

## Introduction to the Special Issue: Switzerland as a Site of Capital Accumulation: The Case of International Education

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*Abstract:* This special issue explores how and why foreign families and individuals, as well as local institutions, capitalize on the Swiss private schools' market. Our introduction unpacks how the country and its educational landscape intersect with broader ties to global capitalism and asset movement. By further unravelling the interplay of social re/production, Bourdieusian capital accumulation, and transnational mobility for the globally elite, our introduction sets forth an important research agenda on Switzerland's international education sector.

*Key words:* Elites, international education, global capitalism, mobility, Switzerland, transnational reproduction

### Introduction au numéro spécial : La Suisse comme lieu d'accumulation de capitaux : le cas de l'éducation internationale

*Résumé:* Ce numéro spécial explore comment et pourquoi les familles et les individus étrangers, ainsi que les institutions locales, capitalisent sur le marché des écoles privées suisses. Notre introduction explique où le pays et son paysage éducatif se situent dans le capitalisme mondial et les mouvements des capitaux. En investiguant l'interaction entre (re)production sociale, accumulation bourdieusienne de capital et mobilité transnationale des élites, notre introduction propose un nouveau programme de recherche sur le secteur éducatif international suisse.

*Mots clés:* Élités, éducation internationale, capitalisme mondial, mobilité, Suisse, reproduction transnationale

### Einführung zum Sonderheft: Die Schweiz als Ort der Kapitalakkumulation: der Fall des internationalen Bildungswesens

*Zusammenfassung:* In diesem Themenheft wird untersucht, wie und warum ausländische Familien und Einzelpersonen sowie einheimische Institutionen aus dem Schweizer Privatschulmarkt Kapital schlagen. In der Einleitung untersuchen wir die Wechselwirkung vom Staat und seiner Bildungslandschaft mit den weitergefassten Verbindungen zu globalem Kapitalismus sowie zu Vermögensbewegungen. Indem wir dieses Zusammenspiel von sozialer Re/Produktion, Bourdieus'scher Kapitalakkumulation und transnationaler Mobilität der globalen Elite weiter entschlüsseln, legt unsere Einführung eine wichtige Forschungsagenda zum internationalen Bildungssektor der Schweiz vor.

*Schlüsselwörter:* Eliten, internationale Bildung, globaler Kapitalismus, Mobilität, Schweiz, transnationale Reproduktion

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## 1 Introduction: Switzerland's Unique Position in the Realm of International Education

This special issue explores Switzerland's unique position in the realm of international education. Switzerland's international education sector has long been regarded as a trailblazer, marked by institutions catering primarily to non-Swiss students with foreign-based curricula and English-language instruction. Positioned at the intersection of global capitalism and education, Switzerland offers a fascinating lens through which to examine the intricate dynamics of social re/production, capital accumulation, and transnational mobility within the educational landscape.

The papers in this special issue delve into various facets of Switzerland's international education system, offering a multi-scalar and multi-positioned perspective. From institutional strategies to individual experiences, our collection of papers investigates how and why families and individuals capitalize on Switzerland's educational offerings and its global reputation. By unpacking the complexities of the Swiss international education sector, we aim to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how the country's educational landscape intersects with broader ties to global capitalism, asset movement, and the accumulation of Bourdieusian capital.

The papers present diverse empirical, methodological, and theoretical approaches. Delving into topics ranging from institutional positioning to individual experiences, our contributors shed light on the nuanced dynamics shaping the educational trajectories of students, families, teachers, and institutions within Switzerland's international education landscape. Together, they not only fill gaps in the existing literature but also set forth a future research agenda that explores the implications of Switzerland's international education sector on transnational strategies of social reproduction.

## 2 Switzerland and Global Capitalism

Achieving a comprehensive understanding of the significance of Swiss international education within the framework of transnational social reproduction necessitates a grasp of Switzerland's unique position within the landscape of global capitalism. Switzerland's strategic positioning within capitalism and asset movement both contributes to and is a consequence of an environment that attracts and caters to privileged foreign nationals. That the nation-state has come to be a central hub in Europe facilitating the influx and outflow of transnational economic resources and individuals means its influence resonates both deeply and widely, across such various interconnected sectors as tourism, luxury goods, art, banking and finance, international trade, and sports. The result is an international social, economic, and educational ecosystem that caters to well-resourced foreign nationals. This special issue delves into a critical component of this dynamic: Switzerland's international

education system. This domain offers insights into how and why Swiss private schools align with foreign families' desire for mobility, prestige, and cosmopolitanism – and, more centrally, how these institutions facilitate the accumulation and conversion of Bourdieusian capitals.

Switzerland's position at the intersection of capitalism and the movement of people and resources has embedded the country with international reach and power. Some international contemporary businesses and politics, for example, are shaped by legitimization processes that take place in the country. As historical research on transnational relationships between Switzerland and international business associations has demonstrated, Swiss economic players have actively influenced the laws and collaborations that govern modern capitalism on an international scale (Pitteloud 2020; Beausire 2022; Eichenberger 2022; Pitteloud 2022; David and Eichenberger 2023; Eichenberger et al. 2023). These relationships materialize at events like the World Economic Forum, an annual meeting in Davos that sets an international agenda in these sectors (Garsten and Sörbom 2018).

The country's international reputation is strongly entwined with its banking sector, which has become synonymous with private wealth management (Bertron 2018; Araujo et al. 2023) despite several crises from 1850 to 2000 (Giddey and Mazbouri 2022). In 1910, hoping to join London and Paris as a center of foreign capital, Switzerland introduced low tax rates. French authorities then sued Switzerland in 1932 for facilitating tax evasion, leading to the Banking Secrecy Act of 1934 (Guex 2000). The resultant “asking of no questions and hence no need to tell lies” (Urry 2014, 229) has appealed to the international rich shopping the globe for a (tax-free) place for their money (Drucker and Hubbard 2022; see also Rossier 2019).

The wealthiest not only make financial use of Switzerland, but also develop a whole range of social activities in specific private areas there. A research project led by Chauvin and Cosquer<sup>1</sup> is currently examining the “private worlds” of international elites in Switzerland through social clubs, holiday resorts, and second homes, and the role those play in the inculcation and dissemination of a privileged lifestyle on a global scale. As this suggests, Switzerland's role as a host country for foreign elites is reflected in its strong local presence of luxury goods and services (Donzé 2023a), including watches (Donzé 2022), private health clinics (Donzé 2023b), and holiday homes (Sonderegger and Bätzing 2013) in contemporary vacation destinations like St. Moritz and Gstaad, which tailor to the international rich (Sherman 2017; Cousin and Chauvin 2021) and operate as winter destinations for the global party circuit (Mears 2020).

The power and influence emanating from Switzerland – especially that which has financial roots – can also be found in non-economic fields, such as arts, culture, and sports. Art Basel, for example, epitomizes the ability of money to dictate what

1 See the project description on the SNF website “La Suisse dans la formation et la transformation des classes dominantes internationales: ethnographie des sociabilités et des styles de vie élitaires”. <https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/204882> (12.03. 2024).

good art is (Schultheis et al. 2015); the Montreux Jazz Festival presumably does something similar for the relationship between money and music (see, for example, Debono 2021). Switzerland also hosts over 60 international sports organizations – such as FIFA and UEFA for football and FIG for gymnastics, as well as the International Olympic Committee, which arguably has immense social and economic power that goes relatively unchecked due in large part to its formal status as a Swiss NGO (Chappelet and Kübler-Mabbott 2008; Geeraert et al. 2014; Nelson and Cottrell 2016; Chatzianni 2018).

This international reach is both cause and consequence of Switzerland being crisscrossed by transnational flows, making the country a dynamic space of internationalization. Because of its attractive economic and tax policies for foreign companies, multinational corporations accounted for almost 25% of the workforce in 2022, according to the Federal Statistical Office. It also has one of the highest proportions in Europe of foreign executives at the head of its companies (Bühlmann et al. 2018). Foreign citizens also hold leadership positions in Swiss economic (Bühlmann et al. 2013), banking (Araujo 2018; Araujo et al. 2023; Araujo and Davoine 2023a), and academic institutions (Rossier et al. 2015; Benz et al. 2021; Rossier 2020). However, this flow is bidirectional. Swiss leaders, too, have internationalized their careers in those sectors through various professional moves to the United States, England, and/or neighboring countries such as France and Germany (Bühlmann et al. 2013; Araujo and Davoine 2023b).

Globally mobile professionals in Switzerland are buttressed by an entire ecosystem that encourages and facilitates their moving and settling in, one that comprises private relations (the family), the private sector (recruitment and relocation agencies, and placement agencies for spouses; Tissot 2018; 2020), the public sector (in terms of setting conditions for migration; Sandoz 2019; 2020), and, importantly here, international schools that educate children who move with their parents.

Switzerland has thus progressively established itself as an ideal destination for foreign elites – a place that is welcoming to their international money, business, families, and lifestyles. Its international schools, to which we turn next, form a critical part of that positioning, while Switzerland's contemporary reputation on the global stage has become an attractive argument for those schools.

### 3 Switzerland's Global Imaginary

A survey from the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (2022) of almost 12 000 people abroad from 18 countries showed that Switzerland is widely associated with its privileged resources – its nature, consumer goods, and socio-economic and political policies. Spontaneous associations with “Switzerland” that were elicited by the survey centered on its physical environment, such as the mountains, the

Alps, the lakes, the beauty of the landscape and the cleanliness; everyday consumer products (chocolate and cheese) and luxury goods (watches); and geopolitical attributes including neutrality, economic prosperity/stability, quality of life, social security, and the high cost of living. These representations provide resources for Swiss international schools, which can activate their host country's global imaginary to appeal to a globally wealthy clientele (Lillie 2024).

Switzerland has actively cultivated its association with attributes that both mark it as a privileged space and work to enhance its privileged position. For example, Switzerland widely advertised itself as "safe" (Swann 2007) – an association that takes on numerous meanings. The country can be seen as "safe" from geopolitics, through both the imagery of the Alps protecting it from the world (Zimmer 1998) and the discourse of being "neutral"; and from disease, due to its long history of sanatoriums (Lüthi 2005). These attributes directly enhance Switzerland's financial standing: Geopolitical neutrality meant that Switzerland profited from trading with both sides of the World Wars and not having to rebuild after bombing (Helmreich 1977; Golson 2011); and sanatoriums catered to a wealthy clientele that not only supported local economies during their stays in the country but also helped to cultivate and disseminate Switzerland's reputation as a place for the rich (Lüthi 2005).

Subsequently, amidst the backdrop of decolonization, the "myth of Swiss neutrality" emerged as a compelling rationale for the country's role in mediating international financial conflicts between enterprises hailing from the Global South and North (Beausire 2022). Similarly, Swiss academic players were asked to take part in the creation of diplomatic training abroad in the second half of the 20th century (Roy 2024 [forthcoming]). Switzerland has thus developed a reputation as one of the best places to manage international conflicts, and safely store financial capital, and its professionals have become known as experts in neutrality and diplomacy, exporting their knowledge internationally.

We could hypothesize that Switzerland's sense of security is strongly linked to the "security" of money. Switzerland's wealthy population, strong economy (and therefore high cost of living), and centrality in global financial landscapes signals its openness to the financially rich. According to OECD statistics, in international comparison, Switzerland has the third highest net national income<sup>2</sup> and employment rate (80.4%),<sup>3</sup> and fourth highest average wages (US\$72 293).<sup>4</sup> Its poverty rate in 2020 was also comparatively low (9.9%).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the country and its major cities are frequently ranked highly in various indexes evaluating quality of life, including the Legatum Prosperity Index, World Happiness Report, and Better Life Index.

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2 OECD (2024), Net national income (indicator). doi: 10.1787/af9be38a-en (05.03.2024).

3 OECD (2024), Employment rate (indicator). doi: 10.1787/1de68a9b-en (05.03.2024).

4 OECD (2024), Average wages (indicator). doi: 10.1787/cc3e1387-en (05.03.2024).

5 OECD (2024), Poverty rate (indicator). doi: 10.1787/0fe1315d-en (05.03.2024).

These statistics and rankings contribute to a global imaginary of an “exceptional” Switzerland, a place seemingly sheltered from global conflicts and crises. At work here are two fundamental symbolic mechanisms: Switzerland’s historical evolution into an international economic and political hub, nurtured by the interplay of transnational institutions, financial networks, and individual interactions; and Switzerland’s comparatively privileged position on the global stage today, economically, socially, and politically.

#### 4 Switzerland’s Role in International Education

Switzerland is widely considered a trailblazer when it comes to international education. In the interwar period, it saw the start of the International Bureau of Education, which practiced educational internationalism as a tool of diplomacy (Hofstetter and Schneuwly 2023). This was also when the International School of Geneva began, educating the children of those working for the League of Nations or the International Labour Organisation (Hill 2001; Dugonjić 2014; Dugonjic-Rodwin 2022). In the 1960s, Switzerland became the birthplace of the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. Although originally designed as a way for the children of internationally mobile parents to receive a continuous education (Fitzgerald 2017), the IB Organisation now arguably creates a global field of “international education” (Dugonjic-Rodwin 2021).

The literature examining international schools outside of Switzerland often finds that they are, at core, nationally oriented schools that have adopted an international outlook “through the prism of a national imaginary” (Rizvi 2015, 137). These schools, in post-colonial places like Singapore (Koh and Kenway 2012), Barbados (McCarthy et al. 2014), and India (Rizvi 2015), but also in Germany (Kessler et al. 2015) and Argentina (Prosser 2016), seek to balance their own local embedment with their clientele’s global ambitions. Their families, these studies show, seek an education for their children that prepares them for the global marketplace. While those schools can be seen as national ones trying to rebrand as international, there are also internationalized schools trying to hold onto their national brand. In some contexts, like China (Ong 1999) and Nigeria (Ayling 2019), families want to educate their children abroad at a school that reflects its home nation and culture – i. e., at a “British school” rather than an international school in Britain. As a result, some English (Brooks and Waters 2015) and Irish (Courtois 2016) schools have tried to preserve their national image while quietly internationalizing their student body.

In comparison, Switzerland’s international educational landscape is unique. Its international schools were typically designed as establishments for foreigners – usually either for middle-class families that worked abroad or wealthy families that sent their children abroad to “scale up” their social class standing from the national

elite to an international elite (see, for example, Bertron 2016a; Lillie 2021a). As a result, these schools traditionally educate primarily non-Swiss students, teach in English, and offer a foreign-based curriculum, such as the IB, British A-Levels, or American Advanced Placement courses, instead of the Swiss Maturité (Rey 2024, this issue).

International schools in Switzerland are tied to economic capital in several ways. Historically, these institutions have continuously educated the global wealthy, even as the geographies and forms of Bourdieusian capitals defining those wealthy have changed – from European and Anglo-American elites up through the 1960s to emerging economic (and, notably, primarily non-white) powers thereafter: The Persian Gulf from the 1970s, Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, Russia and the post-soviet states in the 1990s and 2010s, and the Asia Pacific since then (Bertron 2016b; Delval 2022a).

That these international schools, many of which were founded in the first half of the twentieth century, have survived for so long while often charging high fees attests to their staying power in the global educational market. To survive, many of them have adapted their client base in parallel with changes in the global financial landscape (Lillie 2022). Bertron (2019b) shows what happens when schools cannot adapt: Finishing schools educating international young women in Switzerland declined in the 1960s as societal expectations around how to educate the future elite changed and those institutions could no longer compete in the educational market. Currently, in line with both changes in the global education market and with Switzerland's orientation towards global capitalism, the landscape of international schooling in the country has increasingly become entwined with multinational for-profit companies that take over educational institutions (Bertron 2019a).

Why do wealthy families look to Switzerland for an education abroad? In part, schools in Switzerland offer “refuge” from competitive educational systems (Delval 2022b) and/or geopolitical tensions in other countries (Bertron 2016a). But also, they work to inscribe privilege on their students through the accumulation of international or cosmopolitan capital (Weenink 2008; Igarashi and Saito 2014; Wagner 2020). However, our work shows that young people from different races, nationalities, and social class backgrounds can experience their schooling differently (Lillie 2021a; Delval 2022a; Lillie 2024), pointing to the importance of not reducing Swiss international school students into one conceptual category.

Graduates from Swiss international secondary schools may attend university in the United States or the United Kingdom because of the global status that higher education in those countries holds (Lillie 2021b). An exception is when staying in Switzerland is a strategy for acquiring citizenship, as can be the case particularly for Russian students (Bertron 2018). However, as ongoing work by Lillie and Maxwell (2024) shows, even though young people often leave Switzerland after their secondary schooling, they continue to cultivate the international and wealthy social

networks they acquired there by, for example, vacationing together – and to put those networks to work for personal and professional opportunities.

Switzerland's international education sector also extends to the tertiary level, a large part of which developed after the Second World War. A notable example is the Institute for Management Development (IMD) in Lausanne, which is often internationally top-ranked for business management. David and Schaufelbuehl (2015) demonstrate the essential role played by Swiss and Canadian multinationals – Nestlé and Alcan – in the genesis and funding of the IMD, which also encourages the transatlantic circulation of managers, teachers, and knowledge. The IMD was thus initiated by and for the international private sector and caters to foreign students.

Similarly, Roy (2024 [forthcoming]) investigated the conditions under which the Graduate Institute, which plays an international role in cultural outreach and diplomacy, was founded in Geneva. The Institute was established in 1955 with a donation from the Ford Foundation, one of America's largest philanthropic organizations. Its director Shepard Stone saw Switzerland as a "neutral" place that could attract young intellectuals from decolonized countries hostile to the United States. Switzerland was thus conceived as an "ideal place to expose students to Western ideas, methods and knowledge". The Institute's activities, however, were also aimed at the Swiss public and students studying foreign affairs.

Delval's study of Swiss Hospitality Management Schools (Delval and Bühlmann 2020; Delval 2022a) illustrates how they developed a unique vocational training from the early 20th century. Their reputation is based not only on representing Switzerland as the "cradle of the tourism industry", with professional expertise aimed at a distinctive international clientele, but also on their affiliation with the internationalist educational model. Their curriculum is therefore tailored to international students hoping to enter the global luxury hotel industry. Considered the best in the world in their field, these institutions attract heirs of the foreign economic elite searching for a "refuge" from their home schooling systems when they do not perform well in them (Delval 2022b).

These international higher education institutions (HEIs) share a common thread: The cultivation of a hybrid training model that seamlessly integrates Swiss expertise – in multinational and hospitality management as well as diplomacy – with English-language instruction within an international community. This starkly contrasts with Switzerland's public universities, which do not attract many international undergraduate students, particularly in comparison to the United States or the United Kingdom. Switzerland's international HEIs are dedicated to equipping their graduates with a degree that stands out on a global scale. Conceptualized as "specialized Higher Education Institutions" (Findlay et al. 2012), they thus cater to unique vocational training requirements and goals, positioning themselves within niche markets tailored to the needs and aspirations of a selective flow of international students looking for an English-language curriculum in a desirable Western location.



## 5 The Special Issue

Starting at the institutional level, then focusing on the individual level through teachers, families, and pupils, this special issue offers a multi-scalar and multi-positioned perspective on how, why, and to what ends an international education in Switzerland can be deployed as a mechanism of social re/production. Its papers speak to the question of how families and individuals capitalize on these institutions' Swiss location and taught dispositions. As such, it contributes to a more complete and complex understanding of how Switzerland's educational landscape intersects with the country's broader ties to global capitalism, asset movement and foreign nationals – and the role it plays in the conversion and accumulation of Bourdieusian capital. This special issue marks the inaugural gathering of researchers and their studies on Swiss international schools, offering a comprehensive presentation and discussion of this previously disparate body of work.

The first paper, “Being Swiss and International”, discusses international institutions themselves. Delval studied how Swiss Hospitality Management Schools use the symbolic attributes related to “Swissness” and “internationalism” with other forms of capitals, to both position themselves and compete locally and globally. To do this, Delval used mixed methods data drawn from interviews and Multiple Correspondence Analysis, to produce a cosmopolitan field analysis. The article shows how the reputation of an international educational establishment based in Switzerland is embodied and circulates transnationally through recruiters, alumni, and students. It reveals that not all international institutions have the same symbolic, social, and academic resources to put to work in territorial expansion. In other words, the symbolic categories of “Swiss” or “international” in fact conceal very unequal institutional realities – ones that are not always defined by the elitism, prestige, and multiculturalism often associated with such labels. The paper thus shows that any examination of social reproduction strategies among students within the Swiss international sector requires a nuanced consideration of the distinctive attributes of their institution vis-à-vis its competitors.

The next paper, “The Uncertain Value of International Capital”, shifts to the broader context surrounding international schools in Switzerland, with a focus on the experiences of teachers who come to the country as part of their career and mobility trajectories. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data from a multi-sited ethnography of international schools in the region, the paper shows that the same Swiss international school employment market varies drastically in terms of the social reproduction strategies it can offer, depending on the migratory and professional background, as well as the socio-economic and geographical origins, of the teachers. Rey starts the paper by discussing three distinct socio-professional and mobility trajectories of teachers. For “trailing spouses”, who move as a result of their partner's career path, teaching at an international school in Switzerland emerges as

an accessible avenue to bolster household income, enriching their already privileged circumstances. It also fosters integration into the local expatriate community, despite disparities in qualifications or professional backgrounds. “Adventurer teachers”, who often hail from English-speaking countries, on the other hand, seize Switzerland as an opportunity to cultivate professional expertise in a “first-tier” international school, notwithstanding the challenges posed by the country’s high cost of living. Finally, the third trajectory is that of the “local teachers”, mostly Swiss or neighboring country residents, who may lack the prerequisites for more lucrative public sector teaching roles. Opting instead for international school positions, they leverage their personal ties or cosmopolitan backgrounds to navigate their career paths. The paper examines the potential for these different types of teachers to bridge their skills and experiences between international and local education spheres, underscoring the limited transitional opportunities within Switzerland. In doing so, it sheds light on the social and economic dynamics surrounding international schools in the country. While globally prestigious, Swiss international schools appear to hold lesser social value for the resident population, giving rise to broader socio-professional complexities in the region’s education sector.

The third paper, “Concerted Cultivation from Afar”, looks at students’ families situated outside Switzerland. Using in-depth interviews with mothers analyzed through the lens of outsourced concerted cultivation, Fei delves into the practices of affluent Chinese families in utilizing their economic resources, time, and cultural values to nurture their children remotely. She finds that these mothers exhibit minimal class anxiety, as they firmly believe their children will inherit and manage the family business upon their return. Consequently, they prioritize their children’s cultural enrichment, socio-emotional well-being, and academic performance over concerns about university or career opportunities. Their decision to send their children to Switzerland stems from a desire for a holistic education fostering qualities like maturity, independence, emotional intelligence, courage, and courtesy. Despite the physical distance, these mothers maintain close involvement through frequent travel to Switzerland and financing their children’s visits to China, thereby continuing concerted cultivation despite delegation to boarding schools. The paper thus offers a distinctive sociological perspective on a Chinese demographic often overlooked, despite its significant presence in Switzerland’s international boarding schools.

The fourth and final paper, “Educating Inheritors”, delves into the dynamics within Swiss international boarding schools, particularly focusing on economic socialization within these establishments to understand processes of elite legitimization and perpetuation. Drawing from empirical evidence gathered through a socio-historical study encompassing 12 such schools, Bertron conceptualizes philanthropic practices, the significance of pocket money, and financial management as pivotal to fostering practices of moral and economic distinction. Her analysis suggests that Swiss boarding schools tend to instill an ethos of conspicuous consumption, a tendency that correlates with the substantial presence of heirs to “new wealth” within

these establishments. In these Swiss boarding schools, young people are confronted with always privileged but varied consumption styles, from which they develop economic, symbolic, and social dispositions designed to ensure the reproduction of their social class position. Far from their country of origin and from an early age, they become familiar with the universe of the “rich kids”, a social category now present throughout the world that distinguishes young people living in opulence on a national level, while at the same time creating a sense of belonging to a global elite that shares the same transnational luxury lifestyle.

Together, these papers clearly show that working or studying in Switzerland’s international education sector as part of a transnational pathway takes on a particular meaning and value depending on one’s country of origin and economic resources. Although Switzerland’s reputation as an international, elite, safe, and healthy space is still an attractive argument for its educational establishments, the individual experiences that take place there are varied and unequal.

## 6 A Future Research Agenda

There are many avenues that could still be explored to more fully understand the role played by Switzerland’s international education institutions in transnational strategies of social reproduction. These avenues are empirical, methodological, and theoretical.

Case studies presented in this introduction and special issue show that while international elites send their children to prestigious boarding schools, expatriate communities often enroll their children in local international private day schools, which are cheaper. Swiss international schools also increasingly educate Swiss students hoping to develop or acquire international capital, and who are sometimes charged lower fees. Therefore, studying international education in Switzerland as a whole, through field analysis, and by examining both the different agents involved and the socio-economic distinctions that arise, could provide an excellent case study for understanding the differentiated transnational strategies of social reproduction of various social groups around the world.

Taking a comparative approach would also usefully contribute to what we know about Switzerland’s unique place in the international market. It could help unravel why and how students end up studying in Switzerland rather than in the United States or the United Kingdom, or in other educational hubs such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and the United Arab Emirates. To investigate “Switzerland” from abroad – to understand where and how it is presented and sold to potential clients, by which recruiters, or which agencies, in which locations, with what arguments, for what purposes – is to understand how Switzerland overlaps with and differs from other training locations.

Methodologically, we lack substantial quantitative data on the international school sector in Switzerland. As a result, much of this kind of research relies on

qualitative sociological and/or historical data. An important step forward, then, would be to find data on things like the material bases of these schools, including fees and profits; student demographics, including family wealth; and employment data, including salaries. If we could compile this into a dataset, we could better explore how this sector intersects with broader trends in the financialization of schooling.

Moreover, although Switzerland presents itself as neutral, the country is part of the Global North, which arguably has a vested interest – historically, through imperialism; contemporarily, through financial landscapes – in extracting economic and human capital from the Global South. Future research would benefit from taking a post-colonial theoretical approach, seeing international education in Switzerland as implicated in the western cultural colonization of other spaces. What implications does this have for how racial and geopolitical hierarchies are constructed and construed, and how do those play out for the international families and children educated in its schools?

Another still-open theoretical and empirical question is how cosmopolitan, economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capitals acquired or developed in Switzerland are actually converted abroad in transnational life courses, after leaving a Swiss institution. In other words, does the educational strategy of sending one's child to a Swiss international school for social class *re*/production pay off? Considering that Swiss international schools have been diversifying in terms of geographical, racial, and socio-economic origins, Switzerland is an ideal case study for theorizing how social relations of race, class, and gender influence the acquisition and conversion of capital in transnational life courses and mobile lifestyles.

The aim of our current research projects is, through multi-sited research designs, to follow the alumni of these international schools from their point of departure in Switzerland. This requires going beyond methodological nationalism to follow (or find) an international population of respondents. To do this, Delval<sup>6</sup> investigates valuation mechanisms of a hospitality management degree obtained in Switzerland, by analyzing the careers and mobility paths of alumni working in France, the United Arab Emirates, and China. Lillie, with Claire Maxwell, is examining challenges to and the stability – or, rather, instability – of graduates' elite status when they become mobile, due to “soft barriers” like new configurations of race and racism and “hard” ones like currency fluctuations. This is in line with Delval (2024), which underscores the imperative of reconceptualizing cosmopolitan capital through a postcolonial lens to elucidate the ways that racialization shapes the convertibility of international capital around the world.

That these are just a few ways forward highlights the exciting nature of – and possibilities in – this area of research. We are delighted that our special issue can

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6 See the project description on the SNF website “Converting international capital: The Case of Swiss Hospitality Management Schools’ alumni careers”: <https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/199264>.

contribute both to filling gaps in the extant literature and to setting a future agenda and look forward to seeing that agenda unfold.

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