

The Quality Strategies in the Austrian ‘Dualistic’ VET System

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Outline of critical points for our symposium

- Systems – policies – change processes
 - state, centralization/decentralization, VET types)
 - policies (quality frameworks)
 - change (trajectories, formation, implementation)
- Complexity at different dimensions
 - ‚Dualism‘ – hybridity?
- Levels (central – regional – local)
- Contextual conditions
 - Motivation, purpose behind quality policy

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Systems structures do we have clear concepts of systems?

- How definitive can these structures be distinguished?
 - Rather heuristics than explanatory concepts?
- Concepts:
 - statist/schools based, work/enterprise based, comprehensive/generalistic
 - ‚collective skills systems‘: critical involvement of enterprises and state
 - new hype: **hybridity**, but: hybrid of what? (principal entities needed to be put together)
- Austria-Norway: Austrian VET ‚dualistic‘, two parts, full time VET school and apprenticeship, two systems of grossly equal strength
 - hybrid from point of view of traditional classifications (state system x enterprise system)
 - looking at either system separately, they are not hybrid, but ‚clean‘, apprenticeship is traditional, based on employment relation and employers action
- Difference to newly established or reformed apprenticeship systems
 - they are hybrids, in giving state education authorities much more power than in traditional apprenticeships (Norway)

Quality policy (QP), framework, practices in Austria

- Quality policy has emerged as a surrogate for structural/systemic reform of the **early tracked structure**, quite high energy/investment
 - starting at age ten in compulsory education
 - continued at age 15/16 in VET with three tracks (2 schools + apprenticeship lowest)
- QP **common denominator** across actors/political camps struggling for improvement in the school part, differentiation into three layers
 - achievement standards in **compulsory school**
 - standardised **Maturity-examination** at the upper level tracks related to access to higher education
 - Separation of comprehensive improvement oriented quality development system in **VET schools** (upper track strongly engaged)
- But: very weak quality assurance in enterprise training (**apprenticeship**)
 - some formal framework conditions given, rather legitimacy than effective
 - additional policies rejected by employers, they demand trust

Levels: very different degree of complexity in sectors

- **Compulsory school: very high complexity**
 - bureaucracy + politicised distributional federalism,
 - de facto five levels not clearly integrated (central-regional-district-municipality-school)
 - huge system, high number of schools (1000s), teachers, pupils
- **VET schools: low complexity**
 - mainly two levels, central and school
 - low number of schools (100s), overall segmentation by six occupational sectors
- **Apprenticeship: medium complexity**
 - enterprises main activity level, wide discretion (except labour law), but very high number of training enterprises (10.000s)
 - social partners main political actors, at different levels, more weight on employers' side (overall: ‚buffering change‘)
 - state regulation formally strong, but enforcement very flexible (except collective bargaining and labour law)

Quality systems/policies

- **Compulsory school**
 - achievement standards 4./8.grade
 - accountability + improvement
 - very complex development system
- **Maturity examination**
 - clear measure: part of examination nationally standardised
 - accountability (indirect improvement), mandatory
- **VET-quality-improvement system**
 - comprehensive improvement system
 - core: competence standards and assessment procedures
 - schools involved in development and opt in
- **Apprenticeship-enterprises**
 - accreditation, trainers, examinations
 - competitions, awards, criteria subs.

Quality systems/policies: contextual issues

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- **International achievement tests: source of mistrust**
 - high cost, medium achievement
- **Clear evidence of marked difference between grading and test results**
 - evidence of social background effects
- **System widely trusted, particularly upper level colleges**
 - problems with high selectivity, ambiguously valued
- **System widely trusted**
 - problem with acceptance by / quality of applicants
 - neglected issue: variety of quality

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Some concluding points

- **Complexity: classical point by H.Simon (Luhmann) if something becomes too complex, differentiate (draw a distinction), diversity as strength**
 - Austrian system differentiated: ‚dualism‘ of school and apprenticeship, levels within school (bureaucracy)
 - Norway: comprehensiveness, amalgamation, hybrid increases complexity
- **Levels: in VET schools quality system flexibility created by letting schools opting in through choosing own problems into a quite strongly structured top-down system**
 - broadening always possible, however, needs time (basically good achievement and trust necessary)
 - under high pressure this is not possible (compulsory school)
 - apprenticeship: if trust exists, quality policy could paradoxically destabilise...
- **Apprenticeship, collective skills system: question of external intervention in relation to necessity of state regulatory framework**
 - if enterprises involvement must be based on their interest, what should external (state) supervision help?

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The End



Material

