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The myths and promises of education: The cultural political economy of educationalization in European Union governance

BiWi-International Lecture Series

Wednesday, October 19th, 5 pm, Hörsaal 1 (Sensengasse 3A, 1. OG)

How did European policy-making strategically use education and lifelong learning as key instruments to solve social and economic problems? Based on an analysis policy documents and interviews with policy actors, this presentation will delve into this question through the perspective of educationalization. As a governing strategy, educationalization has historically been central in the formation of nation-states, underpinned by the expansion of schooling as means of moral and social regulation of tensions related to nation-building and capitalist developments. Widely embraced across Europe and globally over recent decades, educationalization has also been propagated through and by multilateral international fora such as the OECD, the World Bank and UNESCO.

Recent public policy studies suggest that also EU institutions have adopted this strategy. Since the 1990s, education has thus become increasingly central to the EU's political agenda and opened the policy area to influences from other areas – and vice versa. During the 2010s, this was evident in major developments in EU governance, such as the European Semester, EU level social dialogue, and the European Pillar of Social Rights, all of which explicitly address education. In the process, 'education' has been reconceived as 'lifelong learning', imbued with the perpetual striving for quality and efficiency and marking a departure from previous attempts to nurture European identity and a common consciousness through Euro-symbols and elitist high culture.

This presentation focuses on the policy actors of the European Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, and European cross-sectoral and sectoral social partners in education. The presentation will analyze how these actors have employed the strategy of educationalization via the methodological approach of cultural political economy, distinguished by its consideration of semiotic as well as material factors in explaining political and social outcomes.

Tore Bernt Sorensen is a Postdoctoral fellow at the Educational Governance Team of the Hertie School in Berlin.

This event is organized by the Department of Education of University of Vienna and will be followed by an open reception.