

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM IN EDUCATION AND GLOBALIZATION

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INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL new institutionalism (HI) is one of the major schools of thought used to analyze how globalization leads to institutional changes in educational systems. HI emphasizes the relevance of temporal sequences, path dependencies, and critical junctures in the study of education and institutional change. Due to long-standing historical legacies and complex actor constellations, education systems are often considered to be strongly path dependent and resistant to reforms (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012). Early versions of HI offered one main explanation for the occurrence of institutional change in strongly path-dependent contexts. This explanation referred to exogenous shocks to institutional systems, for instance, related to technological change or major political conflicts, that would create a critical juncture and, in turn, a moment of contingency allowing change agents to alter the prior institutional trajectory (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; North, 1990). Newer versions of HI offer tools to analyze institutional changes also in the absence of exogenous shocks, focusing on endogenous change and the possibility of gradual changes to path-dependent institutions, which, however, may nevertheless add up to transformative change over time (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). Through this lens, globalization—or the “transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions” (Held et al., 1999, p. 16)—is typically captured as globalization pressures related to, for instance, increasing cross-border activities in production or trade (Campbell, 2004). In HI, such globalization pressures are usually not so much framed as exogenous shocks—the focus is rather on how domestic

actors translate them into endogenous change processes, leading to distinct trajectories of institutional development, which depend on specific national-institutional contexts.

This chapter first reviews recent contributions to HI linked to the study of education and globalization, illustrating how this approach can help scholars grasp how change agents—that is, the actors that actively seek to change a given status quo—may achieve educational reforms in the context of globalization despite obstacles to change (e.g., path dependencies or veto players). From this perspective, globalization is not seen as isomorphic pressure that leads to convergence across countries (Baker, 2014; Meyer et al., 1997). Rather, it is captured as globalization pressures—for instance, to deregulate the economy (Baccaro & Howell, 2011) or to upskill workers in the rising global knowledge economy (Brown et al., 2012)—that may apply “globally” but are dealt with in specific ways by actors on the ground.¹ This implies that the outcome is shaped by the institutional context in a specific country or policy field. Here, key factors include the position and strength of the veto players to an institutional reform and the discretion given to relevant actors to reinterpret a given institutional configuration (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010).

After introducing the aforementioned debates and concepts in general terms, the chapter theorizes the link between globalization and modes of gradual institutional change in education, with special reference to the case of vocational education and training (VET).² While the literature review shows that HI is beginning to have a significant impact in research on all sectors of education—from early childhood education to higher education (HE)—its contribution is most advanced in VET (Thelen, 2004). VET represents a policy field situated at the nexus of education and the economy in which multiple public and private actors tend to cooperate in a decentralized manner (Emmenegger et al., 2019). Therefore, the VET sector can be regarded as an ideal example to demonstrate the analytical strength of HI which, like other political economy approaches (e.g., Hall & Soskice, 2001), has a pronounced interest in the interaction of multiple actors and socioeconomic spheres in the economy.

Globalization presents the policy field of VET with a major challenge. In the case of VET, one of the most profound influences of globalization is related to academization—that is, the rising salience of academic forms of knowledge production and academic qualifications (Severing & Teichler, 2013)—and, specifically, the rapid growth of HE enrolments worldwide (Schofer & Meyer, 2005). Globalization is associated with structural shifts that have led to an expansion of HE relative to VET. This is visible in the general increase in the participation in academic relative to vocational programs in the past decades (Benavot, 1983; Powell & Solga, 2010). The growing demand for academic skills on the sides of both employers and individuals results from a more or less global transition from manufacturing to a service and knowledge economy (Andersen & Hassel, 2013; Mayer & Solga, 2008), the digitalization of education and the world of work (Schmidt & Tang, 2020), the growing influence of large export-oriented firms (Thelen & Busemeyer, 2012), and an influential world polity, represented by international organizations like the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Martens et al., 2007), who have long promoted

the expansion of HE.³ All these challenges are inseparable from globalization, which is why they are here understood as globalization pressures, pushing for educational expansion and academization.

In recent years, this academization challenge has prompted a range of reforms to strengthen VET (Graf, 2018; Wolter & Kerst 2015). These reforms have the goal to promote changes that help to maintain the societal and economic function that VET ideally fulfils, for instance, in terms of providing youth with practice-oriented polyvalent skills (Bosch & Charest, 2008) and a stable pathway into the labor market (Protsch & Solga, 2016), while allowing employers to screen and train their future workforce (Culpepper 2003), as well as supporting a diversified production strategy (Streeck, 1991). HI is well fitted to explore the institutional trajectories that derive from the aforementioned pressures on national VET systems—starting with the premise that in a changing environment, an institution can only be maintained if it constantly evolves (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). Adopting a sectoral HI perspective, this chapter argues that in view of globalization pressures on VET promoting increasing academization and educational expansion, the dominant pattern of institutional change on which the respective policy responses rely is *layering*. This mode of change implies that new institutions or rules are added on top of existing ones, instead of replacing them. To illustrate the argument, the chapter presents case studies of recent institutional reforms in the German skill formation system, representing one of the world's largest VET systems.

The following section reviews the state of the literature on HI and education, with a special focus on globalization. Next, the chapter presents main theoretical tools of the HI framework and how it can be operationalized for the study of institutional change in education in the context of globalization pressures. This is followed by the case study on globalization, academization, and gradual change in German VET. The conclusion discusses the generalizability of the proposed sectoral HI perspective as well as prospects for further research linking HI and education in a globalizing world.

HISTORICAL NEW INSTITUTIONALISM IN EDUCATION: A REVIEW

HI has been applied to various educational sectors, from early childhood education to HE. While this body of literature overall is still rather small, it is growing rapidly. Most of the contributions originate from the last few years, indicating that HI is increasingly being picked up by scholars studying education. This section provides an overview on applications of HI in the domain of education, providing examples for different educational sectors. The review suggests that most of these HI studies have looked at European countries (e.g., German-language regions, France, Scandinavia, Benelux, and the United Kingdom), the European Union (European Higher Education Area, Bologna

process), Anglophone countries (Australia, Canada, and the United States), and Asia (China, India, Korea, and Japan).

There are some few studies that apply HI to *early childhood education and childcare*. For instance, Lewis and West (2017) analyze continuity and change in early childhood education and care in England under austerity. Offering a case study of Japan, Nishioka (2018) studies gradual policy changes in the privatization of childcare service. Wang and Lee (2020) trace institutional changes in quality assurance of early childhood education, focusing on the case of China. In the sector of *secondary education*, HI studies look, for instance, at the case of federalist systems (especially Germany) and how different states embark on distinctive reform trajectories. Edelstein and Nikolai (2013) focus on structural change at the secondary school level focusing on the determinants for school reform policies in Saxony and Hamburg. Powell et al. (2016) explore the impact of path dependence on the effects of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on education systems comparing German states. Contrasting two federal systems (that of Germany and the United States), Niemann et al. (2018) show how institutional path dependencies shape the outcome of international, large-scale student assessments on education. Maroy et al. (2016) speak to the theme of globalization by analyzing policy trajectories in France and Quebec, considering historical legacies related to earlier educational policy choices. There are also some HI studies looking at the *training of teachers and educators*. Thus, Lu (2019) studies the historical thread of teacher education policy in China, while Geiss and Westberg (2020) compare the emergence of training regimes for early childhood professionals in Sweden and Switzerland. In the sector of *HE*, prime examples of HI studies explore the impact of European educational policies. For example, Dobbins and Knill (2014) consider historical legacies in university governance related to “soft” Europeanization. Barret (2017) shows that the Bologna process is part of a path-dependent trajectory of integration in Europe. Feeney and Hogan (2017) adopt a path-dependent approach exploring policy harmonization in relation to qualification frameworks in the European Higher Education Area. At the national level, Schmidt (2017) examines different path developments resulting from quality assurance policies in Scandinavian HE systems.

However, while HI is beginning to have a significant impact in research on HE and other educational sectors, its contribution is still most pronounced in the sector of VET. Studies of VET have been instrumental to theory development in HI. The most prominent example of this is the work by Thelen (2004) in which she explores the evolution of institutions at the example of vocational skill formation and incremental change. Her book represents a steppingstone for the present-day understanding of gradual institutional change in HI. There have since been a range of studies that apply HI to VET. For example, Trampusch (2010) carves out transformative and self-preserving change in the Swiss VET system. Graf et al. (2012) identify gradual change in the changing relationship between apprenticeship training and school-based VET in Austria. Analyzing the Swedish case, Persson and Hermelin (2018) trace incremental institutional changes to explain an “anomaly” within a statist VET system, namely the technical college scheme. Schneider and Pilz (2019) apply HI to

analyze the institutional embeddedness of polytechnics in the Indian education system. Fortwengel et al. (2019) carve out distinct trajectories of institutional renewal of apprenticeship training in Australia, England, and the United States. Building on the varieties of capitalism approach and HI, Busemeyer and Vossiek (2016) show that common structural pressures are not leading to a full-scale convergence in the German and British skill formation systems.

Overall, this review shows that only in a few cases do analyses of HI and education work explicitly with the concept of globalization (Busemeyer & Vossiek, 2016; Maroy et al., 2017). One likely reason for this is that the theoretical enterprise of HI has developed in tandem with institutional approaches in comparative political economy that emphasize the nation level as the main unit of analysis (Hall & Soskice, 2001). Yet in several HI studies, specific international influences on national or subnational education systems are studied, as in the case of international large-scale student assessments (Niemann et al., 2018), UN conventions and agencies (Powell et al., 2016), or European educational policy (Barret, 2017; Feeney & Hogan, 2017). The review also indicates that HI studies have only recently been extended more broadly beyond the sector of VET. Due to the close link between HI and VET, this educational sector is given special attention in this chapter. This is not least due to VET representing a policy field deeply embedded in national labor markets and respective systems of industrial relations, both being fields extensively studied by HI scholars (Streeck & Thelen, 2005), making it a particularly interesting case for the analysis of the impact of globalization pressures on skill formation. In other words, as HI studies of globalization tend to focus on economic aspects of globalization, and because VET is closely related to the economy and labor markets, the VET sector represents a good starting point for a discussion of the relationship between globalization and education from a HI perspective.⁴

Next, the chapter presents the HI framework with a focus on its contribution to the analysis of institutional change.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ANALYZING GLOBALIZATION AND ACADEMIZATION THROUGH HI

The HI Toolbox: Path Dependency and Modes of Gradual Change

This section introduces HI with a focus on the concepts of path dependence, critical junctures, and the gradual modes of change. As Pierson (2004, p. 179) observes, “[. . .] policymakers operate in an environment fundamentally shaped by policies inherited from the past.” For instance, in the case of many established institutional systems of VET, there are powerful constraints built into the system that prevent an

outright defection from the nationally standardized regulative VET framework. These constraints include institutional complementarities between VET and the industrial relations system, such as collective bargaining, and labor-market security regulations (e.g., Estévez-Abe et al., 2001) that link the VET system to such related fields, and the overall institutional configuration of the national political economy. These linkages also make it difficult to achieve change in one field unless there is corresponding change in the other ones (Amable, 2003). In such a context, newer HI approaches are suitable means for identifying institutional changes for which no critical juncture is necessarily required.

Broadly speaking, definitions of institutions usually refer to some sort of regulative, normative, or cultural-cognitive social ordering that “provide stability and meaning to social life” (Scott, 2008, p. 48). HI is mainly referring to the regulative dimension of institutions or the formal and informal rules and procedures, for instance, codified in the law or deployed by states or firms (Thelen & Steinmo, 1992). Institutional theory has long tended to explain path dependency and institutional stability rather than institutional change. The basic idea of path dependence is that established institutions, or the “interdependent web of an institutional matrix” (North, 1990, p. 95), typically generate conditions that strengthen patterns of institutional stability (Pierson, 2000, p. 255). In this context, classical institutional theory has usually accounted for change processes “merely” via exogenous shocks that unsettle a given social institutional ordering and lead to critical junctures. As a result, change could mostly be envisaged only as a form of radical change presupposing an exogenous shock that creates a moment of contingency opening a window for change (Djelic & Quack, 2007). This earlier emphasis on long phases of institutional stability punctuated by periods of exogenous shocks and subsequent episodes of path departures (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993) largely neglected the role of agency in creating more endogenous forms of change that can but need not be exogenously induced.

In recent years, institutionalists have developed fine-grained concepts to analyze endogenous forms of gradual change that may, for instance, be influenced by globalization pressures. This transition builds on a more dynamic understanding of institutions not mainly as constraining but also as enabling agency. This allows HI to focus on processes of endogenous change influenced by globalization pressures in a more grounded way than, for instance, in the case of studies highlighting globalization in the form of exogenous shocks or global isomorphism and convergence. Thus, Streeck and Thelen (2005, p. 16) emphasize that “What an institution is defined by [is] continuous interaction between rule makers and rule takers during which ever new interpretations of the rule will be discovered, invented, suggested, rejected, or for the time being, adopted.” Similarly, Campbell (2004, p. viiii) sees institutional change as “constrained innovation,” stressing that next to constraining the range of options available to actors, institutions can enable actors to strive for institutional innovation. In other words, “institutions also provide principles, practices, and opportunities that actors use creatively as they innovate within these constraints.” In line with these definitions, HI scholars began to develop typologies for different modes of such change based on constrained innovation. For instance, Ebbinghaus (2005) discusses several “branching pathways” (path cessation,

path switch, path departure, and path stabilization). The present chapter mainly refers to the four *modes of gradual institutional change* that are today most frequently applied by HI scholars studying endogenous forms of change. Streeck and Thelen (2005), similar to Hacker (2004), identify the following four modes: (a) displacement, (b) layering, (c) drift, and (d) conversion. In all four modes, incremental changes over time can add up to transformative change, and substantial institutional change may be masked by relative stability on the surface: (a) when existing rules are removed and new ones are introduced, this is *displacement*; (b) when, instead of replacing existing institutions, new institutions are added on top of existing institutions, this is *layering* (see also Schickler, 2001); (c) *drift* refers to shifts occurring in the external conditions of a rule, implying that the rule formally stays the same but that its impact changes (Hacker, 2005); (d) when rules are interpreted and implemented in new ways but formally stay the same, this redirection or redeployment is called *conversion*.

Recent work by Mahoney and Thelen (2010, pp. 18–22) is instructive in this regard, as it links each of these modes of gradual institutional change to a typical combination of (1) key characteristics of the *political context* and (2) the *targeted institution* (Table 3.1).⁵ The political context is defined in terms of the veto possibilities (strong or weak), whereas the characteristics of the targeted institution refer to the level of discretion in the interpretation or enforcement of a particular institution (low or high). Where the *political context* gives the defenders of the status quo strong veto possibilities, potential change agents will find strategies of displacement and conversion less feasible. This is because—unlike layering and drift—they require direct changes to the targeted institution. However, where the *targeted institution* offers potential change agents a low level of discretion in interpreting or enforcing that institution, drift and conversion strategies are less likely to be successful, as both these modes rely on significant leeway in how the institutions are implemented. Drift often builds on a gap between institutions and how

they are enforced. Such gaps usually occur when a specific institution is not strongly enforced. Conversion builds on the ambiguities related to a specific institution, which allow it to be reinterpreted for a different purpose.

Globalization Pressures and Gradual Institutional Change

In HI, globalization is often used to refer to significant increases in cross-border flows of economic and social activities, including production, capital, and trade (Campbell, 2004) but also growing global competition leading to swift changes in skills demands (Di Maio et al., 2020) that in turn induce educational expansion and academization processes (Durazzi, 2019; Graf, 2018). Linking HI to globalization, the strength of HI is that it allows us to analyze how specific globalization pressures get translated in view of different domestic institutional configurations. A classic example of this would be how pressures to liberalize and deregulate markets linked to global production chains are taken up in specific national political economies (Thelen & Wijnbergen, 2003). Thus, while globalization theorists and organizational institutionalist often have maintained that globalization leads to more homogenous institutions across countries (Meyer et al., 1997), from a HI perspective, we would expect different trajectories of change rather than convergence, given the robustness of domestic institutions (Campbell, 2004) and political coalitions that mediate external globalization pressures (Sancak & Özel, 2018). Furthermore, HI scholars are interested in the interrelation between different socioeconomic spheres. When studying the impact of global trends within national skill formation systems, HI often considers the interactions and complementarities with developments and actors in the closely related realm of industrial relations (Strebel et al., 2020). Given gradual changes but persistent differences in industrial relations systems (Thelen, 2014), this further explains why HI studies highlight national differences in the adjustment of education and training systems to globalization pressures.

For HI scholars, the arena of domestic reform politics is usually the main unit of analysis (Trampusch, 2009). That is, they study how globalization pressures are playing out in the domestic arena, in which endogenous change dynamics play a crucial role. In this context, the modes of gradual change can help us understand how pressure for change that derives from the outside (here: globalization) activates actors in the relevant field in the domestic arena, especially if this field is characterized by path dependency but provides some room for endogenous strategies of gradual change, depending on the targeted institution and the political context (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Thus, the HI perspective and in particular the modes of gradual change make it possible to capture how globalization—understood as concrete globalization pressures (here related to academization and educational expansion)—play out in specific domestic cases characterized by path dependence (here: the German VET system).

It is interesting to observe that we still lack an understanding of whether specific policy fields are more likely associated with a specific mode of change. Against this

Table 3.1 Modes of Change in Relation to Characteristics of Political Context and Targeted Institution

		Characteristics of Targeted Institution (A)	
		Low Level of Discretion in Interpretation/Enforcement (A.1)	High Level of Discretion in Interpretation/Enforcement (A.2)
Characteristics of the political context (B)	Strong veto possibilities (B.1)	Layering	Drift
	Weak veto possibilities (B.2)	Displacement	Conversion

Source: Mahoney and Thelen (2010, p. 19); annotations added by author.

backdrop, this chapter explores whether one can observe a dominant mode of change in terms of how VET adjusts to global academization. In view of ongoing globalization and academization pressures, the core argument of this chapter is that in the case of VET, institutional change in the form of layering is likely to represent the dominant pattern. This is argued to be, first, due to VET often being strongly institutionalized through national VET legislation regulating multiactor cooperation, leaving limited room for discretion or creative reinterpretations in terms of the interpretation of rules (A.1). The second main reason is vested interests and strong veto powers of key private and public stakeholders in the VET system (often including business, unions, and state agencies) (B.1). Beyond this, VET is usually deeply embedded in national legacies related to distinct occupational traditions, national labor markets, and respective systems of industrial relations (Amable, 2003; Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012; Hall & Soskice, 2001), which render radical forms of change rather unlikely.

Case Selection, Methods, and Data

In the case of VET, the most profound influence of globalization is manifest in the increase of academic relative to vocational educational programs (Benavot, 1983; Powell & Solga, 2010), driven by a growing demand for academic skills, both on the side of employers and individuals. A key consequence is that actors who want to prevent VET from losing its significance are seeking reforms that maintain the societal role of VET—which includes but is not limited to generating smooth transitions from education to work also for disadvantaged youth (Bonoli & Wilson, 2019). In this context, HI is well fitted to analyze institutional patterns through which globalization plays out on the ground at the national and subnational levels. For this purpose, this chapter presents case studies of recent institutional reforms in the German skill formation system, which is well known for its tradition of apprenticeship training and full-time vocational schooling. As it represents one of the world's largest multiactor VET systems (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012; Culpepper, 2003), here the effect of the global trend of academization should be particularly sizeable. However, the findings for Germany should to some extent be transferable to other countries that feature a tradition of multiactor VET systems and, beyond VET, to other educational sectors characterized by strong path dependence, the presence of public and private actors with vested interests in the status quo, and an institutional context offering limited discretion to change agents.

This chapter focusses on two major areas of activity to maintain VET in the era of academization. In each of these, globalization pressures can be expected to play out through endogenous institutional change as change agents work to translate an incrementally growing globalization pressure into concrete reforms. The first area of activity is the *reconfiguration of the relationship between VET and HE*. This area of activity is further broken down into two major change processes. The first one

is the *development of hybrid study programs at the nexus of VET and HE* that transpose the principle of work-based training characteristic for VET to HE (Graf, 2018). In Germany, the core example of this is dual study programs that have been rapidly growing in recent years (Ertl, 2020). The second major change process relates to *reforms that increase the permeability between VET and HE*. This process is about enhancing HE access options for VET graduates (Bernhard, 2017; Powell & Solga, 2010). In this way, the attractiveness of VET is increased as it does not represent a “dead end.” Here, the key example is a policy promoted by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (KMK) that regulates HE access for VET graduates in Germany.

The second area of activity to maintain VET in the era of academization relates to *reforms in the VET governance system* that aim to create innovation in VET, strengthen the commitment of key stakeholders—on the part of both training firms and apprentices—and, more generally, improve the coordination among all involved actors. Again, this area of activity is broken down into two major change processes. The first major change process refers to the creation of additional *governance platforms at the national and state levels*, steered by the responsible state agents at the respective governance levels, that allow the relevant public and private stakeholders to develop new policy responses to strengthen VET. The prime example in Germany is the Alliance for Initial and Further Education and Training (*Allianz für Aus- und Weiterbildung*, AfAW) (AfAW, 2019). The second change process relates to the creation of *European governance platforms* and derives from European educational policy aimed at improving the conditions for apprenticeship training in Europe. The main instance of this is the European Alliance for Apprenticeship (EAfA) (EC, 2017).

The study analyzes institutional changes mainly during the two decades from 2000 to 2020—a time when massive educational expansion of higher levels of education started to exert significant pressure on VET systems. Regarding the comparative method, it applies the method of parallel demonstration of theory (Skocpol & Somers, 1980). More specifically, the two areas of activity and the two respective change processes are analyzed to examine whether the argument about layering in the context of VET adjusting to globalization pressures is supported or not. To uncover and explore pertinent developments in VET and understand contemporary change processes, the case studies rely on process analysis, which has special value for historical-institutionalist analyses and the examination of theory-oriented explanations in the context of small-n case studies (see Mahoney, 2004). The process tracing is carried out on the basis of available secondary sources, document analysis, and numerous expert interviews (Gläser & Laudel, 2009) with key stakeholders in the field.

Next, the case studies are presented. For each main area of activity, a description of the outcome of the respective change process is presented before tracing their historical evolution.

CASE STUDIES: GLOBALIZATION, THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY, AND ACADEMIZATION—STRENGTHENING VET IN TIMES OF GLOBAL ACADEMIZATION

Reconfiguration of the Relationship of VET to HE

Hybrid Study Programs

Academization implies that firms face a shrinking pool of talented youth interested in entering dual VET at the upper-secondary level (Powell & Solga, 2010). As more and more young talent gets diverted into HE, this poses a threat for the traditional German model of diversified quality production that builds significantly on workers with industry-specific skills (Streeck, 1991). Some German employers fear that the growing number of HE graduates are receiving a predominantly academically oriented education and, hence, are more removed from the actual world of work (Hillmert & Kröhnert, 2003). The emergence of dual study programs is a response to this concern. Dual studies transpose the work-based training principle characteristic for VET to the HE level. As hybrid organizations, they mix selected elements of the traditional VET system and the HE system—especially in terms of curricula, teaching staff, and funding (Graf, 2018). Dual studies combine training in a firm with courses in a HE institution rather than a vocational school as in traditional apprenticeship training. Thus, the learning environments of the firm and the university are integrated in one curriculum. Dual study programs most often lead to a bachelor's degree and sometimes additionally an official VET certificate.

This transposition of work-based training to HE is motivated by the obstacles to carrying out direct reforms in the VET system. In the latter, veto players have more power due to the consensus principle and the institutionalized balance of power between unions and employers, on the one hand, and within the employer camps, on the other hand (Di Maio et al., 2019). At the same time, the level of discretion for reinterpretations of the existing regulative framework is low due to the detailed and strongly institutionalized national VET regulation (Emmenegger et al., 2020). As a result, already starting in the 1970s, large industrial German firms—who represent the key change agents in this case—set up the first vocational academies to offer dual studies in cooperation with local chambers and in a bottom-up process. As these were placed in a “niche” on top of VET, key opponents, consisting mainly of small firms and unions, had limited influence on this reform process. Many small firms are less in favor of an academization of VET, partly as they rely on apprentices as a productive workforce already during the training phase (Thelen & Bussemeyer, 2012). For unions, traditional VET serves as a key channel to recruit new members and influence education policy, while they play a very small role in the HE sector where dual studies are located (Graf, 2018). Since their creation, dual study programs have massively grown in Germany and are increasingly being taken up

by universities of applied sciences as well (Ertl, 2020), adding up to around 110,000 dual students at the bachelor level alone (BIBB, 2020). Overall, the creation and expansion of dual studies on top of VET represents a layering process through which the work-based training principle was introduced at the HE level.

The KMK Reform of 2009

The 2009 KMK resolution on “Higher Education Access for Vocationally Qualified Applicants Without a School Entrance Qualification” is a major response to the academization challenge for VET in Germany. It provides extended pathways from VET to HE and enables the expansion of VET graduates' HE participation (Banscherus et al., 2016). This reform implies that holders of numerous higher VET qualifications have a study authorization equivalent to a general university entrance qualification (Ulbricht, 2012). It also means that, with some exceptions, graduates of initial VET programs—after a period of employment—receive a subject specific HE entrance qualification. That is, they can take up a course of study that corresponds to the subject of the learned profession.

Like in the case of dual study programs, from the point of the VET system, this KMK reform represents a rather indirect response to the academization challenge. As mentioned before, the collectively governed VET system is strongly path dependent, granting strong veto powers to its key stakeholders, whose interests are strongly institutionalized, for instance, in national-, state-, and local-level VET governance boards (Emmenegger et al., 2020). The national VET law also implies that there is limited room for discretion within the regulative setting. Thus, while state agents and especially large, export-oriented large firms (Thelen & Bussemeyer, 2012) are interested in adjusting VET to their rising skills demands, this is difficult to achieve by way of a direct reform of VET. Especially small firms are often not very keen to see a significant increase of the general education proportion in VET programs because this can increase the time spent in the school and, hence, decrease the economic utility they can derive from the apprentice during the training period. Due to such opposition, the reform pressure deriving from globalization and academization was playing out at the margins of the VET system in the form of the reconfiguration of the rules of access to HE. These are rules defined by the HE sector, not the VET actors. That is, the KMK as the main state actor in German HE system (Ulbricht, 2012) was in the driver seat and could advance the reform without having to give too much consideration to the interests of private actors in VET. In sum, the changes leading up to the eventual KMK 2009 resolution represent a layering process, not requiring direct changes leading to an academization of the core VET system.

Governance Reforms in VET

Alliance for Initial and Further Education and Training

Academization and the rise of the knowledge economy bring with them the challenge that there are often either too few firms offering apprenticeships or too few students applying for apprenticeships—with both predicaments often being related to the

relative rise of attractiveness of HE. This policy problem was one of the reasons why the AfAW was signed in 2014 by the German federal government, businesses, unions, states, and the Federal Employment Agency to provide an additional coordination platform for the various public and private stakeholders in the collective governance of VET. Furthermore, at the German state level, 16 complementary state alliances for apprenticeships (*Länderbündnisse*) have been created, some of which came into existence even a few years before the launch of the national alliance. Both the national- and the state-level alliances aim to increase the attractiveness and quality of initial and further VET for both students and employers through the exchange of best practices and deepened cooperation between all stakeholders, including social partners and civil society organizations (Rohde-Liebenau & Graf, 2023).

The origin of the preceding National Pacts and the subsequent AfAW was the failed attempt by the federal government to introduce a training levy in the early 2000s. This training levy would have implied a direct and transformative change in the governance structure of traditional VET, forcing firms that do not train to pay a special tax to support apprenticeship training (Busemeyer, 2009). However, this reform was blocked by the employers, who feared that this would lead to excessive state intrusion in the decentralized system of governance in VET and, in turn, limit employer influence. The state, as the key change agent in this case, therefore opted for the introduction of an additional governance platform that would be placed on top of the traditional governance structure. The AfAW can therefore be seen as the result of the strong veto powers of employers and the limited room for the state to reform VET within the preexisting governance framework. In a nutshell, the AfAW is a new alliance that brings together a variety of relevant actors to foster collective governance and provide novel policy insights. It represents a layer on top of the traditional VET governance structure in the form of strongly institutionalized governance boards at the national, state, and local levels.

European Alliance for Apprenticeships

The EAfA aims to strengthen and revive the historical legacy of VET by improving its prestige and enhancing its European dimension. This involves fostering participation by VET stakeholders at the European, national, and local levels, but especially employers and youth. The European alliance was launched in 2013 by social partners, the European Commission (EC) and the EU Council Presidency, to increase VET quality, supply, and attractiveness in the EU member states through linking relevant stakeholders, VET providers, and think tanks (EC, 2017). It relies on national commitments and stakeholder pledges in its pursuit of enhancing both economic competitiveness and social cohesion. Engaging governments, social partners, and other key stakeholders, it also organizes bench learning and supports collective activities for governments and stakeholders (Graf & Marques, 2022).

The origin of the EAfA lies in the 2008 financial crisis and the huge increase in youth unemployment this crisis has caused in many European states. Apprenticeships were then framed as an important tool to combat youth unemployment and improve

the resilience of European youth labor markets (Rohde-Liebenau & Graf, 2023). However, the EC's influence on the governance of education and training at the national level is limited. Education is a policy field still mainly under the authority of national governments, which hesitate to give up their regulative powers over skill formation, given its economic and cultural significance for the nation state (Martens et al., 2007). At the same time, it is very difficult for the EC, which represents the key change agent regarding the EAfA, to develop a policy that would be differentiated and sophisticated enough to achieve change through a strategy related to the reinterpretation of the highly distinct national legislation for VET. Hence, the EC, in cooperation with other stakeholders, devised the EAfA as a new layer of VET governance placed at the European level. It is designed to inspire policy innovation in VET without interfering too deeply with national-level VET governance, "merely" building on national commitments from member states but also pledges from individual actors at the local level (EC, 2017). Overall, the EAfA can be understood as a layer on top of respective national VET governance systems. In the German case, this implies that the EAfA, next to the AfAW, represents another layer on top of the traditional collective governance system.

CONCLUSION

This chapter first offered a review of the literature on HI and education, highlighting how HI relates to the study of globalization in the sector of education. We saw that the HI studies that address globalization mainly treat it in terms of how it plays out in and is translated by different national institutional systems. That is, in HI studies, globalization is typically analyzed in how it is related to distinct national trajectories of institutional development. Next, the chapter presented the theoretical framework of HI with a special focus on the four main modes of gradual institutional change. This was followed by four representative case studies on globalization, academization, and gradual change in VET as the pivotal educational sector studied by HI. Here, the starting point for a sectoral HI perspective was that globalization pressures have promoted the expansion of HE relative to VET. In recent years, this has prompted a range of reforms to strengthen VET in times of ongoing academization. Focusing on the case of such institutional reforms in Germany, the chapter found that due to the presence of strong veto players and limited discretion in the interpretation of rules, layering represents the main pattern of gradual institutional change on which these reforms rely—implying that new rules are added on top of existing ones, instead of replacing the latter. This enables incremental changes despite the strong degree of path dependence typical for the VET sector. We observed this pattern both in activities related to the reconfiguration of the relationship of VET to HE and the reform of VET governance structures. However, it remains a question for future research to what extent such layering is sufficient to fully adjust VET to the challenges related to increasing globalization and academization or whether, in the long run, the

institutional core of VET will deteriorate, given that much of the institutional innovation is taking place “merely” at its margins, while the institutional core of traditional apprenticeship training remains more or less unchanged.

This chapter has identified patterns of change observable in many other countries beyond Germany. For example, new rules reconfiguring the access for VET graduates to HE have been added in other countries with established VET systems, including Austria and Switzerland and beyond (Ebner et al., 2013). Also, one can observe the expansion of hybrid work-based study programs—which transpose the VET principle to the HE sector but without implying direct changes to traditional VET systems—in countries such as France and the United States and as a broad trend in several world regions (Graf et al., 2014). Furthermore, both the AfAW and the EAFA can be seen as illustrations of more general strategies by educational public policymakers to promote new layers of governance in political contexts where their capacity to carry out policies in a top-down way is limited.

Thus, this chapter showed that the HI perspective and the modes of gradual change make it possible to capture how globalization understood as concrete globalization pressures (here: academization and educational expansion) plays out in specific domestic arenas characterized by path dependence (here: the German VET system). A core strength of HI is that it allows us to analyze how such globalization pressures get translated in view of distinct institutional configurations on the ground, often leading to divergent trajectories of change. HI builds on a dynamic understanding of institutions, which are framed not only as constraining but also enabling change agents. Thus, HI is well adapted to studying how globalization pressures get taken up in domestic arenas where endogenous change dynamics play a crucial role. From the HI perspective, the way this unfolds most crucially depends on characteristics of the targeted institution and the political context—as well as the interrelation of education and training to other socioeconomic spheres.

An obvious prospect for future research in the domain of HI, education, and globalization is to further extend the insights from the application of the modes of gradual institutional change to VET to other educational sectors. This could lead to a more general theory of how education may “globalize” in different ways in different sectors. For instance, the HE sector, as the other major sector that prepares students for labor market entry, represents a nice point of comparison. It can be argued that—in view of globalization pressures—universities are likely to be more open toward processes of *conversion* than is typically the case in VET. Due to the relatively high level of autonomy granted to universities, there tend to be fewer veto players (B.2) but more scope for the creative reinterpretation of institutions (A.2)—at least if the university as the central organizational actor agrees to or even promotes the envisaged changes. In addition, HE is more directly connected to the world polity (Zapp & Ramirez 2019), meaning that there are likely to be fewer opponents to the implementation of related global trends (B.2). In contrast, the VET sector is often more strongly embedded in national labor markets and respective systems of industrial relations. An indication for this is that the Bologna process for the Europeanization of HE more immediately converted European HE systems than

did the Copenhagen process for European VET systems. For instance, the Bologna degree structure was rapidly implemented also in countries that did not have a tradition of dividing study programs into BA and MA degrees (Powell et al., 2012), while the uptake of the Copenhagen process on VET was more ambivalent and selective (Bieber, 2010). In line with this, the present analysis of the EAFA found that it represents layering rather than conversion, not least due to the obstacles to more direct changes in strongly institutionalized national VET systems. Similar patterns unfold in other Europeanization initiatives for VET, such as the European Qualification framework, which was initially intended to strengthen the standing of VET in Europe, but, like the KMK 2009 resolution in Germany, was eventually introduced on top of the national qualification system rather than fully integrated (Graf, 2015).

Overall, with its focus on path dependence and change, HI carries great potential when it comes to the analysis of education and globalization in given institutional contexts. While a key strength of sociological institutionalism is the analysis of processes of global isomorphism and convergence, the HI toolbox is especially useful for researchers aiming to trace in detail how globalization pressures play out in national and local contexts, while taking special note of the respective institutional conditions and actor constellations in specific sectors. By focusing on institutional trajectories of change, HI can contribute to our understanding of how present-day globalization is influencing education in different societal, political, and economic arenas.

NOTES

1. HI studies typically focus less on developing a complex theory of globalization but rather on specific pressures—such as the one to deregulate national markets (Thelen & Wijnbergen, 2003)—deriving from globalization and affecting specific policy fields.
2. See the conclusion for an extension of the argument to HE.
3. In sociological institutionalism, the structuration of the world polity is seen as key factor for the expansion of HE as a worldwide phenomenon (Zapp & Ramirez, 2019). While sharing the perspective that globalization is associated with educational expansion and academization, this chapter applies an HI approach to uncover the divergent impact of this development on the ground.
4. This is also the reason why in the outlook section of this chapter the discussion is extended to HE, that is, another education sector close to the labor market and economy. Further research is needed to explore the extent to which the HI perspective on globalization presented here is applicable also to education sectors further removed from the economy and economic aspects of globalization.
5. These two characteristics capture key aspects of HI-oriented analyses that are often interested in agency (here: focus on change agents and veto players) and the respective institutional context (here: level of discretion available in a specific case). In principle, further complexity could be introduced, for instance, by integrating additional factors such as interaction effects with developments in related socioeconomic spheres (Graf, 2018; Mettler & Sorelle, 2018).

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