

## **Abstract**

This study examines educational systems and the changes observed within them alongside changes in the wider political economy. The research was conducted through comparative case studies of England and Germany, two countries that in the varieties of capitalism (VoC) literature exemplify two very different types of economic coordination (thereby, this study follows a "most different research design"). Expanding upon the VoC approach, this book analyses not only vocational education and training but also school education and higher education, since these two areas contribute decisively to national skill formation. The point of departure is the puzzling observation that the current reforms of the educational systems in both countries depart from the paths predicted by the VoC approach. The study thus argues against institutional path-dependency in the two countries and in favour of an ideational approach based on discursive institutionalism.

The theoretical chapter (second chapter) opens this study with a discussion of discursive institutionalism, policy diffusion, and conceptual mechanisms of institutional change. It also provides a framework that accounts for path-deviant discourses and reforms. This is followed by a description of the three educational areas in both countries and an outline of the paths that the systems should have taken if they had evolved path-dependently. Thereby, this chapter serves as a reference point against which recent developments are assessed (fourth chapter). Next, the visions and aims of the governments are identified through a textual discourse analysis of various British government White Papers that formulate policies on skill formation. The same procedure is applied for relevant policy papers in Germany (fifth chapter).

Finally, the transformation of visions into concrete policy measures is analysed by focusing on three important reform measures in each country (sixth chapter). On the basis of the policy cycle stages these measures are traced back to their original intentions, which are then compared with the implemented initiatives. This procedure sheds light on how reforms match and potentially alter the existing institutional design, how ideas drive educational reforms, and how they resist, "bend", or even vanish once they are implemented through concrete policy initiatives.