
The 'Europeanisation' of Vocational Education between Formal Policies and Deliberative Communication^[1]

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ABSTRACT This article deals with current European policies of vocational education and training, namely the Copenhagen Process, the Open Method of Coordination and the framework of the Lisbon Agenda. The analysis shows that there is no standard European path of achieving the Lisbon Goals, but rather that there are considerable variations depending on the prevailing VET systems and the respective VET policy. Two antagonistic scenarios on the possible effects of the current activities to implement a European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), and the European Qualification Framework (EQF) are sketched. The best and worse case scenarios can be used to assess the current national activities to improve the quality of European VET systems and stimulate processes of discursive communication. The concluding section outlines some prospects of a European VET policy by utilising the presented findings and proposes some cornerstones of a European VET policy aiming at improving the teaching and learning processes. It is argued that the coherence of policies formulated through the so-called Lisbon Goal is not mirrored in concurrent European policies of VET and that more 'deliberative' processes of communication between different actors in VET spanning from the level of practice to the level of European policies are needed in order to truly 'Europeanise' VET in Europe.

Introduction

This article deals with current European policies of vocational education and training (VET). Based upon the political framework of the Lisbon Strategy (European Council, 2000), the article takes up the variety of learning and teaching approaches found all over the European countries, and sorts them into a typology of VET systems. Subsequently, we relate the different VET types to five different possible fields of innovation in teaching and learning. Our frame of reference uses the two fundamental orientations 'learning-and-working integration' and 'open learning and work environments' to distinguish the European VET systems and their innovations in quality development.

By means of so-called innovation spiders we visualise the different paths followed to achieve some selected goals deduced from the Lisbon goal and the Copenhagen Declaration. The analyses show that there is no standard European path towards achieving the Lisbon goal, but rather that there are considerable deviations from the standard – depending on the prevailing VET systems and the respective VET policy. The argument brought forward in this article is that national and European discourses on the development of VET systems need to be established.

With reference to the actions of improving the national systems of vocational training, we outline two antagonistic scenarios on the possible effects of the current activities to implement a European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Qualification Framework (EQF). The best- and worse-case scenarios can be used to

assess the current national activities to improve the quality of European VET systems and stimulate processes of discursive communication.

In the concluding section, we use the findings presented to outline some prospects of a European VET policy and propose some cornerstones for a European VET policy aimed at improving the teaching and learning processes. It will be argued that the coherence of policies formulated through the so-called Lisbon goal is not mirrored in concurrent European VET policies and that more 'deliberative' processes of communication between different actors in VET, spanning the level of practice to the level of European policies, are needed in order to truly 'Europeanise' VET practices and policies in Europe.

European VET Policy Approaches a New Quality

The Lisbon Strategy, adopted during the Portuguese presidency of the European Union (EU), aims to develop Europe into 'the world's most competitive and dynamic, knowledge-based economic area'. At the same time, it is intended to create 'more and better jobs and enhanced social cooperation and cohesion' (European Council, 2000).

The Education and Training 2010 Programme and the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)

In order to achieve this ambitious goal, 'open methods of coordination' are being used. This entails the implementation of a 'soft' instrument for shaping supranational policy, a technique already employed within the context of European employment strategy. According to the European Commission's White Paper *European Governance*, the definition of aims, qualitative and quantitative indicators, the member states' duty to report and peer review constitute the most important instruments and procedures to be used within the framework of basically unregulated OMC (Lundvall & Tomlinson, 2002; Telò, 2002). The imposition of sanctions in the event of failure to achieve objectives – as in the case of the European currency policy – is not foreseen.

The OMC is a method of particular relevance in areas of policy which, pursuant to the EU treaties, remain in the hands of member states, as in the case of VET in accordance with Articles 149-150 of the European Treaties. Ideally, the OMC follows a cycle which ranges from reaching agreement on certain guidelines and objectives for a defined period of time, through the formation of indicators, national processes of implementation and benchmarking the resulting political pressure, to the subsequent formulation of new guidelines (Leney, 2004).

Within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy, the European Council of Ministers agreed on the following global aims for 'Education 2010':

- enhanced quality and improved efficacy of systems of general and vocational education in the European Union;
- easier access to the systems of general and vocational education for everyone; and
- an opening up of the systems of general and vocational education to the world (European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture & Working Group 'Improving Education of Teachers and Trainers', 2003).

These aims are broken down into various activities. The 'benchmarks' and 'indicators', together with the Copenhagen Process, which was launched at the same time, are of particular significance for vocational education.

With reference to data obtained in 2000, the member states agreed on the following aims, which were obtained from statistical education indicators:

- All member states are to halve their number of school dropouts by the year 2010 (base year 2000), in order to arrive at an EU average of 9% or less.
- All member states are to halve the underrepresentation of females studying natural sciences and at the same time achieve an increase in the total number of graduates.
- All member states are to ensure that the average number of 25- to 29-year-olds with secondary school education reaches 80% or more.

- The number of 15-year-olds with inadequate results in reading and mathematical and natural science skills is to be halved in all member states.
- At least 15% of 25- to 65-year-olds are to participate in measures of lifelong learning and in no country is the share to be under 10% (Leney, 2004).[2]

The Copenhagen Process

The Copenhagen Declaration, adopted during the Danish EU presidency in November 2002, defines the following focal areas:

- a common qualification framework to create transparency;
- a credit transfer system for vocational education (ECVET), analogous to the so-called Bologna Process [3];
- common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education;
- common principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- lifelong career accompaniment and counselling.

The different points of the working programme are being pursued at various paces and with varying degrees of success. For instance, a common framework for quality assurance in vocational education has already been presented by the respective working group. It is a matter of note that the smaller and accession states especially are orienting themselves to the process to a particularly high degree, whereas the larger European states are participating in the implementation of the Copenhagen programme to a lesser extent. True to the logic of the OMC, in the underlying documents repeated reference is made to the voluntary nature of the programme and reciprocity, as well as to the importance of so-called 'bottom-up' processes and the needs of the 'users' and 'citizens'.

Experience with supranational policy instruments of control such as the OMC is currently restricted to the European employment policy and just a few other fields of policy (Goetschy, 1999), as well as examples in federal systems such as Canada, for instance. It is unclear to what extent these methods can be transferred to the area of education. It begs the question, for instance, as to whether – in view of the German system of federalism of education – these five benchmarks can be at all legitimately adopted by the ministers for education in the first place (see, for example, Berggreen-Merkel, 2004). It is the task of political science to evaluate the quality of political control instruments and models of 'governance'. In this article, we solely investigate the relationship between the instruments used – in particular the ECVET and the EQF – and innovations in the area of learning and teaching in vocational education.

The Consequences of OMC, Copenhagen, and Innovations in Teaching and Learning in Vocational Education

The most important instruments in the current stage of cooperation with regard to VET in Europe are the ECVET and the pending European Qualification Framework (EQF) as part of the Copenhagen Process (Coles & Oats, 2004). More detailed information on the intended functioning of these instruments can be found elsewhere (Clement et al, 2006).

The 'Maastricht study': Achieving the Lisbon Goal (AtLG). In the evaluation project Achieving the Lisbon Goal a consortium of 10 European research institutes in the field of vocational training was given the task of evaluating the extent to which the different member states were attempting to orient themselves to achieving the Lisbon goal within the framework of their national policies of vocational training, and assessing the progress made to date. This task entailed inquiring into the presence and efficacy of the benchmarks prescribed in 'Education and 2010' and the strategies adopted within the context of the Copenhagen Process.

Within the consortium, the remit of the Institute for Technology and Education at the University of Bremen, Germany involved assessing the advances which had been made to date and the extent to which these had a bearing on the topic 'innovations in teaching and learning'. This part of the official assignment through the European Commission was a blind spot in European VET policies, that should rather be at the heart of VET policies. In accordance with the Maastricht

Communiqué, which was one of the outcomes of the work on the study, innovations in teaching and learning cannot only be considered as instrumental for the achievement of the broadly formulated Lisbon goal, but are, of course, an area of innovation in its own right.

Two separate research stages were called for: firstly, to determine precisely what qualifies as innovation in the field of vocational learning, since there was currently neither a clarification of this in the research literature nor an explicitly formulated political understanding of the term. In a second subsequent stage, developments with regard to the abovementioned innovation criteria were to be described. Three methods were employed in the course of the project:

1. a comprehensive review of the literature regarding the corresponding relevant materials of innovations in vocational training in Europe;
2. an examination of self-evaluation questionnaires which were sent to the Director Generals for Vocational Training (DGVTs – these are the national agencies responsible for the implementation of the Copenhagen Process); and
3. the evaluation of independent national expert reports, so-called 'country studies'.

All the propositions and analyses put forward in this article are based on the study and interpretation of this data.

The Plurality and System Dependency of Innovations in the Area of Learning and Teaching

The term 'innovation' in the area of learning and teaching tends to be overused – in much the same way as the term 'innovation' in general – having its meaningfulness reduced to the mere level of representing something new. So as not to aggravate further the confusion surrounding the term, in this article we refer more to the notion of a general social (though not divorced from technology) interpretation of what innovation stands for, since our area of investigation – albeit increasingly influenced by technology – essentially belongs more to the social pole. In accordance with this interpretation, innovation can be determined as the successful realisation of new ideas, insofar as they are implemented within existing structures and processes, and hence contribute towards an improvement of the quality of the process.

What is finally to be understood as innovation with regard to learning and teaching is ultimately decided in accordance with the extent of the contribution it makes, measured on the basis of specific criteria and goals negotiated at the societal level. Hence, neither the criteria applied nor the goals can be obtained from superordinate supranational resolutions: rather, they must be obtained in the sense of trajectories from the respective status quo of the system and from the historical genesis of the respective system of vocational training. In order to take due account of this procedure, it makes sense to transpose the de facto plurality of systems of vocational training in Europe into a typology with just a few types.

For the area of teaching and learning it makes sense to consider the institutional form of VET as the main criterion for this typologisation (Lauterbach, 1994, 2003; Deißinger, 1995; Greinert, 1995; Lauterbach & Mitter, 1998).[4] The two main institutional pillars (and simultaneously the places of learning) of VET are schools and enterprises. The specific forms, methods and pedagogical concepts – together with the innovations introduced within this overall context – correspond accordingly. We will proceed in two stages: first, the types will be briefly outlined, then the teaching and learning concepts will be analysed and evaluated with regard to their contribution to the respective system of vocational education.

Four Types of Vocational Training System

The European vocational training landscape is distinguished by an enormous plurality (in its juridical, pedagogical and employment policy complexity). Nevertheless, it is possible to carry out a division into four types (cf. Figure 1). The typology design mainly entails the supporting training institutions, i.e. the places of learning, and as a second dimension takes into consideration the question as to whether gaining qualifications and competences is oriented on the acquisition of holistic vocational competence, or whether the acquisition of competence follows a more modularised core or key competence approach.

On the one hand, we can identify the type which qualifies as a scholastic system of vocational training. This type is differentiated into vocational and non-vocational branches. Scholastically oriented routes have in common their focus on theoretical learning, which can be supplemented with on-the-job learning units, though these are almost never of sufficient scope and are often divorced from what is learned at school. Ireland, Italy and Estonia can be seen as examples of scholastic systems void of any vocationally relevant acquisition of competences; an example of a scholastic system which does (primarily) impart vocationally relevant skills is Finland.

A logical antipole to the scholastic type of vocational training is the type belonging to the dual system of vocational training (known in Eurospeak as the ‘apprenticeship route’ or ‘work-based system’). Without going into detail on the differences, a shared characteristic of dual systems is that they link up school and enterprise as the two places of learning, and simultaneously place their focus on work-based learning that is firmly placed on the tracks of the acquisition of vocational competences. The German dual system, which has consolidated itself since the Second World War, can unreservedly serve as the archetype for this model.

The fourth type is a mixed system comprising components of the dual system of vocational training and scholastic pathways of acquiring competences. In the United Kingdom, for instance, we find a school-type ‘post-16 vocational training system’, which for some years now has been providing so-called ‘modern apprenticeships’ and increasingly work- and practice-based routes of vocational training (Modern Apprenticeship Advisory Committee, 2001).

Predominantly dual system/apprenticeship routes Examples: Austria, Germany	Mix of school-based and apprenticeship routes Example: the United Kingdom (especially England and Wales)
School-based (mainly vocational) Examples: Most new member states (EU10), Finland	School-based (mainly pre-vocational) Examples: Ireland, Italy

Figure 1. Structures of initial vocational training in Europe.

This four-field matrix now enables an evaluation of innovations in the areas of learning and teaching with regard to their sustainability. Taking into account the relatively strong *path dependency* of the measures that had been actually pursued as well as planned, the AtLG study developed five main fields of innovation, namely:

- new teaching and learning content (e.g. information and communication technologies);
- new forms of learning;
- new learning contexts (such as various forms of training partnerships, for instance);
- quality assurance and development; and
- the professionalisation of teachers and trainers.

We refer the reader to the final AtLG project report for a detailed exposition of these dimensions, the measures currently employed in the different countries, as well as a preliminary evaluation of the sustainability of European policies of vocational training (Leney & The Lisbon-to-Copenhagen-to-Maastricht Consortium Partners, 2004). In this article we shall restrict ourselves to presenting some selected findings.

Innovations in Different Teaching and Learning Contexts

The criteria which our evaluation is to follow are laid down, at least in the form of a frame of reference, in the Lisbon Goal (European Council, 2000) and the Copenhagen Declaration and are represented by the five fields of innovation outlined. However, this is not to be construed as the emergence of a ‘royal route’ for teaching and learning innovations to be followed by all European countries regardless.

Combining Learning and Work

The general goal of improving the quality of vocational training formulated in the Copenhagen Declaration is being pursued by almost all the European countries via measures in the area of learning contexts. By analogy with the concept of the learning organisation (Argyris & Schön, 1999), a nexus has been formulated for the area of vocational learning between the development of the individual development of competences, vocational learning (i.e. human resources development [HRD] in general) and organisational structures designed to facilitate learning (Nyhan, 2003). In essence, this type of approach postulates designing the 'school' and 'enterprise', the places of learning, in such a way as to facilitate the learning process. For the 'enterprise' to be a place of learning this entails that those involved are able to learn from and via their work. Those European countries which already have dual systems of vocational training enjoy a strategic advantage over those with scholastic systems: the anchoring of (workplace) periods of practical work as established components of their vocational training. Thus, the fundamental prerequisites for learning during work are given. Nevertheless, the circumstances are often somewhat less than conducive to learning, in small enterprises, for instance. Countries of this dual or mixed type focus their measures on learning cooperation (learning partnerships), which involves the regional networking of small enterprises in order to enable (temporary) staff rotation among specialised small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Generally speaking, this raises the learning opportunities and knowledge horizon of the trainees. Such place-of-work partnerships are practised in different forms not only in Germany, Austria and Denmark, but also in the United Kingdom, according to the reports gathered as part of the AtLG project.

Open Learning and Work Environments

Almost all of the countries belonging to the type of scholastic vocational training concentrate their efforts with regard to improving the learning context on measures concerned with the realisation of 'open learning environments' in schools. At the same time, they attempt to compensate for their deficiencies in work-based learning by means of work placements. However, the majority of the country reports compiled within the framework of the AtLG project come to the conclusion that efforts to raise the practice content, and, at the same time, to relate work-based learning systematically to the learning of theory, are of little avail. The reasons for this lie, on the one hand, in the brevity of the work placements, which imposes temporal limits to any real opportunities for extended and intensive learning on the job. On the other hand, constraints often lie in the type and the nature of the work process itself, during which learning is possible only to a limited extent.

As this problem of insufficient learning content in work processes applies both to scholastic as well as to dual/mixed systems of vocational training, and equally to initial training as well as to continual learning in work contexts, the call for 'learning-conducive environments' is increasingly being heeded (Skule & Reichborn, 2002). A notably large part of the efforts surrounding innovations of the learning context is aimed in this direction: perceived as particularly conducive to learning are workplace environments which stimulate the learning motivation of trainees, are flexible for multiple learning styles and which support self-determined learning (via a high measure of temporal, situative and contextual degrees of freedom).

At this point, we do not wish to elaborate further on the depiction of the individual findings on the level of actual innovations in practical teaching and learning correlations. The reader will find these in the final report compiled by the evaluation project (Leney & The Lisbon-to-Copenhagen-to-Maastricht Consortium Partners, 2004). It will be quite a while before we obtain a more encompassing picture of the field of innovation in Europe. In order to achieve this, though, it will first be necessary to fulfil a large number of prerequisites, which is the subject of the following section of this article. In this context, we would first like to introduce some of the estimations of national actors on the level of vocational training policy with regard to our topic. By means of two alternative scenarios we would also like to draw attention to the potential field of tension between the possible consequences of the current policy within the framework of the Copenhagen Process.

Fundamental Orientations of European Vocational Training Systems

Within the framework of the AtLG project with regard to some of the criteria which have a particular relationship to the Lisbon goal and the Copenhagen Declaration, some polarised statements were delivered to the national DGVTs on selected issues concerning the future orientation of the national vocational training systems. The purpose of this was to solicit expert opinions on the emerging development of national strategies of vocational training in order to generate a picture, from the sum of these statements, which would reveal the status and, in particular, the development potentials of the individual countries. A simple aggregation procedure enabled the 'European average' to be computed, which subsequently permitted the determination of how far individual countries deviated from this average – and consequently the search for suitable measures of national reforms to systems of vocational training.

In the following, the results of these expert opinions are graphically described in the form of 'innovation spiders'. Four spiders are presented, whereby each spider stands for a country which can be clustered into one of the vocational training types developed earlier. The statements which were put forward for evaluation referred to the developments of the national systems of vocational training and the resulting educational policy to have effect in 2010.

Before going on to deal with selected statements regarding the differences between the European countries, we first outline the common ground and similarities in the effects of national policies of vocational training, and summarise the *mainstream* in European strategies of vocational training. The predominant characteristics of all the items were computed as the arithmetic mean of all the evaluated questionnaires and appear in Figures 2a, b, c and d as 'reference spiders'.

In detail, the 'European average' results are shown in the right-hand column of Table I and the left-hand columns introduce the polarities against which respondents were asked to rate the future direction of their policies.

Axes on which respondents were asked to map their estimation of future developments						'European mainstream'	
VET focuses on equipping learners with competences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	VET focuses on equipping learners with subject knowledge.	It is to be expected that there will be a strong focus on competences ^a (in place of an orientation to traditional subjects).				
Lifelong learning has as its first priority meeting the needs of 'older learners'.	<input type="checkbox"/>	As its first priority lifelong learning provides a 'strong start' (early childhood up to 16).	Measures of lifelong learning do not favour unequivocally further education, nor are they aimed preferentially at initial training.				
Meeting specific labour market goals is the dominant focus in current VET policies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Meeting broader societal and personal development goals is the dominant focus in current VET policies.	At the European level, the orientation of vocational training policies cannot be subordinated under any single goal: either with regard to labour policy or in the expanded sense of social (or personal) goals.				
Information and communication technology (ICT) in vocational learning mainly involves simulated activities or distance learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	ICT in vocational learning is embedded into work and business processes.	The significance of ICT lies less in 'e-learning' than in its embedment in processes of work and business.				
VET is provided mainly in school-based pathways.	<input type="checkbox"/>	VET is provided mainly in work-based pathways.	There is no clear preference for either work-based or school-based vocational education.				
Most VET teachers and trainers come straight from an educational background.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Most VET teachers and trainers come from working life.	Practical experiences will be more important than formal educational credentials when it comes to the recruitment of teachers and trainers.				

A social partnership model is the norm for VET policies and decisions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	VET policies and decisions mainly depend on single players (the state, employers, etc.).	One expectation shared by all DGVTs lies in the pronounced significance of the social partnership model for future decisions surrounding policies of vocational training.				
Multinationals and actors in the private sector are the main agents of change in VET policy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Public actors (the government, ministries, agencies) are the main agents of change in VET policy.	Parity of power between public policies and the influence of the private sector and employers is expected for the shape of future VET policies.				
National VET policy protects specific groups or professions in the domestic labour market.	<input type="checkbox"/>	European cooperation means that a flexible European labour market is becoming a reality.	Eventually an opening to a European labour market is expected (instead of the protection and isolation of national labour market segments).				

^aThe individual countries' specific notion of competence is, however, still open. It is unclear whether respective interpretations are based on the idea of holistic professional competences or more performance-based units of assessment.

Table I. Future expectations of European VET policies.

Turning our attention to the differences existing between the countries in accordance with the typology we introduced earlier reveals the salient characteristic of the 'dual system' type: the clear focus on initial training (see Figure 2a).[5] Furthermore, the dual type aims strongly and in an above-average way (and also more strongly than systems oriented to scholastic learning) at embedding information technologies in the work and business processes. The importance of goals shared by labour market policy in the dual and mixed type is significantly more pronounced than in the scholastic type. The scholastic type tends to prefer goals in the social and the personal areas.

In answer to the question regarding the future qualification profiles of teachers and trainers, the dual systems clearly stand out from the others (and from the European average). Whereas the mixed systems and the scholastic systems void of vocational orientation in particular have no preference either for pedagogical or for practice and work-oriented qualifications, the dual systems perceive that, in future (as in past years), there will be a relatively clear preference for a practice-based qualification background.

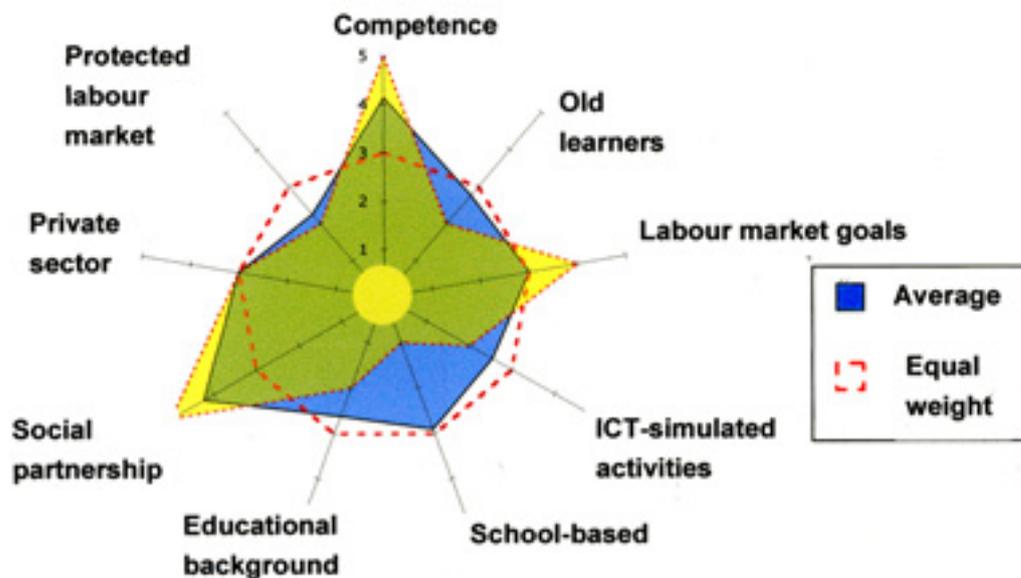


Figure 2a. Effects of future vocational training policy in a country with a dual VET system.

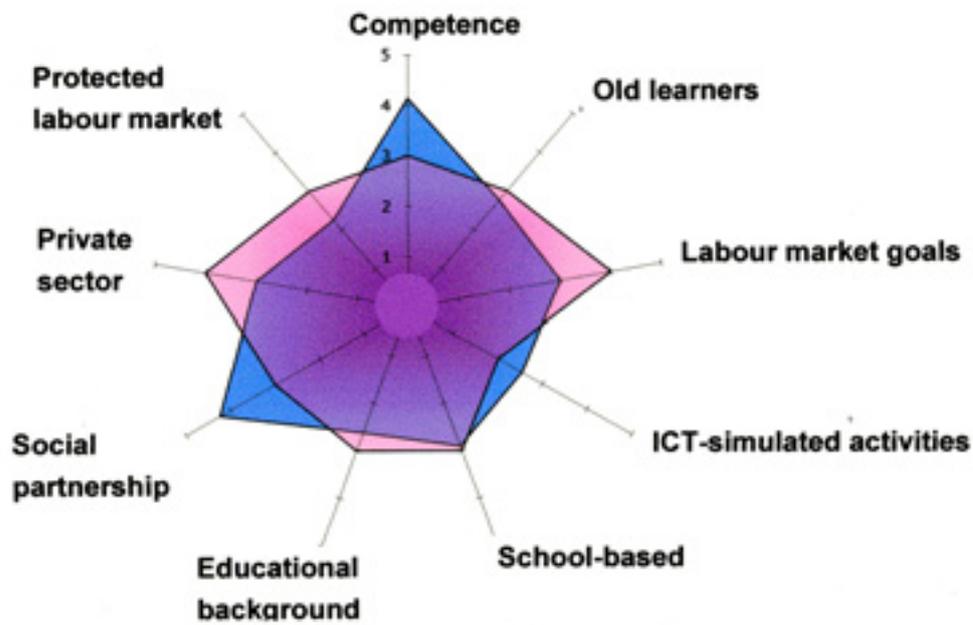


Figure 2b. Effects of future vocational training policy in a country with a mixed system.

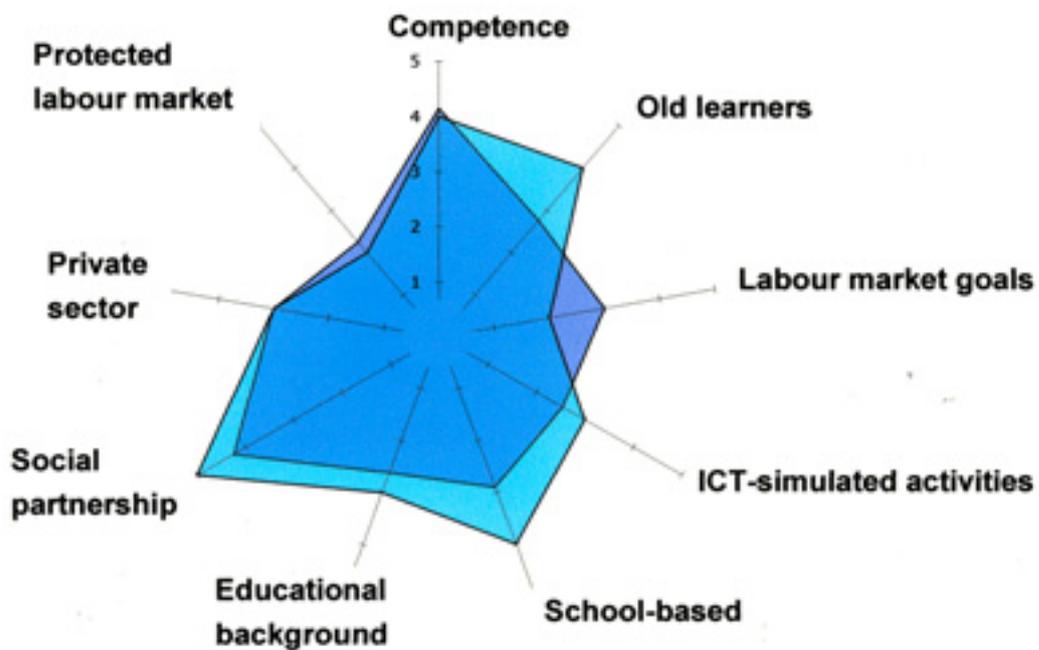


Figure 2c. Effects of future vocational training policy in a country with a scholastic training void of vocational orientation.

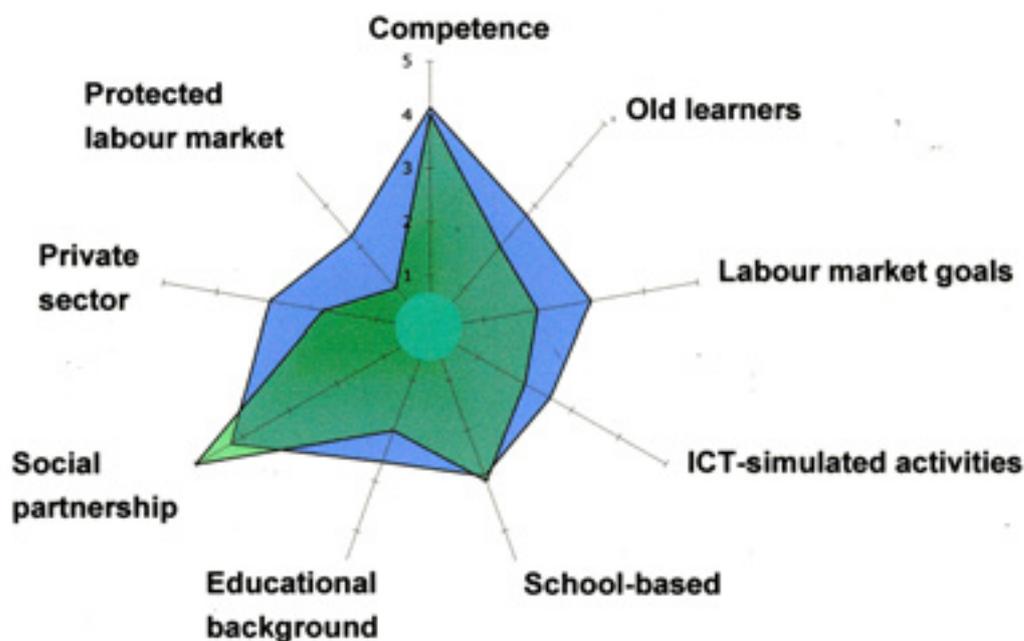


Figure 2d. Effects of future vocational training policy in a country with scholastic training with vocational orientation.

Finally, with few exceptions we can establish a very strong path dependency (or system loyalty) on the part of those countries who took part in the questionnaire: in 2010, both the scholastic systems void of vocational orientation and the dual systems are likely to remain well and truly on their chosen course. The countries belonging to the 'mixed system' type situate themselves in the polarity profile in a midway position of 'both as well as', which takes account of their specific character. As can be easily seen in Figure 2b, the values for most axes are approximating the 'equal weight line'. As expected, the scholastic systems with vocational orientation (refer to Figure 2d) do not locate themselves clearly on the scholastic pole, but rather – much as the mixed systems (in Figure 2b) – in the midway, undecided position.

By means of the innovation spiders it is possible – based on the four vocational training types – to ascertain different reform routes, or innovation trajectories in vocational training, into which the specific innovative instruments (for example, measures of quality development) can be more or less organically integrated. The innovation spiders in their totality reveal that there is no Europeanisation in the meaning of a convergence of national systems. Any progress which has been made is merely with regard to isolated dimensions. A clear preference can be established in all types for the future significance of the model of social partnership as the basis for decision making in vocational training policies. No convergence or harmonisation can be ascertained for most of the other planning fields of vocational training.

Altogether, the results expected on the national levels certainly depend on the medium-term elaboration of a substantive discourse on European vocational training. Here, one thinks in particular of refreshing the content of the 'open coordination discourse'. At the same time, this would prevent the danger of sinister convergence or harmonisation, whereby countries belonging to the same vocational training type reach their own agreement on how the formulated Lisbon goal and Copenhagen objectives can be implemented with suitable measures in their respective contexts.

In this way it would be possible, for instance, to prevent a country belonging to the mixed type with a remarkable share of vocational training (e.g. one of the accession candidates), from seriously considering transforming its system into an exclusively scholastic one as the result of pressure

exerted by the ECVET and the EQF. This gives serious cause for thought in view of the generally accepted call for the reinforcement of workplace-based learning.

The analysis by means of our innovation spiders – we hope – shows that in the near future it is highly likely that strategies will be pursued which deviate from the European ‘mean value’ and which are frequently the results of adaptations to national circumstances. Very often, however, policies are also (overenthusiastically) implemented which stand in contradiction to the norm and which can ultimately only be interpreted as the result of a strategic, instrumental European political calculation. As previously pointed out, the ‘well-being and pain’ will depend on the elaboration of a substantive discourse. How the future of European systems of vocational training can drift into various extremes in the event of the absence or the breakdown of such a substantive discourse is what we would like to describe briefly in the following section, on the basis of polarised development scenarios. Given the plurality of concrete interpretations and actions evolving from the Lisbon Agenda and the Copenhagen Process, a discourse will be needed among the EU member states in order to constantly refine and redevelop policies and practices on the national and the European levels. Therefore, the function of the following scenarios is not to predict the future but rather to support strategic discourses between different groups of interest (Heidegger & Rauner, 1989; Heidegger et al, 1991; Leney et al, 2004).

The Prospects of European Vocational Training: some development scenarios

From the actions described earlier (either implemented or planned) which are designed to improve national systems of vocational training, and, in particular, the efforts of the member countries to support the development of a European accreditation system by means of suitable national measures, it is possible to obtain extreme, but not completely unlikely, medium-term scenarios.

In Table II we would like to outline two opposing scenarios concerning the effects of the ECVET and the EQF. Both instruments are to be introduced within the framework of the Copenhagen Process and both are also on the agenda adopted by the so-called Maastricht Communiqué of December 2004. From the outset, let us make it clear that we do not perceive any adequate control instrument for European policies of vocational training in the efforts to establish a uniform pan-European accreditation and certification system. Indirectly, the ECVET may be able to influence national policies and the respective practice. Firstly, however, it is necessary, on the level of training providers, be they schools or any other places of learning, to ‘hold up’ offers of vocational training in the first place.

Best Case	Worst Case
<p>Via the establishment of the ECVET it was possible to improve the transparency, assessment and comparability of formal institutionalised measures of vocational training and qualification in the respective vocational training systems in the same way as for informal learning processes and their results. The development of a credit transfer system enables the transfer and accreditation of learning results (including examinations), both between the European branches as well as between the vocational training systems in the European countries. This creates the prerequisite for increased mobility between the national systems of vocational training. The implementation of the ECVET has contributed to ensuring that most European vocational training programmes now systematically include practical experience within a work context in their curricula and to the improved co-ordination of the different learning contexts (or places of learning). Moreover, the European credit transfer system facilitates the recognition of learning modules in that it contributes towards an accreditation of subdivided qualifications and defines the dependencies</p>	<p>The ECVET is an abstract system of accrediting singular modules. As its main objective lies in ‘quantifying’ learning results (via so-called credits), it does little to contribute towards situational learning environments. On the contrary, it would appear easier to achieve the realisation of the learning units described in the modules by means of classic learning forms. Due to the credits, it remains largely unclear to what extent the relationship between situational vocational learning and learning in open environments can be formulated. Also, the procedures that determine how and the rules according to which the transformations from quality into quantity are to take place remain largely unexplained. Based on the notion of vocational competence as the development approach of modern vocational education, it seems highly questionable whether the (additive) accumulation of individual independent modules can eventually lead to an all-encompassing vocational competence. Furthermore, there is also doubt as to whether or not individual components, in particular the practical parts, can be</p>

<p>and correlations between the separate modules. Furthermore it explains their significance within the overall vocational qualification (vocational competence). The degree of self-determination with regard to vocational learning on the part of the individual learner has thus been raised, since students are able to combine different qualification modules and subsequently more actively plan their personal career route, implementing their wishes along clearly defined lines.</p> <p>In certain vocational fields in most European countries, and on the European level, a dialogue in social partnership on work and innovation has been initiated which is aimed at the introduction of qualified work within the framework of the respective vocational fields. These measures constitute the main function of the ECVET system. The introduction of the ECVET and the EQF, especially in branches with high mobility, was accompanied by the creation of European career profiles in domains with high mobility. Hence, a European space of lifelong learning with better jobs came into being.</p>	<p>substituted by theoretical components. An unintended side effect which may impact on the choice of learning modules is the instrumental and calculated attitude of the trainees towards the teaching and learning modules: there is a tendency towards choosing the modules which carry the highest number of credit points, rather than modules which build on each other or are correlated in a rational way to the acquisition of the desired vocational qualification. In some cases, students become disoriented in the 'credit jungle'. All this contributes towards a situation in which the trainee fails to attain any high level of vocational competence. Moreover, in many countries there has been little progress towards enhancing the appeal of vocational education. The vocational training route does not present an attractive enough alternative to university education for parents and adolescents. In addition, the ECVET harbours the danger that scholastic learning becomes overestimated to the detriment of work-based learning. Despite strong criticism, an EQF has been introduced that de facto fixes valid minimal standards for qualified work (or vocational competence) across all European countries.</p>
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Table II. The ECVET and the EQF: scenarios for 2015.

The outcomes of the questionnaires sent to the DGVTs in the course of the project and the findings of the country studies provide the basis for the scenarios. According to these results, in many countries the initiatives surrounding the so-called 'Europass' are at the forefront of measures for approaching the goal of opening or establishing a European labour market and the promotion of mobility of labour via improving the comparability of qualifications and degrees (for example, the Czech Republic, Poland, the Netherlands and Denmark). A significant number of countries are planning or are in the process of initiating credit transfer systems which are based on existing national 'qualification frameworks' – often themselves in the first stages of development. Estonia, Ireland, Malta, Spain, Finland and Slovenia number among the countries which are particularly active in this respect.

The two selected fields of measures, the ECVET and the EQF, may well lend themselves to an evaluation of the efforts of the various member states with respect to an orientation to the European agenda of vocational education. But can they also act as indicators for the Europeanisation of vocational education? We do not think the latter to be the case. Rather, it is the introduced or planned measures on the individual levels of the different countries which would appear more capable of implicitly and explicitly taking up the steps and instruments formulated in the Copenhagen Declaration, and implementing them at the national level. This procedure reveals a rather formal and instrumental relationship to the goals and measures. This is illustrated, on the one hand, by the large number of different pilot projects of an experimental nature. The difficulties of carrying out a national implementation of the ECVET that is compatible with Europe are to be seen on the level of the contents and are rooted in the existing diversity of national systems of vocational training. Understandably, scholastic systems with modularised learning units have less difficulty in developing a credit transfer system which conforms to European policies than those countries with dual or mixed routes of vocational training, which in addition already include a work-process orientation in their curricula.

These basic difficulties, arising from the diversity of existing systems in Europe, are at the heart of our attempts to draft development scenarios for European vocational training. Table II sketches two antithetical scenarios, which do dichotomise a favourable and an unfavourable development path.

Admittedly, the table illustrates two antipodal and extreme development paths. Nevertheless, it does make clearly visible the drawbacks and risks of a policy of vocational training which, whilst striving to achieve its ambitious goal, pays too little attention to consultation and consensus-driven

cooperation with the inclusion of all important actors and stakeholders. The potential drawbacks are also revealed when, in those countries considered to be suitable for the ECVET, innovations are impeded by the implementation of credit transfer systems. Examples of this are evident in the attempt to introduce learning units in enterprises in systems which are oriented to scholastic learning (Markowitsch et al, 2006).

Prospects of a European Policy of Vocational Training which is Supportive to Innovation

With respect to the commitment and pace of European cooperation in education a new level has been reached with the introduction of the OMC and Copenhagen Process. So far, within the framework of this cooperation – not least due to the observance of the subsidiarity principle – innovations in the sphere of learning and teaching have not been addressed. However, the education benchmarks and the various points of the Copenhagen Declaration are likely to have an effect on the shaping of teaching and learning processes in vocational education.

Up to now, there has been no systematic assessment of the consequences of these new policies for teaching and learning processes. There can be no doubt, however, that the formulated goals and strategies do not do justice to the declared purpose of promoting the development of modern teaching and learning methods and processes: far more, they are derived from neighbouring fields of policy such as, for example, the creation of a 'European labour market'.

With respect to the thematic area of innovations in teaching and learning processes, it is possible to draw on the findings of the AtLG evaluation project in order to assess these consequences. The findings are summarised as follows:

- Among the different nation states there is a great diversity with regard to current situations and respective interpretations of the goals and strategies.
- In different European contexts, the formulated goals and strategies can have a system-building character. However, they can also result in the overly hasty abandonment of proven principles in exchange for the new European agenda of cooperation in education.
- There is a potential contradiction between the priorities chosen within the framework of the existing agreements and the features of innovative teaching and learning processes.

These findings have been illustrated in the foregoing sections of this article. From the point of view of a European policy of vocational education, phrases like 'bottom-up' and the needs of 'users' and 'citizens' remain empty of meaning so long as no attention is paid to the conditions for the possibility of participating in the currently evolving processes of vocational education policy on a European level. European cooperation on vocational education is at present based on formal mechanisms. It currently lacks a more pronounced orientation to content, as to a certain extent formulated in the Lisbon goal. There is a danger that the coherence strived for by Lisbon will break up within the framework of concrete departmental policies. The Copenhagen Process and the Education and Training 2010 Programme currently lack that 'deliberative' moment.[6] We therefore propose, *inter alia*, the following foci for a European policy of vocational training oriented to an improvement of teaching and learning processes:

- overcoming the fragmented situation with regard to the training and further education of staff involved in vocational education (this constitutes one of the greatest hurdles to achieving an overall concept of a participatory European policy of vocational training);
- the introduction of 'sustainable' professionalised structures with regard to staff involved in vocational education;
- the promotion of improved cooperation between the different local programmes of research, development and innovation, as well as institutions for the training of teachers and trainers in vocational education;
- enhanced cooperation with regard to the declared goals along the lines of 'practical' European cooperation on vocational training, for example, in the tradition of a sectoral dialogue with the inclusion of all the actors (vocational fields could assume an anchor function for all these four points).

Such a framework of extended cooperation on vocational training would also open up the possibility to define indicators and benchmarks more adequate for the reality of the respective educational processes, and would constitute progress in the realisation of the idea of the OMC for policies of (vocational) education.

Notes

- [1] This article is based on the findings of the study *Achieving the Lisbon Goal*, carried out in 2004 on behalf of the European Commission (Leney & The Lisbon-to-Copenhagen-to-Maastricht Consortium Partners, 2004). The co-authors focus especially on chapter 8, section 3, 'Competences in the Workplace', and Section 3 of the study, 'Innovation in Teaching and Learning'. Although based on these parts of the study, this contribution solely expresses the views of its authors.
- [2] In a somewhat softer form, the agreement also contains an indicator for 'investment' in lifelong learning, which should be oriented to best practice. The efficiency of systems of 'lifelong learning' is thus lost sight of. Not least the results of the studies of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reveal that there is no statistical relationship between expenditure on education and the working of education systems. On the whole, the availability of data on the European level with respect to the aforementioned indicators is still rather unsatisfactory.
- [3] To what extent any analogy between the European university space and the vocational education space is at all justified – and, in our opinion, it is (currently at least) not – is, *inter alia*, the subject of the article by Rauner & Grollmann (2004).
- [4] It is not our intention to present a rival typologisation to the many existing forms. Rather, here the typology purely serves to simplify the depiction of an otherwise enormous plurality of VET systems and their respective inherent processes. See the references at the end of the article for more on typologies of VET systems.
- [5] The following 'spiders' were not obtained as the mean value of all countries belonging to one of the system types; rather they depict the results gained for one of the countries deemed to be characteristic for the respective type.
- [6] On the concept of 'deliberative policy', cf. Habermas (1992).

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