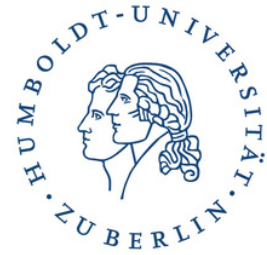




CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE

Contestations of the Liberal Script



“Agentic citizens,” “stakeholders” and social accountability in the era of e-governance

Workshop, June 3 and 4, 2025

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Geschwister-Scholl-Str. 7, 10117 Berlin - Room 1.35



Schedule of Events

Tuesday, June 3

14:00-14:30 **Welcome greetings, introduction of SCRIPTS and the workshop**

Florian Waldow, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Yasemin Soysal, Berlin Social Science Center WZB Berlin

14:30-17:00 **The use of data in the liberal, neoliberal & post (neo-)liberal eras**

3 presentations (each 20 minutes), followed by a coffee break (30 minutes), discussant (10 minutes), & a plenary discussion (50 minutes)

Emre Amasyali, Juliette Crespín Bouchaud, Matthias vom Hau, & Frank Borge Wietzke, IBEI Barcelona

A war of words: Education, language status grievances, and civil war

Pieter Vanden Broeck, University of Modena & University of Louvain

From governance by to government? On algorithmic management and the governing of education

Roser Cussó, University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

The role of statistics in the evolution of policy

Discussant: Gita Steiner-Khamsi, TC, Columbia University

19:00 **Dinner at Restaurant Dieselhaus** (Forum an der Museumsinsel 10)

Wednesday, June 4

9:30-10:00 **Summary of the key discussion points from June 3**

Gita Steiner-Khamsi, TC, Columbia University

10:00-12:30 **The rise of the individual/human rights discourse in education: Global trends, variations and changes over time**

3 presentations (each 20 minutes), followed by a coffee break (30 minutes), discussant (10 minutes), & plenary discussion (50 minutes)

Anja Giudici, Cardiff University

Partisan visions of educational control and accountability between family and state: Recent shifts or long-term developments?

Minju Choi, Berlin Social Science Center (WZB)

«Reformism» and the liberal culture: Global trends in education reform, 1970-2019

Helen Seitzer, University of Bremen

From principles to practice: The global diffusion of educational rights and equal access

Discussant: Yasemin Soysal, Berlin Social Science Center WZB Berlin

Wednesday, June 4, continued

12:30–13:30 Light lunch

13:30–15:00 Stakeholderism, social accountability and citizen engagement

*2 presentations (each 20 minutes), followed by a discussant (10 minutes),
& plenary discussion (40 minutes)*

Walter Fritsch, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

*Stakeholder consultations in international education governance as acts of
performativity*

Paola Mattei (online), University of Milan

*Public engagement and citizen science in research: Restoring public trust in a
post-truth society*

Discussant: Gita Steiner-Khamsi, TC, Columbia University

15:00–15:30 Coffee Break

15:30–17:00 Tools of government and their varied impact

*2 presentations (each 20 minutes), followed by a discussant (10 minutes),
& plenary discussion (40 minutes)*

Annelise Voisin, University of Liège

*Policy instrumentation and institutional change: The education governance
reform of French-speaking Belgium*

Ana Werkstetter Caravaca, Free University Berlin

Teacher governance in Mexico between labour and education reforms

Discussant: Florian Waldow, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

17:00–17:15 Wrap-up

Florian Waldow, Walter Fritsch, Gita Steiner-Khamsi



«Reformism» and the liberal culture: Global trends in education reform, 1970-2019

Minju Choi, Berlin Social Science Center (WZB)

The new millennium began as a period of global optimism. There was extraordinary international cooperation around Education for All, the Millennium Development Goals, and, later, the Sustainable Development Goals. The liberal world culture that became dominant after World War II played a key role in driving many of the changes observed in education systems globally in subsequent decades. These liberal changes in education were accompanied by the belief that social transformation could and should stem from what was elaborated as reforms. 'Education reform' is a distinct form of social change that promotes systematic changes to the way that individuals are incorporated into society, economy, and polity. We argue that emphasis on education reform increases when liberal culture is stronger at national and global levels because of the distinctive attention liberalism gives to both reform as a path to social change and to education as the path to progress. Using a cross-national database of education reforms between 1970 and 2019, we show that global and national levels of liberal democracy and market openness promote discursive attention to education reforms. Global levels of liberalism also shape the extent to which education reforms emphasize concepts of human rights and justice or human capital and economic productivity, but national levels do not. Our findings support the idea that education reforms become more prominent under liberalism as a global cultural framework. As levels of liberal democracy fall worldwide and skepticism against the openness to global competition and economy grows, new arguments for the value and purpose of schooling may emerge. 'Reform' as a legitimate form of social change may also be undermined, as more drastic measures come to be seen as more effective in bringing about change in the world. Our findings have implications for the changing nature of education reform in a post-liberal world.

The role of statistics in the evolution of policy

Roser Cussó, University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

This presentation analyzes the relationship between policy, in the broad sense (public administration but also global and public-private political action), and **quantification** (technical characteristics, statistical theories, related political practices and actors, etc.), i.e. the link between power and data technology. This involves considering (i) the analysis of the transition from the sequence of the Welfare State (State Accountability) to that of the Engaged State (Social Accountability) (Steiner-Khamsi, 2025: 125); (ii) the contribution of Alain Desrosières (2000) on the co-evolution of “State forms” and “statistical arrangements” (i.e. Welfare State development through large official databases on salaried work and its protection, and vice-versa); (iii) my own work on the specificity of the statistics produced by international and supranational organizations (IO) (Cussó, 2006), on recent fragmentation of such data (Cussó, 2019), and on the change in the mathematical-statistical paradigm which has accompanied the emergence of big data (Cussó, 2016).

The main **aim** is to discuss three trends, (i) the fragmentation of statistical sources (end of state and IO “monopoly”); (ii) the use of ad hoc databases; and (iii) the development of Bayesian statistics, as necessary to big data analysis, including Social Accountability (human annotation, data on opinion), and the impact of these trends on decision-making and the public more broadly (education, health...). My **hypothesis** is (i) that such statistical fragmentation loosened the dominance of frequentist methodology compared to statistical/machine-learning tools, the latter allowing for more diversity of hypotheses, and more adaptability to variable contexts; (ii) that ad hoc databases are not stable, they rarely allow for time series; (iii) that the rise of Bayesian statistical methods (and closely related machine-learning variants) undermines the relevance of more classical State, Market or Standard accountability (and new challenges there of underlying interpretability of decision making). In this context, policy implementation, especially in the case of social reforms, is both vaguely defined and constantly revised; it is often experimental or exploratory, without clear goals, without a precise set of variables to be tested over time; it relies on unstructured data including public participation and feedback, which are “custom-made” at individual or small group levels –see, for example, the study of goods pricing and inflation by combining social network data (Twitter) and classical databases (UN, 2014).

This evolution reveals a rather **flexible** policy configuration, subject to **continuous** reassessment, under the arrival of new (digital) data. Government responsibility is diluted, and public participation contributes to both the reform and its evaluation. Yet, **power** remains concentrated as it is exercised over the entire reform process. Frequentism led to a "hard" form of accountability with, for instance, indicators on school participation and achievement clearly linked to announced reform goals. Bayesian methods are more interactive and evolutive. Is this "policy-data" pattern more **unstable** than what preceded? Is it more **effective** (but by being more "invasive") via Social Accountability? Is it both a tool of reform implementation and a means of legitimizing change, insofar as the process is participatory and adaptable, though not as democratic?

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Stakeholder consultations in international education governance as acts of performativity

Walter Fritsch, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Stakeholder consultations have become a ubiquitous instrument for democratizing knowledge production and decision-making in international organisations. The OECD and UNESCO, two of the most influential IOs in international education governance, are no exception. Indeed, in their recent “landmark” initiatives on the Future(s) of Education (and Skills), both heavily emphasize that the outcomes of these initiatives will be the product of extensive stakeholder engagement.

As IOs in education rely on legitimacy, the involvement of so-called stakeholders is not only a general response to demands from their environments to democratize, but also reflects their own strategic choices regarding which audiences they wish to address and how they want to be perceived.

In my presentation, I will show how the two IOs differ in terms of whom they showcase as stakeholders and in what ways, arguing that UNESCO draws much more on (a specific kind of) academics than the OECD. The OECD, in turn, profoundly involves ‘experts’ from the technological and economic sectors of education, while both IOs highlight the importance of youth participation.

Combining this with views from these so-called stakeholders, it becomes clear that the consultative processes at UNESCO and the OECD are matters of performativity. ‘Stakeholderization’—the process by which individuals become ‘experts’, ‘student representatives’, or simply ‘stakeholders’, and thus sources of legitimation—resonates with both the included stakeholders’ as well as the IOs’ environments and is thus a matter of interaction between these two parties.

Partisan visions of educational control and accountability between family and state: recent shifts or long-term developments?

Anja Giudici, Cardiff

How to distribute educational authority between families and the state is a fundamental, and fundamentally contentious, issue of modern education. For theorists, the issue constitutes one of the core dilemmas of democratic government. Historians describe it as a key fault line in the formation of party systems in pre-1945 Western democracies. Challenging the educational authority of parents (and churches) was integral to the liberal (and later social democratic) quest for a more equal and active understanding of citizenship. Resistance to this programme, in turn, mobilised the modern conservative movement.

Since 1945, domestic and international educational landscapes have changed fundamentally, with conflicting implications for the debate over educational authority. Rising middle-class voters and international organisations have called for more state-led expansion and improvement of education. At the same time, neoliberalism and far-right movements have challenged state authority over education. How have parties navigated this changing landscape? Is the recent politicisation of parental rights a new trend, or does it highlight a continuing divergence in party approaches to educational authority?

To address these questions, the presentation draws on a novel dataset. The data include the positions on educational authority—defined as whether the state or families should determine the extent, shape, and choice of children's formal education—of all major party families in 20 Western democracies since 1960. We analyse these data both quantitatively, to understand long-term variation and trends, and qualitatively, to see how positions relate to different understandings of citizenship and statehood identified in the literature.

The analysis shows that partisan divisions over education authority have persisted in these countries in the post-1945 period - this is not a new trend. However, parties' positions on extent, choice, and shape do not always co-evolve, reflecting their reliance on different understandings of citizenship and statehood promoted in the post-1945 period.

Public Engagement and Citizen Science in Research: Restoring Public Trust in a post-truth society

Paola Mattei, University of Milan

There is growing concern in most liberal democracies about a rising wave of attacks against the legitimacy of science, including not only efforts to discredit individual scientists, but also a far-reaching campaign against institutions of higher education, expertise and the public intellectual. Public trust in the scientific community has been, for a while, under extraordinary pressure. The negative effects of the anti-experts and anti-science campaign concern the deterioration of the relationship between citizens and science, despite the best efforts of scientists to communicate their findings to a wider audience. This intellectual preoccupation motivates this paper, which draws from the book "Democratising Science". The paper will review different policy approaches adopted by governments to incentivise the empowerment of stakeholders and participation of citizens through coproduction arrangements, participatory mechanisms, community engagement and interaction with researchers.

From Principles to Practice: The Global Diffusion of Educational Rights and Equal Access

Helen Seitzer, University of Bremen

This presentation examines the global evolution of educational rights from the initial establishment of compulsory schooling, through the adoption of formal rights to education, to the incorporation of antidiscrimination principles and minority protections. It traces how states have incrementally broadened the scope of educational rights and which national and global pressures influenced this development. Using new longitudinal data on constitutional provisions, the analysis identifies patterns in the timing and content of legal reforms.

The findings reveal a complex and uneven landscape: while many states have expanded legal commitments to inclusive education, constitutional guarantees often lag behind the principles articulated in international human rights law. Using new longitudinal data on constitutional provisions, it analyzes how states define and extend educational rights, with particular attention to disparities related to gender, migration status, and minority origin.

Rather than assuming a linear progression toward greater inclusion, the paper explores the different rationales and temporalities behind the adoption of various educational rights provisions. It shows how the expansion of educational rights reflects shifting ideas about citizenship, equality, and state responsibility, and situates these developments within broader patterns of welfare state formation and social policy diffusion.

Policy instrumentation and institutional change: The education governance reform of French-speaking Belgium

Annelise Voisin, University of Liège

This presentation offers a preliminary analysis of the governance reform of the French-speaking Belgian education system, initiated in 2015. It draws on the theoretical contributions of Lascoumes and Le Galès (2004) on policy instrumentation, the literature on institutional change (Streeck & Thelen, 2005), and a preliminary analysis of institutional documentation and scholarly literature (1990-2023).

Situating this reform within the institutional context of Belgium— a consociational democracy (Lijphart, 1979; Bakvis, 1985) within a deeply divided society characterized by consensus-building and bottom-up policies (Dumont & Delgrange, 2008) — we emphasize that the governance reform is part of a gradual process of change initiated in the 1990s, while also capitalizing on a “policy window” (Steiner-Khamsi, 2025) to introduce a significant and systemic transformation.

We argue that key policy instruments such as strategic planning and contractualization, indicators and evaluation tools operationalize and shape this results-based accountability reform. These are complemented by other (principal and school support systems, fostering local participation, etc.), which have been instrumental in building consensus among stakeholders involved in the reform process.

We argue that layering (Streeck & Thelen, 2005) constitutes the primary mechanism driving the process of institutional change at work over recent decades. In this context, the introduction of performance indicators coupled with incentive and communication-based policy instruments (Lascoumes & Legales, 2004) can be viewed as a decisive step in consolidating a results-oriented governance model, which had remained underdeveloped until then.

While this hypothesis requires further investigation, it also invites broader reflections on the role of the French-speaking Community of Belgium: can this case be situated within broader debates on the forms of the state and interpreted through the lens of a strategic “state” (Commalle & Jobert, 1997) negotiating with entrenched actors? Or rather, as an evaluative “state” (Neave, 1998) asserting new steering capacities?

Keywords: Education governance, Education reform, French-speaking Belgium, Policy Instrumentation, Institutional change

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A war of words: Education, language status grievances, and civil war

Emre Amasyali, Juliette Crespín Bouchaud, Matthias vom Hau, & Frank Borge Wietzke, IBEI Barcelona

The education sector shapes the relationship between the state and the individual, but it is also crucial in shaping the governance of ethnic relations. This paper asks how state-imposed language restrictions at schools influence the likelihood of ethnic conflict. While much of the existing literature on civil war focuses on political exclusion and material grievances, the impact of language discrimination on group mobilization remains underexplored.

This paper addresses this gap by introducing a group-level analysis that examines the effects of language recognition policies on conflict dynamics. Using the Nation-Building Policies (NBP) dataset, which tracks state policies on language use and education since 1945, we identify two key forms of language discrimination: Educational Downgrade, reflecting reductions in the educational status of a group's language; and Educational Exclusion, indicating the absence of any language associated with a group in public education. By merging the NBP dataset with the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset, we demonstrate that language policies are directly correlated with the incidence of civil war, rather than its onset. In contrast, political exclusion variables are more closely linked to conflict onset, suggesting that different types of grievances play distinct roles in shaping conflict dynamics. This contrast highlights that language recognition policies primarily influence whether conflicts persist and escalate, while political exclusion is more likely to trigger the initial outbreak of violence.

Our findings challenge the assumption that language recognition policies at schools mitigate the start of conflict. Instead, we show that restrictions or absence of language rights can fuel support for violence and make conflicts more intractable. This study then underscores the critical role of language recognition policies in conflict prevention, emphasizing the need to address language-based grievances to reduce the risk of ethnic unrest.

Teacher governance in Mexico between labour and education reforms

Ana Werkstetter Caravaca, Free University Berlin

This paper examines the impact of global governance mechanisms on the teaching profession in Mexico, focusing on the intersection of labour and education reforms, based on the case of the 2013 Reforma Educativa. Building on Robertson's (2016) concept of the "thickening" of the global governance of the teaching profession, the analysis highlights how neoliberal frameworks have reframed education as a competitive, individualistic endeavor aligned with economic competitiveness. Mexico's reforms, heavily influenced by OECD recommendations and driven by PISA performance anxieties, largely neglected teachers' working conditions, reducing professional development to standardised assessments. This "one-leg" approach to reform weakened unions and positioned teachers as obstacles to national progress. Teacher unions, particularly the CNTE, actively resisted these homogenising reforms, contesting the OECD's universalistic vision and its instrumentalisation of education data. This paper argues that teacher unions are not passive recipients but active agents in negotiating global education agendas. Ultimately, Mexico's experience illustrates how global governance structures like the OECD's operate unevenly across national contexts, revealing both the limits of global educational standardisation and the ongoing importance of local agency in shaping educational paradigms and futures.