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Abstract and title for a keynote lecture at AEA-conference, Glasgow, November 2015

### **What is fair? Summative assessment and conceptions of fairness in a comparative perspective**

In all societies subscribing to the meritocratic myth, summative assessment plays a key role in the allocation of life chances to individuals. For these allocation processes to be considered legitimate, assessment has to be perceived as fair. However, what is perceived as fair can differ considerably depending on who is looking; fairness is in the eye of the beholder and not reducible to abstract principles independent of their cultural context.

The lecture will explore some of the different, culture- and actor-specific ways in which fairness in assessment can be conceived. On the one hand, different conceptions of fairness underlie the rules and regulations governing assessment in different national contexts. This includes a strong symbolic dimension, e.g. certain instruments in which fairness in assessment and in extension its legitimacy are anchored symbolically. In addition to differences between different national contexts, different perceptions of fairness are prevalent among different groups of actors within the same national context. Often, sets of conceptions of fairness of different groups (such as teachers on the one hand and pupils on the other) are not in perfect concordance with each other, or with the conceptions of fairness underlying the regulations.

Arguably, these differing conceptions of fairness – including the tensions between them – play an important role for how systems of assessment operate and also condition how systems can evolve in the future. However, as conceptions of fairness are largely latent, investigating and comparing them can be a tricky task. The lecture will make some suggestions on how to tackle these issues theoretically and empirically. It will also present some results from a comparative research project on the conceptions of justice of teachers, pupils and school evaluators in Germany, Sweden and England.

### **Short bio Florian Waldow**

Florian Waldow is professor of comparative and international education at Humboldt University, Berlin. Before assuming this post in 2013, he taught and researched at the University of Münster, Germany, and the Universities of Uppsala and Stockholm, Sweden. He took his doctorate at Humboldt University in 2005.

Florian Waldow is interested in the cultural context of assessment (including its historical aspects) in a comparative perspective. He currently leads the project “Different worlds of meritocracy? Educational assessment and conceptions of justice in Germany, Sweden and England in the age of ‘standards-based reform’”, which is financed by the German Research Foundation and located at Humboldt University. Another area of interest consists of the changes brought about in educational policy-making and international educational governance through the rise in importance of international comparative data such as the data produced by international large-scale-assessments. A third area of interest, interlinked with the first two, is educational “borrowing and lending”. Here, he is particularly interested in the ways in which the “international argument” serves to legitimate policy agendas.