historical development of institutions (Ebbinghaus 2005; Hurrelmann et al. 2007; Streeck and Thelen 2005). We will argue that the degree to which nation states will respond to these international stimuli is likely to be mediated by – what we call – national *transformation capacities*<sup>5</sup>, most prominently veto players and nationally rooted ideas of education. In the second part, we accordingly explore national veto players and national ideas of education in more detail: National ideas about education influence, for example, whether new education models proposed by IOs are compatible with national traditions, while the number of veto players determines whether reforms can be implemented easily or not. More generally, these national institutional configurations may block, hinder, but also promote reforms initiated by IO governance in the field of education. Instead of convergence, these national determinants of change may preserve cross-national differences or even cause further divergence of national paths. Based on these basic assumptions, we develop a parsimonious model in which we assess the influence of IO governance (independent variable) on national education policy making (dependent variable) mediated through national transformation capacities (intervening variable) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The two-level game in education policy making



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<sup>4</sup> Governance refers to the process of policy making beyond traditional mechanisms of steering (see Jakobi, Martens and Wolf 2009, in preparation). *Governance instruments* are defined as means by which IOs actually seek to influence national policy making, i.e. to gain significant authority in the field of education.

<sup>5</sup> We call the national institutional configurations which have the capacity to initiate and carry out, but also to block or hinder processes of change national *transformation capacities* (see Weiss 1998).

In this paper, we thus eclectically bring together approaches of governance, veto players and ideas with concepts of diffusion and convergence. Examples of the influence of international organisations are given in order to illustrate the theoretical model to be developed. The graph developed in the final section of this paper will explain processes of convergence and divergence of national education policy making by combining our IO governance approach with that of national transformation capacities.

## **IO GOVERNANCE INSTRUMENTS AS DRIVING FORCE OF POLITICAL CHANGE**

International Relations (IR) theory identifies different explanations for international cooperation as a source of national political change. By referring to changed societal conditions and the role that IOs play in political problem definition, our following arguments draw on liberalism and constructivism (see e.g. Moravcsik 1997; Wendt 1992). In this section we closer investigate the governance instruments by which IOs seek to influence national policy making.<sup>6</sup> Since the interplay of IOs and nation states cannot be satisfyingly grasped by applying the categories of ‘market, hierarchy or network’ alone, a typology is presented that lists more fine-tuned instruments IOs have at hand. The overall aim is to theoretically assess what IO influence might look like. But beforehand, we shortly discuss how and why IOs have gained access at all to the arena of education policy making.

The fact that IOs are important players in the field of education is nowadays uncontested in large parts of the literature, even if the influence varies across different IOs and different countries (Dale 2005; Dobbins 2009, forthcoming; Martens, Rusconi and Leuze 2007). Most prominent examples for such increased activity are the OECD, the EU or the World Bank. All these organisations have been involved in education for some decades, but widely increased the scope of their educational projects in the course of the 1990s. The causes of their activity are complex but can be attributed both to the national as well as the international level: On the national level, national governments sought to instrumentalise IOs for their own interests in order to overcome national reforms blockages and to push through unpopular reforms (Martens and Wolf 2006; Weymann et al. 2007). Policy makers from the US and France, for example, urged the OECD already in the early 1980s to develop better comparative indicators for assessing the efficiency (US) and equality (France) of their education systems. Based on these indicators both governments wanted to direct their national education policy into particular directions (Martens 2007).

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<sup>6</sup> This section mainly builds on Jakobi, 2009, in preparation.

In addition, nation states throughout the OECD have been facing problems since the early 1980s regarding the provision and financing of public education services: tight budgets increasingly constrain states' capacity to meet the ever rising demand of education (Daun 2005). This problem becomes even more severe due to the advent of the knowledge-based economy, which redefines the relationship between economy and education, and thus questions structures and contents of national educational systems (Robertson 2005). As a consequence, cooperation among nation states becomes increasingly necessary in a very functional sense in order to seek solutions to commonly shared problems. The Bologna Process, for example, is the result of an agreement between the four largest countries in Europe, which decided to collaborate in order to overcome national problems of their higher education systems (Balzer and Rusconi 2007; Toens 2008, forthcoming). Thus, strategies of other countries became interesting examples or blueprints for national policy processes and policy makers saw the need for international collaboration (Jakobi 2007a).

In sum, policy makers assume that many issues cannot be tackled within the national domain alone, but require international solutions – often developed in IO forums or the organisations themselves. IOs have thus become a tool for diverse problem solving. This, in turn, facilitated the development of IOs as knowledge brokers or arenas of international exchange (Martens and Jakobi 2007). And even though many IO activities in education were initiated by nation states themselves, IOs today have become increasingly independent agents in the education arena (Martens and Wolf 2008, in preparation). Instead of simply carrying out, what their member states urged them to do, today they follow their own interests and agendas, thereby exerting influence back onto their member states beyond mere bottom-up initiatives. This adds a primarily international cause to the explanation why IOs have become more important in education policy and have increased their activities.

Against this background, we investigate the 'feedback effect' of IOs and their enlarged activities on the national level. Such effects have often been assessed by constructivist scholars in IR (Finnemore 1996; Meyer et al. 1997), but still, specific mechanisms of these processes are less known. It has become a commonplace in IR literature that IOs have different means at hand to influence national policy making and thus, depending on the specific IO, generate different kinds of outputs. Surprisingly, there are not many systematic typologies of IO activities that help assessing the different instruments applied in a policy field: Karns and Mingst (2004) mention capacities as linked to information or monitoring, Rittberger and Zangl (2006) refer to outputs as policy programmes, operational activities, or information activities. In the case of education, for example McNeely and Cha (1994) distinguish between exchange of information, charters and constitutions, standard setting instruments and technical and financial re-

sources. We ourselves developed a general typology of opinion formation, coordination and resources (Jakobi and Martens 2007; Martens and Balzer 2007), and, as regards the case of the OECD, we referred to soft mechanisms in education as agenda setting, formulation and coordination (Jakobi and Martens 2007), but also to regulation, financing, structuration and persuasion (Jakobi 2007b: 152, based on Braun and Giraud 2003).

Nonetheless, for assessing all possible ways of how IOs can influence national policy making, more comprehensive categories are needed (see Jakobi 2009, in preparation, for the following). Ideally, such categories should be generalisable beyond the field of education, but also fine-tuned, and moreover linkable to an overarching explanation of general global political processes<sup>7</sup>. In fact, although not labelled as such, Jacobson pursued similar goals in an early work (1979). He assessed the development of international economic, security and welfare policy, thereby focussing on different IOs and their political activities. He distinguished five categories of what we would now call *IO governance instruments*: informational activities, normative activities, rule creating activities, rule-supervisory activities and operational activities. Informational activities are linked to publishing data, promoting policies at conferences or exchanging information. Normative activities encompass declarations and goals that are non-binding, rule-creating functions are linked to binding outcomes. Rule-supervisory functions involve international monitoring of national policy development, while operational activities are related to the resources an IO has at its disposal, such as payments or technical assistance (Jacobson 1979: 88-90).

Even though Jacobson's typology provides a good starting point for classifying IO governance instruments, we suggest modifying his categories in two aspects. Jacobson has, on the one hand, an implicit emphasis on binding instruments when he distinguishes rule-creating from normative activities, thereby focussing on the process rather than on the social result.<sup>8</sup> This reflects a predominant approach to focus on hard law that

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<sup>7</sup> The need for generalisation stems from the fact that IO governance extends across policy field and education is only one field among others in which global governance currently occurs. The need for fine-tuned categories relates to the aim to reach a level beyond 'IOs matter' by showing through which means they matter most. And the need for theoretical linkage relates to ideas of global policy development, in which an IO is only one player among others who push forward specific policy aims.

<sup>8</sup> Other authors argue as well that legally binding forms of IO governance are more effective than softer instruments. For example, scholars highlight that the EU can generally exercise a more strongly binding authority than the OECD, which is, at least formally, a weakly binding programme organisation (Marcussen 2004; Rittberger and Zangl 2003: 32). Such distinction will not be made here, since more generally, the distinction in binding and non-binding instruments implies that the binding ones are in some way 'stronger' – a question that, in our opinion, should be assessed empirically. But specifically in the field of education a high number of activities exist,

has, over time, been supplemented by research on soft law. Since both processes in fact create normative standards, it seems more useful to combine the two; we thus refer to ‘standard setting’ as one particular mode of governance, consisting of normative *and* rule-creating activities. On the other hand, Jacobson subsumes both financing and technical assistance under the term ‘operational activities’. This does not seem adequate to us<sup>9</sup>, given the fact that technical assistance of UNESCO differs widely, both in terms of activities as well as in its addressees, from EU project financing. Thus, following Jacobson with slight modifications, we categorise IO instruments as discursive dissemination, standard setting, financial means, coordinative activities, and technical assistance (see also Table 1).

(1) Discursive dissemination refers to the capacity of IOs to initiate and influence debates on policy issues, also by generating new ideas, concepts and models for policy making (Finnemore 1993; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Examples of discursive dissemination in the field of education are OECD publications that develop ideas on financing education, or material published in the course of the PISA study by which the OECD could influence public discussions on the efficiency of national schooling systems. Compared to the other categories, discursive dissemination is the most comprehensive and ontologically distinct, since all others are in fact related to it. For example, setting a specific standard requires and reinforces discursive dissemination of that standard.

(2) Standard setting refers to formally binding prescription as well as to other normative activities, since both activities aim at providing rules for state policy. As hard law, standard setting is probably the most direct type of governance and encompasses the regulations to which states need to adhere due to their membership in a particular organisation or due to treaties they signed. As soft law, IOs generate standards for evaluation and mutual scrutiny, which lead to the origination of new constitutive norms and are reinforced through normative pressures (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 891). In the field of education, the European Commission today can formulate concrete objectives for education policy making as a result of the Lisbon Strategy (European Commission 2002) and the Open Method of Coordination (OMC); in other policy fields, the EU has even hard law at its hand. In both cases, however, standard setting is pursued.

(3) Financial means refer to the financial resources that IOs can transfer to countries for implementing the IO’s favoured programmes. By financial means, an organisation

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which would be characterised as ‘non-binding instruments’ but are likely to be effective. Thus, it seems useful to differentiate between governance instruments on the one hand and their effectiveness on the other.

<sup>9</sup> This is supported by the fact that financing is characterised as a distinct steering instrument on the national level (Braun and Giraud 2003).

finances projects or policy-implementation in the countries. By such financing, incentives are given and local, regional or national implementation may be fostered. In the field of education, such financing and its impact is most obvious in the case of the World Bank; countries apply for the establishment of a specific educational infrastructure or programme which has to be compatible with the Bank's general policy (Jones 1992). The EU also finances projects that support their policies on different levels, such as student exchange programmes or framework programmes. IOs can also simply sponsor specific events that they find useful, but which might be less decisive for policy implementation at first sight.

(4) Coordinative activities refer to an organisation's capacity to organise and logistically influence procedures in order to observe and promote policy initiatives and decisions. IOs can give incentives for policy making by managing, directing and speeding up the implementations of programmes and projects. In such context, they also execute surveillance on whether commonly agreed policy targets are met in the countries. Examples are meetings in the OECD or the EU's OMC, where countries exchange ideas about the right way to implement policies by bringing together scientific expertise with key policy-makers. This type of governance enables IOs to promote and shape organisational processes by means of bringing together all relevant actors. Therefore, "governance by co-ordination marks the special capacity of an international organisation to 'pull the strings together'" (Martens et al. 2004: 2).

(5) Technical assistance refers to the IOs' capacity to supervise the implementation of international policies. This assistance is often prescribed by international treaties or is a precondition for financial means and mostly applied to developing countries that try to catch up with policies developed in industrialised countries. Technical assistance directly transfers the knowledge of how to implement and further develop a specific policy to the national political system. The OECD, in its beginning, had a well developed technical assistance project as regards education planning (Papadopoulos 1994) while today, this instrument is mainly restricted to agencies working in developing countries, as, for example, the World Bank or UNESCO.

Taken together, this typology provides a more encompassing view on IO governance than classifications developed exclusively for the field of education. But even though all five governance instruments are applicable in theory, it does not mean that all IOs are always making use of them empirically. To the contrary, IOs should have only a selection of instruments at hand. Also, instruments should differ across policy fields, and they should be applicable in a temporarily sequence, e.g. discursive dissemination might be a first step of global policy development, concrete financing of projects or technical assistance the last one. Regardless of the instruments applied, however, IOs do not enter an uncontested field when initiating or realising specific policies, but they face different

country-specific national polities, priorities and histories. How far IO governance capacities can thus be realised and how far the governance instruments really influence national politics, depends not only on the IO's abilities but also on the national preconditions – hereafter called *transformation capacities*.

*Table 1: Governance Instruments of International Organisations*

<b>Governance Instrument</b>	<b>Dominant Function</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Discursive dissemination	Establishing ideas	UN Promotion of Sustainable Development OECD Promotion of Lifelong Learning
Standard setting	Prescribing behaviour	UN Recommendations OECD Benchmarks
Financial means	Transfer payment	World Bank Financing EU Project Financing
Coordinative activities	Execute surveillance	EU Open Method of Coordination OECD Peer Reviewing
Technical assistance	Support structures	UNESCO support for education statistics UNESCO support for educational planning

(Source: based on Jakobi 2009, in preparation)

## **NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION CAPACITIES AS MEDIATORS OF IO INFLUENCE**

By merely focussing only on the international level of governance, authors often assume that it is the type of governance IOs exert that makes the difference for the changes on the national level, thereby generating a very passive picture of nation states. Yet, despite the importance of international factors, we have to consider national strategies, preferences and ideas that play an important role when it comes to the inclusion of new actors in education politics, the re-organisation of political processes or the adoption of new policy goals or instruments. These country-specific institutional factors determine whether IO governance shows an effect at all, which political dimensions are affected, and with which intensity and direction change can take place. Accordingly, we will argue that the question whether and how far instruments of international organisations will show a direct effect is better assessed on the national level by analysing how countries actually respond to international influences.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> On the institutional level, issues of continuity and change have been mainly addressed by arguments of institutional path dependency. The main argument for the existence of path dependency holds that once a country or region has started down a certain path, it is likely to stay on it in the future, since initial choices are not easily reversed, and paths cannot be left without large costs (see Ebbinghaus 2005 for a discussion; Streeck and Thelen 2005). Institutions are path dependent because of increasing returns encouraging processes where “each step



In the literature, two main dimensions of national transformation capacities prevail: In a more rationalist perspective, the focus is on actors and their institutional opportunities and constraints, while in a more constructivist perspective, ideas, norms and identities are the main ingredients of institutional frameworks. As others have done before us (see for example Börzel and Risse 2000), we will combine both approaches in order to get a more encompassing picture of national transformation capacities. The actor-centred perspective is incorporated by making reference to the veto player approach, while the constructivist perspective is based on a typology of ideas.

### **National Veto Players as Motor or Barrier of Change**

National veto points (see Crepaz and Moser 2004; Huber, Ragin and Stephens 1993; Schmidt 2000: 351-355) and veto players (Tsebelis 1995; Wagschal 1999) describe a country's potential for political change by means of the formal structure of the national political system and its political actors (chambers, president, governments and parties). This institutional framework of political decision making aims to explain whether and how certain formal characteristics of the political system, for example federalism, are likely to promote or hinder changes in the field of education. "The basic idea common to all veto player approaches is simple: if some individual or collective actor has veto power (that is, under unanimity decision rules), she will use it to further her interests. More specifically, she will veto policies that go against her interests" (Ganghof 2003: 2). This means that the policy proposal by an IO will be considered by national veto players and – depending on their political interests and agendas – be met with resistance or support. Veto players may thus hinder or promote policy proposals made by IOs.

Regarding the difference between veto points and players, the concept of veto points is related to the wider institutional framework of the political decision making process. A veto point can be described as an institutional opportunity to veto a decision: "Political decisions require agreement at several points along the chain of decisions made in different arenas. The fate of legislative proposals [...] depends upon the number and location of opportunities for veto along this chain. The ability of interest groups to influence such legislative outcomes depends upon their access to the political representa-

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along a particular path produces consequences which make a path more attractive for the next round" (Pierson 2000: 5). Through this, institutions provide resistance to pressure for example generated by IO governance that might otherwise force actors off a particular path. This institutional path dependency strongly influences the particular ways in which national governance respond to IO governance instruments. Yet, since our perspective is on change rather than on continuity, we propose to concentrate on those particular institutional settings of national paths which are likely to promote, but also to hinder change in response to international stimuli, i.e. the transformation capacities of the national level.

tives situated at the ‘weak links’ or veto points in this chain” (Immergut 1992: 396). Given that political change is seldom the result of a single decision - rather modern constitutional democracies employ a system of “checks and balances” that requires the agreement of several actors - the number of veto points determines the length of the decision making chain (Klitgaard 2009, in preparation). Thus, veto points are institutional opportunities to change or block legislation and veto players are those individual or collective actors who can strategically use such opportunities.

Yet, according to Ganghof (2003: 3), a crucial problem of most veto approaches is the problem of identification: Scholars have to distinguish real veto points from other potentially influential actors. The question is to what extent sets of individuals can be treated as collective veto points (for example parties versus party factions), but also whether particular powerful actors, such as courts, are real veto players. In order to overcome the problem of identification, we follow Tsebelis’ framework of veto players, which builds on a more narrow (formal) definition of veto power and thus aims at overcoming the distinction among different veto points found in the literature. With Tsebelis’ definition (1995: 301) we define veto players as “individual or collective actors whose agreement is necessary for a change of the status quo”. Accordingly, veto players can be differentiated into two categories:

First, institutional veto players are those political actors specified by the national constitution, such as presidents, first chambers, second chambers or senates, or federalism. In this regard, Tsebelis (1995: 302) uses a quite narrow definition and considers only those political actors as veto players who have *formal* veto power; if their veto can be overruled they are not counted as such. In the field of higher education, for example, this means that the Federal German government has no official veto power anymore after the latest reform of the federal framework (*Föderalismusreform*) in 2007. Since then, all veto power lies with the governments of the federal states, i.e. the second chamber (*Bunderat*), which introduces a third level into the two-level game. Moreover, according to Tsebelis’ “absorption rule” (1995: 309-10), the number of institutional veto players depends on their political composition: institutional veto players with different political compositions, e.g. party membership, count as distinct players, while different institutional veto players with identical composition count only as one veto player. For example, if the president’s party controls the chamber/s, too, as it was recently the case in the US at the moment, no other institutional veto player should be counted. This example illustrates that Tsebelis’ approach allows for more dynamic than a mere sum of institutional veto opportunities. In contrast to the veto point approach, countries with a presidential system are not necessarily associated with an additional veto player.

The second type of veto players are partisan veto players. Given that, with few exceptions,<sup>11</sup> all government coalition members have to approve a governmental policy proposal, or in other words have the power to veto it, each party of the government coalition counts as a separate veto player. The reason for this counting rule is that, as similar as their positions might be, each party competes for election and therefore each party in the government coalition has to be perceived as distinct by the electorate and will have a different policy position “as means for winning votes” (Tsebelis 1995: 309). In contrast, opposition parties do not count as partisan veto players at all, not even in the case of minority governments, since they possess no formal veto power. They count only indirectly if they control one of the institutional veto players.

By means of the veto player approach we can thus examine how institutional constellations and individual and collective actors’ interests mediate political change brought about by internationalisation in the field of education. It now becomes possible to understand cross-national differences of education policy reforms. Different veto constellations can, for example, explain why some countries quickly respond to IO governance instruments such as reforming their higher education systems in the course of the Bologna Process, while others proceed more slowly or do not show any political reaction at all. Analysing national political actors with their particular interests and preferences serves to better understand how the national, yet contested level deals with given IO proposals.

The importance of veto players follows directly from the conception of legislators as intentional actors. Whenever we understand behaviour as intentional action, we presume that actors are at least minimally rational and that their preferences and beliefs have an underlying structure that is at least temporarily “fixed”. This closely resembles a logic of expected consequences (March and Olsen 1998), where they rationally choose among alternatives by evaluating their likely consequences for personal or collective objectives, conscious that other actors are doing likewise. The consequential logic of action therefore sees political order as arising from negotiation among rational actors pursuing personal preferences or interests in circumstances in which there may be gains to coordinated action. Whether coordination is achieved and the terms of coordination (for example, who adopts whose system) depend on the bargaining positions of the actors.

However, the idea that action is merely driven by the calculation of its consequences as measured against prior preferences has long been subject to criticism. In particular, linking action exclusively to a logic of consequences seems to ignore the substantial

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<sup>11</sup> Oversized majority governments would constitute such an exception. However, even in this case all coalition parties will try to avoid ignoring or going against the will of the other partners, since would carry certain political risks, such as new government formation (Tsebelis 1995: 303-304).

role of identities, rules, and institutions in shaping human behaviour. Also Tsebelis ignores this fact since he gives no clear rule as how to detect differences in the preferences of veto players and the cohesion of these preferences. For example, different parties may have different preferences regarding public education (as exemplified by heated debates on tuition fees or the extent and support of private education) or different positions toward school organisation (as in Germany, the discussion on tripartite or comprehensive compulsory schooling). Ganghof (2003: 3) states in this regard that once the relevant veto players are identified, their preferences have to be determined – however roughly – since particular predictions or explanations of political change based on the veto player constellation depend crucially on such preference attributions. Within the tradition of a logic of appropriateness, actions are seen to follow rules that associate particular identities to particular situations, approaching individual opportunities for action by assessing similarities between current identities and choice dilemmas and more general concepts of self and situations (March and Olsen 1998). We therefore argue that in order to understand policy preferences of veto players in particular countries we have to refer to national ideas about education. The combination of ideas and the veto player approach as national transformation capacities allows for overcoming the theoretical limitations of Tsebelis' approach.

### **Ideas about Education as Mental Road Maps**

As a cultural legacy, ideas are embedded both in the institutional structure and the collective interpretation scheme of a country and predetermine a country's further development to a certain extent by making some paths more likely than others. This is why we regard ideas about education as important elements of a country's transformation capacity. Taking up Weber's "switchman" metaphor, we thus argue that guiding principles (Lepsius 1995; Lepsius 1997) and interpretation frames (Gerhards and Rucht 2000) or cultural accounts (Meyer, Boli and Thomas 1994) "determin[e] the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest" (Weber 1968: 268). In this sense, we assume that ideas about education have a long lasting influence on the preferences and interests of national veto players.

When theorising the role of ideas for change processes of education policy making, it is useful to analytically differentiate several levels of concretion. According to Goldstein and Keohane (1993) ideas or *beliefs*, as they call it, comprise three different levels of concretion: *world views* refer to ideas deeply rooted in culture containing basic assumptions about the world as some sort of cosmology. Today, one of the most persistent world views about education is probably that education is a central value and as such a public good in modern societies (1993; 2005). Thus, world views may cover the ultimate goals of education or legitimise narratives of education itself. On a more concrete

level, there are *principled beliefs*, which state what is right and what is wrong or rather what is legitimate and what is illegitimate behaviour in a normative sense. Compulsory schooling or free education would be examples for principled beliefs which fit in the broader world view of education as a public good. As a third category, Goldstein and Keohane refer to *causal beliefs*, which are beliefs about means-end relationships. Causal beliefs are linked to the actor's knowledge or assumptions of how to reach a given goal. Causal beliefs about public education become visible, for example, in country-specific education finance or political reform strategies which are meant to introduce more performance-based funding measures. Differences in causal beliefs between two countries may account for the adoption of different political strategies, although the overarching goals may be the same.<sup>12</sup>

In this sense, ideas function as mental road maps. The world views contain the overarching goals associated with education. On a more concrete level, the principled and causal beliefs define what choices are legitimate and causal adequate in reaching the overarching goals. Ideas about education certainly do not stop at national borders; nevertheless we assume that one can identify certain idiosyncratic mixtures and compositions of world views, principled and causal beliefs across different countries. Looking at the history of education in society, one can distinguish three different world views about the overarching goals of education as a public good: (1) Education as a means to promote the cultural and moral integration of the people aims at a homogeneous and loyal population. All over the world, the modern state achieved the idea of political integration by introducing a national curriculum and by establishing formal education institutions that created a common language and disseminated the idea of a common history of the people through education (Archer 1979; Smith 1986); (Meyer, Ramirez and Soysal 1992). (2) Education as a means to increase the returns of private and public human capital investment in education aims at permanent growth of productivity and wealth of the nation. Since the rise of capitalism, education has been viewed as a valuable instrument to improve competitiveness of the national economy, a tool to produce grand surpluses and wealth by coordinated human capital investment (Gellner 1983;

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<sup>12</sup> Empirically, it is not easy to distinguish between principled and causal beliefs for almost every principled belief implies some kind of means-end assumption and so one could question this analytical distinction. But when it is turned the other way round, it may be the case that causal knowledge is in conflict with shared principled beliefs. For example, IOs may spread the causal belief that tuition fees are an adequate response to financial constraints in the higher education sector. This belief may conflict with the principled belief of the national political actors that education should be free. In countries, where this conflict occurs, we can expect that the adaptation of impulses from the international level takes more time than in countries, where this conflict does not occur, or even that the impulse is not translated in national policy at all.

Kiker 1966; Mann 1993). (3) Education as a social right aims at overcoming the reproduction of social inequalities by increasing each individual's chances for societal participation and inclusion through education (Marshall 1965 [1949]).

Although each of these world views can probably be found in the political discourse of nearly every country, we will use this classification in order to make cross-national variations visible. We expect cross-national variations in two respects. First, countries differ in the extent of stressing one or more of these ideas as compared to the others. For example, some countries clearly favour the function of education as human capital as compared to education as provider of equal opportunities. Second, the policy output of these overarching ideas behind education, i.e. the precise policy instruments and settings established in the field of education, varies strongly across nations. Thus, particularly on the level of principled and causal beliefs countries differ in their cultural ideas of how to translate the world views on education into actual education policy making.

Besides the abstract level of world views, principled and causal beliefs, ideas can be more “coagulated” into institutional structures and thus influence the incentive structure of the political actors and the transaction costs of a political choice. “Ideas have a lasting influence on politics through their incorporation into the terms of political debates; but the impact of some set of ideas may be mediated by the operation of institutions in which the ideas are embedded. Once the ideas have influenced organisational design, their influence will be reflected in the incentives of those in the organisation and those whose interests are served by it. [...] In this sense ideas can have an impact even when no one genuinely believes in them as principled or causal statements” (Goldstein and Keohane 1993: 20). This statement points back to the importance of the institutional set-up of political decision making, which is often coined as veto points or players. By integrating both approaches, we can therefore fill important gaps that are entailed in the separate analysis of veto players and ideas.

Conceptualising veto players and ideas as national transformation capacities thus allows us to theoretically combine two logics of action (Goldstein and Keohane 1993; March and Olsen 1998), a rationalist and a constructivist. Although there is some tendency for scholars to follow one or the other, the two principles are not mutually exclusive. As a result, political action generally cannot be explained exclusively in terms of consequences or appropriateness. Political actors are constituted by their interests, by which they evaluate their expected consequences, as well as by the ideas embedded in their identities and political institutions. We argue that both have to be taken into account when analysing the potential reactions of nation states to IO governance. The importance of veto players follows directly from the conception of legislators as intentional actors. However, in order to understand policy preferences of veto players in certain setting we have to refer to national principled beliefs about education policy mak-

ing as well as to causal beliefs of education policy makers about how these can be achieved by certain policies. In sum, both logics of actions are important when analysing the dynamics of changing education policy making on the national level.

## **DYNAMICS OF CHANGE OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY MAKING**

By combining national and international determinants of change, we argue that national education policy making does not simply change as a consequence of the impetus given by IO governance instruments, but that national veto players and ideas about education act as mediating transformation capacities. The question is now how such a two-level game translates into political change, i.e. into changing education policies and politics. It might occur, for example, that an IO initiates only minor changes in one country, while another country encounters a major change resulting in a paradigm shift. But when comparing both change processes we might see that both countries are converging towards a common model of education policy making, as proposed by an IO (see also Heichel and Sommerer 2007; Holzinger, Jörgens and Knill 2007; Holzinger and Knill 2005). In this perspective, IO governance instruments have the capacity to cause changes not only in one, but in many countries – with the result that they increasingly become more alike. In our theoretical model, IO governance therefore represents an important driving force towards the convergence of national education policy making. This last section thus deals with the relationship between convergence and divergence of education policy making across countries.

The most basic way of assessing *convergence* of national education policy making is to analyse the extent to which policies of different countries have become more similar to each other over time. In the literature, two different approaches to assess policy convergence can be differentiated that are important for studying the influence of IO governance for national education policy making (see Heichel, Pape and Sommerer 2005: 831 for the following).<sup>13</sup> Starting with the logic that comes closest to a common understanding of convergence, a first approach analyses the decrease in variation of domestic policies. This is currently observable in the field of higher education, where many countries introduce tuition fees in order to deal with tight state budgets and the rising number of students (Kohlrausch and Leuze 2007). The variation in funding sources is thereby becoming more similar between countries. This measurement of convergence is called

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<sup>13</sup> There are two further approaches, beta- and gamma-convergence, which can be found in the literature, but which are not relevant for assessing the influence of IO governance in the field of education. Beta-convergence occurs when poor economies grow faster than rich ones and is named after the growth coefficient. For the analysis of gamma-convergence, country rankings for different points in time are compared to assess the mobility of countries (Heichel et al. 2005: 832).

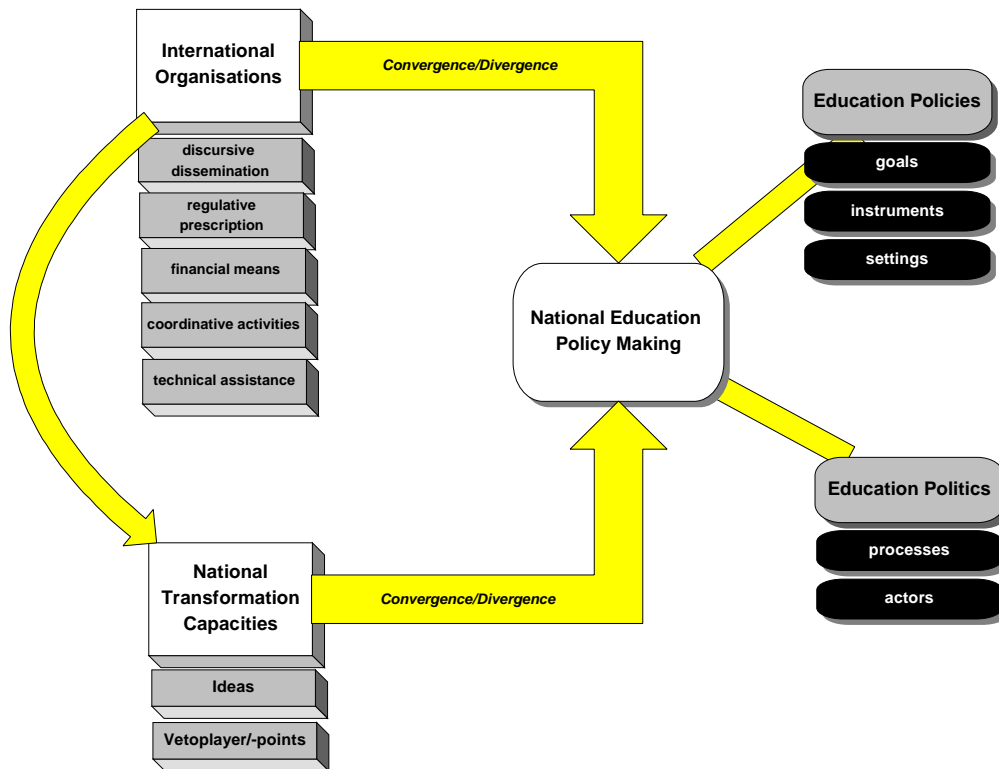
*sigma-convergence*, named after the algebraic notion for variance. In its classic form, a decreasing coefficient of variance (also known as dispersion index) indicates convergence. For more qualitative studies measuring the similarity of policies or regulatory instruments, sigma-convergence as "growing together" is also the basic logic.

However, sigma-convergence does not necessarily imply that IO governance is directing national education policy making into a particular direction, i.e. the sources of convergence are left out. This fact is better captured by a second measurement of convergence, the so-called *delta-convergence*. Delta-convergence is based on the decreasing distance of policies towards an exemplary model, like a model promoted by an international organisation. Especially in the Bologna Process, such a model has been made very explicit, since it proposes to introduce a two-cycles degree system of particular length, accompanied by accreditation and quality assurance, until 2010 (Balzer and Rusconi 2007). Delta-convergence would occur the more countries restructure their higher education systems according to this proposed model. But also IOs such as the OECD, which do not propose such explicit policy measures, aim at directing reforms into a particular direction, for example by repeatedly arguing for an increase in higher education graduates or more competition among education providers.

By developing various governance instruments for education matters, IOs have the capacity to guide education policy making of their member states into a particular direction, towards a common model. Thus, IOs function as entrepreneurs of (delta-) convergence. The pressure towards convergence can take the form of imposition, which refers to constellations where countries or IOs force other countries to adopt certain policies by exploiting asymmetries in political or economic power, for example through financial means as in the case of the World Bank. But convergence can also take place in the form of harmonisation of national policies through international or supranational law or constitutive norms. Finally, cross-national policy convergence can simply be caused by transnational communication, which can be fostered by coordinative activities or discursive dissemination by IOs (Holzinger, Jörgens and Knill 2007; Holzinger and Knill 2005). We therefore assume that the governance capacity of IOs has the potential to push national education policy making into a particular direction, towards a proposed model, thereby stimulating delta convergence of national paths (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Theoretical model for explaining changing education policy making



However, whether IO governance leads to a transformation of the nation state in the field of education does not solely depend on the type of IO governance, but also on a country's capacity and willingness to respond to international influences with reforms in the field of education. Both, expectations and preferences of political actors as well as national identities and meanings of education will have influence whether IO governance shows an effect at all, which political dimensions are affected, and with which intensity and direction change can take place. Regarding the explanatory factors of convergence, empirical studies point to the fact that causes of convergence are often based on international factors, while explanations for limited convergence or divergence are often rooted in national (institutional) factors (Heichel, Pape and Sommerer 2005: 825). Thus, national transformation capacities might hinder convergence and lead to a continuation or even an increase in divergence across countries.

Following Tsebelis' line of reasoning, we expect political stability in the field of education to be more likely the more veto players are involved in the decision making process, the further their political interests lie apart, and the more coherent the positions are within each veto player (Tsebelis 1995: 293). As a result of the formal structure of national political systems, countries with a stronger veto constellation (i.e. a large number of veto player with diverging political interests, but a high level of internal coherence) will show higher political stability and thus a lower pace and extent in reforming their national education systems as compared to countries with a higher potential for

political change following from a weaker veto constellation. Convergence towards an education model promoted by international organisations will thus primarily occur between countries with similar levels of veto power.

However, as the discussion of education ideas have demonstrated, political actors act in accordance with rules and practices that are socially constructed, publicly known, anticipated, and accepted. Therefore, IO education policy proposals are likely to be accepted by national veto players the better they fit with national ideas of education. In line with Börzel and Risse (2000) we expect political change according to the propositions given by IOs to become more likely the higher the congruence between international and national ideas of education is. Particularly by the development of international standards for evaluation and mutual scrutiny IOs are able to originate new constitutive norms which nation states might comply with simply on the basis of appropriateness or perceived legitimacy. An example hereof is the idea of “efficiency” that led to an unproblematic introduction of national quality assurance and accreditation agencies in the course of the Bologna Process. In a similar vein, through discursive dissemination IOs initiate and influence public debates on educational issues, which might turn into constitutive as well as regulative rules. These cognitive processes might lead to stronger policy changes than binding regulations, since the political actors adopting them seek legitimacy and norm compliance based on social interaction and experience (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Thus, the discursive policy proposals made by the OECD might have a stronger impact on national education policy making than more binding EU regulation based on the OMC education. However, if national and international guiding principles lie further apart, education reforms in line with IO proposals will be met with more opposition, as exemplified in the German debates on comprehensive schooling. Only if the principled beliefs about education themselves change on the national level and through this become more similar to the ideas proposed by IOs, reforms of national education policies will again become more likely. In the extreme case that the ideas of IOs and nation states are completely incompatible, IO governance might not be effective at all.

Taken together, we assume that if the congruence between education ideas promoted by international organisations and national *principled beliefs* about education is rather high, then changes of education policy making in the direction of a particular model becomes more likely. The promotion of particular ideas or goals for education policy making through IOs only translate into particular policy outcomes if there is a reasonable fit between the ideas of the international level and the principled beliefs prevailing on the national level. The compatibility between international and national ideas about education influences the development of national reform projects by means of facilitating or hindering political socialisation and learning processes. Yet, this means that IOs do not have the capacity to facilitate convergence of all their member states as well.

Only those countries sharing similar principled beliefs about education are likely to react in a similar manner to IO governance and therefore are supposed to converge more strongly than countries with different ideas about education.

Taking the effect of veto players and national ideas of education together, convergence of national education policy or politics towards a particular model promoted by IOs becomes more likely if international and national ideas are more congruent and fewer numbers of veto players are in power. On the other hand, the more veto players are involved in the decision making process and the more different their principled or causal beliefs (i.e. preferences) are, the more difficult policy changes will be, since reforms have to be approved by all and acceptable compromises will be reached with more difficulty. Only if in systems with many veto players the ideas about education are highly congruent with the ones promoted by the international level, reforms towards a particular policy model will be pushed through nevertheless. Convergence of countries with many veto players might therefore be the result, even though at a slower pace. The result of these reforms will again be more stable than in systems with few veto players.

To sum up, only by analysing the interplay between IO governance instruments and national transformation capacities, it will become possible to establish whether national education policy making will eventually converge across countries. Even though IOs have the capacity to lead to changes of both, education politics and policies, national transformation capacities are decisive for the scope and extent of change taking actually place.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper set out to develop an analytical framework for analysing changes in national education policy making as a response to the increasing influence of international organisations in the field of education. It started off with the observation that since the early 1990s, international organisations have become important players in the arena of education policy making. The increasing internationalisation of education was originally caused by national policy makers themselves. As political response to the national and international pressures originating from economic and technological globalisation or national reform log jams, they shifted some elements of national education policy making to the international level. The aim of this governance shift was to rebut the hegemony of global economic forces, but also to discharge the modern state from some of its burden and responsibility (Welch 2001) in order to evade loyalty and redistribution conflicts (Weymann et al. 2007).

However, IOs increasingly became independent agents in the field of education, following their own interests and agendas. Accordingly, the increasing internationalisation of education led to a feedback effect back from the international to the national level,

thereby changing the mode of governance in this policy field: nation states increasingly loose their prerogative in the field of education, while IOs gain in importance. By developing various governance instruments and by proposing the same policy reforms to their member states, IOs have the capacity to act as entrepreneurs of (delta-)convergence. But at the same time, IO governance does not hit uncontested grounds. Whether or not the various governance instruments will eventually lead to a convergence of national policy making is better analysed by making reference to national institutional settings. Conceptualising veto players and ideas as national transformation capacities allows us to theoretically combine two logics of action, a rationalist and a constructivist. We argued that both have to be taken into account when analysing the potential reactions of nation states to IO governance. In order to understand policy preferences of national veto players we have to refer to national principled beliefs about education policy making as well as the causal beliefs of education policy makers about how certain goals can be achieved by certain policies.

By taking into account the interplay between governance instruments, veto players and ideas of education it analytically becomes possible to disentangle the international and national determinants of change in the field of education. Yet, in the end, it remains an empirical question whether international or national forces will dominate the field of education policy making. The nation state was by definition exclusive: citizenship and wealth of the nation are not shared with the rest of the world and education is in principle an instrument for achieving national goals. This exclusiveness is challenged by the emergence of IOs. Some initial empirical findings point to the fact that the influence of IOs in the field of education is merely complementary to national policy making. For example, while IOs are charged with the development of comparative indicators (OECD) or concepts (World Bank and the International Labour Organization ILO) in education, nation states retain the responsibility of whether and how to reform their educational systems in response to such comparative assessments (Jakobi 2007). Yet, other developments imply that IO initiatives also stand in conflict with national interests (Weymann et al. 2007). For example, by limiting the power of nation states to discriminate against foreign private service suppliers, the General Agreement of Trades in Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) restricts the scope for public choice in matters of education services (Scherrer 2007). Overall, the specific consequences of these developments for education policy making are yet to be examined. Whether the impact of IOs will impinge uniformly upon different national systems and finally lead to convergence will require thorough cross-national comparisons with a large number of countries. Such research would provide valuable insights as regards the relative importance of the internationalisation of education for the transformation of the nation state.

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