

System innovation and evolution in European VET Comparisons over time and state

Final Report



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1 Outline and rationale

1.1 Introduction

Vocational education and training (VET) is an important instrument for setting up and implementing European economic and social policies. In order to keep in pace with global economic developments, the European Community strives to be the most competitive economy. Education, and especially vocational and higher education, is a major instrument to invest in the human potential which is the wheel barrow for competitive development. In several treaties (Lisbon, Copenhagen, Maastricht and Helsinki) policy goals are defined by the European councils. Vet should be modernised and shaped for lifelong learning. Educational policy, however, is the responsibility of the national governments within the European Union. European policies can only be directed to facilitate, support and advice national policy makers. Seen from a systems development perspective, this is a wise decision: educational systems are heavily loaded with traditions and cultural history, which is difficult to unify in a European policy framework. At the other hand, mobility on the labour market and globalisation of economic activities emphasize on the urgency for transparency and comparability of education routes and outcomes. So Europe is searching for a balancing policy in which national governments are supported to work within a European frame of reference.

First and foremost, there is an overall assumption of necessary change: VET is seen as being generically related to the patterns of the industrial society. As a consequence, the emergence of the knowledge society puts new demands on VET, which has to react to those demands. Thus fundamental changes of VET systems are required.

The starting point of our analysis is based on the outcomes of a series of cases of VET policies, selected as key changes in the 10 countries that have been included in the research. The analyses of the cases of policies tried to investigate the drivers of change in VET systems and to create an evidence-based approach to questions raised implicitly/explicitly in the policy making process.

In this contribution we elaborate on the results of the Observe project (Leonardo da Vinci programme). In the Observe project we have studied change policy in VET-systems of 10 EU member states by studying historical cases of system reform programmes and cases which were not yet finished when the project started (December 2002). Based on these cases, the Observe project is producing an overall analysis of the governance of system innovations in European VET.

1.2 Directions of change in VET

Reasons for change can differ. Globalisation has rendered the world smaller and more inter-dependent than ever before. Simultaneously, we are confronted with the challenges of educational systems that are artefacts of an industrial era influenced by capitalist ideologies, educational systems that have largely failed to address the needs of post-modern societies in relation to escalating societal problems, globalisation and technological advancements (Jenlink, 2001). Next to societal problems, globalisation and the development of the knowledge economy, political reasons can have impact on the need for VET-systems change (for instance Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Romania). If they are an important incentive to really change systems is the question.

In the discussion on the VET systems' change lifelong learning is the main focus. At present times, in most western VET systems large tensions are built (cf. Nieuwenhuis, Nijhof & Heikinen, 2002): nowadays systems are built for the industrial economy in which learning and working are organised sequentially, where a parallel organised system of learning and working is needed. In all advanced industrial societies the argument for VET change is broadly the same. The acquisition of knowledge and skills is increasingly seen as the main challenge. Living in a learning society filled with knowledge workers and the rapid changes in knowledge, there is a need for learning as a permanent process (Crouch et al, 1999). The modern VET systems have been built for the industrial economy of the 20th century, in which sequential production lines are usual (training before working). The emerging knowledge economy of the 21st century needs a training and skilling system which is connected parallel to working careers (Gavigan, 2000). In most VET systems, these signals are received absorptively, looking for new arrangements within the old systems. IPTS (the European institute for technology assessments; Gavigan, 2000) foresees that the European VET systems need a complete redesign.

A basic assumption of the project is that due to the economic and societal change there is a low level of predictability and a high degree of uncertainty related to VET system functioning. Therefore, all the actors involved have to adapt to new conditions, based on their different contexts and interests. Unpredictability and uncertainty implies that traditional linear models of policymaking (both in practice and analysis) are still important references for analytical purposes but fail to guide in practice. Policy makers and the experts involved in the analysis face an increasing complex VET scene, with more interest groups and actors involved, resulting in new interaction patterns and initiatives.

A VET system for the learning economy should fundamentally be based on the acceptance of uncertainty: the requirements of the future labour market are unpredictable. Constructive learning and problem solving by both students/trainees and teachers/trainers should complement instruction of stable occupational knowledge and skills. Or, as Wenger (1998) states, VET "... cannot be a closed system that shelters a well-engineered but self-contained learning process. On the contrary, it must aim to offer dense connections to communities outside its setting." New VET should be an open system both in time, and in content as well as in participation, but this requires re-engineering of working conditions and incentive structures. Attractive VET cannot be built by prescription beforehand.

1.3 VET as a layered system

Another basic condition of VET systems is that it is situated at the edge of two subsystems: education and the economy. From the perspective of the individual, VET as any other area of education should provide the appropriate competences, values and attitudes needed for personal development and a successful life in today's complex societies. From the perspective of the society, VET offers also raise fundamental questions: is it sufficient to prepare the individuals for their professional and economic life? Should employability be the main value that should drive the VET systems? According to the answers proposed both at national and European level, the various actors have to find common solutions, to share and transfer relevant experiences and to jointly engage in a comprehensive policy learning process. However the traditional debate about the aims of education, and about the relevance of educational services for both the individual and society, exemplary for the VET field makes evident, that today's VET systems are highly flexible constructions, and over time have developed the capacities to integrate different, even contradictory functions. We might see this internal differentiation as one of the major factors of stability and long-term success of VET systems, which however gains new actuality during periods of change.

Governance of VET asks for a balanced tuning between government and other actors in the VET-system. Education, and especially VET, is a layered system, consisting of four main layers: teaching-learning arrangements, organisational processes, institutional contexts and the political-conceptual debate. In between these layers often inconsistencies occur, causing internal tensions themselves (Nieuwenhuis a.o., 2001; Banathy, 1991). Research on VET should incorporate these systemic layers (Nieuwenhuis, Nijhof & Heikkinen, 2002). In the third Cedefop research report we used this scheme to compare VET reform programmes in Denmark and the Netherlands (Nieuwenhuis & Shapiro, 2005), which has been used as a major input for the Observe project.

VET is a social system for which in each country and/or economic sector a specific set of institutions and organisations has been developed over time. Governments, business and industry, unions, and educational organisations have built an institutional set-up for VET, which is deeply rooted in social, cultural, and economic patterns. Because of these roots, VET institutions are difficult to change, and are sometimes even obstacles to innovation of the system. Changing VET is not only a matter of the educational system, but also of the socio-economic system and of cultural traditions. Examples of VET institutions are: laws on education and labour; public-private arrangements; training funds; collective labour agreements; pathways to becoming skilled; qualifications and wages; occupational identity; training traditions.

However VET as a social practice also is embedded into organisational structures and programmes, which set their own coordinates for change. On the organisational level the following question arise: are VET organisations flexible enough to cope with new demands in education, and do they develop to "learning organisations" with the capacities to constantly improve their own learning behaviour and actively contribute to educational innovation and change. The emergence of national, regional and local VET networks, which gained growing importance in VET policies through the past decade might seen a new deal in organisational learning, which increasingly employs networks as agents of change, with specific regard to mediating learning on the organisational level and linking those with relevant sub-sectors of the educational system (Preisinger-Kleine, 2002).

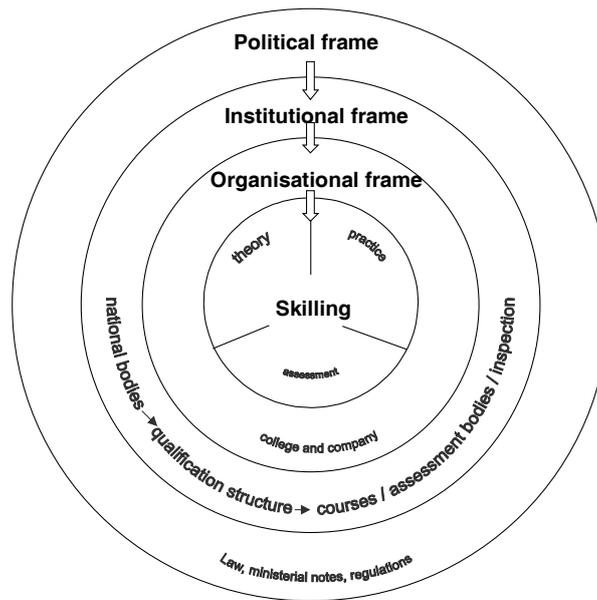


Figure 1: A framework for analysing educational change in skilling systems (adapted from Nieuwenhuis, Mulder, Jellema & Van Berkel, 2001)

1.4 A learning approach for changing VET

Educational systems are historically evolved social constructions (Hommen, 2002). During decades systems are developed into conglomerates of social routines and habits, which are often seen as natural patterns of social action. As in institutional economy, such regulatory patterns of routines and rules are called institutions (cf. Edquist & Johnson, 1998). A mixture of technical, political and economic rationalities results in a complex system idiom. Institutions are guideline mechanisms for communicating and acting and lead to coherence in a society. Examples are language, protocols, etc. Social institutes are physical organisations established for specific purposes. These social institutes exist because of the meaning individuals give to it (van der Knaap, 1997). Proven agreements are encapsulated within more complex configurations, regulating human social behaviour. A long history of social behaviour is enclosed in such institutional set ups, causing a resisting, conservative power to social change. Therefore, system changes will not evolve gradually, but disruptive (Sanderson, 2000). Sanderson gives a comparison to dissipative systems in physics: they are capable of assimilating large amounts of (social) energy and converting this into increasing internal complexity and tensions. In certain situations, when tensions grow too high, these systems can undergo rapid, transformational change (bifurcation) and evolve irreversibly to a new system state.

Many groups in society are involved in changing VET. Both policymakers and stakeholders are trying to influence the development of VET. Focusing on social systems theory we can conclude that systems' change is not a one-shot event. Societal systems are social constructions, built of organisations and institutions (formal and informal rules and habits). Social systems' change is an ongoing process of incremental development, involving many actors. Institutions are developed to have a (changing) role in VET, but at the same time can act as a conservative power to stop these changes. Because the institutional set up works conservatively and absorbing systems evolve disruptive: change impulses firstly cause internal tensions and lead then to earthquake-like changes (bifurcations). Great tensions cause abrupt and irreversible changes. So systems' change is complex and chaotic because of its multi-layer, multi-actor and multi-purpose character.

There is no common definition of policy learning available so far. Many concepts of learning at different levels of social action have been developed during the last decade. Policy learning is very much related to the new concepts of policy making, as the concept of governance as a more complex and open process including more broad sets of social actors than traditional concepts of politics, and the concept of multi-level governance which includes the relationships between the different aggregation levels from the local to the national and transnational level. Common conceptual ingredients of policy learning are a cognitivist understanding of policy making, and giving ideas, knowledge and experts an important role in that process. Thus policy learning is based on certain more or less hidden rationalistic background assumptions about how the policy process is functioning. Policy learning has been analysed very much in the phase of the policy formation process, which sets the cognitive maps of the actors, and also makes up the blueprints of what should be done through policy implementation. Learning might occur at different levels (e.g., by individual actors and collective actors) and in different modes (e.g., by single loop learning or by double loop learning). There is a clear relation between policy learning and organisational learning that, however, has not been investigated in detail so far.

However three generic types of policy learning can be distinguished: first of all, instrumental learning, which is about one's learning in order to improve the instruments to serve better the achievement of goals, secondly, conceptual learning, which leads us to seeing things from different evaluative points of view and this way adopt new concepts, principles and images about reality. Last but not least we can think of social learning, which is about learning on values and higher order priorities such as norms, responsibilities, goals, and the framing of issues in terms of causes and effects selected for attention.

Instrumental learning could be classified standard learning, since it's the usual way organisations and institutions learn about a subject. It is characterised by reaching one-point optima of solutions to a problem, by leaving untouched the fundamental design, goals and activities of organisations and institutions. Conceptual and social learning are characterised as double loop learning (Argyris, 1976). They either end up with re-design of organisational programmes, or even the change of theories about reality in use. However the latter ones are rather exceptional and empirical research makes evident that double loop learning often represents an outcome of crisis or revolution rather than being a result of day-to-day practice (Preisinger-Kleine 2002). Another point to take in account is the depth and extensiveness of of change; thus, dramatic change of organisational programmes and cultures can be acquired within experimental settings, particularly in cases where important parameters are under control of the operating system. However learning effects then hardly transfer to the real world. Similar limitations can be associated with policy learning, based on purely information defined strategies.

1.5 Role of government

Government can play an important role in the steering of VET. A system can be completely state based or on the other hand market driven. Crouch, Finegold and Sako (1999) conclude, based on an analysis of skill creation systems in seven OECD countries, that both state-based and market-oriented strategies are doomed to failure. State-based VET will suffer from low responsiveness and innovativeness, whereas market-led VET will not be able to upskill the majority of the workforce. In between the market oriented and the state based model, is the consortium model. In the consortium model the sovereign units may be tempted to come together and merge in some meaningful larger whole (inter-institutional co-operation) or making a choice for co-ordination imposed from top down (see McDaniel, 1997). The development of new and challenging VET-policies needs the involvement of public agencies. Private economic actors should be challenged to support new public policies to enhance high skill oriented, flexible VET system development. Crouch et al. (1999) do not believe in a single

best solution at system level; copying best practices from elsewhere needs careful planning and consideration of the institutional history of both source and receiving system. They offer a sceptical view of the feasibility of a high-skills strategy in western economies.

When there are many possible scenarios for the future it may well be impossible to construct any single static policy that will perform well in all of them. It is likely that the uncertainties that confront planners will be resolved over the course of time by new information (Walker, 2001). Because of the need to deal with problems in a rapidly changing, complex and unpredictable world, uncertainty has become an increasingly important element in policy formulations. Policies need to be adjusted as the world changes and as new information becomes available. Therefore policies should be adaptive-devised not to be optimal for a best-estimated future, but robust across a range of plausible futures. Such policies will indicate near term actions that combine those that are time urgent, those that make important commitments to shape the future and those that preserve needed flexibility for the future (Walker, 2001).

2 Methodological issues and analytical frame

2.1 *Catching systems' change*

In order to describe and analyse systems' change in different European member states, the partnership has decided to study the object by using the multiple case study approach. The rationale behind this choice is that change policies are often directed to solving specific problems within running systems. Policy makers and stakeholders raise the alarm on system failures only, when specific stakes are in danger. At the start of the project expected to be able to point at specific changes, at least with a clear starting point in time and, hopefully, also with a discernable finish. The partnership also expected for each country, different problems and different searches for solutions to be found. To study change policy in VET, investigating the same issues in each country was expected to be a dead end alley. So for each country the content of change has been left open for choice for the national research team. For the case study procedure, specific appointments have been made.

A major decision has been to investigate two cases for each member state: (1) One historical case and (2) an ongoing case. The relevance of the project is in its actuality: what can we learn from case comparisons for the actual VET policies towards a competitive European economy and a cohesive social structure. However, studying actual policies needs insight in mechanisms and social structures behind social systems. In order to establish this insight, the partnership chooses to execute in first instance a case study back in history. By studying a historical case, with a start and a finish, all aspects of policymaking and stakeholder fights can be brought into the picture. The insights from the historical case were used as starting point for conducting an ongoing case in each member state.

Based on the above theoretical frame, the proposed contribution to the research report will be done by case comparisons of exemplary cases delivered by the Observe project. The cases can be seen as a sample in time and space: they are spread over the last 30 years and they are spread over 10 European countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Rumania, Scotland, Spain, Wales). For each country a finished case in the past was selected, together with an ongoing case. The thematic issues within the case, have been depending on the national debates in each country, so they vary from the enhancement of social partner involvement, the introduction of APL, the establishment of new VET courses for the low skilled, quality assurance systems, financing systems and teacher training facilities, structural improvement through the implementation of networks intermediate to learning found in VET organisations. Because of these thematic foci, they should be dealt with as separate case studies, and not as national cases. They will be described on context characteristics, 9 major themes (level of change; driving forces; typology of change; social actors involvement; government role; power play; policy instruments; valuing outcomes; learning approach in policy). For the proposed contribution the partnership has elaborated on these descriptions, with a special focus on the evolution of institutions in VET through interaction between (players within) the system layers.

For these 16 case studies, both historical and ongoing, the partnership developed a more detailed procedure. In order to catch change processes, the research team decided to use a snap shot procedure: within each case study, logical points in time were chosen. The state of the art of the system at these specific time spots was "photographed" 2-dimensionally: one dimension is the systems' syntax, by which we focus on the rational and cultural logic behind the system. The other dimension consists of specific choice on systems' elements, relevant to the problem at stake (e.g. steering measures, educational choices, pathway decisions, quality measures etc). A basic assumption is that the syntax of the system defines which combinations of elementary choices are meaningful c.q. meaningless for a specific VET system within a specific time frame. Comparing the snapshots over time, and analysing the pol-

icy measures in between, resulted in a thick case description, useful for cross case comparisons.

2.2 Description of analytical themes

During the Observe project the researchers agreed upon 10 analytical themes to describe the selected cases. The selection of these themes was a result from collaborative work during several project meetings, on elaboration of the theoretical framework into meaningful categories for change description. Hereunder the 10 themes are presented.

2.2.1 What change of which institutions/routines

Within this section the research team investigated how the kind of political goals or improvement goals were strived for with this change. Three big categories were discerned, on which each case study was positioned:

- Improving opportunities for students and participants,
- Organising the social dialog between social partners and the educational system,
- Accountability and quality management: how is delivery by educational institutes related to budget stream and quality control; this implies the relation between schools and government and how they cooperate.

Furthermore this section refers to the 'level' of change: is it institutional (does the case imply changes in relations on system level) or on the level of individual routines (who has to change his/her old routines into new ones). Some cases were targeted at institutional change, come at routine change and some at both. Another way of stating this issue was whether the change was oriented at policy level (broad, long term) or at strategic level (instrumental within policy). Last but not least it was considered of overall importance which institutions we were looking at as subjects of change: VET schools, quality assurance; curriculum structure, or body; accreditation bodies; strategic planning bodies; funding and budget structures or teacher training.

2.2.2 Driving forces

Under this theme, cases were delineated and conducted to answer questions on the origin of the change and the problem definition behind it.

- Dimensions: changes can originate from internal (inside education: for example quality discussions, or discussions on learning styles and processes), from larger, national discussions (e.g. from social policies or economic discussions) or from global developments (EU development, world bank pressure, globalisation of economy),
- Interpretation of driving forces: is it a phenomenon or the problems caused by a phenomenon or the problem definition? In the latter case it is interesting who participated in this problem definition (policy, public – society, journalists, experts -, professionals),
- Interesting issues: policy change through government change or by the same government (depending on the political culture: two party system or coalition system),
- Driving forces versus stopping forces.

2.2.3 *Typology of change*

This section is related to researchers' first observations around disruptive or incremental change: we had a discussion on whether this category was more on outcome than on input (it is an evaluation post hoc of the observed change). We decided to keep this issue as an important theme.

- Was it a radical, disruptive change or an incremental one, combined with implementation strategy (snowball)?
- Was it a transformation of existing institutions/routines or an abolishment + creation of old/new institutions/routines?
- How was the change introduced by policy: cooperatively or imposed?
- What aspects they were looking at: Process: how were things done? Reaction on 'fire': how was the process ignited? Impact: what was the expected outcome?
- What was the underlying, innovative idea: which routines have to be changed on what level? Shall this be based on blueprint or experiments: what was defined at forehand?
- The typology of change should be complemented by a typology of the socio-economic-political context: in what kind of societal frame did the change evolve?

2.2.4 *Social actors involvement*

- This section involves the societal debate over and during the change. It was not only social partners' involvement: stakeholders were a broader term: including professional associations, parents, think tanks and educational bodies.
- How was the social dialogue organised: formal, informal or not? Is this the same during all stages of policy-making process (identification, definition, design of alternative actions, implementation of selected policy, monitoring, evaluation, corrective policy)?
- How was the triangle government-employers-trade unions involved, (depending sometimes on the political position of governments)?
- Changing of minds: did stakeholders have the same view on the (urgency of) change during the stages of the change process? They could change minds!

2.2.5 *Government role*

This section targets on the role of government, in a broad sense: policy and civil service.

- A general question in this section was on the focus of government: was it more on ideology or on efficiency?
- How was the relation between government and civil service (in case of unstable government: does this imply a stable civil service, with an increased power; in case of stable – coalition - government: does this have implied a lighter civil service with less power? Or did we deal with a US system: change of government implies change of – the top of - civil service?).
- Was the government role the same during all stages of the change process (identification, definition, design of alternative actions, implementation of selected policy, monitoring, evaluation, corrective policy)?

2.2.6 *Power play and/or interaction*

This section caused large discussion: is it on power or on interaction. Finally researchers decided for power play: it is on obvious and/or informal impact of persons and institutions in the change game. Interaction is one way of organising influence. Under this section several discussion and themes were useful to deal with:

- Was power the main issue (to stay in power), or was power used to get what you want?
- There was a difference between power and influence; power can be personal or positional?
- There was a difference between power and rationality.
- Initiators for change (formally and informally: think of discussions on subversivity): lobbying, taking action, identification of possible arrangements and positions.
- Power play within institutions: identification of reforming and conservative forces.
- Hidden power play and exchange of stakes (Agreements, broader than the educational domain).

2.2.7 *Policy instruments*

In this section we have targeted on political instruments on several system levels. It was considered important to make a distinction between policy instruments to run the system (how was the relation organised between government/civil service at the one hand and executives [colleges, companies, others] at the other hand; by which means: rules, laws, finances, quality reports, etc), and policy instruments for changing the system (legislation, finances, dialogue, experiments, blueprints etc).

- What kind of instruments were used by government: legislation, financing, facilitating social dialogue?
- Was there a relation between strong social dialogue/centralised funding and planning and weak dialogue, decentralised funding and institutional autonomy on a free VET-market?
- Difference between formal change (i.e. institution building, developing new norms) and informal change that was introduced by actors without direct legislative power?

2.2.8 *Learning policy approach and evaluation approach*

We agreed upon the importance of this section. There are a range of smaller questions which could lead to insight in the adaptiveness of change policy on several levels.

- What kind of input was used for the design of the change?
- How open and adaptive was the innovation approach used?
- An important indicator in this section was how many times the initial definition and assumptions behind the innovation or problem assessment were re-examined and changed.
- How fixed is the policy making process, or was there any flexibility towards 'odd signals'?
- Could (and did) schools learn? Could (and did) government learn? And other levels in the system?
- How was scientific knowledge used during the change process? And statistics? (accuracy in data collection and interpretation)

2.2.9 *Valuing outcomes*

In this section the circle is closed: change started with power play on stakes and targets. This section asks for the feedback of actors, and how they valued the outcome of change. This section is closely linked to the theme of learning policy and evaluation, however puts the issue of change in the light of different stakes and different targets: the participation of single stakeholders is dependent on the way they see the development of the change, whereas in 8 the emphasis is laid on systems' development.

2.2.10 *Context of change*

A last section discusses on 'typology of context'. It was outlined in relation to typology of change. In complexity models the way of reasoning is that you cannot explain the chance of survival of a kind solely on knowledge of characteristics of that kind: you always need information on the context. Institutions are responses to specific contextual situations. System change resp. change of the institutional set ups can only be understood from the specific socio-economic-political context of the moment. Any issues related to these kinds of reasoning were reflected in this section. It has been decided to be a preliminary theme, more than a description category.

3 Cross analysis over the cases

Overview of thematic sections of analytical scheme

VET as a political issue

This section is based on context information on the main structural issues of the VET concerned, included in each case study, however extends the focus to “VET as a political issue”, elaborating the role and importance of VET in the different countries.

Subjects for change

In this subsection, the first 3 analytical issues deal with (“what change”, “driving forces” and “typology of change”). So issues like goal of change, level of change, institutions involved, causes for change, political impulses, transformations (radical, developmental, creative destruction, etc).

Powerplay by change agents

In this sub-section, the next 3 issues are dealing with (social partners’ involvement, government role, powerplay/interaction). The section is about the societal debate on the change in question: was the public involved, or was it restricted to the political ‘upperclass’? Who was leading: politicians, civil servants, stakeholder agents? How were social partners involved and educational professionals (headmasters and teachers)? What kind of stakes were defended?

Political and scientific instruments for change

In this subsection, the next 2 issues are dealing with policy instruments and learning policy. Which kind of instruments were used to introduce the change: legislation, financing, facilitating, social dialogue? How was the relation between government and educational organisations (accountability, financing)? How was scientific knowledge used during the change process? Was there a scientifically informed evaluation of the change process?

Valuing change

This section investigates the societal acceptance of the new structure / system.

3.1 Netherlands		
Case studies	HC: Introduction of school based VET on level 2, next to apprenticeship courses during 1970-1996	OC: Installment of a national institute for quality control on examination in VET (KCE)
VET as a political issue	Apprenticeship slots at this time were only present for technical and health vocations. Not getting a job, meant not getting an education in that time. In the final system a mixed model has being grown: apprenticeship combined with school based courses for almost all vocational sectors.	The Dutch ongoing case is about the. The institute is established in 2001, as a reaction on a political fire alarm on low quality in examination. Newspapers and social partners played an important role in raising the alarm. The minister of Education had no choice than launching a national initiative, although the policy culture was in favour of autonomous VET colleges, with own responsibility for all educational aspects, including examination.
Subjects for change	<p>This change is about VET system's design. Driving forces are emancipatory movement, youth unemployment and the need to upgrading labour force skills.</p> <p>Typology of change: incremental (20 yrs), but radical: the system has been changed dramatically (from single trajectories for some, towards mixed trajectories for all) and the employers' responsibility has been growing over time.</p>	<p>This change is about institutional arrangements: accountability for quality in the VET-system. The main beneficiaries are the social partners, especially the employers: by the new institute they should gain trust in VET. VET colleges have to act according to nationally decided protocols.</p> <p>The main cause for this change is a lack of transparency on the quality assurance in the system. The national organisations of the employers played a major role in raising the alarm, issued by a report of the educational Inspectorate. Politicians played their role by enlarging the alarm and forcing the minister to act.</p> <p>The change is an implementation of a brand new institute: so this can be labelled as a radical change. Both colleges and social partners have to</p>

		<p>learn new roles. In the Dutch tradition, the solution is not as radical: the new institute acts as a platform for negotiations between social partners and educational players, and in this sense, the new institute is an extension of the Dutch 'polder model'.</p>
<p>Powerplay by change agents</p>	<p>In the beginning, the change was carried by civil servants. Trade unions and employers were fighting. Working youth was treated as unskilled labour force.</p> <p>An advisory committee for industrial policy had to convince social partners to take up their responsibility. During late '80s and '90s this has resulted in new social arrangements. In the end, social partners (esp. employers) have the lead in VET development and delivery, next to ROC's.</p> <p>The role of government has changed strongly; from having the lead to remote control. So interaction patterns are changed, partly because of economic circumstances, partly because of recognising the importance of a skilled labour force.</p>	<p>Employers' organisations (trade unions were hardly involved in the discussion), the Council of VET colleges and the Ministry of Education (sharply controlled by politicians) played their roles in the change process. Social partners ignited the fire, based on reports of the Inspectorate. Social partners (employers) tried to get back their power position on the control of examinations, but the ministry and the colleges protected the autonomous position of the colleges. The final solution of a national institute is a compromise between these two positions: in the board of the new institute, both colleges and social partners are represented. After the installation of the institute, the interest of politicians faded away very quickly, although the institute used several years (until 2005) to find a proper way to fulfill its role adequately. Finally the institute merged with the inspectorate in 2006.</p> <p>The ministry forced the social partners (represented by Colo) and the colleges (represented by the council for VET colleges) to find a workable solution, and eventually, they came up with the new institute. The common solution was presented to the political scene as the good solution (nobody is against when the stakeholders agree). The civil servants played a small role: they</p>

		<p>supported the stakeholders in reaching their agreement.</p> <p>Basically, the process was about power: power on the examination in VET, as a key issue related to qualification profile definitions, and entrance to the labour market. Within the process, experienced key persons, with no stakes in the game, (especially one former minister of education) played important roles: without them, the process would not have resulted in a common solution.</p>
<p>Political and scientific instruments for change</p>	<p>Starting with social experiments, along with social dialogue, finally top-down legislation.</p> <p>Research was used in the beginning to escort the social experiments. Later on policy became allergic for research and experimentation. So in the end evaluation was not used extensively (although the new 1996 law has been evaluated in 2001; the results are generally neglected).</p> <p>In the new law, ROC's are responsible for learning processes, social partners for output definitions (competence profiles) and the government for quality assessments.</p>	<p>To smooth the process, the ministry of education organized social dialogue in order to reach a common solution. Eventually, the new institute was embedded in new legislation: the old protocols around quality of examinations have been wiped out of the 1996 law, and the new institute has been put in. The government has brought the costs of the new institute.</p> <p>The results of the evaluation (evaluation of the Act on VET in 2000) were not immediately used. But it was one of the publications that gave cause to a new examination structure. After the new legislation, politicians lost their interest in the new institute. With the installation of the new institute (KCE) it seemed that the examination problem was solved. Evaluation has been assigned to the educational Inspectorate and the board of the institute.</p>
<p>Valuing change</p>	<p>The change process ended in a fully accepted mixed system. On power distribution, some battles have to be fought (see ongoing case study), but in general all stakeholders agree on the ef-</p>	<p>All stakeholders agreed with the new institute (officially they have proposed the new institute themselves). The VET colleges accepted shared responsibility. Social partners have accepted the</p>

	fectiveness of the grown system.	Dutch solution as the optimum. Some improvement has been reached in the examination practice on the VET colleges; so most players are accepting the new situation as feasible. In 2006, the KCE institute is merged with Her Majesty's educational Inspectorate; quality policies in VET are united under one umbrella by this movement.
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3.2 Denmark

Case studies	HC: Reform 2000	OC: School based apprenticeships
VET as a political issue	<p>"Reform 2000" is the reform of the Danish VET system that came into force on 1 January 2001. As a case 'Reform 2000 shows the process behind the incremental changes made in the Danish VET system. Current amendments and adjustments are usually negotiated, passed and implemented as described. Reform 2000 illustrates how changes in the VET system are carried out and it is therefore chosen as the Danish historical case.</p>	<p>One of the major challenges in the VET system in the nineties was the lack of practical training places in business enterprises. Politically, the school-based apprenticeship compensation arrangement was proposed as an intermediary solution.</p> <p>The Confederation of Danish Employers has never endorsed the solution as a permanent feature of the Danish VET system. The Danish Confederation of Trade Unions has a dual role. They are in favour of the school-based apprentice arrangement. The VET colleges have neither legal nor financial resources to directly influence discussions and legislation on apprenticeship, though school leaders have tried to influence public debate through the media.</p> <p>The progress of the school-based apprenticeship compensation arrangement is chosen as case as it reflects the leading ideological standpoints in Danish (education) policies. The historical founded 'dualism' is embedded at all levels of the system from the national level to the specific institutional level.</p>
Subjects for change	<p>The reform was foremost a pedagogical reform. A more diverse student population comprising low-end and high end student performers, in-</p>	<p>Danish VET is principally dual: apprenticeship combined with schools based courses. Introduction of school based practical learning has been seen</p>

	<p>creased drop out rates, because students were not prepared to make choices about a specific occupational pathway, as well as labour market changes leading to new types of qualification demands were driving forces behind the reform. System response – also in the early negotiation phases was- individualisation of learning pathways, but within a common structure . Instrumental to the Reform 2000 design was the introduction of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the personal educational plan • the educational log book • the contact teacher • modularisation <p>were the instruments introduced to support an environment where the individual student was set as the centre of a learning process. Within the Danish context the reform should be seen as radical.</p>	<p>as revolutionary, because the company based training was undermined. Employers and liberal parties in politics have never seen school based practice as a permanent solution, so, over time when the political situation changed, the positions on this issue changed. Both financial and pedagogical arguments played a role in the debate. The latest snapshot was that school based practice was reduced to 1200 positions a year, and that government took over the wages of school based apprentices.</p>
<p>Powerplay by change agents</p>	<p>The negotiation and decision process which led to a new legislation illustrates how changes in the Danish VET system occurred. In this case we see that incremental changes in the VET system are based on formal tripartite discussions with the Ministry of Education, informal negotiations between the partners, and the work of ad-hoc taskforces.</p> <p>System actors see clear advantages because the model builds on consensus, and because of the</p>	<p>The political struggle is between government (changing over time from left wing towards right wing) and social partners. Schools are nearly involved in the debate (although they are eager to join!).</p> <p>Within the Danish “Poldermodel”, the debate itself is leading; no party dares to unplug the debate. One is always looking for a compromise.</p>

	<p>involvement of labour market actors a formal orientation and representation of labour market demands beyond those of the individual firm.</p> <p>The more pragmatic explanation is that the work process is very efficient because the close dialogue and bargaining often leads to a stronger consensus when it comes to implementation of a new measure.</p> <p>Therefore almost all bills regarding the VET system introduced in the Parliament have been discussed and approved in advance in the tri-partite negotiations.</p>	
<p>Political and scientific instruments for change</p>	<p>Reform 2000 is led by tripartite discussions between social partners and the government. Schools (teachers) felt left out the discussion. Pilots were used to implement new educational tools, but those teachers who were not involved felt the reform as top-down.</p> <p>Research is used to inform partners in the debate and to evaluate the course of the reform. International knowledge is used to design the reform.</p> <p>Relation between government and schools is regulated by remote control: output arrangements are set.</p>	<p>Intensive negotiations between social partners and government. In this case scientific information seems not to play a major role.</p>
<p>Valuing change</p>	<p>Through the tripartite approach of discussion on reform 2000, the acceptance of change was negotiated during the process.</p>	<p>Discussion is still going on. An agreed solution is not reached yet.</p>

3.3 France		
Case studies	HC: VAP (validation des aquis professionnel)	OC: VAE (validation de l'expérience)
VET as a political issue	<p>Initial vocational training (IVET) in France has traditionally been dominated by institution-based training programmes, notably the brevet d'études professionnelle and certificate d'aptitude professionnelle. These programmes have existed alongside a highly academic and prestigious education system, and a weak apprenticeship system. Educational traditions have historically placed a great deal of emphasis on factual knowledge and there has been a corresponding lack of respect for technical skills, in relative terms. VET, both institutional and work-based, has consequently suffered within this environment.</p> <p>The French 'system' illustrates the historical relationships with the state and the education system. Its essential weakness in the long term has been a labour market which has a hierarchical relationship with education and training. The outcome of this is that VET has traditionally not been afforded the prominence afforded in other countries.</p>	
Subjects for change	<p>France has a well-developed system where the citizen's right to claim credit for entry to, and credit within university programmes, on the basis of prior informal learning is underpinned by national legislation. The latest legislation on social modernisation (Loi de Modernisation Sociale) in January 2002 strengthened the previous VAP programme (Validation des Acquis Professionnels) and transformed it into a VAE process (Validation de l'Expérience). Individuals now have the right to claim credit for a complete qualification on the basis of their prior experiential learning and are supported in this process through the practice of 'accompagnement' by professional, trainers and other actors. There are nationally, well-defined stages to the VAE application process, and if par-</p>	<p>The VAE has started a process that wasn't necessarily there with the VAP. In particular the VAE has permitted the gaining of a diplôme in its entirety whereas the VAP dispensed units. The system has also changed into a 'more open' structure with the VAE. The programme has also included a new public which wasn't involved in the VAP. These individuals often have a high level of professional experience but lack any recognised qualifications. For them the VAE represents social and professional recognition.</p> <p>The VAE also regards training not as an end in itself but as a way of constructing and maintaining individual qualifications. The VAE therefore offers the recognition and putting into practice of knowl-</p>

	<p>tial credit is gained towards a diploma, the 'validation' jury provides recommendations on how the candidate can undertake the further learning in order to complete the award.</p> <p>Prior to the growth of apprenticeships and <i>alternance</i>, the role of enterprises in IVET in France had been minimal. These days, the twin impact of state intervention through legislation and collective bargaining has placed considerable obligations for CVET upon enterprises. The principle of employers' legal obligation to finance training has been imposed upon French companies more intensively and for a longer period of time than elsewhere. Consequently the cost to enterprises for in-house training has come to around 2.2% of the wages bill, compared with 1.2% in Germany.</p> <p>The first element of the <i>Validation des acquis professionnels</i> (VAP), introduced in 1985, was aimed at permitting both those already in employment and the unemployed to gain access to higher education training programmes. It was, therefore, focused on improving opportunities for participants, by providing the means of entering onto higher education courses that were previously not accessible to them.</p>	<p>edge, its development and adaptation to a socio-economic context – reflected by such changes as the mobility of workers and the promotion of life-long learning.</p> <p>The low level of people in France attaining any sort of qualifications - 40% of the working-age population according to a 1995 OECD report - has been a particular focus for policy makers and a concern for successive governments.</p>
Powerplay by change agents		<p>There were political forces that pushed the development and introduction of the VAE, particularly within the ministries. A total of 20,000 VAP candidates between 1995-2001 was considered too modest at a political level. In the aftermath of the introduction of the VAE there was a flood of</p>

		<p>around 8,000 candidates. This can be related to the promotion of the programme and a wide-ranging publicity campaign undertaken by the government and the secretariat for training professionals with the campaign logo 'La VAE, soudain ma vie a acceleré'. There was a political will behind this campaign to aim it both at individuals and enterprises.</p> <p>In June 2002, the VAE law was enacted. The Ministry of Education was obliged to act instantly and introduced it without any transition period. Other ministries such as Employment and Agriculture were given more time to introduce the necessary administration and subjective changes. Initially there were territorial struggles between the various ministries and departments. However no lasting problems were encountered during the creation and introduction of the VAE. The VAE was integrated into the Social Partners Accord of September 2003 and the new law regarding professional training of May 2004. It is related to the second stage of professional life too and the question of how can all this work experience built up over 20 years be ratified and accredited.</p>
Political and scientific instruments for change	Scientific instruments are used to professionalise the procedures needed for VAP. In the case studies no policy evaluation studies have been met.	Scientific instruments are used to professionalise the procedures needed for VAE. In the case studies no policy evaluation studies have been met.
Valuing change	<p>There are 50,000 people annually obtaining diplomas through normal training and examination methods. In contrast the numbers obtaining diplomas through the VAE are increasing steadily – 2001, 6000 candidates, 2002 – 8,000 candidates (both through VAP), 2003 – 15000 candidates and 2004 – 20,000 candidates. It has had an impact on the world of work and ensured that employment itself is recognized as a driving force in terms of knowledge and skills development. Its part of a logical movement towards</p>	

	<p>certification, is it through training or through validation of professional experience, at a national and EU level. It is considered as a contributor to social and national cohesion and towards a European process relating to informal and life long learning as well as professional development.</p>
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3.4 Germany

Case studies	HC: Unification of East and West VET system	OC: Regional networks for lifelong learning
VET as a political issue	<p>To start with, the (West) German VET model, particularly the dual system is designed a largely market driven VET model. As a result, supply and demand of apprenticeship training (slots) as well as continuing VET is a direct outcome of the economic rationality (and decision making) of the economic actors. The role of the state(s) in this model by and large is a regulatory one, setting a framework of rules and regulative acts within which VET is operated, while training investment and human resource planning is left up to the private sector. The advantage of the model might be seen in its flexibility and adaptiveness towards technological, product and process innovation. However on the other side of the coin the VET system tends to come under pressure during periods of economic down cycles, when training markets become narrowed and the economic actors stop investments in training. Usually these are the times when VET becomes a political issue, and as a subject of change becomes relevant in public debate.</p> <p>Secondly, the political relevance of VET shows in the ongoing debate about "Bildungsreform" (reform of the overall education system), which reflects the fact that historically responsibilities for education and training in Germany are divided among federal government and federal states.</p>	<p>The regional networks for lifelong learning are part of a multifaceted national reform project, targeting at the implementation of lifelong learning on a national scale. It is in line with the "Strategy for Lifelong Learning in the Federal Republic of Germany", that had been developed by the Federal Government and the federal states (Länder) and was adopted by the Federal and Länder Commission for Educational Planning and Research Funding on 5 July 2004. A major departure to launch the programme Learning Regions - Providing Support for Networks was the decision of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) in 2001, which since the mid nineties has a leading role in the implementation of lifelong learning policies.</p> <p>The programme format during the past years increasingly has been seen a appropriate means to allow for experiments with new institutional arrangements in the context of an open learning process, but below a regulatory level. This is reflected in the concept of an "higher order" learning process, which educational policies could capitalize on without legally binding. Thus, policy learning from the beginning is given a prominent status, besides the structural effects envisaged.</p> <p>The German LR's program might be seen the most</p>

	<p>Thus, general school, vocational school and higher education is in hands of the 16 federal states, while the federal government oversees vocational training. This structure puts specific tensions to the system, which was subject to several reform projects of the past and gained particular interest with regard to the introduction of lifelong policies.</p> <p>After the reunion of Eastern and Western Germany in 1989, the two VET systems had to be merged into one unified system. Most significantly the BIBB was taking over personnel from the GDR's Zentralinstitut für Berufsbildung in 1990. Thus, even before the political unification, the reconstruction of vocational training in Eastern Germany was dominated by efforts to reproduce the actors and institutions found in West Germany. After the unification, this process entailed establishing a new legal foundation for training, transferring formal competencies, and creating actors capable of exercising oversight.</p> <p>This case is about radical change on systems level, and it describes the transformative process of replacing a VET model as a whole, including a global change of routines.</p>	<p>ambitious national initiative in this area. In close co-operation with the Länder and co-financed by the European Social Fund, the aim of the programme was to help facilitate structural progress in Lifelong Learning. Unlike its predecessors, this German network from the beginning emphasised the LR as explicitly related to structural improvement of the education and training system. The networks chosen for attention in Germany each focussed on the needs of the "customers" and the personal circumstances of learners. In order to perform this function they need to be able to develop local co-operation between all the players across educational sectors and training providers.</p> <p>The specific political notion of the initiative resulted from the fact that it was conducted a joint initiative between federal government and federal states, including specific operational modes (and exit options), which ensured the participation and voice of political actors and stakeholders.</p>
Subjects for change	The change of the VET system is originated from global developments, the breakdown of East European economies and the political process of reunification of the two German states. Rather than a case of VET policies, the change of the VET system from the beginning was understood an	Overall aim of the "Learning regions" programme is the structural improvement of the educational system with a view to implementing a national strategy of lifelong learning. As such it is part of a global strategy besides a series of related initiatives, all of them targeting at the implementation of lifelong

	<p>“undisputable” element of the overall transformative process towards political unification and the restructuring of the East German economy. In a strong political notion the transfer of the West German VET system to the Eastern parts of the country in the inside and outside view was perceived an act of solidarity among old and new states and regions. Thus, in the public debate of these times the question was not about the necessity of change or historical alternatives, but rather if there is anything to be learned from the former GDR VET system. However this (mainly academic) dispute from the beginning suffered from its polarity to official politics and public opinion, and thus remained widely unheard.</p> <p>The historical case is about the transition of steering mechanisms for VET during the first decade after the German unification. In the GDR steering was done top-down, in a non-corporatistic environment. In the new, adopted system sectoral bodies, trade unions and especially chambers of commerce were put in power over the new VET system. However the empty institutional landscape, deterioration of the economy in the “Neue Länder” (East German states), and parallel slowing down of economic growth in West Germany put significant constraints to a one by one transfer of the West German VET model. Thus, the first decade after unification developed a phase of experimentation with regard to capacity and institution building.</p> <p>First of all it became obvious that the success of</p>	<p>learning policies on a broad scale. The actors of the LR programme however shall have the particular role of regional key players in the promotion of lifelong learning.</p> <p>The agenda of change can be classified radical in terms of aims and objectives. It is putting regional actors in a position to taking over responsibility for the formulation of lifelong learning policies in a regional context, and building for- and backward linkages among different educational sectors and policy areas.</p> <p>However the findings from national evaluation make evident that the LR programme in contrary to the official agenda far more is driven by the needs of adult education and C-VET, while the involvement of core sectors of the VET system, such as apprenticeship training in firms, vocational schools and higher education institutions so far remained an arbitrary factor. As a matter of fact it’s C-VET, which has gained particular attention in the LR programme, and the bulk of LR projects finally turned out to be initiatives towards increasing transparency and efficiency of C-VET markets. Complementary adult education agencies due to their high profile on local level from the beginning played a central role in the management of regional networks.</p> <p>After the first two periods of the programme significant weaknesses of the programme became visible, such as missing commitment from the economy, social partners and state institutions. In parallel</p>
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	<p>the new VET model would be intrinsically bound up with civil society, and the availability of intermediate actors. Secondly, the East German actors due to missing industrial structures had to develop practical alternatives for enterprise-based VET, including off-the job training places, school-based training or at least state subsidized training places – which would necessarily breach the core principle of the apprenticeship training system, the responsibility of the economy for financing and conducting VET.</p>	<p>key stakeholders began to question the performance and effectivity of LRs, particularly when it's about their functioning outside funding schemes but also in the light of a downturn economy. As a consequence the LRs creepingly lost ground and through the following programme periods were narrowed down to a series of niche projects, without a broader political perspective.</p> <p>A major factor for the decline of the LRs might be outlined the fact that the LRs were designed as an experimental field for new institutional arrangements in lifelong learning. However this “strength” in the later stages of the programme turned into a serious constraint. The LRs were developed within the context of a top down policy approach (with a set of pre-defined objectives, fixed parameters for collaborative learning and huge financial incentives), but failed to function outside this context.</p>
<p>Powerplay by change agents</p>	<p>Regarding the first group of actors, it's particularly the chambers with their broadly defined training networks, acting as political key stakeholders. There also have been chambers of industry and commerce as well as trade corporations in the former GDR, but with strongly cut competences.</p> <p>During the first years of transition most of them – with the help of West German chambers - could take advantage of location and step by step became key players in regional VET systems. Not surprisingly, their role in the VET system showed completely different, with a considerably stronger position than in Western Germany. They were</p>	<p>The LR initiative includes state and non-state actors, particularly state and federal administration, adult education as well as multifacet players from the VET field. By and large it is dominated by adult education actors on operational level, which also determines interaction patterns on local level, top down communication regarding the fulfillment of roles and tasks, balance of power among state and federal institutional players. Civil servants had a key role in the conceptual phase and during the formulation of the programme.</p> <p>Basically the LR can be seen as a political-practical alternative to approach lifelong learning by bringing</p>

	<p>not only responsible for the supervision, accreditation and certification of VET training (according to the law of vocational education), moreover chambers - on the background of weak employers' federations in the new states – literally defined themselves as the real actors representing the interests and being spokesman of the economy.</p> <p>At the same time they operated vocational training rings, enabling them to offering both, apprenticeship training through the network of member companies, and publicly promoted private or business related training programs.</p>	<p>together multilevel players of the federalist system on the intermediate level of the region. Nevertheless the LR is implemented through a typical top down approach.</p> <p>Thus, although the key actors on different policy levels were voiced, the LR programme in terms of power relations was unbalanced from the start. As the programme moved on the question of power increasingly became a crucial factor, determining the commitment of political actors.</p>
Political and scientific instruments for change	<p>Legislation is the most obvious policy instrument: the old, DDR, institutional setup, has been wiped out and replaced with a new institutional set up, partly copied from western Germany, but in fact also newly invented. Along legislation, financial support from the federal level was an important instrument to facilitate the new chambers of commerce to exercise their new power on VET.</p>	<p>The programme format during the past years increasingly has been seen a appropriate means to allow for experiments with new institutional arrangements in the context of an open learning process, but below a regulatory level. This is reflected in the concept of an “higher order” learning process, which educational policies could capitalize on without legally binding. Thus, policy learning from the beginning is given a prominent status, besides the structural effects envisaged.</p> <p>Scientific evaluation of policy programmes has become a common standard; however the findings gained from investigation rarely find their way to public debate. Evaluation results are capitalized on administrative level only (due to aggregated knowledge no field of use for VET actors).</p>
Valuing change	<p>Due to persisting problems in apprenticeship training, the hazardly experiments with new insti-</p>	<p>The LRs have significantly contributed to the building of capacities for lifelong learning in a regional</p>

	<p>tutional set ups in the east, delivered interesting learning experiences, on which the renewal of the dual system could be built. Off-the-job training facilities are adopted too in the western dual system.</p>	<p>context. However with the end of funding periods, many LRs have stopped working, reduced their activities to a few core services, such as educational counseling or transferred LR know-how to other programme contexts.</p>
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3.5 Romania

Case studies	HC: promoting social partnership in VET	OC: Social partners input to regional planning in VET
VET as a political issue	<p>In the early 90s, social partners agenda aiming at increasing the quality and relevance of initial VET offer was affected by several challenges, among which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A general perception of IVET as a second hand type of education (before 1989 being attended in most of the cases by those failing to high school exam or by children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds) • Limited autonomy and initiative of VET schools, due to a heavily centralised education and training system for a long period of time (1945- 1989) • Massive restructuring of the economy after 1989, with many companies closing or changing radically the products or services • Lack of strategy in the early '90 on the (re) linking of education and training offer with the world of work • Low degree of acknowledgement on the importance of social partnership in the case of both national and county main stakeholders/decision-making bodies in VET. <p>Problems related to social partnership institutional de-</p>	<p>By mid 90s, a systemic change occurred in initial VET system by the means of European Union assistance (Phare projects). The reform initiated then was radical, aiming and supporting Romania redesigning its VET system and also developing an active social partnership at all levels.</p> <p>The reform of VET was taking place in a period when the institutional context has been changed dramatically. From the policy perspective, it is important to highlight that in 1995 Romania passed a new Law of Education, formalizing all the changes occurring since 1989 and ensuring the basis of future reforms. Despite many amendments, this Law is still used in the present.</p> <p>The legal framework assigns new roles of partners and regional flexible programming, key points for the modernisation of initial VET. However, since the beginning there were not taken into account the important challenges to implementation of this new perspective, problems soon to appear: resistance to change of schools, weak incentives for active participation to regional and local social dialogue structures, lack of sufficient competences of the actors to engage and deliberate in VET related policies, lack of accurate and updated relevant data (labour market</p>

	<p>velopment were added to all these systemic challenges. Lack of resources (human, financial), lack of interest of most of the employers' associations and trade unions for education and training issues. As a result, the agenda of cooperation remained very limited and with a lack of a real regional (county) or local interaction.</p>	<p>intelligence) etc. However, strengthening social partnership on national and local level has been seen as one of the main measure/tool to reform VET system in Romania.</p>
<p>Subjects for change</p>	<p>The new political context in 1989 had large impact on the Romanian society. Social institutions had to be built from the ground, in most of the cases as a recommendation or even condition to receive external assistance. This is of particular relevance in the case of education and training field, where a World Bank project (for pre-university education system) and Phare Project RO 9405 (for initial VET) became the main driving forces for radically change (structure, offer/curriculum, human resources, administration). Unfortunately, this field was ahead with the reforms in comparison with other sectors, with a negative impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the changes.</p> <p>Decentralization, the transfer of some of the roles to local/regional actors, was a key condition for the success of the VET reform. However, the state was late in embarking on this road, preferring to use a de-concentration approach (passing some responsibilities from the central government to its county structures – inspectoratele școlare județene) that was offering little incentives to social partnership.</p> <p>However, the formal decision to invest in the social partnership VET meant a radical change: all parties (government, social partners and schools) had to develop new action patterns in order to be able to negotiate and</p>	<p>By the large reform program Phare RO 9405 the Romanian VET system was strongly oriented to implement social partnerships, to involve social partners in all main areas of decision, such as: establishing the VET schools network, development of VET offer (curriculum), assessment of VET graduates, creation of opportunities for practical training of VET students etc.</p> <p>Regional programming process (linking the initial VET offer to regional development plans/priorities) was at the core of social partnership domains of cooperation. Again, the VET field was ahead of the developments in other sectors since the main authorities leading the regional planning process (ADR - Regional Development Agencies) had little or no experience in this area. Gradually, with the help of Twinning Programs, all 8 Regional Agencies managed to elaborate regional development plans, and by so offering a reference for initial VET in adapting its offer to the regional labor market existing and future realities. However, the momentum was lost, the four-five years gap between the official promotion of the social partnership in VET and the conditions to be met in reality already leading to a decrease of interest and even trust in the usefulness of cooperation in this area.</p>

discuss all relevant aspects of VET. The roots of a new framework for cooperation appeared, mainly due to external assistance. International funds played a steering role in the change process.

Therefore, the main promoters of change have to be sought at national level b within the strong input of international organizations (as EU, World Bank and OECD).

By the large reform program Phare RO 9405 the Romanian VET system was strongly oriented to implement social partnerships, to involve social partners in all main areas of decision (establishing the VET network, VET offer, evaluation of VET students. Therefore, the main promoters of change have to be sought at national level b within the strong input of international organizations (as EU, World Bank and OECD).

The labor market medium-long term forecasts remained underdeveloped and economic priorities at national/regional level changed substantially with the occasion of each change in the political regime (1992, 1996, 2000 and 2004).

The major goal of change in this area (increasing the input of social partners in the adaptation of the initial VET offer to regional development priorities) was also put on threat by the lack of effectiveness of other driving forces such as: lack of progress in converging the training standards and the occupational standards (and a erratic and discontinuous development process of a national qualification framework), constant capture of the social dialogue agenda of other issues, insufficient linkage of the social dialogue practices at micro and macro level etc.

As a consequence, the level of change was put on threat, both horizontally (with only some regions implemented the change) and vertically (with an underrepresentation of regional dialogue structures in comparison with the national ones). Intended as radical, the transformations were rather incremental and discontinuous.

Scarce date of the progress made/areas of intervention for fine-tuning the policy due to a weak monitoring and evaluation activity until end of 90. However a comprehensive feasibility study on the continuation of initial VET reform indicated the main challenges for the policy and priorities of intervention in the near future.

<p>Powerplay by change agents</p>	<p>The most important challenge of the policy is that it call into action a practice that was heavily affected by the communist experience. The decrease of social capital caused by the capture of the public sphere by the communist party was reflected in a weak social partnership structures. Therefore, in 1989 social dialogue was more initiated by government than by social partners themselves. The agenda for dialogue tended to be driven by government, in most of the cases with a legitimization objective.</p> <p>Even if the practice was that the input of social partners and colleges to be limited to providing an opinion on policy proposals elaborated by the government, there were some areas where the dialogue was more effective, including the education and training. This was explained by the quality of the social partners input but also by the informal relations.</p>	<p>Already by end of 90s a sort of blueprint model of partnership was piloted through some pilot schools, including the regional planning dimension.</p> <p>The model was implemented top-down to the regional and local level. All stages of the change process entailed state actors (Ministry, National Agency for VET Development, County School Inspectorates) as main actors for change. Already in this piloting it was clear that the role played by the social partners was not the one expected. There were many cases when the social partners were informed but fewer cases when it was a real consultation process. The opinions of the social partners indicated a uni-directional, top-down paternalistic approach. Moreover, within government, politics was leading the policy. Despite the fact civil servants have some informal power by increased stability, top positions in the civil service continue to be politically biased, depending on the political color of the government. Educational actors continued to play the executive traditional role, with little room for initiatives and innovation.</p> <p>An important gap between discourse and real practice was underlined by the participants to the social dialogue structures.</p> <p>The pilot has little relevance for the regional planning area of intervention due to the fact that the regional plans were on the point of elaboration of that time.</p>
<p>Political and scientific instruments for change</p>	<p>As in the case of the other public policies, the reform of initial VET system was promoted through various means. By using a program/project approach, the</p>	<p>Due to the complexity of the policy, in 1995 was decided to start the implementation of the VET reform in a limited number of schools. All the dimensions of the</p>

	<p>changing mechanisms gained internal coherence and increased the possibilities for an effective management. However, the legislation (main tool for policy implementation in Romania) had a limited use. Also the general legal framework for promotion of social partners' involvement in public policy-making was under-developed since late 90s. At the same time, some legal requirements were not followed due to weak monitoring/enforcement mechanisms.</p> <p>Despite that, the implementation was done by a strong steering mechanism since, in essence, the system continues to be strongly centralized. Due to that, it was possible to meet the expectations of the external stakeholders.</p> <p>Training of the actors at national and regional level was insufficiently used compared to the needs of the actors involved. Study tours towards western Europe were used and a range of trainings were organised but only for a small share of VET schools principals or teachers.</p> <p>Evaluation was a weak point of the policy implementation. There was some incidental public evaluation from outside the projects (journalists, media, international evaluations). However the evaluation of the Phare project was externally oriented (in order to account for the spending of the EU money).</p>	<p>reform were tackled within the group of these pilot schools who, however, account for a minor proportion in comparison with the whole VET schools network.</p> <p>However the approach also had positive aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- It matched the existing resources that were allocated for the policy development- Allowed a more individualized implementation strategy while covering all the geographical and typology of VET schools (size, rural/urban, school teacher experiences, links with companies etc.)- Allowed a selection of schools already acting as changing forces, with a good relationship with social partners. <p>In 1999 there is already an external evaluation and in 2000 a feasibility study is produced to prepare the development of the program from the pilot school to the entire VET system.</p> <p>Soon it was obvious that despite an increased financial support, the resources were far from sufficient to offer the new schools the same development support. The transformations were slower and of a lower scale in most of the new VET schools.</p> <p>This had a negative impact also on the collaboration with social partners and on their input in VET network/offer planning. There were huge differences</p>
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		<p>within the same region of the level of social dialogue and involvement of social partners. The sectoral approach development continued also to be weak, as sectoral committees process of establishment started in 2003-2004, a few years after the extension of VET reforms.</p> <p>As a consequence, the level of collaboration of social partners with education and training actors was very diverse, ranging from strong and systematic dialogue to cases of weak, informal, ad-hoc forms of consultation.</p> <p>However, after the sectoral committees were established and some national representative employers/trade unions were more interested in being involved in education and training issues, the examples of effective dialogue increased. The quality of national and regional development plans however was not sufficiently high to offer a sound foundation for a full rationalisation of the VET network/offer. This is a good example why most of the actors involved considered that there was a high lack of scientific knowledge used during the changing process and in assessing the outcomes.</p> <p>High disbalances continued therefore to be present, with the services sector heavily under-represented in the VET schools offer, despite the development of this sector at economy level. By contrary, the agricultural studies continued to be offered by most of the rural VET schools, despite the government concern of diversifying the economic activities here.</p>
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<p>Valuing change</p>	<p>Because of the restructuring and privatization process, issues related to competitiveness were first on the agenda, together with the concerns for economic instability and uncertainty in labor market requirements. However in the early stages of VET reform it became clear that a genuine change cannot be achieved if the policy does not succeed in creating an ownership feeling amongst social partners. However most of the actors surveyed considered that this was not reached yet (2005).</p> <p>The general public is not expressing a strong opposition to this situation, more than 50% of the respondents to a national poll considering that state institutions should increase their decision-making power.</p>	<p>The same applies to the planning issue analysed. Social partners are expressing often their positive opinions about the level of information and consultation with initial VET system stakeholders. However, most of the surveyed actors continue to consider that in the process of planning the VET network/offer there is a formalism and lack of genuine co-decision. In many cases, county decision making authorities are using the existing centralized decision-making system as an excuse for their un-transparent and un-shared planning.</p> <p>This negative opinion is even more strong among the civic partners (parents associations, professional associations, other NGOs), necessary actors in a tripartite plus model of social dialogue.</p>
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3.6 Greece		
Case studies	HC: The establishment of comprehensive schools (EPL), including VET and general education (GE) pathways	OC: Establishing an institution to enhance quality of teacher training
VET as a political issue	<p>The political doctrine was shaping educational equality and equal chances in work for all. Greece has one party governmental system. Education plays a very important role in Greece's public debates. Policy is strongly depending on the political colour of government: changing colour (or even change of minister of the party on power) means changing policy, in order to remove the work of predecessors and respond to the (often hard arguing) public opinion.</p> <p>The start of comprehensive schools is good; follow up is insufficient due to reduced political support. No institutionalisation of the EPL reform. Created in 1984; abolished in 2000 with decisions of the same party.</p> <p>VET was never highly accepted in Greece, not very important for the economy in this country; is for the failures of the educational system. In general only ¼ of the pupils study in VET institutions.</p>	<p>Instigated by the EU, OEPEK (an organization being solely responsible for teacher further training) has been established. EU initiated the establishment of that institution, because the former system (for some years partly financed by EU funds) of teacher training was evaluated as less effective and also being costly.</p> <p>OEPEK was located top-down: above the teacher further training colleges. In fact little supported by the teacher training colleges, which were used in former periods in broad independency. The government: colleges are strongly connected to the ministry (teachers are employed by the ministry). Little support for the new institute also from other state agencies who were main players in teacher training until the establishment of OEPEK, although further training is a strong goal of the teacher unions.</p> <p>Greek culture does not support quality evaluation and control: this has reminiscences to the colonels' regime. Resistance to evaluation and control is still deeply rooted in Greek society.</p>
Subjects for change	Trial to combine VET and general ED. Successful trial to guide pupils to VET pathways.	Introduction of a unique organization for life long learning of teachers, was a radical change. Strong

	<p>The change is about the accessibility of educational supply; also change of pedagogy and curriculum.</p> <p>EPL grounded on social-democratic reform ideas: both social and economic benefits should be facilitated for all. Also labour market requirements to be solved. From the very beginning strongly supported by the parents/ pupils.</p> <p>It has been seen as a radical change: establishment of new conceptions' institute and new routines for teachers. Strong cooperation of GE and VET teachers/ trainers.</p> <p>Traditional thinking organizations opposed this school due to radical change of conceptions (what a school should be – they strongly opposed the idea of educating together VET and GE pupils).</p>	<p>organizations dealing previously with that subject tried to block out OEPEK's activities. After the elections of 2004 they were able to minimize OEPEK's role. Recently OEPEK has fallen into inertia. Problem is that routines of colleges are not changing and role of other institutions remains preponderant in the political scene.</p> <p>It can be characterized as non-change, due to limited operationalization: Although some politicians will call it a radical change, because of the establishment of this institution (forgetting that it is fallen in inertia). When change is enforced from outside, Greeks change the outer face of the system; internally the old routines go on. This has to do with the political traditions (see HC): changes are introduced every time the government changes: that is disastrous for educational development.</p>
Power play by change agents	<p>Started as an ideological change (from a social-democratic government that followed 40 years of conservative governments); supported by a stable position of the minister at that time. Later on this support decreased, by new ministers of the same party or/ and new colors in government. Ending EPL was a silent power play: the personal ambition of politicians lays a great role in Greek politics.</p>	<p>Politics are leading: education is dependent on government (single chain of command). At the one hand, government established OEPEK, at the other hand it deprived. Enough finances (solely EU funds). Not enough personnel; proposals to start with the realization of operational planning have never been responded by ministry after the governmental change.</p>
Political and scientific instruments for change policy	<p>A scientific group supported the introduction on a new way: no blueprint policy but interactive design with regions (educational players, but also debates with people; parents and students' in-</p>	<p>OEPEK established by law, after consultations with EU. No funds derived from national government for the two first years of its action; only EU funds for this first period. The initial plan failed. OEPEK was</p>

	<p>volvement). In first instance this group had extensive power; later on the support vanished.</p> <p>This led to an increase in schools. The selection of school heads was an important policy tool: strong innovators from technical professions. Also extensive training for teachers has been delivered. Later on staff development diminished, resulting on lower support of teaching staff.</p>	<p>very much supported by teacher/ trainer organizations, but opposed from strong public bodies that were sure that this new institution would cut back their importance in the context of the Ministry of Education.</p>
Valuing change	<p>The EPL does not exist anymore; educational reform is strongly depending on actual color of government; this is not a solid ground for educational reform.</p>	<p>Institutions functioning within state environment can hardly do their job autonomously. Politics are non-cooperative.</p>

3.7 Spain		
Case studies	HC: social dialogue in Spain	OC: the social guarantee programmes (SGP)
VET as a political issue	<p>It can be said that development of social dialogue around VET was the most relevant political issue that the historical case shows up. Social partners, both trade unions and employer organisations) are mentioned in the constitution of 1978, which marked the revolution towards democracy after Franco. The period between 1978 and 1986 was characterised by a series of bi- and tripartite agreements to improve the socio-economic infrastructure, together with the democratic system. The development of VET has assumed a major importance.</p> <p>Before, VET has not been recognised as an integral part of education. Only recently VET is valued as an efficient part of the system. Now, VET is seen as strategic for the labour market.</p>	<p>The social guarantee programmes (SGP) comes up from the ongoing study case as one of the most relevant political achievements. These programmes were launched as a result from a generic educational law (LOGSE) approved in 1990 in frame of which VET was integrated as educational subsystem. This law considers VET as a vitally decisive tool, to attend the needs of professional qualifications of the employed and also to achieve the integration process of Spain into the EEC.</p> <p>This law was also directed to improve the educational chances of the underprivileged, by raising school leaving age to 16, by introduction of comprehensive schools and by ample attention for reducing dropout. Within this framework, SGP were born in order to give early school leavers a second chance. SGP were destined for youngster between 16 and 21 (in some regions up to 25), who do not possess a diploma of VET. SGP consist of school based training combined with practical placements in enterprises, sometimes combined with a job contract.</p>
Subjects for change	The change is about social cohesion and synergy between stakeholders of VET. Behind that, the change is about accessibility and parity of esteem. In 1985 a general council for VET is estab-	The introduction of a new type of VET for low skilled youth in the form of work based training. This was not present at that level in the Spanish system. It was a change on system level, in order

	<p>lished, including unions and employers. The third national plan for Vet (1998-2002) is born thanks to this social dialogue. Underlying is a very deep change of culture in the relation between employers and employees and their organizations: from e perspective of confrontation towards a perspective of cooperation.</p> <p>Democratic changes and the crisis in the '80s made together clear that Spain needed astrong employment policies.</p> <p>The introduction of social dialogue can be seen as a radical change: new institutions and routines are created in rather short time, and turned out to be effective. Now, social dialogue is a sine-qua-non in Spanish VET policy.</p>	<p>to fill a lack in the design of the educational system.</p> <p>New employer behavior was expected: not only hiring cheap youngsters but also investing in their training. Employers happen to be eager to cooperate in this system.</p> <p>Driving forces are a combination of ideological arguments from the socialists' party and the requirements of a changing labour market. Also social inclusion was an important argument.</p> <p>The change can be assessed as rather radical: within 15 years a new education subsystem is introduced and developed. The combination of work and schooling is appreciated both by employers and youngsters.</p>
<p>Powerplay by change agents</p>	<p>The agreements on VET are one of the rare areas in politics where rationality has taken precedence over power. On VET economic interests converge and it was possible to cooperate. , This was also the case in the regions. After the state control in Franco's time, the turn towards democracy has been embraced by social partners as a chance to develop VET. The national government took the lead in this change for problem stating. Civil servants took over the lead for implementation. The regions and the regional governments are responsible for effective Vet policies.</p>	<p>The new system is imposed partly by politics: left wing government had made an issue of this change. Regional governments filled in, as they are responsible for education. SGP is strongly decentralized: the municipalities got the final power on the design of the new trajectories. Two models emerged: training/employment and professional initiation. The latter one is leading to a reincorporation into education, the first one leads to incorporation into the labor market.</p> <p>The motives behind the change are especially social and political. Social partners were not directly involved in the development of the new system. Without cooperation of the employers the SGP</p>

		would never had reached such a success.
Political and scientific instruments for change	<p>The main instruments used to create social dialogue were social agreements. Behind these agreements, legal arrangements have passed the government and national and regional authorities take financial obligations.</p> <p>In fact, the perspective was clear, and everyone agreed on that. The way to reach that goal, has been found along way. Learning has been organized around the effectiveness of the Vet system (see ongoing case next door), but not on the issue of social dialogue: that was taken for granted.</p>	<p>In the planning phase of the development some regulations were made, but mainly related to the unemployment rate and the number of enterprises that may need people from SGP. During implementation phase funding has been the most important instrument; promoters had to apply for funding under competition rules. Later on funding has been used as an instrument for accountability.</p> <p>There was no learning strategy used. The employment situation in the early '90s was used as an argument to start the process. During the process some research was used, but not sophisticatedly.</p>
Valuing change	<p>The participation of social partners in the debate and design of VET in Spain was no point of discussion anymore: it was seen as daily routine, that VET policy is developed through dialogue. This implied a high acceptance by all stakeholders of this institutional arrangement.</p>	<p>In general the SGP are embraced by all stakeholders. Although some critics are uttered too: especially the lack of certification after SGP is not motivating for the students.</p>

3.8 Wales		
Case studies	HC: FE colleges before devolution	OC: ELWA: administrating FE in Wales
VET as a political issue	<p>The historical case study looks at the way that the VET schools, specifically the Further Education colleges, have been governed, administered and funded in Wales since their inception up to, and including, the effects of devolution in 1999. This case has been selected for two different reasons. Firstly, successive primary legislation that has shaped the further education (and, therefore, the VET) system has invariably focused on these structural issues rather than on the aims, the outcomes, the curriculum, the teaching methods or anything specifically related to pedagogy. Secondly, all of the latter issues are comparatively well documented and therefore this study aims to provide a clear background and context as to why these structural aspects are also an essential aspect of VET development in Wales.</p>	<p>The on-going case study looks at the Further Education system in Wales since devolution, in particular at the establishment and subsequent demise of Education Learning Wales (ELWa), the umbrella body responsible for the strategic planning, administration and funding of all Post-16 education in Wales. The reasons for selecting this subject as a case study is in part because it follows on naturally and sequentially from the historical case study and partly because VET has increasingly emerged as both an important aspect developing and sustaining Wales and the VET as power lever in the political debate and devolution as closing event.</p>
Subjects for change	<p>The move to decentralisation in the UK was driven, in part, by a perceived need for changes in the relationship between VET institutions and industry. Therefore, it was insufficient to simply improve the links between industry and VET institutions; the real imperative was to develop colleges that were responsive to industry.</p> <p>At the same time as the growing regionalisation of economies in Europe was laying greater emphasis on the need for institutions to be respon-</p>	<p>In July 2004 the Welsh Assembly Government announced that it would be absorbing the independent further education funding body, Education and Learning Wales (ELWa), into the Education, Lifelong learning and Skills division of the Welsh Assembly. During its short history, ELWa attracted criticism for a series of failures in financial management, poor risk management and organisational restructuring. As ELWa released its final business plan, this case study examines the rise and fall of this much-maligned public organisation.</p>

Powerplay by change agents	<p>sive to local and regional economic demand, there was further pressure on institutions to improve efficiency and effectiveness and to adopt the competitiveness and culture of a free (education) market economy. Colleges had both to meet the needs of industry in terms of providing initial training and, increasingly, the growing field of continuing vocational training but also a new responsibility for retraining the unemployed and for those at risk. This has taken place at a time of economic stringency in public expenditure leading to cut backs in the level of per capita spending on further education.</p> <p>“Education and training are no longer an entitlement but an individual responsibility” (Deutsche Bank, 1998). If this is accepted, then the inevitable logic is that institutions must raise funding from private sources be it individual or corporate clients. In such a situation, the model of a ‘nationalised’, locally delivered and democratically controlled vocational education and training model was considered inappropriate.</p> <p>The reform in the UK took place against a background of government policy based on the following premises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That education and training should be subject to both internal and external markets; • That public sector finance, like private sector finance, should be based on responsiveness 	<p>ELWa inherited four main funding systems, each designed to fund learning through different types of providers: FE Institutions; private training providers of work based learning; school sixth forms and Local Authority Adult Continuing Education. The four main funding systems were designed in part to sustain providers and sought to fund good quality learning provision. By contrast, the National Council’s strategic imperatives were geared towards participation and achievement by learners and achievement of successful learning outcomes.</p> <p>The fact that there was no coherent picture of post-16 learning needs across Wales. Planning had been conducted on a short-term basis, with little account taken of likely learning needs over the longer-term and how best to address them. Integrated planning and funding arrangements on a 3 year cycle were supposed to enable the National Council to meet identified needs and priorities in an efficient and effective manner and to engage in longer-term strategic planning of learning. ELWa’s planning would also draw heavily upon information on demand for learning from individuals, employers and communities and upon learning needs identified at individual, local and national level however this policy was not a success due to the complexities of the task.</p> <p>ELWa struggled to create an overall strategy in the wider context of delivering VET, particularly at both a regional and national level. ELWa sought to promote a united organisational culture throughout the whole of its relatively brief existence. However the</p>
Political and scientific instruments for change		

	<p>to market forces;</p>	<p>fact the ELWa was formed on the basis on four pre-existing TECs which all had distinctive styles and cultures made this a very difficult strategy.</p>
<p>Valuing change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That (2 tier) local government was considered costly and unnecessary and one of the keys to neutering local government power was to remove education from the County Councils. • Those industrialists were the people best equipped to manage local services and utilities in a market economy. 	<p>It can be seen that responsibility for VET legislation, management and delivery has now come full circle from 1979-2004. The funding structure has returned to a public management of the Welsh Assembly Government after the corporate style experiments of the 1990's. Similarly, elected politicians are now responsible again for VET after the oligarchic system of the previous decade was dismantled after the absorption of ELWa into the Assembly. Funding is now centralised and the Welsh Assembly Government now assumes full responsibility for its strategic distribution to the VET sector including FE Colleges.</p>

3.9 Northern Ireland		
Case studies	HC: incorporation of FE colleges 1998	OC: assembly enquiry into FE for industry
VET as a political issue	<p>Since 1972 Northern Ireland is under direct rule, which means that legislative responsibility is reverted back to Westminster. In December 1999 arising from the Belfast agreement power was devolved to a newly established N-Ireland Assembly. Devolution was suspended in 2000 (due to political disagreement), was restored and then suspended again in 2002.</p> <p>Policy focus has primarily been on higher education rather than the further education sector, the latter being the “Cinderella-part” of the educational system. This changed in the ‘90s with a range of reports and reviews being undertaken.</p>	<p>The new Northern Ireland Assembly was established in 1999, leading on from Good Friday agreement and following a long peace process. New opportunities were created in this context at regional level for developing policy in the functional areas devolved to the Assembly. An important development in relation to VET has been the work of the Assembly Committee for Employment and Learning which undertook a comprehensive inquiry into education and training for industry, resulting in a new strategy being adopted for the FE sector.</p>
Subjects for change	<p>This case addresses the decision to “incorporate” FE colleges to the extent that they became free-standing incorporate bodies, being responsible for their own management. This happened in 1998, as in England and Wales almost 5 years earlier. Incorporation gave the (governing bodies of the colleges control over their assets, their staffing and budgets.</p> <p>The change involved was at the institutional level, in that change required the 17 FE colleges to transform their operational bases. The decision was driven by the perceived need to ensure and maintain consistently with FE policy and practice</p>	<p>What changed is the way in which needs and challenges are identified in the educational sector. An inquiry taken by the Assembly Committee resulted in a new strategy for the FE sector. The proposition was attempting to ascertain how government, educational and other stakeholders could interrelate more effectively and efficiently.</p> <p>Driving forces were within the political system: the devolution of power played an important role. Local political representatives became more forceful and more informed in their dealing with government officials to bring about change. In contrast the change implemented under direct rule, this devel-</p>

	in other parts of the UK.	opment was based on openness from the outset, and highlighted fundamental concerns about FE. However, because of again introducing direct rule, the capacity of the assembly to monitor and follow up is removed.
Powerplay by change agents	<p>Stakeholders were not involved in the decision how incorporation applied in the N-I circumstances. Incorporation was promoted from Westminster, based on a set of assumptions about the benefits, but without testing it within the specific regional context. No local or regional mechanisms existed through which opposing voices could be raised.</p> <p>During the implementation process the FE colleges were consulted. Consultation of wider stakeholders was absent.</p>	This case is an example of multi-stakeholder involvement in defining challenges and the need for change. For only 2 years, during devolvement, power relations had shifted, and actors on all sides were trying to find ways of understanding and making effective use of their new status. There was no conflict of interests and changing of minds of stakeholders. To some extent there were power struggles between elected local representatives and government civil servants who pursue their way of policymaking by ensuring proposals are consistent with broader national policies and budgets.
Political and scientific instruments for change	<p>Civil service was a very strong actor in this change process. Ministers under direct rule rarely provide any specific directions to policy, which has tended to be guided mainly by civil servants. However, understandably, civil servants tending to be risk averse in terms of political innovations. As a result, the focus of civil servants has often been on simply ensuring policy parity with England and Wales.</p> <p>The government did establish a consultative body, with the task to bring together people from across the sector, but this body was only involved in the implementation phase and not in debating the merits of the change.</p>	The Assembly Committee had no legal basis, but a very strong mandate to explore the need for change in that new political institutions had just been established and there was widespread support for their successful operation. This process led directly to government response and resulted in a strategy for FE and HE being drawn up by the department of Education and Learning. It also led to the adoption of similar means of need investigation being taken up by government officials and stakeholders.

<p>Valuing change</p>	<p>The stated government position is that incorporation has worked well. But no review had taken place and no evidence has been cited to back up this assertion. Questions associated with valuing outcomes were raised only later, during the time of the devolved assembly, and only as part of a broader debate on FE.</p>	<p>Evaluation became a constant theme in the changes proposed. In some cases this marked a move beyond monitoring (in a purely financial sense) and towards a more holistic approach to evaluation and review. Because of the debate stakeholders became more informed in relation to their respective positions. Key commentators have pointed the lack of relevant statistical or documentary material available to inform the debate.</p> <p>Change is an ongoing process. The current (2004-5) period of direct rule from Westminster leaves open the possibility of selectivity in rolling out the strategy, because government officials regained strong influence over what might be implemented.</p>
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3.10 Scotland	
Case studies	HC: introduction of modularisation in VET
VET as a political issue	<p>Since 1 July 1999, overall responsibility for education has resided with the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Executive is now responsible for policy development, and the Scottish Office Education Department administers national policy on education. Scottish Local Authorities (SLAs) are responsible for the provision of school and pre-school education in their local area.</p> <p>Further education and higher education are the subject of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, which established a new structure for these sectors of education. Scotland's 46 FE colleges provide much of the country's vocational education and training as well as a wide range of higher education courses, mainly at higher national certificate and diploma level, but also in some cases at degree level. Many colleges have also developed close links with particular universities or other higher education institutions to which some of their students may transfer after gaining their HND.</p> <p>The origins of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) were in the Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SCOTCAT) scheme, agreed by all Scottish HEI's and FE colleges in 1992. The SCQF is now being progressed under the partnership of the Scottish Executive, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), and Universities Scotland.</p>
Subjects for change	<p>This case study focuses on a particular point in time in the development of VET policy and practice in Scotland. It addresses the decision, in the 1980s, to introduce major changes in the organisation of courses and assessment. Changes came about as a result of the SOED's 16+ Action Plan (1983), which set up a modular system of training for Scottish non-advanced vocational education in the 1980s. Traditionally-structured courses were to be replaced by new courses built of individual "modules", each with pre-defined, publicly-available achievement standards and certificates.</p> <p>The modules were to be offered in further education colleges, by independent trainers and by employers in the workplace. Programmes were constructed from 'building blocks' of units and are designed to</p>

	<p>meet the specific needs of employers and other users. They include 'core skills' as well as suitable blends of theory and practice - and can be designed to incorporate extensive periods of skills' development gained in college workshops and other specialist areas.</p> <p>Modularisation implemented in Scotland was wide-ranging and comprehensive – much more so than was the case in England and Wales, for example. In analysing what he called a 'purist' approach, Raffe (1988, p. 162f.) concludes that 'moves towards modularisation are found in many other countries, but rarely in the thoroughgoing form in which it has been applied in Scotland'.</p>
<p>Powerplay by change agents</p>	<p>The introduction of modularisation was as a direct result of a prolonged consultation process – in which all the main stakeholders (educators, government, students, employers and trades unions) were invited to express their needs and preferences.</p> <p>There has traditionally been a strong role for both employers and trade unions in shaping new developments. Both are represented on the board and committees of SQA.</p> <p>It is also normal for colleges and universities to respond collaboratively to urgent needs for retraining or reorientation following large scale industrial changes such as the closure of a major enterprise or the decline of an industry. Scottish institutions have considerable experience, for example, in meeting the needs of workers displaced from heavy industry.</p> <p>Although the power for change overtly resided with the Westminster Government, the real driving force for change resided regionally. Not only was the case for a shift to modularisation being made most strongly within Scotland; but Scottish government interests also moved quickly and purposefully to ensure that implementation of change also remained local.</p> <p>Modularisation was the end product of of a very formaised process involving wide-ranging consultation and debate. The institutions were themselves key supporters of the change.</p>
<p>Political and scientific instruments for change</p>	<p>The principal instrument was the Action Plan itself containing, as it did, detailed recommendations on the role of each stakeholder in embracing change. SCOTVEC become the central stakeholder in this respect - assuming responsibility for developing a National Certificate programme based on modules. Openness to adaptation and innovation at a particular time – in response to a particular set of social and economic challenges – therefore paved the way for a range of important and unforeseen benefits. Over the years there have been various evaluations of CVET often as part of wider investigations of</p>

	<p>further and higher education and training. It was evaluation of programmes that led to the reforms described above. Importance was also attached to evaluating outcomes in relation to the newly develop modules themselves. The assessment process was to be applied internally by teaching staff, subject to external monitoring.</p>
Valuing change	<p>When HM Inspectors conducted a review of the National Certificate, they concluded that the unified modular system had been a major achievement: 'the National Certificate can be used to provide a delivery system which offers flexibility and choice in content and in mode and pace of learning'. They found the planning of learning and teaching had improved and teaching had become more student-centred. Most students appeared to enjoy their college experiences and this was attributed to a combination of increased choice, more active learning and units of study with clear, short-term targets.</p>

4 The development of social dialogue in European VET

This section is looking at how the social dialogue might be related to the patterns of policy making identified by OBSERVE project in the countries included in the research. We rather try to develop the potential of the social dialogue for policy learning as a transversal theme, as this might follow from the conceptual framework of the observe project. The paper might help to understand the converging and diverging points between the education and training systems using social partnership as a vehicle for reform.

4.1 *The relevance of social dialogue for VET systems and VET policies.*

Social dialogue concerns overall policy making, and was established at the European level to support European integration, and also to support and assist the Commission. The core area are issues of economic and social policy and it is a component of the European social model. Education policy, and VET systems are not a core area of the social dialogue. However, the European social partners, and also the European institutions have given attention to VET issues. The European ministers and the commission have mentioned the social partners in their Copenhagen declaration, referring to their March 2002 framework of action about life-long development of competences and qualifications, and have specifically pointed to their indispensable role in the development, validation, and recognition of vocational competences and qualifications.

To some extent the reasoning about social dialogue and its relevance for VET systems is focusing on legitimisation of change. As recent surveys are pointing out, VET systems are still reluctant to change and innovation. Decision makers are facing important difficulties in creating incentives for the actors to implement new policies and to participate in monitoring and evaluation procedures. Many reforming initiatives are promoted rather formally and are not entering substantial processes in the classroom. Consultation processes are often superficial and limited to some categories of actors. An effective social dialogue, however, is understood as a direct and powerful tool for creating a space that should lead to a wider understanding and acceptance of change by integrating the key actors interactively into the process. This is a basic condition for a successful implementation and for identifying corrective measures for a specific policy.

Key questions of the relation between the general framework of social partnership on the one hand and the social dialogue in VET on the other concerns the power relations and influence channels. It is still arguable if a more institutionalised overall structure increases influence and power of certain actors in social dialogue in VET. Moreover, so far there is little evidence that the institutionalised systems of social dialogue in VET exist without an overall institutionalised structure. The analysis of the cases of policies in the OBSERVE project cast a light on understanding if social dialogue is a sine qua non ingredient for a successful VET system reform or if the inclusion of VET-topics in the social dialogue agenda is on the rise.

Social dialogue, as a tool for managing and changing VET system hides often a tension between the state and the economy about the overall vision for the VET system. Established social dialogue institutions are often a guarantee for ensuring a convergence between different "visions" on what kind of service the VET system should offer to students and what are the key competences, attitudes and values that it should create. The following chapter cast a closer look to the actors currently involved in social dialogue and their role in initiating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating VET policies.

4.2 Impact of social dialogue on VET reform and policy learning

An implicit hidden intuition of promoters of the social dialogue in VET seems to be that it might be a natural medium for policy learning and promoting change. The main instances supporting this idea are related to the cooperative interaction, exchange of views, and search for solutions among key actors influencing the system. However, if we take into account the above reasoning and the key ideas of the OBSERVE project about system change and policy making, this might not be a very plausible view.

First social partners are interest organisations to promote their membership. If there are conflicts, the question is how learning relates to power. Second, a common assumption is that the dialogue might function better the more there are established institutional actors and channels. The traditional interpretation has been based very much on the idea that institutionalised system would produce shared rules of the game, certain cornerstones for the bargaining process, and trust among the actors as a core asset. However, if we introduce the change hypothesis, the question arises to which extent the traditional interpretation needs a stable context of environment conditions. If those context conditions change, this is assumed by the change hypothesis that will probably undermine all those basic ingredients of the functioning system. They must change the rules of game, which have been the basis of their trust relations. If one partner tries to change the rules of the game, this more or less automatically undermines trust from the other, which in turn might struggle for defending them. So the strength of the system might immediately turn into a weakness.

Thus, the conclusion is, that social partnership and social dialogue as an institution is affected by similar adaptation problems as the VET system as an institution: the more it is institutionalised, the more adaptation problems will arise. To illustrate this, we might take Austria as an example. Social partnership has been a very strong system that served as an effective institution for the post war transition to Western European capitalism. However, since the turn of the century it has become increasingly criticised, and some influential analysts of the system even contend that it would have already faded away. More recently strong systems of social partnership have been set up in countries under strong transformation (Spain, Ireland), which underlines that it might be an effective institution for a broad process of economic and societal transition. As Austria before the authoritarian and the Nazi regime those countries had strongly conflict-loaded systems of industrial relations driven by class struggle. This might be an additional ingredient of its later functioning, as Spain and Ireland have developed to dynamic EU – member states. The effectiveness of strong systems of social partnership might be a temporary phenomenon, and a convergence to a medium level might be in the long run the most effective solution. As a conclusion, established systems of social partnership and social dialogue seem to be a good medium for policy learning only under certain conditions. The key problem is, how those systems can learn, which might in turn very much depend on the actors.

Another basic question is what we should to expect about the relationship between the day-to-day “political game” and the social dialogue. The first is clearly determined by short term superficial gains while the second is seen by many as a candidate for the performance of functional reforms. However, as already stated, the social dialogue might also be misused for camouflage/legitimation of political gains in the power struggle, e.g., via exchanges among policy fields. Here the establishment of institutional structures might also be costly: the more institutionalised the relationships are the more “political games” might be played.

Finally, what should we expect for the relationship between the strength and intensity of the social dialogue and the “rationality” of the policy process? In this case we encounter a less clearly determined relationship. “Rationality” can be defined differently. There can be a high “rationality” of the “political game”, if the actors are very successful in their bargaining processes and in trading their interests without too high deadweight costs. Another meaning of

“rationality” is to rely on certain kinds of evidence based policies, using different kinds of external assessments of the policy process, e.g., quality control, accountability mechanisms, and evaluation procedures. There seems to be an ambiguity due to the degree of institutionalisation of the social dialogue: On the one hand, the more the system is driven by the political game, the first meaning of rationality might be developed, however, at the same time the less rationality in the second sense of external control will be established.

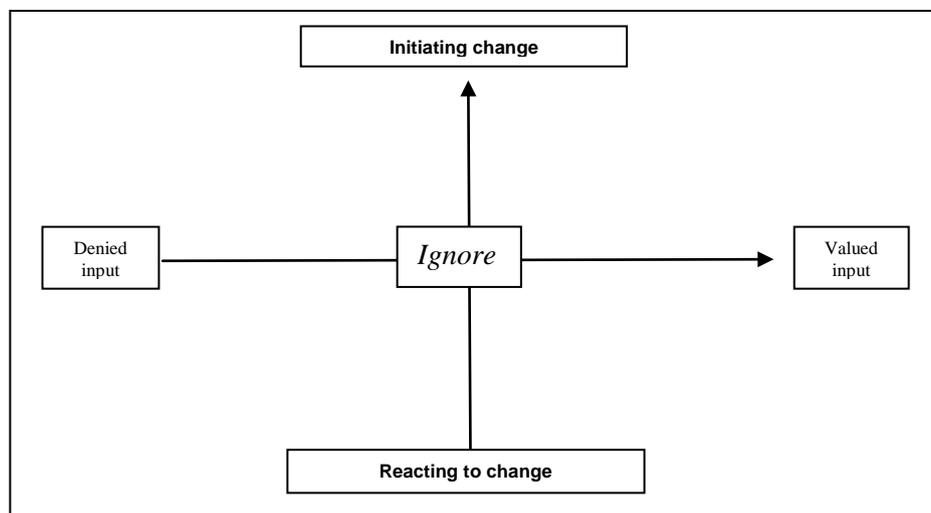
On the other hand, it might also be true that the use of external controls needs institutionalised structures. Those rationality mechanisms cannot function properly without an effective communication of their results among the various involved actors, and without being fed effectively into the policy process. And this seems not being possible without institutionalised structures of knowledge management. As a general conclusion we might infer that this latter aspect might be the litmus test for the extent of an involvement of policy learning in established systems of social dialogue and social partnership: Do they include effective and utilised systems of external assessments of the policy process.

4.3 Configurations of social dialogue

4.3.1 Co-operation between the state and the social partners

We have analysed the degree of cooperation by combining two dimensions: first how the policy makers are taking into account social partner’s input and second what is the social partners role in (initiating change or reacting to change, being pro-active or passive). In the first dimension, we focus on state’s approach to social partners activity while in the second dimension the focus is on social partners role in leading the process of change.

Figure: Patterns of social partnership involvement in promoting change and the impact of social partners on state decision-makers



The outcomes of the research in the ten countries highlight the fact that state organisations remain the main promoter of change in all the cases analysed. Key authorities at national level play a fundamental role in the initiation/inception phase (problem identification, identification of alternatives for action). Social partners are playing a limited role in *leading* the process of change. However, they are *reacting* in various degrees to state’s initiatives and in the majority of case studies are actors that should be taken into account. The interacting parties are more or less familiar with each other’s strategy of action and internal decision-making procedures. However, as pointed out in some cases (i.e. Denmark), the relations are constantly changing with an important role played by government.

The data show that it is possible to trace a direct correlation between the degree of involvement in supporting a policy and the way state institutions are *valuing* social partners input. In countries where this input is constantly ignored or even openly denied, the degree of involvement remains at a low level while in the cases where the social partners input is explicitly taken into consideration, the degree of involvement seems to be higher. It could be argued therefore that a functioning social partnership within a VET system can't be developed without acknowledging the social partners needs and without trying to address these needs. However, that relationship might also indicate a legitimising role of the social partners, and their weaker position in the power relations via the state institutions.

In the majority of cases analysed, the social partners are constantly consulted and involved in the VET-reforms. However, there is not enough evidence for stating that there is a clear pattern of cooperation on *all* important issues specific to a VET system. Danish cases are offering numerous examples of social partners influence in supporting a specific policy agenda (*"Given the interest of social partners in keeping a direct influence on part of the upper secondary system combined with that the system so far had proved its quality in terms of school to work transition a dual based model was chosen as foundation for a reform"*).

4.3.2 *Actors involved and main areas of cooperation*

Different actors are involved to different degrees in the social dialogue, and new categories of actors are coming into the scene with an increasing role. We can identify the traditional core actors of the bipartite dialogue (employers and employees, including the state in the tripartite dialogue) but also other organisations active in a specific economic sector (i.e. farmers associations in VET agriculture fields). In extended systems of social dialogue new actors have been activated and taken on board such as NGOs, regions and/or communities, public employees, professional organisations, etc. Last but not list, the various groups of personnel in education and training (teachers, trainers, counsellors, human resource experts, etc.) represents specific categories of actors that has to be taken into account in analysing VET policymaking process.

An important basic question due to the development of the social dialogue is, how the fundamental economic and societal pressures for change are affecting the various actors included in the process of social dialogue. Are there different kinds of pressures on employers vs. employees? Are there different interests/positions/reactions of employers vs. employees to the pressures? Does the pressure for adaptation produce increased tensions between employers and employees? The project offered evidence allowing us to formulate a set of observations.

Within a traditional sector structure, the tri-partite model plays firstly a legitimising function. Again the Danish case best illustrates this situation: since the 1991 VET reform, the Danish VET system has been highly decentralised, based on a principle of *management-by-objectives*. Since then it started an ongoing evolutionary process, delegating greater co-responsibility and authority to the social partners and the vocational colleges. The model has shown limitations with regard to new and converging sectors for example in terms of whom actually rightfully can represent the specific area. In a neo-liberal environment with high pressure for deregulation and decentralisation the employees' side tends to be more dependent on functioning mechanisms of SP/SD. The employers' side tends to be more adaptive and eager to change compared with employees due to a smaller risk and degree of uncertainty (the employers are directly confronted with the changes in the market, and thus might perceive regulations as inhibiting rigidities, whereas employees are much more dependent on those regulations).

These will also develop tensions within the different groups, which affect the relationship between them in the social dialogue, e.g. the insider – outsider problem at the employees' side, or the difference between exposed and traditional sectors in the economy. A key issue is how prepared are the new actors in the VET field to contribute to the policymaking process and how to create the necessary competences for actors with little or no experience in this field. Observe research highlighted the fact that in countries where there are little programs/opportunities for cooperation between state's organisations and "new" categories of social partners (social partnership as civic partnership), the social dialogue tends to include only the traditional actors (employers and trade unions organisations).

At the same time, the research pointed out that in most of the cases analysed, the actors within education systems are taking a very different position compared with actors outside the system. These categories of actors tend to be conservative and to protect as much as possible the *status quo*, against outside pressure from various sources (changing working conditions, constraints of public budgets, new forms of management, etc.). Being most of the time the categories implementing and, to a lower extent, benefiting directly from VET policies, these actors seem to develop in time a competitive rather than cooperative approach. To this situation has contributed also the *motivation created by constraint* that seems to be a rule of the game for a long period of time in almost all countries surveyed.

Two main areas of cooperation have been identified in the case studies: technical assistance, and financial issues. We have found rare cases of cooperation in the process of defining the foundation (philosophy) of the system. Social partners are more often consulted and involved in implementing focused strategies (i.e. fighting inequality, skill shortages, lack of transparency, unemployment etc.). The cases analysed offered limited evidence on specific financial assistance offered by social partners (sharing the costs of VET system). However, in some countries the social partner's commitment to different policy interventions in VET field can be quantified.

4.4 Stages of involvement in policymaking and institutionalisation

The involvement of social partners is seldom in initiating and designing change, but rather in implementing change. Sometimes they are also involved in monitoring and/or evaluating change.

Social dialogue and social partnership were very differently involved in the cases of VET policy in the ten countries. There were two policy cases that were explicitly analysing the setting up of frameworks of social partnership or social dialogue (Spain and Romania). In these two cases it was possible to find evidence related to mainly all the theoretical assumptions and models presented in this paper. In the other cases, the evidence gathered on social partnership establishment and practice illustrates only specific aspects.

In one case the establishment of social partnership in VET was done as a part of an overall system development, with a strong legal base. In the other case social partnership was utilised as a part of an internationally supported project.

The analysed VET policy cases were implemented on the background of systems of strong institutionalisation and involvement of social partnership (Denmark, The Netherlands). We can tentatively see different configurations of those systems concerning the dynamic of the institutional structures: In Denmark the institutions of social partnership have remained relatively stable, whereas the positions and the policy content promoted by the actors has changed very much. It might be inferred from that pattern, that the actors have been comparatively adaptive, and thus might have shown policy learning due to the content of their positions. However, this pattern might also indicate an effective "bargaining rationality"

among the actors. In the Netherlands we see a very high degree of institutional dynamic. The different policies have included the development and frequent change of very complex and varying bodies of involvement of various actors of social partnership. This high degree of institutional dynamic might indicate that the (previously) established structures were not considered to work sufficiently, thus ever-new constellations were tried. This also might indicate institutional change being a part of the political game, posing questions about how trust is maintained in this system. Maybe there have been stable overall structures in the background.

In one country there is a clear sector specific involvement of social partners (Germany), as they are involved in the governance of apprenticeship, which is the main part of VET in this country. The involvement in VET is in a complex tripartite structure, which differs from the overall pattern of social partnership that strongly based on bipartism (“Tarifautonomie”). No explicit analysis of social partnership is given in two countries (France, Greece). In those countries the overall system of the social dialogue is weak, and there also seems to be a low degree of involvement in VET issues.

4.5 Summarising remarks

VET is not a *de facto* core field of social partnership or social dialogue; however, recent developments in European VET systems place it among the policy priorities. Even in countries that don't have a long social dialogue tradition, the VET systems promote the active involvement of social partners in key areas of decision-making. There is a direct link between a strong involvement of social partners in employment policies and their active involvement in VET change (continuous vocational education and training) while the role within initial education and training systems varies more strongly and is more difficult to assess.

There is a different degree of impact of the social dialogue in different sectors of VET, involvement is rather strong in apprenticeship systems and also in continuing VET, and it is lower in schools and initial VET except in some cases the internal social dialogue between staff and employers, or their inclusion in the overall social dialogue. The state is mostly involved in VET issues while in case of institutionalised social dialogue there are tripartite structures, particularly in initial VET.

It is difficult to say whether there is an essential impact of the degree of the overall institutionalisation of social partnership or social dialogue on the involvement in VET policy. The policy fields seem in some cases to be rather separate, in other cases there seems to be a more tight relationship between policy fields. The involvement is also quite different in different sectors of VET. Empirically we have no clear indications of whether the degree of institutionalisation affects change. From the overall pattern of the mainly reactive involvement of social partners in some issues of implementation there seems to be a limited impact on VET policy anyway.

The EU policy seems to support the development of the social dialogue up to a certain degree in countries where there is no tradition, whereas in countries with a strong tradition the EU policy might work in the opposite direction.

5 Concluding remarks

Present times are designated by unprecedented changes that have been taking place since the last decade of the 20th century. Among others, the fall of the Berlin wall, the termination of political bipolarization due to the antagonism of super powers, the widespread utilization of modern communication technologies, the emergence of globalization, the intensification of economic competition, the abolishment of traditional labour relations and prevalence of work flexibility, have led many state governments to undertake radical reformations (usually by facilitating dismantle of industrial relations and by introducing unpopular austerity measures), often under the pretext of responding to the new developments (Waters 1995; Jameson, Miyoshi 1998; Bauman 1998; Patiniotis, 2007: 15). Domains of economy and labour have been deeply affected, thereby giving rise to novel considerations with regard to the role of knowledge and education in contemporary society. These changes and reformations affected also the VET policies in the respective European countries (Winch 2003).

In order to understand variety and particularities of VET among European countries, the development of VET policies ought to be assessed within their respective socio-economic domain. Differences in VET systems are attributed to the diversity of issues to be addressed at the national level. Despite the ongoing globalization and the European unification trend, differences are deeply rooted due to the divergent pathways followed by the member states in the process of elaborating solutions to their idiosyncratic societal and economic needs.

As was identified in the Observe research project in the European countries that were studied, the following driving forces played a more or less significant role in the formation of VET policies:

- The long-term economic trends.
- The long-term labour market trends.
- The type of economy that is predominant in each country (industry / non-industry driven; role of the service sector; importance of the primary sector).
- Social values and attitudes towards education and VET.
- Political culture: impact of the extended social dialogue on political decisions and measures; long-standing social debate about the mission of education and training and its link to socioeconomic prosperity and innovation.
- Financing of VET mainly from the state or from non-governmental institutions.
- Role and activities of private sector with regard to VET.
- Impact of foreign VET models.
- Structure of the government (single-party government versus governmental coalitions).
- Quality assurance (the efficiency/effectiveness imperative and its mode of evaluation).
- Change of VET provision from a traditional to a modular system.
- Unification of states versus devolution, detachment of autonomous states from larger entities, or acquisition by regions of a state of the right to function autonomously the VET (and the general education) policy.
- Role of chambers and other stakeholders in VET formation.
- Role of state agencies versus activities of stakeholders in the creation and/or implementation of VET policies.
- Forms of cooperation between the ministries of Education and Labour, since both institutions are responsible for VET in the majority of the cases.

The brief discussion that follows attempts to shed light on the driving forces underlying VET revealed throughout the project. In particular, there will be examined the VET mission and its linkage to the knowledge based economy, impact of geopolitical restructuring and mode of

societal development, formation of educational policy, origins of educational funds (the public / private debate), modularization of VET, prevalent societal values with regard to the prestige of VET, and quality of trainers.

A devastating question is raised from the outset. Which is the overriding mission of VET? In what mode does VET serve the promotion of knowledge based economy and knowledge based society? In the recent years there has been introduced an agglomeration of terms like “meta-modern society”, “innovation society”, “information society”, “era of sustainable development”, “new economy” etc. Most of these terms are rather vague, but they might contain overlapping connotations. At this point, however, suffice it to say that the capability of administering modern technologies that aim at bringing innovative products and services into the market has gained a broadly based recognition (Nijhof, 2005: 409). A capital trend has evolved in business in order to converge to the ideal of the so-called “learning organization”, whereby the organization flourishes through the acquisition of knowledge and expertise (Senge, 1990; Easterbuy-Smith *et al.*, 1999; Senge *et al.*, 1999; Marquardt, 2002). Continuous development of organization members has been pursued through lifelong learning (Jarvis, 2004; Ferrari, 2002).

Industrially advanced European countries are eager to maintain an appropriate infrastructure for the facilitation of learning, so far as knowledge is to be readily applied in production. On the other hand, member states whose economy is based mainly on the development of the tertiary and the primary sector are mostly importers of knowledge applications which have been invented elsewhere; therefore their interest in promoting autonomous vocational training of high quality is anticipated to be less intent. In the former cluster of countries, a mere signal indicative of a deteriorating educational system, such as, for example, worse than expected results in the PISA examinations, serve as fire alarms and may arouse an acute political confrontation. By contrast, in the latter cluster of countries such a development might pass by and large unnoticed. Consequently, a two-tier approach has been identified with regard to the quality of VET:

Specialized, “expensive” training that is offered to high-profile business managers and executives in order to preserve their efficiency and effectiveness with regard to competition. Training of lower quality is considered arbitrary for persons of lesser qualifications or for the unemployed, aiming at enabling them to secure an acceptable job.

Apparently, only a portion of organization members is entitled to training of high quality. The rhetoric about the acquisition of competitive advantage of business through the development of first-rate human capital does not embrace the whole organizational population. The deskilling controversy ought to be briefly mentioned at this point, as the decline of craftsmanship has led to polarization of knowledge and skills among the workforce (Braverman, 1974; Vallas & Yarrow, 1987; Frenkel, 2003). Knowledge is likely to reside mostly with the expert designers and inventors of modern technology. Instead, the mainstream of policy-makers alleges that equipment operators are usually in need only of elementary, easily replaceable skills. Therefore, a significant factor that has to be considered when designing a VET system at the national level concerns employers’ preferences. Research has to be conducted in order to focus on the situational factors, according to which employers may select either highly specialized, expensive employees (Germany and Netherlands), or low-qualified personnel that has acquired a moderate amount of knowledge mostly through experience, e.g. ‘on the job’ (Greece and Portugal). The situated learning debate plays here a significant role (Leavey, Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998).

A relevant subject concerns the localization issue, pertaining to the utilization and locus of knowledge in cases of business outsourcing. Displacement of production (but not necessarily of knowledge) has become a common practice. Recipient countries offer low-cost opportunities and flexible working conditions, while issues such as collective bargaining and workers’

rights are likely to remain in the twilight by the conclusion of the agreement. Although some authors suggest benefits for the mother company and possibly for the recipient country (Zhang et al, 2008; Maskell et al., 2006), the practice of uncritical intrusion of subsidiaries is likely to heighten inequalities between the advanced Western European countries and the lagging eastern periphery.

Geopolitical restructuring has played a critical role in the development of national VET policies. A weighty geopolitical event concerns the unification of Germany, which has been followed by the homogenization of the respective VET systems. Even before the unification, vocational training in the east had been influenced by the respective trends in the West Germany (Phillips, 1998). Renewal of the dual educational system has been achieved through the incorporation of eastern experience within the western approach; in any case the latter had already formed the nucleus of the VET system in the unified Germany.

On the other hand, numerous states have sprouted after the dramatic dissolution of Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. More recently, Czech Republic has been separated from Slovakia. The former remains a heavily industrialized country, its VET system being influenced by the German tradition, whereas economy of Slovakia is dependent on income obtained mainly from the primary and tertiary sector. In order to sustain the new regime, newborn states have pursued from the outset to become incorporated within the European Community. Following this trend, former communist countries often sought to adopt, usually with unjustified enthusiasm, educational systems proposed (and amply funded) by powerful international organizations (OECD, World Bank, EU). However, systems designed by external experts may not be applicable without the consent of the affected society; therefore, such educational systems run the danger of becoming eventually sterile despite their scientific efficiency.

A different approach has been followed in Spain, an industrial economy in Southern Europe; after the restoration of democracy (by the mid '70ties), authorities gave priority to social dialogue, in order to integrate the debate on VET within a broadly acceptable unifying framework. By the democratic regime the status of VET has been highly upgraded. Early school leavers are offered a second chance, while employers are encouraged not only to hire cheap young labor, but also to invest in training. In the two other Southern European countries (Portugal and Greece), where democracy was restored at the same period, social dialogue had also a strong impact, but developments followed a different course due to the orientation of these economies to the tertiary and the primary sector.

Another important issue that has emerged throughout the Observe Project concerns the degree of centralization / decentralization of VET within the same country and the historical relationship between the state and the educational system. The German case constitutes a paradigm of planning efficiency. VET policies are centrally designed through the active participation of all stakeholders at the national and at the local level. A most fruitful outcome of the educational policy concerns the programme "Learning Regions", whereby land states are targeted with regard to the promotion of lifelong learning networks. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research aims at promoting regional co-operation and networking by bringing together important players from different educational sectors within the scope of an integrated regional strategy. Within the thematic networks of the project, among others, national conferences and conventions are organized, models are elaborated, and success factors are identified.

At the other extreme lies the British paradigm, by which the VET system is entirely decentralized at the regional level (the so-called devolution). Regional authorities of Scotland and Wales have assumed the responsibility of determining upon major educational issues. It is interesting to note that the conservative government of Scotland had resisted the central policy for deregulation, local management of schools, and the establishment of competition as a guiding principle in education (Ozga, 2003). The decentralization pattern in the UK has been

driven by the imperative need to strengthen links between education and industry. This has become a widespread trend, stemming from the ongoing regionalization of economies and the need of educational institutions to become adapted to the local economic environment.

Origins and mode of VET funding constitute a controversial issue. Neo-liberal governments and proponents of the British (and other member-states) tradition indicate that only the fittest may survive among educational institutions, while the state is confined to a regulatory role. The question whether educational outcomes reflect some value with regard to the expenditures (return upon investment), has been posed pressingly in the recent years. Therefore, institutions have to persuade their economic domain at the regional level about their efficiency and effectiveness. They have to rely mostly on industry and on private donors in order to obtain necessary funds, but contributions may also be obtained by the trade unions, welfare institutions, the Church, non-profit organizations, Chambers, and the local government. However, close attachment of education to the economy may result to the degradation of its social and cultural role (Schugurenski, 2003). It should be remarked here that since in many countries the skills problem is not primarily one of supply but of demand, governments need to take measures to stimulate demand from employers for high-level skills (Winch 2003). Obviously, humanistic disciplines that are not readily applicable to business are downplayed under the regime of competition. At the other extreme lie countries that are largely dependent on the state (and the EU) for VET funding.

Modularization in VET provision is an interesting example in the convergence process of European policies. The idea underlying modularization is the sub-division of complex training arrangements into manageable, self-contained units of vocational qualifications in order to offer the opportunity to the VET providing institutions in different national contexts to respond to the more than ever quickly changing skill demands by the economy. While the challenges posed by the economy, depending on the type of each economy, are targeted through the design of appropriate national qualification systems (Lassnigg, 2003), actually the traditions, structures and functions of these systems vary significantly. As shown through the examples of UK and Flanders, accreditation of prior knowledge acquired through experience seems to be a major prerequisite for the establishment of modularization. In the current period a more broadly based combination of modules, in the sense of comprehensive overall qualifications, seems to have become the aim of training, but on the other hand the political acceptance of modularization in the various European countries remains still at stake. In certain countries, stakeholders and institutions promoting interests of graduates of formal education are likely to oppose to schemes that facilitate incorporation of knowledge acquired through experience within a unifying educational system, thereby perpetuating low status of VET (Ertl, 2000).

As expected, profile of vocational training within a society seems to be directly associated to the VET efficiency. France is an example of a country oriented to academic tradition, having developed a prestigious educational system. The VAP Law of 1985 offers the opportunity to VET graduates to enter the university. VET is not viewed as an end itself, but rather as a way of creating and maintaining individual qualifications. Validation of experience is provided on the basis of prior acquisition of empirical knowledge. Low status of VET is apparent also in many other cases; only low-performing youths address VET, while families have the propensity to orient offspring toward higher education.

Countries where VET bears a high prestige (Netherlands, Germany, Denmark) seem to be designated by the development of long-term educational policies. Political consensus upon major issues affecting education has been achieved after a multi-level longitudinal debate, while VET has been selected as a promising career pathway by a wide range of youths, notwithstanding their educational performance. By contrast, countries where VET is considered of inferior importance (France, Romania, Spain, Greece) are characterized by lack of continuity concerning educational planning. VET policies are largely determined by political parties, even single persons at the head of educational state authorities. VET attracts mostly the

“failures” of the educational system that have low ambitions and scant alternative career options.

Single-party governments have the propensity to introduce more frequent and radical educational reforms compared to governments formed by coalition.

At this point a brief note on the mode of formation of the educational policy has to be made. In certain countries, educational policy has been designed in terms of age-cohort, by means of establishing provisions for the whole system of educational channels (both general and VET). By contrast, other countries have set clear - but not necessarily official - educational objectives, stressing particular importance on specific educational pathways; thus their planning focuses rather on the fate of a particular educational channel instead of the future of a generation. It is worth of mention that in most countries we did not witness an endeavor toward regular collaboration between the ministries of Labour and Education concerning the design of VET policy, even though partners recognized its necessity. In most countries (Netherlands, Denmark, France, Romania, Greece) provision of VET tends to be school-based. On the other hand, in Germany and Austria the VET system combines education with long-term apprenticeship, the school and the enterprise been recognized as equivalent knowledge providers.

Quality, identity, and adequacy of trainers have been identified as crucial factors affecting success of the VET policy. In a variety of countries VET policy is based on trainers who have not been specialized in order to respond to its particular requirements. An entire “industry of seminars” has emerged due to the influx of ample EU funds to this direction. However, the mainstream of funds is pocketed by the educational institutions, since trainers constitute the least powerful link in the whole chain of the economic transaction. Most often VET trainers have not developed a specific vocational identity. Unstable working conditions have rendered them to view their occupation as temporary, often being ready to evade it as soon as a more promising vocational alternative appears. Low morale of trainers has an erosive impact on the respective of students. In some cases vocational training has been undertaken by working people having experience, but scant training qualifications; training is considered at best as an auxiliary “second job”, enabling them to increase their income (Patinotis, 2007). As reported previously, however, a distinction should be made between the mainstream of VET trainers who attempt to make a living and a small minority of well educated, highly specialized, and amply compensated trainers who are employed mostly by advanced enterprises and the multinationals.

Education and VET constitute the primary pillars that sustain the European socioeconomic and political entity. It is therefore understandable that Jean Monnet once said that if the EU project were to begin anew he would start from education. Mission and tasks of VET are applicable worldwide, as formulated below by Rosenfeld (1998):

- Education and training of new employees and employers to scaffold the knowledge base in companies.
- Supply of up-to-date information and training facilities for updating the knowledge and skills of the workforce.
- Facilitation of technology adaptation.
- Organization of active networks of enterprises to facilitate interactive learning processes.

Despite the community of VET aims, the Observe project has corroborated that member states have established very different patterns of education and VET systems, each one being the product of interaction between complex historical, cultural and socioeconomic processes; moreover, education and VET systems are continuously reshaped through an interminable negotiation between institutions pertaining to the domains of politics, syndicalism, economy, local government, religion etc. National VET systems are diverse – and they

should be so, even though convergence is desirable in certain aspects. This is in accordance with the strategic objective inaugurated at the Lisbon summit of 2000 with regard to education and training: “diverse systems – shared goals”. On the contrary, the eventuality of an all-encompassing pan-European VET system, as well as the introduction of a unique clear-cut set of inflexible evaluation criteria is likely to fail, at least in the near future, due to the variform socioeconomic needs that have to be addressed by the member states (Patiniotis, 2007: 63).

This means that a series of empirical research attempts is needed in order to explore the diversity of political reality of VET issues in the European regions and furthermore, to produce a comprehensive strategy in order to mitigate differences and to promote the formation of European economies based on knowledge, having fewer disparities than today. In any case it should be reported that in the recent years the member states themselves seem to have initiated a series of networks of cooperation, have contracted significant mutual agreements on common policy aims concerning VET, and have promoted the exchange of best practices in order to respond to common challenges. This is another point why scientific research has to be conducted on a continuous base in order to understand, and probably co-ordinate, the changing reality in VET issues.

Since political decisions at the European level have as a consequence a standardising effect in the stimulation of innovation in national projects, the EU funded projects dealing with VET in the member states have become more homogenous because the outcomes of research or pilot project activities are often viewed as political imperatives or benchmarks by many member states. This effect is furthermore supported by the ‘open method of co-ordination’ as agreed in 2000 (Lisbon summit) that prescribes new forms of working together in the European context.

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