

## Call for Papers

# Organizing Education

## Sociological Approaches, Analyses and Findings

Conference organized by the Education Sections of the  
Sociological Associations of Switzerland (SGS), Germany (DGS) & Austria (ÖGS)

Friday–Saturday, 13–14 June 2014  
University of Teacher Education **Basel, Switzerland**

### **With Prof. Dr. Christine Musselin, Paris (to be confirmed) and Prof. Dr. Moritz Rosenmund, Wien: Keynotes und discussions**

We spend a significant part of our lives as members of educational organizations; increasingly so. The duration and relevance of our time spent in formally organized learning environments continue to grow, from early childhood education, lengthened careers stretching from primary and secondary schooling to tertiary education, or continuing education parallel to employment and lifelong learning into old age.

Today, the quality of educational organizations is a key indicator of national competitiveness, as the public and private good of education produced in them promises to guarantee productivity – and innovation. Schools, academies, and universities decide on the life chances of individuals and the social positioning of families and social groups; indeed, social structures and resulting inequalities are perpetuated through them. Yet educational organizations themselves learn and develop as social actors, observing and cooperating with others as well as competing with them.

Far beyond the schoolhouse or the workbench, institutions of all kinds, such as churches, voluntary associations, and unions, have adopted educational goals as their own, whether focused on children and youth, those in middle age, people with disadvantages or disabilities, or elderly people. More than ever, organizations providing learning opportunities structure life courses in modern society, from the cradle to the retirement community.

Representing a plethora of settings of learning, socialization, and networking, these organizations provide access to ideas and human diversity across the boundaries of social status, age, ability, ethnicity or gender. They can facilitate social and spatial mobility, even as they reproduce unequal life chances. Such organizations serve as employers, as centers of consumption, and as objects of investment. They provide hope for individuals and societies alike.

All the more surprising is thus the relative silence, in the German-speaking countries, of *organizational sociology* in the area of educational organizations – with the important exception of higher education. Here, analyses have illuminated the consequences of changes in governance that have reshaped the covenant between state and universities (e.g., new public management; privatization). Analyses have shown how organizations react to supranational expectations and norms (PISA, Bologna): through reforms but also resistance.

Educational organizations are of interest for organizational sociology for a variety of reasons. These include the generation of key concepts such as “loose coupling” developed and extended with a focus on schools and educational systems. The processing and management of knowledge, which has always been central to educational organizations, has earned significance in other organizations. Important drivers of change in contemporary knowledge society include the professions and comparative mechanisms, such as evaluation, benchmarking, and ratings or rankings, which are particularly visible in educational fields. Finally, educational organizations find themselves the subject of massive transformative challenges relating to competition, management, and human rights – with considerable differences regarding organizational type (schools or universities) and regional and national contexts.

Recent publications in many languages suggest that research activities in these areas are growing in scale and scope: Studies analyze not only organizations devoted to compulsory schooling or tertiary education, but also those providing vocational training and continuing education as well as private and for-profit organizations.

However, the *sociology of education* can still be critiqued for insufficiently addressing questions of organization or organizational fields explicitly. Recent sociological analyses have contributed to our understanding of the consequences of Europeanization in higher education and science (Bologna, “excellence” Initia-

tives), of rising marketization of education in research and teaching, of shifts in educational opportunities and the conditions of work in service-dominated economies. Yet the impact of such processes on vocational education and training, higher education, and further and continuing education demands enhanced attention.

While research on educational inequalities has flourished, especially since PISA, these studies mainly investigate so-called primary and secondary effects – the consequences of familial socialization contexts or parents decision-making, respectively. Too rarely have other factors, such as organizational cultures, micro-level processes of teaching and curricular choices, or the logics of selection and the distribution among alternative pathways, featured prominently in our explanations of persistent or ameliorated dis/advantages. Exemplary studies can be found in the fields of migration and gender research, both grappling with issues surrounding intersectionality and exclusion/inclusion.

The planned conference provides a forum to bring together scholars working on these and related questions. On the one hand, genuinely organizational perspectives are to be theoretically and empirically extended to include perpetual educational themes such as inequality, quality, reforms and so forth. On the other hand, educational sociology could strengthen its explanatory power by using the epistemological and methodological tools of organizational research to focus on the specifics and dynamics of organizations that produce and distribute learning opportunities and result in disparities in outcomes. Conference contributions may be on the following or related themes.

### **A. Genesis, Functioning, Change and Mortality of Educational Organizations**

Schools and universities are ancient educational organizational forms. Their secret to long life is simple and complex: they have continuously reformed themselves, adapting to the times, and survived numerous political and technological revolutions. With educational expansion, new educational organizations have been formed, sometimes as hybrids (such as vocational academies or “dual universities” combining vocational training and post-secondary education or universities run by firms of various sizes). While many private providers come and go, some private universities have histories extending back centuries, exhibiting extraordinary durability.

Questions here include: *Which environmental conditions lead to the establishment, the reform or the untimely death of educational organizations? How do old organizations evolve or merge to become new ones? What happens to their diverse membership? How do organizational cultures develop and adapt? How do different types of educational organization function? Which cultural orientations and structural instruments coordinate the behavior of actors, especially in complex organizations? What meanings and impact do type of sponsorship (such as private, public or partnerships) and the location in particular organizational communities (such as education, science or economy) have?*

### **B. Educational Organizations and their Environments**

Embedded in nested environments, educational organizations respond to and structure routines, especially with those actors with whom they maintain exchange relationships (e.g., parents of schoolchildren; partners in research and development), whether in local communities or the entire world, be it via concerted political activism, economic networks, transnational relationships, or the “world society”. Parents have become more demanding as they struggle to ensure their child’s learning progress and educational success. Associations of parents and professionals and policymakers all attempt to influence schooling, in particular the quality and distribution of learning opportunities to increase equity and excellence, efficiency and choice. National systems of education and individual universities compete in global ratings and rankings, subject to benchmarking and the influence of international organizations.

Thus we may ask: *Which are the relevant environments for particular educational organizations? How dependent are organizations on the contexts in which they operate? How have such environments developed and how do organizations respond? How do different environments and actor groups influence organizational behavior? How do organizations adapt to shifting environmental expectations? Which organizational forms enjoy legitimacy today and why? How are taken-for-granted organizational solutions for learning processes and problems reflected and critiqued, enabling reform and innovation?*

### **C. On the Relationship(s) among Educational Organizations**

Educational organizations are rarely isolated, but rather connected to varying extents by formalized educational pathways within organizational communities and complex educational systems. Questions of access, selection, survival, and outputs are key and debated with regard to dis/advantaged groups, resulting in calls for enhanced permeability. Higher-level organizations more than ever voice their demands of lower levels to improve their preparation of graduates. Whether horizontal or vertical, relationships between educational organizations are rarely simple, especially when they must build bridges as they compete for clients – and distinction.

Here, we can ask: *How do educational organizations relate to each other? In what ways are they connected? What motivates them to observe each other and how do they do so? How do they compete and negotiate? Which organizations win and why? How do they cooperate and which processes, such as evaluating performance, determine the complementarities between organizational forms?*

### **D. Education as an Objective and Activity of Organizations**

Today, all kinds of organizations, whether religious, political, or social, offer educational programs, as do firms. The “quality” of social work institutions today is often measured not only in terms of their care, but also the learning opportunities they provide. Even criminal justice uses education to support rehabilitation and societal reintegration. In policies at all levels and in diverse organizational forms, education is included as an all-purpose device that serves myriad social, political, and economic goals.

In this context: *What are the motives to include educational goals and activities in diverse organizational forms? How do educational purposes relate to the organization’s other goals? Which client groups are addressed – and served? What impact does this form of education have on individuals and society?*

### **E. The Production and Distribution of Education: Consequences for Pathways, “Consumers” and Careers**

The purpose of educational organizations seems clear: the production – and, depending on the funding source(s) – the (public) provision or (private) sale of education. Education is produced under certain conditions. Given rising standards, the competencies of children and youth in public schooling or vocational training are often maligned. And, the scarcity of resources available to organizations is continuously lamented. Simultaneously, education is highly valued symbolically and socially, as it determines capabilities and life chances. Educational organizations must legitimate their selection and distribution processes or, if businesses, they must be profitable. The influence of education in its various forms continues to rise.

*Under what organizational and employment conditions is education produced? How are the working conditions of teachers related to the learning conditions of students? To what extent and how can the organization select – or recruit – learning individuals? What criteria, structures, and processes determine education’s distribution? What patterns of inequality result, how do these develop, and how do decisions and actions within educational organizations affect disparities? In what ways do the clients of public and private organizations differ?*

### **F. Organizational Culture(s)**

Organizational culture(s) are the glue of organizations, since they maintain the shape, coordinate orientations, activities, and decisions, and enable identities and collective association. However, they may also alienate or exclude those who do not or cannot fit into their culture. Whether with regard to “inclusive education”, multiculturalism, or diversity management, all levels of education must respond to this fact as they attempt to be inclusive. Alternatively, elite organizations celebrate their exclusivity.

*What are the dominant “cultures” in educational organizations? Through which processes and artefacts are they implemented and supported? How do teachers and learners relate to these cultures? How are social ascriptions – such as gender stereotypes, ethnic attributes, abilities, and special educational needs – translated from the environment into the educational organization and its culture? What effects do these cultures have on social norms? When are alienation, integration or identification produced?*

## **G. Membership in Educational Organizations**

Membership is diverse, extending from teachers and administrators to staff and students. While membership may be transitory for learners, they too offer insights into organizational development and identification. The range of power relations in society is reflected in compulsory schooling, in school choice initiatives, in the “opting-out” of home schooling, and in exclusion from schooling as a punitive measure. Compulsory membership, often demanded by the state, is sometimes refused, leading to dropout. Such questions are reversed in optional areas: who may access particular education offerings?

*How do organizations recruit and select members? Which aspects of their institutional environments guide such processes? What are the consequences for organizational cultures, educational pathways, and learning experiences? How do schools justify the (partial) exclusion of certain students? How do these individuals “position” themselves vis-à-vis the organization? What are the motives and membership rules of home schooling and private programs?*

Contributions on the above or related themes may be theory-based and conceptual or theoretically guided empirical studies. The submitted abstract, with (working) title, should make its objectives and research questions explicit and discuss its theoretical framework, and, if empirical, identify (first) results. The abstract and conference presentation may be in English or German. The abstract (5000-6500 characters, document max. 2 pages) should be submitted in Word and pdf by the **30 November 2013** on

[www.organizing-education.ch/call-for-papers-submission](http://www.organizing-education.ch/call-for-papers-submission)

Decisions of the evaluation process will be communicated by 15 February 2014.

The conference organization team looks forward to your submission!

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