
TAKING THE COPENHAGEN PROCESS APART

CRITICAL READINGS OF EUROPEAN VOCATIONAL
EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICY

PHD DISSERTATION

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PREFACE

By letting go, it all gets done. The world is won by those who let it go! But when you try and try, the world is then beyond the winning.

– Lao Tzu

For me, the writing of a PhD dissertation has been a rewarding, self-realising, challenging, long and at times messy and frustrating learning process. It has been a major step out of my comfort zone and a learning experience that cannot be captured completely in any learning outcome description – be it Danish or European.

One of the major challenges has been to let go: there is always an argument that could be strengthened, a formulation that could be more precise, a newly published article that could have provided valuable input, etc. The learning process is ongoing and never-ending. Fortunately, I had two very professional and supportive midwives who helped me deliver a dissertation that was long overdue. My warmest thanks go to my supervisor Susan Wright, who has been an excellent supervisor throughout the whole process and who in the final stage provided me with intensive feedback. I would also like to thank Emilie Jahnnie Sigård who helped me let go.

Many people have been supportive, challenging, and inspiring in the process: my co-supervisor Philipp Grollmann; all of my colleagues in the Unit for Guidance, Vocational and Professional Education; my fellow PhD colleagues; my project partners in various Leonardo da Vinci projects, and last but not least my students, from whom I learn so much.

And now, it's time to let go!

Pia Cort, June 2011

PROLOGUE

This dissertation found its origins in experiences I had many years before I even contemplated becoming a PhD student. Immediately after graduating from the Copenhagen Business School in 1996, I worked as a project assistant in the Danish Institute for the Educational Training of Vocational Teachers. My job was to carry out the Danish research in a European Union (EU) Framework 5 research project to develop common European classifiers for statistics on vocational education and training (VET). In retrospect, this was just one of many attempts to create transparency in VET, in this case through the development of common statistics. At the time, the project made little sense to me: why this interest in defining common classifiers and statistics across diverse systems and why not involve the national statistics offices in doing the work? Why use social scientists instead?

From this first project, I moved on to other EU projects as well as becoming the Danish representative in a number of networks organised by the EU agency, the Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP). Within these networks, I reported on national developments, provided information on new laws, carried out research, and co-ordinated project work in co-operation with representatives from other European countries.

The work was strangely detached from national policymaking, not to say national VET, as it unfolded at the vocational colleges. Interest directed toward CEDEFOP from the national level, be it the Ministry of Education, or the regional level such as vocational colleges, or even my own organisation was minimal. The material I assembled was included in newsletters, websites, and reports, but it was not clear who or which agencies were meant to take advantage of this vast array of information provided by representatives from all the Member States, associated countries and acceding Member States. The work seemed to me to take place in a space with its own internal logic and stakeholders. Over time, however, I grew socialised into the European educational space: its bureaucracy, its technocratic language, and its perpetual descriptive mode – producing numerous descriptions of the ever more rapidly changing Danish VET system.

In 1999, I participated in the evaluation of the Leonardo da Vinci Programme in Denmark, and the Danish research concluded – in very diplomatic terms – that ‘the impact [of the programme] has been strongest at the local level in vocational colleges and AMU Centres while at the system level impacts will only gradually be seen’ (Nielsen et al., 1999, p. 95).

In the report, we used the term ‘encapsulated knowledge’ to describe the fact that European projects had a life of their own, often a short one that extended no longer than the grant awarded to the project. At the same time, the people involved in these projects gained knowledge and formed networks and in this sense, we could describe how micro-level Europeanisation (although we did not use this term at the time) was slowly forming transnational practices amongst teachers, planners, consultants, etc. who were interested in mobility and internationalisation. However, at a national level, the impact of these many projects was not yet visible.

Four years later, I was involved in another evaluation of the EU programmes, the ‘Evaluation of the extent of achievement of the linguistic objectives of Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci’ and in terms of impact on national policy-making, the evaluation again concluded:

In general the impact in relation to these objectives [of the programmes] has been confined to project coordinators and direct beneficiaries of the actions and has not been embedded in any long term way within institutions or in policy developed at local level (Deloitte & Touche, 2003).

Immediately after my involvement in this evaluation, I went on maternity leave and when I came back in 2004, I noticed a change: suddenly, activities in the networks were being steered much more in accordance with European policy objectives.

I saw this, e.g. as the Danish co-ordinator in the CEDEFOP TT-network, which organised institutions involved in the training of Teachers and Trainers. In early 2002, in co-operation with the Finnish Board of Education, I had co-ordinated a project called ‘Professionalisation of VET teachers for the future’ – a theme, the relevance of which had been identified and promoted amongst the Nordic members of the network in a dialogue with the CEDEFOP and other network members. However, from 2004 onwards, the themes were chosen in a top-down co-operation between the CEDEFOP and the European Commission (Directorate General (DG) for Education and Culture). The themes chosen reflected the overall priorities of the Copenhagen Process, which

had been adopted by the Ministers of Education in 2002. In 2004, I was thus involved in a case study that related to the European policy objective of improving procedures for recognition and validation of nonformal and informal learning. It was difficult to reconcile this policy agenda with the Danish context and practices VET teacher training, and I felt that the project was somewhat out of sync with relevant themes in the Danish context, but I managed to squeeze my description into the European template.

Changes had not only taken place at European level: the Danish Ministry of Education also showed greater interest in the work that was going on at a European level. In 2005, I was asked to draw up a booklet describing the Danish strategy for quality assurance in VET. As an organising principle, I chose to take my point of departure in the Common Quality Assurance Model, which had been developed within a technical working group set up by the European Commission and that involved civil servants, experts, and representatives from CEDEFOP. The Ministry gladly accepted this approach and the booklet was disseminated widely within this technical working group, and was even updated for a second edition in 2008. According to the Ministry, it became a benchmark for the other countries involved in the working group. There was in other words quite a different interest in EU VET policy and especially in the national positioning within this sphere, than I had experienced before 2004.

Thus, in my mind, there was a before and after, and the turning point *seemed*¹ to be the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration in November 2002. The changes that I witnessed upon my return from maternity leave puzzled me: What was this all about? Why was there suddenly such an interest in EU policy objectives? Would it have any effects at a national level? This dissertation was born out my wonderment. It can be understood as an attempt to make sense of the Copenhagen Process - by taking it apart.

¹ My experiences could also reflect the fact that I had moved from a peripheral position to a more central position within the field; however, as this dissertation will show, the EU policy processes have changed the arena for vocational education and training policymaking, which is in fact the aim of policies: to change 'something' that 'someone' thinks need fixing.

INTRODUCTION

Europe is a project, a space of meaning, a state in process, and education is the core technology in which governance, ordering, and meaning can be constructed. Without education, there can be no Europe (Lawn, 2003).

In November 2002, an EU policy process was initiated in Copenhagen with the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration. The aim of the Copenhagen Declaration was to enhance co-operation within the policy field of VET in order to solve problems of transparency, quality, and recognition of competences across the EU.² This is basically what a policy is meant to do: to solve problems and bring about change.

New policies often receive media attention. In the newspapers, we read about policy makers trying and not least failing to fix numerous problems, be it drop-out rates amongst students, completion rates, or proficiency levels through new policies. In fact, the pace with which parliaments introduce new laws is rapidly increasing as new ‘problems’ are brought to public attention by media, researchers, and policy makers, thus creating a demand for policy solutions. However, in the case of the Copenhagen Process, it is a policy that has received little attention, at least in Denmark. As a fellow PhD student once remarked, ‘yours is not a very sexy research topic’.

Thus, whether due to its lack of sexiness or its novelty as a phenomenon, it is not a highly researched area. A review of the literature dealing with the Copenhagen Process shows that the existing research can be divided into three strands. In the first strand, a historical-institutional perspective is taken on the Copenhagen Process and its consequences for institutional change in national skills formation systems (VET). Here, the research interest focuses on change and identifying the independent variables leading to institutional change. Europeanisation is treated as

² The process is continued under the new strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training ("Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020")," 2009).

one of these independent variables, which may or may not exert influence on change in national skills formation systems (see e.g. Thelen & Busemeyer, 2008; Trampusch, 2009, 2010). The second strand I call ‘the German Critique’ of the Copenhagen Process. It analyses the consequences of the Copenhagen Process for the German dual system and takes a (predominantly) normative position defending the dual system against modularisation and atomisation. Modularisation is perceived as a factor undermining the concept of *Berufsbildung* in the German VET system, i.e. vocational education and training is a progressive learning process through which the learner develops not only ‘knowledge, skills, and competences’ but also an occupational identity (see e.g. Drexel, 2003; Grollmann, 2008; Rauner, 2004, 2008). Finally, there is the policy reporting that is commissioned by, e.g. the CEDEFOP or the EU Commission. Here, the research interest is to take stock of the Copenhagen Process and monitor Member States’ progress in regard to the overall EU policy objectives (see e.g. Cort & Rolls, 2008; *In the finishing straight: From Copenhagen to Bordeaux*, 2008; Leney, 2004; Tessaring & Wannan, 2004).

This dissertation closes a gap in the research as it analyses the Copenhagen Process from a critical perspective with a specific interest in the changes in the EU VET policy with discursive and institutional effects in a national context. The analysis is based on Bacchi’s ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (hereafter WPR) approach to policy analysis (Bacchi 1999, 2009) and in terms of the methodological perspective, this dissertation is the first to take a post-structuralist constructionist approach to the Copenhagen Process.

As stated in the prologue, the main research question was provoked by personal experiences from working in European projects and networks. It can be shorthanded as “What’s going on?” and academically paraphrased as

‘How can the European vocational education and training policy process – the Copenhagen Process – be understood from a WPR perspective?’

The research question is addressed in six articles that which take apart the Copenhagen Process and treat specific WPR questions and specific aspects of the Copenhagen Process: the construction of VET; changes in governmentality; the genealogy of the European Community (EC) VET policy; the technologies of Europeanisation; and finally the discursive and institutional effects of the

policy process in the Danish context. The focus is on EU policy, the problems it is supposed to fix, and the changes it is meant to bring about.

The main research question can also be taken apart, as other research questions are 'nested' within it (see section on 'Question 1: The WPR nesting doll' for a definition of Bacchi's concept of nesting).

The dissertation addresses the following research questions in the six articles:

- 'What is the problem represented to be in the Copenhagen Process?', 'How can the Copenhagen Process be contextualised?' and 'How did it come to be successfully adopted in 2002?' are addressed in the article: 'VET policy formation and discourse in the EU';
 - 'How can we understand the Copenhagen Process from a genealogical perspective?' and 'Is it change or continuity?' is addressed in 'The EC discourse on vocational training';
 - 'What is the problem represented to be in the policy of the EQF?', 'What is left unproblematic? How can this policy be critically assessed?' are addressed in the article: 'Stating the obvious';
 - 'What is the model for VET that is under construction in the Copenhagen Process?' and 'How does it differ from existing European VET models?' are addressed in the article: 'Transcending the Nation State';
 - 'What are the discursive and institutional effects on national VET policy?' and 'Will the Copenhagen Process induce institutional change?' are answered in the article 'Europeanisation and Policy Change in the Danish Vocational Education and Training System';
- 'How is the Copenhagen Process being disseminated?' and 'What changes in EU governance structures went in tandem with the adoption of the Copenhagen Process?' are addressed in 'The open method of coordination (OMC)'.

The WPR is the framing methodology, and the main method applied is an analysis of policy documents. I have built an archive of policy documents gathered from the EC and Denmark, from which are drawn case examples for studying the effects of the Copenhagen Process. In addition to policy documents, I also draw on empirical data gathered via interviews and observations.

Throughout my doctoral tenure, I have continued to work within European networks and projects and have had a unique opportunity to observe practice in EU networks and projects.

Whilst Bacchi's approach to policy analysis is used consistently throughout the dissertation, in addition I draw on different theoretical approaches and on research from different fields suited to the topic of each article: vocational education and training, policy science, EU integration studies, comparative politics, EU law, and neo-institutionalism. My doctorate is interdisciplinary and it links different theoretical perspectives that originate in different research theoretical positions. This is always a challenging endeavour, as each field has its own discourse in which certain arguments and methods are valid and others are not. However, I shall advocate for carefully combining theories from the different fields covered in this dissertation, because different theories open up different ways of seeing.

STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation is divided into two parts. In the first part, I tie the articles together methodologically, theoretically, and analytically. First, I set out the overall methodological approach and reflect on the position of the WPR methodology within the field of policy analysis. I discuss my findings from applying this methodology to the European VET policy, and from this base, I extend and refine the WPR methodology. Second, I reflect on the theoretical understanding of central concepts. Third, I reflect on my findings in each of the six articles and show the development of argument(s) across the articles. The aim of the first part is to ensure the transparency of my own positioning and assumptions and to reflect on the effect on my research results.

In the second part of the dissertation, six articles that have been published in anthologies and international journals are presented. Prefacing each article is an excerpt from my field notes as a kind of *telling example* offered to lend a sense of agency to the articles. One of the shortcomings of the Bacchi approach (and of discourse theory in general) is that agency to some extent disappears. Although discourse is not rigid in a structural sense, there is still a tendency to perceive agents as 'framed' by discourse. Furthermore, the telling examples provide insight into European policy

processes, as they unfold in networks, projects, and meetings (see also the section on methods in the WPR methodology).

PART ONE: REFLECTIONS

In short, critical policy analysis is less a methodology than a pair of critical glasses that researchers look through to reveal the values and politics of the process of policy-making (Walker, 2009, p. 89).

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS: BACCHI'S APPROACH: 'WHAT'S THE PROBLEM REPRESENTED TO BE?'

To shed light on the Copenhagen Process as a policy process, I use the 'What's the problem represented to be?' (WPR) methodology developed by the Australian researcher Carol Bacchi. The choice of this methodology was partly based on serendipity, for I was introduced to the approach at a PhD seminar during my first year of study. As is the case with serendipity, however, this critical approach to policy analysis fitted well with my analytical need for taking the EU policy process apart.

The WPR approach has been developed over a period of 10 years. The approach was developed as part of gender studies and presented in *Women, Policy, and Politics: The Construction of Policy Problems* from 1999. In this work, Bacchi situates the approach vis-à-vis other approaches to policy analysis and puts forward a model based on five questions for a policy analysis – or what I call “‘taking policies apart’”. These five questions formed the starting point for my work and for each question I devised specific question(s) for the Copenhagen Process to be addressed in a series of articles (see section on analytical reflections). In 2009, Bacchi published a textbook for undergraduates in which the WPR approach was further developed. In it, she divides the approach into six questions, isolating the question of the genealogy of the problem representation as a question per se.

Central to the WPR approach is a basic assumption that policies are meant to ‘fix’ things (Bacchi, 2009, p. ix). In recent years, this assumption has been strengthened by the discourse on ‘evidence-

based' policy in which scientific knowledge and policy are intertwined, and science adds legitimacy to a given policy as being 'evidence-based' and therefore the 'right' policy to introduce, neutralising the *politics* of policy proposals. The WPR approach calls attention to the fact that policy – even if evidence-based – is not neutral. Policy is meant to bring about change that intervenes in the social fabric of society. The aim of the WPR approach is to reveal processes of governing. In the case of the Copenhagen Process, it is embedded in a discourse of 'evidence-based policy' and the entire process is based on an uneasy mix of 'voluntary' participation by Member States and fixed milestones for attaining common objectives and introducing specific policy tools. Processes of governing are made extremely subtle in the Copenhagen Process; thus, my aim is to reveal that governing is nevertheless taking place.

POSITIONING BACCHI'S APPROACH – AND MYSELF

A central question in research is the question of positioning: how can a researcher and her work be positioned vis-à-vis previous and existing research?³ Methodologically, I inscribe myself within the field of policy analysis and its contemporary critical positions (such as Bacchi, 1999; Ball, 1993; Codd, 1988; Gewirtz & Ball, 2000; Howarth & Torfing, 2005; Lather, 2004).⁴ I also draw on a specific scientific discourse, which itself is based on a number of assumptions about the role of research in policy analysis. In this tradition, the role of research is to 'unpack the politics of policies as they relate to the social context' (Walker, 2009, p. 92), i.e. to reveal the underlying assumptions, values, and, not least, effects. Underlying the research is a value of equality and how to promote equality in society: 'A WPR agenda has an explicitly normative agenda. It presumes that some problem representations benefit the members of some groups at the expense of others. It also takes the side of those who are harmed' (Bacchi, 2009, p. 44).

As a researcher, I am not outside of the 'knowledge-power nexus' (Bacchi, 2009, p. 249) but rather am contributing to the nexus. To provide an example, I was contacted by a former colleague, who

³ This positioning may be counterproductive, as it creates division instead of co-operation between different epistemic communities. Instead of engaging in dialogue and seeing how different theories and methodologies could fruitfully expand our understanding of a specific research area, it becomes a question of proving oneself. This standpoint reflects my own eclectic positioning and research values.

⁴ Please note that the articles on the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) include reviews of the research topics.

now works in the European Training Foundation (ETF), to present my findings from the critical analysis of the EQF. In such ways, research knowledge on EU policies returns to an organisation within the EU polity.

But how can critical policy analysis be positioned historically and which positions precede it? A brief genealogy of policy analysis shows how the discipline has developed from a rationalistic approach to policy analysis to contemporary more diverse approaches; among these Bacchi's WPR approach. It also informs us of the U.S. origins of policy analysis as a field. According to Fischer (2003), only a few European countries have developed traditions for policy analysis, however, in the last decades of the 20th century, post-structural, social-constructionist approaches have evolved on the basis of European theoretical contributions (see next section). Before moving into a discussion of my own positioning, I shall briefly outline the genealogy of policy analysis.

A GENEALOGY OF POLICY ANALYSIS

According to Erik Albæk, policy analysis as a specific branch of political science developed primarily in the United States during the 1950s as a response to societal needs for policy planning. As Albæk writes: 'There was a belief in the future and an almost euphoric belief in an ideology-free and technocratic government of society. There existed in society the best of intentions to alleviate poverty, but there was a lack of knowledge concerning which policies would be most appropriate to do so' [own translation] (2009, p. 1038).

Up until then, modern political science had focused on 'polity' and 'politics' (Ibid, p. 1035). In the 1950s, policy scientists started debating how policy could and should be analysed. In 1951, one of the founding fathers of policy analysis, Lasswell, puts forward three demands that should be made of policy analysis: it should be 1) problem-oriented, 2) cross-disciplinary and 3) explicitly normative. Despite this creed, policy analysis approaches developed during the 1950s were rationalistic and rested on a positivist foundation and for some time, the demand of normativity was largely ignored in policy analysis (Ibid, p. 1036; see also Bacchi, 2009; Dery, 1984; Stone; 1988). Policy analysis based on a rationalistic approach would not pay attention to 'problems' as being politically construed. Problems were objectively definable and 'out there' (Dery, 1984, p. xi).

Instead, in the rationalistic strand, the focus would be on the analysis of policy as a rational decision-making process in which the optimal solution could be identified from a cost-benefit perspective: maximising benefits and minimising cost. All alternative solutions could be described and assessed. The policy analyst was to be an advising figure in the rational identification of solutions to societal problems. This strand was based on the post-World War II Keynesian consensus on the state's intervening at the macro-economic level to control fluctuations in order to secure full employment and low inflation. Fischer mentions the 'War on Poverty' policy initiated by U.S. President Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s as an example. In this programme, policy researchers came to play an important role in devising the policy programmes that would solve the problems 'identified in health care, urban renewal, housing, education, legal assistance, social welfare and hunger' (Fischer, 2003, p. 6). The policy was based on an optimistic belief in the benefits that would accrue to society from both advances in science and the implementation of progressive policies.

During the 1960s, the post-war consensus was disturbed and such disturbances were reflected in the development of policy analysis as a research field. Analysts started focusing on conflicts of interest or rather the political dimension of policy. A central theme became power and the democratic representation of interest in the state.⁵ In this approach, the political rational approach, the focus is on analysing how interest is represented in the state apparatus and especially which interests are represented (Bacchi, 1999, p. 24). The approach is based on a participatory ideal and promotes a belief in democratic participation by all groups in society. The approach rests on a belief in 'political man' or the active citizen. Expert knowledge is less important than political participation. In this approach, the belief in 'economic man' is undermined, man has limited

⁵ In a traditional view (see e.g. Dahl, 1961), power is discussed as the power of A over B and the different means through which A gains power over B. The focus is on individual actors and the ways in which A can make B do something that is not in the interest of B. However, this perspective on power as a direct, rational process has been challenged and during the 1960s and 1970s, a number of other perspectives on power arose: an indirect dimension in which A is able to filter out problems from ever making it to the policy agenda or filter away a policy from ever being implemented (see e.g. Bachrach & Baratz, 1963); a consciousness controlling dimension in which A is able to control the thoughts and desires of B. This view is close to the Marxist concepts of false consciousness and objective interests reflecting the fact that this third dimension was introduced in the 1970s (Lukes, 1974); and a structural dimension in which both A and B are part of structures that facilitate the interests of A over the interests of B but not as a conscious act on the part of A but as part of norms, values, routines and traditions (Christensen & Jensen, 1986).

rationality, and it is not possible to identify all alternative solutions and their implications, but it is possible to consider the better solution based on the idea of the Pareto criterion, which means that 'at least one person is made better off, and no one is made worse off by the introduction of a specific policy (Dery, 1984, p. 33).

The critical strand of policy analysis grew out of the U.S. civil rights movements and the Vietnam War. Instead of a focus on problem-solving, attention shifted to policy evaluation and 'the normative, ethical and qualitative dimensions of policy-making' (Fischer, 2003). In the U.S. version, the focus was – as stated above – on pluralism and how different interests (power elites) were represented in the state (see, e.g. Lindblom, 1968), whereas the European version was more Marxist-inspired and focused on the role of class interests in society and how these interests were reflected in national policies (see e.g. Arnfred, Kjellberg & Malmgren, 1979). In my own theoretical luggage from the 1980s, I carry the work of the Greek theorist Nicos Poulantzas (1973), who provided a more nuanced theory on the relationship between the state and class interests under capitalism. One problem was that the Marxist analyses tended to become rather mechanistic, and since the early 1980s, the move has been towards post-structuralist and social-constructionist positions in critical policy analysis, not least because the Marxist strand was tied up with a political project that failed and fell in 1989.

The shift to the post-structuralist and social-constructionist positions to some degree has implied a shift in focus from the macro- to the micro-level, away from a concern with material conditions and towards the role of discourse and subjectivity. Such positions develop out of critical theory with the twist that *all* ideological formations need to be deconstructed (Mouritzen, 2009, p. 666) and are part of the *discursive turn*. Behind this turn was an increased awareness of the interweaving of linguistic and societal changes. Changes in the world lead to the formation of new concepts, and changes in language lead to new ways of organising social life and create changes in subject positions. Globalisation questions the possibility of integrating institutions and individuals within a (national) social order that is rooted in a specific rationality, a fixed norm, and a value system. Rationality, norms, and values are no longer regarded as fixed reference points but instead are constantly renegotiated in a multitude of overlapping discourses. In post-structuralist approaches, the focus is on the relationship between knowledge and power and how governance occurs via

hegemonic discourses that naturalise certain ways of thinking. The French philosopher Foucault is one of the main sources of inspiration, but today Derrida, Zizek, and Laclau and Mouffe are central in the field as well.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, another strand of policy analysis, public choice, developed as a part of the *neoliberal turn* and Ronald Reagan's and Margaret Thatcher's attempts to roll back the 'nanny state' (Mouritzen, 2009, p. 656). In this strand, analysts focus on how policy may lead to distorted interventions in the social and put forward policy failure as an equivalent to market failure. Dery offers an example of this shift of focus in policy analysis:

Once upon a time, the problem of budgeting had something to do with maintaining full employment. Now the subject is formulated by [a] discussion of 'structural' deficit. By 'structural' is meant self-generating. Unlike the term it has replaced – the Keynesian full-employment budget – calling the deficit structural suggests that government is out of, instead in, control. From being the solution, government becomes the problem (Dery, 1984, p. vii) .

In public choice, the aim is to rationalise policy processes by introducing market competition into the state. It draws on the concept of economic man and how the state is meant to introduce incentive structures through which economic man can pursue his self-interests. Equivalent to the argument in economic theory, this will lead to a natural equilibrium and to an efficient state. The public choice approach is closely connected to the neoclassical economic theory and its firm belief in the market (see also the section on the concept of neoliberalism).

WPR can be positioned as a post-structuralist, social-constructionist contribution to policy analysis. Its aim is to establish a counterbalance to the rationalistic policy approaches that still tend to dominate the field, at least politically, through the ideas of 'evidence-based policy' and 'what works'. Bacchi's point of departure for analysis is not the contents of the policy or the policy-making process or the outcome of the policy but rather the problem representations in a policy, i.e. the construction of problems, the rationality and assumptions underpinning this construction, the genealogy of the construction, etc.

This genealogy could give the impression that the WPR approach is a rupture with previous policy analysis approaches. However, the focus on 'problems', and if not 'problem representations', then 'problem definitions' has its predecessors. Dery wrote about 'problem definition in policy analysis' in 1984 and examined the framing character of 'problem definitions'. In 1988, Stone developed a critique of rationalistic policy analysis similar to Bacchi's. Stone unpacked the values underlying policies and argued that categories are constructed as part of political struggle (Stone, 1988). One of the central differences between Dery and Stone and Bacchi is that Dery and Stone focus on the macro-level, whereas Bacchi focuses more on the micro-level, i.e. the impact on 'individuals lives' and the 'subjectification processes within current modes of governance that produce us as particular kinds of subjects' (Bacchi, 2009, p. 267). In the work of Stone and Dery, the heritage from the political rational approach lingers on, reflecting the time and the place of their work, which was written in the 1980s. Dery, e.g., stresses the role of values such as justice, freedom, and human life in a modern democracy.

In line with the other strands of policy analysis, the WPR reflects its historical context in which globalisation has led to an increased awareness of (national) culture as a construct and a hollowing out of the nation state due to the increased importance of transnational organisations and not least the free flow of capital, goods, and services and, in the EU, a push for the free flow of labour.

The genealogy of policy analysis shows how the problem representations of the various approaches change in a dialectical relationship to societal changes. In the 1950s, policy analysis was used to identify solutions in response to societal demands for applied research in support of policy-making. In the 1960s, the problem was represented to be one of democratic participation and a representation of special interests. This problem representation continued into the 1970s during which time class and class struggle from a Marxist critical perspective became dominant. The 1970s were also a time when public choice developed with a focus on the state as being the problem and market-like incentive structures emerged as the solution. In the 2000s, there seems to be a renewed call for applied research, as evidence-based policy has become a global mantra. This is paradoxical, as research over time has shown the inherent normativity of policy analysis. Policy analysis can be cloaked as 'objectivist', but is based on theories about human nature, the social, the role of knowledge, etc.

Today, there is a multitude of strands within policy analysis, making it difficult to make a clear-cut division amongst them, as the edges have become more blurred. However, the public choice strand of policy analysis can be said to be politically influential, for as it seemingly provides answers, solutions, and evidence:

It does so by assigning numbers to decision-making criteria and produces what appear to be definitive answers to political questions. Conforming to the bureaucratic imperative of impersonality and value-neutrality, it seeks to reduce emotional and conflict-ridden political questions by translating them into scientific and technical answers (Fischer, 2003, p. 14).

Post-structuralist, social constructionist researchers, on the other hand, seek to reveal that what seems neutral, objective and true on the surface is in fact based on deep-seated presuppositions. This strand of research does not offer answers, solutions, or evidence but instead a deconstruction of policies in order to show their contingency. In this strand, there is no privileged position outside discourses. Although, public choice claims to be objectivist, it is interesting to note that underlying this strand of analysis is the value of 'individual freedom' and a perception of human nature as being rational and self-interested, whereas critical analysis is based on the value of 'equality' and a perception of human nature as being complex and socially construed. Notwithstanding the danger of oversimplifying, we can see a rightish-leftish divide between the strands.

By using the WPR methodology, I have positioned myself within the post-structuralist, social-constructionist strand of policy analysis. This is the 'pair of critical glasses' through which I investigate the Copenhagen Process as a policy process. I could have chosen other 'glasses', e.g. more rationalistic approaches to investigate other aspects of the Copenhagen Process. Having used the WPR methodology, however, it is difficult to apply other theories, as the WPR develops into a kind of critical 'common-sense' through which not only policies but also theories are deconstructed in order to gain an understanding of its underlying assumptions and values. The WPR methodology provides a critical incision into the policy process and shows how the Copenhagen Process works as a framing policy reconfiguring VET within a lifelong learning perspective and with the aim of establishing the free movement of labour throughout Europe

THE WPR METHODOLOGY

The WPR methodology rests on six questions (five in the 1999 version) that can be used in their entirety to analyse problem representations in a specific policy:

1. What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated, and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?(Bacchi, 2009, p. xii)

It is possible to work with just a couple of the WPR questions as an analysis based on all of the six questions can be quite wide ranging. In the six articles included in this dissertation, only two articles are based on all six questions and are found in the articles, 'VET policy formation and discourse in the EU' and 'Stating the obvious'.

The WPR methodology looks pretty straightforward: It consists of a list of questions that the researcher which you have to go through and then you have provided an analysis of a policy. However, having taught the methodology to both and master students, I have realised that the WPR requires a profound knowledge of the policy area that is being analysed, in my case VET.

In the following, I shall reflect on each of the six questions in the WPR and show how these can be further developed and clarified. The aim is twofold: on the one hand, I shall account for my use of the WPR in this dissertation, and on the other hand, I shall show the strengths and weaknesses of the approach.

QUESTION 1: THE WPR NESTING DOLL

The first question in the WPR, 'What's the problem represented to be?' applied in a specific policy is, in a sense, straightforward. The aim is to identify problem representations. However, both my own work and the work of my students have shown that starting to identify problem

representations in a specific policy (often with a point of departure in one or more central policy texts) is like opening up a babushka doll: there is not one problem representation but many, and analysing one problem representation leads to other problem representations, as these are 'nested'⁶ within each other.

Bacchi promotes the concept of 'nesting', the strength of which is that it shows the interconnectedness of policies and contributes to making the 'cross-border' movement that she advocates (Bacchi, 2009, p. 269).⁷ However, analytically, it may lead into a never-ending spiral of analysing different problem representations across different policy fields. In my analysis, the first article, 'VET policy formation and discourse in the EU: A mobile work force for a European labour market?' led me into the field of labour market studies and EU law. It showed the relations between education policy and labour market policy and how the verdicts from the European Court of Justice are nested within the problem representation of the Copenhagen Process. These verdicts concern the rights of unions to block foreign companies that refuse to sign the collective agreement and pay their workers the wages that have been negotiated by the social partners within the frames of the national labour market. This aspect is central for understanding the construction of VET in the EU; however, I chose not to pursue this problem representation any further, as it would have taken me into another field of study.

In terms of traditional demands on reliability, i.e. another researcher should be able to repeat my research, the methodology opens up to many different research processes. As Bacchi writes: '[this is] not to suggest that my analysis is in any sense comprehensive or correct. You may produce a very different analysis of the same or related material' (Ibid, p. 21).

Regarding the research done within this dissertation, the claim is not for reliability, understood as repeatability of my research, as I enter the field with specific prior knowledge and internal positioning. During my research, I remain in a double inside-outside position within the field, still acting as 'expert' in various networks and researching the processes of which I am part. However,

⁶ The concept of nesting refers to the fact that problem representations are embedded one within the other. Therefore it is required to repeatedly ask the questions throughout the analysis (Bacchi, 2009, p. 21).

⁷ In the WPR methodology, an explicit aim is to challenge policy 'specialisms' in order to promote new ways of thinking about policy (Bacchi, 2009, p. 267). I would add that researchers should make the same cross-border move across different academic disciplines in order to open up to new ways of 'seeing'.

an attempt to encounter traditional criticism of validity and reliability in qualitative research is to make transparent any prior assumptions and positioning within the field. This is what I attempt to do in this first section of the dissertation. Still, it remains that the facts I have found in the field do not speak for themselves but are impregnated with my assumptions and prior experience (Silverman, 2004).

Normally, the issue of transparency arises when 'defending' qualitative research; however, I also would question the validity of concepts derived from quantitative research that are based on assumptions of objectivity, a reality independent of both our actions and perceptions and that we can study from a detached perspective. The concepts of validity and reliability are not consistent with the WPR methodology, and it feels almost like a positivist violation to justify qualitative research in terms of its validity and reliability. Instead, we ought to look at the consistency of the argument and even deconstruct it from a WPR perspective to reveal its inconsistencies. As Lather writes:

Absolute knowledge was never possible, anyway. Archimedean standpoints have always been shaped in the crucible of the power-knowledge nexus. We just thought otherwise, believing in gods and kings and, more recently, the 'objectivity' of scientists ((Lather, 1990, p. 322).

QUESTION 2: POLICY=DISCOURSE?

Having identified problem representations, the second question looks at the presuppositions underlying these problem representations. This question opens the topic for a discourse analysis of the problem representations. This is achieved through an analysis of the assumptions, underlying ideas of casual relations, binaries, key concepts, and categories.

In the WPR approach, discourse and policy are closely interwoven, and in the application of the approach, it is sometimes difficult to make the distinction between the two concepts. It should be easy to tease them out, since policy traditionally is defined as a process, programme, or proposal for change, whereas discourse is defined in WPR as 'socially produced forms of knowledge that set limits upon what it is possible to think, write, or speak about a given social object or practice'

(Bacchi, 2009, p. 35). However, as the WPR focuses on how we are governed through policies as problematisations, we find a tendency for the two concepts of discourse and policy to collapse into one, which can be problematic analytically. Diez (2001) who explores the use of discourse theory in European Integration Studies calls for a discussion of the relationship between discourse and policy. He asks whether policy is an outcome or a part of discourse.

Bacchi defines policy-as-discourse in the article by the same name (Bacchi, 2000) and defines policy as a 'discursive activity' that frames the actors within the area and limits 'what can be talked about' (Bacchi, 2000, p. 49). This is close to Ball's conceptualisation of 'policy-as-discourse', as he states that 'we do not speak a discourse – it speaks us' and describes the effect of a policy as 'changing the possibilities we have for thinking 'otherwise' (Ball, 1993, p. 14). There are two implications of this conceptualisation: first, discourse becomes a restraining structure that offers little room for contestation, and second, policy can be analysed as a discourse in its own right. However, in the analysis of policy-as-discourse, other societal and often *conflicting* discourses can be identified. In other words, there is room for contestation, and policy cannot simply equal discourse.

The problem may be that 'discourse' is a rather fuzzy concept and is used within many different fields of research (see also section entitled 'What is a discourse?'). Discourse is a 'floating signifier', and Bacchi even warns against a search for a fixed definition of discourse as 'the whole idea of discourse is that definitions play an important part in delineating knowledge. When I look at my own usage of the concept of 'discourse', I describe policy-as-discourse and incorporate Bacchi's and Ball's conceptualisations. However, this choice is not without its problems, and it has led me to consider the consequences of this usage.

As mentioned above, one consequence is that in the WPR methodology, the concepts of policy and discourse start collapsing into each other. In this respect, I think a need exists to make explicit that 'discourse' is both an analytical concept and a perspective aiming at uncovering a policy. 'Policy' then becomes more clearly the object of study, a political intervention having effects, both discursive and nondiscursive. The difficulty lies in keeping the concepts apart. As Stone writes:

Policy is centrally about classification and differentiation, about how we do and should categorize in a world where no categories are given (Stone, 1988, p. 308).

In this way, policy establishes what can be said by whom and with which authority. Moreover, another important point is that policies have material effects as well, and the collapse of policy and discourse may blind us to these effects. The category of 'lived life' in the WPR approach is an important category for the understanding of the material effects of a policy, although it is a category that is somewhat underdeveloped within the approach or perhaps implicitly taken for granted from Bacchi's gender perspective (see section entitled Question 5: The need for linking).

This teasing out of the concepts of policy and discourse is important, as discourse analysis otherwise may tend to become an immaterial 'bobble'. I detect this tendency in some of my articles and it has led to a subsequent 'material turn' in my theoretical interests (see section entitled The concept of neoliberalism).

QUESTION 3: GENEALOGY

The third question, 'how has this representation of the "problem" come about?' calls for a genealogy of the problem representation in question. As Bacchi writes, this requires detailed archival work during which the problem representation, the policy, a concept or categorical forms are traced in policy documents:

A note on methodology needs to be made here. Both genealogical and cross-cultural studies of this kind recommended here require long detailed records of decision-making together with the identification of specific institutional developments that support particular ways of seeing [problematisation] (Bacchi, 2009, p. 44).

In terms of methodology, this raises two questions: when is the archive extensive enough and what should be the timeframe for the analysis? As to the first question, the answer is 'never', as the archive can always be expanded. This results from three factors: intertextuality, nesting, and information overload. In this dissertation, the criteria for selecting the documents have been their 'centrality' in the Copenhagen Process. I have started from the central documents and then examined the references to other documents (intertextuality) trying to follow these links until I reach the blurred edges between fields. The problem concerning VET policy is that it is interdisciplinary and crosses education policy, labour market policy, and employment policy at a first level. At a second level, it also crosses into the fields of policy – social, industrial, and

economic (nesting). In principle, all policy texts should be read in order to establish the discourse, its borders, and its interaction with other discourses; however, this would be impossible due to the vast amount of documents (information overload). I have therefore primarily studied policy texts addressing directly VET, and only familiarized myself with related documents.

As to which historical period to study, periodisation is a construct on the part of the researcher and reflects the research question and interest. In the article 'The EU discourse on vocational training: How a "common vocational training policy" turned into a lifelong learning strategy', I chose to start with the European Coal and Steel Community (i.e. the period from 1951 to 1957), because vocational training was included as a policy area, and discourses and practices had been already established during this period. Regarding data collection in this dissertation, I stopped collecting in spring 2010. Otherwise, the study has tended to be a 'moving target' with the inclusion of new resolutions, communiqués, and policy reports on an ongoing basis (Kallestrup, 2005).

QUESTION 4: INNOVATIVE OR SPECULATIVE?

The fourth question of what is left unproblematic in a policy deals with what is 'unstated' in policies, and when teaching the WPR methodology to students they often react to this question, asking how to analyse and not least confine alternative ways of thinking the 'problem'. Question 4 deals with what remains as 'unspoken' or unproblematic in a given problem representation. One way is to work with the dichotomies from question 2, and from this perspective analyse what are the privileged and unprivileged signs. However, the question also opens up for what can be characterised as either innovative or speculative analysis. It aims at stretching our abilities to think otherwise. At this stage, we encounter the problem of being embedded in discourse ourselves and being unable to move beyond discourse. As a critical researcher, the danger is that in our eagerness to reveal the globalising neoliberal discourse, we become blind to the Marxist/humanist-inspired critical discourse of which we are a part.

QUESTION 5: THE NEED FOR LINKING

Question 5 deals with the effects of a specific problem representation and looks into its discursive and subjectification effects. Although Bacchi primarily stays at the level of policy analysis, and her main method is to analyse policy texts as a way of coming to terms with the meaning-making that occurs in policy debates and policy development, she also includes the effects of a given policy in terms of 'lived life'. Coming from a background in gender studies, Bacchi's primary aim has been to focus on the effects of problem representations on the micro-level. However, in my dissertation, I diverge and examine the effects of problem representations in the Copenhagen Process less in terms of how the individual is discursively positioned within the policy and more in terms of how VET as a societal institution is reconfigured, i.e. a macro-level perspective. I therefore propose that an additional category of effects is added to the WPR methodology: *institutional effects*. These effects can be explored by linking the WPR approach with neo-institutional theory. In this linking, it is important to recognise that the ontology and epistemology of this theoretical strand differ from the post-structuralist foundation of the WPR. Running through the different branches of neo-institutional theory is a general interest in establishing both causality and theories that can explain institutional change. However, there is a common terrain, as Bacchi is interested in understanding the effects of specific problem representations and underlying this interest in effect is an interest in the ways a specific problem representation *changes* the space of possibility for the various actors through its discursive framing.

Neo-institutionalism covers four branches: rational choice, historical institutionalism, sociological institutionalism, and discursive institutionalism each of which has different epistemological and ontological foundations (Schmidt, 2010). In the article, 'Transcending the nation state', which is the first article to explore the possible institutional effects of the Copenhagen Process, I link to discursive institutionalism. In order to argue for this linking, I shall briefly describe the different positions within discursive institutionalism.

One branch is represented by Smith and Radaelli, who write:

Our notion of discourse differs from the more macro-political concept of discourse used by Foucault – a concept more suitable to describe entire social institutions, such as education, family, and medicine. Simply put, we accept that reality is socially and discursively constructed but do not engage with the critical orientation of some discourse analysis tradition[s]. We do not say anything about power abuse, disciplinary discourses, privileges hidden in dominant discourse, and about how some actors are discursively relegated outside the perimeter of decision-making activity (Schmidt & Radaelli, 2005, p. 164).

In the Radaelli and Smith variation of discursive institutionalism, discourse becomes a ‘variable’ that can be isolated and tested in terms of its explanatory power in relation to a specific phenomenon (dependent variable). They interpret the concept of discourse as a more rational approach wherein the key question is ‘when does [discourse] exert a *causal* influence on policy change, say by redefining interests as opposed to merely reflecting them’ (Radaelli & Schmidt, 2005, p. 2). I tend to see the concept of discourse in the Radaelli and Smith perspective mainly as ‘rhetorical’ or ‘ideational’, especially in their discussion about the soundness of a discourse and questioning whether the ‘solutions to the problems it identifies [are] workable’. In other words, they take for granted that problems can be objectively identified and a need for change can be established (Radaelli & Schmidt, 2005, p. 4). Thus, the WPR does not settle easily within a Radaelli and Schmidt perspective.

However, another position within discursive institutionalism is held by Andersen, Kjær, and Pedersen, who are closer to Bacchi’s concept of discourse. The range of questions developed by Bacchi does not differ much from the four discursive stages of Pedersen’s model of discourse formation. He defines the emergence and consolidation of a discourse through the following stages:

- at the emerging stage, the discourse consists of a set of ideals: what is good/bad? What is right/wrong? In any discourse, there is a basic rationality value. This stage corresponds to Bacchi’s question 2 wherein the aim is to uncover the binaries and dichotomies in a specific policy;

- at the second stage, the discourse establishes itself through the formation of core conceptions and a conceptual framing that is a prerequisite for interpreting problems and establishing solutions;
- at the third stage, validity claims are established: within any discourse there are claims as to what is perceived as a valid argument. These validity claims vary over time and are an immanent aspect of a discourse. The question of change is also intradiscursive, as concepts are 'empty containers' and meaning is given only through a complex meaning system;
- at the fourth stage, we find the figure of a problem: how problems and their solutions are discursively defined. This should be compared to Bacchi's problem representation.⁸

Whereas Pedersen describes the genesis of a discourse and its institutionalisation, Bacchi's methodology is aimed at deconstructing the discourse. In terms of ontological and epistemological premises, the WPR fits nicely with this conceptualisation of discursive institutionalism and from a purist point of view, I stay on 'safe ground' by not mixing theoretical positions.

However, in the second article on institutional effects, 'Europeanisation of the Danish vocational education and training system', I needed to link to a realist perspective and examine how the policy of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) were 'represented differently by different actors and interests' (Ball, 1993, p. 11). I therefore link to historical institutionalism and analyse the reactions of the various actors in response to the implementation of a qualifications framework and the ways these conflicts can be understood within the context of the Danish VET system. I justify this linking based on the WPR method's concept of 'lived life' and Ball's understanding of policy as text and as discourse.

In my opinion, Bacchi opens a 'window of opportunity' (Walker, 2009) to make the cross-over into the material effects of policy through her fifth question on 'lived life'. To understand lived-life effects, it is necessary to study how a policy is transformed in a specific context and look into the contestations and struggles between different interests in this context. Hereby, a move is made

⁸ This four-stage model was presented at a PhD course in neo-institutionalism in May 2007. In his latest book, the model is further developed by distinguishing between Ideas, Discourse, Institution, Organisation, and Transformation (the IDIOT-model), which is to show the important role of ideas as a trigger for processes of institutional change (Pedersen, 2010).

from what Ball calls 'policy as discourse', i.e. how discourse comprises a frame that 'constrains the possibilities and probabilities of interpretation and enactment' to 'policy as text', i.e. the 'real struggles over the interpretation and enactment of policies' (Ball, 1993, p. 15).

Bacchi does not clarify how to research lived-life effects, neither in terms of methods nor in terms of theory. Yet I agree with Ball when he states that 'effects' of policy must move beyond the analysis of policy documents and study the conflict and struggles between interests within the context (Ball, 1993, p. 13). The question about lived-life effects, in my opinion, makes possible the cross-over to a more realistic perspective in which we study how discourses 'materialise', i.e. are transformed into bodily knowledge and practices (at the individual level) or institutional change and practices (at the societal level).

I make the cross-over to historical institutionalism as it examines the interests that are linked to an institution, in this case VET. The main aim of historical institutionalism is to explain how phases of political change – such as the Copenhagen Process – may affect institutions and lead to institutional change. A central concept is the concept of 'path dependency', which is used to explain the relative stability of institutions. As such, historical institutionalism tends to be historically deterministic (Schmidt, 2010). The linking of the WPR and historical institutionalism is, in a sense, the bridging of change and continuity. Whereas the WPR can show how policy-as-discourse changes and has effects either of a discursive nature or on 'lived life', historical institutionalism can show how an institution such as VET can absorb such discursive changes and still remain relatively stable, due to the interests linked to in the institution.

QUESTION 6: INVISIBILITY OF POLICY

The sixth question relates to the production, dissemination, and defence of a specific problem representation and how this is or could be questioned, disrupted, and replaced. Bacchi draws attention to the role of the media in the co-constitution of a specific problem representation. In the case of the Copenhagen Process, the media are largely absent in the dissemination of this policy. The media – at least in Denmark – have not taken up this policy process. The EU is perceived to be too removed from the lives of Danish citizens, as it operates to some extent politically on a meta-

level. Therefore, the policy is largely invisible, although it does have direct effects on VET in Denmark through the re-configuration of VET as a societal institution and the introduction of an NQF that aims to emulate the EQF.

The Copenhagen Process is an elitist discourse that is disseminated and challenged through policy networks, which are not open to public scrutiny. This adds the aspect to Bacchi's question that the production and dissemination of a policy may be opaque and take place in closed communities. In terms of method, the analysis of policy documents and governance structures may give an idea of these processes, but my interviews with key actors and access to the networks provided a better insight into the last question of her methodology. In short, analysis of policy documents may bring some understanding, but other supplementary methods may be necessary to deal fully with Bacchi's six questions.

METHODS IN THE WPR METHODOLOGY

The WPR approach takes its point of departure in the analysis of problem representations in policy documents. However, as stated in the previous section, when using the methodology, we must add methods other than an analysis of policy documents, especially in order to analyse the effects of the problem representations. Post-structural analysis in general promotes methodological pluralism and textual analysis is productively supported by ethnographical methods (observations) and interviews. These are also the methods that I have used in this dissertation.

Whereas I will generally refer to the individual articles for a discussion of the methodology applied, I must make a note concerning the observations that I have carried out. In my dissertation, I have chosen to include a number of what I term *telling examples*. These events aim at bringing people into an account that is otherwise told at an abstract level. The telling examples provide insight into how people move within the EU policy processes and into the counter-discourses that arise in various settings. That has been the focal point for my observations: to understand EU policy processes at the micro-level.

My basis for observation has been the following:

- network member in an EU network and consequently participate in meetings and preparation of follow-up reports;
- participation in three lifelong learning projects;
- participation in two CEDEFOP study visits;
- participation in the Helsinki biannual stock-taking conference of the Copenhagen Process.

According to Silverman, an important aspect of observational work is to consider the ethical aspect of gaining or not gaining the informed consent of those being observed (Silverman, 2004, p.47). In this respect, I must note that my observations have not always been overt, but covert due to my not entering the field as a researcher on EU policy processes but as a VET expert. I am aware that this is ethically problematic, but have nevertheless chosen to include a telling example on EU networking, as it provides an insight into rarely described processes. To counter the ethical problem, the example is based on my observations from several meetings in a network that is kept anonymous. All other examples are also made anonymous although I, in the case of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) Trust project, have informed all participants that I enter with a double position: as a researcher of EU policy processes and as an expert on VET. All examples are my construction of the events based on written field notes.

THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS: KEY CONCEPTS

We can see social theory as a sort of kaleidoscope – by shifting theoretical perspective the world under investigation also changes shape (Martin O'Brien (1993: 10-11) in Silverman, 2004).

Silverman describes theory as an arrangement of 'a set of concepts used to define and/or explain some phenomenon' (Silverman, 2004, p. 3). Applying the WPR methodology, I have already been 'framed', as some of the concepts are given within this methodology (problem representation, discourse, governmentality). Other concepts have arisen from the analysis. When I read my

articles, there are a number of concepts I apply but with which I do not really grapple, although they are central to my argument. These are:

- Institution and not least the relationship between discourse and institution(al change);
- Europeanisation, which I do touch upon but that needs further clarification on the basis of the research results; and
- Neoliberalism, which becomes an almost explanatory factor in the dissertation: there are no ills in this world that cannot be related to the epidemic spread of neoliberal policies (to use the concept of Levin, 1998).

Before turning to the concepts above, I shall, however, briefly return to the concept of discourse in order to establish its underlying epistemological and ontological basis and investigate whether this adds to an understanding of the collapse of categories discussed in the section entitled Question 2: Policy=discourse? I shall start with a bear.

WHAT IS A DISCOURSE?

‘Christopher Robin!’

‘Yes?’

‘Have you an umbrella in your house?’

‘I think so’.

‘I wish you would bring it out here, and walk up and down with it, and look up at me every now and then and say, “Tut-tut, it looks like rain” (Milne, 1992, p. 27)’.

Winnie-the-Pooh has been used to explain such divergent topics as management theory⁹ and Eastern philosophy¹⁰; perhaps he can shed light on discourse theory as well. At least, it seems to me that what Pooh is trying to do here is to establish a discourse of rain in order to make the bees

⁹ Roger E. Allan, ‘Winnie-the-Pooh on Management’, 1994.

¹⁰ Benjamin Hoff, ‘The Tao of Pooh and the Te of Piglet’, 2002.

believe that he is a small black cloud. Hopefully, without overstretching the allegory, I would say that Pooh sheds light on a number of troublesome aspects of discourse:

First, the understanding of discourse as a 'complex system of meaning', i.e. a system that is internally bound together by a certain rationality and in which the various elements relate (this is not to say that a discourse cannot be internally contradictory). Even in this small example of a 'Pooh' discourse, there is a 'complex system of meaning': Umbrella denotes rain, rain comes out of black clouds, bees return to their hive in case of rain, which will make it possible for Pooh to get to the hive without being stung. There is an inherent logic or to use Dean's term, rationality, to the discourse (Dean, 1999). Elements are linked together in a complex meaning system based on a set of presuppositions of what is good/bad, right/wrong, etc.

An example of how elements are linked together in a complex meaning system comes from my participation in a project on modularisation in prevocational training for disadvantaged young people. One of the underlying assumptions of this project was that the introduction of modules would facilitate disadvantaged young people's access to the formal education system. The concept of 'modularisation' turned out to be associated with the concepts of 'accreditation of nonformal/informal learning', 'output-based qualifications', 'competence profiles', and 'national qualification frameworks', all embedded in the discourse about education as a means for the competitive state to gain an economic advantage in a global market. It proved difficult to reconcile 'modularisation' with the concepts of 'situated learning', 'communities of practice', and 'living meaningful unemployed (!) lives', and internally, it led to many discussions on ways to ascribe new *meaning* to the concept of modularisation. In this sense, a discourse imposes a restraining framework, which it may prove difficult to move beyond.

Second, in a discourse, a specific representation of the physical world is forwarded. The representation can be seen as human perception of the world. Or in the case of Pooh, a bear's perception of the world in which it all has to do with honey:

'First of all', he said to himself, 'that buzzing noise means something. You don't get a buzzing noise like that, just buzzing and buzzing, without it meaning something. If there is a buzzing noise, and the only reason for making a buzzing noise that I know of is because you're a bee'. Then he thought another long time, and said: 'And the

only reason for being a bee that I know of is making honey'. And then he got up, and said: 'And the only reason for making honey is so as I can eat it'. (Milne, 1992, p. 18)

This representation of bees and honey would probably be shared by other bears but contested by bees. Central to the concept of discourse is the concept of power. Discourse analysis makes possible a de-naturalising of our unreflective common-sense understanding of how 'things are' and how power is built into discourse. A representation can become hegemonic and naturalised, i.e. the representation is unchallenged and perceived by the majority of people as the 'truth'. Harvey, e.g. describes the neoliberal discourse as 'the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world' (Harvey, 2005, p. 3).

In the discursive perspective, power is relational and actors are embedded within the discourse and derive their power from their discursive positioning; there is room to move within discourse, and counter-discourses and change are built into the fabric of the 'social': '[...] discourse is not simply that which masks, rather it is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized' (Purvis & Hunt, 1993, p. 488).

The representations are our meaning-making of the physical world, a meaning-making that takes place through language, through categories, through experience. The aim of a discourse analysis is to analyse the constitution and dissemination of a specific representation, and discover which kind of different representations make up a discourse (Neumann, 2001, p. 35).

Third, a discourse works through a set of technologies that allow the discourse to consolidate amongst other competing discourses. Pooh uses the not-so-powerful technology of an umbrella to establish his discourse of rain. However, his umbrella does not regulate the behaviour of the bees, who continue to be rather suspicious. A discourse may in itself regulate the behaviour of individuals, organisations, or nation states; however, a discourse is underpinned by technologies. Technologies include legislation, contracts, statistics, standards, evaluation forms, etc. aimed at regulating behaviour in a specific way. Dean defines two different technologies: first, technologies of agency that encompass the introduction of contracts as a means for regulating organisational and individual behaviour. Second, technologies of performance that cover the attempts to hold both public bodies and citizens accountable for their (lack of) performance. Both technologies are

in use in the Copenhagen Process. In the dissertation, I suggest the concept of 'technology of Europeanisation' to capture the attempts to steer national VET policies in a specific direction.

As a fourth aspect of discourse, this example of Pooh also touches upon a central question in discourse analysis: the intentionality of the agent. Pooh intentionally sets up a discourse on rain, with a specific purpose. But do agents intentionally set up discourses or are they so enmeshed in them that it is not the agents who speak the discourse but the discourse who speaks the agents (Ball, 1993)? This is a question that divides discourse analysts. On the one hand, there are those who perceive of discourse as a 'rhetoric' that policy-makers can set up with the aim of influencing policy-making in a certain direction:

Although postmodernists and some social constructivists would argue that 'reality is discursively constructed', this does not imply that analysis should be delimited to discourse. Neither does it imply that one should approach discourse as an 'object' by dissecting texts or deconstructing speeches, thus missing the basic fact that political discourse may conceal substance under rhetorical smoke. Sometimes words reflect action, and sometimes they obscure or even belie action. Additionally, discourse is always situated in broader institutional contexts, with institutions and culture framing the discourse, defining the repertoire of acceptable (and expectable) actions. Moreover, interests also matter as do the material conditions and hard economic variables that may serve to drive change (Radaelli & Schmidt, 2005, p. 11).

On the other hand, there are those who – like Ball – see discourse as something agents move within and that frames their room of manoeuvrability. For him, discourse is something in which we as agents are so embedded, that we cannot move beyond it and in this sense, the concept of discourse is almost a return to structuralism.

I would argue for an in-between position wherein discourse is not a 'fatal' framing but leaves room for manoeuvrability and thus for the intentional action of individual agents. However, the discourse will pose severe constraints on the agents, as their ability to influence and contest policies/actions will depend on their discursive subject position and the interrelationship between subject positions within the discourse. Furthermore, as Purvis and Hunt state, discourse is 'the thing for which and by which there is struggle' (1993, p. 488) and this struggle changes discourse

over time incrementally, evolutionarily, and revolutionarily – and it is – if not replaced – then overlaid by other discourses. Concerning the neoliberal discourse, Harvey defines the turning point as the economic crisis in the 1970s that destabilised the consensus around the Keynesian welfare state. However, he argues that the neoliberal discourse arose as part of a deliberate strategy on the part of the ruling classes, who saw their privileges threatened.

Finally, Pooh is also a good example of the troublesome ontological question of discourse theory: is it possible to access the real world and establish the truth? Are we not always in a discourse restraining our ability to perceive what is at stake and our ability to communicate what is at stake? Discourse theorists such as Fairclough, Wetherell, and Pedersen would claim that Pooh's is an example where the discourse does not connect to 'reality'. There is too big a gap between Pooh's discourse of rain and reality. In a lecture on discursive institutionalism, Pedersen was asked about the ontology of discourse and said that he did not see the world as fully socially constructed, and one of the reasons for the fall of political systems is 'that reality can kick back'. The discrepancy between discourse and reality becomes too great. However, other theorists such as Laclau and Mouffe would claim that Pooh is in the unhappy situation where there is a stronger counter discourse claiming that Pooh is trying to steal honey. This perspective suggests that no ontological distinctions can be made between different kinds of social practices – between, e.g. cultural practices involving discourse and signification, and material practices involving physical objects and human labour in the world (Wetherell, 2001, p. 390).

However, the example shows that a discourse can become too detached from the shared understandings of the world and reality to gain any foothold. Pooh and Christopher Robin do not establish a hegemonic discourse, which is a question of power. To go back to the issue of position and relations, these are central to understand the question of power. In the case of Pooh, the discourse is anchored with Pooh, who speaks from a discursive subject position with little authority. A discursive subject position, which is anchored in an institution, is a position from which one can speak and act with authority (Andersen & Kjær, 1996, p. 9).

This discussion of the troublesome issues in discourse analysis shows how 'discourse' as a concept and an analytical strategy is used by researchers with quite different ontological and epistemological positions. It can range from quite positivistic approaches in which 'discourse' is

defined as an independent variable with (semi)explanatory power to constructionist approaches in which discourse becomes almost everything. This may offer an explanation to the problem of categorical collapse set out in the section on Question 2: Policy=Discourse. From the perspective of discourse analysis itself, it seems to me that the concept is being overstretched, and that we may have reached the point where the elasticity of the concept simply snaps. The only way out is to define it in the framework of the research being conducted and give up on providing universal definitions, acknowledging that research is produced from a specific position and within a specific context.¹¹ In this dissertation, I have – as already stated – stayed with the Bacchi conceptualisation ‘policy-as-discourse’ and perceive of discourse as a framing within which actors have a space of possibility for contestation.

DISCOURSE AND INSTITUTION

What is the relation between the concepts of ‘discourse’ and ‘institution’? It is not always a relationship treated in discourse theory and analysis, although the references to the concept of ‘institution’ make clear it is an important relationship to address. Bacchi uses the concept of ‘discourse’ and ‘institutions’ as mutually constitutive. She writes:

We live in a capitalist economy and we have institutions such as the law, education, marriage, and the family, and the church. The discourses which are dominant tend to reinforce these institutions. Because we are all located within these institutions, it is not easy to step outside of dominant discourses and recognise the role they play in our lives (Bacchi, 2006, p. 141).

However, in her clarification of ‘policy-as-discourse’, she also writes: ‘With the focus on frames and ways of thinking, it is useful to think of religious doctrines, political institutions, cultural myths as all taking a role in shaping discourses (Ibid., p. 141).

¹¹ Another explanation could also be deduced from discourse analysis itself: looking at societal changes, many of the institutions that we have taken for granted are collapsing around us: the nation state, religion, education and science itself. There is an increased awareness of the social construction of these institutions and their underlying values and presuppositions, not to mention governmentalities. Furthermore, there is also an increased awareness of interconnectivity, or what Bacchi calls ‘cross-border movement’: borders are not clear-cut, but blurred and messy. There is a need for knowledge that is not based on dichotomies but that reflects this interconnectivity and cross-border movement.

Institutions shape discourses and discourses shape institutions. The quotations point in the direction of institution and discourse as elements that are closely linked. We are located within both institutions and discourses; however, the exact distinction between the two concepts is not addressed. Mitchell also addresses discourse as 'something' that constitutes institutions, 'a system of meaning [discourse] that constitutes institutions, practices, and identities in contradictory and self-identified ways' (Mitchell, 2006, p. 389). She gives the example of neoliberalism as a discourse leading 'to the emergence of institutions and practices (technologies of governance) that facilitate and encourage individual and group conformity to market norms' (Mitchell, 2006, p. 389).

I shall conclude that there is a dialectical relationship between discourse and institution, but one does not equal the other. Looking at the definition of 'institution', the most common definition is 'norms, values and rules'. Pedersen argues that an institution is what actors (individual/collective) are motivated by, and goes on, referring to Weber, to define motivation as a 'complex meaning system'. He then argues that motivation ends up being defined by institutions and vice-versa. However, taking his definition of discourse into consideration, 'discourse is a complex system of meaning', it seems to me that all three, motivation, institution, and discourse end up being defined by one another.

To gain a clearer perspective on the interrelationship between the two, I shall turn to discursive institutionalism, as represented by Kjær and Pedersen (2001). They see discourse and institutions as two sides of the same coin, claiming that they are mutually constitutive. In their version of discursive institutionalism, the concept of institution is developed starting from the concept of discourse as 'institution'. They elaborate three types of preconditioning aspects of a discursive practice:

1. An institution can be viewed as a formalisation of discursive practice in systems of knowledge production and maintenance. They give the examples of libraries, archives, reference systems, and models.
2. Second, institutions can be seen as socially sanctioned speech acts governed by a particular set of rules of acceptance and validity. They give the example of science and scientific arguments based on particular rules of empirical validation and truth claims.

3. Finally, they argue that the institutional merges with discursive language games to constitute a particular context of meaning and rationality that operates with particular definition of problems, solutions, causation, and temporal and spatial concepts (Kjær & Pedersen, 2001, p. 226-231).

In a sense, there seems to be a temporal relationship between discourse and institution. In Pedersen's IDIOT-model, this temporal aspect becomes clear, as he argues that institutions develop on the basis of ideas and can be defined as 'naturalised' discourses (Pedersen, 2010). Andersen and Kjær (1996) also elaborate on this 'temporal' aspect stating that the distinction is to be understood as a logical one, i.e. discourse logically precedes institution. They also offer the definition of institution as a consecrating of discourse:

To institutionalise the discursive order means to consecrate, i.e. to sanction and, in a sense, sanctify one or several particular discursive distinctions and hereby making them publicly known and recognised. When discursive subject positions are institutionalised, they are no longer just positions from which one can speak and act rationally; they become positions [from which] one can speak and act with authority (Andersen & Kjær, 1996, p. 13).

They argue that institutions are not constituted as monoliths. Since institutions are institutionalisations of discourse, discursive changes or – to use the terminology of Andersen and Kjær, displacements in the orders of the discourse – may lead to change and renewal of the institutions (Ibid, p. 14). This is central to the argument of this dissertation: If the Copenhagen Process is such a displacement, it should lead to institutional change, or rather 'could', as there are other discourses in play; furthermore, as Purvis and Hunt argue, 'social practices and institutions are not reducible to discourses: they have their conditions of possibility that are not provided for by discourse alone' (Purvis & Hunt, 1993, p. 490).

There is a 'materiality' to institutions that is self-reinforcing, thus making them more resistant to change. I perceive an institution as a discourse that has been naturalised, institutionalised, materialised, and not least routinised (in terms of practice). If I were to use a metaphor for the relationship amongst discourse, institution, and practice, I would draw a parallel to cognitive theory in which the aim is to unpack deep-seated assumptions about the self and ingrained ways

of thinking about the world. This kind of therapy works at the discursive level, at the level of language; however, it needs to cross over and be embedded in the body and in action. Discourse can be viewed as collective conceptual schemata that need to be embedded in institutions and practices in order to have any kind of effects. To sum up, I tend to agree with Wetherell: 'The enmeshment of discourse and the material world is difficult to contest; however, there is a materiality to institutions which transcends discourse' (Wetherell, 2001).

EUROPEANISATION

A central concept in the dissertation is 'Europeanisation', and reflecting on my research, I sometimes consider whether I have studied VET from an EU perspective or processes of Europeanisation from a VET perspective. My research intersects studies of VET and EU studies. From the latter perspective, the application of discursive methodologies is still rare, as research on Europeanisation tends to be focused on explanatory models.

From the discursive perspective, it is striking in the discussion of Europeanisation how the EU has come 'naturally' to equal Europe. When asking students how to define Europeanisation, they all point to the impact of the EU on national policies and identities. This is also reflected in the vast majority of studies on Europeanisation in which the focus is on the changes taking place in national institutions, policies, and practices due to European integration. In these studies, the focus is seemingly one way, being on the process of national adjustment to the EU (see e.g. Radaelli & Schmidt, 2005). Vink has reviewed the literature on Europeanisation and concludes that

the bulk of literature speaks of Europeanisation when something in the domestic political system is affected by something European (Vink, 2002, p. 3).

He also concludes that Europeanisation has to be understood as a 'process', which makes it important to distinguish between Europeanisation and the concepts of convergence, harmonisation, and integration, as these three concepts can be perceived as either the consequences or the starting point (integration) of Europeanisation. However, can we define Europeanisation simply, without bringing any assumptions concerning the results of this process? I think that most literature on Europeanisation is based on assumptions regarding convergence,

harmonisation, and increased integration. Discussions on the 'hollowing out of the nation state' and the 'rescue of the nation state' still linger (Milward, 2000).

Lawn also describes Europeanisation as a process in which all EU states are involved and that takes place within common policy projects (such as the Copenhagen Process) and between them through exchange, networking, and interest articulation (Martin Lawn, ECER conference in Ghent, 2007). It is a process that occurs within the frames of the EU, and Lawn focuses on the role of the Commission in this process of constructing education systems, e.g. through constant comparison, internally and externally: 'They [the Commission] have the data and the people to think like this' (Martin Lawn, ECER conference in Ghent, 2007).

In Lawn's definition, the focus is on the EU and its effects on the 'domestic'. He argues that Europeanisation works through the control of knowledge and the introduction of European standards. In a Lawn perspective, the Copenhagen Process is an exemplary case of Europeanisation, as it works precisely through the introduction of standards and the control of knowledge production in technical working groups.

HOW TO STUDY EUROPEANISATION

A central question in the literature on Europeanisation is how we can study it as a process that is ongoing and disentangle the process from other national and transnational policy processes.

Pasquier and Radaelli points to three types of research design:

- Domestic → EU
- EU → Domestic
- Domestic → Domestic

The epistemological concerns in these three research designs are not precisely the same. In the Domestic → EU research design, the focus is on the 'pooling' of national sovereignty and how European integration affects the nation state. In the second design, called the baseline design, the aim is to establish the impact of the EU on domestic policies. According to Pasquier and Radaelli, the problem of these two designs is that the EU level is endogenous, i.e. EU policies/politics are regarded as independent variables and then the consequences for domestic institutions, policies,

etc. are tracked down. Therefore, they propose a third design, domestic -> domestic, whereby EU variables are treated as exogenous. In this design, a national policy area is, e.g. tracked over time, and different exogenous variables can be accounted for, e.g. EU policies, the pressure of globalisation, etc. In the third research design, there is no a priori idea about the impact of EU variables on a national level (Pasquier & Radaelli, 2006). In my opinion, the epistemological concern of the third design is then more a general study of institutional change than a study of Europeanisation, and yet, there is something that disturbs me: Because the EU has been chosen as an independent variable, there will nevertheless be an a priori idea of a European impact on the nation state. In all three research designs, there is an interest in defining the causal relation between Europeanisation and change, and the research designs are based on rationalist perspectives.

My research design is based on a constructivist perspective and thus aims at gaining an understanding of the Copenhagen Process as a discourse and analysing its elements from a WPR perspective. In this sense, my point of departure is from the EU perspective and an interest in tracing the Copenhagen Process as a discourse at a European level. My research design is EU -> EU, as I trace the VET policy historically and contextualise it within the global economic development. However, as I am also interested in the effects of the EU policy-as-discourse, I also trace it into the national context and do so by using Denmark as a case example in which I trace Danish policy in a domestic -> domestic design by investigating the development of the Danish VET system that has occurred since the end 1980s and an EU -> domestic design showing that the relationship between the EU policy space and the Danish policy space is messy and far from linear, which is what the research designs offered by Pasquier and Radaelli infer (see appendix one for a historical account of the Danish VET policy).

The relationship is far more complex. Yet, the dichotomy (EU/national) that we operate within is too simplified. The EU is composed of nation states whose representatives are in the Council, in the Parliament, in the Commission, and on the Court of Justice. In the case of the latter three institutions, it is presupposed that the national representatives leave their national bias and interests behind upon entering a position in one of the three institutions; however, they will still carry and bring national values, ideas and concepts into these EU institutions. The EU policy space

is thus an amalgamation of the 'national' and the 'European' based on a rationality of European integration as a way to prevent war and to create prosperity. The 'national' is perceived as 'dangerous' and something that must to be kept in balance through the pooling of sovereignty in the EC.

The national policy space remains the (most) legitimate arena of national policy-making and the 'nation state <-> EU' dichotomy is a figure used by both policy makers and the media in the national policy discourse. The EU can be blamed for unpopular policies, and can also be used by both nationalist movements to reinforce national identity and liberation movements in regionalisation processes. However, the bottom line is that today, national legislation is to a large extent EU legislation, transformed and translated into national law. EU legislation directly influences the everyday lives of people, regardless of whether they live in Denmark, Italy, or Romania.

In other words, the two policy spaces are highly intertwined, and yet, we hold onto the idea of a sovereign nation state and a distant separate EU supranational level. Maybe it would make more sense to view the levels of national policy and EU policy as a yin-yang symbol: highly intertwined, and although separated, with a representation of the one in the other. Europeanisation could be defined as an increase in the representation of the EU in the nation state, in that the nation state will persist as the legitimising frame of national institutions and practices; however, these institutions and practices to an increasing degree will be re-configured by EU policies.

Vink argues that Europeanisation is more than just EU-isation, meaning that it is not restricted to complying with EU regulations or transposing and implementing EU directives. My figure becomes more complicated if Europeanisation not only includes interaction between the EU and nation states, but also the interaction between individual nation states, e.g. in activities of policy learning. Policy learning activities are organised throughout the EU and bilaterally as well, e.g. when Danish civil servants go on a study trip to Finland to learn about the Finnish VET system, and return home to reform the Danish system based on Finnish programmes. This is also part of Europeanisation. Analytically, it calls for a need to clarify the study objective and the researcher's epistemological interest. I think it is legitimate to state that the interaction between the EU policy space and the national policy space is of research interest. In the case of policy learning between

Finland and Denmark, there is no question of sovereignty, policy legitimacy, and conflict. The most interesting aspect in the discussion on Europeanisation is the interaction between the nation states and the EU policy spaces, and the EU as a hybrid form of governance. The key question: what effect does this integration have on national institutions, such as convergence, divergence, translation, bricolage, diffusion, layering, etc.

The complexity of the EU and the interrelationship between the nation states and the European institutions are issues not easily addressed. From the standpoint of analysis, one must make distinctions and separations and delimit the research questions to be answered within the analysis. In my analysis, the two levels are therefore, analytically separated, and in this sense grounded on a 'baseline' design. However, the main emphasis is not on the 'impact' and 'good fit' of the Copenhagen Process on national policy-making. Rather, it is on the policy process itself and on gaining an understanding of the process as a *common* European discourse concerning VET, and the role and the functions it is perceived to perform in a 'knowledge economy'. The concept of 'knowledge economy' brings me to the last concept: neoliberalism.

THE CONCEPT OF NEOLIBERALISM

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that the Copenhagen Process is part of a discursive convergence around neoliberal tenets about global competition; however, I do not account for my understanding of neoliberalism in any of the articles. My understanding of neoliberalism derives primarily from the work of Mitchell Dean, who can be positioned as a part of the Anglo-Foucauldians or 'governmentality' theorists and of David Harvey, who can be positioned as a neo-Marxist.

In the governmentality perspective, neoliberalism refers to 'specific styles of the general mentality of rule' (Dean, 1999, p. 149). This includes a complex configuration of values, problem representations, causalities centred around the market as the dominant mechanism for regulation of not only economic transactions, but of the 'social'. Underlying neoliberalism is a conception of freedom that is closely related to the economic market: an individual (and this includes enterprises) should be free to pursue self-interest in the market without state interference. The individual is constructed as an entrepreneurial utilitarian self whose freedom consists in using

one's 'own knowledge for [one's] own purposes' (Hayek (1976:8) in Dean, 1999). Dean emphasises this is not a return to the 'invisible hand' of Adam Smith, as the market is not seen as a 'system of natural liberty' (Dean, 1999, p. 155) but as a construct. Furthermore, neoliberalism reconfigures the state on the basis of the market, as the state (not the market) is defective (Foucault, 2008, p. 117).

Depending on which strand of neoliberalism is followed, the state plays a role in ensuring the functioning of the market. In the ordoliberal strand, which is the German variant of neoliberalism, the market and the construction of freedom are dependent on state interventions (Dean, 1999, p. 56). In this strand, the state establishes a legal system (the rule of law) that supports free market flows (this is the strand that has left its imprint on the Treaty of Rome). In the other strand, known as the U.S. 'Chicago School', there is greater belief in the market as a self-regulating mechanism. In this latter variant of neoliberalism, a reconfiguration of the framework of social government takes place through which public services are reformed and turned into either quasi-markets or entirely marketised (Dean, 1999, p. 161).

Harvey's Marxist perspective does not deviate markedly from Dean's neo-Foucauldian definition of neoliberalism:

[...] a theory of political-economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices [...] if markets do not exist [...] then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture (Harvey, 2005, p. 4).

Harvey also emphasises that in neoliberalism, the market is perceived as the main mechanism for regulating 'all human action' (Ibid).

Dean and Harvey also share an understanding of the emergence and consolidation of neoliberalism as the contemporary hegemonic discourse or in Dean's conceptualisation 'the dominant contemporary rationality of government' ((Dean, 1999, p. 150). Both point to the 1970s as the turning point 'towards neoliberalism in political-economic practices and thinking' (Harvey,

2005, p. 2). They trace the shift in thinking to the critiques of the welfare state that arose on both the left and right in the aftermath of 1968. On the left, the civil rights and feminist movements criticised the state for reproducing social inequalities through a hierarchical and patriarchal system. On the right, there was an increasing dissatisfaction with the pluralistic state and its expanding welfare provisions (Dean, 1999, p. 149). The Marxist critique of the state intersected with neoliberal critiques of the welfare state, although the critiques had quite different aims. The 1968 movements shared an ideal of the emancipated self, whereas in the neoliberal critique, the conception of freedom was one of the disciplined and rational self who maximised his utility in the marketplace.

Whereas Dean stays at the discursive level analysing the underlying rationality of neoliberalism, Harvey also situates neoliberalism within the economic crisis of the 1970s. He points to the crisis of capital accumulation that put stress on the system of fixed exchange rates as a major factor for the breakdown of the Keynesian economic regime. However, he sees this breakdown in terms of 'class'¹² interests rather than an ideational vacuum, arguing that in the 1970s. two roads opened up:

- A deepening of state control and regulation of the economy through corporatist strategies;
- A rolling back of state control and de-regulation of the economy through neoliberal strategies.

In his perspective, contemporary dominance of neoliberalism can be explained by a political strategy aimed at re-establishing 'the conditions for capital accumulation and [restoring] the power of economic elites' (Harvey, 2005, p. 19). He locates the neoliberal discourse in business elites and the financial sector citing the 'overwhelming evidence for massive interventions [...] in the production of ideas and ideologies: through investment in think tanks, in the training of technocrats, and in the command of the media' (Harvey, 2005, p. 152). In line with Klein (2007), he argues that neoliberalism also includes coercion externally (Chile, Argentina, Mexico) and internally (social movements seeking collective interventions are repressed), and in this sense it goes beyond its own underlying rationalities of individual freedom.

¹² He notes that that 'class' is not a social configuration but rather that neoliberalism has privileged the financial sector and corporate management.

The juxtaposition of Dean and Harvey brings forward an issue that has troubled me during my writing of this dissertation and that brings me back to the concept of power (see also the section entitled, What is a discourse?). The concept of governmentality opens up for an understanding of power as relational, productive, and not least discursive. Power is understood as the 'conduct of conduct', either as individual disciplining or as framing through biopolitics. It deliberately breaks free of a conceptualisation of power with domination, but in doing so, it seems to me that a central aspect of power is lost. Power becomes dispersed and cannot be located, as it works through a rationality that permeates social structures. Power is made invisible and in this sense, the concept of governmentality blends in with the contemporary neoliberal discourse. It is not specific groups in society who benefit from free markets; it is society at large that benefits: the needs of labour markets are met, and social provision is made more effective and efficient via outsourcing and privatisations, etc. My own analysis points to this elusive character of the neoliberal discourse: it operates ambiguously alongside concepts of individual freedom, individual choice, social inclusion, and coherence, making its policies appear neutral and almost impossible to criticise and contest. As Apple states:

Markets are marketed, are made legitimate by a depoliticising strategy. They are said to be natural and neutral, and governed by effort and merit (Apple, 2001, p. 413).

However, according to Harvey this strategy of naturalisation and neutralisation is counteracted by the disparity between the neoliberal discourse and its actual effects. If this is the case, we might expect the neoliberal discourse to break down in the wake of the financial crisis in 2008. The question is whether there is a new emerging discourse or whether the powers tied up in the neoliberal discourse are counteracting change. I leave this question open and conclude with my definition of the characteristics of neoliberalism, emphasising that it is found in different variants across countries as national institutions enter into hybrid forms with neoliberalism:

- The market is the main mechanism for regulating society and the state is to actively contribute to the optimal functioning of the market;
- Market mechanisms are introduced into the state in order to make the state more effective and to prevent policy failures (the equivalent to market failure). This is done through the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) that emulates market mechanisms

through the introduction of contracts, incentive systems, compulsory competitive tendering, etc.;

- Markets are deregulated, including labour markets that are to be more flexible;
- Knowledge is constructed as an asset and a good/service that can be realised in the market;
- The individual is constructed as the autonomous entrepreneur who is responsible for ensuring his employability in a global labour market and for insuring himself against social risks.

ANALYTICAL REFLECTIONS: KEY ARGUMENT(S)

Inevitably, the industrial enterprise would seek to train workers, employees, and supervisory staff according to its own needs and would organise promotion in such a way as to fit in with its own criteria for technical and managerial skills. The abolition of the legal value of degrees and diplomas, the institutionalisation of systems providing completely free options [...] might culminate in the emergence of a meritocracy regulated by the interest of private enterprise (Janne, 1973, p. 43).

The argument of this dissertation is developed through six articles that examine different aspects of the Copenhagen Process from a WPR perspective. In this section, I shall first briefly outline which of the WPR questions I have worked with in each of the articles to set the stage for the second part of the dissertation. In this outline, I have chosen to reflect on my analysis and elaborate further on the argument in some of the articles. At the end of this section, I apply the WPR approach to my own work, asking 'what is the argument represented to be?' and delve into my own underlying assumptions, beliefs, and dichotomy thinking.

REFLECTIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARGUMENT IN ARTICLES

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM REPRESENTED TO BE AND WHAT ARE THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OR ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING THE COPENHAGEN PROCESS?

In the first article, 'VET policy formation and discourse in the EU: A mobile work force for a European labour market?' I apply the WPR approach in its entirety to the Copenhagen Process arguing that – as a discourse – the policy aims at framing VET policy in Europe and effecting change in VET. However, the emphasis is on the first two questions, as the article is rather tentative.

This first article brought me to the realisation that the Copenhagen Process is part of a wider EU policy, the Lisbon Strategy, which was laid down in 2000. In this policy, the Member States agreed to co-operate within the field of education and training, as they perceived 'high skills' or 'human capital' to be one of the key factors that could ensure Europe's competitive advantage in the global economy.

The construction of the EU as a competitive actor in a global economy dates back to Jacques Delors' strategies of the 1990s and is thus of a more recent vintage ("Growth, Competitiveness, Employment: The Challenges and Ways Forward into the 21st Century - White Paper ", 1993). However, in the article I show how the Copenhagen Process is also part of the continuing efforts on the part of the Commission to realise the free movement of labour as laid down in the treaties (The Treaty of Rome, 1957).

In this wider political strategy, VET is constructed in two different ways: as part of the solution to the problem of global competitiveness and as a problem in itself, as it establishes barriers to free mobility within Europe. Regarding the first construction, I show that the policy is to some degree contradictory. On the one hand, VET is designed to contribute to a high-skills strategy by supplying the labour market with innovative, entrepreneurial, skilled workers. On the other hand, VET is also assumed to be the sector in the education system that can absorb the approximately 20% of a youth cohort that never completes a qualification (see also appendix one).

The first article is a rather tentative analysis of the Copenhagen Process. Nested within it are issues that are pursued in more depth in the subsequent articles. It helped me uncover some lesser-researched parts of the policy: competing constructions of VET in Europe, the genealogy of vocational education and training policy in the EC, the introduction of the OMC in vocational education and training as a mode of governance, the role of EU tools, and the effects on a national level.

HOW HAS THIS REPRESENTATION OF THE 'PROBLEM' COME ABOUT?

The article 'VET policy formation and discourse in the EU' deals with the third question in the WPR methodology: the question of genealogy. It traces vocational training policy from the 1950s until today. The main argument in the article is that vocational training being treaty-based has served as a lever for expanding the policy base at a European level, so that today, education and training has become a legitimate EU policy area. There are three additional points I would add to this argument.

First, the article shows how the discourse on lifelong learning can be anchored in the EU and that this anchorage goes back to 1973 when Henri Janne advised the Commission to draw up a strategy for permanent education, as this was 'a building site where little work has so far been done and which [...] would lead the community to draw conclusions on educational policy in general' (Janne, 1973, p. 42). This conclusion runs against the argument of Rubenson who, in an article on lifelong learning, writes that the 'conceptual formation of lifelong learning has primarily been shaped by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation UNESCO, while the EC plays a crucial role in encouraging EU countries to implement the idea into national policies' (2006, p. 152).

Although I agree with Rubenson that the EU has embraced the OECD's neoliberal discourse on lifelong learning, today, the conceptualisation of lifelong learning in the EU has some additional features reflecting the need for legitimising the EU, i.e. the role of education and training in European identity formation and, moreover, the need for realising the free movement of labour through transparency, comparability, and portability of qualifications. In this sense, the ideas of

building up a European identity and ensuring mobility of labour within the EU play an important role in the construction of lifelong learning.

The second point concerns the changes in the role of the education and training system from a societal perspective. The genealogy of vocational training shows how different values underpin the policy from the 1950s until today. Until the 1970s, values of citizenship and of the role of education in personal development (*Bildung*) were promoted as part of the post-World War II Keynesian ideal of the welfare state, even in VET that traditionally serves utilitarian purposes (i.e. qualifying people for entering the labour market). Education and training were perceived to have wider democratic and humanitarian purposes, reflecting the role of the citizen in the democratic welfare state. At the end of the 1970s, the role of education and training was changing, and beginning to reflect the ideas of human capital: education and training are to qualify people for being productive and effective units in the labour market, ensuring that the nation state is able to compete in a global economy. This discourse on education and training became predominant from the 1990s forward during which time the individual learner was to enter a lifelong learning pathway in order to stay employable in an ever-changing labour market, and organisations providing education and training are to adapt to the demands of individual learners and industry by making education and training relevant in the labour market. It is thus a narrow interpretation of VET, which prevailed and became the standard for other sectors.

Finally, the article shows the important role of common 'problem representations' and the ability and power of discourse to frame policy problems in a specific way. The expansion of the EC's influence on education and training is made possible through a number of crises that challenge the Member States: the youth unemployment rates in the 1970s and 1980s, structural problems in the labour market, low productivity, etc. However, it also reflects the neoliberal representation of the EU's problem in the world as one of competitiveness and of the role of knowledge in the global competition. The neoliberal discourse establishes a 'fear' of falling behind and becoming a 'second class' region. In this respect, there is one thing the article does not touch upon but that is crucial: the power to establish global standards for education and training. The Copenhagen Process is not only an internal quest for standardisation but also a quest for dominance in a global market of education and training. Moutsios shows how the World Trade Organisation is pushing for a

liberalisation of education as a 'service', and this liberalisation implies the creation of a global market in which the ability to set the standards undoubtedly will provide a competitive advantage (Moutsios, 2009, p. 470).

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM REPRESENTED TO BE AND WHAT IS LEFT UNPROBLEMATIC?

The article 'Stating the obvious' was born out of wondering about the repeated mantra of the EQF being 'neutral' and 'evidence-based'. The article looks into question 4 concerning what is left unproblematic, and in terms of methodology, the article shows how the method of 'nesting' in the WPR approach opens up new analytical perspectives.

The article argues that the EQF is not neutral and in fact is not based on evidence. The aim is to demonstrate the way policies today are made 'natural', 'neutral', and 'evidence-based', and how this discourse is reproduced without verifying such claims. The effects are that policies are not questioned, but unreflectively implemented, and afterwards, researchers are asked to provide evidence for how it works.

An underlying concern in the article is with policy analysis itself and the role of researchers in providing evidence for policy-making. To some degree, my experience is that researchers – willingly or unwillingly – act as useful fools or perhaps more diplomatically expressed are caught up in the highly competitive game in securing external funding of their research:

Social science can make an important contribution to society by querying how 'official' definitions of problems arise. To be truthful, however, we should also recognize how social scientists often need to accept tacitly such definitions in order to attract research grants (Silverman, p. 9).

Regardless of which is the case, the consequence is that we put aside the politics of policy and return to a rationalistic approach to policy analysis: we know only that a problem has been defined by policy makers and then we look for relevant evidence. In the case of the Copenhagen Process and its policy tools, numerous projects are initiated through the EU Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) each year. The aim of these projects, which involve researchers as well as practitioners, is to

promote specific learning approaches (e.g. modularisation), and to develop and test common tools (e.g. the ECVET) in practice. These projects seldom question the policies and the tools, and from experience, I know that if criticism is raised, it is quickly put aside out of fear that the project will not deliver the output promised in the application and therefore not receive the final funding. In this market climate, the danger is both that the critical component of the work suffers: research is marginalised and researchers self-censor.

However, the article gives rise to another concern. As noted above, Bacchi writes that there is no 'declared interest' in the WPR in contributing to the production of 'more effective policy'. Walker criticises this exact point concerning post-structural analysis, as 'it tends to stop at the revelation of the effects of discourse' (Walker, 2009, p. 96). A critical perspective of a given policy may be a valuable contribution. The problem is that the argument of an overall shift to neoliberal policies (essentially the argument in this dissertation) may have little value outside of the epistemic communities reproducing this discourse. I agree with Walker's critique and accept that it may be directed towards my research as well. How can we treat this issue? As I see it, a return to Laswell's call for normativity in policy analysis could be a solution, as it could help open up the discussion of underlying values in policies as was done in post-structuralist analysis and then bridge over and identify 'evidence' for furthering different values, bringing the discussion of the 'good society' back into politics and policies. The question is how far researchers should go in taking a stand:

If we agree that there are no neutral observers [...] if we agree that we all take sides, the question is, then, How far do you go in taking sides? [...] the more we acknowledge our political positions, the freer we are to take a stand and become an advocate, the more we confront some very difficult ideas (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1988, p. A8 in Lather, 1990, p. 316).

WHAT EFFECTS ARE PRODUCED BY THIS REPRESENTATION?

I explore the WPR approach's fifth question in two articles. In the first article, 'Transcending the nation state', the analysis tends to be speculative, because it attempts to identify the possible institutional effects through an analysis of how VET is constructed in the policy: the underlying values, rationalities, assumptions, etc. This construed model is compared with three institutionally

ideal types of VET in order to identify the changes taking place. I argue that the EU reconfiguration of VET within a lifelong learning perspective establishes a new ideal type, a plural lifelong learning model.

There are three aspects of this discussion, which I would like to develop. First, in the European model, VET is discursively constructed in the narrow sense: vocational education and training as an institution is to provide the labour market with the skills in demand by industry and business. In other VET models (e.g. the Danish, the German and the Swedish), VET is part of the general education system and in this regard, the values of citizenship and personal development have also been integrated into the national curriculum. However, the European model is based primarily on a value of 'utility' in the labour market, what traditionally (and pejoratively) has been categorised as 'vocationalism'.¹³

Second, the European model challenges institutional monopolies in the corporatist and school-based models (see Figure 1, p. ?). In the corporatist model, VET is part of an institutionalised right of the social partners to negotiate conditions in the labour market. One of the institutionalised rights is to develop the curriculum for VET in co-operation with the state and define the standards of access to specific positions in the labour market. The EU model opens up the idea for establishing other pathways to a qualification. Thus, it applies pressure, especially on corporate models, particularly on the union side, as employers may be interested in breaking down vocational monopolies in order to be able to pay lower wages.

It also challenges the monopoly of organisations providing education and training in formal VET systems. Learning is to some extent decontextualised or perhaps multi-contextualised: learning in companies, voluntary organisations, leisure time activities, etc. should be recognised and accredited. The underlying creed is that a learner 'does not have to learn the same thing twice'. There are three aspects of this creed: as a matter of rights, people who have been in the labour market for many years can have their 'real' competences recognised; as a matter of efficiency, the provision of education and training can become more cost-effective, as superfluous provisions can

¹³ General education is generally constructed within a broader civic discourse serving the purposes of educating people to be part of a democracy and to enhance their personal development, and higher education within the 'Humboldtian' discourse, being an end in itself as it opens one up for personal development and fulfilment (see Gonon, 1995; Moodie, 2002).

be cut back; and as a matter of commodification of competences, learning is constructed as an individual process and knowledge as a possession. This leads to the third aspect.

Third, the conceptualisation of learning in these policies is quite instrumental. Despite the fact that the policies describe the modernisation of VET in progressive terms: from education to learning, from teacher-centred approaches to student-centred approaches, differentiation of learning according to individual learning styles, etc. they actually put forward quite a reactionary conceptualisation of learning. As stated above, learning is an individualised process and gaining a qualification is a question of filling the gap between those competences the individual 'possesses' and those required for the qualification. Learning can furthermore be broken down into units based on generic learning outcomes and then combined in different ways (see Telling example: The Qualifications Credit Framework – a case of good practice?). In this conceptualisation of learning, learning as both a social process and as part of community building is under-emphasised and learning as a contextualised practice likewise. Learning becomes a detached individualised product available for sale in a global education market.

In the second article, 'Europeanisation and policy change in the Danish vocational education and training system', I trace the Copenhagen Process into the national policy space, focusing especially on the European qualification framework and its transformation in a national context. It critiques the literature on Europeanisation which attempts to establish causality by isolating and identifying the independent variables which are taken to explain change in policy and institutions.

The article traces both the discursive and the institutional effects of the Copenhagen Process. As to the discursive effects, the article points out the danger of comparing discourses without taking a longer time period into consideration. The problem representations in both the Danish and the EU policies on VET are remarkably similar: vocational education and training is constructed within an ambiguous discourse of competitiveness and social inclusion.

The article shows the limitation of the WPR approach: tracing lived-life effects, or in this case institutional effects, demands other perspectives than are offered within the approach itself. In order to investigate the effects on institutions, we must look beyond 'policy-as-discourse analysis' and perform empirical studies. This is the point at which the approach crosses into the realm of more realist perspectives, as the article on the EQF framework also shows. In other words, Bacchi

operates with a concept of nondiscursive practices and a materialism that places her approach closer to critical discourse.

The article deals with 'change' and shows that change in national institutions takes time. The EU policy is translated into an institution that path dependent and for which the policy of an NQF is embedded and interpreted in the national discourse on VET. In this sense, change is incremental. However, the changes taking place within the frames of the Copenhagen Process are also quite rapid, for the OMC within only a few years has institutionalised practices for European co-operation within the policy field.

HOW AND WHERE HAS THIS REPRESENTATION OF THE 'PROBLEM' BEEN PRODUCED, DISSEMINATED, AND DEFENDED?

The article on 'The Open Method of Coordination in vocational education and training' deals with the central issue of 'governmentality': what is the mentality of rule in the Copenhagen Process? The article answers question 6 about how the policy-as-a-discourse is disseminated and re-produced through a specific governmental setting. Stone neatly summarises the entire argument of the article in the following quotation:

What is at stake in changes of decision-making structures is the power to control a sphere of policy. A call to restructure is always a bid to reallocate power [...] a new configuration of participation and authority would allow a currently subordinate interest to become dominant (Stone, 1988, p. 290).

My argument is that the OMC is directly aimed at moving national policies on VET through the involvement of central actors, the extension of the EU polity into national ministries, and not least through a whole regime of technologies of performance, i.e. developing indicators, monitoring against indicators, etc. The OMC works through the mechanisms of NPM, i.e. decentralisation in order to create incentives and a sense of ownership amongst stakeholders and a narrow central framing through policy objectives, indicators, statistics, etc. A key difference is that until now the EU has had no influence on national budgets; however, this may change if the French-German EU pact on competitiveness is adopted. The pact aims at enhanced co-ordination and convergence

around three policy areas: competitiveness, employment, and public finances (article from the *Financial Times*, March 21, 2011).¹⁴

WHAT'S THE ARGUMENT REPRESENTED TO BE?

Bacchi advocates for an application of the WPR questions to one's own problem representations in order to reflect on their origins, purposes, and effects (Bacchi, 2009, p. 19). Thus, this entire first part of the dissertation is part of this reflexive work. I have reflected on my own positioning, use of methodology, use of key concepts, and development of the argument. However, as a last reflexive exercise, I shall apply the first two WPR questions to my own work. Doing so, I can identify at least four central problem representations.¹⁵

The first problem representation concerns the unreflective transfer of policy across not only the EU, but throughout the globe. In their quest for competitive advantage, regions and nation states adopt policies without considering their adaptability and suitability in regional or national contexts. To use the image of lemmings caught up in a movement and diving off a cliff (see picture 2 and 3), the discursive framing within transnational policies does become almost fatal, for it becomes increasingly difficult for individual countries to opt out of global benchmarking and PISA league tables and decide on VET policies that deviate from the neoliberal construction of education and training as 'human capital'. Paradoxically, underlying this problem representation is an assumption that one can formulate VET policies on a more informed basis taking context and tradition into consideration. This is not a return to a rationalistic policy approach, but an idealistic call for an awareness of the fact that it is important to make the values underlying policies transparent. In a sense, this involves bringing back politics to policies, instead of cloaking them in technocratic, quasi-rationalistic approaches.

The second problem representation concerns the hegemonic neoliberal discourse. In the dissertation, I argue that the Copenhagen Process is part of a discursive convergence around

¹⁴ *Financial Times*. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/b9fe5320-4296-11e0-8b34-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1HF5LHLqh> (accessed 21 March 2011).

¹⁵ Here I would like to recall Bacchi's comment that it is possible to produce a different analysis of the same material (Bacchi, 2009, p. 21); likewise it is possible to identify other problem representations in this dissertation.

neoliberal tenets concerning global competition. A central conclusion is that the Copenhagen Process is made possible within this global economic discourse, which dismantles earlier resistance to EU interference in education and training as a sovereign national policy area. Crisis plays a central role in dismantling resistance and providing an opportunity for developing common policies. An underlying dichotomy in this problem representation is between Keynesianism and neoliberalism or between the welfare state and the competitive state. Normatively, I defend the welfare state and its underlying values of social equality and equal opportunity. Tracing this value's in my own personal history, I could point to the fact that I grew up in the 1970s during which time the education system was immersed in these values and later, some of my lecturers in economics were Keynesians. The main point is to emphasise my own implicitly normative stance as a researcher and the ways these underlying values affect my work.

A third problem representation concerns the relationship between the EU and the Member States. I argue that the EU has been established as a legitimate part of policy-making within the field of education and training at large, not solely VET. Indeed, all educational sectors are being transformed into one that stresses a lifelong learning perspective, the aim of which is to ensure the competitiveness of the EU and its Member States as a single region. This representation of the 'problem' as a tension between the EU and the nation state in terms of sovereignty must be problematised, as it rests on a 'naturalised' discourse of the nation state and of national institutions and identities.

The EU, on the other hand, is not considered a 'natural' entity, and citizens in the various Member States perceive themselves as national citizens, not EU citizens – although EU legislation confers citizens EU rights. The question is whether we can justify clinging to the discourse of the sovereign nation state as the legitimate space for policy-making. Globalisation has shown how 'problems' are not restricted to the national level, but are transnational in character and require transnational solutions. It calls for a re-conceptualisation of the relationship between the Member States and the EU as a supranational organisation. Thinking in dichotomies is too limiting. As described in the previous section, the EU and its Member States could be considered as constituting a whole or as a polity of polities wherein the EU is represented in the nation state and the nation state is represented in the EU. Although the figure of the 'national' is less than 200 years old, it has become

so ingrained that I have problems thinking beyond it. In analytical terms, this implies an oscillation in perspectives, as I keep falling back to the national-EU dichotomy.

Finally, the problem representation concerning the EU reconfiguration of VET within a lifelong learning perspective is central. It points back to the other problem representations: the critique of neoliberalism and its limited utilitarian perspective of education and training, and the critique of the unreflected transfer of policies across countries. Underlying this problem representation is the ideal of VET as more than a set of knowledge, skills, and competences that can be put to use in the labour market. Here, I accept the German critique and its underlying perception of VET as a progressive identity-forming process, but also the value of general education in the Danish VET system. Vocational education and training is an end in itself and not just a means for enhancing human capital, as education and training has become in the neoliberal discourse. One of my underlying ideals is that of the craftsperson who takes pride in what s/he is doing, and in addition, this ideal sneaks into my assessment of the Copenhagen Process.

In this first part of the dissertation, I have analysed my own positioning, the applied methodology, my use of concepts, and my own problem representations and their underlying presuppositions, all with the aim of providing transparency in my research. This then is the context in which the following articles should be read.

PART TWO: ARTICLES AND TELLING EXAMPLES



The Helsinki Leonardo da Vinci 2006 Award

TELLING EXAMPLE: THE PRICE OF BEING MOBILE

Train between Kolding and Rendsburg, May 2007

I can feel his gaze through my book. I'm on my way to a CEDEFOP study visit in Rendsburg and am trying to prepare for the visit by reading Thelen's case study on the evolution of the German dual system. But the only other passenger in the train compartment wants to strike up a conversation and asks what I'm reading. Somewhat annoyed, I put down my book and look at my co-passenger. He is probably around 45 years old and looks as though life has been a bit tough on him. He speaks English with a marked German accent and during the conversation, he changes to German occasionally. I answer his question, telling him that I'm reading about the German dual system, as I'm on my way to visit a vocational college in Rendsburg. He asks why I'm interested in the dual system and again I answer. I tell him about my interest in European VET policy and the changes that it may entail. He is quite interested, which is not always the case when I talk about my research. But soon I learn why, as he tells me a personal story concerning the experience of transnational mobility.

His name is Dieter, and he lives south of Hamburg but is only at home every fourth week, as he works in Norway. He is only 36 and yet he tells me that he is too old in the German labour market, where he has been unable to find work even though he has completed two related dual-training programmes. He is a trained sausage maker and a chef. In Norway, he is the head of a small production unit in which they produce sausages. His skills are highly esteemed. He lives with a Norwegian landlady who tries to teach him Norwegian. This is not an easy language, he says laughing.

I ask him what it is like to work far from home. Not surprisingly, he says it is tough, on him, on his wife, and on their two children. They miss their dad. But there is no other solution: he has only been able to get a job in Norway, and, importantly, the pay is much better than for a similar position in Germany. He earns twice as much in Norway as he would in Germany. We talk about changes in society and the role of the EU today. He has no opinion about the EU but strong opinions about the role of the United States in the world. He thinks that Americanisation and

individualisation is undermining the social pillar of the German society. Solidarity amongst workers has gone. German culture is being undermined through American cultural imperialism. Young people today are only interested in fame through commercial programmes such as *Popstars* and *American Idol*. He starts to talk about immigration and the way immigrants take away jobs from Germans – notwithstanding that he may be taking away a job from a Norwegian. He is especially against the many Moslems in Germany.

I listen to this story, told slowly in a mix of English and German and think about the chasm between policy and lived life. I reflect on how European mobility of skilled labour in the policy documents is represented as a problem of creating transparency in qualification structures in order for supply and demand of labour to be matched. In the actual lived life, mobility is a matter of making a living and of social deprivation. It is part of a larger tale of legitimate and illegitimate mobility: to policy makers, intra-European mobility is to be advanced although in respect of national labour market traditions, whereas mobility from other parts of the world – especially the developing world – is to be hindered. The first article will show how the Copenhagen Process is part of a continuous discourse on mobility in the EC and how the enlargement of the EU from 15 to 27 Member States has re-accentuated the issue of mobility.

VET POLICY FORMATION AND DISCOURSE IN THE EU: A MOBILE WORK FORCE FOR A EUROPEAN LABOUR MARKET?

In Jørgensen, C.H. & Aarkrog, V. (eds.) (2008). *divergence and convergence in education and work*. (Studies in Vocational and Continuing Education. Bern: Peter Lang.

Abstract: The Copenhagen Process aims at a convergence of VET policies in Europe whilst at the same time respecting the diversity of national systems. The author sees this as a main tension within the process. Through a discursive reading of the Copenhagen Process, an interpretation of it and its possible effects on VET discourse in Europe is offered. The interpretation points to the Copenhagen Process as a framing of VET, which, at the Member State level, may lead to a narrowing of national diversity, as VET is subsumed under a common logic of creating a European labour market. The discursive reading is based on the 'What's the problem represented to be?' approach developed by Carol Bacchi.

INTRODUCTION

From Copenhagen to Maastricht to Helsinki – for the insiders of European VET policies – these cities mark the political highlights of the ongoing Copenhagen Process, which aims at reforming VET policies in Europe. For five years, the process has been underway with a view to making VET policies in Europe converge along common objectives, whilst at the same time maintaining the diversity of VET systems and traditions throughout Europe. In the Copenhagen Declaration, the element of voluntary participation is stressed: this is all about co-operation and about achieving the goals set in Lisbon in 2000, of making Europe a competitive region vis-à-vis the United States and Asia, and at the same time building stable, cohesive European societies. However, when

looking into the process, a striking feature is its ambiguity: on the one hand, it stresses diversity, subsidiarity, and national sovereignty and, on the other hand, quite a lot of 'control' mechanisms are introduced, such as monitoring of Member States' policies, peer reviewing, and EU benchmarks and indicators. The question is how we can make sense of this ambiguity within the Copenhagen Process?

Formally, the Member States have committed themselves to the convergence of VET policy objectives, and hereby to a common framing of problems within VET and a common framing of solutions. The question is how this framing of VET policies in Europe will affect national VET policies and VET systems? Will it be possible to allow for converging policies whilst maintaining diverging systems? A discursive reading may offer a greater understanding of the Copenhagen Process. From this perspective, the process is perceived as a discourse in VET, which is currently being promoted in Europe and that puts forward a specific construction of VET and what it is supposed to achieve, hereby limiting national scope of action.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The discursive reading of the Copenhagen Process is based on the 'what's the problem represented to be?' approach developed by Carol Bacchi, professor of politics, at the University of Adelaide. Her approach is inspired by Foucault and aims at deconstructing policies or policy debates by an analysis of 'problem representation': 'policy proposals constitute the "problems" they purport to address' (Bacchi, lecture at DPU, January 2007).

Her main argument is that any policy has built into it an understanding of what the problem is, and this understanding constitutes a theory about causality and processes of social change. Furthermore, she stresses the interaction between solutions and problem representations, i.e. within the representation of policy problems, solutions are already predefined:

Traditional policy literature commonly adopts a functionalist approach to social problems. That is, social problems exist, are capable of being empirically tested, and can be remedied by the development of policies. A different approach, however, frames policy not as a response to existing conditions and problems but more as a discourse in which both problems and solutions are created (Goodwin, 1996, p. 67).

In this approach, policies are viewed as ‘creative’ rather than ‘reactive’. The approach focuses on language and discourse as a way of coming to terms with the meaning-making that occurs in policy debates and policy development (Bacchi, lecture at DPU, January 2007). By deconstructing the problem representations, it is possible to unpack the policies and understand underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs.

The ‘what’s the problem represented to be?’ approach consists of five steps through which a policy can be unpacked¹⁶ (see Bacchi, 1999). The structure of this article is based on these steps, although in a form adapted to the purpose of analysing the Copenhagen Process.

In the first section, I shall outline the basis for the analysis, i.e. the documents that have been analysed. As these documents must be understood in context and in relation to other EU documents and policies, issues of context and intertextuality are briefly outlined. In this section, I take the first step of a discursive reading, as the Copenhagen Process is part of a wider discourse on the EU as the ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world’ (*Presidency Conclusions: Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000*, 2000). This is to be seen as the prelude to the second section, where I shall go deeper into the problem representation and its underlying presuppositions and assumptions. In the third section, I shall discuss the possible effects of the Copenhagen Process: how VET is constructed and its possible effects on national VET models. In the fourth section, I shall look into the dissemination of the Copenhagen Process as a dominant problem representation: how and where is the Copenhagen Process disseminated and defended? And how or where is it disrupted and/or contested?

By taking these steps, the Copenhagen Process is deconstructed and the main rationales and beliefs are uncovered, enabling me to answer the questions raised in the introduction.

¹⁶ Bacchi’s approach consists of the following five steps: 1) to identify what the problem is represented to be in a specific policy document; 2) to look into the presuppositions and assumptions underlying a problem representation; 3) to look into the effects produced by a specific problem representation; 4) to look into what is left unproblematic; and 5) to look into the dissemination of a dominant problem representation and possible contestations.

POLICY DOCUMENTS, CONTEXT, AND INTERTEXTUALITY

The first step of Bacchi's approach goes into 'what is the problem represented to be?' in a specific policy document or proposal. However, I shall start by setting the scene – so to speak – by describing the documents to be analysed, the context in which they have been produced and, most importantly, their intertextuality. These documents should be read as part of a wider web of policy documents relating to the Lisbon Strategy, set up in 2000.

The analysis is based on the three main policy documents of the Copenhagen Process: the Copenhagen Declaration, the Maastricht Communiqué, and the Helsinki Communiqué. These policy documents have been endorsed by the Ministers of Vocational Education and Training of the Member States, the associated and acceding countries, the social partners, and other stakeholders at meetings during the presidencies of Denmark, the Netherlands, and Finland. The documents are not binding directives governing Member States' actions, giving the Commission powers to interfere if Member States do not act on the agreed policies. They are more comparable to declarations of intent in which participation in the process is voluntary, *although* no more voluntary than the progress of *all* Member States is monitored on the basis of the Copenhagen priorities.

During the Danish presidency in 2002, a major issue was the enlargement and the ongoing negotiations concerning the admission of candidate countries to the EU. The enlargement is a radical change of the EU, as it increases the number of Member States from 15 to 25, and the EU population by 28% (Sinn, 2000). Furthermore, the standards of living in the new Member States are lower than in the 15+¹⁷ Sinn (2000) gives the example that wages in Eastern Europe are one-tenth to one-fifth of wages in Western Germany. In other words, the enlargement presents a major challenge of integration for the EU, and it is important to keep this in mind when reading the Copenhagen Declaration, as the enlargement plays a central role in the process. Unsurprisingly, it has continued to be a main policy area during both the Dutch Presidency in 2004 and the Finnish Presidency in 2006, as this necessitates a rethinking not only of the EU polity and decision-making procedures, but also of the internal market, free mobility, and European welfare systems.

¹⁷ The 15 Member States before the enlargement.

In addition, one must keep in mind that these documents are interconnected with the policy documents of Lisbon (the Lisbon Strategy) and a long array of other documents issued by the Commission, technical working groups set up in relation to the Copenhagen Process, CEDEFOP, and the ETF. The Copenhagen Process is furthermore closely linked to the Community policies on social inclusion, employment and mobility. The documents are opaque in the sense that the problem representation(s) does not emerge clearly from the documents. They have to be contextualised and linked with other relevant policies. According to Fairclough, this implicitness is a pervasive property of texts that serve, on the one hand, to establish common ground and, on the other, to exercise domination and hegemony (Fairclough, 2003, p. 58). Thus, in order to understand the Copenhagen Process, a first step is to contextualise it and to link it to the discourse of the Lisbon Strategy.

THE COPENHAGEN-LISBON CONNECTION

The Copenhagen Process is embedded within the overall discourse of Lisbon, which presents the problems that the EU is facing through a whole range of *key concepts* aimed at framing education and training in a specific way, stressing that

- the transition towards a *knowledge-based economy* capable of *sustainable economic growth* with more and better jobs and greater *social cohesion* brings new challenges to the *development of human resources*; and
- the *development of high-quality vocational education and training* is a crucial and integral part of this strategy, notably in terms of promoting *social inclusion, cohesion, mobility, employability, and competitiveness* (*The Copenhagen Declaration*, 2002); my emphasis).

These phrases are reproduced in most EU texts dealing with education and training, and take on a cloak of fact, of representing truth. These are what Fairclough (2003) would term 'existential assumptions', i.e. that such things as globalisation, social cohesion, a knowledge based economy exist. These assumptions lead to propositional assumptions and hereby to a problematisation on how to deal with these issues – namely, that high-quality VET should be developed to ensure the transition to a knowledge-based economy and that the causal relations between the economy and social cohesion are clear-cut: economic growth leads to greater social cohesion! VET is perceived as

an instrument to achieve an array of other policy goals, whereas VET as a policy area in itself is not dealt with in any greater detail. In the Maastricht and Helsinki Communiqués, the Process, however, starts digging deeper into VET as a European policy area.

According to Fairclough (2003), texts can be seen as doing ideological work in assuming, taking as an unquestioned and unavoidable reality, the factuality of a given concept. When the Copenhagen Declaration assumes that VET will contribute to promoting social inclusion, cohesion, mobility, employability, and competitiveness, it is doing ideological work, promoting an instrumental discourse on VET embedded in an economic rationale (neoliberal discourse) and bridging a social rationale (social-democratic discourse).

The Copenhagen Process is thus part of a wider discourse on the EU in the global economy, and in this discourse, VET itself is perceived as a solution to a problem, i.e. the problem of maintaining high standards of living in a globalising world wherein different regions are in competition to attract investments of foreign capital. The dominating discourse of the Lisbon Strategy is, as described above, an economic, neoliberal discourse whereby both economic growth and knowledge as an *asset* ensuring the comparative advantage of the EU as a region are key concepts.

The neoliberal turn of EU policies has been pointed out by many researchers (see e.g. Fairclough, 2003; Mitchell, 2006; Nóvoa & Lawn, 2002; Walters & Haahr, 2005). However, it is important to acknowledge that the overall EU discourse is contradictory and conflicting, representing many different interests in the EU. The social-democratic issues are noticeable in the concepts of '*sustainable economic growth*', '*greater social cohesion*', and '*social inclusion*'. The question is how these concepts are filled out as they enter the EU discourse – a transformation may very well take place, as concepts move from one site to another, making the 'social-democratic' concepts part of an economic rationale in which inclusion into the labour market and employment is seen as *the* way to avoid marginalisation and ensure social cohesion. The market becomes the main mechanism for regulating social order. Hall (2005) argues that in New Labour, the social-democratic discourse has become subordinate to and dependent upon the dominant neoliberal discourse, leading to a constant transformation of Social Democratic values and, in my opinion, this is also the case for the EU discourse. That the neoliberal discourse and NPM are dominant is reflected in the dominant values of (developing skills for) the market, economic growth, and

competitiveness, and in the whole set-up of ‘management-by-objectives’, devolution of powers, and accountability measures.

Already at this step of the analysis, a sense of direction is achieved: the Copenhagen Process is embedded in a dominating neoliberal discourse whereby VET is being made part of the European solution to global competition: investment in human capital – in knowledge.

ENHANCED CO-OPERATION

The second step of my analysis (which corresponds to Bacchi’s first and second steps) examines problem representation and its underlying presuppositions and assumptions. The Copenhagen Declaration does not mention ‘problems’; it is a document to which the stakeholders (Member States, the EU Commission, and other stakeholders within VET) commit themselves to a number of key areas of *enhanced co-operation*. However, already the concept of *enhanced co-operation* indicates the direction of the problems for VET. The Member States and the Commission do not co-operate (enough) on VET. Co-operation within this field has been limited to the programmes of the Commission and the activities initiated by the Community agencies of CEDEFOP and ETF. When looking into the Commission’s VET policies, it has historically been an area of great importance, as VET is seen as a major factor in ensuring (or in fact impeding) the mobility of skilled workers. The area of VET – as the only educational area – was written into the 1957 Treaty of Rome, and from the 1960s through the 1990s, the Commission advocated for issues of transparency, harmonisation, recognition, and the transnational transfer of vocational qualifications in Europe. Until now, these efforts have proven unsuccessful. Some of the most striking examples of the failure of promoting common VET policies are the 10 general principles for VET launched by the Commission in 1961. These principles, however, were watered down by Member State resistance. Another example is the System for EDucation and OCcupations (SEDOC) project of the 1980s in which the CEDEFOP in co-operation with Member States representatives developed a classification System specifically focused on vocational qualifications. The aim was to make SEDOC a European standard¹⁸ to increase transparency of vocational qualifications in Europe. However, the SEDOC classification was only implemented in a few Member States, such as the Netherlands.

¹⁸ Similar to the Unesco ISCED standard.

Subsequently, part of the problem is that the EU and the Member States have not established a 'satisfactory' level of co-operation in order to ensure the transparency of VET qualifications across Europe. Interestingly enough, this policy objective has remained stable since the Treaty of Rome, with its main objective of establishing an internal market in which goods, capital, services, and *labour* can flow freely. In this sense, the VET initiatives pushed by the Commission have been marked by continuity; and the Member States' resistance of EU interference in education and training policies likewise. However, the strategy of Lisbon and the enlargement have created new conditions for European co-operation within this field and made it important to address the issues of national barriers to European mobility and the necessary skills (levels) of a work force in a 'globally competing knowledge society'.

CONNECTING VET, ENLARGEMENT, MOBILITY, AND THE INTERNAL LABOUR MARKET

Staying at the second step of Bacchi's approach, it has in the previous section become clear that important elements in the problem representation are the issues of enlargement and mobility:

The enlargement of the European Union adds a new dimension and a number of challenges, opportunities and requirements to the work in the field of education and training. It is particularly important that acceding member states should be integrated as partners in future co-operation on education and training initiatives at European level from the very beginning ('The Copenhagen Declaration', 2002).

The enlargement is perceived as posing a problem within the field of VET, as it is closely linked to the central freedom of mobility in the EU Treaty. The enlargement opens up the European internal labour market¹⁹ to workers from Eastern European countries.²⁰ A central assumption in the

¹⁹ According to Walters and Haahr, the discourse of the common market is one in which Europe is imagined as an economic region located within a regionalised world economy. The problem is represented as one of competitiveness and economic performance (Walters & Haahr, 2005, p. 59).

²⁰ That this is perceived to be a problem is seen in the transitory regulations introduced as part of the enlargement process: the 'old' Member States could choose to restrict access to their labour markets until 2011. Access has been restricted and a 2 + 3 + 2 scheme has been introduced in the Accession Treaty. This scheme obliged all 'old' Member States to declare themselves in 2006, and again in 2009, on whether they

enlargement process was that a particularly high rate of mobility of people from the new Member States was to be expected. These workers would be attracted by both the higher wages of the West and more attractive welfare systems. This would put pressure on the welfare systems of the 15+ countries and act as an incentive for them to block access to their labour markets as well. National qualification structures could serve as grounds for discrimination against foreign workers, i.e. as barriers²¹ to mobility.²² The Copenhagen Process is aimed at impeding the 'protectionist policies' in the 'old' Member States and opening up labour markets in the EU by introducing EU instruments for ensuring transparency and cross-border recognition of qualifications. The central issue is mobility of *skilled* workers!

THE INTERNAL LABOUR MARKET

The free movement of workers is one of the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by Community Law (Article 39 of the EC Treaty), as well as being an essential element of European citizenship. In *Governing Europe*, Walters and Haahr (2005) point to the rather instrumental conception of freedom in the Treaty of Rome in which subjects are defined in relation to categories of economic and social activity, by virtue of their function in the operation of economic processes. The main rationales for increasing mobility are to be able to move workers from areas of unemployment to areas of labour shortage, to enable business to 'access a wider pool of scarce skills' (de Vries, 2006, p. 1), and to develop a 'more flexible and adaptable workforce which is responsive to changes in the global economic situation' (de Vries, 2006, p. 1).

Thus, an underlying assumption is that VET systems are barriers, as they uphold national monopolies on qualifications, restricting access to the national labour market to those who can document specific vocational qualifications – and historically these qualifications are embedded in national qualification structures. Hereby VET is woven into a discourse on the Europeanisation of labour markets wherein 'barriers' must be removed. This is also a view forwarded in the 2006

would open up their labour markets to workers from the EU-8 or keep restrictions in place. All labour movement restrictions are to be lifted by 2011 (EU-8) and 2014 (Romania and Bulgaria).

²¹ It should be noted that 'barriers' are also a construct and not something that are objectively given.

²² One might also argue that by establishing a European qualification structure, an important selection mechanism for emigration will be established for the benefit of the nation state and not the least, industry.

Commission Green Paper: 'Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st Century'. The Green Paper presents labour law as a barrier to a flexible labour market and thus an impediment to economic activity and high productivity, and it calls for a modernisation of labour law and a harmonisation of the definition of 'worker':

Outside the specific context of freedom of movement of workers, most EU labour law legislation leaves the definition of 'worker' to the Member States. It has been argued that Member States should retain discretion in deciding the scope of the definitions of 'worker' used in different Directives. Continued reference to national rather than Community Law could, however, affect worker protection, especially where freedom of movement is at issue (*Green Paper: Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century*, 2006).

From the EU perspective, freedom of movement is constructed as one of the main rights of workers, and it is a freedom that national legislation and VET systems might impede. From this perspective, VET becomes a central element in the realisation or creation of a European labour market in which there is free movement of labour. The solution is to open up the VET systems to increase transparency, facilitate credit transfer, and ensure recognition of vocational qualifications across Member States. Ensuring the freedom of movement is, in fact, the last building block in the realisation of the internal European market as goods, capital, and services already move relatively freely. How is VET constructed in the Copenhagen Process? This brings us to Bacchi's third step: the effects produced by a specific representation of a problem.

EFFECTS ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF VET

What I have been arguing thus far is that the problem representation should be understood as a combination of enlargement, mobility, and the nationally embedded VET qualifications: 'An enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training will be an important contribution towards ensuring a successful enlargement of the EU and fulfilling the objectives identified by the European Council in Lisbon [the Lisbon Agenda] (The Copenhagen Declaration, 2002).

Ensuring 'freedom of movement of workers' is at the heart of the Copenhagen Process. If we linger here a moment to unpack this concept and its subject positioning, it may give us further insight

into the main rationale of the Copenhagen Process. The subject positions available in the Copenhagen Process (and indeed in the Lisbon Strategy) are either that of employed (which is unproblematic) or unemployed (which is problematic). The labour market is perceived as the main mechanism for ensuring social cohesion and inclusion into society. Exclusion is a question of either not having the right skills or not being in the right place (mobility).

The role of VET then is to ensure that workers have the right skills, i.e. those that are in demand in the European labour market *and* that these qualifications should be transferable and unattached to a national labour market, so that mobility is made possible. The construction of VET becomes fragmented and disembedded, or in dominant discursive terms 'flexible' and 'individualised'. It should be made possible to opt in and out according to the changing skills needs of the *European* labour market in a *lifelong learning* perspective. As recognition of nonformal and informal learning is a key element in this construction of VET, it should always be possible to add to the skills, as it is the 'skills gap' that is basically perceived as making the difference between 'inclusion' and 'exclusion'. It is an economic, technocratic, and instrumental perception of learning put forward here. Central is the 'employability' of the subject, i.e. that the subject possesses the skills that makes her/him a valuable good in the labour market.

It is noteworthy that in the three key documents of the Copenhagen Process, the humanitarian values of personal development, general education (*Bildung*), equality,²³ and empowerment are rarely mentioned, whereas the discourse of human resource management prevails: workers as 'assets', investment in 'human capital', and 'human capital accumulation' (*The Helsinki Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training*, 2006). The humanitarian values can be found, e.g. in the Helsinki Communiqué, stressing that 'policies should engage all young people in vocational training and/or higher education, ensuring at the same time that they acquire skills and competences relevant to the labour market and *to their future lives*' (*The Helsinki Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training*, 2006). But, as in the quotation, these humanist values come second, i.e. they are marginalised when compared to the labour market skill needs discourse. The neoliberal discourse

²³ It is interesting to see that the concept of 'equality' has been substituted with the term 'equity', which has strong economic connotations.

prevails in the Copenhagen Process, although it is coated with the subordinated concepts of 'social cohesion', 'inclusion', and 'equity' (see below).

It is also noteworthy that it is the lack of both transparency and transnational recognition of VET qualifications that are perceived as the main barriers for mobility, leaving out other important factors that may prevent people from moving from one country to another – such issues of language, a different culture, the ability for the spouse to find a job, family, and friends are ignored. The creation of a European labour market does not depend on worker mobility and transparent VET qualifications alone, but on other crucial differing factors as well, such as cultures, welfare systems, labour market conditions, etc.

When compared with current 'ideal types' of VET models in Europe (see e.g. Greinert in *Towards a history of vocational education and training (VET) in Europe in a comparative perspective*, 2004), the EU construction of VET comes close to the Anglo-Saxon market-based model with its emphasis on on-the-job learning, accreditation of prior learning, modularisation, and market-driven provision. This model is embedded in a deregulated labour market and a welfare model based on minimum provision. It is central to understand the embedded nature of VET models as VET, in comparison to other education areas, is more interconnected with other policy areas such as sociocultural, employment, and industrial relations; also, more interests are tied up in the systems and interests that have been institutionalised, e.g. in the case of the corporate models found in Austria, Denmark, and Germany.

One effect of the Copenhagen Process may be convergence along the lines of the Anglo-Saxon model, based on a strong market rationale whereby the subject position of a 'skilled worker' is one of being 'flexible, adaptable, and mobile'. Pushing the argument, based on the dominant neoliberal discourse²⁴ identified in the document, VET is to contribute to the creation of a European labour market in which workers have freedom of movement, but labour laws, collective bargaining and a minimum wage are constructed as 'barriers' for the free movement of labour. These may be rights that the 'individualised' worker – responsible for being flexible, constantly adapting to the changing needs of the labour market – may lose. The Copenhagen Process can be read in the light

²⁴ Neoliberalism is pushing for free trade and an international division of labour, and rejecting labour policies that ensure minimum wages and collective bargaining rights.

of these broader changes brought about by a dominant neoliberal discourse aimed at improving efficiency in market terms. However, it should be noted that the neoliberal discourse is contested, as other discourses whose aim is to establish a 'social' Europe are in play.

THE MEMBER STATE-COMMISSION TENSION

An interesting aspect of this problem representation is the tension between the Commission and the Member States. The Commission's role is to safeguard the treaties and thereby the freedom of movement of workers. This is an area that is under the community method, i.e. the Commission is to safeguard that the Member States do not impede mobility. However, VET systems are not within the jurisdiction of the Commission but under the principle of subsidiarity. One reason for the tension in the documents is that different principles of government/governance are at stake; the policy area of mobility is part of EU 'hard law' and VET is part of 'soft law'. However, this cannot account entirely for the ambiguity (see next section on technologies of power and policy promotion). This conflict is influencing the discourse in the Copenhagen Process immensely. The balance between the creation of an internal labour market (after the enlargement) and the sovereign power of Member States within the area of VET is negotiated – perpetually, but as the Copenhagen Process progresses there seems to be a slide to the fleshing out of a more European dimension of VET policies as a *European VET area* is now in the making:

The aim should be to promote a European VET area in which qualifications and skills acquired in one country are recognised throughout Europe, thus supporting the mobility of young people and adults. This VET area should be *cultivated* through use of common frameworks, instruments, and tools and supported by consistent use of comparable data enabling *evidence-based* policy-making (*The Helsinki Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training*, 2006) my emphasis).

This marks the slide from a 'bottom-up, voluntary process' discourse to a 'top-down centralised steering' discourse, a discourse immanent to the Copenhagen Process and its steered networks.

TECHNOLOGIES OF POWER AND POLICY PROMOTION

The final step in Bacchi's approach is to look into how a policy is defended and disseminated (Bacchi, 1999). The Copenhagen Process represents an entirely new configuration of VET policy in the EU based on common objectives, common technologies, and a change of governance ensuring the active involvement of key actors in the process.

A central element introduced in the Copenhagen Process is the OMC. The OMC is 'soft law' (as compared with the community method in which legally binding directives are established). The OMC rests upon a number of elements: the establishment of common objectives at EU level, drawing up EU indicators and benchmarks, and carrying out periodic monitoring, evaluation, and peer review organised as mutual learning processes (Zeitlin, Pochet, & Magnusson, 2005). Furthermore, the OMC entails the development of tools, methods, frameworks, etc. that are to aid the Member States in translating EU policies into national policies. The OMC can be seen as a technology of power narrowing the scope of action. According to Nóvoa and Dejong-Lambert, the OMC is indeed acting towards convergence as objectives, indicators, policy audits, etc. frame the overall direction/ role of education and training in Europe, hereby formulating supranational education policies. The OMC is, so to speak, a way of overriding other more nationally embedded VET discourses in Europe. As Nóvoa and Dejong-Lambert state, 'It is difficult to imagine a Member State opting out of this game of "freely adhering" to shared guidelines' (Nóvoa & Dejong-Lambert, 2003, p.56).

The main technologies in the Copenhagen Process are common tools and instruments aimed at ensuring 'transparency' and 'recognition' of qualifications across Europe (the Europass, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), the EQF, and the Common Quality Assurance Framework). Some of these technologies were in play prior to the Copenhagen Process, whereas others are being developed as part of the process. The aim of these technologies is to promote European standards to national VET systems, and one of the channels of promotion is the

Leonardo da Vinci programme, which is to be a 'testing field for the Copenhagen priorities'.²⁵ These technologies are not neutral but instead put pressure on VET policies and models in Europe. These technologies echo the discourse of new public management (NPM) and its ideas of managing performance through objectives. As a mode of governance, NPM is based on the devolution of powers supported by accountability strategies and narrow indicators for what the systems are supposed to achieve. Walters and Haahr ask the rhetorical question, 'are we not seeing a system of indirect "government at a distance" being established with the open method of coordination' (Walters & Haahr, 2005, 125). In a sense, the EU is trying to establish the same methods of management-by-objectives that, since the end 1980s, have been implemented by governments in the Member States. However, the EU is restrained, as VET is not legally within its jurisdiction, thus there are no means of sanctioning countries that do not act on the EU declarations and communiqués, except from 'naming and shaming' (see Zeitlin, et al., 2005). The EU cannot cut off grants, as is the case in which Member States control educational institutions. Therefore, the logic is the more subtle one of 'government of government': 'the world of partnership, frameworks, bench-marking, league tables, best practice, standards, and performance contracts is one that subtly constrains and shapes us, enjoining us to exercise our freedoms and liberties in particular ways, and towards particular ends' (Walters & Haahr, 2005, p. 119).

To sum up, the Copenhagen Process is pushing VET in Europe in a specific direction, putting forward a neoliberal Anglo-Saxon model based on ideas of outcome, modularisation, accreditation, and accountability. The dissemination of this policy takes place via the OMC, which is a way of managing through central objectives, and hereby attempts to steer the policies of the Member States through their own consent/active involvement. The means of dissemination are common tools and instruments.

However, the Copenhagen Process has been and will continue to be contested. In Germany, e.g. the issues of EQF and a credit transfer system meet resistance amongst national actors (see e.g. Rauner, 2004). The European discourse on VET is up against strong national discourses that contest the assumptions, problem representations, and policy solutions drawn up in the

²⁵ Mika Saarinen, Acting Assistant Director of CIMO at the conference 'From Copenhagen to Helsinki', December 4, 2006.

Copenhagen Process. The Commission may be pushing for convergence of VET policies, but at the national level, the Copenhagen Process is not turned into national action. This is a problem directly addressed in the Maastricht Communiqué:

In two years, the Copenhagen Process has succeeded in raising the visibility and profile of VET *at the European level* and in the Lisbon Strategy. Participating countries and stakeholders have come to a *common understanding* of the specific challenges at stake, have agreed on strategies to address these challenges and have developed concrete means to support their implementation [...] *However, greater emphasis should be placed on action to implement agreed objectives at national level, taking into account common European references and principles (Maastricht Communiqué on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (2004), my emphasis).*

A key word is 'agreed': the Member States have agreed on these strategies, but no action has been taken at national level. This is also stated in the EU white paper on governance: 'By the same token, Member States do not communicate well about what the Union is doing and what they are doing in the Union. "Brussels" is too easily blamed by Member States for difficult decisions that *they themselves have agreed to or even requested*' (my emphasis) (*European Governance - A White paper*, 2001).

Thus, actual success in making the Copenhagen Process a dominant discourse framing national VET policies and systems with the aim of achieving an internal labour market is uncertain. The Copenhagen Process may remain freely floating in an EU policy universe reflecting an almost surreal logic of the EU system wherein Member States agree to a common EU policy, but this discourse never enters the national VET area, which stays aloof from EU policy agreements. From this perspective, the Copenhagen Process seems to constitute a discourse with no effects on the construction of other discursive and nondiscursive practices. However, in my opinion, the whole configuration points to the discourse having effects on national VET policies and practices, especially the technologies of an ECTS and an EQF. Basically, this must be studied empirically, as the Copenhagen Process moves from one site to another, and this is an issue to be addressed in another article.

CONCLUSIONS

The 'what's the problem represented to be' approach has taken us through different steps in order to identify what is at stake in the Copenhagen Process. The first step brought context and intertextuality to the fore: the Copenhagen Process must be understood within the process of enlargement and the overall discourse of the Lisbon Strategy and lifelong learning/knowledge that are represented as the European answer to global competition. VET is in itself a solution to a problem represented to be 'globalisation' and 'global competition' between different regions, notably the United States, Europe, and the Asian-Pacific region. To refer to Fairclough (2003), these are existential assumptions that shape the solutions presented. This step also identified the dominating discourse of the Lisbon Strategy, which is neoliberal but with subordinate 'streaks' of social-democratic concerns regarding social cohesion, inclusion, and sustainability. Central, however, is a strong economic rationale with education perceived as a means to economic growth. The second step pointed to the problem of a lack of co-operation within the area of VET in Europe. It also revealed the continuity of EU policies regarding VET, perceived as an important factor in the realisation of the internal market. Transnational (recognition of) vocational qualifications is necessary if a European labour market is to be established. However, this objective has been long in the making; and not until 2002, when the enlargement expands the labour market in Europe and increases pressure on the 15+ labour markets and welfare models, will the time be ripe for 'enhanced co-operation' in VET. One of the main assumptions is that national VET systems (and hereby national labour market structures) may act as barriers for free mobility, and therefore VET should be opened up through common European policies and – not least – technologies. This brought us to the third step of effects on the construction of VET where I argued that the main rationale of the Copenhagen Process is one of enhancing the 'employability of the individual worker'. The subject positioning is either one of employed or unemployed, and the labour market is perceived as the main mechanism for inclusion. The dominant discourse is one of 'human capital', whereas more humanitarian values are marginalised. In this section, some of the silences of the process were also identified, as there is no mention of other barriers to mobility.

As for the construction of VET in the Copenhagen Process, it is pointed in the direction of the Anglo-Saxon model with its emphasis on on-the-job learning, accreditation of prior learning, modularisation, and market-driven provision, and hereby towards a 'disembedded' European VET model, whereby the focus is on providing the skills demanded by the labour market, and also that workers be mobile in order to meet labour market demands. My argument is that this will put pressure not only on VET but also on labour laws, collective bargaining, and minimum wages, as VET is highly embedded in labour market structures and as these may also be perceived as 'barriers' to mobility. This latter point reveals some of the tensions in policy domains in the EU: the freedom of mobility as an EU policy area, and VET as a policy area under the principle of subsidiarity.

The last step took us to the dissemination of the Copenhagen Process and also to its contestation. The process has introduced a new mode of governance within VET: the OMC. Rhetorically, the OMC is based on voluntary participation and bottom-up learning; however, it is supported by technologies that frame VET policies in a specific direction. The parallel was made to the introduction of management-by-objectives at the national level, which has been a process of de- and recentralisation – decentralisation in terms of making institutions accountable for their performance, and recentralisation in the sense that the relative autonomy of the institutions is seriously strained by methods of measurements: setting up indicators, standards, and performance goals. The Copenhagen Process introduces the same NPM methods at the EU level as have been introduced at the national level, and a logic of 'government of government'. However, it remains to be seen whether the Copenhagen Process will have a disciplining effect on the Member States. In some countries, the process is being contested, and counter movements are forming. In order to understand the dissemination and rejection of the process, it has to be traced back to the Member States and the development in VET policies and models.

Ambiguity is built into the Copenhagen Process through the OMC, which discursively stresses bottom-up learning, diversity, and a participatory approach, yet, on the other hand, introduces technologies of power aimed at steering the process in a specific direction. Radaelli (2004) makes the point that the OMC is an attempt 'to make progress in politically sensitive areas by seeking to avoid politicisation'. VET is a sensitive area, not only because it is under the principle of

subsidiarity, but also because it is connected to the quite sensitive policy areas of labour market, industrial relations, and welfare models. In a sense, the ambiguity of the Copenhagen Process is amplified by the ambiguous polity of the EU. On the one hand, we see a supranational institution with restricted authority and, on the other, intergovernmental co-operation with restricting tendencies, at least on the part of some of the Member States.

REFERENCES

The articles' references have been merged in the common reference lists in the back of the dissertation.

TELLING EXAMPLE: CONSTRUCTING A EUROPEAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SPACE

Helsinki, December 2006

I'm at a Leonardo da Vinci conference in Helsinki, a conference to which I have managed to get an invitation through some of my contacts in my EU networks. The conference is held in relation to the bi-annual ministerial meetings on the Copenhagen Process. My interest is to hear about the progress of the Copenhagen Process, as I expect that the conference will provide a status report of its advancement. However, I soon realise that I have misaligned expectations. It is not a conference about the progress of the Copenhagen Process but a celebration of Leonardo da Vinci projects that have managed to link EU policy priorities and (trans)national practices. I'm at an award ceremony and in my sweater and jeans, I'm not properly dressed for the red carpet.

I realise my mistake when I look around at the crowd gathered in the lobby. The participants are more dressed up than is usually the case for EU meetings – at least the ones that I normally attend. Moreover, there are many photographers, and a TV-crew, which shoots the whole award ceremony.

Before the actual awards ceremony takes place, a number of speakers are going to talk about the Copenhagen Process, the role of the Leonardo da Vinci programme, and not the least, the achievements of the ten projects that have won the award. The director of the Finnish Centre for International Mobility (CIMO), is the first speaker. She speaks about the Copenhagen Process and stresses the role of the Leonardo da Vinci programme in Finland. The programme offers an opportunity to follow policies into practice. This is also the reason why the Finnish EU presidency in collaboration with the Commission has decided to give awards to ten Leonardo da Vinci projects for their successful promotion of European co-operation in VET. The aim of this award is to honour the projects that contribute to the promotion of the Copenhagen priorities. Altogether, 157 projects have been nominated. Out of these, 50 have been selected in the competition for the award and 10 have been chosen as winners of the Helsinki Award for Linking Policy and Practice.

After her introduction, a Finnish choir sings Finnish folk songs. It is a sight both spectacular and unusual at an EU conference.

Then follow several other speakers: First, a representative from the EU Commission, responsible for lifelong learning. He speaks about the role of the Leonardo da Vinci programme as a link between VET and European co-operation. Then the head of the Research Unit in CEDEFOP follows. His presentation entitled, 'From Copenhagen to Helsinki – and still a long way to go', offers an overview of the Copenhagen Process, along with its priorities and stages. Finally, one of the project co-ordinators presents the results of an EU project on developing an ECVET prototype (the credit transfer system for VET). She talks about the readiness of various Member States to implement ECVET and concludes that less than 50% of all Member States have a high level of ECVET readiness, thereby emphasising the previous speaker's point that there is 'still a long way to go'.

Finally, we reach the main event: the Helsinki Awards for Linking Policy and Practice. A special prize has been designed especially for the occasion: a small ceramic star that walks (see picture 1). The Acting Assistant Director of CIMO and the representative from the EU Commission present the winners of the Helsinki Award who – almost like at the Oscar Awards Ceremony – step up and receive applause and flowers for their achievement. Although, they do not receive the real prize – the star. This must wait until the real stars, the European ministers of education, arrive at the ministerial gala dinner in the evening.

Undoubtedly, such an event and the award of a prize means a lot to those engaged in the projects and it creates a sense of community. Event is also one of the elements in Pedersen's model (see section question 5: the need for linking) and he stresses that events are important in the transformation of discourses into institutions. They form part of a larger narrative. In this case, the event is to contribute to the formation of a European space of VET. The prize is given to projects that link EU policies with national practices, thereby promoting Europeanisation on the micro-level and establishing the EU as a legitimate space for VET policy. The next article will show that this process of establishing a European discourse on VET is a process, which has taken quite some time.

THE EC DISCOURSE ON VOCATIONAL TRAINING: HOW A 'COMMON VOCATIONAL TRAINING POLICY' TURNED INTO A LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGY

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Abstract: This article traces the EC vocational training policy historically and describes the discursive alignments which brought the policy from a “common vocational training policy” as laid down in Article 128, in the Treaty of Rome to the Lisbon Lifelong Learning strategy. The argument is that vocational training has served as a lever for the gradual expansion of the policy field into both general and higher education and for the establishment of a European discourse on lifelong learning. In the article, Ball’s concept of ‘policy as discourse’ is used to identify the changing spaces of possibility within EC vocational training policy (Ball, ‘What is policy? Texts, trajectories and toolboxes’, *Discourse*, 13(2), 1993).

INTRODUCTION

Contrary to what many assume, vocational training has been a community policy area since the adoption of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, and in the 1960s, ambitious, albeit contested, principles for a ‘common vocational training policy’ were formulated by the Commission. Today, Member State resistance to EU ‘meddling’ in vocational training policy has been replaced by a common European policy process, the Copenhagen Process, which aims at making policy objectives for VET converge. Moreover, common tools, benchmarks, indicators, etc. are being developed under the OMC in order to identify ‘good practices’ as a way to achieve the common objectives.²⁶ But how

²⁶ The OMC is in most EU studies described as ‘soft law’, i.e. the method does not establish the binding law of the community method, which has to be implemented at national level. Like the programme method, it creates networks of individuals and institutions exchanging ideas and developing similar practices. In addition, the open method involves national governments in creating and diffusing an EU framework of

did these changes come about, from national resistance to a 'common vocational training policy' in the 1960s to national acceptance and implementation of a common European policy in the 2000s? The aim of this article is to answer this question by tracing the vocational training²⁷ policies in the European Community. The article will show how vocational training, as a policy area legally included in the Treaty of Rome, has served as a lever to expand community policy within the areas of both education and training, establishing lifelong learning as an EC policy area.

The vocational training policy at the community level will be traced from 1951 until 2002, mapping the discursive construction of vocational training in European policy and the technologies of Europeanisation, i.e. the modes of governance or policy instruments which are to ensure the implementation of EC policies at a national level.²⁸ In this article, I draw on the concept of 'policy as discourse', describing the space of possibility²⁹ established in European vocational training policy. One of my points is that 'Europe' has become a 'natural' arena for policy-making in education and training, adding to the complexity of policy-making and policy analysis. Furthermore, the discourse established at the European level has contributed to the re-configuration of vocational training through its framing within a lifelong learning strategy.

The article is divided into three sections. In the first section, I shall briefly outline considerations on theory and method. In the second section, I trace 'vocational training policy as a discourse' in the

policies and practices on a topic area over which, they, officially, retain sovereignty. This works through the establishment of common policy objectives, benchmarks, and indicators and through continuous evaluation by peers, and monitoring by the Commission through reviewing policies and action plans in each country in annual or bi-annual reports (Cort, 2008b).

²⁷ I use the term 'vocational training' hereby reflecting the legal basis for implementing a common vocational training policy as stated in Article 128 of the 1957 Treaty of Rome. It is not until the adoption of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty that the term 'vocational education and training' starts being more widely used in EC policy documents. The different EC usage of the terms reflects that the community is treaty-based and that wording has to be carefully considered to not overstep the EC's legal jurisdiction.

²⁸ By 'technologies of Europeanisation', I mean the modes of governance or policy instruments that lead to changes in national policies along the lines of European policy objectives or European models, such as the EQF or the European lifelong learning model. This definition is partly based on Vink, who defines Europeanisation pragmatically as 'when something in the domestic political system is affected by something European' (Vink, 2002, p. 3).

²⁹ Andersen and Kjær (1996) introduce the concept of 'space of possibility' by drawing on Foucault's concept of 'conditions of possibility', which make possible certain ways of thinking and acting and exclude others (see Foucault, 2005). I find their concept very interesting, as it opens up for a spatiality of actions but also for counteractions, e.g. drawing on other discourses within this space.

EC from the 1950s until 2002, looking into the discursive alignments which have made possible the EU discourse on lifelong learning. Finally, in the third section, I analyse changes in EC vocational training policy, with the emphasis on policy as a discourse and technologies of Europeanisation.

CONSIDERATIONS OF THEORY AND METHOD

The article is based on a diachronic discursive reading of policy documents from the early 1950s until 2002.³⁰ The aim is to understand how vocational training has been constructed within EC policies over time and hereby add to the understanding of current policy developments. I draw on Ball's concept of 'policy as discourse' (Ball, 1993), looking into discursive changes and the technologies through which a common European policy was to be realised.

Ball distinguishes between 'policy as text' and 'policy as discourse'. The first concept is policy contextualised, i.e. the struggles over policy, the translation, the adaptation, the interpretation amongst different actors within different institutions, etc. Within this perspective, there is 'plenty of social agency and social intentionality around' (Ball, 1993, p. 13). 'Policy as discourse', on the other hand, deals with how policy frames a field and its actors. It is about what can be said and thought, who can speak, when, where, and with what authority, enabling 'certain possibilities for thought' (Ball, 1993, p. 13). The effect of 'policy as discourse' is that it changes the possibilities we have for thinking 'otherwise' (Ball, 1993, p. 14). Analysing 'policy as discourse' is the analysis of policy as a space of possibility in which vocational training is re-framed and re-configured, in this case within a European context and a lifelong learning discourse.

I have traced 'vocational training 'policy as a discourse' through the detailed reading of policy documents from the EC and secondary literature from the 1950s until today (see list of policy documents in the References). These documents have been selected partly from the EUR-Lex database and partly from other databases (such as the CEDEFOP Bibliographical Database and the Archive of European Integration at Pittsburgh University). The policy documents encompass both legal documents and policy reports; consequently, their status differs. However, it is important to

³⁰ It is inspired by the approach developed by Andersen and Kjær (1996), institutional history. They promote an analytical strategy consisting of two steps: 1) a diachronic analysis focusing on how a specific institution is constructed over time; and 2) a synchronic analysis focusing on change/rupture that reconfigures a specific institution. In this article, I apply the diachronic perspective. (For a synchronic perspective, see Cort, 2008b).

note that my aim is not to establish whether the documents are legally enforceable but to trace the changes in the discourse that have made some ways of thinking and acting possible and excluded others, hereby contributing to institutional change. The strength of the ‘policy as a discourse’ approach is that it opens up for an understanding of how small alignments in the policy have opened up for new possibilities. The aim is to ask what happened ‘there and then’ that made it possible to change a ‘common vocational training policy’ into a common European discourse about lifelong learning.³¹

It follows that ‘Europeanisation’ is one of the key concepts in this article. Since the late 1990s, this concept has gained ground to the detriment of harmonisation, reflecting an increased awareness of the complexity of the relationship(s) between the EU, the Member States and the educational institutions. Harmonisation implies a top-down adoption of European regulation, which is directly applicable in the Member States. Europeanisation describes the interconnectedness between European and national policies on the basis of common objectives, common concepts, common tools, benchmarks, etc. Whereas harmonisation implies that European legislation precedes national legislation, Europeanisation means the adaptation or transformation of national policies and legislation along the lines of European policies and processes. In the article, I suggest the concept of the ‘technology of Europeanisation’ to capture European modes of governance and/or policy instruments that lead to changes or transformations in national policies.

TRACING THE VOCATIONAL TRAINING POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

In this section, I trace the vocational training policy in the EC from the 1950s until the 2000s. The aim is to show how small alignments in the discourse leads to the lifelong learning strategy of the 1990s which includes both education and training. The main driver is the objective of establishing the free movement of workers and hereby a European labour market.

³¹ EC policies adopted within the field of vocational training in general belong to the lower echelon of the EC judicial hierarchy, i.e. recommendations and decisions.

1951 TO 1957: CO-OPERATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

The tracing of a vocational training policy in the EC can take its starting point before the EC was even founded. Common ground had been established during the years of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The main driver for European co-operation was the policy objective of establishing a common market for coal and steel. Mobility of workers within these two sectors, and the transnational recognition of vocational qualifications, was perceived as essential in attaining this objective. From this point onwards, mobility and transnational recognition of vocational qualifications have been central issues driving a common vocational training policy.

The conceptualisation of vocational training was closely linked to the coal and steel industries, as these constituted the conditions of possibility for ECSC policy-making. The discourse about vocational training was narrow and specifically focused on the skill requirements of workers within these industries (see, e.g. Mechi 2004; *Projet Memorandum sur les Problèmes relatifs à la Formation Professionnelle des Travailleurs des Industries de la Communauté*, 1957). The approach to vocational training was a sector approach in which co-operation and co-ordination developed at the Community level. This approach continued into the 1960s when the agriculture and transportation sectors were included in Community policy, and is still current today where a sector approach can be found in the establishment of credit transfer and mutual recognition of qualifications.

The policy ambitions were to some extent modest, as they primarily were aimed at mapping national approaches to vocational training within the two sectors and analysing the changes affecting the industries. The belief in research and ‘evidence’ of good practices came to play a major role in defining common objectives within the area of vocational training and in the movement towards common solutions to common problems. This role of ‘knowledge’ and ‘expertise’ in EC policy-making can be said to rest on the bridging of diverse political systems and governments in power without invoking ideological conflicts, and not least the belief in research and planning in the modernisation of society after World War II.

The main technology of Europeanisation was the formation of transnational groups of experts, policy makers, and representatives for the social partners, and the policy rested on the idea of

exchange of experience and policy learning. Study visits to the different Member States, the United Kingdom, and the United States were one of the main means of developing common ground (Projet Memorandum sur les Problèmes relatifs à la Formation Professionnelle des Travailleurs des Industries de la Communauté, 1957). The underlying rationality was scientific-rational with an emphasis of identifying ‘good practices’ and a belief that research can come up with objective solutions to social and political problems. To some extent, the method of the 1950s was similar to the present day’s open method of co-ordination. However, the policy was limited to the coal and steel sectors and was not followed up by the development of common instruments or indicators, and there was no agreement on convergence between European and national policy objectives. The discourse established in vocational training policy in this first period was highly influenced by a scientific-rational approach to the planning of policy and this idea of being able to objectively define policies were to become an underlying assumption in EC policy-making.

1957 TO 1973: SUPRANATIONALISM VS. INTERGOVERNMENTALISM

In 1957, the European Economic Community (EEC) was established. The EEC included the original six Member States of the ECSC but the objective was more far-reaching: the establishment of an economic community and – in time – ‘an ever-closer union among the people of Europe’ (*Treaty of Rome*, 1957).³² The main drivers behind an EC vocational training policy remained the issues of mobility and transnational transfer of vocational qualifications.

Chapter 2 of the Treaty of Rome, dealing with the European Social Fund, Article 128, laid down vocational training as a common policy area:³³ ‘The Council shall, acting on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, lay down general principles

³² Gillingham points to the fact that the Treaty of Rome is highly influenced by ordoliberal ideas of the market as the main mechanism for regulating the economy. He sees the Single European Act as a return to these ordo-liberal ideas, but points to a perpetual schism within the Community between the ideas of the EC as a new ‘superstate’ or as a new market economy consisting of 27 member states. In the early 1960s, there was a wish within the Commission to establish a federal state, and this led to conflicts with the member states, especially France.

³³ In the *Treaty of Rome*, vocational training is mentioned in several of the Articles (see, e.g. Article 41 on a Common Agricultural Policy, Article 57 on the mutual recognition of diplomas, and Article 118 on social policy within the community).

for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development of the national economies and of the common market' (*Treaty of Rome*, 1957).

Vocational training was established as a legal area for EC action, which was not the case for general and higher education. In the 1960s, however, most proposals under Article 128 were contested by the Member States as a reaction against the attempts to harmonise the area.³⁴ The Member States insisted on their sovereignty in matters of vocational training, and during the 1960s, this vocational training policy became an object of push and pull between the Commission and the Member States.

In 1961, the Commission formulated 10 principles for implementing a common vocational training policy. Behind the principles was a strong wish on the part of the Commission for a harmonisation of vocational training in Europe; therefore, the principles were to be mandatory and not to be implemented according to national rules (Petrini, 2004, p. 26). The Commission was pushing for the introduction of the 'community method' within vocational training which would set down policies in regulations or directives, which are enforced by the Commission and the European Court of Justice. Furthermore, in the first draft of the principles, the Commission was authorised to make proposals to the Council which the Council 'could reject only by unanimous agreement' (Petrini, 2004, p. 29).

These principles were not adopted until 1963, and then in a watered-down version in which the Member States retained the competence within the policy field. Nevertheless, the principles broadened the conceptualisation of vocational training to include 'all vocational training of young persons and adults who might be or already are employed in posts up to supervisory level'. Furthermore, in the first principle, section c, it is stated that the common policy should have as its objective 'to broaden vocational training on the basis of a general education' to an extent sufficient to encourage the harmonious development of the personality and to meet requirements arising from technical progress, new methods of production and social and economic developments [...]. In section d, the importance of 'civic education' is mentioned, and in section e, the link between

³⁴ This dichotomy of Commission versus member states and the issue of retaining or pooling sovereignty is a common theme in many articles dealing with the EC. However, as pointed out by many EU researchers, EC politics is a complex process in which both the member states influence EC policies and EC policies have a direct impact on national policies (see, e.g. Howarth & Torfing, 2005; Kohler-Koch & Eising, 1999).

general education and vocational training is mentioned (Council decision of 2 April 1963 laying down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy). These principles reflect the post-war consensus on 'welfare' and its underlying values of equality, equal opportunity, and democratic rights (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000). Despite the fact that the principles were never realised in actual policy-making during the 1960s, they opened the ground for an expansion of the policy area, as the discourses on 'general education', 'civic education', and 'personal development' were made possible. They hereby pointed towards the broadening of the policy area in the 1970s to include education.

At the end of the 1960s, a push towards formulating and implementing a common vocational training policy arose again, this time on the initiative of the Member States that were facing common problems such as matching the supply of skills and labour market demands, and long-term unemployment. As a consequence, the Member States pushed for common studies and research, and the exchange of experiences at a community level (Petrini, p. 35). In a sense, this was a return to the policy co-operation of the 1950s during which the High Authority co-ordinated the common efforts within the field but vocational training policy was considered a national policy area. From 1969, intergovernmentalism was to mark co-operation within the field of vocational training and by 1971, the Council adopted a new action programme (General guidelines for drawing up a Community action programme on vocational training 1971). The new action programme did not take the common policy as far as had been anticipated in the 10 general principles.

Petrini (2004) mentions a number of reasons for the failed attempts to draw up a common vocational training policy in the 1960s: the reluctance to cede powers to the Community, the integrationist policy of the Commission, and the dialectic between intergovernmental and supranational pressures. Another way of explaining the failure of the policy is the lack of a defined common problem amongst the Member States. The 1960s were characterised by the economic boom, the education boom, and increased welfare in Europe. Only Italy, which had problems of massive unemployment, pushed for a common vocational training policy, whereas the other Member States not facing these problems withdrew from the common policy. In a sense, the

discourse the Commission attempted to establish in the 1960s within this area was not in line with the wider economic and societal development of the time.

1973 TO 1985: EUROPEAN EXPANSION OF THE POLICY FIELD

By 1973, the context changed, and the possibilities for establishing a common EC discourse on vocational training changed. Keynesian economic policies had failed and all national governments were facing the problems of stagflation and unemployment. However, the welfare discourse on equality and equal opportunity was to colour the vocational training policy of the Community in the 1970s. As Neave points out, the 1976 action programme was to be seen 'as the final echo of that consensus which, gathered about the tenets of neo-Keynesian policies, had carried before it the most dramatic growth and change in education' in the 20th century (Neave, 1984, p. 199).

During the period 1973 to 1985, important changes took place and EC policy measures were introduced that in the long run changed the possibilities for drawing up a common education and training policy at community level. Barriers between education and training in the traditional sense were starting to be gradually broken down in the Community policy (Fogg & Jones, 1985). It was also the decade in which the concept of 'permanent education' found its way into the EC policy documents, paving the way for a lifelong learning strategy 25 years later. Youth unemployment in particular was seen as a major problem, and the problems of transition between basic education and vocational training were a common concern. Vocational training was thus awarded the role of integrating young unemployed people into society (school-work transition). During this period, major institutions were set up: a Directorate-General for Research, Science, and Education (1973), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) (1975), and the Action Programme for Education (1976). From the 1970s, the EC started expanding, growing from six to nine Member States in 1973, which increased the complexity of EC policy-making.

In 1973, the Commission appointed an expert, Henri Janne, former Belgian Minister of Education and at that time Professor at the Free University of Brussels, to explore the ideas of expanding the

policy area into general education. The report was to have an important influence on the future developments within the policy field.³⁵

First of all, the report pointed out that ‘intergovernmental procedures and community solutions are visibly in opposition to each other’, meaning that the reluctance of the Member States to transfer competence to the community blocked the way for finding viable common solutions to the problems within education and training, not least for realising the internal market. The community had to be able to formulate policies within both education and training if the internal market were to become a reality. In the report, Janne underlined the interconnectedness amongst vocational training, education, and economic development, on the one hand, and the provisions of the Treaty of Rome dealing with the equivalence of degrees, the right of establishment, and the free movement of labour, on the other hand. This interconnectedness provided the basis of an argumentation for moving towards a common policy within the field of education and training at a European level. Furthermore, he described the blurring of borders between vocational training and general education, writing ‘there is no longer any good vocational training which does not comprise a sound general training at all levels, and there is no longer any good general training which is not linked with concrete practice, and, in principle, with real work’ (Janne, 1973, p. 11).

A report drawn up by Ralph Dahrendorf, the first Commissioner of the DG of Research, Science, and Education, also served as a driver of change. Both reports pointed out that even if progress were made at the level of principle, at a practical level, the impact of the common policy was limited (Dahrendorf, 1973, p. 3; Janne, 1973, p. 10).³⁶ Dahrendorf concluded, e.g. regarding the mutual recognition of diplomas that none of the 40 directives placed before the Council had been passed. He put forward the idea of a ‘European educational passport’, that should indicate the ‘convertibility’ of diplomas and qualifications. This passport, the Europass, became a reality in 2004, more than 30 years after Dahrendorf’s proposal.

³⁵ For researchers interested only in education, this is often regarded as the starting point for a common education policy in the European Communities, and Neave notes that ‘[the Janne report] was a noteworthy contribution to breaking down the taboo which, hitherto, had been set around the area of education in community affairs’ (Neave, 1984, p. 8).

³⁶ Ralph Dahrendorf was the German Commissioner of the first Directorate-General for Research, Science, and Education from 1970 to 1974.

In both reports, the possibilities for the Commission and the Community to explore the area of 'permanent education' were put forward. Dahrendorf and Janne pointed out it might be strategically wise for the Community to embrace this emerging field, that had '[...] few structures, little integration and, consequently, [was] more open to combined action' (Janne, 1973, p. 40). Permanent education would find at the community level 'a building site where little work has so far been done and which [...] would lead the Community to draw conclusions on educational policy in general' (Janne, 1973, p. 42).³⁷ Twenty years later, the Commission published its working paper, *Guidelines for Community Action in the Field of Education and Training*, establishing lifelong education as an EC policy area. In other words, already in the 1970s, the first outline of an EC strategy within the field of 'permanent education' or to use the current term, 'lifelong learning' can be detected.

During the 1970s, the problem of youth unemployment increased and constituted a major 'common' problem around which the Member States could gather – despite reluctance to cede power to the Community. A theme of major importance became the school-work transition, an area that made possible the inclusion of education and compulsory schooling in the common vocational training policy. In 1976, a common report was drawn up advocating further co-operation and exchange of experiences about retaining and motivating young people for vocational training (*From education to working life*, 1976). This led to the adoption of an action programme at a Community level in which pilot projects and studies were to 'assist in the evaluation and development of national policies'. In the programme, special weight was given to the preparation of young people for work and to the transition from school to working life. This change of policy focus was to influence the construction of vocational training to a very high degree, as it was to become a main inclusion mechanism for 'disadvantaged groups' at risk in the labour market.

³⁷ In his report, Janne also warns against the extreme outcome of an à la carte system whereby learners can choose freely: 'inevitably, the industrial enterprise would seek to train workers, employees, and supervisory staff according to its own needs and would organise promotion in such a way as to fit in with its own criteria for technical and managerial skills. The abolition of the legal value of degrees and diplomas, the institutionalisation of systems providing completely free options [...] might culminate in the emergence of a meritocracy regulated by the interest of private enterprise' (Janne, 1973, p. 43). Now, more than 30 years later, it might be worth remembering this far-sighted warning by Janne.

The Community Action Programme in the field of education had farther reaching implications than originally envisaged in 1976. It opened up possibilities for Community action within national educational institutions. This new technology of Europeanisation, the 'programme method' (see, e.g. Kohler-Koch & Eising, 1999), was set up on the basis of advice from national experts who recommended that the 'Community should develop interrelations in Europe at all possible levels, whether between young people or adults, but *without the state playing any part*' (Janne, 1973, p. 28, my emphasis). This advice was set against the realisation that 'ministerial meetings, not prepared with an eye to active decisions, produce nothing but speeches and declarations of principle' (Janne, 1973, p. 22). With the adoption of an action programme for education, vocational training was no longer just a policy area from which the Commission pushed for action and the Member States reluctantly declared their good intentions, but an area wherein networks were being developed amongst individual students, teachers, workers, institutions, and labour market organisations across Europe, and European practices within the field of vocational training were being established. The programme method works on the basis of the granting of financial incentives to national educational institutions, creating a European space for experimentation and the development of practice (Nielsen et al., 1999).

At the end of the 1970s, other changes took place in the overall configuration of vocational training policy at Community level. Most importantly, the concept of 'alternance training' appeared and changed the perspective on vocational training, and indeed learning. The idea of work in itself constituting a learning environment was developing, with the contours for recognising learning outside of formal educational settings taking shape, leading to one of the main principles in the lifelong learning strategy of the 1990s. The alternance model was promoted at European level and according to Neave, the objective was to implement it through a directive that would have been binding on the Member States. Behind the promotion of the alternance training model lay the assumption that it was necessary to develop an integration approach encompassing both general education and vocational training. A directive on alternance training was, however, never passed.

It is characteristic of the 1970s that, on the one hand, progress was made towards expanding the area of vocational training, yet on the other hand, many ideas for further co-operation within general education were rejected amongst the Member States. It reflects the sensitivity of education

as a national policy area, central to the creation of national identity and national language, and the fear of pooling sovereignty within this sensitive area. According to Neave, the Commission discourse on a 'European dimension of education' stirred unease amongst countries sceptical about increased integration and Europeanisation, especially in the United Kingdom and Denmark.³⁸ Still, the Member States were facing common problems and were interested in finding common solutions through co-operation. To conclude, the vocational training policy of the 1970s and into the 1980s was a balancing act between respect for national structures and traditions and co-operation at a European level in order to attain the objectives of the Treaty of Rome. Nevertheless, it was during this period that a common discourse was established as a consequence of – especially – the economic crisis. In the next period, the discourse would be expanded and consolidated by the fact that vocational training was treaty-based.

1985 TO 1992: THE INCLUSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE QUEST FOR COMPARABLE QUALIFICATIONS

The 1980s and early 1990s were characterised by a transition of regime. In many European countries, governments re-oriented policies according to neoliberal tenets with increased privatisation of public services and the introduction of NPM to make public institutions compete on 'quasi-markets'. The implementation of neoliberal policies and NPM took different forms in the various countries; however, it was a trend that was perceptible in all European countries (see, e.g. Campbell & Pedersen, 2001; Gillingham, 2003; Harvey, 2005). The same can be said within the EC. The European Single Act (SEA) adopted in 1986 was heavily influenced by neoliberal (Thatcherite) policies, although it was not an unambiguous document, as it also reflected more traditional French '*dirigiste*' thinking (Gillingham, 2003). This ambiguity in policies was also perceptible within the field of vocational training policy. On the one hand, the policy discourse was characterised by an orientation towards meeting the needs of the labour market and the economy, and on the other hand, the welfare discourse of the 1970s with its weight on 'equality', 'equal access to education', and a concern for the social consequences of the introduction of new information technology lingered on.

³⁸ Thirty years later, the unease seems to have disappeared, as the terms of 'a European VET area' and a 'European education and training space' are generally accepted, even in national policy papers.

One of the first major landmarks in Community policy on vocational training in the 1980s was set by the European Court of Justice in 1985. In the case of *Gravier vs. the City of Liège*, the Court laid down a wide-ranging definition of vocational training that included courses at university level (*'Françoise Gravier v City of Liège'* 1985).³⁹ This judgement paved the way for a wider policy within the field of vocational training at Community level and led to the adoption of the Erasmus programme in 1987 (de Moor, 1985; Walkenhorst, 2005). This expanded the remit of the Community considerably. Interestingly enough, higher education was not included in the vocational training policy on combating social exclusion, unemployment, and structural problems within the European industries. It was developed as a policy area in its own right, with its own action programmes, own policy objectives, and own processes. Although university courses were legally considered to be vocational training, policy-wise, parallel processes were initiated. However, in one respect vocational training left its imprint: vocational training's valuing of competences for work, and its more utilitarian values were integrated into higher education (see Moodie, 2002, for a discussion on how to distinguish vocational training from other educational sectors).

Another event of major significance was the adoption of the Single European Act in 1986 in which the Member States agreed on a final date for the implementation of the internal market. This implied that all barriers to the free movement of goods, capital, services, and labour should be dismantled by 1992 (leading to a frenzied issuing of directives dismantling trade barriers). In the field of vocational training, this led to a re-launch of the 1960s' project to harmonise vocational qualifications. However, as there was too much opposition to common directives on vocational qualifications, the approach of comparability was introduced. It was decided that a system of comparability of vocational qualifications should be established at the latest by 1992 and the opening of the internal market (*'On the comparability of vocational training qualifications between*

³⁹ The central issue of the case was the payment of a fee for attending a course in the art of strip cartoon at the Academie Royale des Beaux Arts in Liège. A French student, Gravier, objected to paying the fee, as it was only to be paid by non-Belgian students. The European Court of Justice ruled that '(2) the term "vocational training" includes courses in strip cartoon art provided by an institution of higher art education where that institution prepares students for a qualification for a particular profession, trade, or employment or provides them with the skills necessary for such a profession, trade or employment'. (*'Françoise Gravier v City of Liège'*, 1985).

the Member States of the European Community', 1985). Instead of harmonisation as a technology of Europeanisation, comparability became the new technology.

This comparability of vocational qualifications should be ensured through an extensive process of co-operation involving all partners (governments, sectors, and social partners). They were to come to agreement and distil the diversity of vocational qualifications into a description of core skills/competences within selected vocational qualifications. These descriptions were to form the basis for an educational passport that skilled workers could use when travelling to other Member States (see Nielsen, 1993). The whole set-up had much in common with the open method of co-ordination: common objectives, involvement of national stakeholders, follow-up procedures, etc. Despite the many resources channelled into the project, it failed and was closed down in 1993, and the method of comparability was replaced by the method of 'transparency'. According to Deane, the comparability procedure was considered too complex because of the detailed analytical work required (Deane, 2005). The descriptions, when completed, were outdated due to rapid changes in the labour market, and the Member States and the social partners exhibited only minor willingness and interest in implementing the descriptions at national level. The comparability project provides an interesting case of how processes of Europeanisation may remain disconnected to practices in the Member States, despite political consensus and stakeholder involvement.

A more successful technology of Europeanisation within the area remained the programme method. At the end of the 1980s, a proliferation of action programmes flowered. Many different programmes were established, having different aims, different target groups, but almost all fancy names: Comett, Eurotechnet, Erasmus, Lingua, Tempus, Petra, Iris, Force, and the Young Workers Exchange Programme. Two main aspects of the action programmes are worth considering: the consolidation of the programme method through which European policy objectives were turned into practice in national VET institutions, and the consolidation of further and higher education under Article 128. It was no longer questioned whether the Community could set up initiatives within this area. New ways to ensure that common policies were implemented, new methods of evaluation, and annual reporting were introduced. The policies adopted at Community level and the programmes implemented were to be evaluated to ensure that the objectives were attained, and if not, to decide what could be done about it. Another technology was the annual reporting of

the Commission, 'drawing together the main achievements of its different initiatives concerned with human resource development, education, training and youth' ('Memorandum on the Rationalisation and Coordination of Vocational Training Programmes at Community Level', 1990, p. 13). The introduction of these technologies marks the subtle shift towards the introduction of NPM within the Community institutions.

1992 TO 2000: THE INTEGRATION OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING INTO A LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGY

At the beginning of the 1990s, new terms started appearing in the policy documents reflecting the changing tides. Communism and the iron curtain may have collapsed, but now Europe was facing (and still is) the threat of China, India, and the United States in an economic global race. In the Commission Memorandum from 1991, the terms globalisation, human resource development, a 'European space for training and education', open and distance learning, intangible investment/capital, European labour market, human capital, and flexible and innovative workforce became part of an economic discourse on 'European competitiveness' and the striving to become a world-leading 'knowledge economy/society' (see Brine, 2006 for a discussion of the different meanings ascribed to these two concepts).

From the 1990s onwards, education and training became increasingly intertwined policy areas under the umbrella concept of 'lifelong learning'. The many different programmes and policy objectives of the 1980s were tied together during the 1990s. This was made possible by the inclusion of education into the new Treaty of Maastricht in 1992. In the Maastricht Treaty, the Community practice of including general and higher education in European policy-making was consolidated in Article 126, which concerned the remit of the Community to promote co-operation within the field ('Treaty on European Union', 1992). Vocational training was re-formulated in Article 127, reducing the remit of the Commission and the Community compared with the original aim of establishing a 'common vocational training policy'. Although, education and vocational training were under separate articles, the policy of the 1990s was that of an integrated approach to education and training. Both areas were reconfigured under the heading of 'lifelong learning', with its emphasis on learning from the cradle to the grave and the recognition and accreditation of

competences acquired outside formal education systems. The focus was no longer on input or process (formal educational trajectories) but on 'learning outcomes'.

During the 1990s, a number of working papers and white papers were published by the Commission, in which the concept of lifelong learning took form and in which education and training were dealt with as a common policy area. In the working paper from 1993, the role of the Commission was described as the catalyser igniting changes within the Member States. The paper stated that 'the virtue of the concept of lifelong education is that it could provide a new vision and a better framework for welding together in one integrated effort the various components of the education and training arrangements, often separately organised, and thus create much more dynamic and flexible education and training systems in the future' ('Commission working paper: Guidelines for community action in the field of education and training', 1993). The Commission succeeded in positioning itself as a major strategic player in a field under construction, in keeping with the advice given by Janne 20 years earlier.

In the 1995 White Paper on Education and Training: Teaching and Learning – Towards the Learning Society, the concepts of informal and nonformal learning started to emerge: 'Education and training whether acquired in the formal education system, on the job, or in a more informal way, is the key for everyone to control their future and their personal development'. On the one hand, the paper stressed the role of education and training vis-à-vis the individual, and on the other hand, the role of education and training as 'immaterial investment and getting the best out of our human resources will improve competitiveness, boost jobs, and safeguard social achievements' ('White Paper on Education and Training: Teaching and Learning– Towards the Learning Society', 1995).

The focus on the 'individual' is characteristic of the policy documents of the 1990s (see also Lawn, 2003). In the previous periods, policy documents were addressed to the Member States and the problems that the states should address. In the 1990s and today, the policy documents to a much higher degree addressed – and are addressing – the 'individual', reflecting a more neoliberal discourse that emphasises the freedom of the individual in a free competitive market. A key term in this discourse becomes 'employability': it is the responsibility of the individual to keep his or her 'knowledge, skills and competences' up-to-date with changing labour market needs. It marks

the change of discourse from a welfare state discourse in which the role of the state is to support the individual in case of economic fluctuations, to a more neoliberal discourse whereby the 'problem' is not so much one of economic fluctuations as of individual adaptation to labour market needs. However, it is important to note that the 'welfare discourse' remained layered within the field, legitimising the individualisation of responsibility, 'helping people to help themselves', etc. The 1995 White Paper described two routes to 'employability': the 'traditional route' in which one's qualifications have been acquired through formal educational institutions, and the 'modern route' wherein the individual is part of a network that 'educates, trains, and learns'. The use of the terms 'traditional' and 'modern' indicated the preferable route to take. It also indicated that the national education systems were out of touch with the latest developments and therefore needed to be reformed and modernised along the lines of European policies.

The 'modern route' was assumed to be dependent on 'reliable accreditation systems'. In the 1995 White Paper, it was stated that '[a]n accreditation system of this kind, on a voluntary basis, widely available in Europe and involving universities, chambers of commerce and specific business sectors, would complement the formal qualifications systems and would in no way be a replacement'. The accreditation system at a European level should include a 'personal skills card' that would facilitate mobility. The contours of a European 'lifelong learning model' emerges, despite the assurance of the paper that 'proposing a model is not the answer ... giving the diversity of national situations and the inadequacy of global solutions in this context'. In proposing the outline of a European model, the Commission does push for the harmonisation of education and training in Europe hereby overstepping its role of being 'complementary' to the nation states (see Cort, 2008c).

The discourse of the 1990s was in many ways a discourse with many internal contradictions and tensions, e.g. between the concept of lifelong learning and its focus on nonformal and informal learning, the efforts to benchmark existing systems, and make the formal education system the benchmark for the accreditation of nonformal and informal learning. One way to interpret it is as a transitional phase in which the concepts of the traditional national education and training systems are gradually integrated into a new European model for lifelong learning whereby learning takes place at any time and everywhere, but one in which the concepts and divisions of the 'old' systems

cannot embrace, or even counteract, the new ideas. One could ask whether it is education or training that dominates in the EU lifelong learning discourse. To some extent, it seems to be the latter, as the orientation is towards the ‘utility’ of education and training in the labour market. Lifelong learning is to a high degree about becoming and staying ‘employable’ throughout life.

2000-2002: MAKING THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS DO THE WORK

The Lisbon Agenda and the Copenhagen Process are the most recent culminations of the efforts to establish vocational training as part of a lifelong learning policy at the European level. The Lisbon Agenda sets common European objectives for education and training, establishing an aim for convergence based on voluntary participation in a bottom-up, but coordinated, open method of co-ordination leading to the development of common European standards, concepts, methods, and tools. The focus is on the ‘implementation’ of a European policy at the national level (see Cort, 2008b). The implementation revolves around a number of common instruments, such as the EQF and includes the launching of a vast number of projects involving vocational colleges, social partners, consultancy firms, national ministries and agencies, and European agencies such as the CEDEFOP. It is bottom-up Europeanisation insofar as national ministries and other stakeholders develop, test, adapt, and implement the European tools in national contexts. It has led to the paradoxical situation whereby national ministries receive funding from the European Commission for participating in European projects testing the feasibility of European tools. In short, the policy of the 2000s seems to be aimed at more action through the ‘self-regulation’ of the Member States.

‘POLICY AS DISCOURSE’: CHANGES IN THE SPACE OF POSSIBILITY

In the previous section, I traced the vocational training policy from the ECSC of the 6 Member States in the 1950s up to the EU of 27 Member States in the 2000s. I described how the space of possibility of vocational training policy at a European level has expanded considerably since the 1950s. In this section, I shall unfold Ball’s concept of ‘policy as discourse’ further by looking into how the European discourse on vocational training has framed vocational training and defined its space of possibility (the ‘who, when, where, and what’).

Tracing changes in the vocational training policy showed that a European dimension to vocational training has been legitimately established. Moreover, as a discourse, the vocational training policy has widened from a narrow discourse concerned with the training of workers in the coal and steel industries to one embracing lifelong learning transcending the nation state, educational sectors, and formal education institutions. As noted above, lifelong learning includes informal and nonformal training, vocational training, youth education and training, continuous vocational training, and higher education, pointing towards a changing construction of not only vocational training, but also education and training in general. These changes have disembedded vocational training policy from the national to the European level, initiating a process of defining common objectives for the field and its function in a 'knowledge' economy. New actors have moved into the field: the Commission with its rights of policy initiative within the field of education and training and its agencies for vocational training, the CEDEFOP, and the ETF. It has also created new constellations of actors cutting across the firmament of national borders, institutions, and sectoral fields.

The historical outline also showed the slow pace of establishing a European discourse on vocational training. European policy-making has tended to be re-active based on the lowest common denominators and mainstream policies, regardless of the fact that the Commission in some respects was quite ahead of the time in its anticipation of lifelong learning as a key policy area. Policy-making at a European level takes time. The vocational training policy of the 1970s reflected the policies of European welfare states in the 1960s, and the current lifelong learning strategy is a reflection of what has been taking place in most European countries since the 1980s: decentralisation/recentralisation, marketisation, commodification, individualisation, modularisation, etc. It does, however, add a European dimension to the policy, in which the realisation of the 'internal market' plays an important role.

This leads to the role of 'law' in the widening of the discourse. One of the crucial elements in the Europeanisation of vocational training policy is its legal basis in the Treaty of Rome. Along with the realisation of the four freedoms in the internal market, these have been important drivers in the expansion of vocational training to a lifelong learning strategy. In a sense, this is an argument in favour of a neofunctionalist perspective whereby the inclusion of one policy area in the treaties

spills over into other policy areas. However, a legal underpinning is not always enough for further integration, which the quest for establishing free movement of workers shows. Although the objective of establishing the free movement of workers and a 'truly' European labour market has been a constant undercurrent in EC vocational training policy and has led to a push for 'harmonisation', 'equivalence', 'comparability', 'transparency', or 'recognition' of vocational qualifications, this objective has still not been attained. This reflects the discrepancy between 'policy as discourse', 'policy as text', and social practice. 'Policy as text' would show the many interests tied up in the area of VET and their resistance to an undermining of special interests. As to social practice, mobility is a more complex phenomenon than the discourse about 'recognition of vocational qualifications' indicates. It concerns the social fabric of the individual: family, culture, welfare, etc. (see Telling example: The price of being mobile).

Another element that has worked in favour of increased Europeanisation is the achievement of consensus on the definition of common European problems and solutions to these problems. In the 1950s, it was the restoration of the coal and steel industries after the World War II. In the 1970s, the oil crisis triggered efforts to formulate European initiatives that focused on vocational training as a means to solve youth unemployment. In the 1990s and 2000s, the problems of 'globalisation' and 'economic competitiveness' were identified as common challenges to all Member States, leading to the adoption of the Lisbon Agenda and the Copenhagen Declaration. These two processes, along with the Bologna Process in higher education, have established the EU as a common space for policy-making in education and training at large. Here it would be tempting to point to the 'economy' as the main mover of policy, but the relations are not as straightforward as here depicted.

Throughout the whole period, vocational training has been tied up in two different rationalities: one about economic growth, and one about social welfare and cohesion. The balance between these two rationalities has changed from the 1950s until today, as has the meaning ascribed or rather its ideological underpinning. From the 1950s until early 1980s, the underlying ideology was that of the welfare state intervening in order to ensure economic and social stability. Problems were 'collectively' defined. The youth unemployment of the 1970s was a 'problem' for the state to solve. From the 1980s, as the neoliberal ideology became more prevalent, the role of the state

changed. Concerning unemployment or rather 'unemployability', this became a problem of the individual. The state is to ensure that the necessary educational provisions are available through which the individual will be able to become more employable. The image of the state is that of a 'therapist' facilitating the individual to realise the potential in him-/herself, but it remains the responsibility of the individual to achieve the much vaunted 'employability'. In this discourse, vocational training has been assigned the function of including marginalised groups into society (see below).

From 1950 until today, the construction and the perceived functions of vocational training have changed. In the 1950s, vocational training was perceived as a 'mainstream' provision aimed at the needs of workers entering or working in an industry. In the 1970s, vocational training policy started to target, in particular, unemployed youth and other 'disadvantaged' groups. In the 1980s, parallel to the proliferation of action programmes, target groups proliferated as well: disabled people, unemployed people, early school leavers, women (returning to the labour market), ethnic minorities, etc. (see also Brine, 2006); in other words, groups considered at risk in the labour market. However, in this respect there is somewhat of an inconsistency within the policy, as vocational training is also to provide highly qualified labour for the European industries. In this sense, vocational training plays a strange double role: on the one hand, it is to contribute to a 'high-skills' strategy and provide companies with highly skilled, innovative, entrepreneurial workers, and on the other hand, it is to include marginalised groups in the labour market. In many countries, this double role constitutes a problem of esteem for vocational training with problems of attracting students to the area.

The technologies aimed at a Europeanisation of vocational training policies have developed from the 1960s until today. In the 1960s, the Commission pushed for an introduction of the community method as the main instrument of governance within the field of vocational training; the aim was to harmonise vocational training across the Member States. However, this was rejected by the Member States, and instead intergovernmental co-operation became the main mechanism. At the end of the 1970s, the programme method was introduced, circumventing national governments, insofar that the programmes are targeted educational institutions, companies, and individuals. In this way, the first step for opening up a new transnational, European space for vocational training

was established. In 2000, the open method of co-ordination was introduced, aimed at supporting the Member States to develop their own policies in line with the objectives set at European level. The open method added 'soft' policy regulating mechanisms of monitoring, bench-marking, standardisation and surveillance, and a neoliberal element of national policy self-regulation to the two other technologies of Europeanisation (see Cort, 2008b). Today, all three technologies are at play within the field of vocational training (lifelong learning) and hereby create a triangle of governance aimed at steering national policies and actions more effectively in accordance with the objectives set at a European level, indicating the problem of actually realising the intensions of EC policies at a national level.

Nevertheless, the analysis points to the consolidation of a European discourse, concerning not only vocational training, but also education and training in a lifelong learning perspective. The lifelong learning model promoted at European level finds resonance in the Member States, as do its practices of modularisation, individual portfolio systems, recognition of skills acquired outside the formal education system, etc. However, the analysis also points to the messiness of European policy-making. It is not top-down policy processes (harmonisation) but a complex interplay between different actors at different levels feeding into a European discourse on vocational training in a lifelong learning perspective. Maybe the image of an amplifier would be appropriate, giving resonance to ideas already circulating in education and training and turning them into a common policy. In this process, the ideas get a European twist as 'Europe' becomes a 'natural' space of policy-making and the European labour market the 'arena' to which vocational training should contribute with highly skilled manpower serving the economy and hereby contributing to the social cohesion of society.

CONCLUSIONS

The reading of policy documents has shown how the policy area of vocational training has gradually expanded from a narrow policy directed towards two industrial sectors to a lifelong learning strategy. From a discursive perspective, continuous small alignments in the policy have changed the space of possibility enabling the Community to act within a wider and wider remit, which originally went beyond Article 128 of the 1957 Treaty of Rome. From the beginning,

vocational training has been embedded in economic and social welfare rationalities, for which the ideological underpinning has changed along the way, reflecting the overall paradigmatic shift from Keynesian welfare state policies to neoliberal NPM policies. In the end, it is perceived as the panacea to ensuring economic growth and social cohesion, not as a 'common vocational training policy', but as a lifelong learning strategy. The ordoliberal vision of an internal European market seems today to be carried forward by a neoliberal policy envisioning Europe as a world-leading competitive knowledge economy in which education and training plays the major role (see, e.g. Walters & Haahr, 2005).

The consequence is that, today, national VET policies have become so entangled with the EC policies that it no longer makes sense to look only at national institutions, national policies, and national structures in order to understand changes in the field of VET. Education and training has legitimately become a European policy field that feeds directly into national policies on VET. To put it into perspective: At the moment, many Member States are preparing the introduction of a national qualification framework (or the adoption of an existing one) in order to be able to benchmark against the EQF for lifelong learning. These processes reach deep into the national curricula for VET, as the EQF requires a focus on 'learning outcome' rather than input, time, duration, and subject. This means, EU policy-making becomes a concern, not only for researchers interested in the distant space of European policy-making and integration, but also for practitioners within the VET institutions.

TELLING EXAMPLE: THE QUALIFICATIONS CREDIT FRAMEWORK – A CASE OF GOOD PRACTICE?

London, September 2010

I'm in London to take part in ECVET Trust, a Leonardo da Vinci partnership project that has been running for more than a year. I have entered the project with the aim of studying processes of Europeanisation at a micro-level. The question asked is how do policy and practice connect in such a project in which stakeholders from different levels and from different VET systems come together to explore the feasibility of the setting up a common credit transfer system for VET in Europe (ECVET)? I observe how the various participants argue for specific solutions and problem representations based on their own national, organisational, and professional backgrounds and how the European dimension is represented in the discussions.

In London, the English project partner has invited one of her colleagues to speak about the new Qualifications Credit Framework (QCF), which is being introduced in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland (Scotland has its own qualifications framework). The presentation is to be a case of 'good practice' on how to make vocational qualifications more responsive to the demands of employers and learners and especially on how to use credit points in a framework, which is central to the ECVET Trust project.

I look forward to hearing about the QCF. I'm somewhat sceptical of the framework, since an English colleague from the University of London has told me about it and particularly about the qualifications database which is being set up under the slogan 'No Knowledge Ever Lost' with a five-year statute of limitations on the qualifications. I'm curious about what AB, the qualifications manager from the CfA is going say. The CfA is responsible for developing standards and qualifications within the business area and has its own interest in the QCF, so I expect to hear a different story from the one I have been told.

AB starts his presentation by saying: 'Nowhere else in the world is there a QCF', signalling that today is not the day for the critical story of the QCF. Instead, it starts out as a praise of a new

system that is more responsive to employers' needs and that allows room for employers to become providers of training. The strength of the framework is that it introduces standardisation across the sectors through shared, generic units and that it is nonbureaucratic and self-regulating. He says, 'I believe it is a very rational system'. It will rationalise the previous system, the NQF into fewer qualifications.

He then turns to address what is perceived as a barrier for introducing the new system, the idea of qualifications as intellectual property. This kind of thinking is a bit strange from a Danish perspective, as our system is based on standardised national qualifications laid down in tripartite co-operation, and I'm not quite sure if I actually get the point about intellectual property. He continues that 'everyone can deliver a qualification; the intellectual property is "how" you deliver it'. He makes his case in the form of an allegory, that of selling shoes. Shops selling shoes do not hide away their shoes, so that other sellers cannot see the shoes they are selling. It should be the same with qualifications. Finally, I think I get the point: providers are competing for customers, and in this competition, qualifications are a commodity like shoes that can be differently branded and marketed. Qualifications from one provider may be better branded amongst employers, and consequently learners will want to gain their qualification from this provider rather than another. However, there is a twist to this, in AB's perception qualifications are compared to shoes as a generic product, i.e. nobody can patent 'shoes' and likewise nobody should be able to patent specific qualifications. He is advocating for standardisation of qualifications in order to rationalise the previous system of NQF and its 34,000 units. This makes sense and yet it does not: the English system is based on a belief in the market and in the devolution of powers to quangos (quasi-autonomous governmental organisations) and providers who are to compete for customers in a quasi-market. I would take it to mean that competition includes product differentiation.

Finally, he gets to the database part, and I look forward to comparing his story to the story of my colleague. He stresses the fact that it is more expensive to deliver qualifications in the QCF due to IT costs: all learners are to have an individual learning record in the national database. This must be the 'No Knowledge Ever Lost' part. He perceives the learning records as a positive invention, for the learner record will link the units that the learner has gone through to different qualifications in the database. This will make it transparent to the learner that he is not only

qualifying for one specific qualification. Due to the generic nature of the units, they may be included in more than one qualification. An example is the generic competence of 'problem-solving', which is a part of more than one qualification.

AB goes on to describe the rules of combination, i.e. that for a certain qualification, some units are mandatory and other units optional. Some qualifications consist of mandatory units only, but most are a mix of mandatory and optional. The descriptions become more technical, with different kinds of units discussed wherein some units include recognition of prior learning. To me, it actually seems a bit bureaucratic and highly technical with mandatory units, optional units, other units at specialised levels, units from other countries, and equivalent units. Apparently, I'm not the only one as AB states that 'the units are not really understood by providers'. The essential component in this system is that 'people do not have to repeat learning'.

From here, it grows even more technical as we are introduced to the levels and how they can be mixed. The framework is based on learning outcomes, and AB says that he, in the development of the units, had 'a lot of problems coming from the regulators, as they define certain active verbs as equivalent to a level'. 'Writing a unit takes a long time', he adds.

After the presentation, I ask him about the emphasis on developing generic units, such as problem-solving. Is it possible to describe problem-solving without contextualising? He answers that the units may be described in a generic way, but that it is up to the providers to transform the units into teaching and in this process contextualise. He says, 'The CfA does not care about how the units are provided, as long as the providers follow the rules of combination'.

At the end of the session, I honestly doubt that I have understood what this is all about and how it is going to work. According to AB, it has taken seven years to develop the system and he believes that it will take another seven years to develop it fully. It is going to be interesting to see if this will make it into the European VET policy as a case of 'good practice'. The Anglo-Saxon idea of qualifications frameworks has made it – despite the fact that there is no evidence showing that this is the solution to the problems of transparency, comparability, and portability. This will be shown in the next article.

STATING THE OBVIOUS: THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK IS NOT A NEUTRAL EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY TOOL

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Abstract: In European Union policy documents, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is described as a neutral tool embedded in an evidence-based policy process. Its purpose is to improve the transparency, comparability, and portability of qualifications in the European Union. The aim of this article is to denaturalise the EQF discourse through a discursive reading of the EQF policy and a review of research on national qualifications frameworks in a number of primarily Anglo-Saxon countries. The argument may seem obvious: the EQF policy is not neutral (policies never are), nor is there evidence to substantiate the claim that the EQF is a case of policy learning from 'good practice'.

We cannot afford the unthinking copying from elsewhere of education policies dimly understood. Nor can we afford a situation in which many jurisdictions are doing similar things while failing to learn from each other (Levin, 1998, p. 139).

INTRODUCTION

Since 2002, qualifications frameworks, and particularly the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), have been advanced in Europe as a solution to many of the problems that member states of the EU are facing due to globalisation (Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning). As part of the Copenhagen Process, the EQF aims at initiating a process of modernisation of (vocational) education and training systems across the member states. This will contribute to 'the wider objectives of promoting lifelong learning' and improve 'the transparency, comparability,

and portability of citizens' qualifications that are issued in accordance with the practice in the different Member States' (European Parliament and European Council, 2008, p. 2).

In the many EU reports and resolutions, the EQF is described as a 'neutral' tool of 'translation' that will provide transparency between the diverse education and training systems in Europe. The EQF is one of the key tools in the Copenhagen Process, which is to be based on 'reliable evidence supported by rigorous research and data' (Bordeaux Communiqué, 2008, p. 10). This process introduced the OMC into EU VET policy and thereby a mode of governance, based on a belief in policy learning through peer reviewing and the sharing of 'good practices' across member states. In other words, an underlying claim is that the EQF will be based on evidence and examples of good practice. The claims of being a neutral tool based on an evidence-based policy are repeated throughout the policy documents.

The research dealing with the EQF is still scarce and the issues of 'neutrality' and 'evidence base' have not been touched upon. Many of the articles take for granted that qualifications frameworks are desirable and achieve transparency, comparability, and portability. In a special issue of the *European Journal of Vocational Training*, the EQF is described by different authors and from quite different perspectives.⁴⁰ However, only Bohlinger (2007/2008, p. 108) points to some of the inherent problems in the EQF: 'The risk is most likely to arise if economic policy objectives such as the promotion of mobility, competitiveness, and employability take precedence over those of educational policy, although these aims need not be mutually exclusive'.

Bohlinger (2007/2008) points to the central role of values in policy and education, and how different policy aims may be contradictory. In her article, she points to the need to learn more from countries with many years of experience with qualifications frameworks, and this was my point of departure when I started researching for this article: What are the experiences from other countries in terms of achieving the policy objectives of transparency, comparability, and portability? During

⁴⁰ Many of the articles point to a degree of Europeanisation due to the link between the EQF and the need to set up NQFs in order to make qualifications comparable across member states (Bjørnåvold & Coles, 2007/2008; Hanf & Rein, 2007/2008; Hozjan, 2007/2008; Lauzackas & Tütlys, 2007/2008). The articles by Maguire et al. (2007/2008) and Raffe et al. (2007/2008) offer the cases of Ireland and Scotland as cases of 'good practice' from which Europe could learn, and many of the articles go into the implementation of NQFs and the problems encountered during implementation (Bohlinger, 2007/2008; Lauzackas & Tütlys, 2007/2008).

my research, Levin's (1998) argument about an 'epidemic spread' of neoliberal policies across countries came to mind. In an article on 'policy borrowing', Levin explores the spread of 'free school choice' and wonders why this practice, despite the fact that there is no real evidence underpinning it, has managed to spread across the globe. He uses the metaphor of 'epidemic spread' to capture the current unreflective transfer of policies across countries. It seems to be the case as well for qualifications frameworks: there is no substantial evidence of qualifications frameworks being examples of good or better practice than other national curriculum systems. Why, then, has it become a universally accepted solution to problems in the education system?

In this article, I offer a critical perspective on the EQF by looking into the policy objectives and the evidence from other countries that have already implemented qualifications frameworks. My argument is that the EQF is not a neutral evidence-based policy tool. In this sense, I shall substantiate Levin's (1998) argument on an epidemic spread of neoliberal policies in education.

The article is divided into three sections. The aim of the first section is to look into the question of what the EQF is represented to be, applying Bacchi's (1999) discursive approach of 'what's the problem represented to be?' This approach looks at the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and causal explanations for the introduction of qualifications frameworks in the EU. In the second section, I review existing research on qualifications frameworks, discussing the context for implementing frameworks in Anglo-Saxon countries and looking into the 'evidence' concerning how frameworks have met the stated policy objectives of transparency, comparability, and portability in countries that have already implemented a qualifications framework.⁴¹ This section is based on a review of existing research on qualifications frameworks. In the third section, I analyse the discourses in which qualifications frameworks are embedded, analysing why frameworks have become (almost) universally accepted as a means to modernise education and training systems today. In the article, I apply both a realist and a discursive perspective, knowing that this is

⁴¹ I am aware of the danger of drawing general conclusions from examples of the implementation of NQFs, as these have been implemented in quite diverse contexts for different purposes and by different stakeholders. Nevertheless, learning from best practice and policy learning have become institutionalised elements in the OMC and are thus based on an assumption that it is possible to draw general conclusions from education policies and their implementation elsewhere, regardless of systemic, cultural, social, or economic differences.

ontologically problematic. However, it is to be seen as a heuristic device for unpacking the policy: I use the argument of the EQF discourse itself as a means of deconstruction.

THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK: A DISCURSIVE PERSPECTIVE

The EQF has been a high priority on the EU agenda since 2004 when it was mentioned in the Maastricht Communiqué that priority should be given to ‘the development of an open and flexible EQF, founded on transparency and mutual trust’ (*Maastricht Communiqué on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training*, 2004, p. 4). In January 2008, a resolution on the EQF was adopted by the European Parliament and the European Council. In the recommendation, the EQF’s primary goal is to improve ‘the *transparency, comparability, and portability* of citizens’ qualifications issued in accordance with the practice in the different Member States’ (European Parliament and European Council, 2008, p. 2; my emphasis).

Historically, the EQF can be seen as part of an EC discourse of promoting worker mobility amongst the European member states. Since 1957, the realisation of the fourth freedom in the Treaty of Rome, the freedom of mobility, has been on the political agenda in the EC. There have been several attempts to ensure mobility, which in the early years primarily concerned vocational qualifications: in the 1960s, the European Commission pushed for a regular harmonisation of qualifications; in the 1980s, it was a push for comparability; and in the 1990s, this changed into transparency (Cort, 2009). Today, the EQF is designated to bring about transparency of not only vocational qualifications but also all qualifications from basic schooling to higher education, both formal and nonformal, from a lifelong learning perspective (Cort, 2008c). In this quest, ‘harmonisation’ has come to connote the scary image of a federal European state: ‘the EQF ... is not an instrument for *harmonising* qualifications or parts of qualifications systems but is intended to function as a type of translation device to make relationships between qualifications and different systems clearer’ (Bjørnåvold, 2007b, p. 9; my emphasis).

Regardless of the policy discourse, the EQF can be perceived as an attempt to ‘harmonise’, if not education systems, then the way in which qualifications are described in terms of outcome. In

order to make this process legitimate in the EU member states, the EQF is being based on a discourse of neutrality and evidence gained through the OMC, and hereby the politically troublesome discourse of 'harmonisation' is circumvented.

Politically, the EQF is embedded in the Lisbon Agenda, which was adopted by the European Council in 2002, and is to contribute to the Lisbon policy goals of ensuring 'social inclusion' and European 'competitiveness' (*Presidency Conclusions: Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000*, EU Commission, 2000). The EQF is to facilitate lifelong learning by making education and training systems more transparent and comparable, and by making qualifications more portable. These policy objectives are endorsed by other international organisations. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, in particular, is interested in finding a way to bridge NQFs and lifelong learning, and it also uses the argument that NQFs 'allow for transparency, comparability, and mobility' (Werquin, 2007, p. 466).⁴² Indeed, if lifelong learning is to be achieved, qualifications frameworks are perceived not only as desired but also required: 'Meeting the objective of lifelong learning *requires* an integrating framework, i.e. a framework covering all sectors' (Bjørnåvold, 2007a; my emphasis). Central to the whole discussion of the EQF is the problem of maintaining trust in qualifications: How can the value of qualifications be ensured in Europe and, indeed, globally? This issue can be seen from both a societal and an individual perspective.

From a societal perspective, there are two lines of reasoning. The first concerns the establishment of an internal labour market in which the national embeddedness of qualifications is perceived as a barrier to mobility. A qualifications framework is seen as the solution to this problem of mobility, as it will increase transparency and thereby establish a basis for mutual trust amongst the EU member states. Another line of reasoning, which is in a sense tautological, is that education systems and labour markets are no longer embedded only in a national context, but need to respond to global demands and forces. In these processes of globalisation, the necessary trust in qualifications is being undermined. Historically, trust could be established and negotiated

⁴² See also the 2007 OECD report on qualifications systems and their correlation to lifelong learning, *Qualifications Systems: bridges to lifelong learning*, in which mechanisms conducive to lifelong learning are identified.

amongst national stakeholders within the national context. This is becoming increasingly difficult, as mobility and migration increase, and, as a consequence, the entrance of people with foreign qualifications. Another factor is the increased marketisation and internationalisation of education and training. In national systems with public providers, national legislation and curricula can contribute to the building of trust. However, the more education and training is deregulated and powers devolved to independent institutions and/or private providers and a transnational market for education develops, the more the need for new mechanisms of ensuring quality (and thereby trust) in qualifications arises. A NQF (along with the establishment of accreditation institutions that independently accredit either institutions or qualifications) is perceived to be the solution to these problems.

At the individual level, a qualifications framework is a standardisation of qualifications providing the 'consumer' / 'learner' with an 'informative label' describing exactly what s/he should be able to do acquiring a specific qualification. The idea of learners as 'consumers' is central to neoliberal thinking, in which education is perceived as a market in which 'learners' should have free choice, and education and training providers should be competing to attract learners (see also Levin, 1998). The framework stipulates the 'outcome' of education and training, and provides the measuring rod for successful completion: Have the candidates acquired the competences? This focus on outcome is closely tied to the marketisation of education and training: it provides a means of regulating through quality indicators (i.e. outcome). Providers of a specific qualification can be evaluated based on the qualification standard, as can the 'owner' of a qualification applying for a specific job in the labour market. As described by Strathdee (2003), a qualifications framework establishes a common currency in the education system that can be used by individuals and companies in the labour market and that can serve as a benchmark and standard for evaluating and accrediting education and training providers.

From these perspectives, qualifications frameworks seem unavoidable – they provide a legitimate solution to the problem of trust – or at least a way of legitimising qualifications included in a qualifications framework. The EQF can, in other words, be characterised as a means of standardisation, ensuring that education systems are based on the same standard descriptions of qualifications in terms of 'knowledge, skills, and competence' and levels. The central principle in

the EQF is to base frameworks on 'learning outcomes' and thereby acquire a means of standardising and comparing educational programmes. Werquin (2007, p. 468; my emphasis) describes how the EQF will 'help to disseminate or *impose* the concept of learning outcomes, at least in Europe', and, in this sense, the EQF is no longer a 'neutral register' (see Young, 2007) of European qualifications but prescribes a specific way of setting up national curricula. Learning outcomes are, in the document, defined as 'statements of what a learner knows, understands, and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and competence' (European Parliament and European Council, 2008, p. 4). The focus is on the individual learner and on learning as a detached – and not necessarily systematically and intentionally organised – process. The introduction of learning outcomes facilitates the recognition of nonformal and informal learning and is understood as part of a 'shift in governance in education and training', which favours 'demand-led reforms' and empowers 'consumers of qualifications, mainly individuals and businesses ... at the cost of providers' (Bjørnåvold & Coles, 2007/2008, pp. 231-233). From these quotations, it is obvious that the EQF is not neutral but will influence national education policies in the direction of a higher degree of standardisation and commodification of education, and an introduction of market principles into the education sectors.

As can be seen from the above the EQF is wrapped in beliefs, assumptions, and causalities. The same goes for the three main policy objectives: transparency, comparability, and portability. There are also different assumptions and ideas of causality lying beneath these policy goals (see Commission of the European Communities, *Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*, 2005, p. 8). In the following, I shall briefly outline the rationality.

With regard to *transparency*, a central assumption is that the lack of transparency between qualifications systems in Europe acts as a barrier for mobility. The argument is goes like this: companies are reluctant to take on foreign workers, as they do not know the value of their qualifications, and individuals are reluctant to move abroad, as they cannot be sure that their qualifications will be recognised. The EQF is meant to remedy this situation by facilitating translation between the various qualifications systems in Europe and building trust amongst the member states, as it sets up clear level and learning outcome descriptors. However, it is stressed in the policy documents that transparency is not only perceived as a cross-national benefit of a

qualifications framework, but qualifications frameworks also make national education systems more transparent, as all qualifications are gathered within a single overarching framework.

The second assumption is that an EQF will improve *comparability* of qualifications to the benefit of both individual citizens and companies. By introducing common reference levels and descriptors of learning outcomes, the various qualifications will become more comparable across Europe. The issue of comparability also operates within a national framework, as it will facilitate the comparability of VET qualifications and academic qualifications, and thereby add to the overall ‘parity of esteem’ of vocational qualifications in the education system.

The third policy objective, *portability*, is closely connected to the discourse of lifelong learning. The problem is stated to be one of dead-end education systems, especially when people go through VET and find themselves at a dead-end in terms of further and higher studies. VET is, in most countries, not an admission route into university. Furthermore, portability deals with the issue of skills acquired outside the formal education system. In many European countries, there is a large part of the population categorised as unskilled or semi-skilled; however, from their work experience they may actually have acquired a skills level comparable to that of a skilled worker. By focusing on learning outcomes, instead of formal requirements, these people will have a possibility of entering the education system based on an assessment of their skills and, in this way, the system will be more flexible and adaptable to the needs of individual learners.

Even if we take the discourse for granted and accept its premises and line of reasoning as shown here, we can still ask what is the actual ‘evidence’ from other qualifications frameworks? Have they achieved the objectives of transparency, comparability, and portability? In the following section, I shall look at the research on qualifications frameworks and at the research findings on whether or not qualifications frameworks have attained these objectives. The focus is on ‘evidence’ from a realist perspective pointing to the discrepancies in the policy discourse.

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS: THE ‘EVIDENCE’ BASE

NQFs have been implemented in a number of countries. Most are Anglo-Saxon countries, and they have in common a weak integration of vocational training into the formal education system – if not

a weak tradition for VET in general. In the cases of England, Scotland, New Zealand, Australia and Ireland, there has been a common problem relating to the integration of the vocational training sector into the education system, and NQFs have been introduced to address this problem. It should be noted that this is not a problem that is shared across countries. In countries such as Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Holland, Norway, and Sweden, VET is highly institutionalised within the formal education system, providing opportunities for further education at the tertiary level – although the transition routes from VET to higher education in some of the countries are arguably weaker than they are for students with a general upper-secondary education.

The first frameworks were introduced as early as the 1980s in the United Kingdom, thus there ought to be ample experience on which to draw. However, reviewing the existing literature, it is striking that there is not much ‘rigorous’ evidence, and large-scale evaluations do not exist. The OECD has initiated research on the link between qualifications *systems* and the promotion of lifelong learning, but although the organisation promotes qualifications frameworks, it does not come up with rigorous evidence for their superiority (see Werquin & Coles, 2004). The Scottish and South African Qualifications Frameworks have been evaluated and provide some insight into the impact of qualifications frameworks, although the evaluations are far from unambiguous. The South African evaluation was, e.g. contested for only evaluating the implementation process and not looking into the policy of the qualifications framework itself. Other articles deal more or less critically with national frameworks and processes of implementation (Bouder, 2003; Keating, 2003; Lauzackas & Tütlys, 2007/2008; Keesy, 2008), ideological features of qualifications frameworks (Allais, 2003, 2007), and problems of unitisation/modularisation as a key feature of an NQF (Raffe et al., 2002). Michael Young (2003, 2005, 2007) is one of the few who have attempted to theorise or draw up typologies for frameworks. The bottom line, however, is that there are no transnational comparisons analysing the qualifications frameworks against other ways of organising an education system, and specifically not with regard to the policy objectives of transparency, comparability, and portability. In the following, I shall attempt to synthesise the findings regarding these three policy objectives. I shall draw on the ‘evidence’ and discussions of the many articles that have focused on NQFs, and their strengths and weaknesses.

TRANSPARENCY

As already outlined, one of the overarching assumptions behind the EQF is that it will provide transparency of qualifications across the EU. The means through which this transparency should be achieved is through the description of qualifications in terms of level and learning outcomes. One of the main features of the EQF is that it is based on output parameters instead of input or a mix of parameters. When looking at the research literature, the drawing up of qualifications based on learning outcomes is one of the issues that has been problematised in a number of articles dealing with national qualifications and/or qualifications frameworks.

One of the main ideas behind an NQF is to make qualifications transparent and accessible by drawing up formal, explicit criteria that are defined independently of any specific experience or practice (Young, 2003, p. 228). The logic is that it is possible to acquire knowledge in many different sites, and if qualifications can be described in a transparent manner, then the individual learner will be able to acquire a qualification without having to go through a specific formal pathway. However, as Allais (2003) points out, although the qualifications can be separated from the curriculum, an NQF ends up being a mechanism for specifying curricula, as the providers have to look to the framework in order to know the stipulated outcome for a specific qualification. Starting out as a register, an NQF might nevertheless end up as a regulation, which prescribes the curriculum.

Allais (2003), Wolf (1995), and Young (2003) point to the fact that the aim of transparency seems to be counterproductive: In the endeavours to make qualifications as transparent and explicit as possible, the complexity of the NQF increases, as new descriptors set out the qualifications in minor detail: 'The attempt to map out freestanding content and standards leads, again and again, to a never-ending spiral of specification in which the effort and cost involved quickly reach a point where the law of diminishing returns takes over' (Hall & Woodhouse, 1999, quoted in Allais, 2003, p. 533).⁴³

⁴³ Allais (2007, p. 524) describes how a South African unit standard requires a 25-page specification and that a qualification can be composed of 20 unit standards and thereby is a lengthy document. Philips (2003, p. 301) points to the same problem in New Zealand, where the number of registered qualifications has

The findings of Allais (2003) in the South African context are supported by the research of Wolf (1995) in the English context. She draws on her own experience of evaluating the implementation of the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in England and describes how the objective of transparency creates a vicious circle of overspecification. Wolf (1995, p. 24) evaluates the introduction of the NVQ system in England as follows: 'The short history of NVQs has also been one in which the quest for clarity has produced an ever more complex and complicated 'methodology'.

Another problem, described by Young and Allais, is that NQFs may foster unusable qualifications. Standard-setting agencies have, so to speak, taken over the qualifications and the job of 'filling in' qualifications according to levels and descriptors. As a consequence, some of the qualifications have no actual embeddedness in either education or work (Young, 2007, p. 449) and it follows that the demand for these qualifications is low or nonexistent. Allais (2007, p. 532) goes so far as to describe the South African Qualifications Framework as a 'castle in cyberspace – a list of qualifications and unit standards with very little relationship with the real world of educational provision'.

Besides the proliferation of qualifications and the increased specification of outcomes, numerous researchers also point to the danger of creating an opaque language of qualifications. Canning (1999) and Wolf (1995) both point out that an expert terminology is generated, incomprehensible not only to students but also to teachers. In a survey of student experience with National/Scottish Vocational Qualifications, Canning observes that students found the language of the standards 'confusing' and 'often intimidating'. He concludes: 'What is ostensibly presented as a language offering transparency and clarity soon degenerates into impenetrable syntax, a language in need of expert translation and open to idiosyncratic interpretations' (Canning, 1999, p. 206).

The research points in quite the opposite direction to the policy discourse: qualifications frameworks do not lead to a higher degree of transparency, but rather to increased complexity and opaqueness.

increased, and, by 2002, there were over 850 qualifications and 16,500 standards. This can hardly be said to contribute to transparency – either for the individual learner or for companies.

COMPARABILITY

Another assumption is that the EQF will provide comparability both across countries and frameworks and between qualifications, especially vocational and academic qualifications. The EQF is the first transnational qualifications framework, and therefore ‘evidence’ of its effectiveness does not exist. However, in the evaluation of the Scottish Qualifications Framework (Gallacher et al., 2005), it is stated there is a need to ensure comparability across the United Kingdom, as each region currently has its own framework. The evaluation notes that co-ordination between England and Scotland will be inhibited by both political and technical problems. This indicates that although the frameworks are based on the same underlying rationality of learning outcomes and registers of qualifications, comparability is not necessarily ensured; furthermore, the co-ordination is seen as politically sensitive and, indeed, not *neutral*.

The policy objective of ensuring comparability (and portability, see below) between vocational training and higher education is, in many articles, identified as one of the major obstacles for the implementation of a unified NQF – i.e. all sectors are included within the same framework and with the same underpinning principles (Allais, 2003, 2007; Keating, 2003; Strathdee, 2003). Ensor (2003) and Young (2007) both point to the difference in epistemological concerns between the two sectors, and in many countries (e.g. South Africa, New Zealand, and Scotland), there has been resistance from the university sector against what is perceived as a ‘new vocationalism’ – i.e. utilitarian ideas and processes imported from VET into higher education. The shift from input to learning outcomes promotes a focus on what learners will be able to do when they complete an education programme rather than on the knowledge (subject matter) that is to be included in an education programme. This is a rationality that is closer to VET than to university studies.

From these sources, it can be concluded that qualifications frameworks have not ensured parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications. Heyns and Needham (2004) point to the fact that the objective of overcoming disparities of esteem in the South African education and training system was not met with the introduction of the South African Qualifications Framework. Indeed, Raffe (2003, p. 254) points to the danger that qualifications frameworks may actually accelerate the process of academic drift rather than promoting parity of esteem. One explanation

for the apparent failure of promoting parity of esteem is that vocational qualifications in the qualifications framework policy are closely connected to the issue of inclusion of marginalised groups, and this connection further repudiates VET. As to the success of ‘empowering’ marginalised groups, both Strathdee (2003) and Allais (2003) argue that exclusion mechanisms in education and in the labour market are not overcome by the introduction of a qualifications framework.

PORTABILITY

As to the third and last assumption that qualifications frameworks promote portability, this is actually an area in which we find positive research results. The evaluation of the Scottish Qualifications Framework points to its success in providing clearer structures between further and higher education; however, it also concludes that ‘there was little evidence that the SCQF [Scottish Qualifications Framework] had contributed much beyond providing a language and tools to underpin arrangements that would have usually been introduced in the absence of the SCQF’ (Gallacher et al., 2005). According to Young (2008, p. 132), one of the evaluations of the New Zealand Qualifications Framework also pointed to improvement of portability, especially in terms of opportunities for disadvantaged young people to achieve a qualification. However, he adds that the gains were modest compared with the ambitious goals on which the framework was based. Qualifications frameworks may, in other words, allow for wider access to educational opportunity (Canning, 1999, p. 207). However, the research of Canning (1999) also shows that although portability improved, an increasing number of candidates had problems completing their programmes, because the modularised approaches in an outcome-based framework demanded a higher degree of self-management and motivation by the students. Therefore, on the one hand, this approach may improve access routes in education and training, but, on the other hand, a growing number of students may be in danger of dropping out, as the framework in its pedagogical set-up tends to be more exclusionary. Portability is not in itself an advantage if the barriers for completion multiply, and given the abundance of literature showing how the education systems reproduce inequalities, the belief that a qualifications framework can overcome inequalities seems – at best – naïve.

THE IDEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNING OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

It thus appears that there is no substantial evidence that qualifications frameworks achieve their objectives of transparency, comparability, and portability. Indeed, they seem to promote a higher degree of intransparency. Comparability is problematic, as it has to bridge a divide between different education sectors – vocational, general, and higher – wherein quite different epistemological concerns are at stake and in which the education sectors have different teleologies. In the case of the EQF, it also must bridge different education systems embedded in different national contexts. As to portability, there seems to be some evidence that this may be improved – although the evidence is far from unambiguous. The EQF does not seem to be a case of ‘learning from good practice’. Nevertheless, qualifications frameworks are being implemented all over Europe at the present. Why?

A genealogy of qualifications frameworks shows that they were embedded in neoliberal policies aimed at dismantling the welfare state and introducing market principles in the public provision of education and training in the 1980s. In the case of the United Kingdom, NVQs were introduced in the 1980s as part of a wider policy of devolution and marketisation of education. Young (2003, p. 228) describes how British governments since the 1980s have increased their emphasis on qualifications as measures of performance and how this policy has been ‘closely linked to the freeing of schools and colleges from local government control ... forcing them to compete in a ‘quasi-market’ for students (and therefore for funds)’. The aim of the Thatcher government was not so much to solve an educational crisis as to undermine the role of unions in qualifications structures (and wage bargaining) and to increase government control of educational institutions through a double movement of decentralisation of responsibility and recentralisation of control through management-by-objectives and quality standards (Young, 2004, p. 14).⁴⁴ Allais, Strathdee, Young, Philips, and Wolf also argue that the idea of NQFs is tied closely to neoliberal ideals of deregulation, marketisation, and undermining ‘special interests’ (in this case, educational institutions and unions). According to Philips (2003, p. 290), the introduction of an NQF in New

⁴⁴ According to Philips (2003, p. 293), the inspiration for the New Zealand Qualifications Framework came from Scotland and England and was especially influenced by the ideas of Gilbert Jessup, who was one of the chief architects behind the English NVQ system.

Zealand was based on an objective of 'ensuring that more people gain qualifications of relevance to the economy, with enhanced accountability for the providers of tertiary education'. Philips argues that the reforms in New Zealand were driven by a neoliberal agenda, i.e. the marketisation of education, accountability, and individual choice. From this genealogy, I want to establish that qualifications frameworks are born out of a specific ideology and, although transformations take place as the idea of qualifications frameworks moves from one site to another, they are far from neutral policies.

Allais (2003) and Wolf (1995) discuss that the policy of qualifications frameworks was endorsed by all stakeholders, as it was embedded in a double-sided discourse of 'social inclusion' and 'global competitiveness'. On the one hand, the qualifications framework is presented as a way of improving equality in education and training (not least the parity of esteem of VET).⁴⁵ People who have not entered the formal education system can still have their competences assessed and recognised, as it is the outcome or the competences that count, not the time spent in an educational institution or the curriculum through which one has passed. In other words, a qualifications framework offers groups outside of the education system, even outside of the labour market, the possibility of having their nonformal/informal learning recognised (at least in theory). In this sense, a qualifications framework is about empowerment of groups who fall outside the formal system. However, the qualifications framework is also about improving the match between the competences of populations and the needs of businesses in order to promote economic growth (for a critical discussion on the education–growth nexus, see Wolf, 2002). The qualifications are to be closely linked to the labour market to bring about economic improvement and international competitiveness. In a sense, the discourse on qualifications frameworks immunises itself: who can argue against a policy that offers the part of the population with the lowest educational level the chance to have their competences recognised, whilst the framework also provides the nation at large with a competitive edge through a higher educational level? The framework will benefit the individual, the companies, the labour market, and the nation state, and it becomes cloaked as a

⁴⁵ This is also the case of the EQF, in which it is stated that 'an important objective underpinning the EQF is the promotion of parity of esteem between academic, vocational, or higher education routes as well as between initial and further education' (Bjørnåvold, 2007b, p. 6).

technical 'neutral' response to problems in the real world, which it is in the interest of all stakeholders to solve.

The case of South Africa, as described by Allais (2003) and Morrow and King (1998), exemplifies the double-sidedness of qualifications frameworks – although there can be no doubt that the South African case from a historical perspective is unique. Allais (2003) describes how the South African Qualifications Framework was introduced as a mechanism for creating greater equality in the education system by facilitating mobility and inclusion. The focus was to be on the individual learner and on the recognition of nonformal and informal competences, which would give Black workers the opportunity to have their competences recognised. Regardless of which side of the political spectrum, there was a wide consensus on a competence-based modular approach in which the social partners (and especially the employers) played an important role in reforming the existing education and training system in South Africa. Allais describes it as a political amalgamation of global competitiveness, high skills, and social welfare through increased employment as the answer to the economic survival of the nation state. In this sense, the European Lisbon Strategy seems to unfold around the same set of assumptions about the relationship between competitiveness, growth, and increased equality/equity, thereby reflecting the global spread of neoliberal policies (see Allais, 2003, p. 308).

Despite the fact that there is no real evidence that qualifications frameworks bring about transparency, comparability, and portability, many member states are now preparing to implement NQFs and reorganise their existing education systems along the lines of an outcome-based approach in order to align with the EQF. The process seems, to use the words of Levin (1998), almost 'epidemic' in its spread, as the few countries that had expressed reservations are becoming fewer still on the official list of 'implementing, considering and not-implementing Member States' (Bjørnåvold, 2007a).⁴⁶ In the countries that want to accede to the EU, work on NQFs is ongoing, and here the influence of the EQF on developments is clear (Bjørnåvold, 2007b). From a discursive perspective, the EQF is part of a hegemonic discourse on a high-skills economy and has thereby become a naturalised solution to 'problems out there'. The ambiguity of the

⁴⁶ According to officials in the Danish Ministry of Education, this list is putting (peer) pressure on the member states.

discourse makes it palatable to most stakeholders, as it stresses both social inclusion and global competitiveness. Its focus on low achievers and the democratic right to education – regardless of social background – is in line with humanist educational discourses on social inclusion and equality, and its focus on upgrading competences for the labour market is in line with economic discourses on human capital and the knowledge economy. A conclusion is that the EQF is not a neutral evidence-based European policy but a highly ideological global policy whereby the ‘policy learning’ is perhaps not so much learning but a transfer of policies from the ideologically dominating Anglo-Saxon countries. In this sense, the case of the EQF is similar to Levin’s (1998) case of ‘free school choice’ – the unreflected transfer of neoliberal policies across the globe.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has stated what seems obvious: the EQF is not a neutral evidence-based policy tool. There is no evidence to substantiate the proposal that qualifications frameworks are better fitted to solve the challenges that national education systems are facing due to globalisation and increased marketisation. Instead, qualifications frameworks seem to be born out of the same rationality that has led to increased marketisation and contributed to the instalment of market principles in education systems, or, as stated by Strathdee: ‘The [New Zealand] Framework contributes to the creation of educational markets by providing a common qualifications currency. This common currency, like money in an economy, is viewed as promoting greater competition between the providers of educational qualifications because all institutions are recognising and rewarding learning in the same way’ (Strathdee, 2003, p. 157).

Qualifications frameworks cannot be regarded as a neutral instrument but must be regarded as a management tool, both in terms of policy and in terms of educational practices within the national education systems, for they frame our perception of how education and training should be organised, managed, and implemented. Åkerstrøm Andersen and Thygesen (2004) point out that a management tool creates the space of possibility and thereby limits actions. I find it important to stress that policies are *never* neutral, despite the emphasis in recent years on ‘evidence’ and ‘good practice’ in policy-making. Policies are to intervene in, modify, change, and restrict some kind of social practice, in this case the practice of education. Apple (2001, p. 413) points to the fact that the

hallmark of the neoliberal discourse is its attempt to make political strategies neutral – e.g. in its promotion of market solutions in education: ‘Markets are marketed, are made legitimate by a depoliticising strategy. They are said to be natural and neutral, and governed by effort and merit’ (Apple, 2001, p. 413).

This depoliticising strategy also applies to the EQF, and is further accentuated by the efforts to avoid the problematic discourse of harmonisation. By making policies – and policy tools – neutral, they become technical solutions to problems and thus less necessary to debate and discuss critically.

Why bother to go through this exercise of stating and substantiating the ‘obvious’? My aim is to encourage critical reflection of the EQF and the processes that have been initiated due to the adoption of the EQF policy. Young (2007, p. 455) points to the risk of undermining the strengths of education systems without offering many advantages, and from the review of experience gained in countries with qualifications frameworks, the case is that qualifications frameworks lead to new problems, or rather other kinds of problems. It is not a panacea for the education crisis. Although the EQF policy is still in the pipeline and may end up being ‘much ado about nothing’ – historically, European policy initiatives within the area of VET have gone askew (Cort, 2009) – the reform processes that have already been initiated in various member states to prepare for the introduction of the EQF standards will have an impact on national education and training systems, and may turn out to have unforeseen consequences. As Bjørnåvold (2007a) states: ‘NQF development is about developing a ‘software’ [level descriptors and learning outcomes] but also about ‘hardware’ [institutions and procedures]’. The development of ‘hardware’ is far from neutral but goes to the heart of educational and institutional reform. Another reason for stating the obvious is a wish to denaturalise the discourse on ‘policy learning’. As stated by Ball (1990), policy-making is not a rational and scientific process. Policies are based on ideas and assumptions about how society should be regulated and how resources should be allocated. This is not a neutral exercise; it is an ideological exercise, and it is important to open up a critical discussion on how to conceive of policy learning and the transfer of policies across countries. From the perspective of comparative education, education and training systems are historically, culturally, and nationally embedded, and it is problematic to transfer policies uncritically. Nevertheless, this

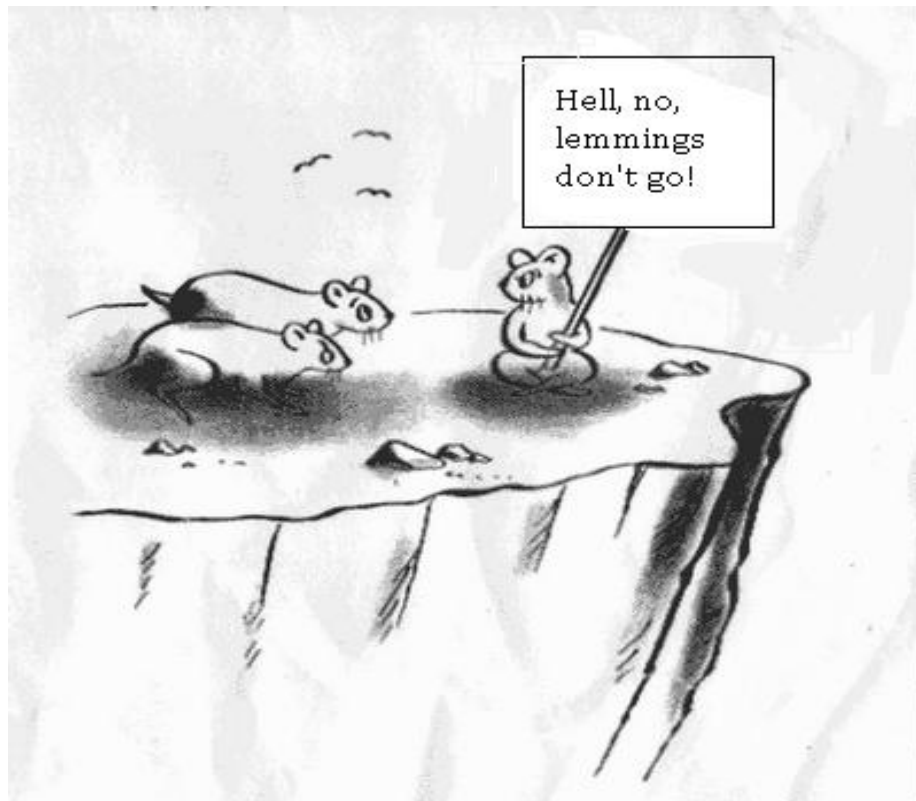
is what seems to be happening at policy level, and the effects seem to be remarkably similar, despite theories on 'path dependency' and 'policy adaptation': increased marketisation, standardisation, and individualisation. In this process, it is important to uncover underlying values, assumptions, and causalities, and to make clear that policies are not neutral. As to being evidence-based, evidence depends on the claims being made: What is (to be) the aim of lifelong learning and whose interests are being served? The answers to these questions are far from obvious.

'ANIMATED' TELLING EXAMPLE

Policy
Learning?



The role of researchers?



TRANSCENDING THE NATION STATE – TOWARDS A EUROPEAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING MODEL?

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Abstract: Throughout Europe, VET is undergoing reform and modernisation as part of a common EU policy process, the Copenhagen Process. The aim of this Process is to initiate a pan-European modernisation of VET in order to meet the challenges of global competition. This article surveys VET models in Europe, applying a discursive–institutionalist perspective in order to describe how VET as an institution is being reframed by means of the Copenhagen Process, and concludes that a European model is under construction which aims to transcend the nation state by introducing a new way of ‘thinking’ vocational education and training.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of definition often raises problems in a European Leonardo da Vinci project dealing with VET: how can we define VET in such a way that we are not, so to speak, comparing apples with pears? The issue of definition is troublesome due to the diversity of VET systems (or lack of systems) in Europe. In my experience,⁴⁷ this issue ends up being tackled pragmatically: yes, VET is quite diverse and whatever is defined as VET at the national level is also taken to be VET at the transnational level. Common ground is established in the definition of VET as ‘practical education and training’, ‘education and training aimed at qualifying people for specific trades or crafts’, or ‘education and training aimed at qualifying people for entering the labour market’. When it comes to defining target groups, educational levels, provision, structures, organisational principles, these have arisen out of historical and cultural circumstances, for which all varieties must be accounted.

⁴⁷ Having participated in quite a few European projects and networks.

However, this issue may prove to be less troublesome in the future: at a European level, common objectives are being laid down in the Copenhagen Process, and the contours of a European model are emerging.⁴⁸ Already now, we have common benchmarks for assessing the quality of a VET system, for indicators on employability, matching labour market needs, and access to education have been defined in the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework. In January 2008, a resolution on the EQF was adopted by the Council and the European Parliament, and an ECTS for VET is likely to be adopted at the end of 2008 under the French presidency. The claim that a European model is emerging would probably be contested by policy makers:⁴⁹ the Copenhagen Process is about aligning policy objectives whilst at the same time allowing for national diversity. However, I shall argue that by means of the Copenhagen Process, a European model for VET that transcends the nation state and national VET systems is under construction. The Process includes elements that form a new configuration of VET in Europe: what it aims to achieve, how it should be organised, the role of formal educational institutions and settings, and the positioning of the individual learner. The aim of this article is to examine the changes over time in the institutional construction of VET, with the main emphasis on the emerging construction of a European model of VET. By comparing the different models, I shall attempt to identify the ways in which the European discourse changes the conditions of possibility within the field and hereby opens up for institutional change in national models.

A DISCURSIVE-INSTITUTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

In this article, I shall apply a discursive institutionalist perspective on VET in order to see how, by introducing new distinctions, new concepts, new boundaries and new practices, the European discourse on VET may 'change the space of possibility', enabling certain ways of thinking and acting possible and excluding others, hereby contributing to institutional change.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ With the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration in 2002, a common process was initiated at a European level that aimed at reforming and modernising vocational education and training in Europe ('The Copenhagen Declaration', 2002).

⁴⁹ See, e.g. the interview with Roland Østerlund (published in the volume of this original article, and his reference to Danish Minister of Education Bertel Haarder's principle of 'recognise not harmonise'.

⁵⁰ Andersen & Kjær (1996) introduce this concept by drawing on Foucault's concept of 'conditions of possibility', which make certain ways of thinking and acting possible and exclude others (see Foucault,

I shall draw on Andersen and Kjær (1996) who have developed an analytical strategy, institutional history, for analysing the role of discourse in institutional change.⁵¹ Their epistemological interest is to ‘diagnose the spaces of possibilities that emerge and change as a result of specific institutional histories’ (Andersen & Kjær, 1996, p. 4). To pursue this aim, first they examine the relationship between discourse and institutions, and identify three steps in the development of institutions: from ideals to discourse to institutionalisation. Second, they are interested in capturing changes or ruptures in the institutional space of possibilities. They focus on identifying the main distinctions at play within an institutional field, in this article VET, in order to analyse how it is constructed and how it is delimited vis-à-vis other fields.⁵² They apply an analytical strategy consisting of two steps:

- a diachronic analysis focusing on how a specific institution is constructed over time;
- a synchronic analysis focusing on changes/ruptures that reconfigure a specific institution, or in their words ‘change the space of possibility’ of an institution.

In this article, I shall apply both perspectives by looking into how VET has been constructed over time as a social institution, hereby identifying the main distinctions at play within the field, and subsequently comparing ideal models of VET in order to analyse the changes taking place in the European construction of VET.⁵³ My main emphasis is on how the European model is being

Vidensarkæologien, 2005). However, I prefer the concept ‘space of possibility’ as it provides a good image for what happens with an institution when space is transcended, in this case the nation state and national institutions.

⁵¹ The concept of ‘institutional history’ has not gained ground in the literature on new institutionalism, which is most often divided into the following four branches: rational choice, sociological institutionalism, historical institutionalism, and discursive institutionalism. Andersen and Kjær can be placed within the fourth branch of new institutionalism: discursive institutionalism, which investigates the role of discourse in institutional change. Andersen and Kjær see ‘institution’ as a consecration or formalisation of discourse (for a further discussion of new institutionalism, see Campbell & Pedersen, 2001).

⁵² Andersen & Kjær (1996) define a field as ‘a network of institutions that are all based on the same discourse’ and refer to Bourdieu’s concept of field as ‘a stable network of positions with clear and unambiguous boundaries’. I consider vocational education and training as a field, because it ties together different actors and different institutions.

⁵³ It is important to note that this is not an analysis of real vocational education and training systems ‘lying underneath the surface of discourses and institutions’ (Andersen & Kjær, 1996, p. 17). It is an attempt to analyse changes in the discourse on vocational education and training at a European level through an exploration of distinctions and rationalities of vocational education and training and existing models that historically have emerged in Europe.

constructed, how distinctions and rationalities change, and how they may contribute to institutional change by reframing VET in Europe.

This article is based on my reading of EU policy documents and secondary literature. EU policy documents lay down the framework for national and European determinations within this policy field, and subsequently this article is an attempt to anticipate the institutional effects by analysing the discursive construction of VET at a European level. It is important to note that the European discourse is already affecting national VET policies through the involvement of civil servants in the development of European tools such as the EQF; the ECTS for vocational education and training; the continuous monitoring against European indicators and benchmarks; and the bi-annual evaluation and revitalisation of the Process, etc. (see Cort, 2008b). Exactly *how* national systems are affected, however, does not fall within the scope of this article.

DIFFERENT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING MODELS IN EUROPE

In this section, I shall be looking VET as a social institution that is historically and culturally embedded. My intention is to analyse how VET as an institution has developed from an initial pan-European model into a variety of different European models, embedded in different discourses and rationalities of education and work (see Figure 1). First, I will outline the apprenticeship model of the Middle Ages in order to describe how VET originated in the crafts and was based on a uniform model across Europe.⁵⁴ Second, I shall describe the three models emerging in the European industrial societies in order to identify the different rationalities at stake within each model. This analysis provides the basis for identifying, in the final section of the

⁵⁴ According to Epstein and Prak, guild-based apprenticeship was the main institution for craft training across Europe from 1400 to 1800. However, they point to the fact that craft training also took place through other institutional settings, primarily the family and charitable institutions (Epstein & Prak, 2008, p. 10). Women, especially, who were excluded from the guilds, were dependent on these alternatives.

article, contemporary shifts in the discourse and institutionalisation of VET in the emerging European model of the 'knowledge society'.⁵⁵

FROM CRAFT TO INDUSTRY

Historically, vocational training was organised as apprenticeship training within a craft. Being an apprentice was a transitional phase for a young person being initiated into a specific craft. One function of vocational training/apprenticeship was to reproduce the social order, and the craft was often transmitted from generation to generation.⁵⁶ Being a craftsman was not just a way to earn a living; it was a position in the social hierarchy. Even the classifications we use today reflect this social order, as journeymen belonged to the third estate (middle-level occupations). Besides being part of the social system, vocational training was part of the production system and served the function of protecting the crafts from outside influence and of ensuring the quality of the craftsmanship.

VET was institutionalised in the guilds located in the medieval towns, where they monopolised access to the crafts. The rationality of learning was one of learning by doing. Apprentices were trained by the master or journeymen. This model for vocational training was common for towns all over Europe.

However, the monopoly of the guilds was undermined during the period of mercantilism and, it either broke down or, from the 18th century, was transformed, under the influence of industrialisation, the formation of the nation state, and the differentiation of society into different subsystems. A vacuum was created, and to fill it, vocational training was reconfigured as an institution dependent on the degree and pace of industrialisation, the construction of the nation state, craft traditions, and the dominant values deriving from the relationship between the state, capital, and labour. Vocational qualifications were needed by the emerging industries, and new

⁵⁵ As it would entail an insurmountable amount of work to study the vocational education and training systems of 27 member states, I will remain at the exemplary model level and look into the models that are perceived as incarnating the main principles and rationalities of vocational education and training.

⁵⁶ It is important to note that it was not a rigidly closed system: it was possible to enter the guilds by paying for an apprenticeship, and it was also possible to leave them, although restrictions were placed on those who did so (see, e.g. Jacobsen, 1982).

ways of organising and institutionalising VET arose in different countries during the period from 1800 until the mid-1900s.

The introduction of freedom of trade and the abolition of the guilds unleashed those interests that had been tied up in the guild system. This is not to say that there had been no conflicts during the period of the guilds: on the contrary, the guilds created conflicts, e.g. between skilled and unskilled, and between town and country (see, e.g. Jacobsen, 1982; Sigurjonsson, 2002). The transition from a traditional to a modern society created new conflict lines within the field, and the alignment of different interests, which took place over centuries, has led to the present variety of European models for VET. The conflict lines arising in modern society included those resulting from state, employers (capital), and employees (labour) acting on the basis of quite different rationalities.

During this period, different ways of regulating VET and different ways of organising learning arose. The degree of institutionalisation of VET and its underlying rationalities came to cover a greater variety of models than during the period of the guilds. However, according to Greinert (2005), three exemplary models can be said to have emerged in Europe during the first period of industrialisation:

- the liberal market economy model (England);
- the state-regulated bureaucratic model (France);
- the dual-corporatist model (Germany).

The underlying rationalities in these three models are liberalism, rationalism, and traditionalism, reflecting the overall regulation of VET and modes of learning within each model.⁵⁷ In the following, I shall briefly outline these three models.

⁵⁷ I am aware of the limitations of Greinert's models but find them feasible as theoretical concepts within the framing of this article. The limitations are amongst others that other rationalities may be at stake, e.g. an analysis of the Swedish system would point to the rationality of 'egalitarianism' as being at the core of the nonstreamed Swedish system (as opposed to 'elitism' in the overall French education system). Greinert's models, furthermore, are Eurocentric. Models found outside of Europe are not included. In other comparative studies of vocational education and training models, Japan is often typified as an exemplary model (see, e.g. Brown et al., 2001; Thelen, 2004).

In the English liberal market model, the relationship between training supply and training demand came to be regulated by the market. This model is based on the assumption that the market will create an equilibrium between the demand for skills and the supply of skills. The state should not intervene in the market, as this would create imbalance. The individual has free choice of occupation, and businesses should be free to organise work to achieve the highest degree of efficiency and profit. As a consequence, there is no national system for vocational training; the distinction between skilled and unskilled is less clear-cut, and as an institution, VET is less developed and less integrated into the education system. The regulation of VET is minimised and (on-the-job) training focuses primarily on employability, i.e. the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for available jobs in the labour market. In this model, the accreditation of qualifications acquired at work has come to play an important role (see, e.g. Thelen, 2004). As such, the rationality is one of short-term planning and the narrow qualification of workers.

In the French state-regulated bureaucratic model, the state took responsibility for VET, integrating it into the education system. The logic of the education system prevailed, with theory prioritised over practice: 'This model contains the risk that vocational training institutions may be too strongly influenced by the logical structures of the general education system and degenerate to a subordinate branch of it' (Greinert, 2005, p. 21).⁵⁸

The state-regulated bureaucratic model is based on the rationality of the education system, and VET is school-based. As such, VET becomes detached from the labour market, with only weak connections between the knowledge, skills, and attitudes imparted in VET programmes and the needs of the individual, who has to be able to perform in the labour market. In this model, VET may not be connected to specific occupations but to an educational taxonomy in which abstract knowledge and theory are advanced to the detriment of practical training. As such, the rationality is one of technocratic planning and forecasting, a general qualification of workers, and the education of the citizen.

In the German dual-corporative model, VET provision came to be the joint responsibility of the state and the social partners. In this model, education and training at school alternates with training in a company, whereby work and education are linked. The labour market is highly

⁵⁸ It is clear from Greinert's account that he has a bias towards the dual model and considers it to be superior.

regulated, and to enter a craft or trade requires certification. VET is highly institutionalised, first, through a web of councils and committees on which both sides of the labour market are represented. Second, national regulations lay down requirements for training and for trades/occupations/crafts, and there is further regulation through labour market laws and collective agreements. Third, VET is institutionalised through the principle of vocation, i.e. a process of socialisation and identity-building based on 'learning while working' (Jørgensen, 2007). The dual-corporatist model links the traditional apprenticeship model with the modern national labour market. The crafts have been transformed into modern occupations, and the social partners and the state co-operate in the governance of training and access to training. Acquiring a vocational qualification has a double function: it provides direct access to a specific occupation in the labour market and to better earnings (compared to those of unskilled workers), and it forms the basis of a vocational identity and membership in an exclusive group. As such, the rationality is one of basing VET programmes on 'traditional' crafts and occupations, and a broad vocational and general qualification of workers.

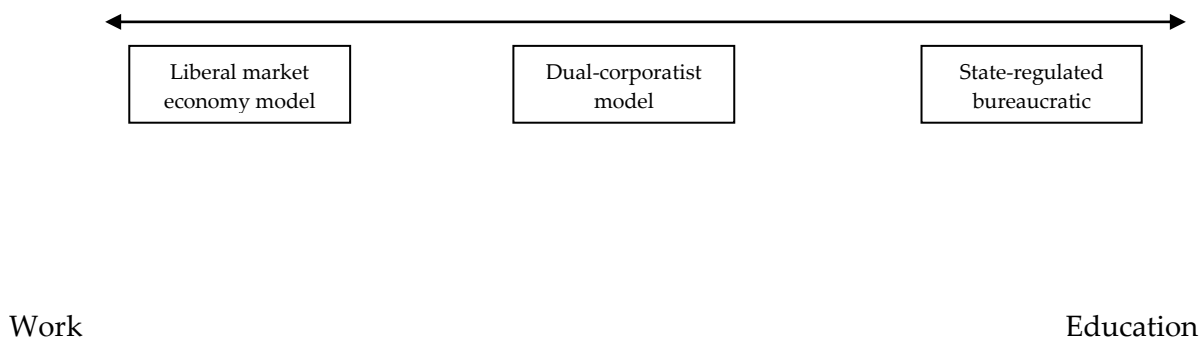
It is important to note that these three models are associated with different ways of *regulating the labour market*: through the market itself (which is basically nonregulative, although liberal labour markets often have a minimum standard for wages); through national law; or through corporate arrangements.

These three models emerged with the formation of the nation state and the emergence of a national industrial economy, a national labour market, and a national education system. Common to the three models is that they all rest on the rationality of the 'national': the nation state became the *natural* context for 'thinking' vocational education and training. One of the main distinctions at play within the national context was whether VET should be regarded as 'work' or as 'education'; its position in national policy formation was therefore ambiguous. Should it be covered by employment policy, labour market policy, or education policy? Each policy choice would lead to quite different forms of regulation and institutionalisation.⁵⁹ The three models seem to represent three positions on a continuum from regulation through the market at one extreme to bureaucratic

⁵⁹ This is reflected in the fact that vocational education and training can be under the jurisdiction of quite diverse ministries: Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Employment, Ministry of Education, or Ministry of Commerce.

regulation at the other. As an institution, VET has an ambivalent position at the discursive intersection between education and work where quite different rationalities exert centrifugal forces within the field.

Figure 1



Today, globalisation and the specialisation of production processes, the changing labour market (changes in occupational structures), the massification of general upper-secondary and higher education, and the modernisation of the welfare state have once again put pressure on the institution of VET and led to a crisis: How should VET be organised? How should it be provided? How should it be 'marketed' vis-à-vis general and higher education? What is the target group? What should be the contents of the training? Who should be involved in the regulation and provision of VET? We are witnessing a change in the three 'classical' VET models outlined above, which were embedded in the nation state. In response, the EU has adopted a common policy on modernising VET in Europe, the Copenhagen Process. In the next section, I shall look into the 'emerging model' in Europe and its underlying rationalities.

THE EMERGING EUROPEAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING MODEL

Vocational (education and) training has been on the EU agenda since the establishment of the Coal and Steel Union in 1951. It was included in the 1957 Treaty of Rome (Article 128), in which at the

request of the Council, the Commission was to establish general principles for a common European vocational training policy. In some respects, vocational training has served as an icebreaker for including other educational areas in the domain of community policy. Article 128 in conjunction with Article 7 on free mobility has provided the basis for the European Court of Justice to allow for a broad interpretation of VET that even includes higher education (see, e.g. Cort, 2009; de Moor, 1985; Walkenhorst, 2005).⁶⁰ In this section, I shall look into the Lisbon Agenda and the Copenhagen Process in order to see how VET is constructed in these policy processes, which distinctions are made, and how the emerging model transcends the nation state.

The main frame of European VET policy is the Lisbon Agenda, with its focus on lifelong learning as a means of gaining European competitive advantage in the knowledge society and ensuring social cohesion in Europe. There is a clear economic rationality behind the Lisbon Agenda and its focus on lifelong learning (education and training). In an article on the Lisbon Agenda, Dion (2005) from the European Commission (DG for Education and Culture) describes how an increase in the overall educational level will lead to an increase in growth, e.g. one year of extra schooling increases economic growth by 5% in the short term, and by an additional 5% in the long term. Such a line of argument exemplifies the economic rationality driving the Lisbon Agenda and the Copenhagen Process: education and training are perceived as a panacea to the low European growth rates (compared with those of the United States and China). There is a strong instrumental rationality driving education and training policies in Europe: it is perceived as a means to foster economic growth. In this sense, it is the rationality of VET (vocationalism) that has become prevalent to the detriment of general and higher education. Education and training is reconstructed as a means to serve the economy, the labour market, or society at large. At a European level, VET is, e.g. defined as 'education and training that aims to equip people with skills and competences that can be used on the labour market' (EU glossary).

There is no mention of the traditional liberal educational virtues of citizenship and personal development or fulfilment.⁶¹ However, it is important to acknowledge that the overall EU

⁶⁰ This is rather interesting, as vocational training was perceived from the beginning to be part of a European employment policy rather than part of an education policy.

⁶¹ In the consultation process on the Memorandum of Lifelong Learning, voices were raised about the predominant weight given to employment and the labour market dimensions of lifelong learning.

discourse is contradictory and conflicting, representing many different interests within the EU. Social-democratic issues are noticeable in the concepts of '*sustainable* economic growth', 'greater social cohesion', and 'social inclusion'. All the same, it is clear from the EU policy documents that the social-democratic discourse has become subordinate to and dependent upon the hegemonic neoliberal discourse, leading to a transformation of social-democratic values in the acceptance of the market as the 'modus operandi of "governance" and institutional life' (Hall, 2005, p. 327; see also Mitchell, 2006).

With regard to the institutional set-up, the Commission's report on lifelong learning makes it clear that 'traditional' formal education institutions are 'ill-equipped to empower citizens for actively dealing with the consequences of globalisation, demographic change, digital technology, and environmental damage' ('Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality', 2001, p. 1). The report stresses that 'traditional systems must be transformed to become much more open and flexible, so that learners can have individual learning pathways suitable to their needs and interests, and thus genuinely take advantage of equal opportunities throughout their lives' ('Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality', 2001, p. 1). The shift from education to learning as the main focus implies a shift away from national standardised education and training institutions to learning arenas broadly understood. Learning is a lifelong exercise that has to be performed if the individual is to avoid social exclusion.

This lifelong learning discourse dominates the Copenhagen Process, but in addition, VET is constructed as a means to achieving 'a genuine European labour market' ('Maastricht Communiqué on the future priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training', 2004). The main problem is represented to be that national VET systems are too closed, and this will prevent the EU from realising its vision of an internal labour market with free mobility of workers:

A comprehensive new European approach to valuing learning is seen as a prerequisite for the area of lifelong learning, building on the existing right of free movement within the EU. Proposals focus on the identification, assessment, and recognition of nonformal and informal learning as well as the transfer and mutual

recognition of formal certificates and diplomas ('Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality', 2001, p. 4).

The aim is to open up national labour markets to migration in order to make the European labour market more responsive to the needs of industry and business for qualified labour. Framing VET within the lifelong learning agenda means that some of the main distinctions within education and between education and work are broken down. The main distinction comes to be that between social inclusion and exclusion, with 'learning' as the main means of ensuring inclusion in the labour market, and the labour market as the main mechanism for ensuring inclusion in society. The learning model being promoted is one whereby the monopoly of formal education and training institutions is dismantled and they morph into demand-led providers of 'tailored learning opportunities'. Learning takes place in other settings, and the individual has the right to have qualifications and competences acquired elsewhere 'identified, assessed, and recognised' (see Bjørnåvold, 2000). This points to more open systems and to accreditation institutions playing a more central role than today. The practice at a national, and even an institutional, level has hitherto been that of protecting (national) qualifications and not recognising learning that has taken place elsewhere:

The Commission will by 2003, in cooperation with the Member States, develop a 'modular' system for the accumulation of qualifications, allowing citizens to combine education and training from various institutions and countries. This will build on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS and Europass ('Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality', 2001, p. 17).

In the Helsinki Communiqué, the focus is on recognising prior learning gained through training and work experience. ECVET is currently being developed and tested throughout Europe, pointing towards *modularisation* as a common European principle for organising vocational education and training.

A key issue in the Maastricht Communiqué is how to make VET more attractive in relation to other educational areas. In a sense, the Maastricht Communiqué draws on a traditional perception

of VET as the first rung of the educational hierarchy.⁶² It says, amongst other things, that VET are designed to meet the needs of the low-skilled and people at risk. On the other hand, there is clearly an attempt to transcend such a traditional distinction by promoting the idea of a flexible individualised learning system:

[...] the development and implementation of open learning approaches, enabling people to define individual pathways, supported by appropriate guidance and counselling. This should be complemented by the establishment of flexible and open frameworks for vocational education and training in order to reduce barriers between vocational education and training and general education, and increase progression between initial and continuing training and higher education (*Helsinki Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training*, 2006, p. 2).

The barriers between VET and higher education are to be broken down, as it is the concern of both areas that people should acquire skills and competences relevant to the labour market. The exclusive pathway from general to higher education is to be abandoned and instead flexible pathways should be established leading to further education and training, 'especially from vocational education and training to higher education' ('Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality', 2001).

One of the instruments that is to facilitate the transformation of VET systems is the EQF. This framework is based on the concepts of learning outcomes and levels of achievement, marginalising traditional education descriptors such as duration, curriculum, institutional settings, etc. In this logic, VET need no longer consist of programmes of specified length, with specified progression and specified contents provided by a specific VET provider. VET can be acquired through a mixture of on-the-job learning, school-based courses, and participation in informal activities. The

⁶² In the article 'Identifying vocational education and training', Moodie identifies three types of classifications at use within the field of vocational education and training: by educational level, by occupational level, and by cognitive level. These hierarchical classifications are markers of the status of vocational education and training, in the sense that vocational education and training is embedded in an educational hierarchy in which it constitutes the bottom rung of the educational ladder, an occupational hierarchy whereby it makes up 'middle occupations', and a cognitive hierarchy in which practical knowledge is less highly regarded than theoretical knowledge.

outcome of these forms of learning can then be assessed and recognised. It is clear that the borders between formal education, work-based learning, and leisure time activities become blurred – they all come to be learning arenas with the possibility of identification, assessment, and recognition with the purpose of enhancing the individual's overall employability. The EQF will also transcend national borders and make it possible to transfer qualifications across Europe:

[The EQF] will provide a common reference to facilitate the recognition and transferability of qualifications covering both vocational education and training and general (secondary and higher) education, based mainly on competences and learning outcomes. It will improve the permeability within education and training systems, provide a reference for the validation of informally acquired competences, and support the smooth and effective functioning of the European, national and sector labour markets (Maastricht Communiqué on the future priorities of enhanced *European* cooperation in vocational education and training, 2004, p. 4; my emphasis).

In the emerging European model, the main functions of VET as an institution are to contribute to the functioning of the economy and to stabilise social order. Furthermore, it is based on the rationality of promoting European competitiveness and establishing a European labour market that overcomes the restrictions of national VET systems (and labour markets):

Vocational education and training has a dual role in contributing to competitiveness and in enhancing social cohesion [...] In short, vocational education and training should be both equitable and efficient (Maastricht Communiqué on the future priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training', 2004, p. 4).

The terms 'equitable and efficient' echo the OECD discourse on education and a neoliberal rationality based on ideas of individualisation and marketisation. Employability has become a key concept, as it is employability that determines the value of one's human capital and that is perceived to be the source of economic opportunity, choice, and occupational status (Brown, 2001, p. 7).

In the Maastricht Communiqué, it is stated that the Copenhagen Process aims at promoting

a European VET area in which qualifications and skills acquired in one country are recognised throughout Europe; thus supporting the mobility of young adults and adults. This VET area should be cultivated through the use of common frameworks, instruments, and tools and supported by consistent use of comparable data enabling evidence-based policy-making (Maastricht Communiqué on the future priorities of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and Training', 2004, p. 4).

To some extent, the aim is to return to a pan-European VET model, but now anchored in a European framework based on a belief in rational-scientific policy-making. It would, however, be a model without monopolisation and protective barriers at national, regional, or local levels: an open, flexible, individualised system in which learning and recognition of individual learning are at the centre of attention. The learning system is to be based on a neoliberal market rationality of differentiation of learning provisions, adaptation to individual needs, and tailor-made provision/production. The nation states are no longer to provide 'standard goods' within the educational sector.

Without stretching the argument too far, one could say that the European lifelong learning strategy aims in the long run to undermine the education system as a 'pillar' of the nation state (see Nóvoa & Lawn, 2002). There is no question that the model attempts to transcend the 'national' and make 'Europe' the standard.

Not surprisingly, as 'declarations' of intent and good faith, the EU policy papers make no mention of conflicts between interest groups in VET. However, the documents touch on the conflict between capital and labour by stressing the importance of 'engaging social partners and sectoral organisations in all stages of the work' (*Helsinki Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training*, 2006). Representatives of the European social partners are involved in technical working groups and advisory committees, and national social partners are involved through extensive consultation processes. Moreover, discursively, the policy is presented as serving the interests of all stakeholders in Europe, as it is based on 'evidence-based policy-making', 'best practice', and 'policy learning'. Ideology and values are removed from the equation – at least rhetorically.

The relocation of VET to a European level and its contribution to the realisation of a European labour market, however, has already re-accentuated conflict lines: the influx of Eastern European labour into Western Europe has led to transnational labour market disputes. This shows that the 'problem' is not so much one of mutual recognition of vocational qualifications in order to facilitate labour mobility. In periods of economic upturn, barriers to labour mobility are low, especially in a two-tier Europe (East and West), but when economic competition increases, the problem is one of reconciling different ways of regulating trades, vocational demarcations, and not least, access to the labour market.⁶³

CONCLUSIONS AND SOME COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Historically, VET has developed from a uniform European model that was tied up in the working communities of the guilds, which protected access to the crafts and the quality of the craftsmanship. Going through VET was an initiation into a craft and (ideally) the formation of an identity with vocational pride in being a craftsman.

However, this model was transformed beginning in the late 18th century, with the introduction of freedom of trade as a means to undermine the privileges of the guilds.⁶⁴ Throughout Europe, different ways of organising VET arose, leading to the present diversity of systems. Three models for the institutionalisation of VET can be discerned, based on different ways of regulating VET. These models reflect the fact that VET is at a discursive intersection between education and work, as it was either left to market forces, integrated into the education system, or bridged through corporative structures. Today, these models are under pressure due to (the hegemonic discourse on the threat of) globalisation, changing labour markets, and the massification of general upper-secondary and higher education.

⁶³ The Vaxholm case is a good example of the problems that national labour market regulation poses in the internal market. In brief, the case concerns the principles of anti-discrimination and free movement vs. the right to collective action and to negotiate and conclude collective agreements. A Latvian company contracted to refurbish a school in Sweden refused to sign the collective agreement and was subsequently blocked by the Swedish unions. The company went bankrupt and took the case to the European Court of Justice arguing that the industrial actions taken in Vaxholm were not in compliance with EU law. In December 2007, the European Court of Justice ruled the Swedish blockade of the Latvian construction company illegal, since it violated the rules on the free movement of services as laid down in the treaties.

⁶⁴ Freedom of trade was first introduced in France in 1791.

In the article, I have argued that a model for VET is under construction at an EU level. It is forwarded as a 'meta-model' able to bridge this diversity of VET models in Europe and align only objectives, not national systems. However, more is at stake here than ensuring transparency and the mutual recognition of vocational qualifications across Europe. The emerging European model transcends the 'national' and the institutions traditionally responsible for VET.

In the emerging European model, many of the distinctions made in the national models are transcended: between education and work; VET and general education; VET and higher education; and between formal education and nonformal and informal learning. The aim is to create a flexible and highly individualised lifelong learning system that is not restricted within national borders. The rationality of the system is predominantly neoliberal. Education and training are supposed to match the needs of individuals responsible for enhancing their employability in accordance with the requirements of the European labour market. Employment is seen as a means of inclusion, not a final stop, but rather a continuous process whereby the individual keeps abreast of the demands of the labour market through lifelong learning.

In this model, accreditation of learning (wherever acquired) comes to play a major role. Thus, not only is the nation states' monopoly over education systems dismantled but also is the education institutions' monopoly on education programmes. Furthermore, NVQs are to be modularised based on a rationality of accreditation of prior learning. This could lead to a loss of the integrative aspect of socialisation and identity formation in VET programmes.⁶⁵ One future scenario that emerges from the reading of the EU papers is of a European system of accreditation institutions where individual European citizens can have their learning assessed, accredited, and even

⁶⁵ It is also worth remembering the far-sighted warning by Janne in his report to the Commission in 1973 where he warns against the extreme outcome of an à la carte system in which learners can choose freely: 'Inevitably, the industrial enterprise would seek to train workers, employees and supervisory staff according to its own needs and would organise promotion in such a way as to fit in with its own criteria for technical and managerial skills. The abolition of the legal value of degrees and diplomas, the institutionalisation of systems providing completely free options [...] might culminate in the emergence of a meritocracy regulated by the interest of private enterprise' (Janne, 1973, p. 43).

certified, wherever they go.⁶⁶ This may be considered as a plural lifelong learning model offering many pathways to the same qualification.

Figure 1

VET model	Refers to		Regulation	Rationality
‘Meisterlehre’	European towns		Guilds	Protectionism
Market-based	England	Nation	Market/companies	Liberalism
Dual	Germany		Corporative	Traditionalism
School-based	France		State	Rationalism
Plural lifelong learning	Europe		Market/individuals	Neoliberalism

Author's construction, partly based on Greinert (2005).

There can be no doubt that the emerging European model changes the space of possibility through a transcendence of the 'national' as the *natural* arena for VET, both when it comes to the education system and to the labour market, and through subtle discursive changes in the traditional distinctions found within the field. The model calls for a harmonisation of not only VET models but also labour market models, as these two types of systems are intensively intertwined. However, the emerging European model is not a rupture with the existing models of VET. The transition from one model to another is dependent on existing institutional paths. The example of the transition from the medieval apprenticeship model shows that many elements from this model were continued in the dual model, but within a national framing.⁶⁷

The European model induces a European framing of VET and makes policy-making within this field a European matter. In the emerging European model, elements from the three existing models can be traced. There seems to be a continuation in terms of the English market-based model with which it shares not only its underlying market rationality but also the concept of

⁶⁶ In Denmark, a national institute responsible for accreditation of university programmes was established in January 2008 in line with the Bologna Process.

⁶⁷ Even in the market- and school-based models, the apprenticeship model has been continued within certain crafts.

recognising and accrediting learning outside of formal education institutions, and a modularisation of qualifications (cf. the EQF). It is noteworthy, though, that in the European model, the responsibility for lifelong learning lies with the individual, not the companies. For the English market-based model, the leap towards a European model does not seem to be large.

The school-based model is under pressure, because the formal education institutions are perceived to be outdated and are faced with the challenge of developing into market-oriented, demand-led providers of individualised and flexible learning offers. The school-based models are set the task of establishing ties with industry and businesses in order to make VET more relevant to its customers – i.e. primarily the labour market. It is beyond a doubt that the school-based model is challenged by the EU policies, as it is not perceived as delivering the ‘goods’, meaning providing students with relevant labour market skills.

The EU model also echoes the German dual model, for its focus is on bridging education and work and making education more relevant to the labour market. However, the European model implies a rupture with the principle of vocation, as a vocational qualification can be acquired through the recognition of nonformal and informal learning. The ideal of socialisation into a trade/craft as a temporal process and the formation of vocational identity and pride may be lost in an individualised, modularised plural system. Undoubtedly, the European model will also challenge the dual-corporative model wherein VET is tied up in vocational demarcations, as these may be seen as a barrier to free mobility.

TELLING EXAMPLE: NATIONAL ADAPTATION TO THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK OR TRANSFORMATION OF THE EQF TO THE NATIONAL SYSTEM?

Berlin, November 2010

‘What is the status of the European Qualifications Framework in your country?’, asks AC, a department head in the *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (DGB) (the German Confederation of Trade Unions) and looks around at the CEDEFOP study visit group consisting of 15 people who have travelled from all over Europe. We are visiting DGB to learn about the role of the trade unions in the dual system and the development of the German qualifications framework. Everybody is a bit hesitant about what to answer. He smiles and looks around the room again and rephrases the question: ‘How are *you* involved in the EQF?’

This question elicits answers, and they reflect both different national contexts and organisations. One of the French participants answers that he is working for the chamber in Paris that represents the companies and is responsible for the training of apprentices. The EQF is somewhat out of his jurisdiction. The Spanish teacher tells us how his department has been involved in the development of the national qualification for the ceramics sector.

The Norwegian representative for the National Board of Education says that the work concerning the EQF is being co-ordinated by the department for higher education. A qualifications framework has been set up for the university sector; however, it is still in progress as it concerns upper-secondary education, because there are some disputes regarding the descriptions of VET programmes.

My Danish colleague describes the process in Denmark, how the trade committees have been involved in the implementation of a Danish qualifications framework. The framework has been implemented, but no law has been passed.

AC states, ‘It is a dialectical process. Each country is creating an NQF; only two countries already have a qualifications framework, Scotland and Ireland. All other countries are creating new

frameworks. This creates problems for the stakeholders, e.g. regarding permeability and equivalence between general education and VET. Germany is one of four or five countries that have a dual system, while all other countries do not. France turned around the idea of dual by making their system more school-based and offering work placements in a company. Spain and Italy do not have an overall VET system’.

‘But nevertheless’, he continues, ‘The same instruments are being implemented all over Europe. In Germany, there are no traditions for the validation of nonformal and informal learning. This is a policy that the DGB promotes in Germany through the European instruments. However, the level descriptors of the EQF do not make sense in the dual system, as this covers a more holistic approach to learning. The trade unions were not amused about the terminology of the EQF. The same was the case for the employers. It was considered to be a problem that the higher levels are occupied by the universities. VET also provides knowledge, skills, and competence at higher levels. This should be recognised in the EQF’.

He goes on to describe how the German qualifications framework was created in a corporate process. The German qualification framework was created by the social partners and reflects the German education system and especially the central role of the dual system in German society. ‘And this is why people with a vocational qualification will be able to have their skills recognised at the highest levels in the German framework’.

He continues, ‘Level six is the bachelor level all over Europe. However, in Germany the descriptor was expanded to include the descriptive phrase ‘or be in possession of broad and integrated occupational knowledge. These phrases are also added at levels seven and eight, making it possible to have vocational skills recognised at the Ph.D. level. The main idea is to integrate vocational knowledge, skills, and competence into the higher levels of the framework’.

‘As to the levels’, he says, ‘Germany has adopted the eight levels, as the rest of Europe has adopted eight levels. The levels have been taken from England. What we can change is the contents of the framework’.

Someone asks about difference of interests between employers and trade unions. He answers, ‘The employers would like to distinguish VET at the lower levels, to introduce steps or levels into the

dual system'. The trade unions, on the other hand, are against it. There was also disagreement on the level indicator and its descriptors, but they managed to find a solution.

He ends his presentation by saying, 'We do not know how the EQF will influence the development of the education and training systems nor how it will influence tariffs and negotiated wage levels. The EQF levels could be used to stipulate tariffs and minimum wages. Qualifications are the bridge between education and the labour market'.

The implementation of an NQF in Germany is based on the introduction of the EQF and as such can be seen as a case of Europeanisation. However, in Germany, the NQF has been developed in a close dialogue between the stakeholders in the dual system and the framework deviates from the European in relation to its descriptors. In other countries, the development of an NQF is directly emulated on the European. The next article will show the case of Denmark.

EUROPEANISATION AND POLICY CHANGE IN THE DANISH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

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Abstract: This article aims to analyse the interrelationship between the Copenhagen Process (EU VET policy) and the Danish initial VET policy in order to shed light on the discursive and institutional effects of the Copenhagen Process. The article points to the discursive convergence of policies, but also to the complexity of policy-making and the crisscrossing of policies across the globe. A major change brought about with the Copenhagen Process is the acceptance of the EU as a stakeholder in VET policy-making and as a consequence an expansion of the policy space. However, the institutional effects are yet to be seen, as changes at the national level are incremental. The EU policy translates in the national context where above all it contributes to the re-accentuation of existing conflicts and fissures.

Joint efforts to develop an EQF based on learning outcomes are having a significant catalytic effect: the EQF appears to be substantially contributing to the implementation of national qualifications frameworks; the principles on which it is based have significant consequences on the organisation of systems and are applied to all sectors and levels of education and training (Bordeaux Communiqué, 2008).

INTRODUCTION

In 2000, the OMC was formally institutionalised in EU governance as a soft policy tool, which made it possible to address policy issues that are considered politically sensitive from a national point of view (Cort, 2008b; Gornitzka, 2005). The OMC is based on the voluntary participation of the member states and rests on a rationality of 'conduct of conduct' aimed at steering national policies in a specific direction in order to attain EU policy objectives (Dean, 1999). The OMC was introduced as a central component in the Lisbon Agenda, which stressed education and training as

key factors in promoting economic growth and social cohesion. Two years later, common objectives were set up for education and training in the detailed work programme, and the member states agreed to be continuously monitored and evaluated against common EU indicators by the EU Commission (Detailed Work Programme, 2002). Also in 2002, the member states adopted the Copenhagen Declaration under the Danish EU presidency and hereby a specific OMC was also introduced into VET.

Through the OMC, 'policy learning' has become a practice in EU VET policy. The central actors have been tied closer together in European networks and working groups, and through these working groups, they have contributed to the development of common EU tools. In many European countries, governments are now introducing NQFs in order to provide comparability with the EQF. Although education policy has historically been a policy area in which the member states have expressed concerns over harmonisation and common initiatives, this concern has slowly eroded, if not evaporated (Cort, 2009).

Along with the increase in EU policy initiatives and processes, research on Europeanisation has gained momentum. Featherstone and Radaelli show how the number of articles referring to Europeanisation grew dramatically around 1999/2000, and today a search for 'Europeanisation' on Google Scholar results in over 24,000 hits (Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003, p. 5; see also Olsen, 2002). Part of the literature focuses on defining Europeanisation and its limits – as a historic phenomenon; as a matter of transnational cultural diffusion; and as a question of institutional adaptation 'emanating directly or indirectly from EU membership' (Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003, p. 7). In EU policy studies, over the past 20 years, focus has shifted from integration to 'Europeanisation', where it is more on the changes taking place in national institutions, policies, and practices due to changes in EU governance and the adoption of common EU policies than on the emergence (or not) of a supranational state, which was the main issue when I studied European integration in the 1990s. The focus is now on the processes of national adjustment to EU policies (see, e.g. Radaelli & Schmidt, 2005), and the main epistemological interest is to explain or understand institutional change deriving from these processes (Diez, 2001, p. 8).

A research concern in EU policy studies is how EU policy processes translate into policies at the national level and how they should be researched. A common critique of research exploring the

effects of Europeanisation on national policies is that it is based on a 'top-down' approach whereby a linear casual relationship between the EU and the member state's policy-making is inferred.

However, the policy processes are far from linear, and to establish causality is highly problematic.

This article will show how European policies feed into a national policy space, where the exact amalgamation of policies – be it global, European, national – is difficult to disentangle.

In this article, I shall be exploring the discursive and institutional effects of the Copenhagen Process in order to understand the role of EU VET policy in policy and institutional change at a national level. I tie together a discursive and a historical-institutionalist perspective on how European and Danish policy processes become interconnected and hereby shed light on the complexity of the changes taking place in VET.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The article rests on a methodological approach of tracing policy, process, and concepts. I shall trace the Copenhagen Process into the national policy space, focusing especially on the EQF and how it translates in the national context. The reason for choosing the EQF is that it deals with structure and credits, the two elements that have proven successful in the Europeanisation of higher education (the Bologna Process). The EQF is thus an important form of technology in EU governance establishing itself as a means of intervening in national VET systems.

I shall apply both a discursive (Bacchi, 1999) and a historical-institutionalist perspective (Campbell & Pedersen, 2001), first by tracing the Danish VET policy-as-discourse (Bacchi, 2000) since the 1990s in order to look into the discursive effects of the Copenhagen Process and establish the resonance between the European and the Danish policy discourses (Diez, 2001). By tracing the Danish VET policy in a historical perspective that predates the Lisbon and the Copenhagen Declaration, it is possible to analyse the interrelationship between European and national policies and the institutional development over time in order to establish whether the changes are influenced by national, European, or global discourses (Pasquier & Radaelli, 2006). Second, the EQF provides an analytical basis for establishing the institutional effects of the Copenhagen Process, and I shall trace the introduction of the EQF into the Danish VET policy by analysing the responses of the main actors in the Danish VET system and how they perceive the introduction of

an NQF and its linking to the Copenhagen Process. This perspective rests on a historical-institutional approach, which traces the interests and conflicts between the main actors, in this case the social partners and the Ministry of Education. Combining discourse analysis and historical institutionalism is an attempt to bridge an analysis of policy-as-discourse and policy-as-text by establishing on the one side, the discursive framing and on the other side, the 'struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations, and reinterpretations' (Ball, 1993, p. 11).

The article draws on policy documents; research reports; 10 interviews with unions, employers' associations, teacher training organisations, and civil servants in the Ministry of Education; and observations from national and international conferences and meetings during the years 2006 to 2009.

THE RESONANCE BETWEEN THE EU AND THE DANISH DISCOURSE ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

How can we identify the European VET policy discourse? One approach is to identify the problem representations and their underlying key concepts, values, assumptions, presuppositions, and binaries (Bacchi, 1999). From this perspective, the problem in the European VET policy is represented to be one of the role of skills formation for European competitiveness and the protection of social order (inclusion). VET is to be part of an overall policy about lifelong learning in which more flexible and individualised learning pathways, in which learning outside of formal education systems must be recognised and accredited, should be established.

A central concept in this discourse is the EQF, the aim of which is to promote transparency, comparability, and portability of qualifications, advancing the mobility of students and workers as promulgated in the various treaties. In order to make the introduction of the EQF possible, the provision of VET should be based on learning outcomes and modularisation (in its various forms, from 'pick and mix' to 'rules of combination').⁶⁸ The member states have committed themselves to relating their NQFs to the EQF by 2010 and, 'where appropriate, by developing national

⁶⁸ 'Pick and mix' modularisation implies that the learners can choose freely amongst modules and design their own vocational education and training programme, so to speak. 'Rules of combination' implies that the modules have to be taken in a specific order to ensure progression and the relevance or recognition of the qualification in the labour market.

qualifications frameworks' in order to make this relation possible (Recommendation of the European Parliament, 2008, p. 7).

Overall, the EU policy can be placed within the hegemonic neoliberal discourse emphasising marketisation, privatisation, and individualisation of education and training (Mitchell, 2006; Cort, 2008c).

How does this discourse translate into the Danish VET policy/system? At a glance, the Danish initial VET policy seems carved around the same objectives as the EU VET policy. It is based on a similar rationale of using a high-skills strategy in order to stay competitive in a global economy: 'A well-qualified and highly educated workforce plays a crucial role in an increasingly globalised knowledge economy' (Denmark's Strategy for Lifelong Learning, 2007). Furthermore, it is based on the rationality of social inclusion in order to strengthen social cohesion: 'The overall aim of the globalisation strategy is to make Denmark a leading knowledge society with strong competitiveness and strong cohesion' (Denmark's Strategy for Lifelong Learning, 2007).

In terms of the introduction of a qualifications framework, a Danish qualifications framework has been gradually introduced since 2006. It has been implemented by law where it concerns the education programmes within higher education (as laid down in the Bologna Process). In the case of initial VET, the framework has not yet been implemented by law, but forms the basis of the descriptions of learning outcomes, as set out in the regulations drawn up by the trade committees in co-operation with the Ministry of Education. The qualifications framework is modelled on the EQF: it has eight levels; the descriptors are divided into knowledge, skills, and competences; and, interestingly, the Ministry has chosen to redefine the concept of 'qualification' on the basis of the English meaning – i.e. a learning outcome that has been assessed and documented by a publicly recognised degree or certificate (Introduktion til den danske kvalifikationsramme for livslang læring, 2010) – whereas qualification in Danish normally refers to 'skills'. The justification for introducing a qualifications framework is the same as for the EQF: 'The qualifications framework is to promote lifelong learning and mobility in the labour market' (Den dansk kvalifikationsramme for livslang læring, 2010). By 2012, NQF and EQF reference levels will be added to all Danish VET certificates (Introduktion til den danske kvalifikationsramme for livslang læring, 2010).

When it comes to the objectives and rationalities in the Danish VET policy, there is no doubt that there is discursive convergence between EU and Danish VET policies, and one might jump to the hasty conclusion that this is a case of Europeanisation. However, the transformation of the Danish VET system has to be observed over a longer time span in order to trace the genealogy of the policy.

THE DANISH INITIAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM AND POLICY CHANGE

The Danish system can be clustered with the Austrian, German, and Swiss systems as a corporatist system exhibiting the following main characteristics:

- involvement of the social partners in the administration, provision, and financing of training;
- the provision of transferable certified occupational skills recognised nationwide through ‘dual’ programmes – i.e. vocational education and training provided as an apprenticeship programme during which the students work in a company and have recurrent periods of education and training at a vocational college (Trampusch, 2010, p. 187);⁶⁹
- in Denmark, a third trait should be added: the inclusion of VET into the youth education system with an emphasis of general education for personal development, citizenship, and further education.

These institutional traits can be traced back to reforms in 1937 (involvement of social partners), 1956 (dual training), and 1976 (general youth education) (Juul, 2005; Cort & Wiborg, 2009).

The current Danish VET policy has been gradually installed since the end of the 1980s (Cort & Wiborg, 2009). The first radical change took place in 1989 when a structural reform of the system was introduced based on NPM ideas: devolution of powers to the vocational colleges; students’ free choice of vocational college; the introduction of taximeter rates (i.e. a market logic in which the colleges are funded per student instead of having fixed annual budgets); and the end of detailed central management. The 1989 reform also meant a continuation and strengthening of the dual

⁶⁹ In the Varieties of Capitalism literature, three typologies for vocational education and training systems are defined: liberal, segmentalist, and collectivist. These typologies derive from Thelen’s work on how institutions evolve and are based on the English, the Japanese, and the German skills formation systems (Thelen, 2004).

principle, as the social partners' involvement was strengthened and the idea of integrating VET with general upper-secondary education was abandoned.

In 1996, the commercial training programmes were reformed, and the idea of a competence-based curriculum was tentatively introduced and then seriously unfolded in the reform of the technical training programmes in 2000. The Reform 2000 was based on an idea of individualisation as a means to make the VET programmes more inclusive (Juul, 2005; Cort, 2008a). The reform radically changed pedagogical methods by introducing modularisation of the school-based foundational courses,⁷⁰ portfolio methods, variable duration/length, partial and additional qualifications, and shorter, more practice-oriented programmes (Nielsen, 1999; Cort & Wiborg, 2009). The aim of the reform was to make VET more transparent to its users and thereby increase its attractiveness compared with general upper-secondary education. The reform also made it compulsory to assess the students' prior learning and include it in the educational portfolio that all students were supposed to have. An important element in the reform was to make the students 'take responsibility for their own learning' (*ansvar for egen læring* (AFEL)). The introduction of an NQF can be seen as the prolongation of policies since 1991 and especially since the reform in 2000, for which the key words were 'transparency, flexibility, and social inclusion' and the introduction of partial qualifications (Nielsen, 1999).

In 2005, the Liberal-Conservative government set up a Globalisation Council that was to analyse the opportunities and threats stemming from globalisation. The work of the council was closely related to the EU Lisbon Strategy and aimed at setting up a strategy for Denmark in the global economy. Focus areas were education, research, innovation, and entrepreneurship – themes that the EU had set on the agenda in 2000. As in the European policies, VET was perceived to play a major role in achieving these objectives (Cort & Wiborg, 2009).

The work of the Globalisation Council was followed up by committee work on modernising the Danish VET programmes (Udvalget om fremtidssikring af erhvervsuddannelserne, 2006). The main initiatives within the VET area stemming from these processes were to stress the importance of VET in attaining the objectives of making 85% of a youth cohort complete a youth education

⁷⁰ The reform primarily concerned the school-based part of the vocational education and training programmes, whereas the training in a company was only marginally touched by the reform.

programme by 2010, and 95% by 2015. These objectives are quite similar to the common European objectives, but were already laid down at the end of the 1990s (Andreasen et al., 1998).

In 2007, the concept of competence-based programmes was further unfolded in the next reform when learning outcomes were introduced. All regulations on VET programmes were rewritten by the trade committees responsible for the apprenticeship part of the VET programmes. The regulations were now to describe the learning outcomes in order to make the programmes more flexible and allow for the recognition of nonformal and informal learning in the programmes. Currently, the Ministry of Education has funded pilot projects at the vocational colleges in order for the teachers to translate the new learning outcomes into teaching (Holm Sørensen & Størner, 2008).

This brief outline of major trends in the Danish initial VET system shows a discursive resonance (Diez, 2001) with the present European VET policy. The Danish discourse with its emphasis on 'growth', 'high skills', and 'social inclusion' resonates with the European discourse on the global competitiveness of Europe as a region and education as a key factor in assuring social cohesion. Establishing causality between Europeanisation as an independent variable and the Danish VET policy as a dependent variable is, however, more than difficult. Is this a case of Europeanisation or a case of Danish influence on European processes since the Danish policy discourse predates the Copenhagen Process? The Copenhagen Process was born during the Danish presidency in 2002, and Danish civil servants played an important role in establishing policy consensus amongst the member states and in drawing up the final declaration. If we trace some of the key concepts in the Danish VET policy from 1992 onwards, it shows the complexity of policy-making and the entanglement of policies borrowed from other countries and different research traditions:

- Modularisation can be traced back to the 1950s in the United States ⁷¹ and the emphasis on scientific management in the quest to rationalise learning processes in the same way that production processes had been. Modularisation had its renewal in the 1980s in a number of Anglo-Saxon countries, such as the United Kingdom, where modularised systems were

⁷¹ According to Dochy et al. (1989), modularisation can be traced back to the U.S. universities at the end of the 19th century.

introduced in further education (England and Wales) and in the entire education system (Scotland);

- The concept of learning outcomes can be traced back to the American educator Ralph Tyler who published his 'Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction' in 1949. In this work, he proposed a curriculum model based on defining appropriate learning objectives and in this way, determining 'the means by the ends' (Ross, 2000, p. 118).⁷² In the 1980s, learning outcomes became a major component in the English NVQ system;
- The pedagogical concept of responsibility for one's own learning (AFEL) can be traced back to the Norwegian education researcher Bjørgen, who published his book *Ansvar for Egen Læring* in 1994. The concept found its way into the Danish VET system in the 1990s through the Danish Institute for Educational Training of Vocational Teachers (Juul, 2005, p. 74) and became a key principle in Reform 2000;
- The devolution of powers to the vocational colleges can be traced back to the Thatcherite government in the 1980s and its attempt to install market mechanisms in educational institutions whereby they were forced/encouraged to compete on (quasi)-market conditions (see, e.g. Gewirtz & Ball, 2000);
- Finally, the discourse on lifelong learning can be traced back to the OECD, UNESCO and the EU in the 1960s and 1970s (Rubenson, 2006, pp. 151-170; Cort, 2008b).

The tracing of concepts and policies shows that the Danish VET policy is a bricolage of policies and theories borrowed from all over the world and translated into the Danish context. The same is the case with the European VET policy, which also borrows elements from different contexts and different VET traditions (see Cort, 2008c). However, in both discourses the influence from neoliberalism can be detected, and hence an uncritical borrowing from Anglo-Saxon countries, in which the tradition of providing occupational skills through a national system has been weak, if not nonexistent (see Cort, 2010b).

Despite the complexity of influences on the Danish VET system, the actors involved in the policy processes at a national level point to the discursive framing of the Lisbon Agenda and the

⁷² Ralph Tyler's ideas were influential in the Danish vocational education and training system after World War II, and it was not until the reform of the vocational education and training programmes in the 1989 and the introduction of management-by-objectives that the means-end pedagogy was abandoned (Juul, 2005).

Copenhagen Process as having a major effect on national policy-making. Through involvement in technical working groups and the influence of EU white papers and reports, the main stakeholders have started reproducing the discourse, according to a civil servant in the Danish Ministry of Education. EU policies have become a reference, and this is an important discursive effect of the EU policy, one that was not seen prior to 2000 and 2002 (see the prologue). Therefore, I shall turn to the actors involved in implementing the NQF in Denmark to analyse how the actors are framed within this discourse and the effects of the Copenhagen Process on the Danish VET policy.

THE INTRODUCTION OF A NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Whilst the introduction of an NQF has caused conflicts in other corporatist systems, such as the Swiss and German systems, the NQF has been introduced without open conflict in Denmark (Thelen & Bussemeyer, 2008; Trampusch, 2009, 2010).⁷³ With regard to the European policy on setting up an EQF, this policy was accepted by all parties. This was reflected in the Danish response to the EU consultation process on the working document *Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*: the Danish comments were generally positive, although they emphasised the fact that the introduction of the EQF is voluntary (the principle of voluntary participation is key in the OMC). A representative for the Danish Trade Union Congress (LO) argued that nobody could be against increased transparency and mobility.

In interviews, representatives of the social partners were, in general, positively disposed towards the Copenhagen policy process. LO supported European mobility, transparency, and mutual recognition of qualifications,⁷⁴ although when the interview was conducted in 2008, the NQF was still under development and the representative for LO still spoke about its high level of abstraction

⁷³ The NQF was initially labelled 'Qualifications Key' in order to distance it from the EQF. According to a civil servant in the Ministry of Education, the Ministry was reluctant to use the European concept, as it was thought it may evoke resistance in the Danish Folk's Party, which was supporting the minority government consisting of the Liberal and Conservative Parties. However, until now there has been no political questioning of the EU qualifications framework processes.

⁷⁴ It is interesting to note that trade unions in both Germany and Switzerland are very critical towards the introduction of an NQF (Thelen & Bussemeyer, 2008; Trampusch, 2009). In Denmark, LO has not criticised the NQF but perceives the service directive as a greater menace to collective wage bargaining (interview).

and how it was too far from practice. Again, an important point was that the tools are voluntary and that Denmark could choose to not implement the tools in the national context (interview with representative for LO). Somehow, political developments have already overtaken this standpoint: although voluntary, an NQF has been introduced. As research has shown, the European policy works through the subtle management principles of peer pressure, benchmarking, and monitoring, and thus the principle of voluntary participation can be and has been questioned (Zeitlin et al., 2005; Cort, 2008b).

The representative from the Danish Employers' Association (DA) was very much in line with LO and pointed out that mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications was an important objective for DA.⁷⁵ He also noted that the EU tools were still too abstract and distant from national practice, and that they should be tested for their usability in enterprises before being implemented (interview with representative for DA).

Although the social partners agreed with the European objectives of the qualifications framework, they feared the national usage of it. In his classification of qualifications frameworks, Young points to the fact that a qualifications framework can be either an instrument of description or an instrument of regulation. The Danish social partners feared a qualifications framework that was regulatory, because then more power would be distributed to the Ministry at the expense of the social partners (Young, 2007). In the minutes from the meeting of the National Council for Initial Vocational Education and Training, it was stressed that the NQF should be 'descriptive and not normative' (Referat af REUs møde nr. 45, 2009).⁷⁶

The Ministry of Education saw the introduction of an NQF as the 'natural development' of the Danish system and pointed out that the EQF provided an answer to a problem faced by many member states concerning how to promote outcome-based approaches in VET. I have discussed

⁷⁵ As stated in my article on the EQF, the discourse on qualifications frameworks makes itself immune to criticism. Who can argue against a policy that offers the part of the population with the lowest educational level the chance to have their competences recognised whilst the framework also provides the nation at large with a competitive edge by raising the overall educational level? The framework will benefit the individual, the companies, the labour market, and the nation state, and it becomes cloaked as a technically 'neutral' response to problems in the real world, which are in the interests of all stakeholders to solve (Cort, 2010).

⁷⁶ In the National Council for Initial Vocational Education and Training (REU), the stakeholders are represented in parity. The role of the council is advise the Minister of Education on matters relating to vocational education and training.

the facilitating power of common problem representations in my analysis of the transformation of EC VET policy (Cort, 2008b). The hegemonic discourse about education and training as a means for achieving economic growth and social cohesion has facilitated the EU policy processes, and in the case of the EQF, both the EU and the OECD have been successful in promoting qualifications frameworks as viable solutions to problems in education and training. A key element has been the construction of qualifications frameworks as examples of good practice based on scientific evidence (Cort, 2010b). This has paved the way for the EQF proposal that, according to one of the civil servants in the Ministry of Education, would have met with significant Danish resistance prior to the Lisbon Agenda and would have been perceived as yet another Commission attempt to harmonise VET across the EU. However, the EU discourse gives resonance to ideas already circulating in education and training and has been successful in turning them into a common EU policy (Cort, 2008b).

With regard to the NQF, the demarcation lines in Denmark lie between the Ministry of Education and the social partners (DA/LO). The Ministry of Education has been active in pushing for the implementation of the qualifications framework and seemed to be committed to the Copenhagen Process, which had Danish civil servants as some of its chief architects. Interestingly enough, the Copenhagen Process may silently have installed itself as the framework for the Danish VET policy due to the ministerial involvement, whereas the partners have been more focused on the national policy processes and have missed their chance to actively contribute to and constructively criticise the European agenda. The NQF is subtly shifting power from the social partners to the Ministry, which is able to set the policy agenda by referral to the European processes.

An example is the introduction of 'levels' (*trin*) in the Danish VET system, a policy the social partners have opposed but that they have been more or less forced to accept (interviews with social partners).⁷⁷ The possibilities for introducing levels were strengthened by the adoption in 2003 of the bills L448 and L1228 ('Rådet for de Grundlæggende', 2009). The Ministry connected the need for introducing levels in the VET programmes directly to the implementation of a qualifications framework in the report on the modernisation of the VET programmes: 'In order to

⁷⁷ *Trin* is to be understood as the disintegration of an occupational profile into one or more 'partial' qualifications.

ensure that such levels have an equivalent in the labour market, it is the opinion of the working committee that work on establishing a national qualifications framework has to be initiated' (Udvalget om fremtidssikring af erhvervsuddannelserne, 2006, p. 15).

How an NQF will contribute to ensuring equivalence between qualifications and labour market needs is unclear, and the argument is tautological, as the introduction of levels is an outcome of introducing a qualifications framework for lifelong learning, in which learners should be able to move in and out of the education system as they see fit in a lifelong perspective. In ministerial terms, however, the introduction of the NQF was justified by the need to establish levels for the VET programmes (Bemærkninger til Lovforslag L173, 2007).

In the minutes from the meeting of the Rådet for de Grundlæggende Erhvervsrettede Uddannelser (REU), the council stressed that the levels had to reflect an occupational profile in the labour market. In the consultation responses to the NQF, both DA and LO emphasised that the Ministry should only introduce levels based on a recommendation from the trade committees and not, as proposed in the bill, by leaving the Ministry with the sole competence to introduce levels in a specific programme (Høring over udkast, 2007). DA recommended that the trade committees should be responsible for assessing the need for introducing levels in a qualifications structure. It warned that the compulsory introduction of levels in all VET programmes would neither contribute to the achievement of making more young people acquire a vocational qualification nor ensure a high quality level in the programmes (Høring over udkast, 2007). In the final bill, the Minister of Education laid down the precise rules on the introduction of levels and took into account the recommendation from the REU. The law on VET came to stipulate that it should be possible for students to complete a programme at more levels *if* there is a need in the labour market for a partial qualification (§15). In the end, a consensual formulation was found, but the issue of levels remains a matter of conflict between the Ministry of Education and the social partners, and the further development of the NQF may re-open this conflict.

As shown by Trampusch (2009), the European policy establishes opportunity structures in national policy-making. In the case of the EQF, the Ministry of Education tried to use it as a means to implement a policy of levels in qualifications in the Danish VET system. At the political level, the attainment of making 95% of a youth cohort complete a youth education programme was of

overriding importance, and this made it imperative to offer the residual groups a pathway into a youth education that they would have a chance of completing. The social partners, on the other hand, stressed the match between the occupational profile and the labour market and feared the disintegration of occupational profiles, as this may undermine the main institutional principle of providing certified occupational skills that are recognised nationwide.

In sum, the EQF and the introduction of an NQF were closely connected with the reform of the technical training programmes in 2000, and in that way, European and national policies became closely intertwined. In the national context, the NQF was used as a legitimising means with regard to the introduction of 'levels' in the initial VET programmes. This was an issue dividing the actors, but that is part of a longer historical conflict in the Danish VET system. According to Juul, the demand for a modularised step-based system was supported by employers within the metal industries in the 1970s when they proposed a system that was based on levels (Juul, 2005, p. 53). However, this was not accepted as a solution at the time, and instead the reform of the 1970s strengthened the general subjects in the VET programmes and the aim of providing a youth education programme. This was in line with the overriding discourse of the 1970s when the issue of equality played an important role in education policies (Udvalget om fremtidssikring af erhvervsuddannelserne, 2006, p. 42).

The conflict concerning levels was accentuated again in Reform 2000 in which the social partners were charged with designing short-term VET programmes of a duration of one and a half years. The introduction of these programmes may be seen as the first step towards introducing a qualifications framework wherein it would be possible to build on top of a qualification in a lifelong learning perspective. Although the introduction of an NQF is clearly linked with the EU policy, it is also part of the national policy and of already existing conflicts. The case of Denmark underscores that the EU policy is reaccentuating conflicts in the Danish context and is used as a pretext for reforms that could change the power balance amongst the stakeholders in the system.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have traced the effects of the Copenhagen Process and the policy of qualifications frameworks on the Danish VET policy and aimed to shed light on the complexity of the

interrelationship between European and Danish VET policies. It can be concluded that the EU VET policy has become a legitimate part of the Danish VET policy, which is a major rupture with previous 'arm's length' policy and fear of 'harmonisation'. From the two perspectives applied in the article, different aspects of 'Europeanisation' stand out:

The discursive perspective shows the convergence of the EU and Danish policy discourse in which VET is embedded. The policies converge around a hegemonic discourse of globalisation and its emphasis on growth, inclusion, and the role of education in providing flexible and individualised programmes in a global education market. I would claim that the hegemony of this discourse has made the European discourse on education and training possible, as 'problems' are now constructed in a similar way across the globe. However, it also shows that the Danish policies are nested within global policies and based on ideas borrowed, e.g. from the United States, England, and Norway. In this sense, it is difficult to disentangle Europeanisation and globalisation, as the EU discourse largely rests on a global discourse. Bulmer and Lequesne (2005, p. 61) state that 'Europe is not always the driving force but complements and enhances trends that were already affecting the member states'.

This point by Bulmer and Lequesne is supported in the historical-institutionalist perspective that emphasises the different interests bound to the introduction of an NQF. This perspective showed how the EU VET policy has been translated at a national level and fused with national issues. In the case of Denmark, the introduction of an NQF was generally accepted by the stakeholders, i.e. the discursive framing was accepted. However, it was used by the Ministry of Education as a pretext for a reform in which the introduction of levels would be linked with the EQF. The trend that could be detected was that the Ministry was trying to assert more influence at the expense of the social partners, and the policy could thereby contribute to a hollowing out of the corporatist system, one of the key traits of the Danish system.⁷⁸ In other words, the amalgamation of European and national policy has led to incremental changes in the system. The changes are not – yet – radical in terms of how they have affected the main institutional traits of the Danish VET system. However, they point towards subtle changes that over time could lead to institutional change.

⁷⁸ It should be noted that analysis of the Danish employment policy also points in this direction. Torfing's research showed that the social partners are less involved in reforms than they were previously (Torfing, 2004, p. 264).

It can be concluded that the Copenhagen Process plays a role in the incremental change of the Danish VET system, as it re-accentuates fissures and conflicts in the Danish context. In addition, it can be established that the EQF constitutes a technology of Europeanisation, as it moves the borders of what is acceptable European influence in the Danish system (Cort, 2008b). No critical voices point out that VET is subject to the principle of subsidiarity. As stated in the introduction, education and training has been regarded as a central part of national sovereignty, and the member states have been reluctant to make the EU part of the shaping of the institutional framework for education and training (Olsen, 2002, p. 931). In this respect, the processes initiated in 2000 and 2002 have contributed to the Europeanisation of Danish VET policy. References to EU policies are now legitimately included in the comments to national legislation and in national strategies for VET. The arena for laying down a national VET policy has been extended to include European stakeholders, processes, and tools.

FURTHER PERSPECTIVES

In the previous sections, I have focused on the discursive and institutional effects of the Copenhagen Process on Danish VET policy and specifically on the effect of the introduction of an NQF. However, the Copenhagen Process also has effects on institutional practices. A central element of NQFs is the shift to learning outcomes. In Denmark, learning outcomes were introduced in the 2007 law on VET. The law stipulates that ‘the subjects have to be justified in the learning outcomes for the programme, including the learning outcomes for innovative and international competences’ (Bekendtgørelse om erhvervsuddannelser, 2007, § 4). In other words, subjects are subordinated to the learning outcomes.

The introduction of learning outcomes has required a comprehensive reformulation of the national regulations on the various VET programmes. In the new regulations, the description of contents has been removed and instead learning outcomes have been formulated. The introduction of learning outcomes has gone through the trade committees, which are responsible for laying down the contents of the various VET programmes within the framework of the overall VET law.⁷⁹ The Ministry of Education has developed templates, guidelines, and examples on which the trade

⁷⁹ The trade committees consist of representatives of the social partners in parity.

committees have based the descriptions of learning outcomes. The Ministry has used the concepts of the EQF (knowledge, skills, and competences).

Whereas the trade committees have been responsible for laying down the learning outcomes for the programmes, it has been up to the vocational colleges to translate these learning outcomes into teaching. What is at stake? The prospect of change in the national curricular standards (Ross, 2000). This change of educational practice within the Danish VET programmes has been described by consultants from the National Centre for Vocational Education and Training as a 'silent revolution' (Holm Sørensen & Størner, 2008, p. 3), as it shifts the national curricular design from being primarily 'content based' to being primarily 'outcome-based'. The introduction of learning outcomes and the focus on knowledge, skills, and competence has tended to reduce the objectives of conveying general and citizenship education to the students. The primary focus has become vocational knowledge, skills, and competence, and the general youth education aspect of the programmes has been marginalised. Young points to this schism in qualifications frameworks and states that it implies a tension between a political and an educational rationale: 'At the core of the idea of NQFs is a tension between the aim for more market-oriented education systems and the aim for more equal and democratic education systems' (Young, 2003, p. 226).

From the curricular perspective, it can be established that change is taking place and that these entangled global-European-national policy processes reach deep into the educational values on which the Danish VET system is based and into teaching practice at the Danish vocational colleges.

TELLING EXAMPLE: SCENE FROM AN EU NETWORK MEETING

Thessaloniki, September 2006

I sit in the CEDEFOP conference room. It is a dark room, although it has a huge panorama window looking out onto the surrounding fields. However, the dark blue curtains are drawn and a huge poster hangs down from the ceiling: '20 years of study visits: A moving experience for Europeans'.

I'm here with a Danish colleague to represent the Danish part of a CEDEFOP network. We sit together in the outer square of tables in the conference room. There are three squares and the inner square is – as always – occupied by CEDEFOP staff and representatives from other international organisations, ETF, Eurydice, Euroskills. Also 'as always', the national co-ordinators cluster in specific groups: the French speaking, the new Member States, the Nordic countries, and the Southern Europeans, although the pattern is not consistent, because 'old friends' in the network choose to sit together as well – regardless of nationality. My colleague and I sit close to the Norwegian and Finnish representatives.

In the boxes surrounding the conference room, the interpreters sit. Today, it is possible to have interpretation in English, French, German, and Spanish. This is not customary – normally it is only English and French.

The most important item on the agenda is the discussion of the future of the network: what is the role of the network in Europe? In the agenda, CEDEFOP is to launch the discussion defining their visions for the network, afterwards the Commission's view will be presented, and finally the national representatives will have the opportunity to state their points of view.

The Director of CEDEFOP, Aviana Bulgarelli, launches the discussion by drawing up the role that the network has played so far and concludes that the results are impressive but that a re-launch of the network is necessary. Her vision is that the network should become a 'think tank on VET policies in Europe'.

I am quite surprised about this ambitious goal and actually consider it out of proportion to transform the network into a political agent feeding into the Copenhagen Process. Yet I can appreciate her drift: many of the national representatives are from the national Ministries of

Education, and the network could provide an important link between the European level and the national level – ensuring better synergy between national and European VET policy-making.

The reactions of the national representatives are not enthusiastic. Many of those who react do not relate to this overall vision, but rather to more practical matters, such as the use of the reports drawn up within the network, the issue of the target group for these reports, the various ‘tools’ and databases, and not least the issue of inadequate funding of the work being carried out by the national representatives.

However, two national representatives respond favourably to the director’s suggestions. The U.K. representative seems to have some kind of interest in this overall vision of becoming a ‘think tank’. He argues very much in favour of a network that focuses more on policies and less on detailed descriptions of systems. He argues that the network should produce ‘at a glance’ publications on trends and issues in European VET, hereby referring to the OECD, and that the publication should be aligned to the DG EAC ‘Education and Training 2010’ reporting (an analysis of progress towards the overall goals in EU education and training policies). His vision is that the network should not just ‘reflect’ the agenda but ‘set’ it.

The Norwegian representative also addresses the more visionary part of the discussion; however, his arguments reflect a completely different reality: he is currently working on a development project in an Asian country and has substantial experience from development projects in less developed nations. His arguments reflect this experience, as he argues for opening up the network for co-operation with countries and regions outside Europe. The network should focus on sharing knowledge with other international organisations such as UNESCO and provide knowledge on VET, and furthermore, set new norms for sharing knowledge worldwide.

I think about these two very different ways of making sense of the world: an internal focus on the EU and the ability to influence EU VET policies, and an external focus on how the EU and European experiences with setting up formalised VET system could feed into development processes in countries outside the Union.

The discussion drifts, again, into more pragmatic issues: What is the need for the many reports that are produced within the network? Who is the target group? Who uses the many electronic tools? How about funding of the network activities? Etc.

The discussion continues until lunch. It is obvious that no 'solution' can be found – and to me it is obvious as well that there is no agreement as to what the problem is. The discussion moves in circles, reflecting different national realities and different interests. The U.K. representative has the last word, stating that the key elements for defining the way forward for the network are target group, key products, interaction with key stakeholders, and financing 'real work' realistically.

It is lunch time and the discussion continues and here people find voice to discuss the think tank proposal.

The network actors are not European policy makers – and yet, many of them are civil servants representing the national Ministries of Education or Labour and hereby policy-making is going on – although in a more subtle manner. It is not 'high' politics but the everyday interaction and negotiation between national civil servants and experts, and EU civil servants and experts. At the meeting, the relations and the distribution of power and interests between the national representatives and CEDEFOP are being negotiated. The national representatives make their standpoint clear, however, regardless of some resistance: at the end of the day, the national representatives still tender for the contract and hereby accept the terms of CEDEFOP. They could choose to opt out, but as Nóvoa and Lawn state in 'Educating Europe': 'It is difficult to imagine a Member State opting out of this game of "freely adhering" to shared guidelines', and they do not.

It is apparent that the network is used as a means of diffusing objectives and goals, and of harmonising VET thinking across the countries. The OMC has institutionalised network governance in the EU, and the last article will show how this contributes to the dissemination of the objectives of the Copenhagen Process in tandem with other modes of governance.

THE OPEN METHOD OF CO-ORDINATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING – A TRIANGLE OF EU GOVERNANCE

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INTRODUCTION

The Copenhagen Declaration on Enhanced Co-operation in Vocational Education and Training, adopted by the Council in 2002, introduced a form of governance called the open method of co-ordination. Within VET, the open method built upon the previous institutions and practices in an area of more than 50 years of co-operation.⁸⁰ The open method, however, added a number of new features including a common discursive framing of European VET; the establishment of transnational networks (technical working groups); the continuous monitoring of the policy process (the Copenhagen Process) and the progress made by the Member States; and the initiation of a process of consultation with relevant stakeholders at national level. This was all with the aim of modernising VET in Europe through the convergence of policy objectives based on voluntary participation in a bottom-up co-ordinated process of mutual learning leading to the development of common European instruments. The process is based on an open invitation to participate, and involves policy makers, social partners, and practitioners sharing ideas and good practices in order to co-ordinate and develop a common European VET policy: hence the name, the OMC.

The OMC was originally developed within EU employment policies (1997), but the Lisbon Strategy (2000) formally defined and recognised the OMC as a ‘policy instrument’ of the EU. The

⁸⁰ Here it is important to acknowledge that the OMC is not a method, which is adopted homogenously across policy areas. Laffan and Shaw have mapped the open method in different policy areas and conclude that ‘though the Lisbon Council conclusions provided a template for the method, different processes operationalise the method differently sometimes introducing new elements while ignoring others’ (Laffan & Shaw, 2005, p. 6)

Lisbon Process used this method to co-ordinate processes of convergence in policy areas that were included in the first pillar of the EU but that legally still came under national sovereignty. This was also the case of VET.

Since its introduction as a policy instrument in 1997, the OMC has become a highly debated object of study attracting researchers from many different fields of research, although mainly from within EU studies⁸¹ and political science. The interest has been to discuss the method as a *new mode of governance* in the EU and to assess the effect of the method on a national level (see e.g. Chalmers & Lodge, 2003; Gornitzka, 2005; Prange & Kaiser, 2005; Schäfer, 2004; Zeitlin, et al., 2005).

In many studies, the OMC is often described in isolation and/or as an alternative to the community method by which the Commission functions as the ‘motor’ of integration (see e.g. Chalmers & Lodge, 2003; Gornitzka, 2005; Schäfer, 2004). Walters and Haahr, e.g. describe the shift from the community method to the open method as a move from harmonisation (centralisation) to framework regulation (decentralisation) (Walters & Haahr, 2005, p. 119). The open method is, on the other hand, seldom compared with the programme method with which it actually shares a number of features. However, in my opinion, the open method should be seen as a mode of governance that supplements these two other modes of governance in the EU, and in this chapter, I aim to compare the open method with the community and programme method within the area of VET in order to understand the three modes of governance as a triangle of governance – establishing different ways of implementing a common EU VET policy. I shall also look into the ‘newness’ of the open method in VET: what does the method add to EU policy-making within the area of VET?

My focus is on ‘policies’, i.e. the operationalisation of political goals into concrete actions, and the capacity of the EU to carry out its policies. My definition of ‘mode of governance’ is thus the instruments or technologies (to use Dean’s concept, see Dean, 1999) through which political steering takes place and policies are to be implemented. My main argument is that the open method of co-ordination – in connection with the two other EU modes of governance – makes up a

⁸¹ The studies draw on theories about European integration, e.g. the compliance with EU law and policies (‘good fit’); the ‘push-and-pull’ between the Commission and the member states; and Europeanisation understood as the establishment of horizontal and vertical networks, as the creation of a European discourse, and as the extension of the European polity (see e.g. Nedergaard, 2005).

triangle of EU governance with the aim of making VET policies in Europe converge. Furthermore, the *new* thing about the open method is that it can be seen as an attempt to introduce NPM structures at the European level (neoliberal governmentality). The chapter is structured in two sections: a comparison of the open method with the community and the programme methods in which the main differences and similarities of the three modes of governance are outlined, and a section on the open method, viewed from a governmentality perspective.

THE TRIANGLE OF EU GOVERNANCE

My argument is that the three modes of governance, the community method, the programme method, and the OMC form a triangle of governance covering different means of regulating EU member states' (and citizens') behaviour.⁸² They use different technologies for connecting the European policy space with the member states' policy spaces.⁸³

The *community method* is the backbone of EU governance. It establishes a common law that is superordinate to national law and that aims to make the EC a reality. The community method draws on *hard* law, i.e. regulations, directives and decisions⁸⁴ that the Member States are obliged to implement in their own national legislation. The Member States are granted a period of implementation after which the Commission has the authority to monitor that the treaties and the EU legislation are being respected. The community method is, however, limited to those policy areas directly concerned with the realisation of the internal market. A key characteristic of the

⁸² This is just one of many ways of categorising EU modes of governance. See Treib et al. for other categorisations (Treib, Bähr, & Falkner, 2005).

⁸³ Having been a member of various EU networks and projects, my impression is that the EU space functions in a way that is disconnected from any national space. The discourse of the EU policy space seems – at times – totally disconnected to any national policy discourse.

⁸⁴ There are different sources of law in the EU. First, a distinction is made between primary and secondary legislation, the first covering the treaties and the second covering regulations, directives, decisions, recommendations, and opinions. The different types of legislation have different legislative impact. Regulations are binding and directly applicable in all member states. Directives are binding to the end to be achieved, leaving room for member states to adapt them to their own national context. Decisions are binding in their entirety on those to whom they are addressed, whereas recommendations and opinions have neither binding force nor direct effect. In this sense, the community method also encompasses both hard and soft law/binding and nonbinding legislation, and could in itself be seen as covering different modes of governance on a continuum from hierarchical top-down political steering backed by legal sanctions to more voluntary, less hierarchical political steering based on argumentation and persuasion.

community method is that it is backed by legal means, i.e. that a lawsuit can be filed against a Member State by a European citizen, a company, another member state, or the Commission at the European Court of Justice. If member states fail to comply with EU law, the Commission can initiate an infringement procedure that may lead to a judgement by the European Court, and ultimately to financial sanctions (Treib, et al., 2005). In other words, the Member States are legally bound by agreements under the community method.

The community method can be perceived of as a 'traditional' mode of governance based on the rule of law. The method is the main driver in European integration, but it has proved difficult to adapt the method (and the polity on which it is based) to the 27 member states.

The *programme method* is based on action programmes that aim to promote specific EU priority areas (e.g. regional development, student and teacher mobility, equality in education, etc.) through EU funding of regional and/or transnational projects and networks. It targets individual institutions that are eligible to apply for funding. The criteria for the projects are described in the programmes, and the selection process is carried out either by the relevant DG of the Commission or by national agencies established as satellites in the individual Member States. The programme method provides an incentive structure for testing, promoting, and implementing EU policies at an institutional, local, and regional level.

The programme method dates back to the establishment of the 1961 European Social Fund, and within the field of education and training, it was expanded considerably in the 1980s with the establishment of the programmes of Petra, Iris, Eurotecnet and Comett.⁸⁵

The programme method has been discussed in EU studies as a way of circumventing national governments, insofar that the programmes are targeted to geographical regions (in the case of the European Social Fund), or educational institutions, companies and individuals (in case of Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci). The programme method is a subtle mode of governance based on the voluntary participation of primarily nonpolitical actors. The programme method operates as a voluntary bottom-up process to promote EU policies and objectives, and it creates communities

⁸⁵ Later transformed into the programmes of Leonardo da Vinci (vocational education and training) and Socrates (higher education), which are now being merged into the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP).

cutting across national borders and institutions. The programme method should be understood within the objective of building a European identity and dimension of education and training.

Within the field of VET, the programme method has a number of strengths but one clear limitation, as seen from a European perspective. Evaluations show that the programme method is an effective means of creating a European VET space at individual, institutional, and local levels through funding, diffusion of EU policies, and the establishment of networks of practice throughout Europe. But evaluations point to limited – if any – impact on national VET policies (see e.g. Deloitte&Touche, 2003; Nielsen, Cort, & Pedersen, 1999).

The OMC is in most EU studies described as ‘soft law’, i.e. the method does not establish the binding law of the community method that must be implemented at a national level. Like the programme method, it creates networks of individuals and institutions exchanging ideas and developing similar practices. In addition, however, the open method involves governments in creating and diffusing an EU framework of policies and practices on a topic area over which they, officially, retain sovereignty. This works through the establishment of common policy objectives, benchmarks, and indicators as well as through a continuous evaluation by peers and monitoring by the Commission through reviewing of policies and action plans in each country in annual or bi-annual reports. The OMC presupposes that problems confronting VET in Europe are more or less the same, and that common solutions can be established based on mutual learning, and through collecting evidence of good VET practices in the individual member states.

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the reasons for introducing the OMC into the area of VET is that this is a policy area in which the authority of the Commission is limited by the principle of subsidiarity. According to Article 150 of the Treaty establishing the EC, ‘the Community shall implement a vocational training policy that shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of vocational training’ (TEU). The OMC is based on the voluntary participation of the Member States and aims at supporting the Member States in developing their own policies in line with the objectives set at the European level. Schäfer argues that the OMC can be seen as a way of overcoming the reluctance of the Member States to accede more power to the Commission. If a policy area is included in the community method, there is – so to speak – no way back for the

Member States (Schäfer, 2004). More than that, once involved in the open method, Member States are under pressure to become progressively more integrated. Alternatively, if they chose – voluntarily – to stay out, they are unable to influence the development of common instruments setting the European standards for VET. Through monitoring and surveillance, it is possible to maintain the focus of Member States on the process, to keep track of common agreements, and ensure a common policy.

It is clear that the three modes of governance rely on different means of regulating the behaviour of member states and European citizens, and they have slightly different objectives in the project of Europeanisation.

Figure 1

Mode of governance	Means of regulation	Objective
The community method	Hard law/legal sanctions	Realising the economic community
The programme method	Funding through action programmes/practice learning/bureaucratic procedures	Creating a European identity and European communities of practice
The open method (OMC)	Soft law/policy learning/ 'naming and shaming'	Achieving the Lisbon goals: economic competitiveness and social cohesion

The *community method* sets up a binding legislature to which member states must adhere. Within the field of VET, the community method does not find direct application, as this field is under the principle of subsidiarity; however, a number of decisions have been taken by the Council on implementing common instruments such as the action programme of Leonardo da Vinci, Europass, certificate supplements, etc. The *programme method* regulates through the objectives set in the action programmes and through – often criticised – complex bureaucratic procedures that

control and oversee project and network participants. The method creates a space for learning from other countries' practices, and on this basis common practices develop, such as European certificates, transnational modules, and teaching materials. The *open method* regulates through objectives and indicators, which are nonbinding, but nevertheless functions through a mechanism of 'naming and shaming' and 'peer pressure'. These instruments, however, are not inconsequential. The OECD operates in a similar fashion, and its surveys are seen to have considerable effects on members' policies. Thus, the OMC can be seen as an 'OECD-ification' of EU governance.

Although the three modes of governance are distinct, they also share some common features: in both the community method and the open method, regulation is set up. In the two methods, however, regulation has different aims: in the *community method*, it is to create a legally binding legislature for the EU (hard law), whereas in the OMC, the aim of regulation is to shape the conduct of member state governments through common standards, benchmarks, and indicators (soft law). While these are soft regulations, the performance of the Member States is continuously evaluated based on these criteria, and the regulations work towards the establishment of a system of management-by-objectives.

The *programme method* and the OMC also share common features. In both methods, the issue of mutual learning is stressed along with the building of European VET practices through study visits, pilot projects, and not least transnational networks. The networks in the OMC are policy (shaping) networks at a national level, whereas the networks in the *programme method* are primarily policy-testing and practice-creating networks at an institutional level.

Seeing the methods in conjunction also makes the interaction between the methods more visible. Instruments developed within the technical working groups (e.g. the Common Quality Assurance Framework) are subsequently tested within the *programme method*, with Leonardo da Vinci now perceived as the testing field for the Copenhagen priorities (Mika Saarinen, Acting Assistant Director of CIMO, Leonardo da Vinci conference, Helsinki, December 2006). The EQF is now in the process of being adopted by the Parliament and the Council (*community method*), and the Europass has been adopted by both Council and Parliament (*community method*) with the aim of setting up national Europass centres responsible for disseminating the portfolio model to European citizens

who want to document their (vocational) qualifications through a European standard. The OMC in VET is supported by the *programme method* and underpinned by the *community method*, as VET is an important element in the efforts to promote the free mobility of labour. The OMC creates an intermediary link between the *community method* and the *programme method*, focusing on making an impact at the national policy level. In a sense, the OMC extends the EU polity into national governments (civil servants) and states (other stakeholders), tying actors together in order to create a European VET area that goes beyond the articulation of national interests. The means of tying actors together at national policy level is through the creation of technical working groups/networks.

NETWORK GOVERNANCE

In the discussion of the open method, the concept of network governance has been central.⁸⁶ Network governance is perceived as a solution to different problems confronting the EU as a supranational institution *sui generis*.⁸⁷ First, there is the issue of enlargement and the adaptation of the EU polity to 27 member states. Metcalfe (1996) provides a historical account of the introduction

⁸⁶ Network governance is part of a wider discussion on whether or not there is a move from 'government' to 'governance', signifying a shift in policy-making from central or local government and from national bureaucracies to policy networks cutting across borders and institutions. The idea of a shift from government to governance must be seen in the context of increased societal complexity and the difficulties political institutions experience in addressing this complexity. Furthermore, the concept of governance is also closely related to globalisation and the shifts in policy-making from a national to a global context. Walters and Haahr (2005) points to the dichotomy of global-national as a driving force in studies on governance. The traditional definition of government as a political process involving the 'authoritative allocation of values' and its underlying notion of a unified state, comprising a single locus of power is losing ground (Easton, 1979 in Walters & Haahr, 2005). The concept of 'governance' is to capture these changes in policy processes from national processes to processes running across a national polity and the nation state involving many different actors – both public and private – in policy processes.

⁸⁷ Two of the metaphors often encountered in literature on networks are of a network being organic, and the image of the Internet as an (anarchical) network. However, these metaphors are not altogether useful in defining the concept of network governance, as this is not something that is completely organic, i.e. self-forming and self-regulating, nor is it as anarchical as the Internet. Governance networks are managed networks; they are not open to any actor, the actors are nominated and approved of by ministers/ministries, social partners, and in the case of EU networks, the Commission and its agencies. Furthermore, their remit is limited, and the policy frame has been laid down by others, e.g. the Council, and the aim of the network is thus not to make policy but to shape it and adapt it, so that it fits into different national contexts. However, the networks may take on a life on their own: individual actors form personal relations and draw on each other in other policy matters and in this sense, governance networks start being organic and uncontrollable.

of network governance and ascribes it to a problem of management deficit in the EU. He sees network governance as one way of gearing the Commission to its new task by 're-inventing it as a network organisation with the task of designing and developing multi-level intergovernmental networks for managing European Union policies' (Metcalf, 1996). Second, and in line with the issue of *management deficit*, Börzel points to the fact that one of the advantages of network governance is that networks may be able to produce collective outcomes, despite the diverging interests of their members, and that they can provide linkages between inter- and intra-organisational decision-making arenas (Börzel, 1997). Network governance may be perceived as a way of creating a culture of consensus, taking the conflictual character out of a political process in order to move a policy process forward, a need that the EU has confronted on many occasions. Finally, network governance is perceived as a method for operationalising European policies in areas that do not fall under the remit of the community method. Network governance may be seen as a way of overcoming the reluctance of the Member States to accede more power to the Commission through a process of devolution.⁸⁸

However, network governance is a new phenomenon in EU governance. Kohler-Koch even claims that it is the primary characteristic of EU policy-making, as it operates within all three modes of governance: 'All three modes of governance make use of networks as an institutional setting alongside formal organisation. In this sense, network governance is an integral part, or even the primary characteristic of policy-making and implementation in the EU' (Kohler-Koch, 2002 in Esmark, 2007).

Furthermore, network governance and the co-ordination of policies are also *old* practices within the area of VET, going all the way back to the 1950s. Learning from good practices and exchanging ideas across sectors and borders has been part of co-operation on VET since the European Coal and Steel Union, when a Standing Committee on Vocational Training with representatives for both trade unions and employers in the coal and steel industries was formed. Under this committee, ad hoc working groups were established and made responsible for documenting vocational training

⁸⁸ Sometimes I wonder if the EU can be captured by the concepts developed to explain the polity of the nation state. Maybe there is a need to develop new concepts to capture the *sui generis* of the EU and the ambiguous even ambivalent relations between the EU and its member states.

in the six Member States and collecting teaching and training material/tools to be disseminated across the Member States (Mechi, 2004).

The *newness* of the OMC phenomenon seems overrated. However, the open method and its associated networks do differ from the two other modes of governance. In the *community method*, the networks consist of civil servants and policy makers. In the *programme method*, students, practitioners, researchers, and public and private institutions/organisations comprise the networks. In the *open method*, there are networks of civil servants, experts, and social partners. In addition, the networks are marked by different degrees of institutionalisation and formalisation. The networks of the *community method* are marked by hierarchy, whereas the networks of the *programme method* are more organic and voluntary, but nevertheless bound together by a contract with the National Leonardo da Vinci Agency or the DG EAC. The networks of the *open method* are 'policy expert networks', less hierarchical, although not organic and voluntary, and bound together with the aim to shape a specific policy area within VET.

The role of the networks within the open method is, however, new. The networks under the OMC are responsible for the operationalisation of common EU objectives into practical national policy tools. The mandate for the network is given, and the interests should already have been negotiated across the member states. The role of the networks is to shape the policy and come up with practical solutions concerning how to transform the EU policies into tools, guidelines, indicators, etc. that can be implemented at the national level, resulting in a convergence of policies. The role of the civil servants is therefore more to be experts on specific topic areas rather than to represent national interests.

The name of the networks, '*technical working groups*', also indicates that they are not regarded as policy-making groups but groups in which the members are committed to find common solutions to the policy problems formulated in the Declaration, i.e. at European level. There is an explicit technocratic rationality inherent in these working groups: that it is possible to establish evidence for 'good' VET practices, and that these can be transferred across national contexts.

One aspect of the networks, in all three modes of governance, is to make 'Europe' a common reference. Torfing, Kohler-Koch, and others make the point that these networks result in the internalisation of the EU policy objectives, values, identities, and behavioural patterns (see Kohler-

Koch & Eising, 1999; Torfing, 2007). One finds an aspect of socialisation to the networks, along with an aspect of extending the 'European' policy space into national governments and involving national actors in processes of Europeanisation – understood as extending the boundaries of the EU polity.

THE 'NEWNESS' OF THE OPEN METHOD – NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY

The OMC can be seen in conjunction of other modes of governance in the EU and in this sense as a 'triangulation' of EU governance. Within the field of VET, the open method is an amalgamation of old and new practices. In my opinion, the important 'new' elements of the OMC are the 'soft' policy regulating mechanisms of monitoring, bench-marking, standardisation, and surveillance. In this respect, the open method differs from the other modes of governance, and adds an element of *national* policy (self-)regulation to the EU governance triangle – or as an element of 'government of government' (Dean, 1999).

Before analysing the OMC from a governmentality perspective, I offer a brief note on the concept of governmentality.⁸⁹ Governmentality is defined by Dean as an institutionally embedded discourse that articulates a more or less coherent set of perceptions, rationalities, technologies, and subjectivities that together defines the conditions of possibility of concrete acts of governance (Dean, 1999). The strength of a governmentality perspective is that it focuses on the rationality behind a specific mode of governance, and problematises the way policy problems are represented. It does not take for granted that policies are solutions to problems 'out there' but that problems and their solutions are contingent. In governmentality studies, the concern is the underlying rationality and mentality of government, and for that matter of governance, with the concept providing a direct link between power and the individual. Thus, the term is not limited to the study of state politics but to the study of a wide range of technologies regulating the behaviour of individuals, groups, organisations, and, in the case of the EU, member states.

⁸⁹ The concept of governmentality was first posited by Foucault in the article of the same title (Foucault, 1991). The concept has since been developed further, especially from an 'Anglo-Neo-Foucauldian' perspective by authors such as Mitchell Dean, Colin Gordon, Graham Burchell, and Nicholas Rose (Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991; Dean, 1999; Gordon, 1991; Rose, 2005).

Applying the optics of governmentality to the OMC in VET, the 'newness' of the method becomes clearer. The method introduces a number of new elements aimed at steering member states and their VET policies in a specific direction, e.g. through the policy instruments of the EQF, the ECVET, the Common Quality Assurance Framework, indicators, and the streamlining of statistics on VET. In this respect, the open method can be perceived of as a 'technology' for achieving the Lisbon goals, as Dean (1999) points to two technologies at play in neoliberal governmentality: the technologies of agency and of performance. These two technologies interact and form a link between the regulation of conduct and the technical requirements of performance. Studying the OMC in VET from this perspective, the bottom-up networks steered within a top-down managed frame start making sense. The networks have agency in the sense that they allow the flow of information from the member states to the European space. The technologies of performance – the benchmarks, indicators, monitoring, surveillance, etc. – make it possible to steer (indirectly) national VET policies in the direction of a European area of VET (viz. the title of CEDEFOP's conference in April 2007 on 'Building a European VET Area'). According to Dean, 'these two technologies are part of a strategy in which our moral and political conduct is put into play as elements within systems of governmental purposes' (Dean, 1999, p. 173).

The means of doing so is via the creation of common tools, benchmarking, and indicators of what a 'good' VET system is to achieve. These tools, benchmarks, etc. are to be produced by representatives of the member states in co-operation with EU institutions, enforcing the legitimacy of the instruments. The aim is first to make VET policies converge; however, a common qualifications framework, credit transfer model, and quality model may very well work towards the convergence of VET systems in the long term.

According to Walters and Haahr (2005), the OMC is to govern through the manipulation of national governmental techniques and mechanisms. It introduces technologies that seek to promote the economy 'by fostering agency within and across the space of the governmental apparatus of local, national, and European institutions'. The technical working groups set up in connection with the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration can be perceived as a move to involve national actors in this quest and to steer national VET policies in a specific direction, as the OMC draws on NPM and its culture of auditing, devolution of policy-making, benchmarking,

learning from best practice, and the setting of performance indicators. The OMC is based on a political rationality of efficiency and technocratic solutions.

Knowledge (policy learning) and expertise play important roles in the OMC. Experts from member states, EU institutions, universities, consultancy firms, etc. are called upon to identify the good practices within VET for member states to learn from them. The assumption is that policy solutions can be identified scientifically, regardless of the values, objectives and rationalities in which they are embedded. It has defined the role of VET as one of securing a mobile, highly skilled labour force in Europe to be able to compete globally. However, when looking into national VET systems and policies, these are born out of quite different rationalities.

The open method adds the elements of systematic monitoring, auditing, and the creation of common tools and benchmarks whilst at the same time decentralising decision-making to transnational groups of stakeholders (cf. Walters & Haahr, 2005). What may be at stake is the introduction of a neoliberal governmentality whereby EU policies are to reach into the member states through management-by-objectives and an attempt to influence national VET policies.

CONCLUSIONS

I have argued in this article that the OMC should be seen as forming a triangle of EU governance, adding new elements to existing modes of governance and addressing issues that are politically sensitive – from a national view point. The OMC is part of ‘steering’ the EU and its member states in a specific direction to attain the goals that have been set out in the various treaties and strategies, and it is a part of overcoming the deadlocked situation between national policy spaces and a European policy space wherein different discourses are at play. This deadlock is not easily overcome in the community method and not really addressed in the programme method.

As a mode of governance, the OMC covers an amalgamation of existing and new practices in EU governance. It adds a link between the community method and the programme method. The *community method* is about *policy-making* and the negotiation of interests in the EU. This takes place through committees of national representatives having a mandate from the national governments. In this mode of governance, articulation of national interests is a part of the process. Within this method, policies are binding (regulations and directives) and implemented through hierarchical

top-down procedures. The *programme method* is about *policy testing* and the *creation of new practices* at individual or institutional levels (furthering mobility of VET students and teachers, building transnational networks that work with specific policy elements, e.g. quality assurance, the drawing up of a credit transfer system, the creation of European VET modules, etc.). This is a voluntary bottom-up process within a policy-made framework stipulating the concrete areas of action. However, the OMC adds a *policy-shaping* process to these other policy processes. The actors in the networks (technical working groups) do not have a national mandate to negotiate; they have a European mandate and a result to be delivered. In these networks, the actors are regarded as experts more than as civil servants representing national interests. Consequently, a 'bracketing of national interests' is assumed in the OMC, as network members engage in a push to reach consensus. The open method manages to create a base line between the European policy level and the national policy level (cf. Börzel) whereby 'cracks' are created in sensitive fields, which are legally under the principle of subsidiarity. The evaluations of the Leonardo da Vinci programme emphasised that the programme method has not had an impact on national level; in contrast, the OMC creates the possibility of feeding directly into the national policy level, as the civil servants are drawn into a process of operationalising European VET policy.

The OMC thus should be understood as part of a wider web of governance and part of an intrinsic logic in the EU polity (as pointed out by Kohler-Koch, 2003) that works towards 'an ever-closer union of the European peoples' (TEU). The EU policy game is a strange process of negotiation and conflict, leading – nevertheless – to harmonisation and increased integration.

From a governmentality perspective, the bottom-up networks steered within a top-down managed frame make sense: information flows from the member states into the European space and the technologies of performance introduced with the OMC make it possible to steer national policies in specific directions, albeit indirectly. A central assumption in the open method is that it is possible to find evidence for good policy solutions and in a sense create a culture of consensus around VET policies: the role of this policy field is to secure a mobile and highly skilled labour force in Europe to compete globally. Within this perspective, the OMC is clearly about member states (self)-regulating VET policies within a common European framework, and thereby moving this policy

area out of a strictly national arena into the European arena, which is – indeed – a significant move
– if it succeeds!

EPILOGUE

In May, 2011 I went to Helsinki to take part in the final meeting of the ECVET Trust project. The last project meeting focused on the status of the ECVET implementation process in the 6 participating partner countries.

The meeting showed that this process is quite advanced in some countries and less advanced in others. In Finland, the VET system has been geared to the introduction of ECVET points. This is partly due to the fact that the Finnish VET system is school-based and modularised, facilitating the award of credit points to individual modules; partly to the fact that the National Board of Education has been proactive in regard to ECVET and has initiated a transnational project, FINECVET, running in three phases from 2004 to 2011 (Autere, 2009). The aim is to test the feasibility of ECVET in the Finnish VET system.

In Germany, a similar process is on-going initiated by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training. However, the German VET system is not ready to introduce credit points as the programmes are neither modularised nor within the sole jurisdiction of the Federal Republic. Many interests have to be negotiated in the process, not least the social partners' and the Federal States'. But ECVET is being tested in transnational mobility projects and a national network consisting of both experts and practitioners has been set up to provide input to the Federal Institute on the continuous development of ECVET in a German context (Drews, 2010).

In France, Denmark and the UK, the ECVET is under consideration which basically means that not much is happening at a national level. In Denmark, the Ministry of Education and the social partners have agreed on a 'minimal solution in connection with the implementation of ECVET in Denmark' (REU, 2011). However, no one is voicing that this is a 'voluntary process' which was the case when I interviewed the social partners in 2008. As to Hungary, the government is adapting the Hungarian qualifications system to the EQF and ECVET. However, the major part of the activities take place at the level of the vocational colleges as these are involved in EU projects testing various approaches to using ECVET in transnational mobility projects. These projects seem

to create a demand for national action among the colleges as the comparing of specific qualifications is time-consuming and resource-demanding. A central conclusion in the ECVET Trust project was that 'that for ECVET to work at provider level, it needs to be introduced through national regulation which lays down the criteria for awarding ECVET points and for its use in transnational transfer'.

The ECVET project shows that a lot of initiatives are going on at a European level, at national and provider levels and it points to the success of the Copenhagen Process: VET as a policy area has been moved out of the national space and into the European space. The EU tools have been accepted as standards to be introduced, even in the more hesitant countries. It also shows that this is a process that takes place in different tempi depending on the national VET system and political readiness to introduce the EU tools.

As to institutional change, the lesson from the ECVET project is that national VET systems are path-dependent and change takes time. Even in a former communist country like Hungary, it is not easy to dispose of previous practices, although there is an interest in adapting to EU standards. In this sense, a major flaw of this dissertation is the time-framing. The Lisbon Agenda and the Copenhagen Process have changed the space of possibility of VET policy-making in Europe, however the exact institutional effects of these processes are yet to be seen. In 2025, there may be common standards and structures of VET in the EU if these processes of convergence continue to take place; if the EU survives the current crisis; if The space of possibility is open for continuous research.

ENGLISH SUMMARY

Research topic: In November 2002, the Copenhagen Declaration was adopted and a new EU policy process, the Copenhagen Process, initiated within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy. The Copenhagen Process is meant to enhance co-operation within the policy field of VET in order to solve problems of transparency, quality, and recognition of competences across the EU. The Process is embedded in a discourse of ‘evidence-based policy’ and founded on an uneasy mix of the ‘voluntary’ participation by Member States and fixed milestones for attaining common objectives along with introducing European standards. Because it is new and a relatively novel phenomenon, the Copenhagen Process is not yet a highly researched area.

Research question: The dissertation analyses the Copenhagen Process from a critical perspective based on Carol Bacchi’s policy analysis methodology, ‘What’s the Problem Represented to Be?’ (WPR). The main research question is ‘How can the European VET policy process – the Copenhagen Process – be understood from a WPR perspective?’ This is addressed in six articles which take apart the Copenhagen Process and examine both specific WPR questions and specific aspects of the Process: the construction of VET; changes in governmentality; the genealogy of EC VET policy; the technologies of Europeanisation; and the discursive and institutional effects of the policy process in the Danish context.

Argument: The dissertation argues that the Copenhagen Process has expanded VET policy to legitimately include actors at the EU level. Its new European institutional settings have been established through the OMC. VET is now being reconfigured within a neoliberal LLP discourse in which education and training is to contribute to the competitiveness of the EU in a global economy.

Research contribution: The dissertation closes a gap in the research field, as it analyses the Copenhagen Process from a critical perspective, with a specific research interest in the changes

within the EU VET policy and the policy's discursive and institutional effects considered in a national context. Analytically, it adds to an under-researched area by providing new knowledge about the Copenhagen Process as a transnational policy process. Theoretically, it adds a new dimension to knowledge about processes of Europeanisation. Methodologically, it extends and refines the WPR methodology.

DANSK RESUME

Forskningsområde: I november 2002, blev København Erklæringen vedtaget og hermed blev en ny politisk proces, Københavnerprocessen, igangsat indenfor rammerne af Lissabon strategien.

Formålet med Københavnerprocessen er at øge samarbejdet indenfor

erhvervsuddannelsespolitikken med henblik på at løse problemer vedrørende gennemsigtighed, kvalitet og gensidig anerkendelse af kvalifikationer på tværs af EU's medlemslande. Processen er indlejret i en diskurs om "evidens-baseret" politik og en indbygget spænding mellem medlemsstaternes "frivillige" deltagelse og fastsatte milepæle for opfyldelse af fælleseuropæiske målsætninger og introduktion af europæiske standarder på uddannelsesområdet. Som et relativt nyt fænomen eksisterer der endnu ikke megen forskning, som omhandler Københavnerprocessen.

Forskningsbidrag: Denne afhandling "Taking the Copenhagen Process apart – critical readings of the European Vocational Education and Training policy" har til formål at dække dette tomrum i forskningen ved at anlægge et kritisk perspektiv på ændringerne i EU's erhvervsuddannelsespolitik og undersøge politikken diskursive og institutionelle effekter i en national kontekst. I afhandlingen er analyserne af Københavnerprocessen baseret på Professor Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (WPR) tilgang til politisk analyse og i forhold til denne metodiske tilgang er denne afhandling den første til at anlægge et sådant perspektiv på Københavnerprocessen. Analytisk bidrager den således med ny viden om Københavnerprocessen som en transnational politisk proces. Teoretisk, bidrager den til diskussionen omkring europæisering og hvordan vi kan forstå europæiseringsprocesser. Metodisk diskuteres og videreudvikles WPR metoden og der kobles til nyinstitutionelle teorier omkring institutionel forandring.

Forskningsspørgsmål: Udgangspunktet for afhandlingen har været følgende forskningsspørgsmål: Hvordan kan EU's erhvervsuddannelsespolitik – Københavnerprocessen – læses i et WPR perspektiv? Dette spørgsmål diskuteres gennem seks artikler, som har til formål at dekonstruere Københavnerprocessen. Den enkelte artikel fokuserer på forskellige aspekter af Københavnerprocessen: konstruktionen af erhvervsuddannelse, ændringer i styringsform,

erhvervsuddannelsespolitikens genealogi i det Europæiske Fællesskab, europæiseringsteknologier, samt diskursive og institutionelle effekter af processen i den danske kontekst. Fokus er på, hvilke problemer som processen skal løse og hvilke forandringer, der kan afledes af processen.

Argument: I afhandlingen argumenterer jeg, at Københavnerprocessen legitimt har udvidet det politiske rum for erhvervsuddannelse til at inkludere aktører på europæisk niveau. Dette sker gennem introduktionen af den Åbne Koordinationsmetode, som er med til at institutionalisere samarbejdet omkring erhvervsuddannelsespolitikken i EU. Jeg argumenterer endvidere, at Københavnerprocessen forstået som en diskurs rammesætter erhvervsuddannelsespolitik i EU og medfører forandring i konstruktionen af erhvervsuddannelse. Erhvervsuddannelse rekonfigureres indenfor rammerne af en neoliberal Livslang Læringsdiskurs i hvilken (erhvervs)uddannelsernes primære formål er at bidrage til EU's konkurrenceevne i en global økonomi.

APPENDIX ONE

THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM IN DENMARK: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Cort, P., & Wiborg, S. (2009). 'The vocational education and training system in Denmark: Continuity and change'. In Bosch, G., & Charest, J. (Eds.), *Vocational Training – International Perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Introduction

Throughout the world, vocational education and training (VET) systems are under pressure to change and are subject to increased policy intervention. VET is perceived as a 'key to the future'⁹⁰ and one of the means by which to meet the challenges of globalisation and the knowledge society. This political rhetoric can be heard in many countries and, as a consequence, VET systems are continuously undergoing reforms in order to make them more responsive to societal, technological, and economic changes. This certainly applies to the Danish VET system, which has undergone numerous reforms over the last 15 years. However, despite the many changes and transformations, some of the main principles of the Danish system have withstood political pressure and continue to be viable today. The aim of this article is to describe both the continuity and the change that characterise the development of the Danish VET system. In Denmark, the traditions of dual training and social partnership have avoided major ruptures, although these principles have repeatedly been under pressure.

The Danish education system

Education systems around the world can usually be clustered into regions in terms of their distinctive characteristics. This is certainly true of the Scandinavian countries, which share many similar traits. Generally, it can be said that these countries are more similar to each other than any

⁹⁰ *Vocational Education and Training – Key to the Future. Lisbon-Copenhagen-Maastricht: Mobilising for 2010* (CEDEFOP 2004).

one of them is to any other country outside the region. The Danish education system belongs to the Scandinavian cluster, with its tradition of comprehensiveness and its values of equality and inclusiveness. The primary and lower-secondary school levels are integrated into a nine/ten-year programme delivered in state schools, which can best be described as all-through, nonselective schools with mixed-ability classes throughout the entire period of compulsory schooling. Thus, the Scandinavian countries all have exceptionally egalitarian education systems, with any selection being delayed until the upper-secondary level (Wiborg, 2004). However, at the upper-secondary level, which in Scandinavia spans three years, there are greater differences between the countries. In contrast to Denmark, the upper-secondary level in Norway and Sweden is also relatively inclusive. In Sweden, e.g. the upper-secondary school system combines the old classical grammar schools (*läroverk*) and the 'new' VET system within a single institution. In Denmark, the boundary between general upper-secondary education and VET has been maintained up to the present. Historically, efforts have been made, especially in the 1970s, to dismantle the boundaries between the two types of education but to no avail. Instead, the VET system has tried to attract academically oriented students by offering general subjects in order to level out the differences. Upper-secondary education in Denmark consists of two main tracks. One track is VET, which offers numerous programmes lasting between 1.5 and 5.5 years (3.5 years on average). The other track is academic and consists of two streams: general upper-secondary education and vocational upper-secondary education. General upper-secondary education comprises the three-year *gymnasium* programme and the two-year higher preparatory programme, or *højere forberedelseseksamen* (HF). Vocational upper-secondary education consists of the higher commercial examination (*hcx*) and the higher technical examination (*htx*), which are also three-year programmes. The programmes within the upper-secondary academic education track are all intended to qualify students for further and higher education, whereas the aim of VET is to qualify students to enter a specific occupation in the labour market. In recent years, however, efforts have been made to create pathways between VET and tertiary education.

Approximately 30 percent of a given youth cohort enters the VET track, whilst 55 percent enters the academic track. Both tracks provide access to tertiary-level programmes, depending on the specific entry requirements. Approximately 80 percent of a given youth cohort completes an

upper-secondary programme and 45 percent a tertiary-level programme. The government's objectives are to raise these figures to 95 and 55 percent respectively, by 2015 (Danish Ministry of Education, 2005).

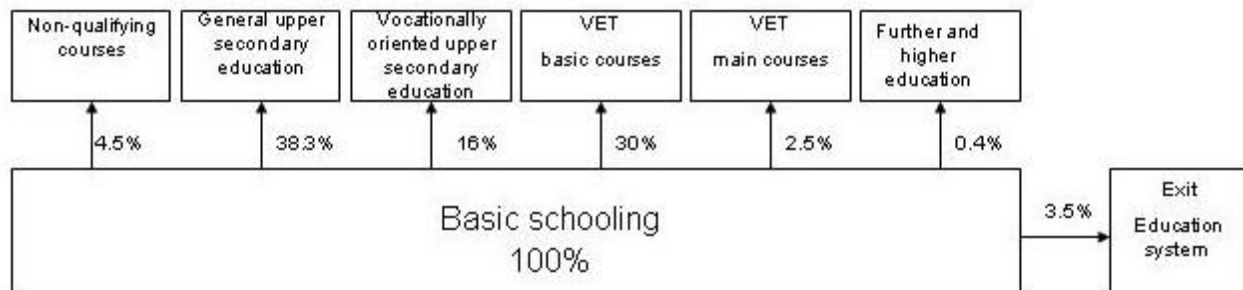


Figure 4.1 Flows in the Danish education system from basic schooling to youth education (source: Uddannelse på kryds og tværs, UVM, 2004)

Vocationally oriented adult training

The adult education system in Denmark consists of three types of schooling. The first type is that provided in the general adult education system (*det almene voksenuddannelsessystem – AVU*), involving adult education associations (*oplysningsforbund*) and free evening schools (Ministry of Education). The second type is provided in the adult vocational training system or 'labour market training courses' (*arbejdsmarkedsuddannelserne – AMU*) (Ministry of Education), and the third type is continuing or 'open education' (*åben uddannelse*) (Ministry of Education). A tradition of interaction between these three types of adult education has developed. It is possible to put together training schemes that simultaneously offer both vocational qualifications and a broader general education. It has been shown that substantial benefits can be gained from this combination. Adult vocational training takes place in companies, in labour market training centres, and at vocational colleges.⁹¹ The adult vocational training system offers a wide variety of programmes of varying length. The training is not based on the dual-training principle but does include workshop training. The social partners are key actors in the supervision of AMU training

⁹¹ Labour market training centres merged with vocational colleges at the beginning of the new millennium due to a change in the legal framework and the institutional structures of the overall vocational education and training system.

and provision whereby a comprehensive advisory structure has been set up. The links between adult vocational training and VET have been strengthened to ensure coherence between different qualifications and competence levels, and to allow for credit transfer as well as the inclusion of AMU modules in a VET programme. As in the rest of Scandinavia, the public sector plays a significant role in the financing and provision of continuing vocational training. In Danish labour market policy, there has been a common interest in maintaining a high level of vocational qualifications in the labour force. The AMU system is seen as the means of producing a flexible and mobile labour force and can boast a higher intake of adults than that in other European countries (Nielsen & Cort, 1999).

Key principles of the Danish VET system

The Danish VET system⁹² is based on a number of key principles that distinguish it from the other Scandinavian VET systems. First, it is a dual-training system based on interaction between school-based education and training and work-based training, and leads to the award of nationally recognised vocational qualifications. The work-based training takes place in companies that have entered into a training contract with an apprentice. The system can probably best be described as a mix of the German dual-apprenticeship system and the school-based model of the Scandinavian countries. This is evident from the fact that there is more school-based teaching in the Danish VET system than in the German system (Danish Ministry of Education, 1999), with all programmes, including an entirely school-based basic course. However, since the Danish VET system is also based on an extension of the apprenticeship principle, there is more practical in-company training than in the Swedish system, e.g. where the apprenticeship principle played only a minimum role in the establishment of the system. In-company training in Denmark takes up 60-75percent of the training period, compared with only 15 percent in Sweden (Danish Ministry of Education, 1999). Thus, the system can be said to be a fairly balanced one, in that it offers a sandwich-type programme in which theoretical education and practical training at a vocational college alternate with practical training in a company.

⁹² The focus in this article is on vocational education and training targeted at young people, which in some countries is labelled initial vocational education and training. However, the system is not limited to young people between 16–25 years old. Adults are able to enter a vocational education and training programme on specific conditions, taking both their life circumstances and previous work experience into consideration.

Second, it is a corporatist system in which the social partners are actively involved, from the national Advisory Council for Initial Vocational Education and Training (*Rådet for de grundlæggende erhvervsuddannelser* – REU) to the local training committees that advise colleges on local educational plans and other local training matters. This involvement ensures coherence between VET programmes and the nationally recognised occupational profiles in the Danish labour market. However, the role of the social partners is not just advisory. The national sector trade committees decide on the duration and structure of VET programmes and on objectives and content for the different occupations. They also play an important role in the implementation of training, since they are responsible for approving companies as providers of work-based training and for monitoring training quality. Furthermore, the committees are responsible for examinations and for any disputes concerning training contracts. Thus, the responsibilities of the social partnership are relatively far-reaching.

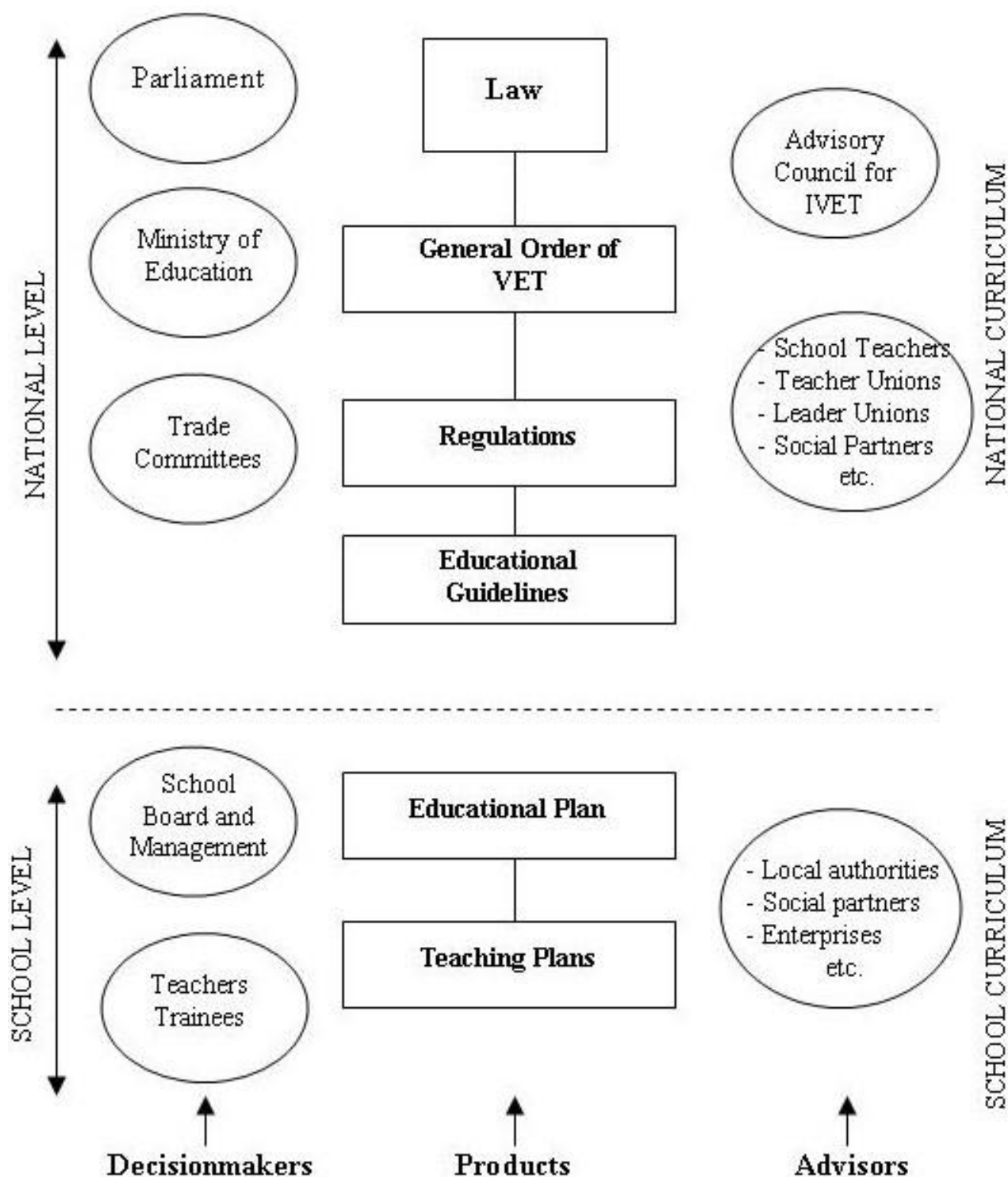


Figure 4.2 Danish model of stakeholder involvement

There are two key historic features that have been retained within the system. The first, the principle of social partnership, was established in 1937 by the Apprenticeship Act. The second, the

dual-training principle, was established in 1956 with the new law on VET in Denmark. As will be seen in the historical description of the system, there have been attempts to break away from these principles and integrate VET into the general education system but to no avail.

Key stages in the development of the VET system

The development of the VET system has been characterised by close links with the general education system, the production system, and the labour market, as well as by close co-operation and consensus-seeking politics between political parties and between the state and the social partners.⁹³ Traditionally, the social partners have played a major role in the continuous development of the system (Cort & Madsen, 2003). The consensus-seeking approach to politics adopted by policy makers and the social partners is key to understanding the historical development of the Danish VET system. However, this is not to suggest that it has evolved without conflict; this is far from being the case, since the participants in the political process naturally have represented different interests.

The school-based education and training of apprentices was primarily a private matter for enthusiastic volunteers until the interwar period, when the state gradually took a hand in setting up a formalised system of VET. The Social Democratic Party and the Social Liberal Party (*Radikale Venstre*), which was an offshoot of the Liberal Party, introduced the Apprenticeship Act of 1937. The Act gave the social partners a key role in managing the VET system and shaping the content of training programmes. The major question of the day was whether the Sunday and evening schools, which offered a rather rudimentary training, should be replaced by regular day schools. The roles of both the technical colleges in the VET system, as well as corporate learning facilities, were also the subjects of much debate (Juul, 2005). These questions became the subject of a commission, appointed in 1952, which subsequently led to the Apprenticeship Act of 1956. In this Act, the dual principle of the Danish VET system was finally laid down. The resulting system looked more or less like that in the rest of the Scandinavian countries, although the school-based part – now provided in day schools – was, in comparison, of shorter duration (three months).

⁹³ Tripartite co-operation and negotiation are general traits of Danish society and are reflected in other policy areas, such as labour market policies, adult education, and training, industrial policies, etc. The wage structure is also negotiated by the social partners through collective bargaining; see section on the Danish labour market.

The Act was also an attempt to solve the problem of a shortage of skilled workers and to meet the demands of an increasingly complex production system. Restrictions on the number of apprentices in companies were abolished and the number of programmes was increased from 91 to 166. Some of the programmes maintained their original scope, whilst others became rather specialised. For example the 12 training programmes in the iron and metal industry were divided up to make a total of 32.

The 1956 Act also strengthened the role of the national trade committees, as they were given decisive influence on matters regarding the vocational curricula (Juul, 2005).

A breach of the consensus: The 1970s

Even though an important step had been taken towards the modernisation of the VET system, there were still demands from some quarters for the system to be adapted further in order better to meet the needs of the labour market. The 1960s was a period of strong economic growth, with a considerable increase in the numbers of employees and a substantial reduction in unemployment. The consequence of this was an immediate need for skilled labour. Manufacturing industry, in particular, called for a more flexible, mobile, and specialised work force. An increasing number of young people were opting for academic upper-secondary education in the *gymnasium* programme, which made it more difficult to address this problem. Recruitment to VET suffered as a result, limiting the system's ability to produce a sufficient number of people to meet industry's demand for skilled labour. This problem was addressed, in part, by creating training schools for semi-skilled workers (*specialarbejderskoler*) and, in part, by experimenting, through much of the 1970s, with a new structure for the VET system (Sigurjonsson, 2002).

The debate concerning the structure of the VET system revolved essentially around two opposing viewpoints. On the one hand, it was believed, mainly by the Social Democrats, that VET should have an academic foundation in addition to the trade-oriented programmes, in order to attract low-achieving students along with the traditional recruitment group. The Social Democrats also wanted to reduce the power of the trades and industries over VET in favour of state control. On the other hand, the Liberals made it clear that they intended to maintain the apprenticeship principle in order to retain the close links between school and work. They argued that this close connection would simply disappear if general subjects were to be introduced into VET.

However, it was mainly the Social Democrats' ideas that were taken up by the commissions appointed to put forward plans for the reorganisation of VET. The 1967 Commission argued for the abolition of the dual-training principle, stating that it was too difficult for young people to decide on a trade at the age of 16. Their recommendation was to create a system in which VET started with a comprehensive academic education, followed by increasingly specialised tracks leading to the final trades (Sigurjonsson, 2002). This argument was also put forward by a subsequent commission, the *Lund Christensen-udvalget*, which wanted to bridge the gap between the academic and vocational tracks at the upper-secondary level. In order to do so and to further equality, the commission recommended integrating the experimental training programmes, introduced in 1969, into the existing education system – i.e. the *gymnasium* programme.

The recommendations of the two commissions were taken up by the Social Democrats, and a working committee was appointed to supervise the establishment of the new so-called *erhvervsfaglig grunduddannelse (EFG)* (vocational basic education) in which general education was given greater emphasis, as recommended by the commissions. The act was to be revised in 1975-1976 based on the experience acquired up to that point, with the aim of achieving a full working *EFG* system by 1979 and finally abolishing apprenticeships, as defined in the 1956 Act, by 1982.

In the meantime, however, another commission had suggested a far more radical plan for the reorganisation of VET than that recommended by the previous commissions. The main thrust of this plan was that the *gymnasium programme*, the two-year academic secondary education programme (*HF*), and the vocational system *EFG* should be integrated into one single system of education for all. The advantage of this system, it was argued, was that it would considerably facilitate transfers between the different types of upper-secondary schools. Moreover, it was believed that, by offering common academic courses, such a system would reduce the sharp divisions between the three types of education and create equal opportunities for young people – regardless of their social background. The VET system tended to reproduce existing social structures,⁹⁴ as most students came from families of unskilled or skilled manual workers. The

⁹⁴ Recent studies show that this is still the case. A 2005 study by Peter Koudahl showed that VET students are primarily recruited from amongst both unskilled and skilled worker families. Another 2005 study by Ida Juul confirmed this result.

argument was that a unified three-year programme preceded by a nine-year, nonselective course of basic education would help to improve social equality.

In essence, this system was more or less the same as the one their fellow Social Democrats in Norway and Sweden were about to introduce. In Denmark, however, the opposition, which included the Liberals, the Conservatives, and the social partners, was too strong. Their main argument against a state-controlled integrated upper-secondary education system was that it would be difficult to maintain the interest and active involvement and commitment of the social partners. The link between the vocational curriculum and the needs of the labour market would weaken, thereby making it more difficult to integrate young people into the labour market. Another argument advanced by the opposition was that companies would lack incentives to take on trainees educated in a system over which they had no influence.

Thus, after the experimental period, new legislation on VET, the EFG Act, was introduced. This Act maintained the dual-training principle, and the social partners remained involved. However, general subjects now made up 40 percent of the curriculum. Furthermore, it was agreed that entry to the system would take place through broad one-year introductory courses. Apprenticeship continued to be an option alongside the *EFG*. In essence, therefore, there were two possible points of entry into VET: through school or through a training contract with a company. In both cases, VET was based on training that alternated between school and work.

Thus, the Social Democrats were unsuccessful in introducing a comprehensive upper-secondary education system in Denmark. The reasons for their failure can be found in the different power bases of the Social Democratic parties in the two countries and in inherently different traditions of VET. In Sweden, a school-based model of vocational training had been put in place early on, whereas in Denmark, the tradition of apprenticeship and social partnership was strong. In Sweden, co-operation between the social partners and the state in the sphere of VET had not been institutionalised to the same degree as in Denmark.

Parallel systems and educational inflation: The 1980s

In the early 1980s, the major right-wing parties came into power, bringing with them a change in education policy. During this period, low economic growth and high youth unemployment rates

made apprenticeships more attractive to young people than the *EFG*. The Liberal Party also tried to make apprenticeships even more viable by introducing a grant scheme⁹⁵ to support them and by increasing the number of apprenticeships in companies. In 1986, the distribution of young people between apprenticeships and *EFG* was almost 50-50 (Sigurjonsson, 2002).

The *EFG* Act had introduced opportunities for vocational students entering the *EFG* to continue their studies after the one-year introductory course, which now served as an entry into both VET programmes and the higher commercial and technical training programmes (hhx/htx⁹⁶). The consequences were 1) that students with lower levels of academic attainment were crowded out of VET and 2) that employers, especially within commercial training, started to employ hhx students instead of *EFG* students. Therefore, suddenly the shared entrance and the long introductory programme were perceived as major problems. It was suggested that the problem was largely pedagogical in nature, since there was no link between the general subjects taken by all students and the trade-oriented subjects. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that the teachers of these two types of subjects had different educational backgrounds. General subject teachers were usually university-educated, whilst the teachers of the trade-oriented subjects were mostly skilled workers. After years of competition between apprenticeships and the *EFG*, the Liberal education minister, Bertel Haarder, appointed a commission⁹⁷ in 1986 to resolve the matter. The commission was to specify a new structure for VET in which the two parallel VET systems would be integrated into one single education system. The question of how entry into the VET programme was to be organised caused the greatest difficulties for the commission. The majority of its members, amongst them representatives from the Federal Danish Trade Unions (*LO*), opted for a model in which young people could choose between a 40-week school-based programme followed by a work placement or a work placement combined with a school-based programme of a minimum of 20 weeks. The minority, which included representatives from the employers' association, pushed

⁹⁵ To find more work placements, the extraordinary measure was taken of awarding a grant to employers to establish work placements in addition to reimbursing the salary paid to students whilst they are at college. The grant was abolished in 1997.

⁹⁶ Htx was established in 1982 and did not act as a crowding-out programme in regards to technical training programmes in general.

⁹⁷ The *Nordskov-udvalget*.

for a stronger emphasis on the practical side of the vocational training preparatory programme (Juul, 2005).

Streamlining the system: The 1990s

The problems identified by the commission were addressed in the Vocational Training Act of 1991 that reformed the entire VET system. Under the new legislation, the *EFG* and apprenticeships were to be replaced by a single VET system with two access routes: the school pathway and the company pathway. The dual principle was maintained as were the general subjects, which were strengthened and linked to the trade-oriented subjects. The programmes were broadened and clarified by reducing their number from 300 to 89 main programmes. Moreover, the entrance restrictions were abolished so that young people were now given a free choice of schools. Finally, the interaction between the school-based and work-based parts of the VET programme was strengthened to ensure coherence and progression between the two parts, the problem being that, for many young people, school had no meaning, whereas they were highly motivated for the work-based training (see, e.g. Bjerre, 2002; Juul, 2005; Koudahl, 2005a).

The new VET system was divided structurally into two streams, the commercial and the technical training programmes. In both programmes, students could choose between a school pathway and a company pathway. However, the commercial training programmes were more theoretical and general in scope and included longer school-based periods (either 38 or 76 consecutive weeks). In technical training, the students could either opt for an initial (voluntary) period of school-based learning or go directly into the second period of school-based learning. Retention of the apprenticeship principle as an option in the new VET system meant that the old *EFG* idea of a common school-based introduction for all had finally been abandoned. However, in 1994, about 70 percent of young people in the new VET system chose to begin their training in school, whilst about 30 percent chose to begin in a company (Juul 2005, p. 67).

The reform was strongly influenced by NPM and neoliberal ideology: decision-making power was decentralised, vocational colleges were turned into self-governing organisations, VET was to become more demand-led by letting the students have free choice of schools, colleges were to compete in 'quasi-markets', and the state was to control activities by laying down the governance framework and increasing quality control.

During the 1990s, a trend emerged towards more individualised youth education programmes. These arose out of the 'Education for All' strategy, which was launched in 1993. The aim was to ensure broader access to youth education, decrease the drop-out rate, increase the number of young people completing a youth education programme, and increase motivation. One problem was how to create a system that could cater to both low achievers and the academically able. One answer was to set up individualised special schemes. Two new programmes were established in 1993: the vocational basic education programme *Erhvervsgrunduddannelsen* (EGU), which targeted low achievers and young people who were disenchanted with school, and the free youth education programme *den fri ungdomsuddannelse* (FUU), which targeted more creative students who had lost their way in the ordinary education system. These programmes, which attracted strong criticism from the social partners, never became a viable alternative to other education programmes at the upper-secondary level. The FUU was closed down in 2002 by the Liberal government; however, the EGU is, today, receiving more attention, as it has been successful in integrating low achievers into an ordinary VET programme or the labour market.

Compensatory school-based training

A controversial issue in the 1990s was the compensatory school-based training scheme. Due to a lack of training places for apprentices, a special scheme was introduced in 1990 for students at vocational colleges who had not succeeded in obtaining an apprenticeship contract to complete their VET programme. In so far as they could, colleges acted as though there were companies by offering students opportunities to acquire vocational qualifications through workshop training and simulated work placements. The education minister at the time, Bertel Haarder, was strongly against the scheme, as he feared it would undermine the dual principle. He was backed by the right wing and the employers' associations, who all agreed that this should only be a temporary solution to a temporary problem. The Social Democrats, on the other hand, were in favour of this scheme, as they saw it as a viable supplement to the VET system. However, the problem persisted and the scheme was made permanent in 1995 and still exists today, albeit on a reduced scale, since access to popular programmes and to programmes with no prospects of subsequent employment has been limited. Thus, what was initially regarded as a temporary solution to the lack of

apprenticeships has now become a permanent solution; although it remains an institution much contested and debated amongst the social partners and the political parties.

Towards an individualised and flexible system: Reform 2000

VET policies in the 1990s were influenced by the notions of commercialisation and decentralisation of education that had acquired global currency. The policy objectives were to provide more flexible and individualised VET programmes. The idea of creating a unified youth education system became less of a priority, as did the notion of using education as a means of creating equality. On the other hand, the key principles of dual training and corporatism were strengthened during this period.

However, a number of problems persisted, amongst them the problem of parity of esteem. VET was still not perceived by young people as an attractive alternative to general upper-secondary education. In 1997, a Ministry of Education report pointed to the fact that general upper-secondary education, especially the *gymnasium* programme, had become a mass institution, attracting almost 40 percent of a given youth cohort. The report perceived it as problematic that upper-secondary education had become divided into two independent tracks, academic education, on the one hand, and VET, on the other, and that development had occurred through branching (e.g. *EGU* and *FUU*). The report questioned whether it was still appropriate for VET to continue to be developed in isolation from academic upper-secondary education, since enrolment on the *gymnasium* programme had increased substantially during previous decades.

The report outlined two possible VET models. The first was similar to the one that the Social Democrats had launched several times during the 1970s. It involved a comprehensive upper-secondary education system in which the *gymnasium* programme and VET were integrated into a single youth education programme. This system was to offer an extensive curriculum with different tracks and ability groupings as well as a range of optional subjects. In this model, however, in contrast to the Social Democratic model, low achievers could enrol in a largely practical vocational programme. The second model was based on the existing system, which meant that the two main tracks would be maintained. However, in contrast to the existing system, a reduction in the number of entry programmes was recommended to simplify vocational training and make it more transparent.

The present Danish system: Individualisation and modularisation

The latter model became the core of Reform 2000. The then Social Democrat government decided to base the reorganisation on the bifurcated model of education. The core of the Act was a simplification of the VET system: A flexible modularised system was introduced that was supposed to attract both academically weak and strong students. The reformed system consisted of a basic programme delivered in school and a main programme of vocational specialisations (approx. 85 options covering 200 specialisations). The main programme remained more or less the same as before the reform. However, the basic programme was changed drastically, with the existing 89 entrance programmes being condensed into seven basic programmes, which are followed by the existing trade-oriented programmes. Of the seven programmes, six lead into technical training and one into commercial training. The basic programmes are organised as follows:

- 1) service industries;
- 2) building and construction;
- 3) technology and communication;
- 4) mechanical engineering, transport, and logistics;
- 5) food production and catering;
- 6) crafts and engineering trades;
- 7) commerce, clerical education, and finance, (Sigurjonsson 2002, p. 74).

The length of the basic programme, which replaced the first and second periods of school-based learning, is flexible, depending on the needs of individual students. It may last from 10 to 116 weeks. The basic programme is meant as an orientation and introduction programme to one or more trades and consists of modules for which specific learning and competence objectives are defined. For young people who are quite clear about their educational choice (which is the majority), there is a possibility of progressing quickly through the basic programme. For those who are undecided or may need a longer period of acquiring the necessary skills, the system opens up the possibility of prolonging the basic programme up to 116 weeks. On average, however, the

basic programme lasts 20 weeks for the technical training programmes and 76 weeks for the commercial training programme, which is more theoretical in scope.

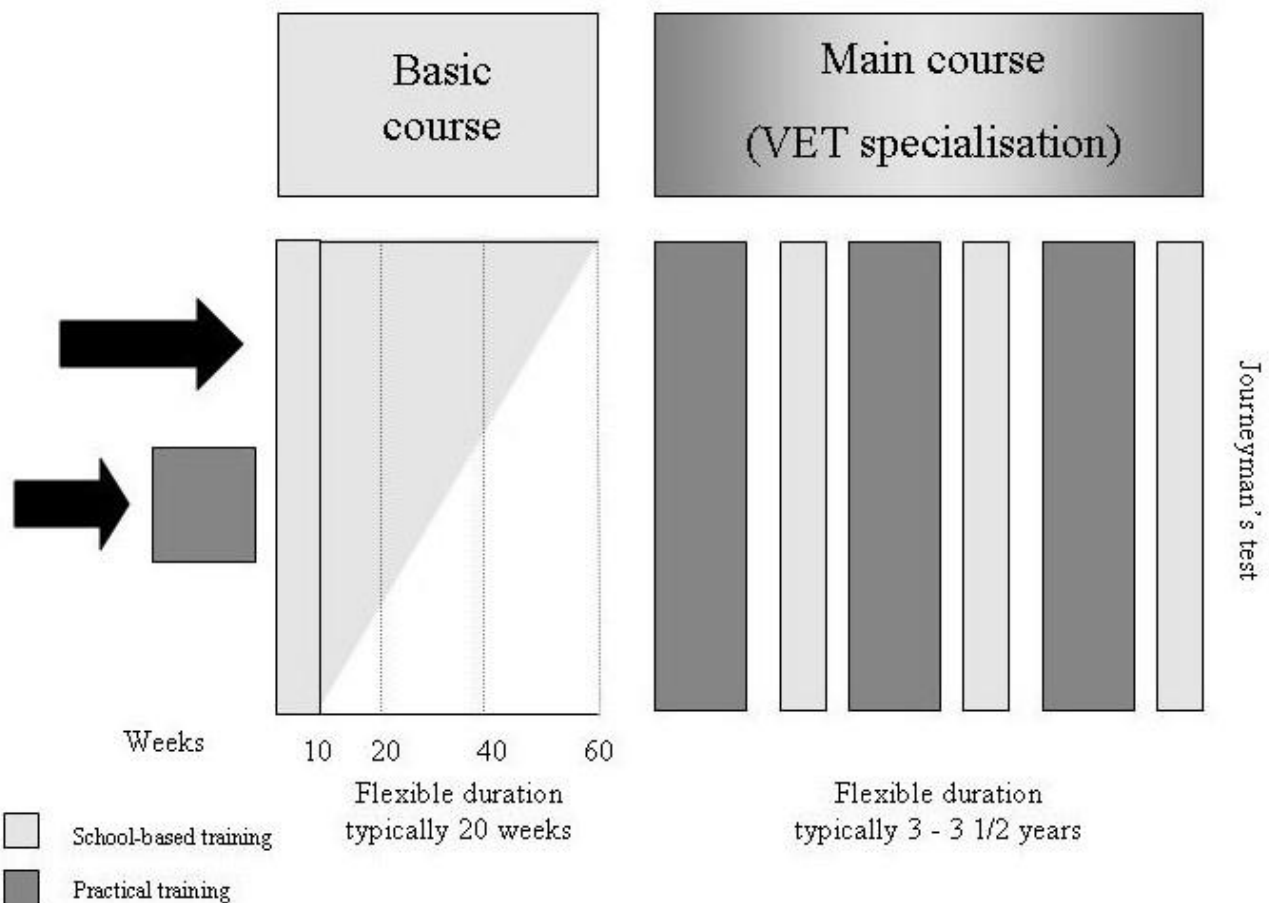


Figure 4.3 Structure of the technical training programmes (source: *New Structure of the Danish VET system*, Ministry of Education, 1999)

The curriculum for the basic programme consists of general, sector, specialist, and optional subjects. During the programme, the individual student is continuously supervised by a teacher responsible for both educational and occupational guidance. The composition of the final programme is decided by each individual student, who has to amass a personal education

portfolio that serves as the basis for assessment.⁹⁸ Most of the vocational colleges today offer a structure of four main blocks lasting five weeks each.

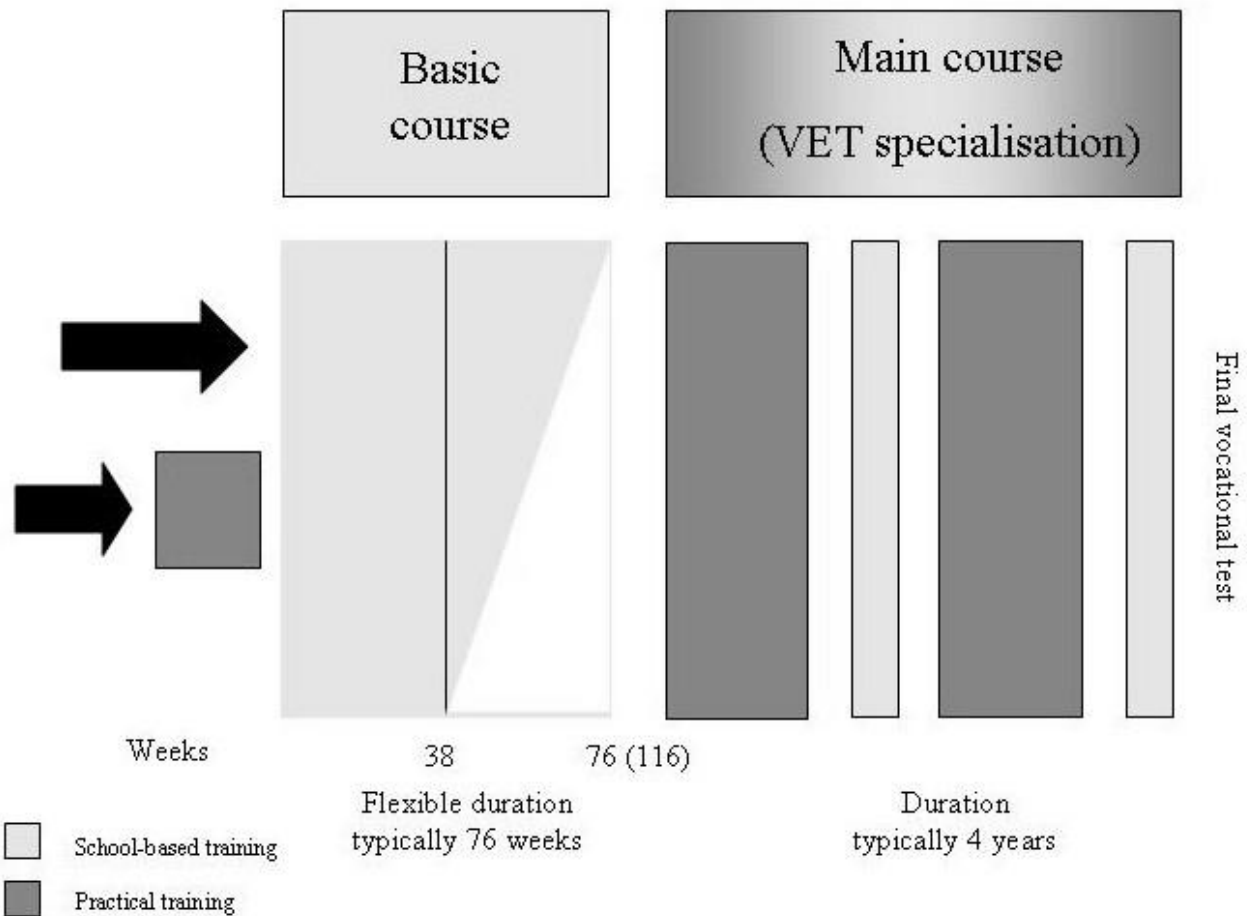


Figure 4.4 Structure of the commercial training programmes (source: *New Structure of the Danish VET System*, Ministry of Education, 1999)

The optional modules are intended to make it easier to meet individual needs. It has also been argued that such an approach is more in keeping with the needs of the labour market, in which flexibility and innovation are increasingly being prioritised. Whereas training has hitherto been based on large groups of related subjects, these are now divided into smaller groups of subjects to achieve greater flexibility. When the basic programme is completed, a certificate is issued that

⁹⁸ The Ministry of Education has set up a rather ambitious electronic system for the registration of education portfolios. The system, however, has not been completely successful, given that a large proportion of students and companies are unaware of its existence (Aarkrog, 2005).

specifies which subjects have been taken and at which proficiency level. It also lists the main programme for which the holder is qualified.

The basic course and its increased individualisation have been criticised in a number of recent studies (see, e.g. Koudahl, 2005a; Juul, 2005), which claim that the targeting is wrong. The student profile drawn up in Reform 2000 is not that of a vocational student, but more that of a student in general education.

The main programme has changed little as a result of the reforms. It still starts in a company and comprises on average six school-based education and training periods lasting from five to ten weeks, alternating with practical training in the company. It ends with a journeyman's examination, which is organised by the trade committees (technical training), or by a final project-based examination (commercial training).⁹⁹ To enter the main programme, a young person must have signed an apprenticeship contract either with a company or with the school at which the training is to be undertaken. Employers pay apprentices during both the in-company training and school-based periods. The wages paid during periods of school-based training are reimbursed from the Employers' Reimbursement Fund (*Arbejdsmarkedets Arbejdsgiverrefusion – AER*). This fund is financed by a levy paid by all employers. However, most young people enrolled in VET begin their training period at a school before signing an apprenticeship contract. As a consequence, the transition phase from the basic to the main programme is critical. Although there are various forms of support and assistance for students seeking apprenticeship contracts (e.g. school-based consultants responsible for guiding students and persuading companies to take on students and websites where the students can upload their profiles and companies, their job advertisements), many students drop out at this point of the training, because they are demotivated as a result of their inability to find a suitable apprenticeship.

According to the Act, both the academically weak and the academically able were to be integrated into the system by introducing greater individualisation and flexibility. Opportunities for acquiring additional or partial qualifications were also introduced. The additional qualifications were intended for the more able students, who could choose to include subjects at the same level as the general upper-secondary education programmes (primarily hhx and htx) and thereby gain

⁹⁹ The school-based part constitutes on average 35 weeks of the main course.

access to further and higher education. Some large companies have created elite student tracks, the aim of which is to train future engineers who have a solid practical background. For the more practically oriented students, a number of partial qualifications have been introduced. These are based on the decomposition of existing occupational profiles into partial qualifications that are still recognised in the labour market. The idea is that students can take the partial qualifications and later – when more motivated – return to college and complete the rest of the programme, with the possibility of having work experience accredited. Finally, a number of short VET programmes have been introduced. These last 1.5 to 2.5 years and are targeted at the more practically oriented students as well. The problem with the partial qualifications and short programmes is that they do not correspond to well-established occupations; consequently, companies are generally unaware of them. Hence, it may be difficult for students to find jobs after completion of such programmes. However, there is as yet no evidence as to how well these programmes function.

As of today, the aim of replacing traditional class teaching and a subject-based curriculum with individualised paths has not been achieved. One reason for this is that colleges do not have the capacity to offer a sufficient number of optional subjects in order to create a flexible curriculum. Furthermore, in a modularised system, new students are continuously being taken in, and this results in either small classes, which are expensive to run, especially in smaller schools, or different proficiency levels within the same class, which is a pedagogical challenge for teachers. Teachers also maintain that it is difficult to create a comprehensive, unified programme based on a large number of small, unrelated modules.

The management of the VET programmes was not changed substantially by Reform 2000. The Danish Ministry of Education exercises control over VET by setting targets, laying down regulatory frameworks, and, to an increasing degree, monitoring the quality of training provision. Decisions concerning programmes are made by state supervisory bodies, trade committees, vocational colleges, local businesses, associations, and local authorities, all of whom co-operate closely with each other. More specifically, the Sectoral Trade Committees, on which the social partners have equal representation, make decisions on VET qualifications and lay down training requirements. College boards of governors consisting of representatives of the social partners, and local authorities appoint the head of the vocational school and approve budgets. Changes are

constantly being made in order to meet companies' current requirements. Local training committees, on which the social partners from the local/regional community are equally represented, advise vocational colleges and forge links with regional job markets. As far as curriculum innovations are concerned, the social partners are responsible for planning the main specialist programmes (3.5 years) and further training.

The Danish model of VET has retained the dual principle, which both facilitates the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, and eases the transition from VET into the labour market. Furthermore, both the social partners and Danish business and industry are able to exert considerable influence over the system. As a result, careful consideration is given to the skills actually needed in the labour market in the VET planning process. In addition, VET qualifications are recognised by all companies, since training takes place partly in companies and the social partners were involved in designing the programmes. Thus, despite the intention of creating a unified youth education system, these principles continue to hold sway, and although the debate on a 12-year unified system has been resumed, especially amongst college leaders, there are no signs that they will be abandoned for the majority of VET programmes.

The Danish labour market

The main principles upon which the Danish labour market model is based are tripartite co-operation, collective agreements, and a high membership rate for the representative associations on both the employers' and employees' sides.¹⁰⁰ In general, the state does not intervene in collective bargaining, and today approximately 80 percent of wages in the Danish labour market are laid down in collective agreements between the social partners. Thus, consensus-seeking can be regarded as a central trait of Danish society.

The labour market is characterised by high employment and low marginalisation, which is assumed to be a result of what has been called the 'flexicurity model',¹⁰¹ i.e. a combination of flexible dismissal rules, an active labour market policy including entitlement to education and placement services, and relatively high unemployment benefits. This model provides both labour

¹⁰⁰ The degree of unionisation in Denmark is more than 70 percent, and in some sectors, membership in a specific union has been a requisite for employment.

¹⁰¹ 'Flexicurity' is a contraction of flexibility and security.

market flexibility and a high level of social protection for employees (Bredgaard et al., 2005): there is considerable job mobility as well as an extensive social safety net for the unemployed. This high mobility is made possible by a relatively modest level of employment protection in the labour market. The consequent high level of job insecurity was made acceptable to the trade union movement by the development of a public unemployment benefit system and a cash benefit scheme for the noninsured unemployed. Between 25 and 35 percent of the work force change employers on average each year. Some of these job changes involve periods of unemployment, as evidenced by the fact that between one-third and one-quarter of the labour force is affected by unemployment in any given year (Bredgaard et al., 2005).

The link between the labour market and VET

Most Danes take for granted the link between VET and the labour market. The fact that Danish VET programmes reflect the occupational and wage structures of the Danish labour market is so much a part of the VET tradition that the link is seldom questioned. On completing a VET programme, a vocational student acquires a qualification that corresponds directly to a specific occupational profile in the labour market, e.g. that of carpenter, metal worker, sales assistant, or media graphic designer, and also to a grade within a wage system negotiated by the social partners themselves. The transition from VET is smooth, given that the final qualifications are recognised by all parties across the entire country. Figures from the AER show that 80 percent of those completing a VET programme are employed one year afterwards (AER, 2004). Thus, the benefits of VET include a lower youth unemployment rate and access to nationally agreed wage rates for skilled workers, as laid down in the sectoral collective agreements.

The problem of a mismatch between students' qualifications and employers' needs is avoided to some extent in the Danish system, as the social partners themselves are responsible for adjusting VET programmes to meet the needs of the labour market and for identifying new occupational skills needs. Furthermore, the programmes are based on broad occupational profiles, ensuring that students acquire skills that are transferable across companies, thereby facilitating labour market mobility.

However, it has been claimed that the trade committees are rooted in the traditional occupational structures of an industrial society and that this is not a sufficient basis for a modern VET system.

Recent criticism has suggested that the trade committees are not able to identify new skill requirements and changing occupational structures – not to mention entirely new occupations within, e.g. information technology or the service and entertainment and leisure industries – quickly enough to incorporate new training provisions into the national system. As a consequence, the Liberal government has proposed that skills analysis and labour market forecasting should not be the sole prerogative of the trade committees but that universities and educational consultancy firms should also contribute (Danish Ministry of Education, 2006).

One major problem in labour markets is the risk of underinvestment in training. In Denmark, this risk is avoided to some extent by a training levy, which is paid by all employers as a means of sharing the costs of taking on apprentices. The levy provides an incentive for small- and medium-sized companies in particular, which are more cost-sensitive than large companies, to take on apprentices. Research also indicates that small companies have an interest in training for production-specific skills and in reducing the general education content of VET, whereas large companies are more interested in a broad skills base, as they depend on their ability to innovate and compete in international markets (Culpepper, 2007). Thus, many small- and medium-sized enterprises tend to underinvest in the general skills and qualifications of their staff. From the individual employer's point of view, the benefit of investing in upgrading an employee's general qualifications might be lost if there is a high probability that the employee will leave the company. High labour market mobility might result in underinvestment in education and training. Bredgaard et al. (2005) suggest that this prediction can be both proved and disproved based on existing data on the extent of adult vocational training in the Danish labour market. On the one hand, there is a relatively low level of adult vocational training amongst unskilled workers. On the other hand, however, judged in terms of the extent of adult vocational training in general in the labour market, Denmark is at the top of the European league. One possible explanation for this paradox might lie in the existence of a fairly comprehensive VET system, which solves the 'market failures' resulting from high job mobility. It could also be that companies themselves use adult vocational training as a means of retaining employees who would otherwise be looking for new jobs.

The fact that companies tend to underinvest in education highlights once again the importance of an effective system of general education, vocational training and, last but not least, lifelong learning. Consequently, VET is a constant focus of attention, as a means of raising the quality of training and skill formation. Nevertheless, there are still unresolved problems in this regard.

Problems in the Danish system

As can be seen from the historical description, the Danish VET system has gone through a number of major reforms since the early 1930s. This modernisation has taken place in response to pressing problems in Danish society. Some of these problems have also been remarkably persistent, e.g. the problem of esteem, the lack of work placements, the correspondence between vocational education and the skills required in the labour market, and the interaction between school and work. This raises the question of whether these problems are in some way a consequence of the main principles underpinning the system or whether they are inherent in any VET system. Comparison with other countries reveals that most of these problems seem to occur elsewhere, even where the VET system is different. The problem of low esteem is evident throughout Europe (see, e.g. Stenström & Lasonen, 2000); in most countries, the majority of young people, and their parents, show a preference for general academic education, which provides access to tertiary education. The same is true of the problem of changing skills requirements, which is markedly more pressing in school-based systems. The problem of the interaction between the world of school and the world of work is also something that is debated in countries throughout Europe. Thus, many systems are confronted with the same common set of problems; these are outlined below.

The role of the state

Since the 1990s, the evolution of Denmark's VET system has been characterised by increasing decentralisation. The state's role has been reduced to some extent, with much of the decision-making having been handed over to the social partners, colleges, and companies. The state, in co-operation with the social partners, establishes the overall legislative framework for VET, as well as financing the school-based element. For economic reasons, the state might see an advantage in handing over the entire VET system to companies to maintain at their own cost. On the other hand, it might have a political interest in maintaining a state-controlled VET system. A compromise between these two positions has been found, whereby the state controls and finances

the school-based element, whilst companies control and finance work-based training. However, the national challenge of pursuing a 'high-skills' strategy requires a strong focus on education, which may result in the state being unable to keep step with the needs of the labour market. A market-driven vocational training system, on the other hand, may be well-positioned to meet the demands of the labour market. However, this will inevitably result in underinvestment, a short-term approach to planning for the future of VET and, last but not least, an increase in social inequality (Brown, Green, & Lauder, 2001).

Some of these problems have been avoided by establishing the employers' reimbursement scheme (1977) and the trade committees. All employers contribute to the reimbursement scheme in order to share the cost of training. It is intended as an incentive for companies to take in apprentices. The trade committees mediate between the state and individual companies and are believed, by virtue of their position, to be well-suited to making long-term policy plans for vocational training. However, it has been suggested that, since the introduction of Reform 2000, the trade committees have been weakened as a result of decentralisation, which has resulted in more power being handed over to individual vocational colleges and companies (Jørgensen, 2005). Although it would appear at first glance that these bodies are well aware of current labour market requirements, the question of whether they have the committees' ability to draw up long-term, co-ordinated policy plans, not to mention nationally recognised occupational profiles, has nevertheless been raised. This current debate can be summed up in one key question: how can the advantages of strong state and partnership-based control over vocational training be combined with the flexibility of decentralised, market control?

Problems regarding the companies

Companies have traditionally had a common interest in contributing to the training of the future labour force. Despite the economic interest of having cheap access to labour in the 'trade-off' arrangement between companies and apprentices, companies are usually committed to securing jobs for young people in the external labour market.¹⁰²

¹⁰² The rationality of businesses in training apprentices is perceived as a trade-off between the initial costs of training and the subsequent profit of having a skilled worker to work for the cost of an apprentice. The duration of apprenticeships is perceived as a weighing of costs and profit.

Small- and medium-sized companies (especially in the craft sector) have traditionally trained more apprentices than they are able to employ, whereas larger companies have generally needed to recruit more skilled workers than they themselves have been able to train. The main reason this balance works is that the single vocational training programme is nationally accepted by all sectors of industry. In order to avoid 'free riders', the AER also works to prevent companies from evading their obligation to take on apprentices (Jørgensen, 2005).

The problem of maintaining an adequate supply of apprenticeships has increased over recent years. There are several reasons why companies do not offer apprenticeships. One reason is many companies have divided their technology-intensive production systems into smaller units and are unable to offer the broadly based technical training that is required. Apprentices would simply not be introduced to all the different aspects of the production process. Another reason is that production itself has become subject to increasing efficiency demands, in accordance with new management concepts and market-based economic calculations. The shareholder economy, in which companies are continuously valued on the stock market, has driven companies to eliminate unprofitable activities in order to promote 'lean' production. In such a climate, companies have little interest in establishing expensive apprenticeships. A third reason is the rapid pace of technological change, which often leaves VET programmes lagging behind. The many different specialist projects in which companies are engaged do not necessarily match the skills that are taught in vocational programmes. The boundaries between the various occupations and departments are being eliminated in many companies to create the interdisciplinary work groups these specialist projects require. In consequence, many companies are reluctant to sign a three-year contract with an apprentice, as they are unable to predict what their requirements may be over the relatively long period of an apprenticeship (Jørgensen, 2005).¹⁰³ To sum up, the main question today is how can the dual system survive in the future, when the production system has become increasingly specialised and fragmented?

Problems associated with VET students

One problem concerning VET students is competition from other forms of secondary education. Despite the efforts of the Danish government, VET does not have the same prestige as other forms

¹⁰³ Approximately, one-third of Danish companies train apprentices.

of secondary education. Many parents and pupils still regard the academic track as the more attractive option. Consequently, VET is increasingly becoming the option for students who cannot enter that track, thereby further reducing the prestige of VET. Another factor that seems to impede recruitment is that many trainees embark on vocational training programmes at a later stage in their lives, well after they have left school. Today, every third apprentice is over 25 years old when they start vocational training. This means that every year, 14,000 apprentices over the age of 25 are recruited into the system. In 1992, the corresponding number was only 7,000 (Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening, 2001). This can be explained by the fact that companies are reimbursed at a higher rate if they take on an adult trainee at the same wage as an unskilled worker. The effect of this is that older apprentices tend to crowd out younger apprentices from the practical experience pathway into vocational training (Aarkrog, 2001).

Another problem is the high drop-out rate from VET programmes, especially amongst ethnic minorities. The drop-out rate has been a continuous problem, and one of the aims of Reform 2000 was to remedy this situation. However, the drop-out rate has not declined since the reforms. Today, the VET drop-out rate is approximately 35 percent, whilst amongst male students from ethnic minorities it is almost 60 percent. According to Koudahl (2005b), there are many reasons for the increase in the drop-out rate. First, the statistical data are inadequate and do not distinguish amongst transfers between programmes, colleges and tracks, and total drop-out from the education system. However, there is no doubt that there is a need to improve student retention. Possible remedies proposed by Koudahl include improved co-ordination and interaction between school-based and work-based training, a more attractive study environment in colleges, and special schemes targeting ethnic minorities. In some ways, Reform 2000 may have increased the drop-out problem as a result of the continuous intake of students and the lack of fixed classes. Many of the weaker students drop out because of the lack of a stable framework and integration into a fixed peer group. Others drop out due to personal problems, and here Koudahl points to the need for increased awareness in colleges of students' personal circumstances. Thus, the question of how to make VET more attractive to both weak and strong students remains unresolved.

Problems with the colleges

Finally, the colleges providing the school-based part of VET should be considered as important actors. Due to the division of responsibility between the Ministry of Education and the social partners, most reforms have focused on changing the school-based part of VET as a means of solving pressing social problems. Danish colleges today are regarded as semi-autonomous, self-governing institutions that must operate within the legislative framework laid down by the Ministry of Education and the social partners. However, the decentralisation process has in fact produced a somewhat different outcome for the colleges, since the overall regulative framework has been tightened up, as the Ministry of Education has laid down more specific objectives and requirements for the colleges. Output management has led to increased (re)centralisation. Some agreements with the Ministry of Education, e.g. are voluntary for the colleges, but if they choose not to enter them, they automatically lose access to significant financial resources. Because the colleges are already labouring under financial constraints, their freedom of choice is in fact restricted. Strong financial controls have become the main mechanism of governance. The colleges' freedom of action has been considerably reduced, since framework governance was introduced in the early 1990s (Cort, 2005a).

In recent years, expectations on colleges have also increased, as VET programmes have been perceived by policy makers as a means of integrating ethnic minorities and low achievers in their pursuit of a 95 percent completion rate at the upper-secondary level. Many colleges have experienced problems in integrating the many different target groups into the same programmes, and at some colleges, students are now being ranked based on their prior learning achievements to create more homogeneous groupings and thereby prevent them from dropping out.

Furthermore, colleges are trying to find means of increasing the interaction between school-based and work-based learning. Since the 1990s, this has been a high priority area in numerous development projects initiated by the Ministry of Education. One overriding concern has been that the majority of students perceive in-company training as better than school (Koudahl, 2005a) and school-based education as irrelevant. Thus, many schools are working on several fronts, trying to increase communication and co-operation with local companies and to relate school-based education and training to the practical experience that students gain in companies – all in order to

motivate students and prevent them from dropping out. A central question for the colleges is their role within VET policies and how that role should be fulfilled.

Conclusions and prospects

In 1999, the Danish VET system received the Bertelsmann prize for its capacity for innovation and change and its unique involvement of all stakeholders in the continuous development of the system. This article has set out to show that the system has both its strengths and its weaknesses. Since the 1930s, there has been an on-going discussion regarding the appropriateness of having two separate tracks at the upper-secondary education level. One of the arguments in favour of merging the two tracks has been to further equality and improve the opportunities available to young people from working-class backgrounds. In the 1980s and 1990s, this debate was set aside due to more pressing economic concerns and a Liberal government being in power throughout most of the 1980s. In recent years, a number of actors, especially college leaders, have reintroduced the idea of a 12-year unitary school programme in response to the continuing problems created by an insufficient number of apprenticeships, lack of parity of esteem, problems of co-ordination between school and work, and increasing difficulties in integrating both weak and strong students into the system. However, a unified school system is not perceived as a viable alternative to dual training and social partnership, as the same problems affect other systems. In Sweden, e.g. the problem of esteem remains despite a unitary system (Juul, 2006), whilst in school-based systems, such as the Swedish and French, there are many problems with the school-work transition. In many people's view, therefore, the solutions to these problems lie elsewhere. Moreover, the latest policy initiative does not point in the direction of a unified system: since 2006, it has been possible for vocational students to enter a VET programme through a practical training pathway, rather than through the school-based basic course. The dual-training principle will be maintained within the main programme, but the practical training pathway does open the way for an expansion of work-based training at the expense of the school-based part and the more general subjects included therein. The dual-training principle has not been abandoned in the Danish system. From the outside, however, the system in place today does appear to be more of a pluralist training system, with ordinary programmes running alongside short programmes and partial qualifications; opportunities to acquire additional qualifications; elite student tracks within specific

companies; the EGU programme for students with learning disabilities, personal or social problems; practical training pathways; and possibly in the future, a dual-training programme more like the German system, with two days a week spent in college (Cort, 2005). One of the aims of Reform 2000 was to simplify the system and make it more transparent to the individual student; somehow, this aim does not seem to have been achieved.

As to the involvement of the social partners, this principle has not been abandoned either, although it does seem as though some of their prerogatives are being undermined. The introduction of the individual education portfolio following the student from school to company will create more bureaucracy for companies and require them to specify the in-company training process more explicitly, thereby interfering with companies' right to manage and allocate work. Companies will be made more responsible for fulfilling the requirements laid down in the VET regulations. Furthermore, considerable attention is being paid to the quality of training and to trainers' qualifications. It is no doubt only a matter of time before trainers are required to undergo some kind of formal teacher training – probably with the consent of the social partners. However, the risk is that fewer companies will take on students if the requirements become too rigid for individual companies to accept. Finally, if the government goes ahead with its plan to centralise analysis and prognosis, some of the tasks traditionally performed by the social partners will be carried out by universities and external consultants. These are all subtle signs that the prerogatives of the social partners are being undermined.

Thus, the main principles of the Danish system continue to be upheld, but changes are occurring that are transforming the dual-training principle and the roles of the social partners. Political pressure on VET has increased over the last decade. This is obvious from the increased rate of reform since the late 1980s and the many new principles that have been incorporated into the system: increased flexibility, inclusiveness, decentralisation, and increased market orientation, not to mention changes in the roles of teachers and students and in teaching methods. The Danish VET system of today has become increasingly complex, offering multiple learning pathways for different types of vocational students. The dual-training principle is giving way to a pluralist principle in an attempt to meet the very different demands of young people, companies, and society in general.

The main problem afflicting VET today is perhaps that it is perceived as some kind of panacea for all kinds of problems: inclusion, integration, global competitiveness, lifelong learning, innovation, entrepreneurship, etc. The question is whether the system can live up to all of these many policy objectives. Maybe there is a need for a more critical assessment of what the system should be able to achieve and what the main outcome of the system should be. One thing remains certain: there are obviously still many issues that will need to be addressed in the future.

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