

The Role and Impact of International Organisations in the Shaping of a Global Education Space

Much contemporary research literature points to the existence of a global education space implying that the basic differences between educational systems are in the process of becoming differences in degree rather than in nature. The idea about the global education space goes well in line with recent trends in education research where notions about actor-networks, transnational movements, and entanglements between place and space are often in focus. But while the existence of very powerful transnational trends in education – especially at the policy level - are beyond debate, the implications and the impact on the ground are more debateable.

In this lecture I take a close look at the role of international organisations (IOs) in the shaping of education globally using both historical and contemporary examples. While some authors emphasize IOs as some of the key agents of globalization in general and the rise of the global education space in particular, other scholars doubt the latitude and independent contribution of IOs as a result of powerful nation-states pulling the strings behind the curtain.

My starting point is the rise of IOs in education after World War II seeking to influence and shape national education systems through various programmes, initiatives and networks. Especially the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) including its leading branch in education, the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) played a key role in these processes by organising various programmes for the alleged improvement of education globally.

My empirical examples stem from the UNESCO programme 'Education for International Understanding' and some of the OECD's educational recommendations and programmes. From these empirical examples I will deduct some core themes in order to draw a nuanced conclusion about the role and impact of IOs in the Shaping of a Global Education Space.