

CONSTRUCTING SCHOOL AUTONOMY WITH ACCOUNTABILITY AS A GLOBAL POLICY MODEL

A FOCUS ON OECD'S GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, **international organizations** and the **OECD** in particular have played a key role in the dissemination of **school accountability with autonomy (SAWA)** reforms.

- + Prefigured by the policy repertoire advanced during the 80s >> emphasis on school effectiveness and approach to schools as key units of change.
- + Increasing levels of conceptual and theoretical elaboration on the potential of a series of policy tools:

External assessment

Accountability

School autonomy

... crystallizing in the SAWA policy model during the 2000s

- + In coherence with the New Public Management agenda promoted by the organization in a range of public sectors.

OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Understanding the role and impact of the OECD in the international promotion and dissemination of SAWA reforms.

- + **Theoretical framework:** international organizations' governance mechanisms

➔ Martens & Jakobi's (2010) categorization of **governance mechanisms** particularly relevant for OECD:



- + **Empirical strategy:** desk study relying on 2 main data sources:

- Systematic literature review on processes of reform along the lines of SAWA.
- Document analysis of OECD publications and working documents.

MAIN RESULTS

DATA GATHERING

- + Leading role in the collection and production of **comparable** education data as one of the most distinct features of the organization >> establishment of a wide range of data-intensive initiatives including PISA but also EAG or PIAAC.

- + Promotion of the SAWA repertoire through:

- **Sense of competition** + “naming and shaming” dynamics triggered by frequent reliance on league tables



Greater appeal of outcome-oriented governance approach + policies allowing for a more accurate control of education results.

- Incorporation of prognosis frames and **recommendations** in reports and press releases.
- Reconfiguration of assessment frameworks at a national level >> adjustment to PISA structure, contents and standards.

POLICY EVALUATION

Extensive and well-established use of **peer reviews** as a privileged means to provide policy guidance >> Reliance on **multilateral surveillance, socialization** and **indirect coercion** as key drivers of change.

- + Country reviews as strategic to the **advancement of SAWA** through:

- Identification of new **policy problems**.
- Identification and shaping of **policy solutions**.
- **Internalization** of causal and principled **beliefs** among decision-makers.

Evaluation results

Evaluation process

Effectiveness ultimately mediated by the interests of policy elites acting as gate-keepers.

- + National reviews published over the last decade emphasize **two key principles**:

- From **inputs to outcomes**.
- Need to instil an **evaluation culture**.

- + ... but recommendations on **specific policy instruments** remain more **heterogeneous** in nature - particularly in relation to the stakes attached to assessment.

IDEA GENERATION

Stimulation of policy/political debates between States and development of new policy goals and programs - leading to the dissemination of causal ideas (what works) and principled beliefs (what is acceptable):

Strategic role in the **advancement of the SAWA** agenda through:

- + Different **research and training initiatives** with **external experts and country representatives** >> subsequently echoed in different **knowledge products**.

- Growing centrality of the SAWA agenda within internal discussions since the early 2000s >> dissemination of **managerial accountability**.

- More **recent initiatives more nuanced** in their conclusions >> emphasis on formative assessments and multi-stakeholder accountability.

- + **OECD officials' role as advisors** to countries in the context of education reforms.

- + SAWA recommendations featuring prominently within a range of products oriented at **interpreting PISA** results and other **one-off publications**.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The OECD role in policy transfer dynamics goes far beyond that of a neutral broker between States >> **soft power mechanism prove influential** - and can compensate for modest financial or legal instruments.

The effectiveness of governance mechanism depends on their capacity to open a policy window.

- ➔ OECD as an **instrument constituency** - theorizing policies and matching them to a wide range of contexts and problems.

Governance mechanisms over domestic policy should **not be understood as a top-down process** >> they frequently lend themselves to countries' appropriation/instrumentalization as a consequence of their *à la carte* and interactive nature.

Methodological difficulties in assessing OECD's influence on national policy-making >> key dynamics (socialization, persuasion, meaning-making exchanges) **not readily observable** at hindsight...