

# VET in Austria – Strengths and Weaknesses in Comparative Perspective

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# (...work in progress...)

## Questions in the background

- What are **reasonable ,benchmarks'** for the assessment of strengths and weaknesses of VET, given the current ,rhetoric' and ,counter-rhetoric' about globalisation (G) and the knowledge based economy (KBE)?
  - ,**Rhetoric**': global competition needs strengthening of the KBE, meaning innovation, quality and high skills strategies
  - ,**Counter-rhetoric**': globalisation means neoliberal spread of the market and dismantling the public benefits of the state
- Given the ,**rhetoric**', the system and related policy must be assessed against the challenges given by G & KBE
  - This is more difficult than appears at first sight, involves three steps
    1. *Assessment of the status-quo against the challenges (economy, institutions, etc.)*
    2. *Assessment of the strategies and practices at the demand side (the firms and their environment)*
    3. *Assessment of the actual and potential contribution of VET as a part of the supply side*
- Given the ,**counter-rhetoric**', the assessment should find serious moves towards ,neoliberalism (NL)'
  - Seems less difficult, if we can find an accepted operational definition of NL  
*the latter seems most difficult, as every change is a potential candidate for NL*

# Agenda

- How to assess VET against the ,**big challenges**‘?
  - ,Rhetoric‘ and ,reality‘: too big gaps between the challenges from ,globalisation (G)‘ & ,knowledge based economy (KBE)‘ to VET?
- Political ,reality‘: how are the ,big challenges‘ reflected in the Austrian **policy discourse**
  - Only ,rhetoric‘ without concrete consequences, and weak ,counter-rhetoric‘
- Assessment of VET: Some key aspects of the **VET system’s structure and development**
  - Some peculiarities, however, no clear evidence about strengths and weaknesses against G & KBE
- The system and the current policy ,practice‘: a set of **disputes** and LLL as approach for solutions?
  - Politics as a self-sustainable mechanism of unended reform-disputes without reforms?
- Concluding question: (no) ground for ,strengths‘ and weaknesses‘?

# Assessment of VET against the ,big challenges‘

- Involves three or four levels
  - **Aggregate**: Overall positioning of strengths and weaknesses in global competition...  
*Composite economic (and social) indicators*
  - ...broken down by the **demand** and the **supply** side  
*Questioning of the position of both sides, or taking demand (enterprises') side as given?*
  - **Institutional**: Potentials of policy and the institutional framework to cope with the challenges  
*Governance, involved systems (social, innovation, culture...)*
  - Potential contribution of **VET**  
*Conflicting concepts and theories: tertiarisation and „radical“ innovation vs VET and diffusion of innovation*
- How can we get along, if there is a **mixed picture** at each of these levels, combined with **conflicting concepts and theories**?
  - Aggregate: good economic and labour market performance
  - Demand-Industry structure and innovation: medium performance
  - Supply: good medium level qualifications, weak higher education system
  - Institutions: co-ordinated economy, partly contested
  - VET: strong system at upper secondary level, weak evidence about performance

# Assessment of a VET system: some conceptual difficulties...

- Background: ,**Challenges**‘ of globalisation and knowledge-based economy: ,real‘ challenges or power-biased ideological ,rhetoric‘?
  - Is there evidence for the basic challenges?

*Strong arguments and competing theories but questions about compelling evidence (what does ,globalisation‘ mean? decline of the nation state, successor of modernisation, fragmentation, A.Dirlik; KBE and ,development‘, Brown/Lauder/Ashton)*

*Competing perspectives about how broad the framework of assessment has to be (economic, pedagogical, social (P.Ryan)*
- If we accept the challenges as ,real‘, **how to develop ,evidence-based‘ policies for a specific ,case‘?**
  - What is a case: a national ,system‘ in the globalisation, a region, a sector?
  - Possible to find the concrete challenges based on assessment of the position of the ,case‘ against globalisation and KBE?

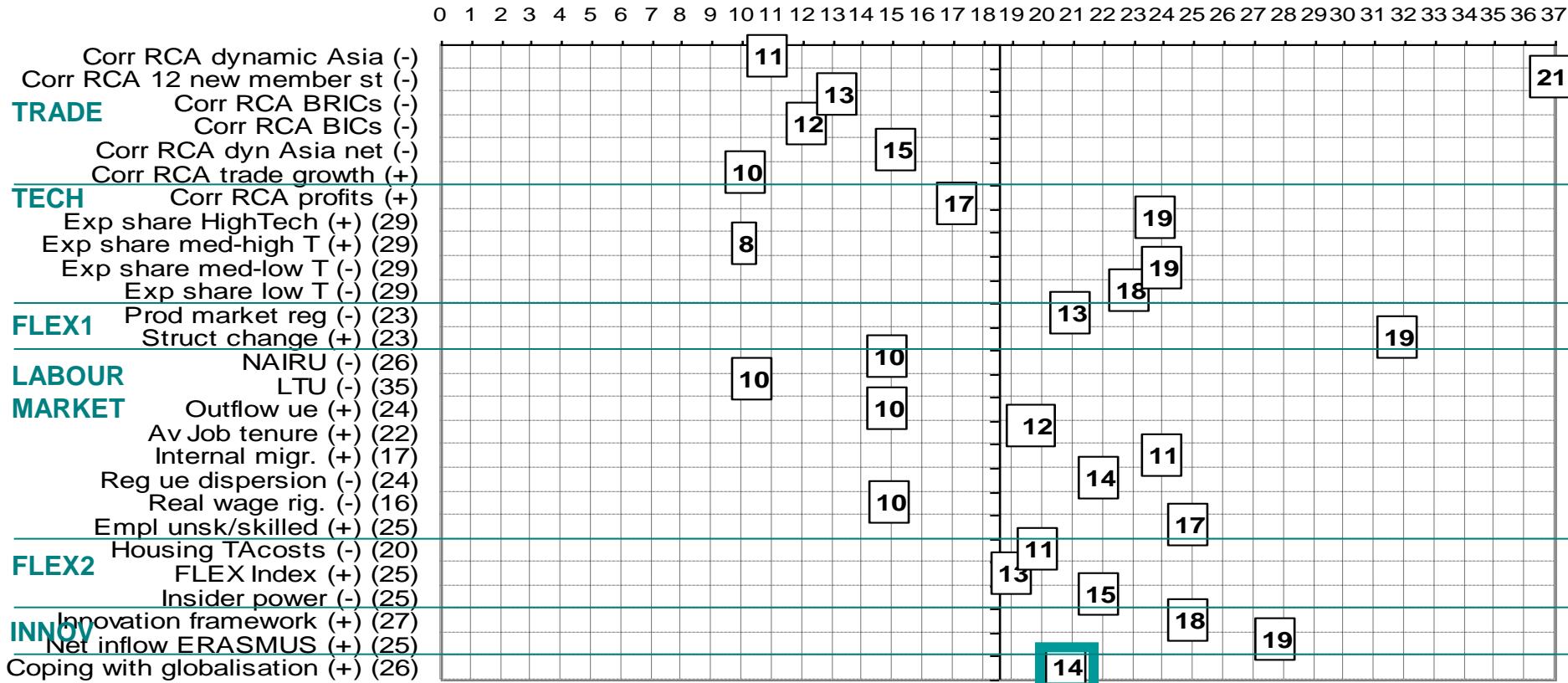
*Various forms of ,benchmarking‘ (examples: OECD-globalisation indicators, EU-structural indicators, Innovation scoreboard, Lisbon-process and followers)*

*Sufficient evidence to base policy on these?*
- Who is how affected by the policies?
  - Actors in the economy, in the social system, in culture and education
- What role for education? ,**Gospel**‘ or most important ,**driver**‘?

# Examples for benchmarking: Globalisation indicators

- Austria's ranking on indicators for coping with globalisation
  - 37 countries; not the only picture ... ,*marketing of competitiveness*'

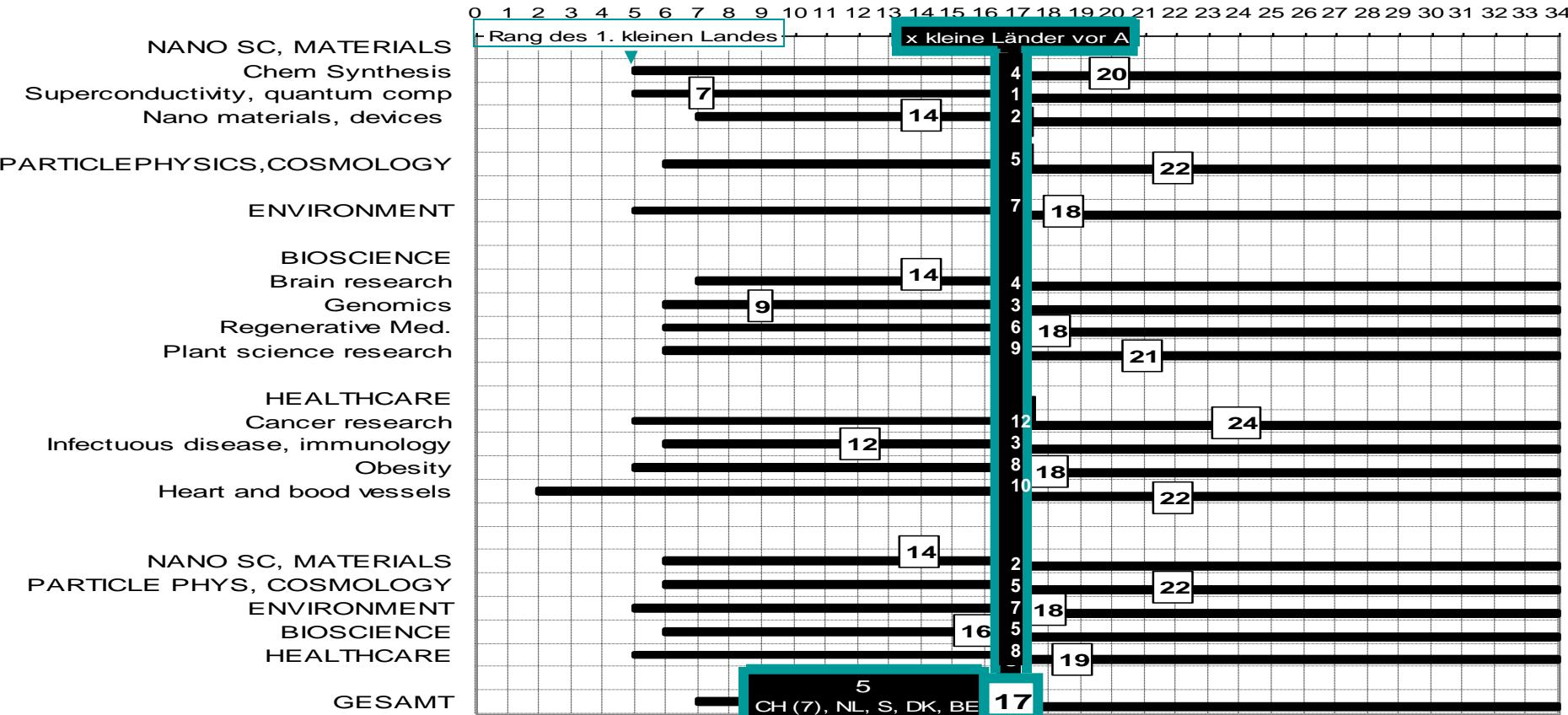
Source: Rae/Sollie 2007 OECD



# Examples for benchmarking: Research indicators

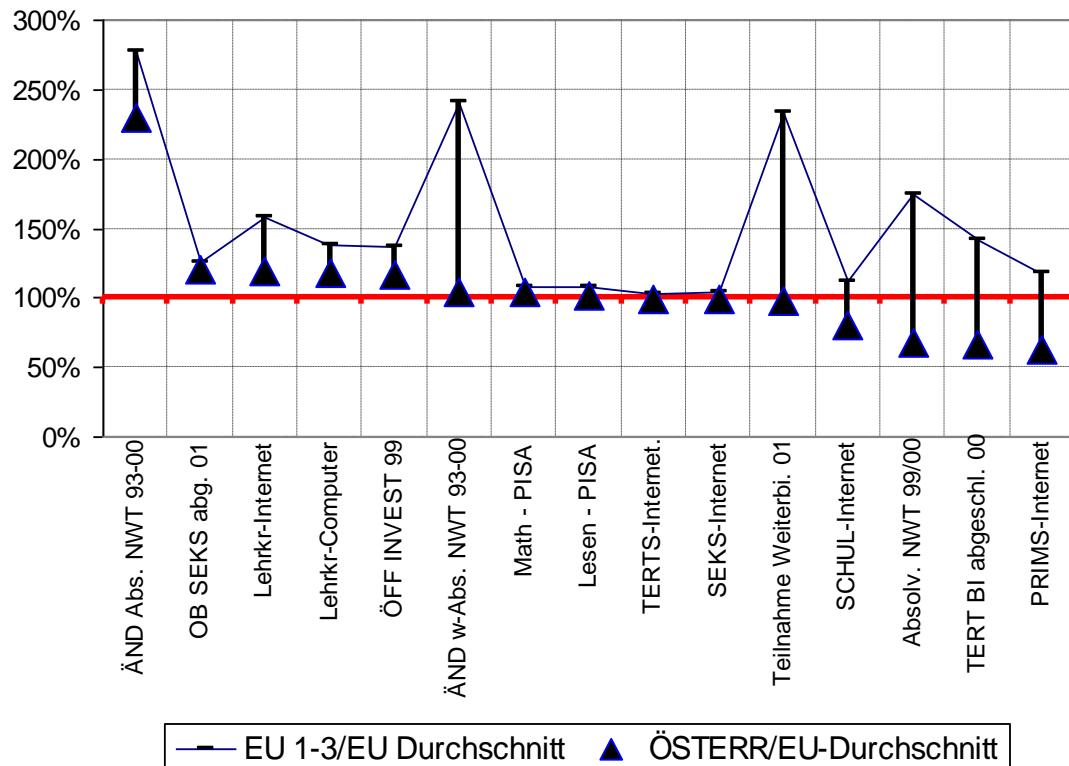
- Austria's share among 'core papers' in different disciplines
  - 34 countries, ranking compared to smaller countries

Source: Igami/Saka 2007 OECD

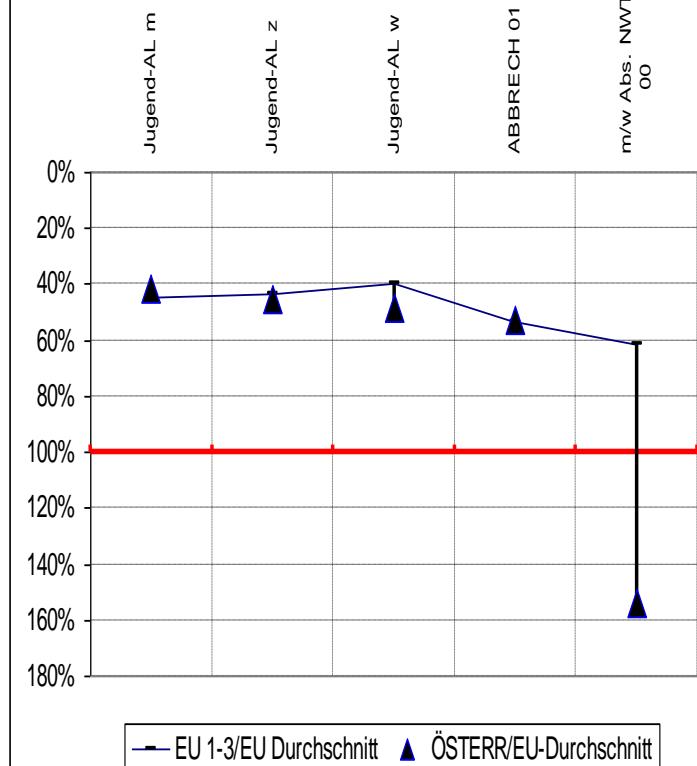


# Examples for benchmarking: EU-education indicators (orig.proposal)

**POSITIVE ZIELWERTE**

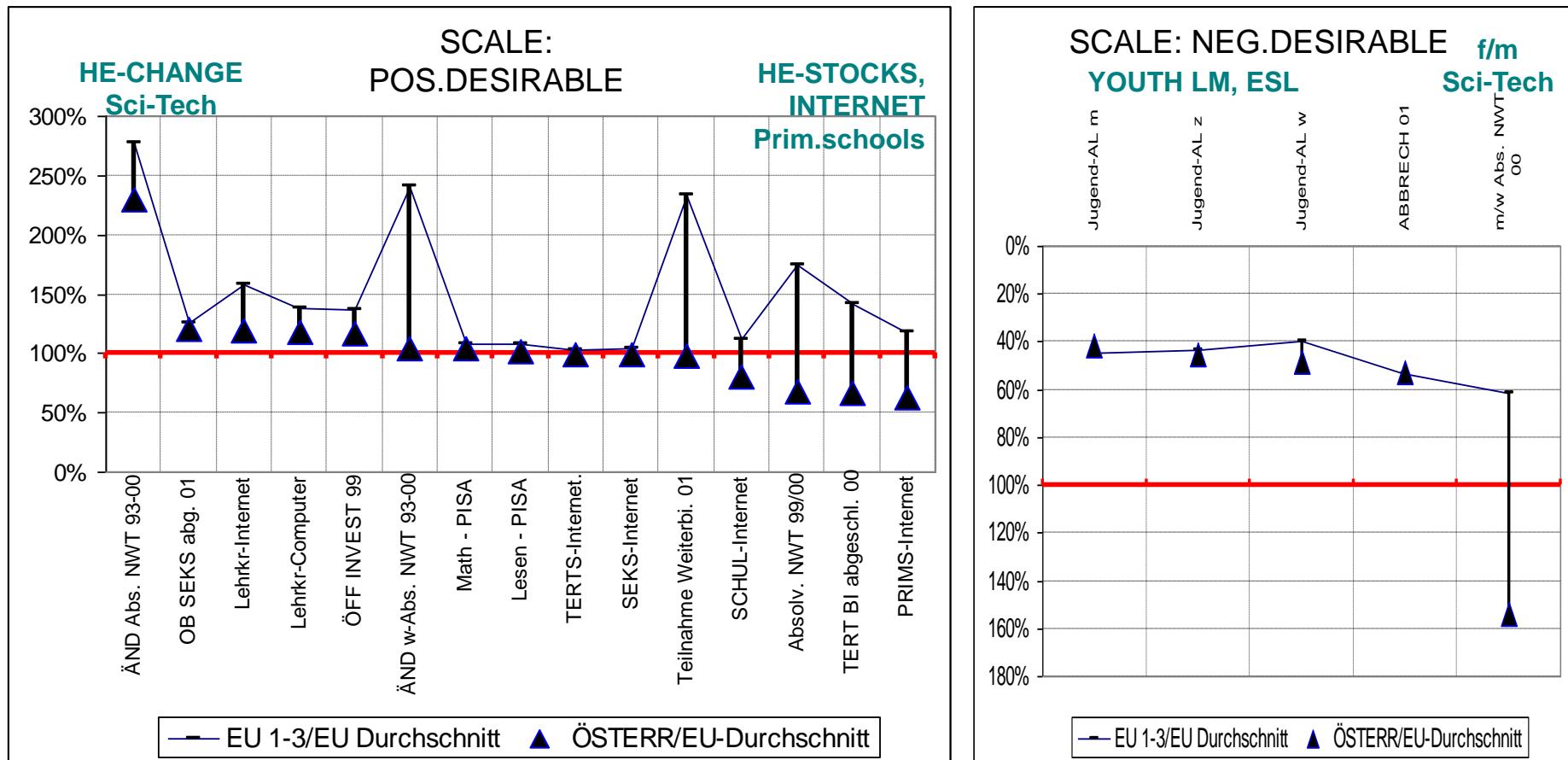


**NEGATIVE ZIELWERTE**



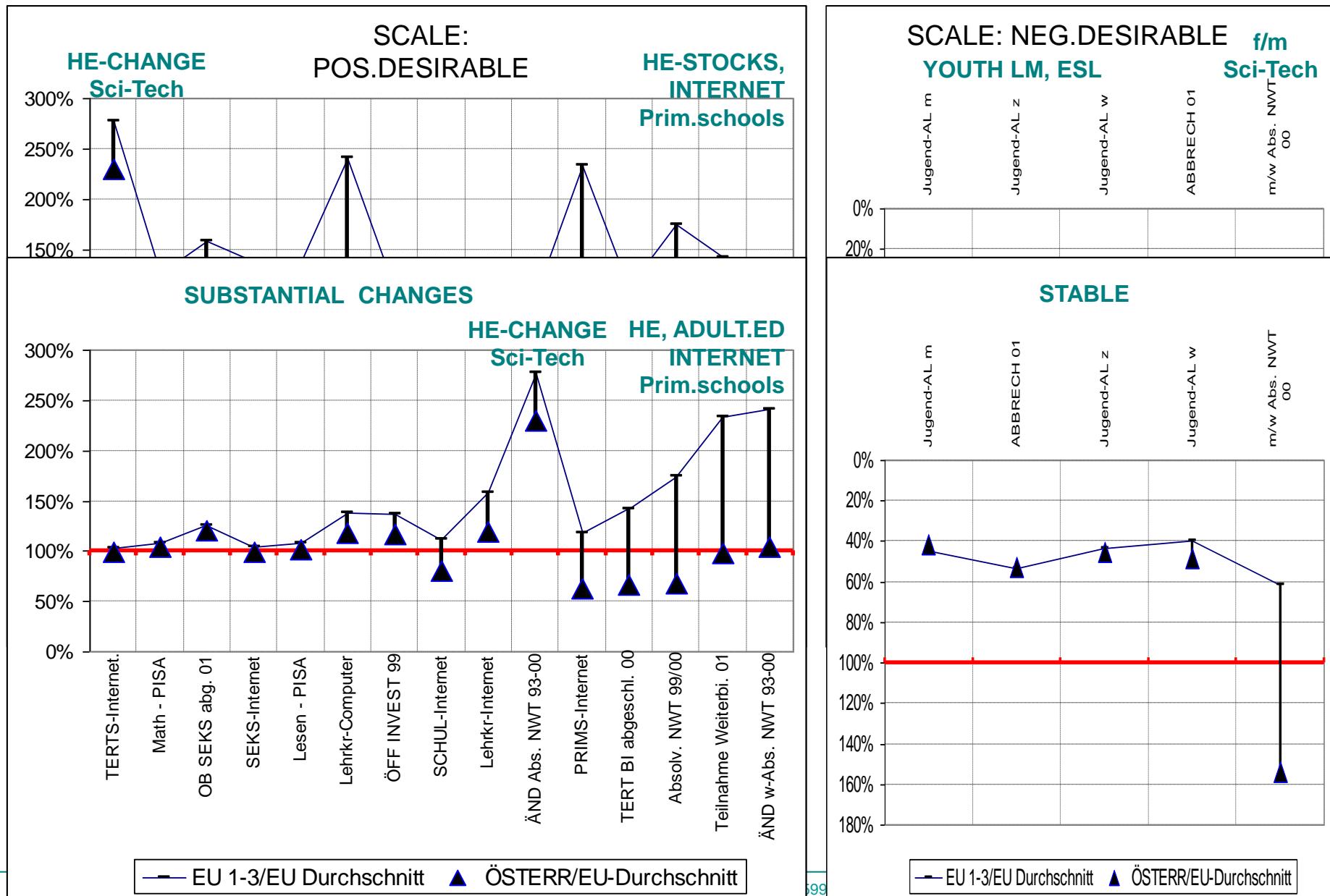
- Relation Austria/EU-Average

# Examples for benchmarking: EU-education indicators (orig.proposal)



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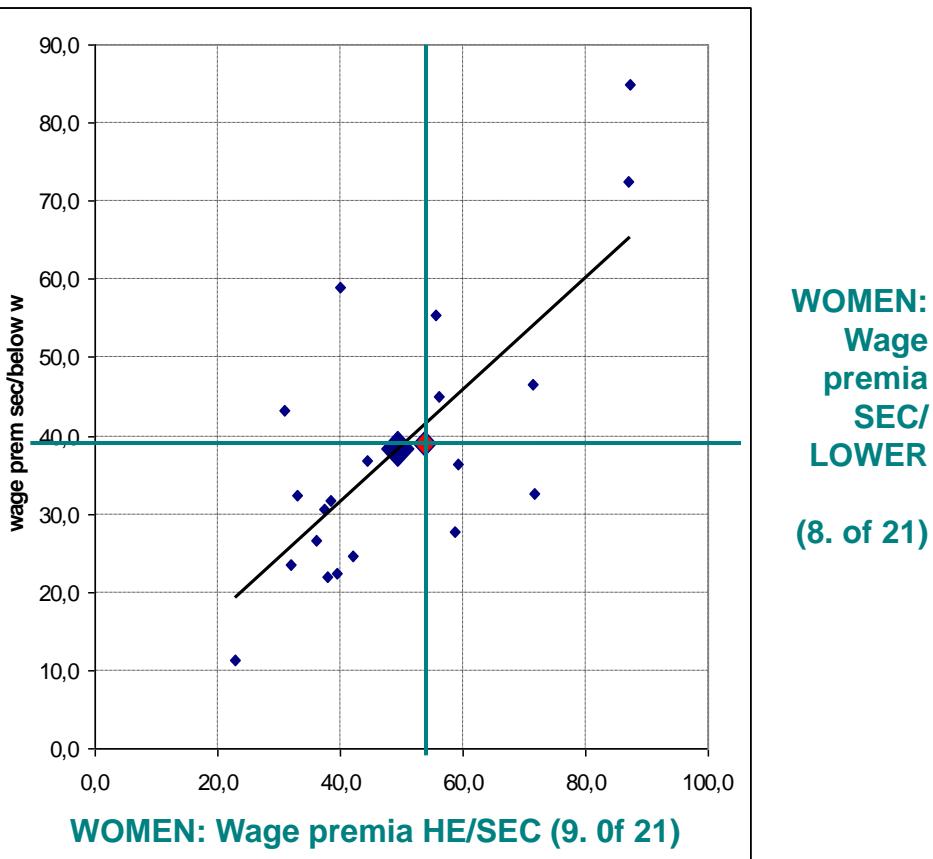
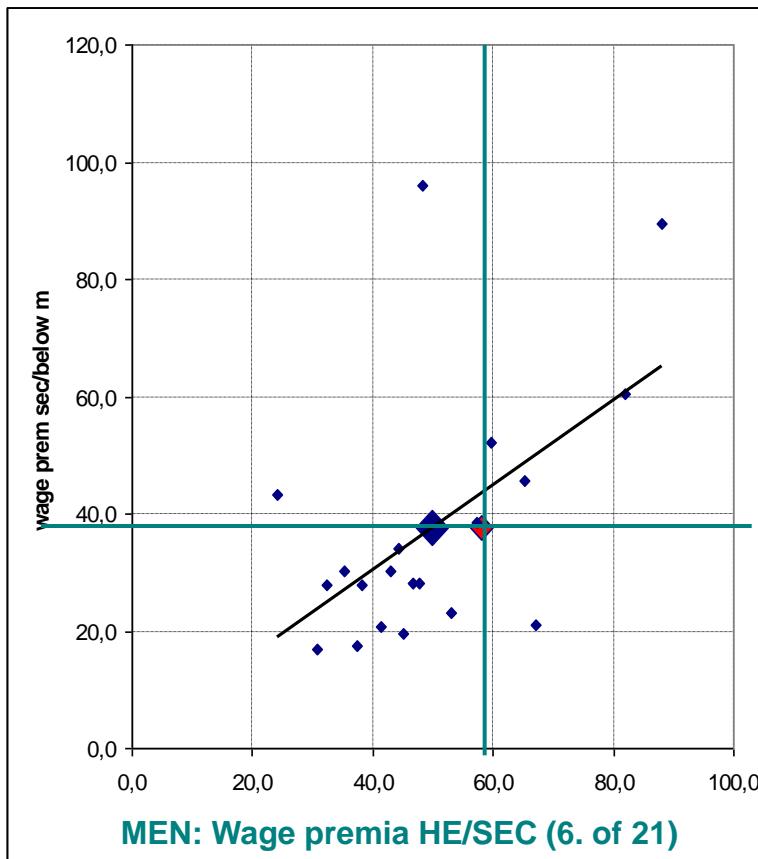


# Examples for benchmarking: Relation returns SEC/LOWER, HE/SEC

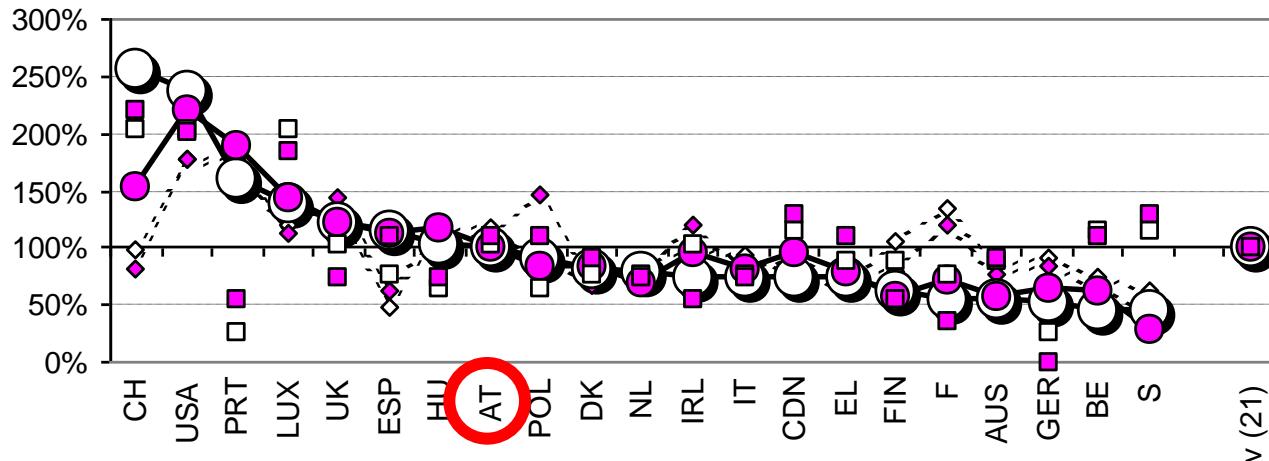
- Austria's ranking with differences of returns HE, SEC, LOWER
  - 21 countries
- Slight differences: SEC below; HE above average

Source: Strauss/de la Maisonneuve 2007 OECD

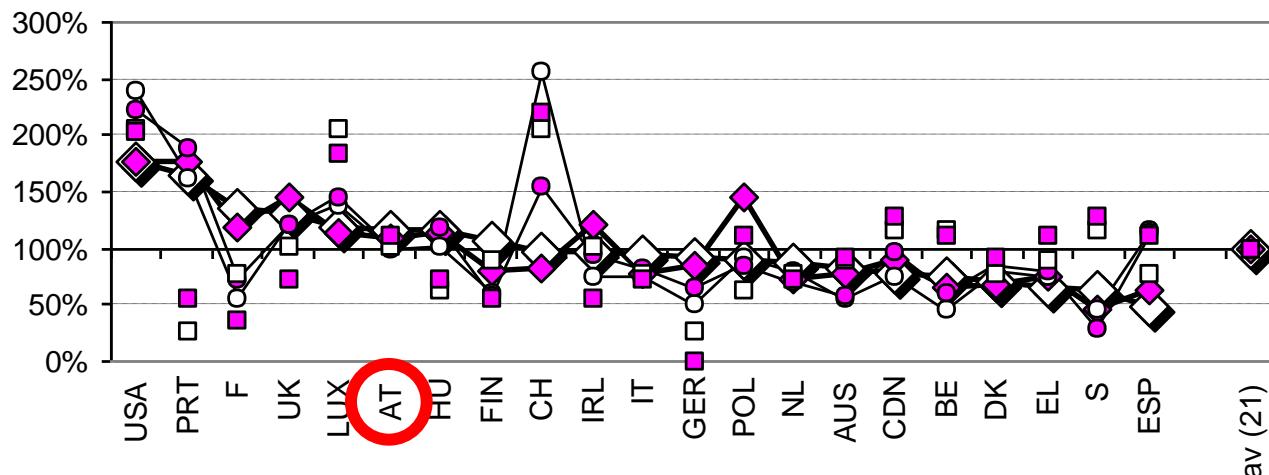
MEN:  
Wage  
premia  
SEC/  
LOWER  
  
(8. of 21)



**Lohnprämien standardisiert auf 100, geordnet nach  
Sekundarbildung/weniger (Strauss/de la Maisonneuve 2007)**



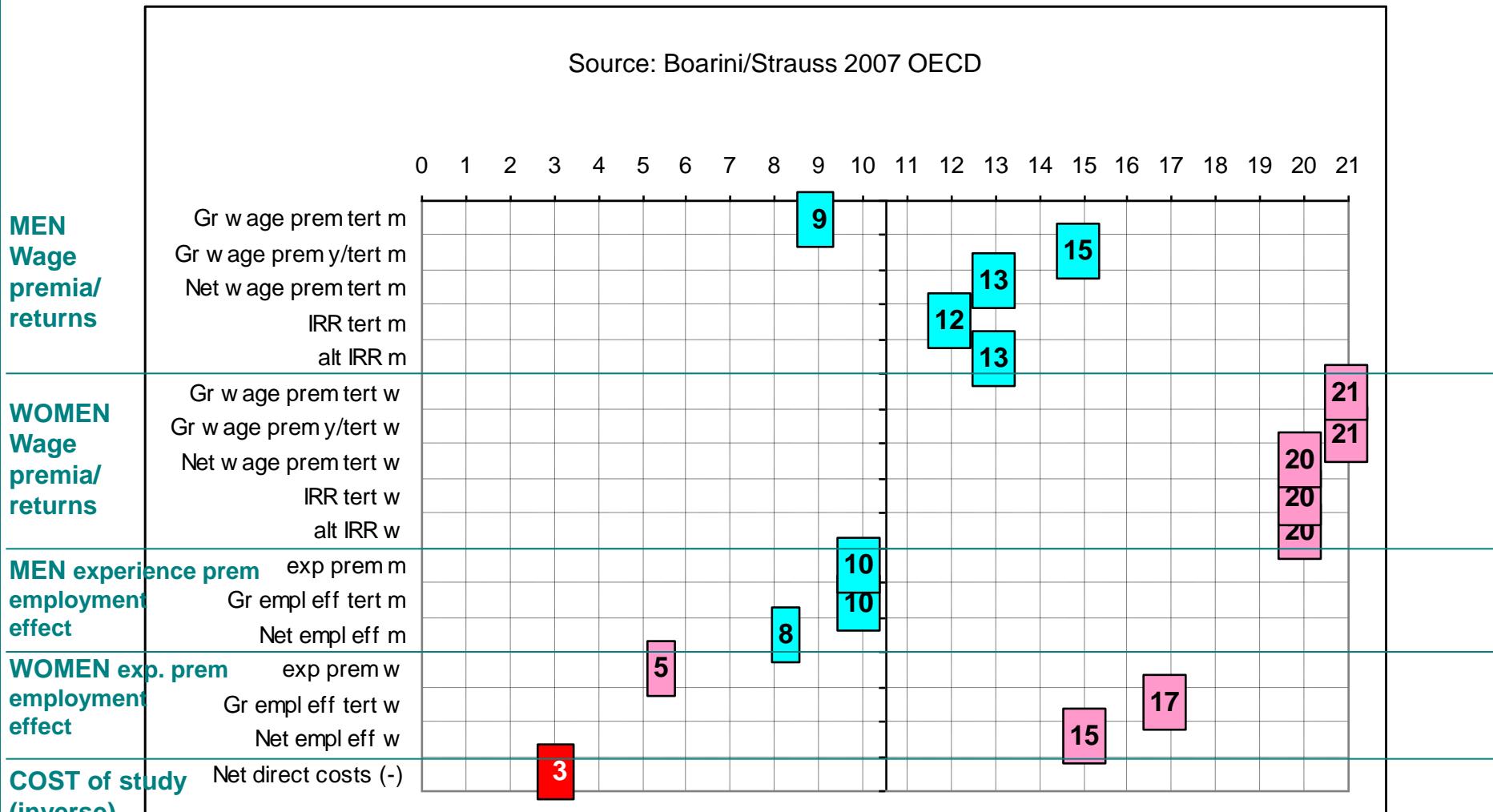
**Lohnprämien standardisiert auf 100, geordnet nach  
Hochschul/Sekundarbildung (Strauss/de la Maisonneuve 2007)**



—♦— tert prem m	—◆— tert prem w	—○— sec prem m
—●— sec prem w	□ exp y m	■ exp y w

# Examples for benchmarking: Returns to higher education

- Austria's ranking with returns to higher education by gender
  - 21 countries



# ‘Rhetoric’ of G and KBE and questions

- Assessment of the status-quo against the **challenges of G&KBE**
  - Positioning of the Austrian economy in global competition: mixed picture  
*Good aggregate performance; ,traditional markets‘, medium and low tech industries*
  - Institutional support? co-ordinated economy; strong social partnership  
*Contested (2000 ,new governing‘), difference SMEs-big industries/services*
  - Current crisis: some debate about ,new strategy‘:  
*Shift from innovation follower to innovation leader; a new ,rhetoric‘ of ,high skills‘?*
- Assessment of strategies and practices at the **demand side**
  - Key issue: how are **enterprise practices** situated vis-a-vis competition?  
*,High-skills, high wage‘ strategy: enterprises should/must change their practices*
  - Policy debates somehow ,stuck‘ in ,empirical fallacy‘  
*Search of what ,enterprises demand‘; issue of different equilibriums; ,medium skills‘*
  - Possible to get out from there? Cycles of Rhetoric without empirical ground?  
*\*Brown/Lauder/Ashton: ,Illusion‘*
- Potential impact of VET at the **supply side**
  - Impact of education (human capital) generally proved, however, ,devil in the details‘  
*Different channels theoretically: via stock/flow, temporary/lasting effects; role of diffusion*
  - Ultimately: attribution of the role of VET unclear (,proof‘ by aggreg.performance)

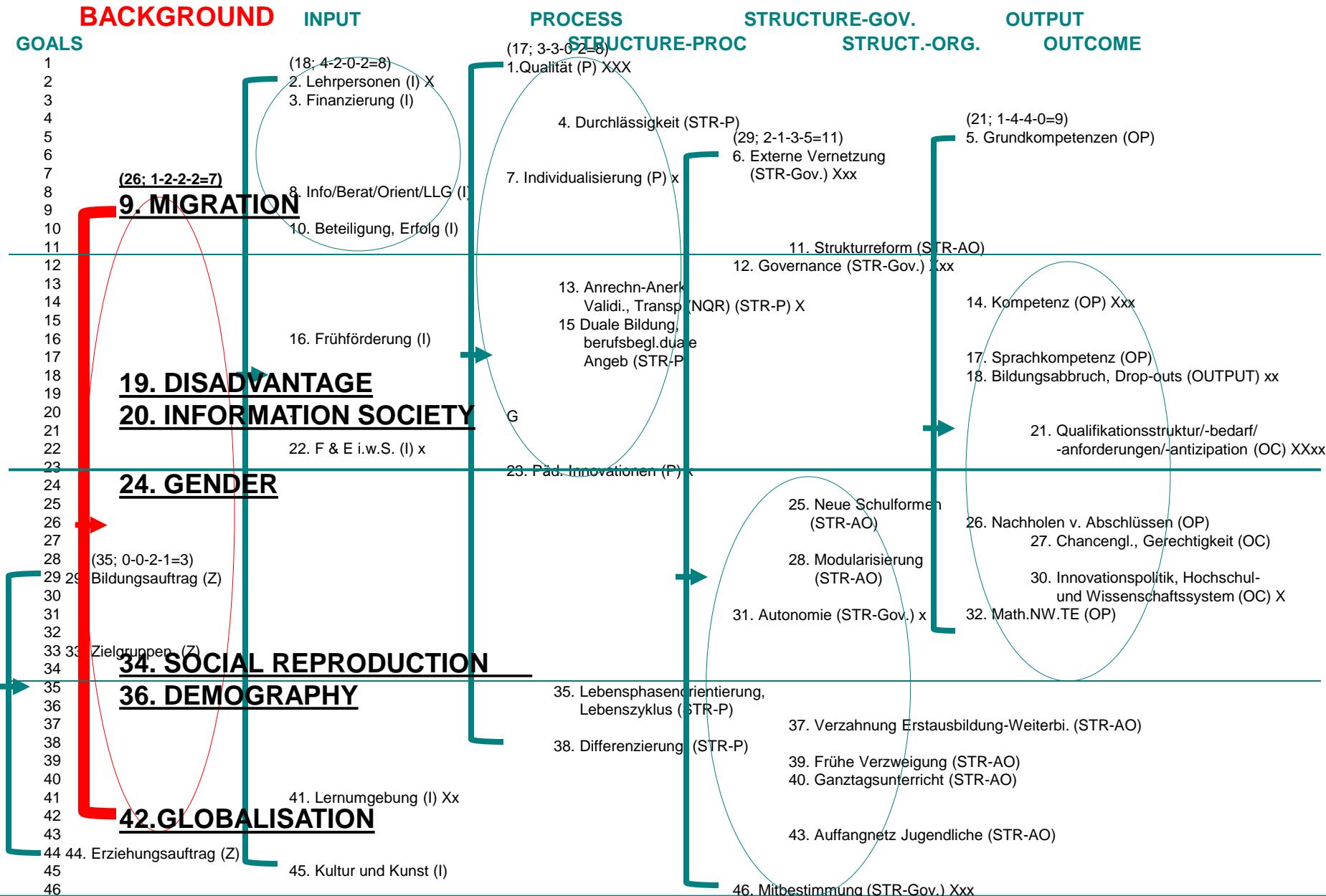
# ‘Counter-rhetoric’

- ‘Challenges’ by G & KBE: hegemonic ,neoliberal‘ discourse for maximation of profits
  - ,Globalisation’: struggle of corporations for world hegemony
  - ,KBE’: affirmative chiffre for commodification and capitalistic exploitation of knowledge and competences
- Policy and the state must hold/regain primacy against economic power
  - Education as a right *against* education as a commodity and economic good
- Economic rationale must not ,dominate‘ education
  - ,Bildung‘ must be set against ,economisation‘
  - A rich economy must afford more education (‘Bildung’)
  - Educationalists must set strategies for education against ‘hegemonic discourse’
- Austria: hypotheses from ‘counter-rhetoric’
  - Change of co-operative capitalism to (neo)-liberal capitalism
  - Pullout of the state from educational responsibilities in favour of private actors
  - One-sided efficiency and market guided reform (proposals) in education
  - ‘De-powering’ of the education community in favour of ‘business’
  - Business interests over social, democratic, and educational (cultural) objectives

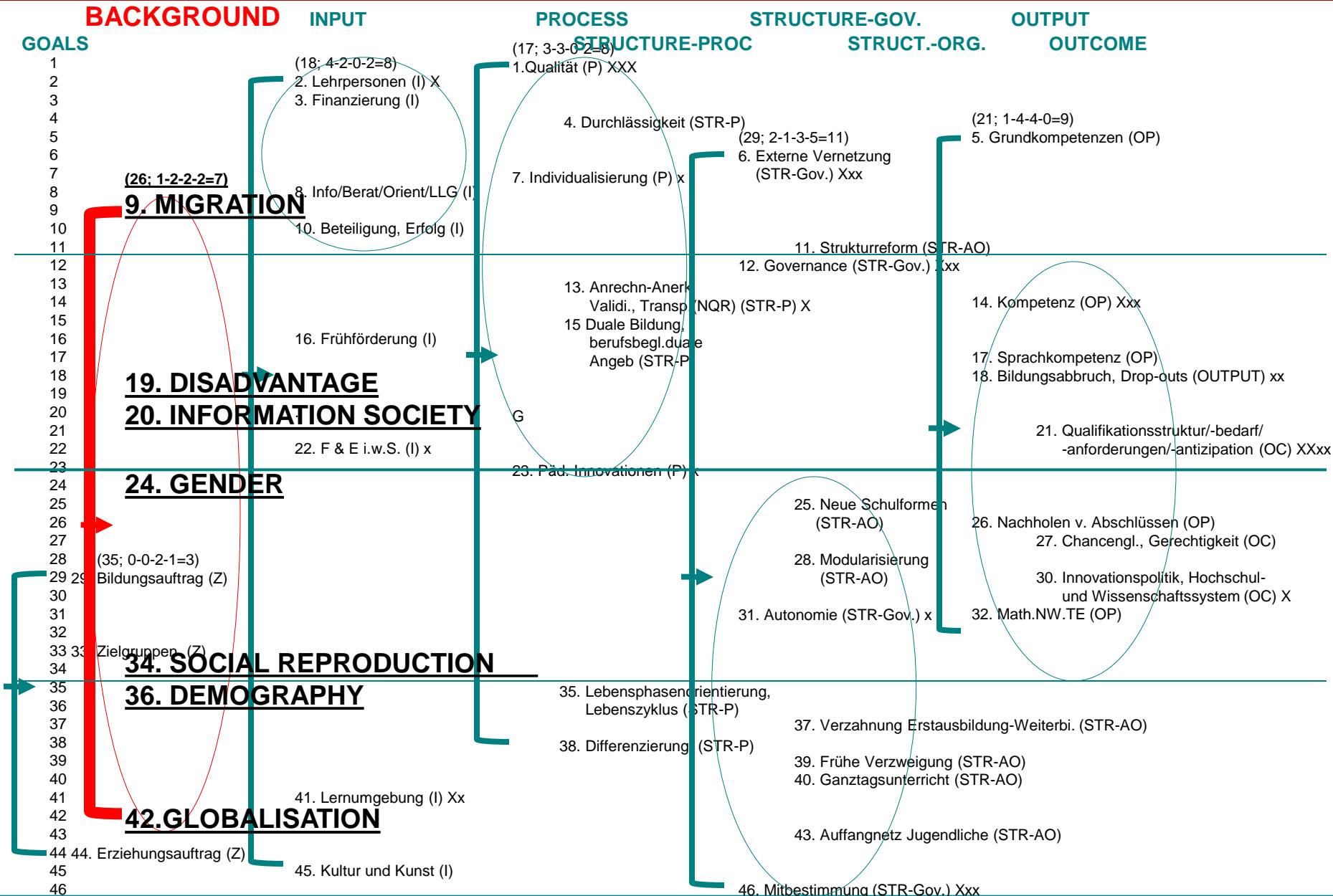
# Political ,reality‘ 1: Structure of the education policy discourse

- How are ‚challenges‘ reflected in education policy?
  - Is the ‚rhetoric‘ reflected by high emphasis on globalisation and KBE?
  - Is there a hegemonic discourse about these issues?
- Analysis of programmatic documents about education policy (12 programmes 2005-2008: <http://www.equi.at/material/Politikprogr08.pdf>)
  - ‚Challenges‘ in the very background, mainly as ‚rhetoric‘ in the preamble, except migration
  - KBE in the middle, globalisation in the rear of shared priorities
  - ‚Social reproduction‘ seems the main underlying issue of educational programmes
- Conclusion
  - Neither are programmes destined to implement answers to challenges...
  - ...nor do globalisation and KBE dominate the ‚hegemonic discourse‘
- Political discourse seems rather driven by path-dependency and peculiarities of the education system
  - We also don‘t find a shift from inputs to outputs/outcomes or ...
  - ...from specific statements to programmatic statements
  - this might be determined by the shape of the governance structures

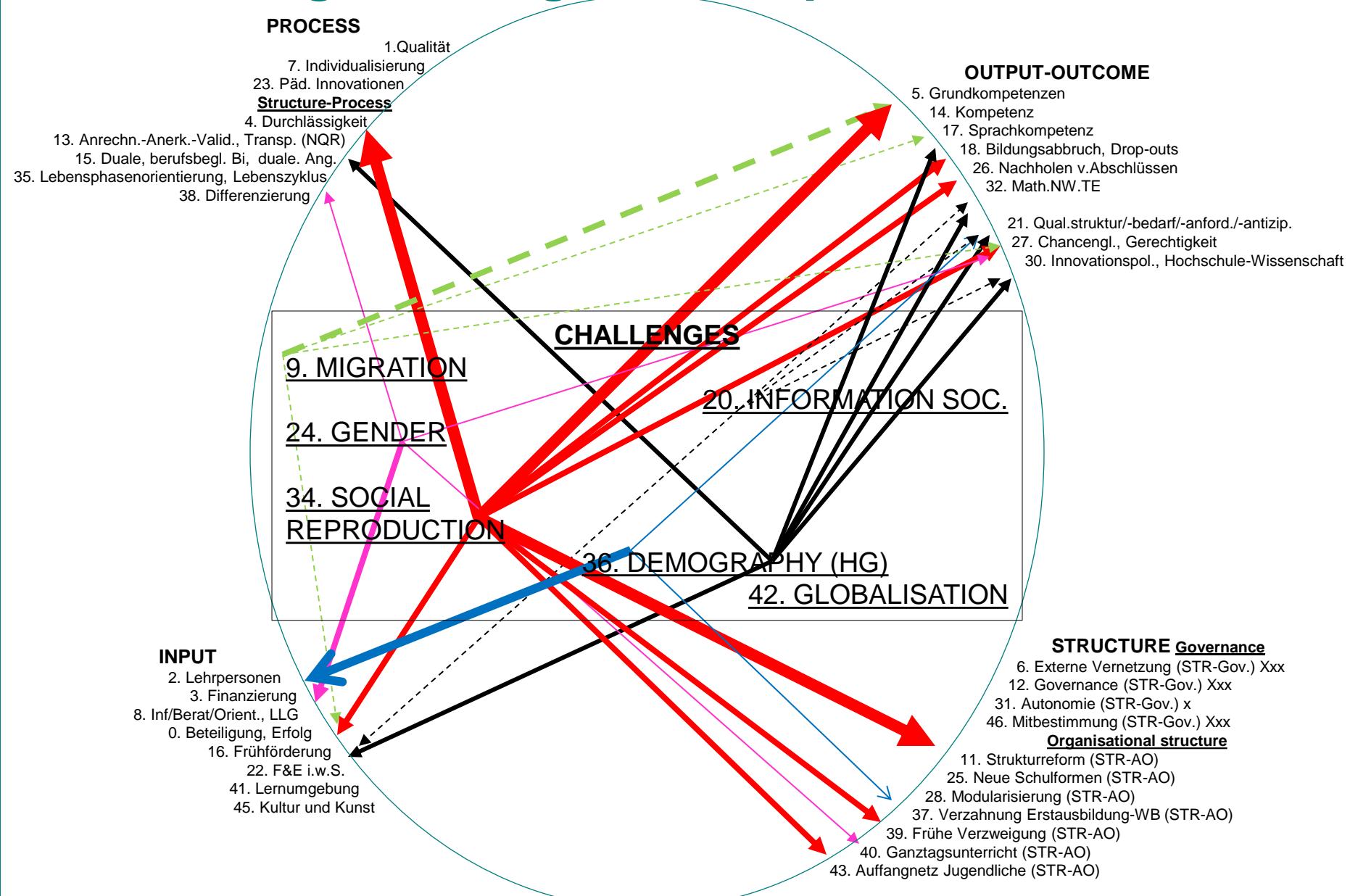
# 'Challenges' in political programmes

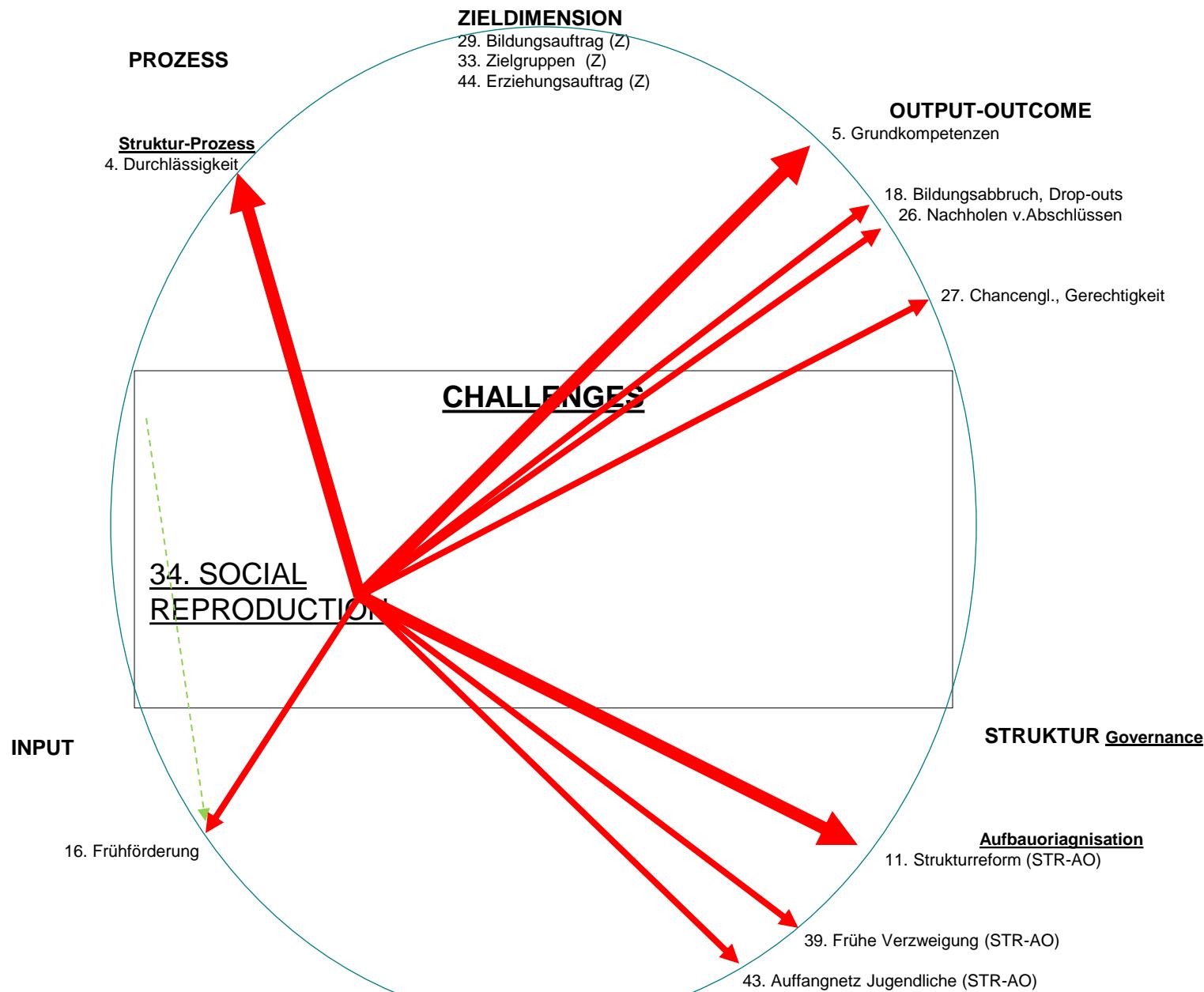


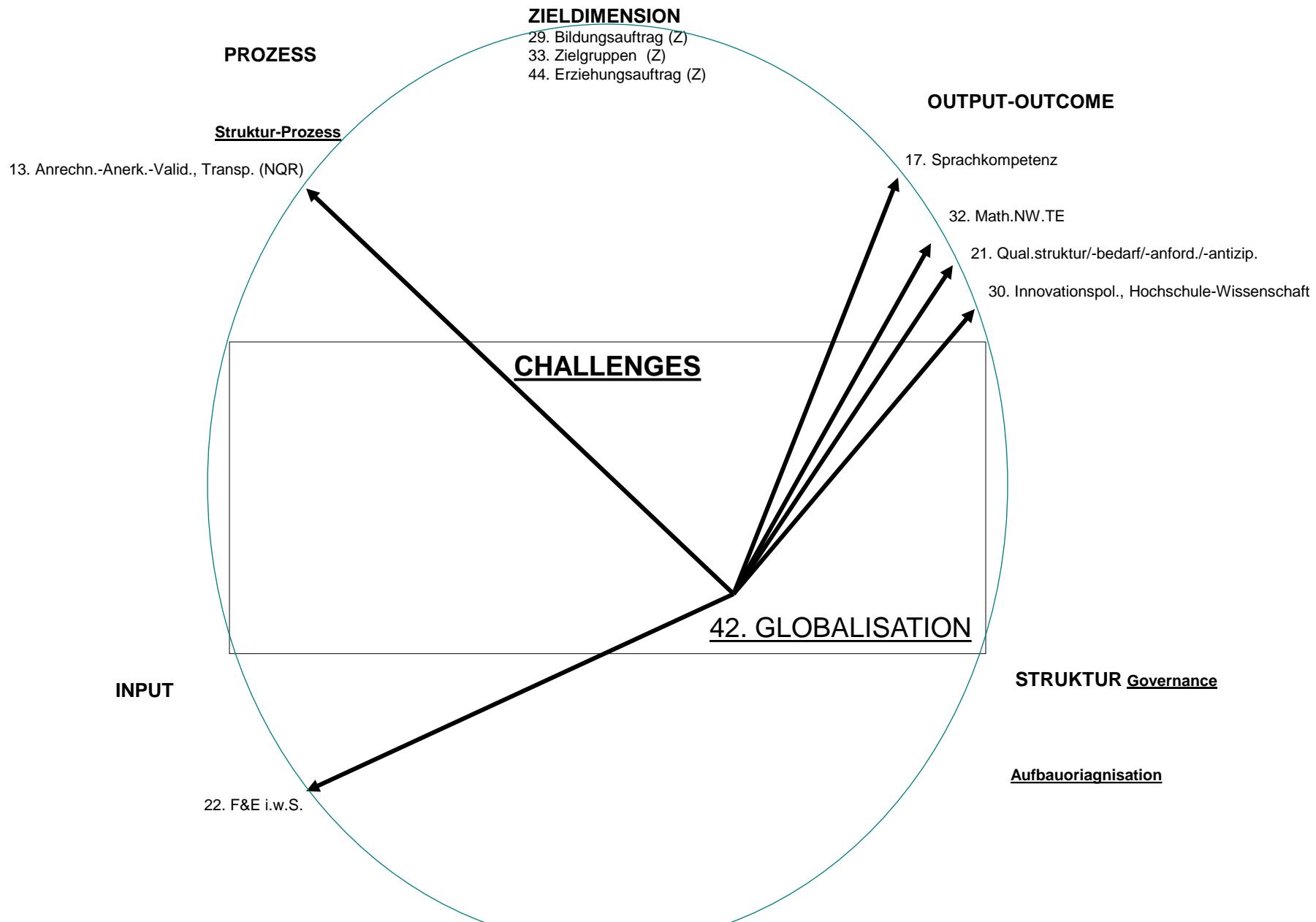
**,Ranking' of issues: ,Big challenges' rather low; ,Input-Process' high; ,Structure' low; ,Output-outcome' medium; ,Goals' lowest**

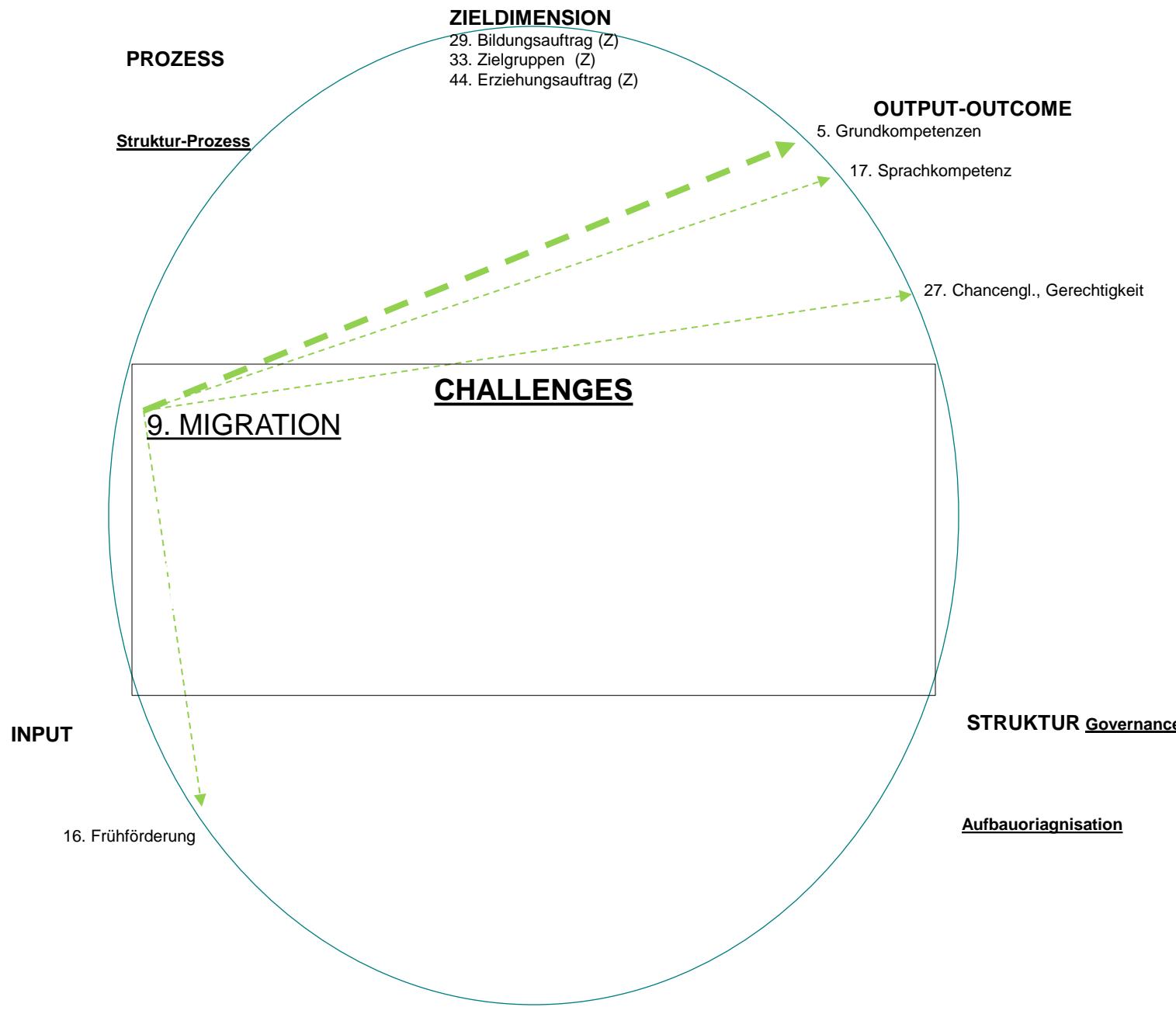


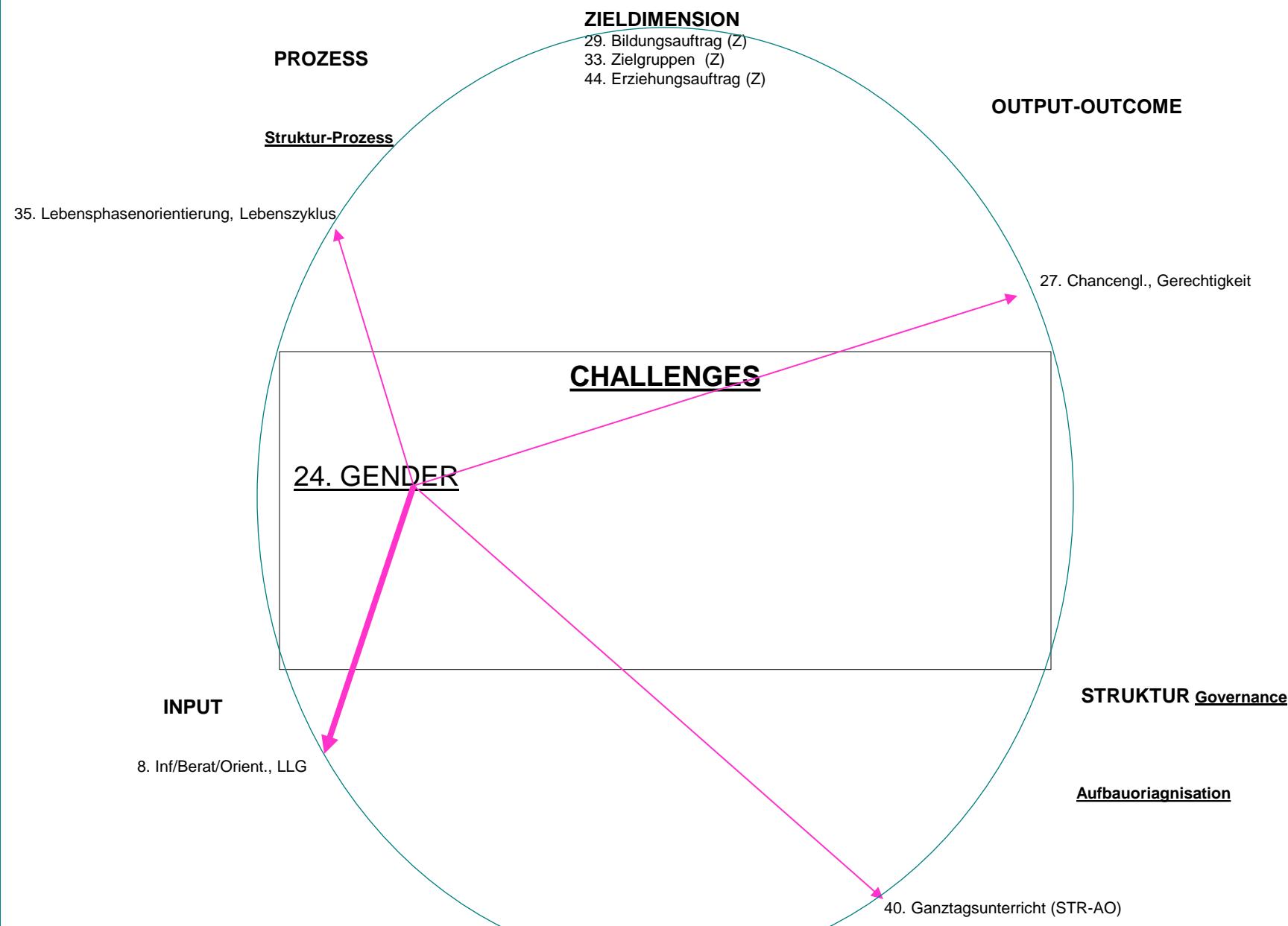
# 'Big challenges' and specific issues

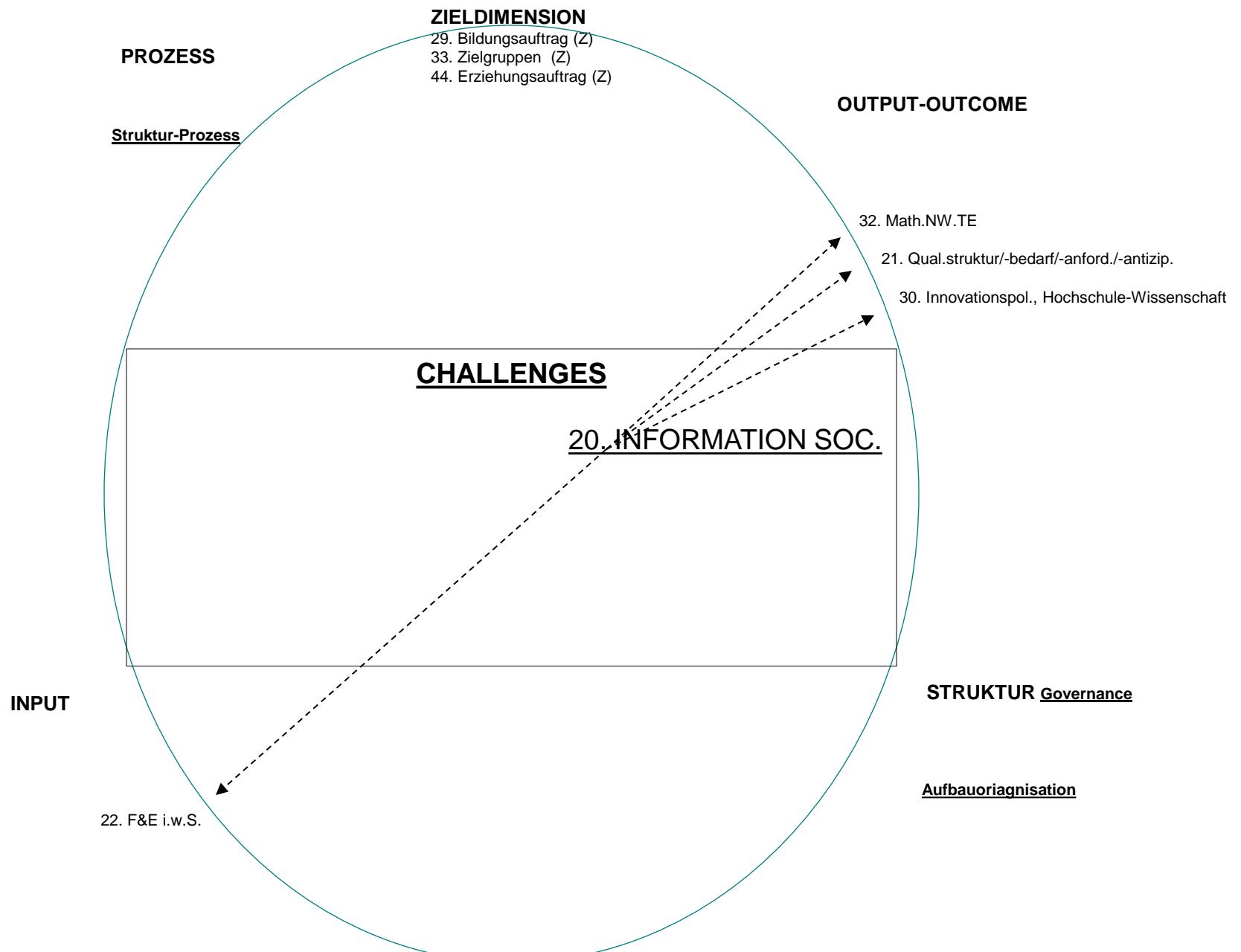


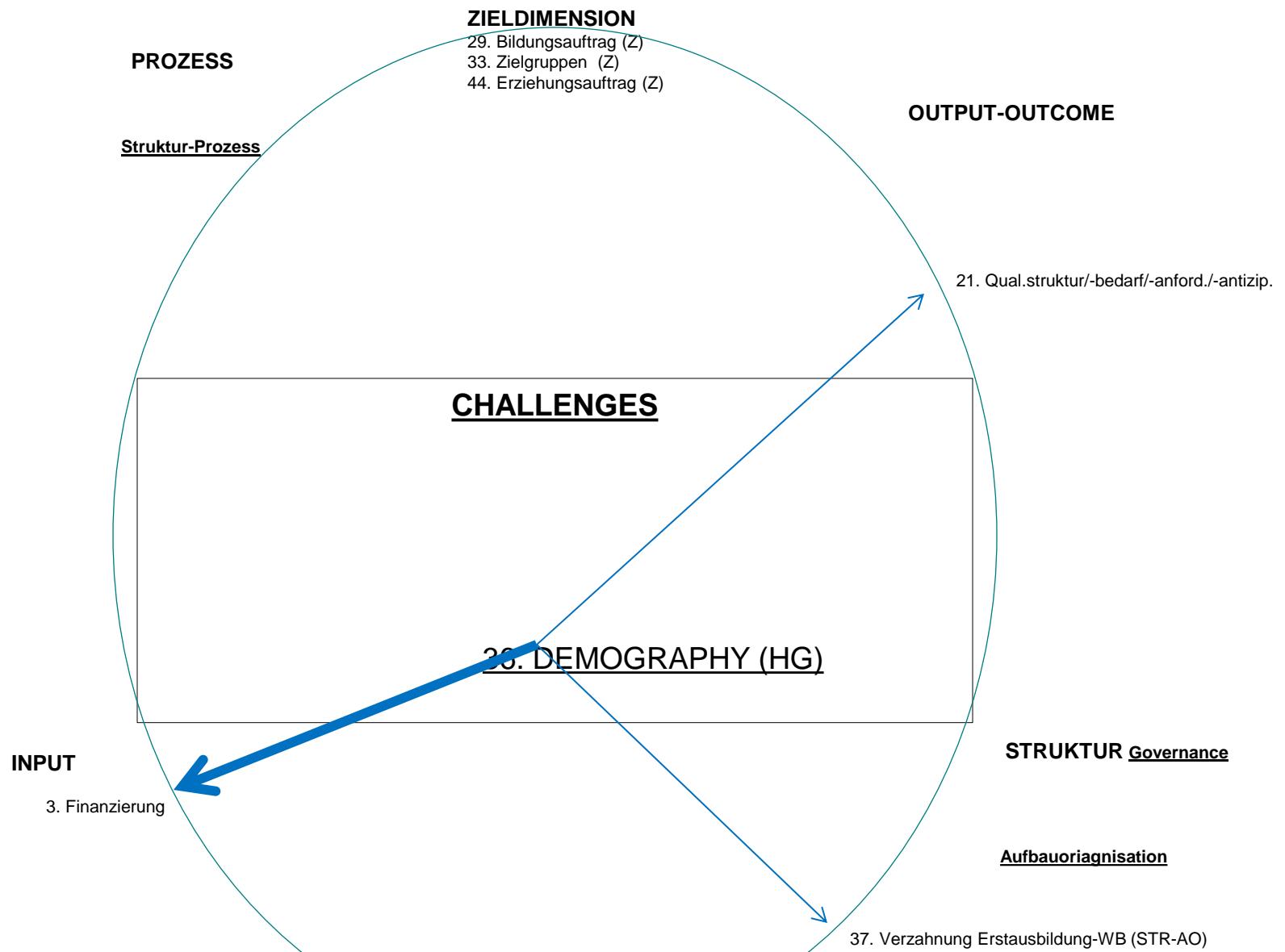


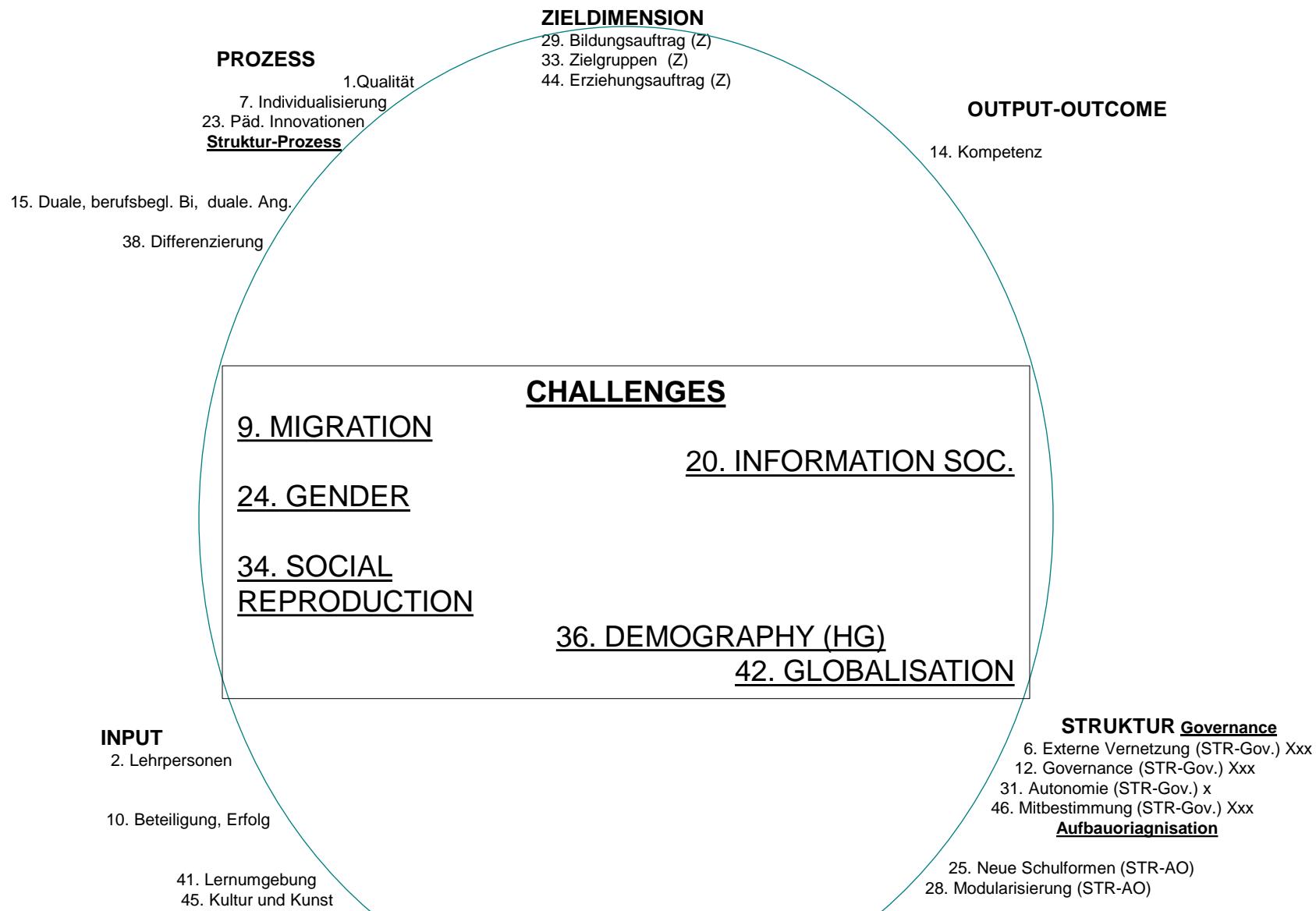












# Criss-crossing topics

9. MIGRATION

5. Basic competences  
16. Early childhood support

27. Equality of opportunity,  
equity

24. GENDER

34. SOCIALDISADVANTAGE

36. DEMOGRAPHY

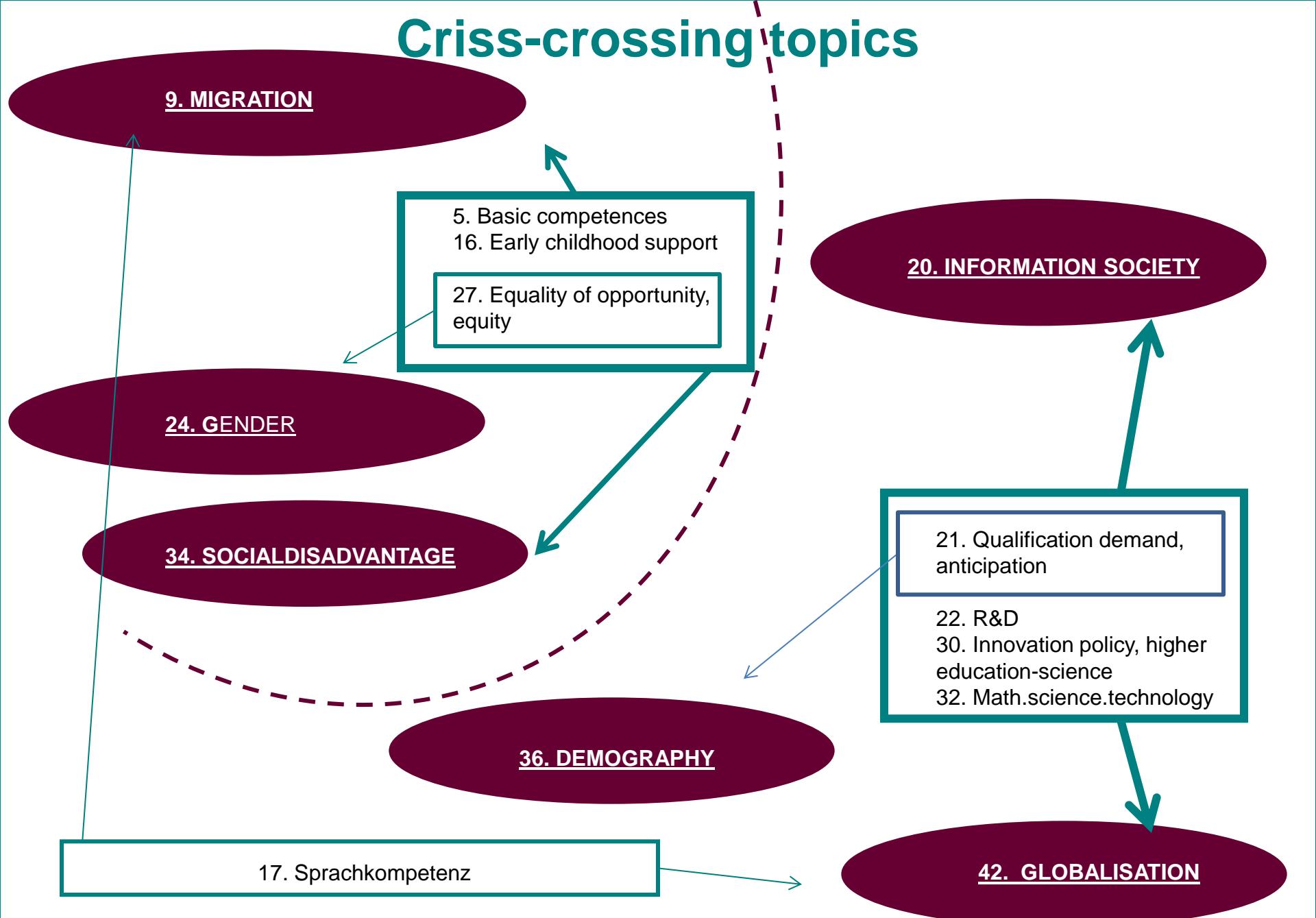
17. Sprachkompetenz

20. INFORMATION SOCIETY

21. Qualification demand,  
anticipation

22. R&D  
30. Innovation policy, higher  
education-science  
32. Math.science.technology

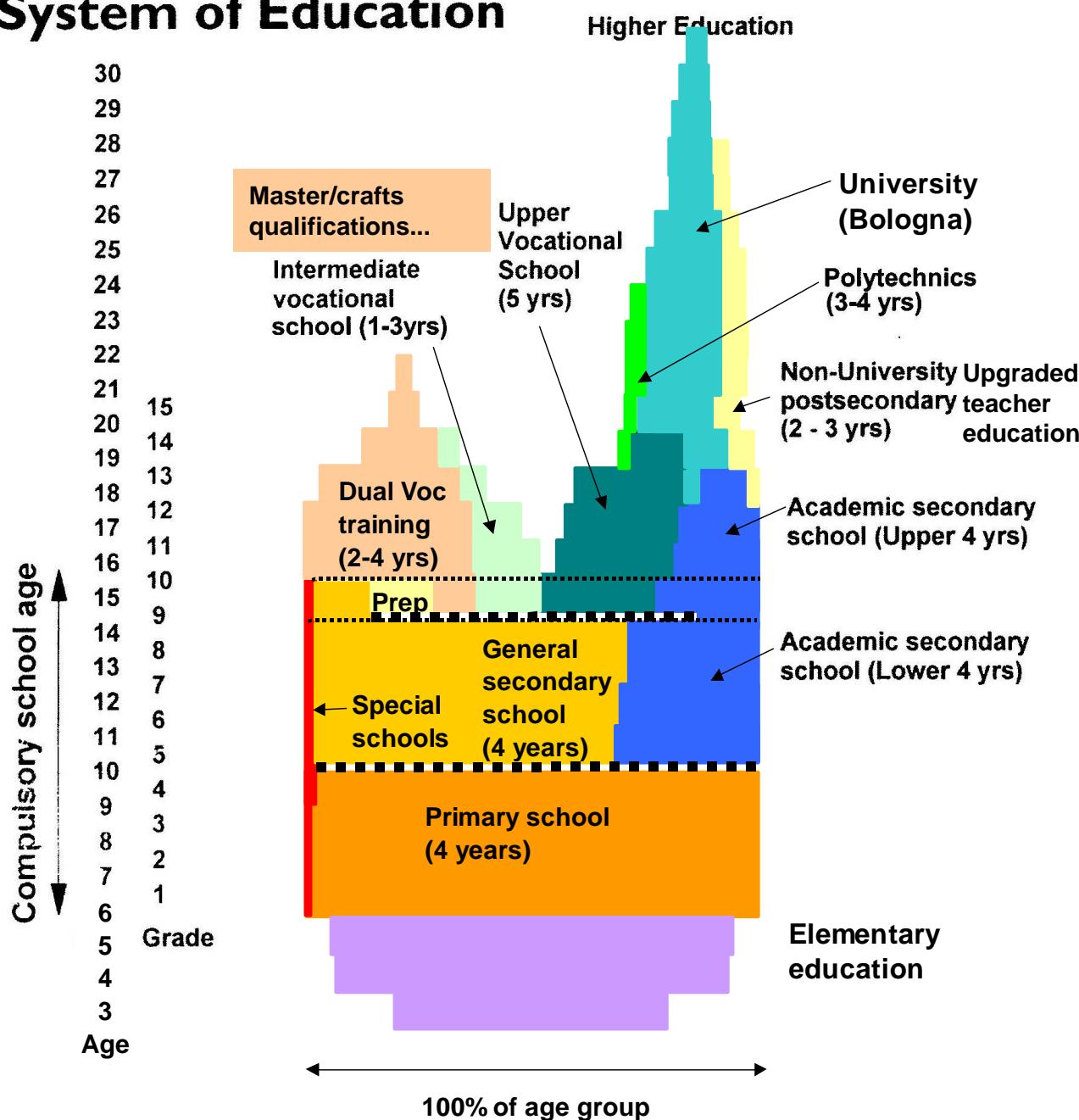
42. GLOBALISATION



# Political ,reality‘ 2: The education policy process

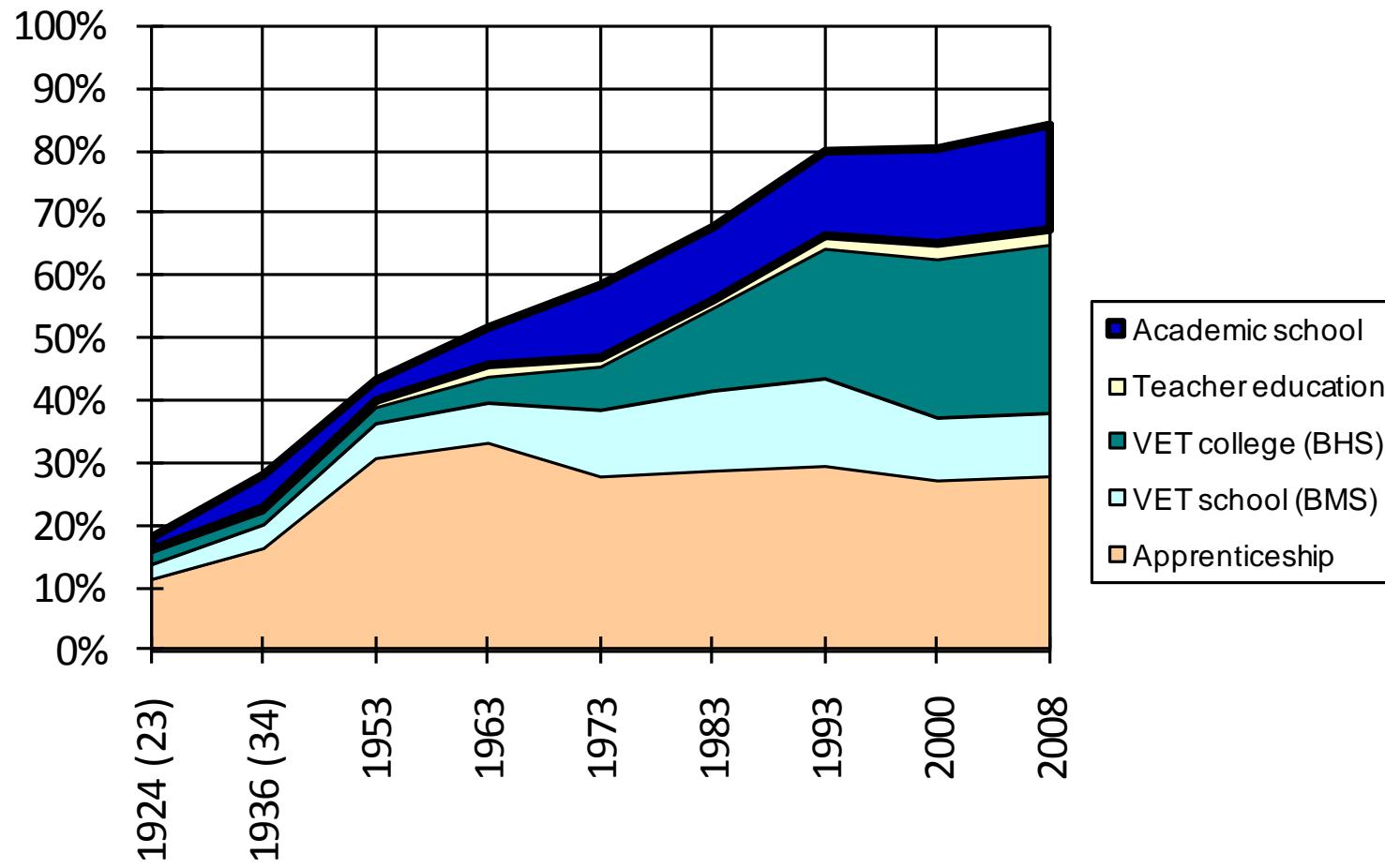
- ‘continuing policy disputes‘ without foreseeable solutions
  - A wide range of ‘reform issues‘ concerning most areas of education is under dispute, without solutions being in reach...  
*,Dauerdisput‘ – no word in engl. dictionary*
  - ...and without actors trying to reach solutions  
*a form of disputing always the same reforms instead of inventing always new reforms for dispute? – holding ‘the pendulum‘ constant?*

# System of Education

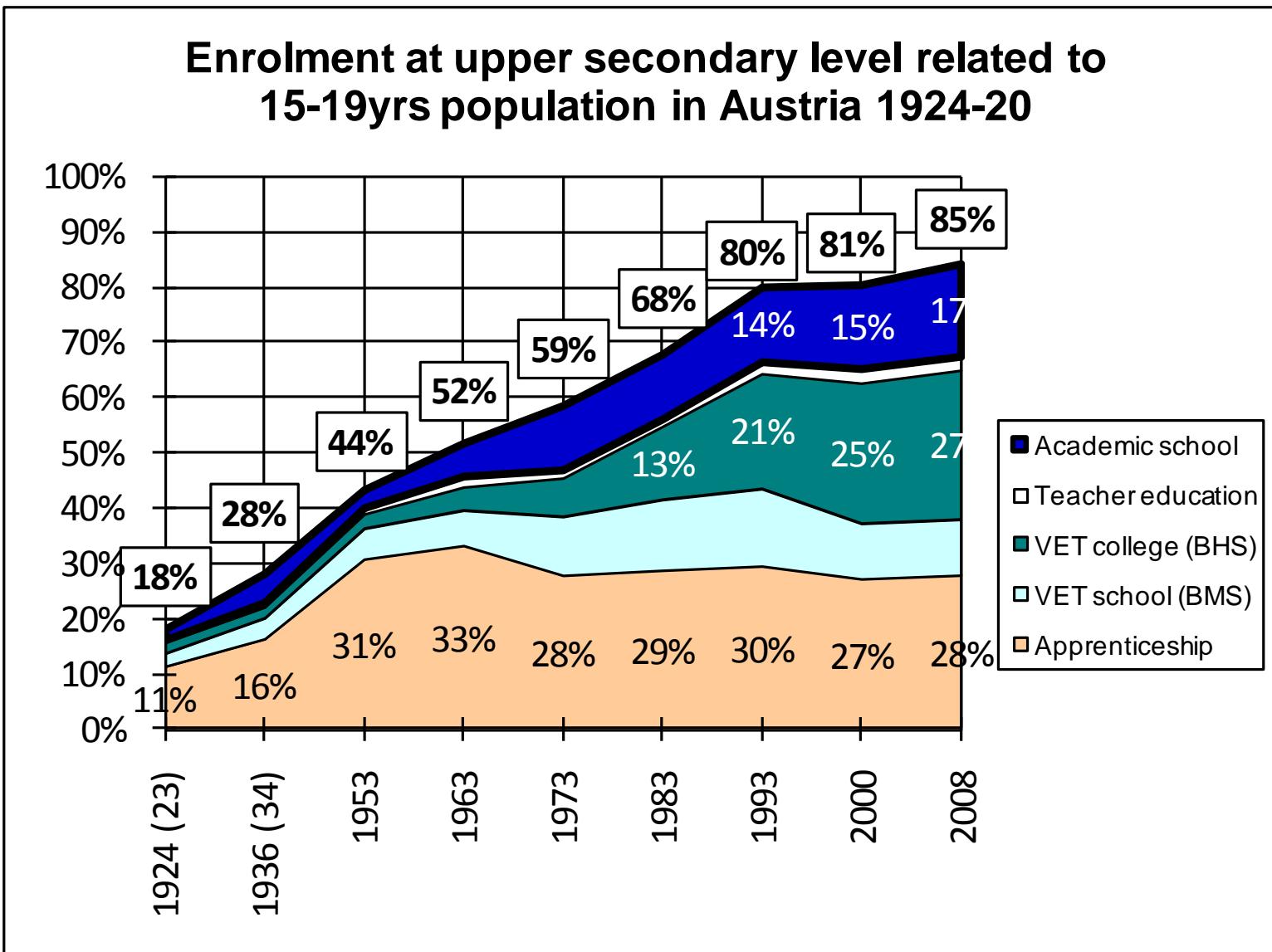


# Dynamics in VET: Evolution of tracked school-based VET

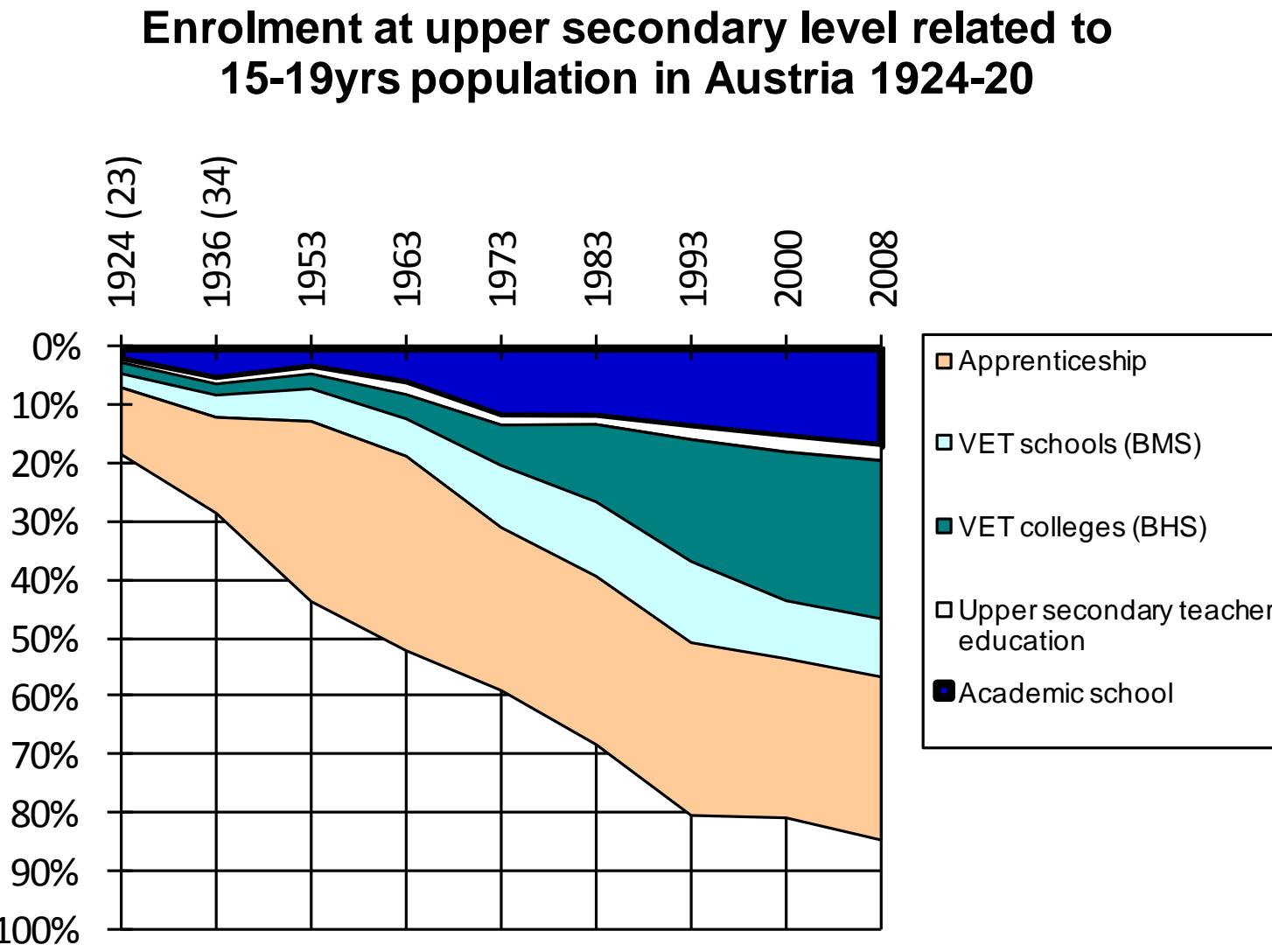
Enrolment at upper secondary level related to  
15-19yrs population in Austria 1924-20



# Dynamics in VET: HE-related VET-colleges main track

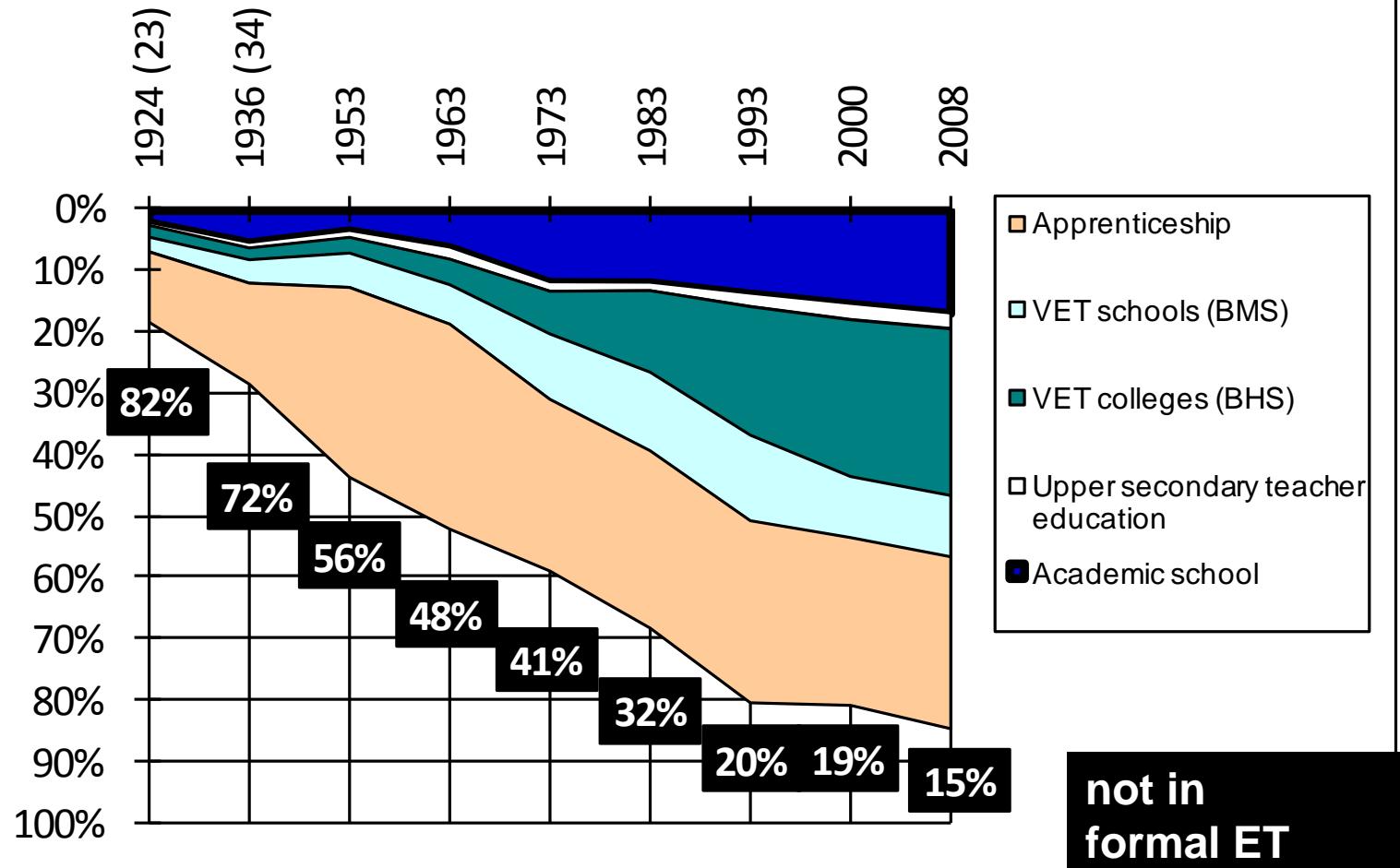


# Dynamics in VET: increased participation in tracked system

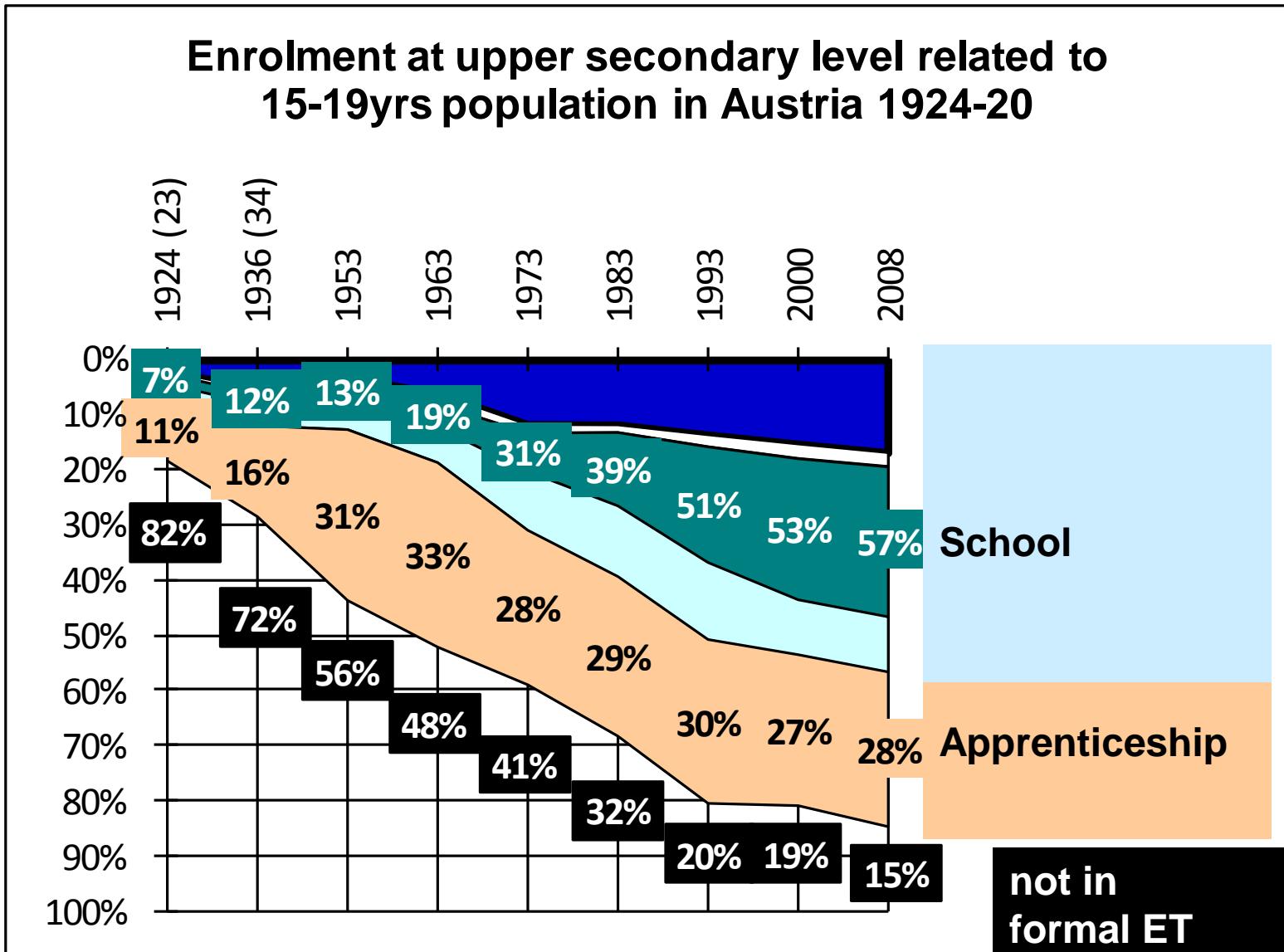


# Dynamics in VET: early school leavers & completers

Enrolment at upper secondary level related to  
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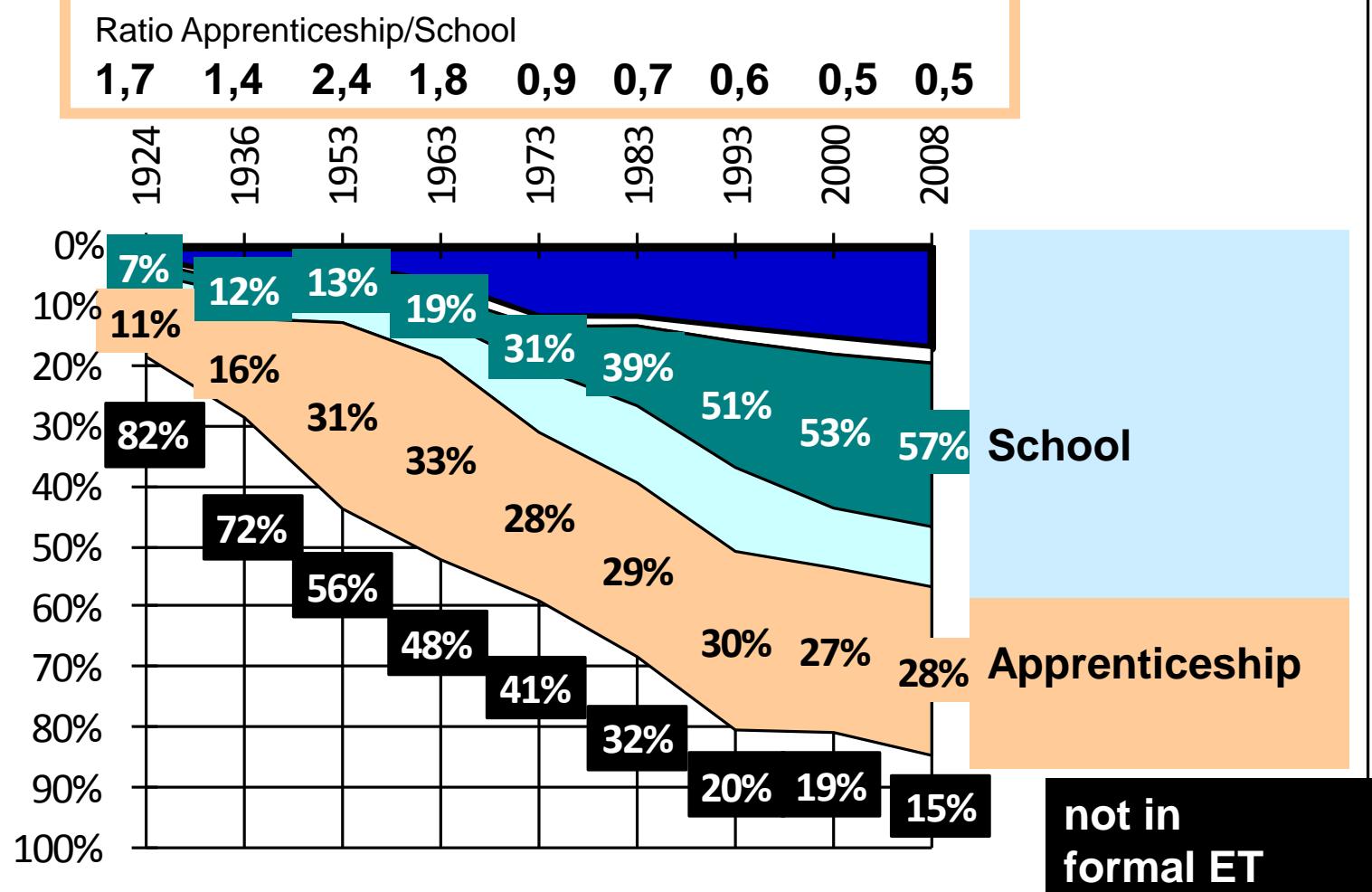


# Dynamics in VET: School dominates at upper secondary level...



# Dynamics in VET: ...since the 1970s

## Enrolment at upper secondary level related to 15-19yrs population in Austria 1924-20

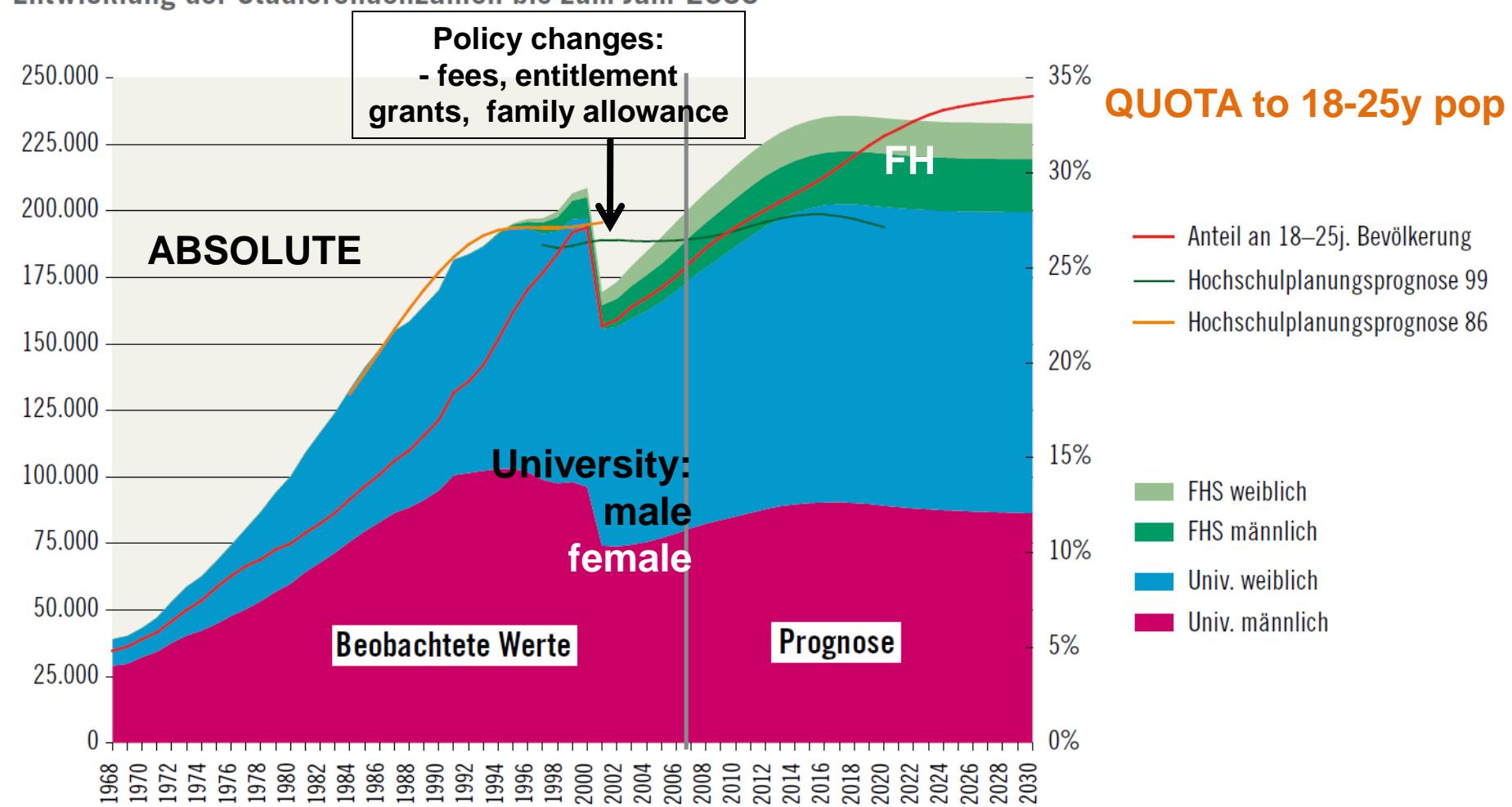


- Higher education: small elite-system, dominated by traditional universities
  - University access still controlled by upper secondary institutions
  - Speciality: VET-colleges provide similar entitlement as academic secondary schools
- Second tier (Fachhochschule-FH) established in 1990s
  - New framework, established from scratch (no upgrading of existing institutions)
  - New governance framework based on accreditation and institutional autonomy
  - Should provide new advanced VET-qualifications for industry and services
  - Should provide additional opportunities for access from apprenticeship, did not work, instead has shifted on top of VET colleges
  - Substantial ,academic drift‘ (main qualification after Bologna: master)
- Consequences
  - VET-colleges are substantial pipeline to higher education
  - Many students are ,doubling-up‘ their upper secondary qualifications in same field
  - FH only partly ,real‘ new business related opportunities for additional students
  - Substantial increase of costs of educational pathways

# Students University and FH

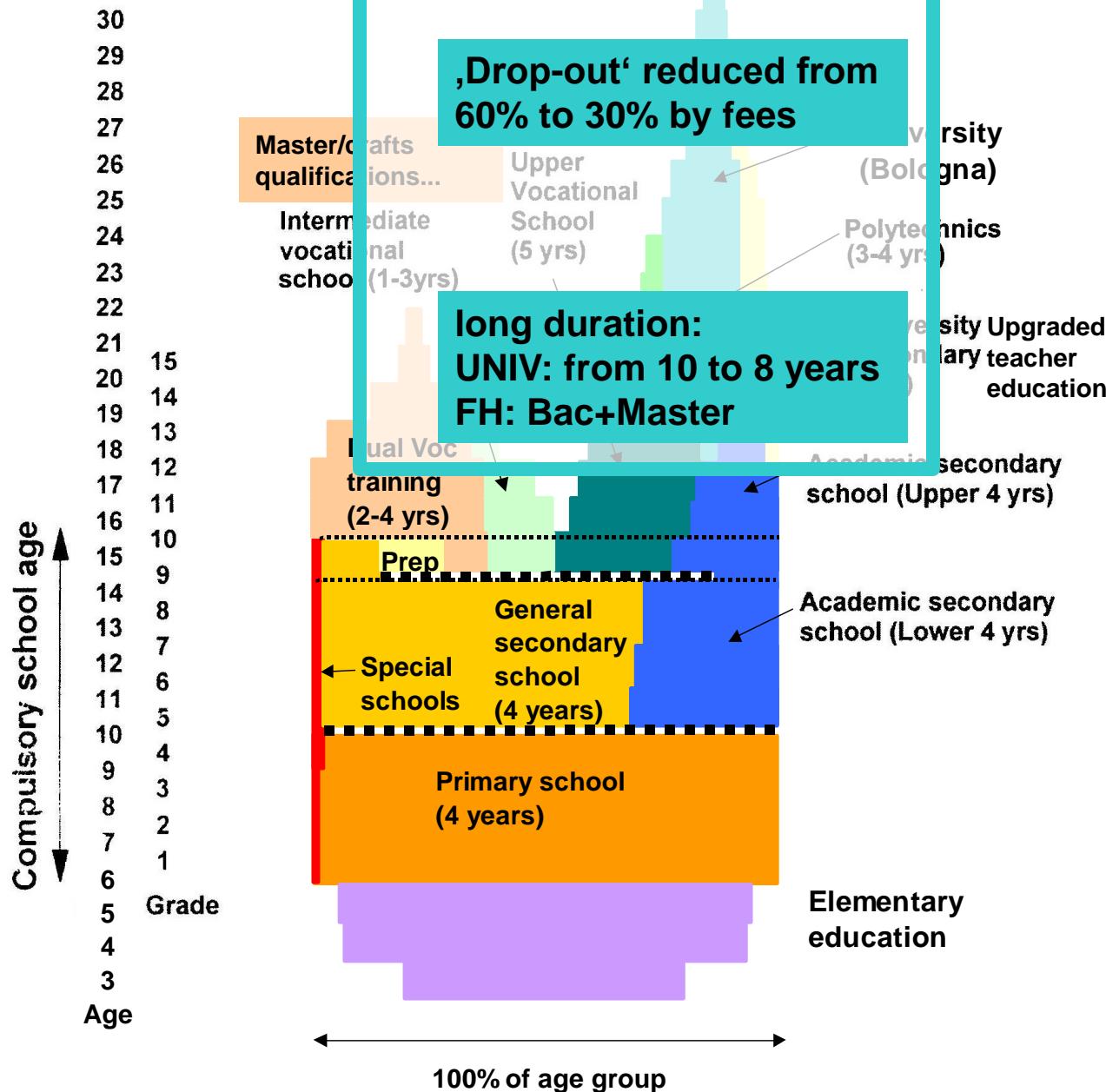
Abbildung 3.9-2:

Entwicklung der Studierendenzahlen bis zum Jahr 2030

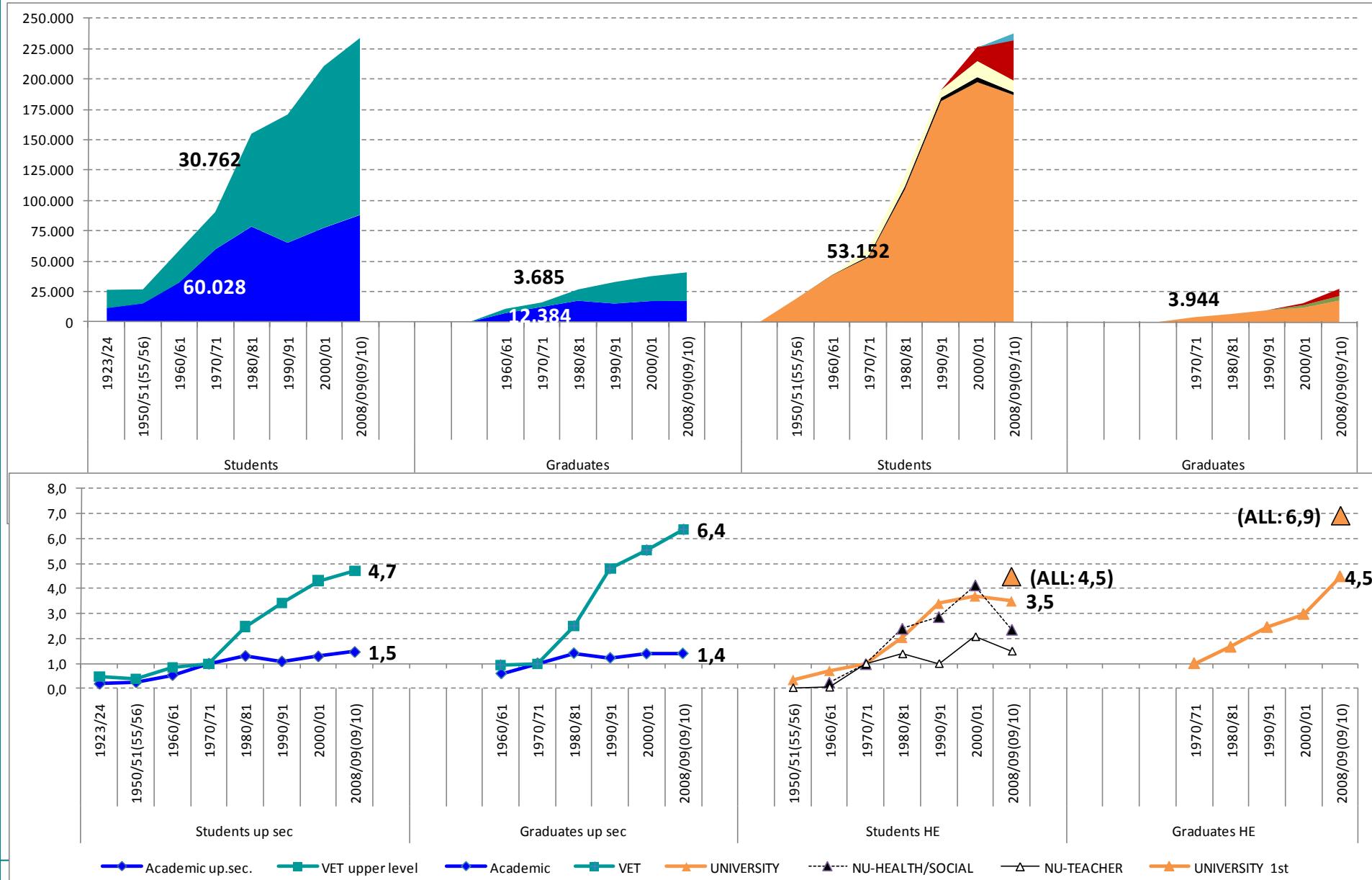


Quelle: Landler 2008

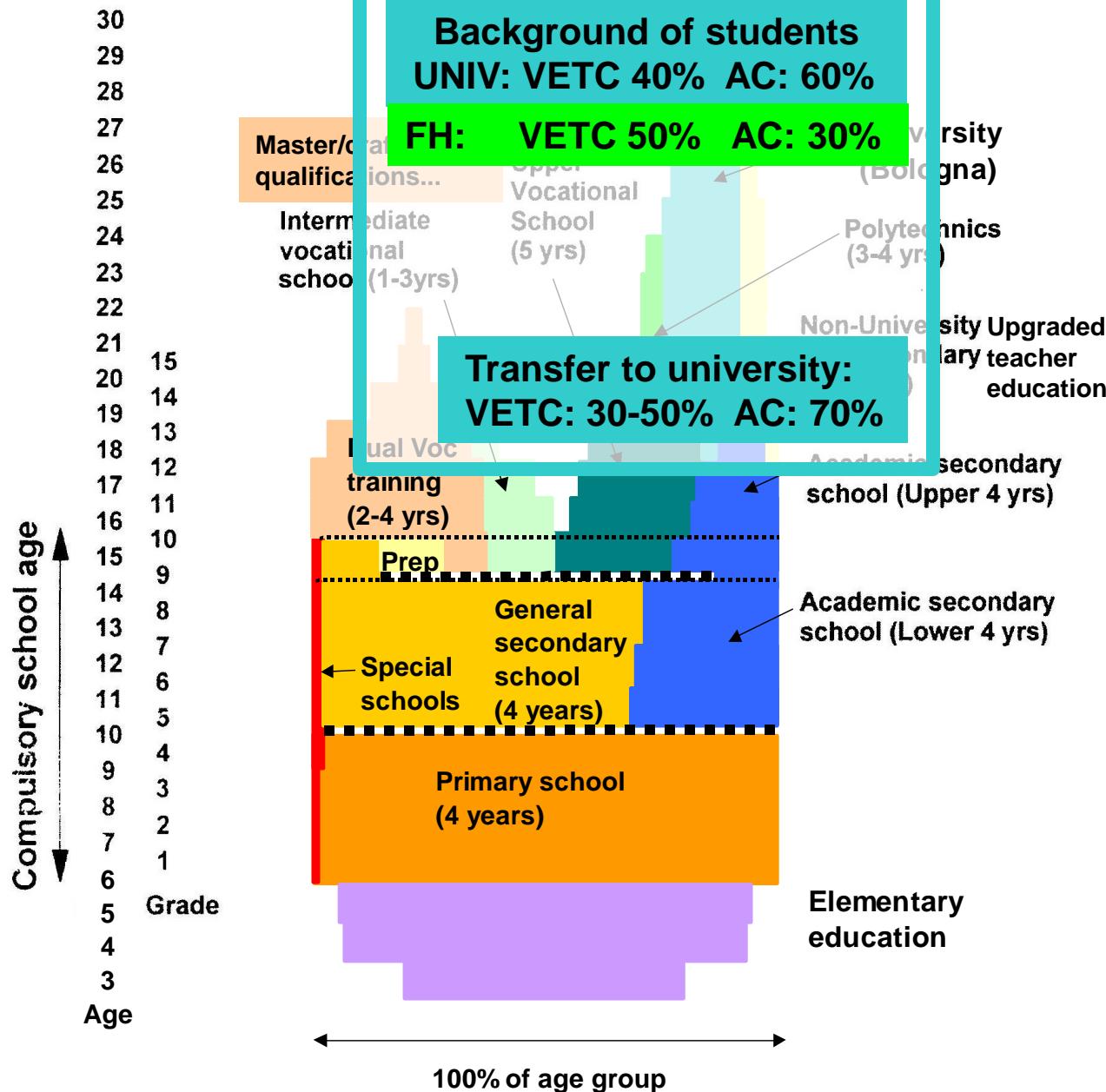
# System of Education



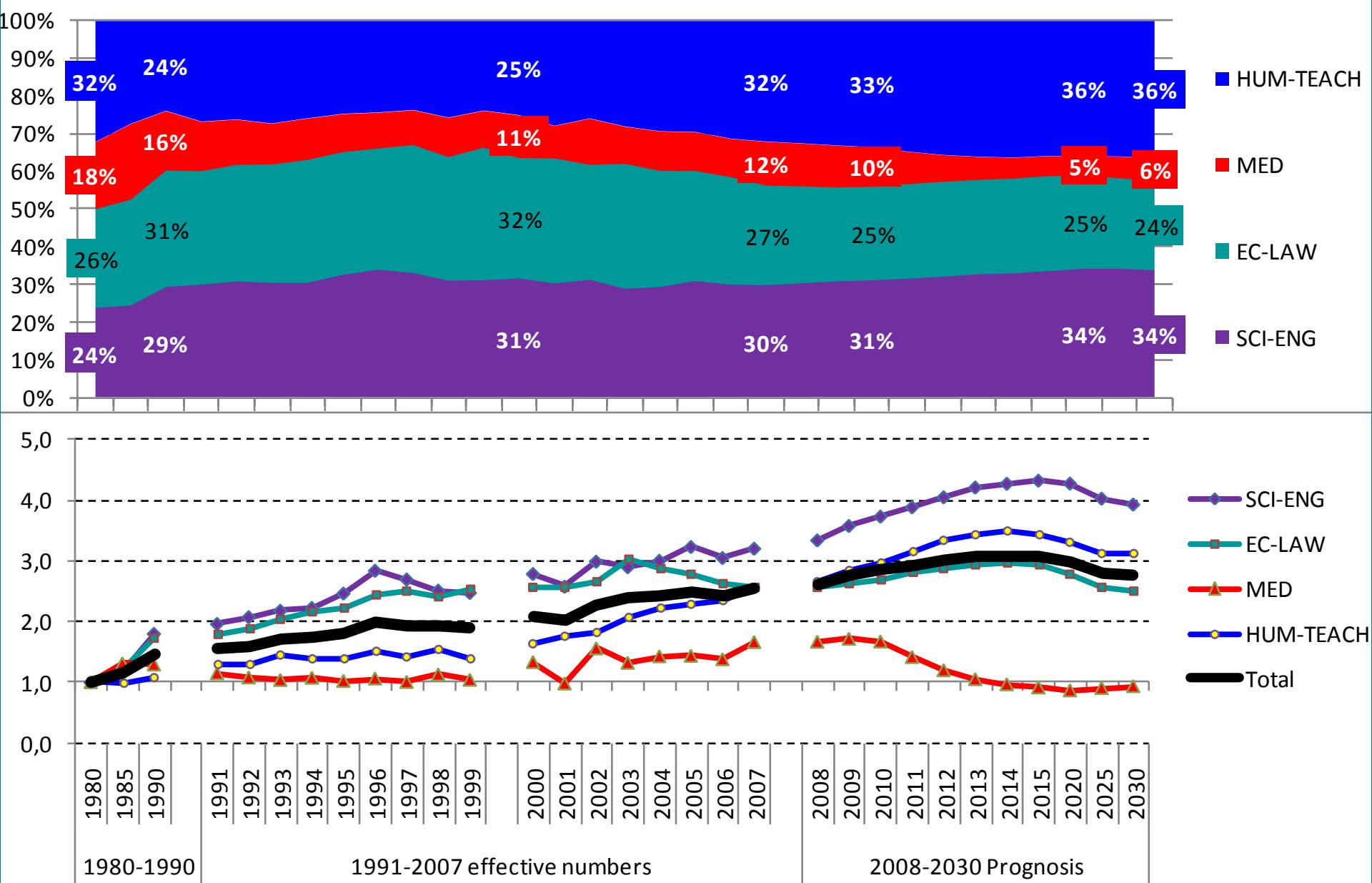
# VET and HE long term development



# System of Education



# University graduates by broad study fields

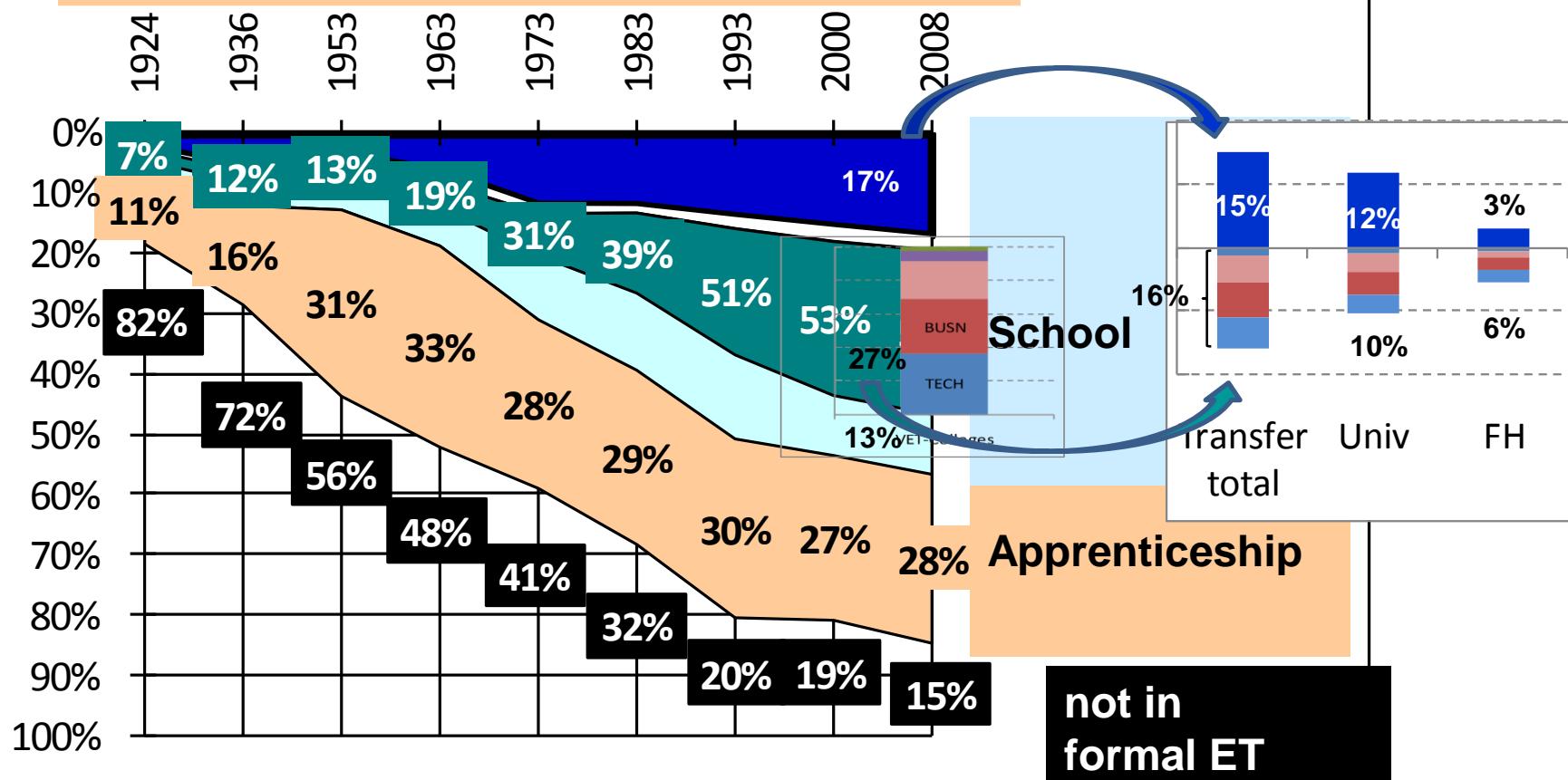


# ‘Double qualifications’

## Enrolment at upper secondary level related to 15-19yrs population in Austria 1924-20

Ratio Apprenticeship/School

1,7 1,4 2,4 1,8 0,9 0,7 0,6 0,5 0,5

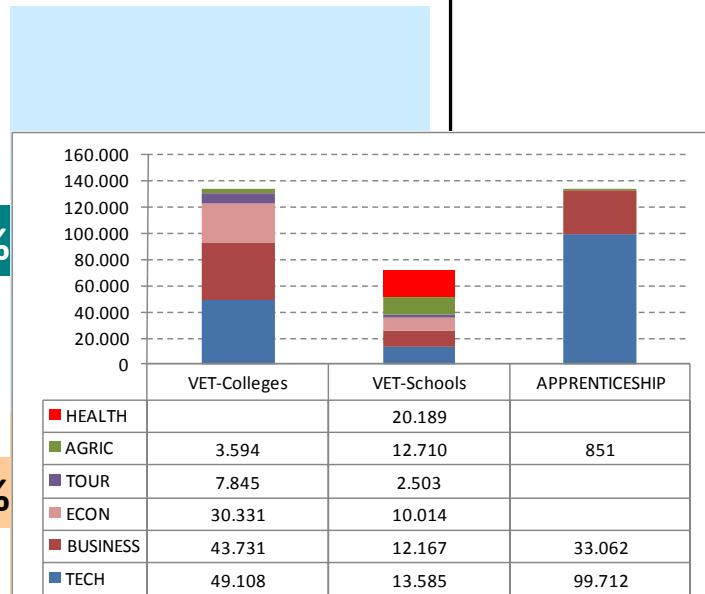
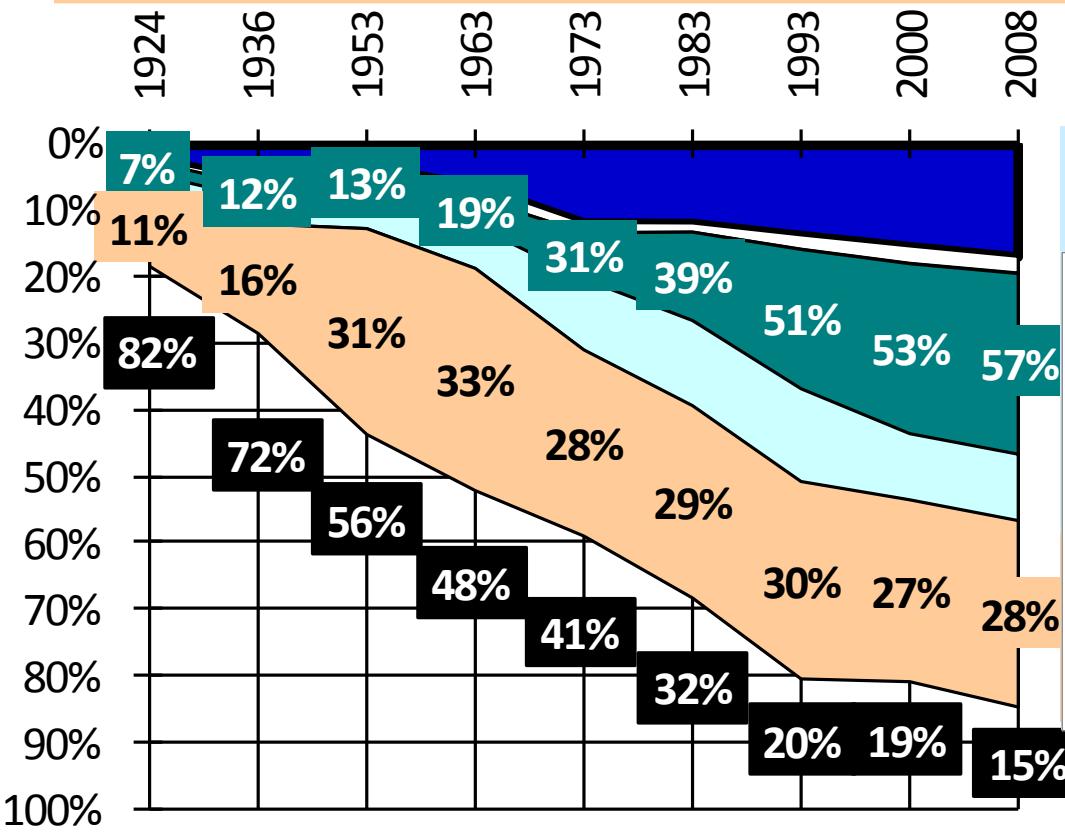


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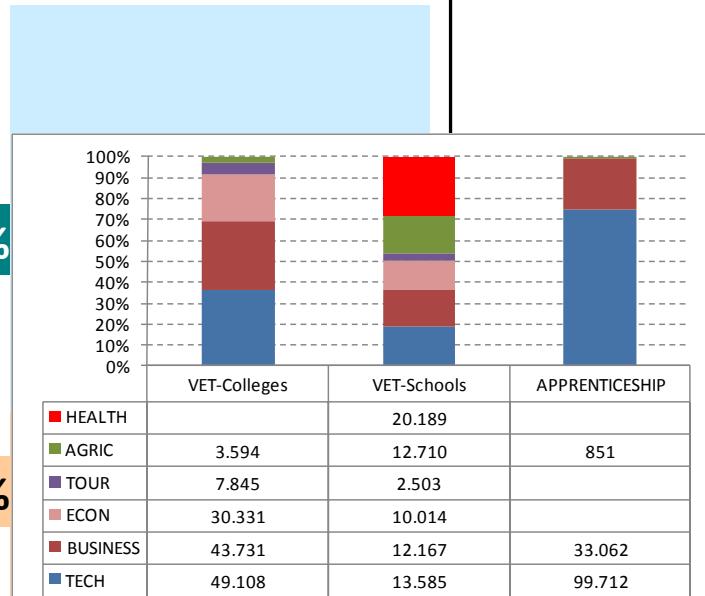
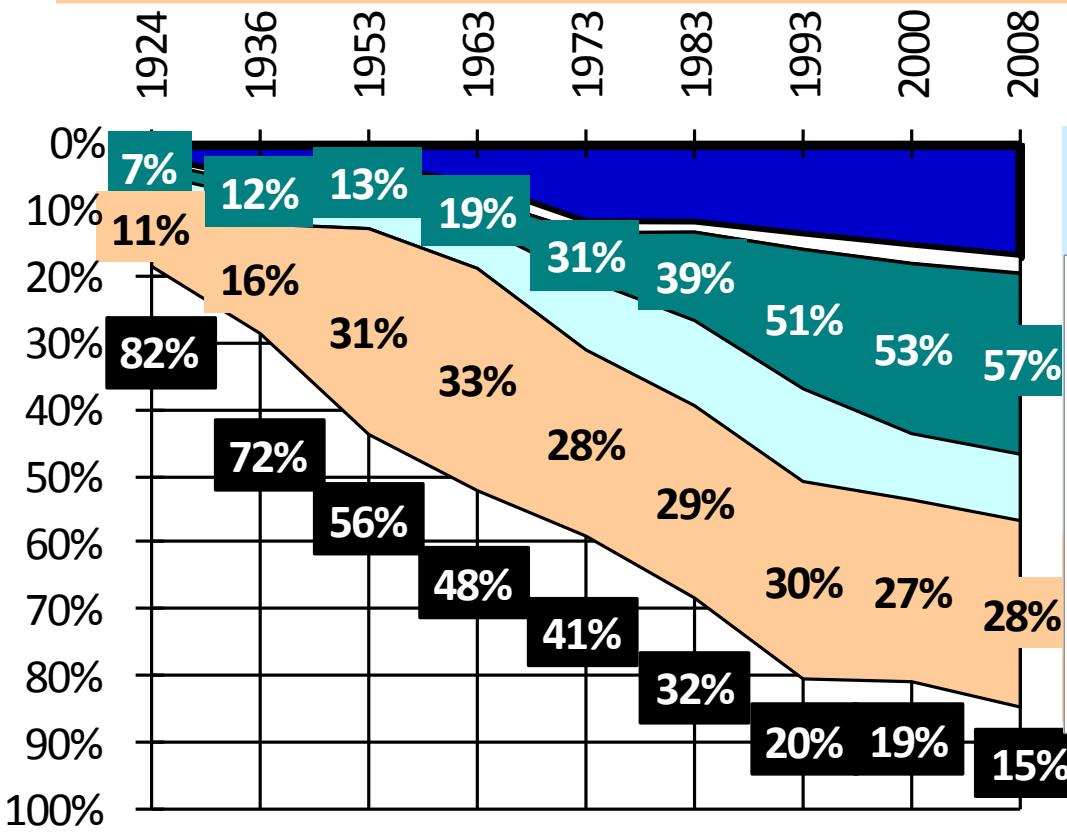
not in  
formal ET

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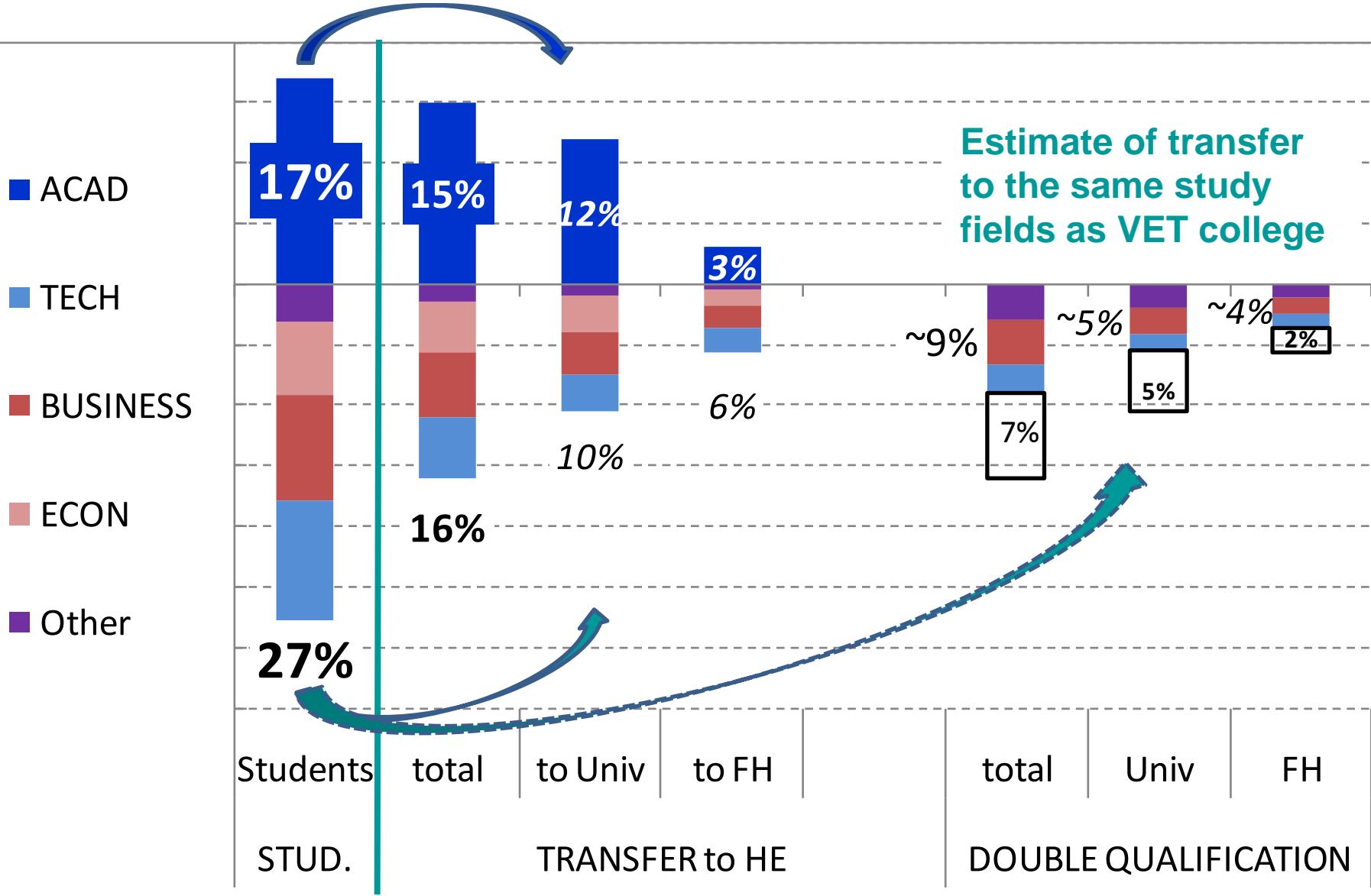
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# ,Double qualifications‘



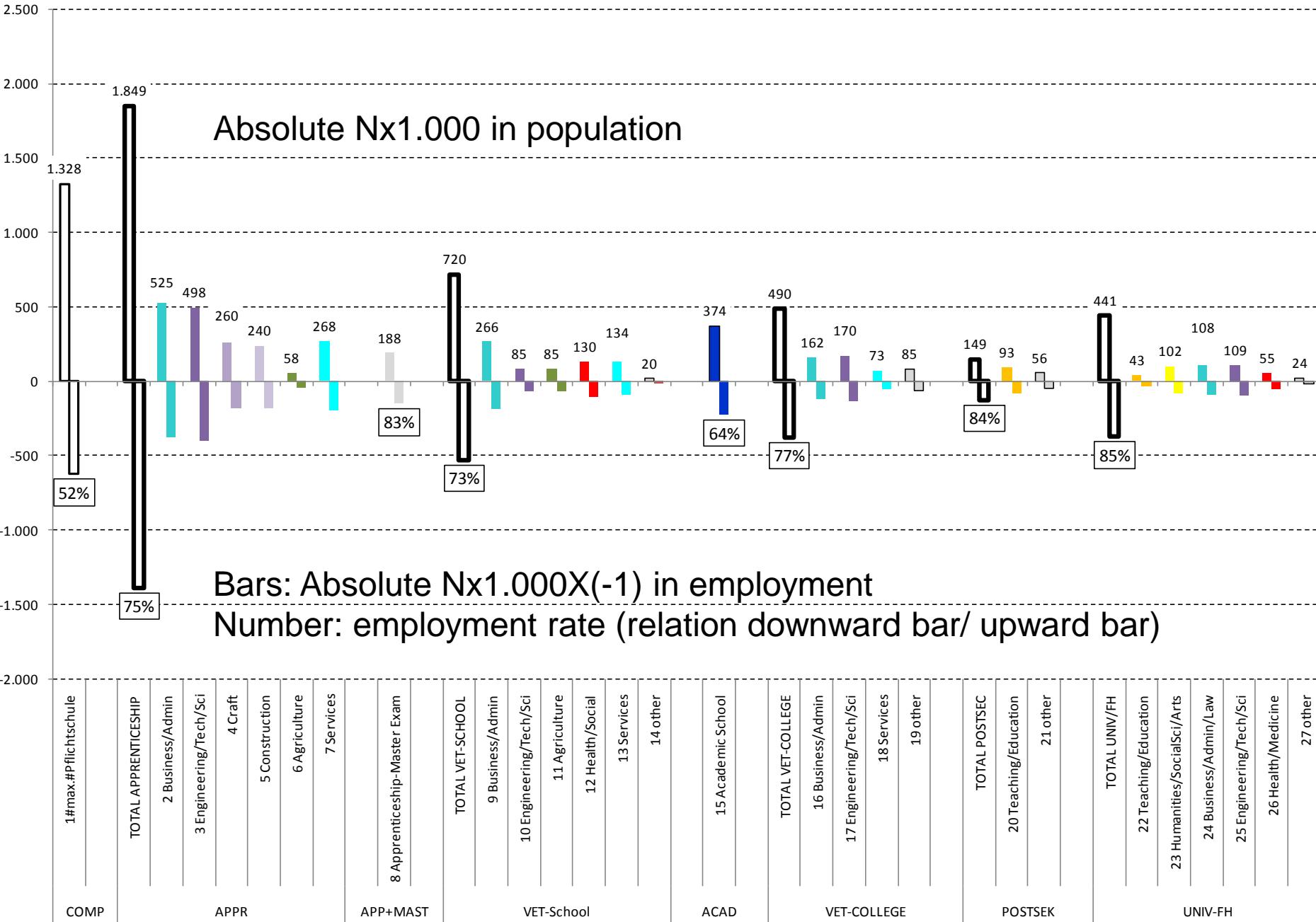
# Supply in population (15-64y) and employed (employment rate)

N x 1.000, %

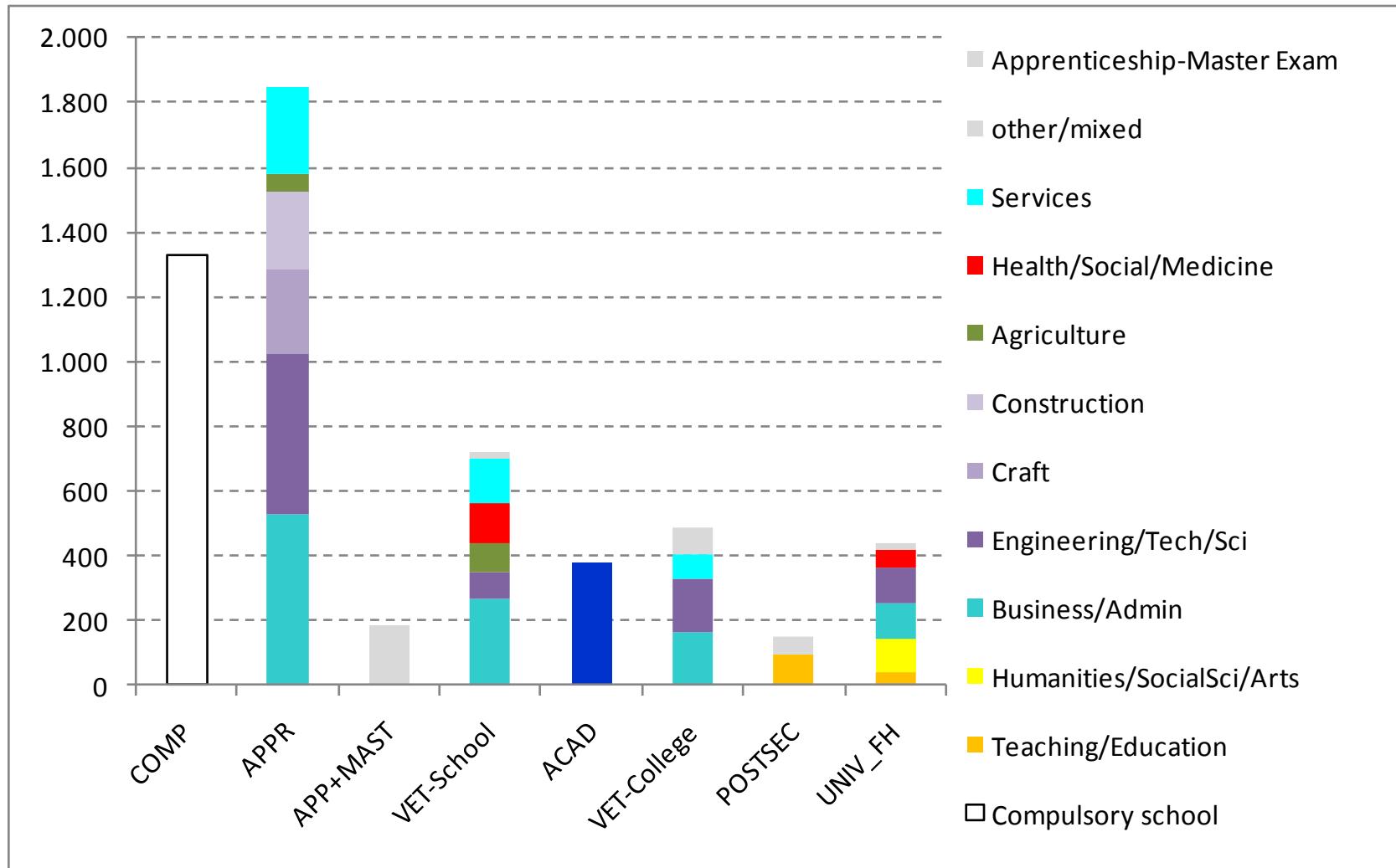
Absolute Nx1.000 in population

Bars: Absolute Nx1.000X(-1) in employment

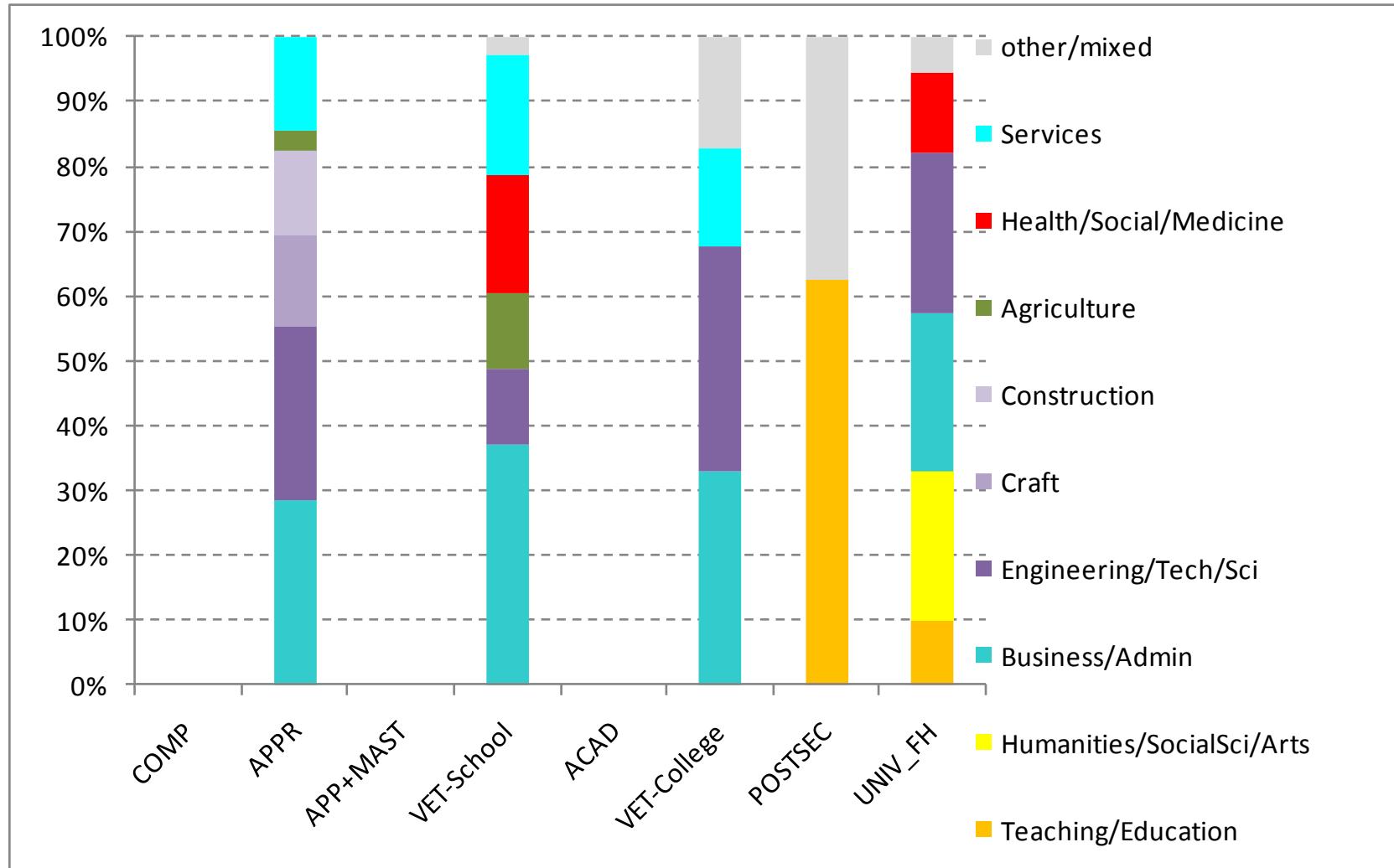
Number: employment rate (relation downward bar/ upward bar)



# Education levels by fields in population (abs. Nx1.000)

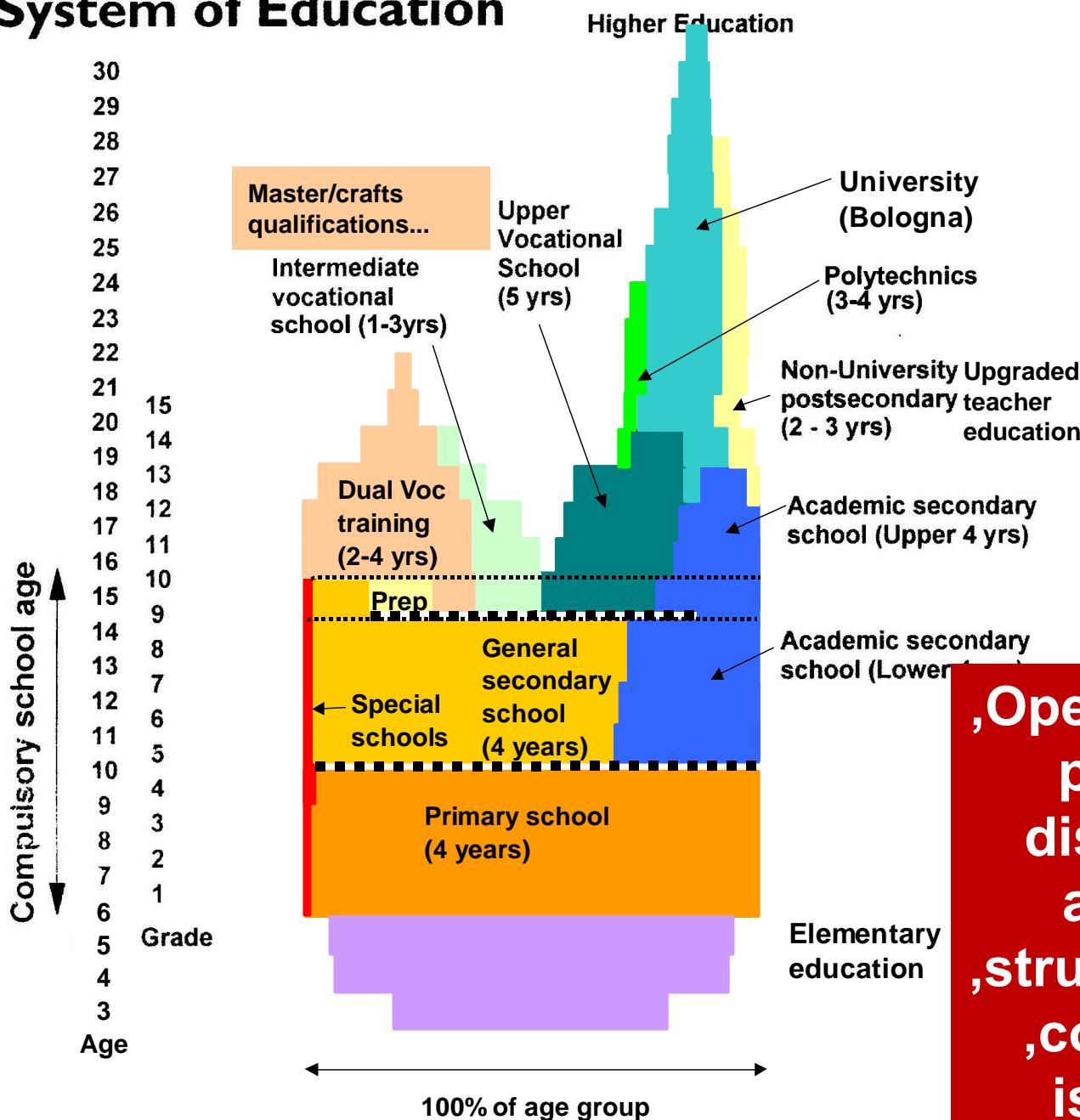


# Education levels by fields in population (distribution within levels, %)



# Summary and implications

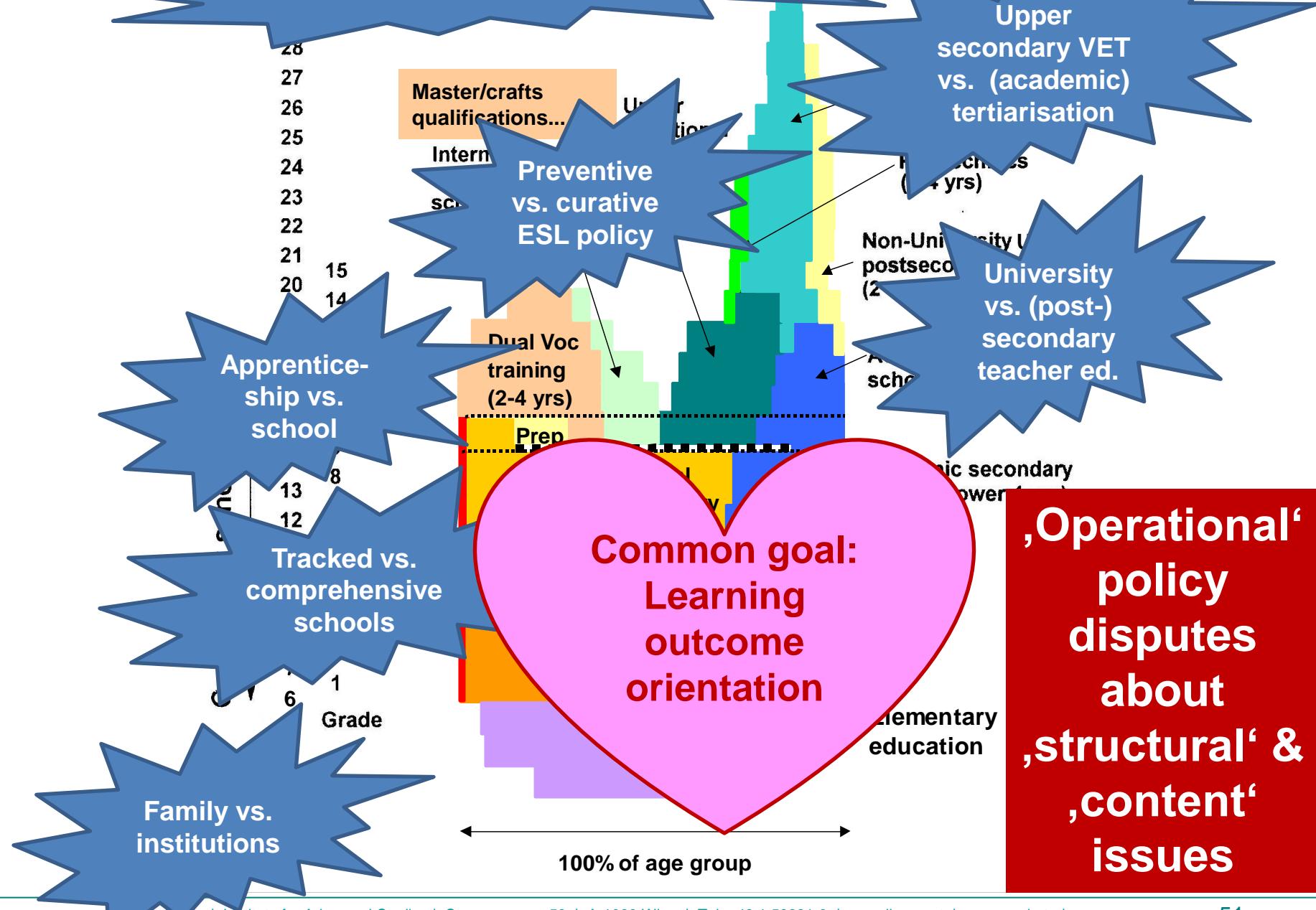
# System of Education



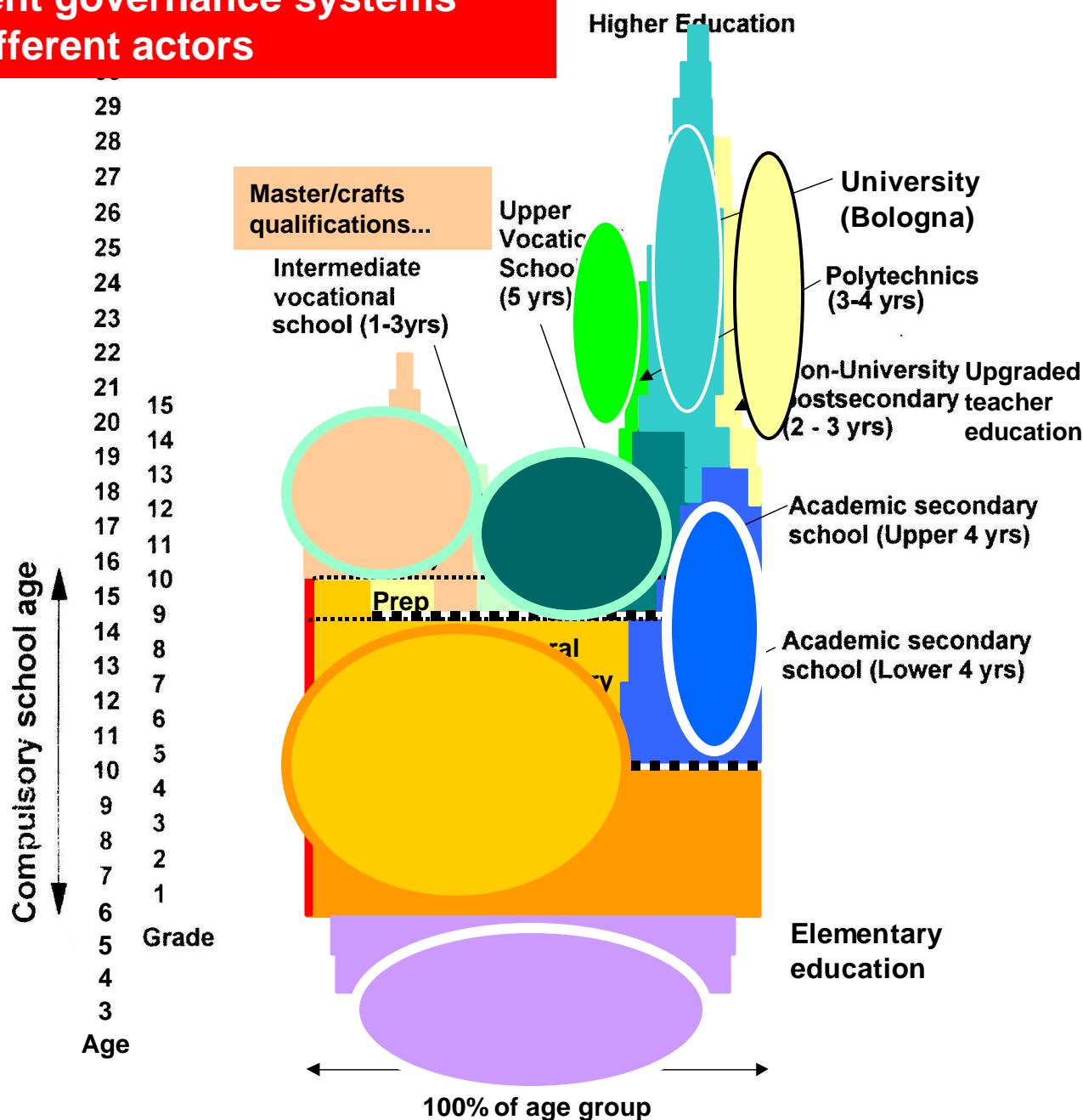
**‘Operational’  
policy  
disputes  
about  
‘structural’ &  
‘content’  
issues**

# Systems of Education

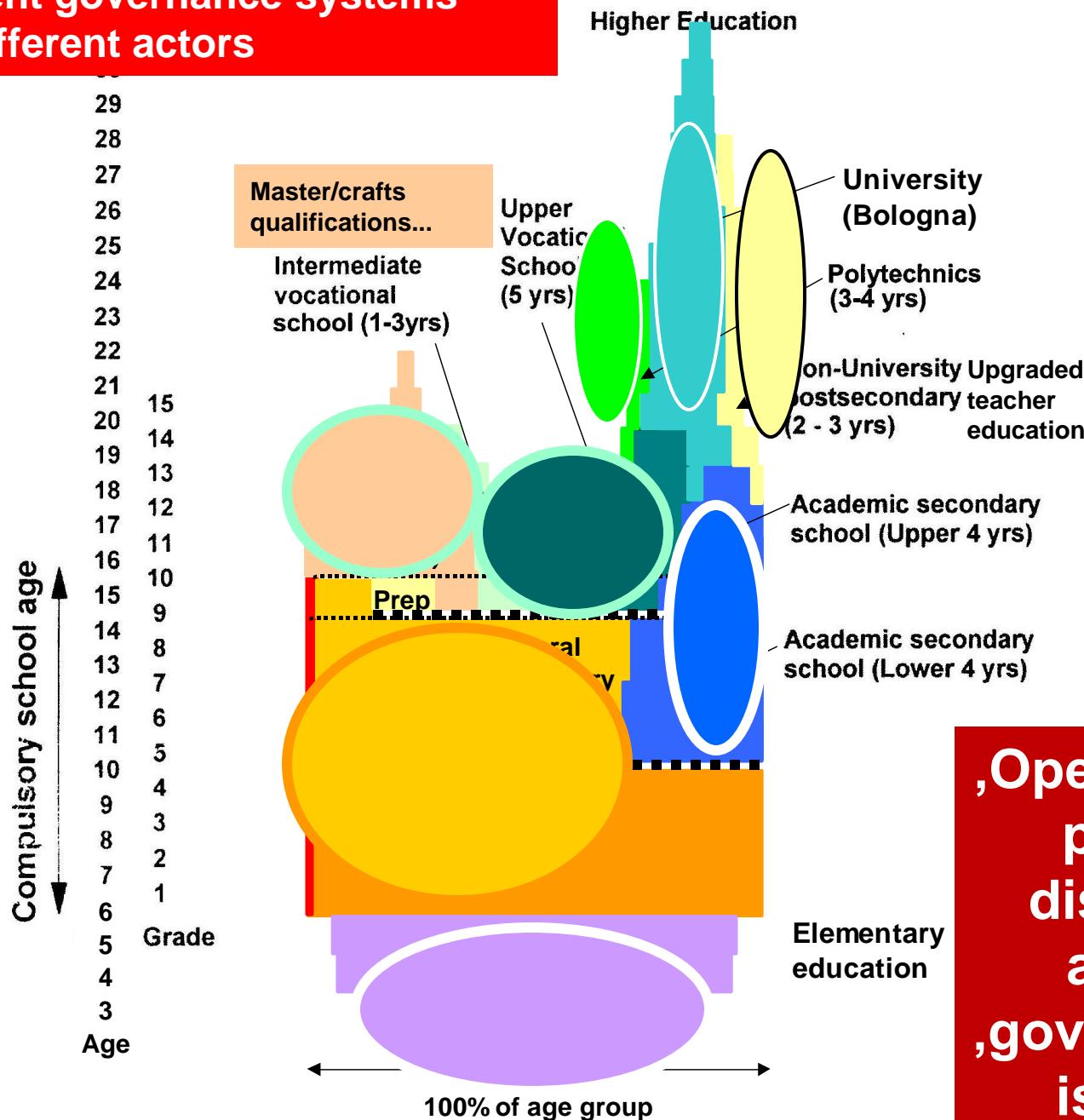
## Overarching vs. sector NQF



## ~ Eight different governance systems including different actors

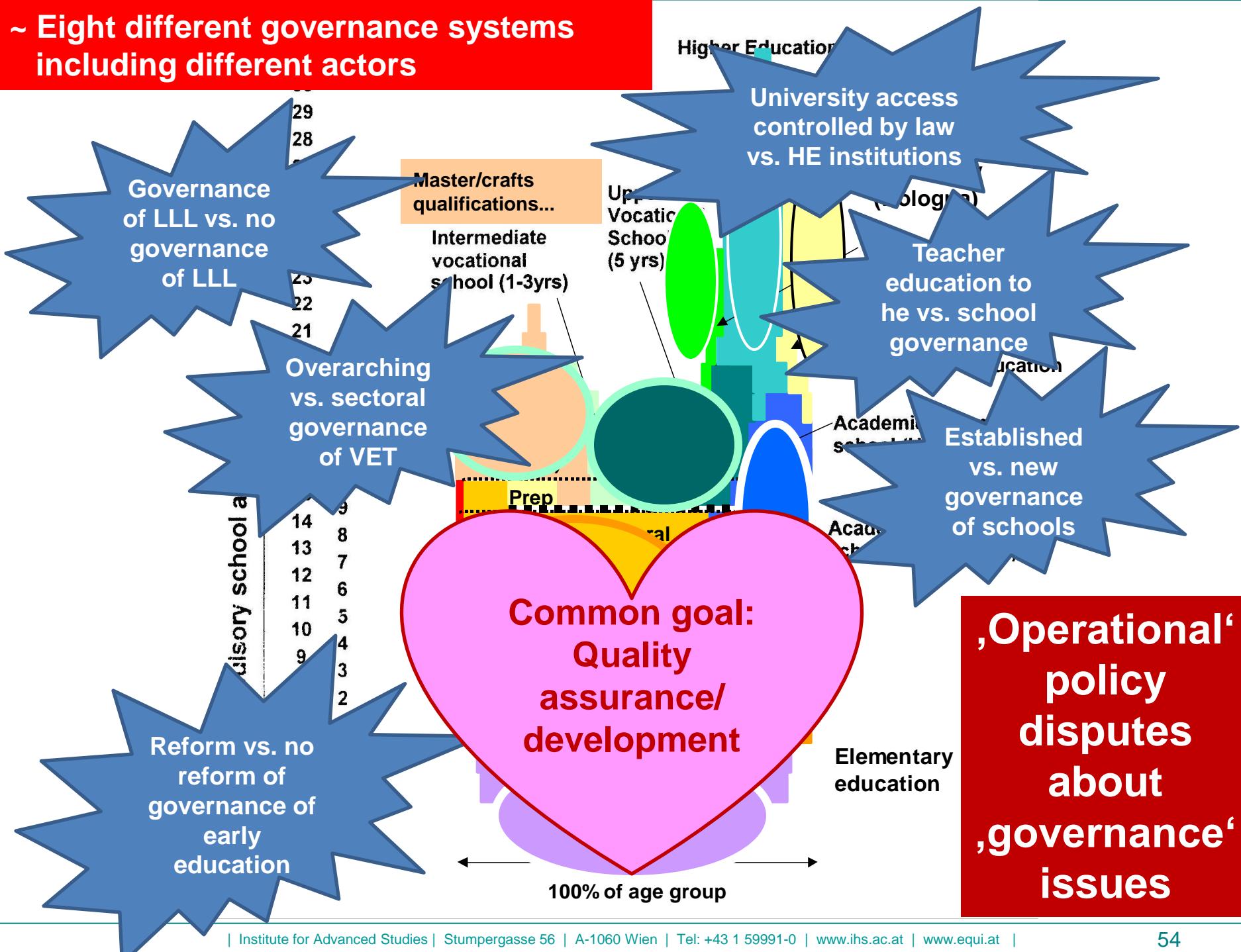


## ~ Eight different governance systems including different actors



‘Operational’  
policy  
disputes  
about  
‘governance’  
issues

## ~ Eight different governance systems including different actors



# Policy disputes 1: structure & content

- Family vs. institutional early education
- Tracked vs. comprehensive lower secondary education...
- ...related to ‚tracked‘ teacher education
- Upper secondary VET vs. (academic) tertiarisation
- Apprenticeship vs. school-based VET
- Curative, employment related vs. preventive ESL-policy
- Sectorial vs. comprehensive NQF
- **Postponing ‚learning outcomes orientation‘ to future goal**

# Policy disputes 2: governance

- Early education: responsibility of education system?
- School governance: 'distorted' bureaucracy, complex responsibilities
- Teacher education: controlled by school administration or HE?
- University access: controlled by law or by HE institutions?
- Comprehensive governance of VET?
- (No) Governance structure for LLL-Strategy?
- **Quality development/assurance as a compromise?**

# **LLL-strategy: a concentrated reflection of unresolvable disputes?**

- 12 ,action lines'...
- ...without a governance structure

# Syst 11. Recognition of non- & informal competences

## 8. Community education

## 9. Continung VET and professional ET

## 12. Opportunities for the elderly

## 6. Effective new-orientation of the middle-aged

## 7. Basic competences

## 10. Learner-friendly employment environment

Master/crafts qualifications...

Intermediate vocational school (1-3 yrs)

Upper Vocational School (5 yrs)

University (Bologna)

Polytechnics (3-4 yrs)

Non-University Upgraded postsecondary teacher education

## 3. Second chance qualifications

## 4. Support of transition to employment

Dual Voc training (2-4 yrs)

Special schools

Prep

General secondary school (4 years)

Academic secondary school (Upper 4 yrs)

Academic secondary school (Lower 4 yrs)

## 2. Basic competences & equity in school

## 5. Effective compatibility of employment and parenting

Primary school (4 years)

Elementary education

## 1. Early education

100% of age group

C 6 5 Grade

Age

# A conceptual and 'programmatic' note

- One problem for the analysis seems to be that the ,**discourses**‘ are **oscillating** rather between the ,rhetoric‘ and the ,counter-rhetoric‘, than trying to find empirical grounds for the assessment of VET
- The ,rationale‘ for this ,practice‘ might be, that the landscape is so vast and complex, that it is *de facto* **impossible to find a stable empirical ground**
- As a result we might have a **symbolic struggle** between ,rhetoric‘ and ,counter-rhetoric‘ that feeds the political system for its own purposes...
- ...whereas the actors move on more or less via various **evolutionary search process at the practice level** that we only can partly understand afterwards...
- ...and even, if we understand them properly, we are not able to draw ,practically‘ relevant conclusions because these would be *de facto* ,**un-implementable**‘
- The analysis of the **Austrian case** will somehow illustrate these conjectures

# The End

**Thank you  
for your attention !**

# Material

**www.equi.at**

**www.arbeiterkammer.com**

# New Skills for New Jobs: Action Now

A report by the Expert Group  
on New Skills for New Jobs  
prepared for  
the European Commission

