

“... no satisfaction”?

Roles and conflicts in commissioned research

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„Vocational education and training research in Europe – to what end?“, 16-17th February 2004

Exposition

Reflection on two decades experience in Austrian VET research, and impact of almost one decade of EU-membership

Perspective of a („critical“) researcher making mainly **commissioned research** at the edge of academic and applied research

Main messages concern:

- Strengths and weaknesses of a „non-academic“ system
- Dynamics of internationalisation and commodification

Agenda

Description

- Educational R&D and VET-research system and actors
 - Assessment of satisfaction and dissatisfaction

Reflection

- Strengths and weaknesses
 - VET and innovation
- Trends: internationalisation, commodification
 - Outcomes

Description

A “non-academic” system ...

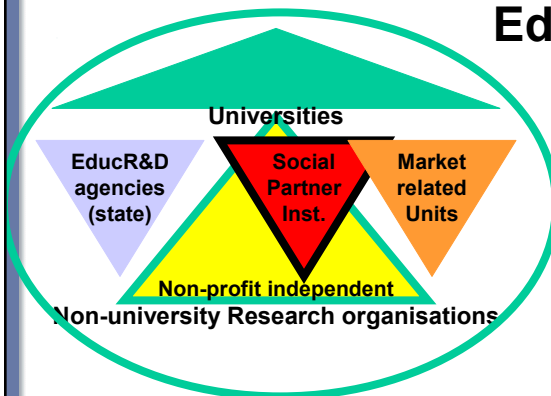
VET-research in Austria has never been rooted in university based academic research

- It started to grow in the 1970s with the foundation of institutes related to the **social partners' interest organisations** (ÖIBF, IBW, + IBE, IWI)
- Since the 1980s the VET research scene is in a period of very dynamic change, as a **growing number of market oriented research units** perform a big share of VET research (Austrian REFER-Net: 6 + 10~)

VET research and labour market (LM) research are different „worlds“

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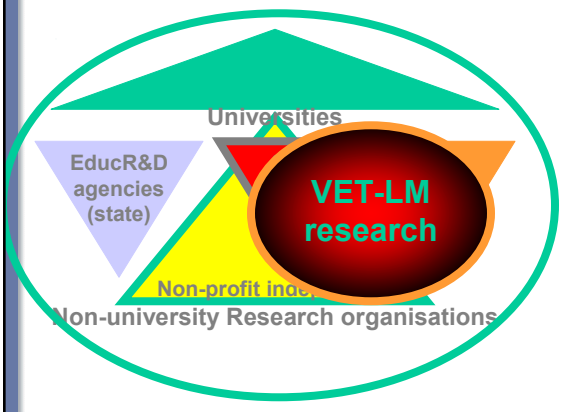
Educational R&D



5 Types
of organisations ...

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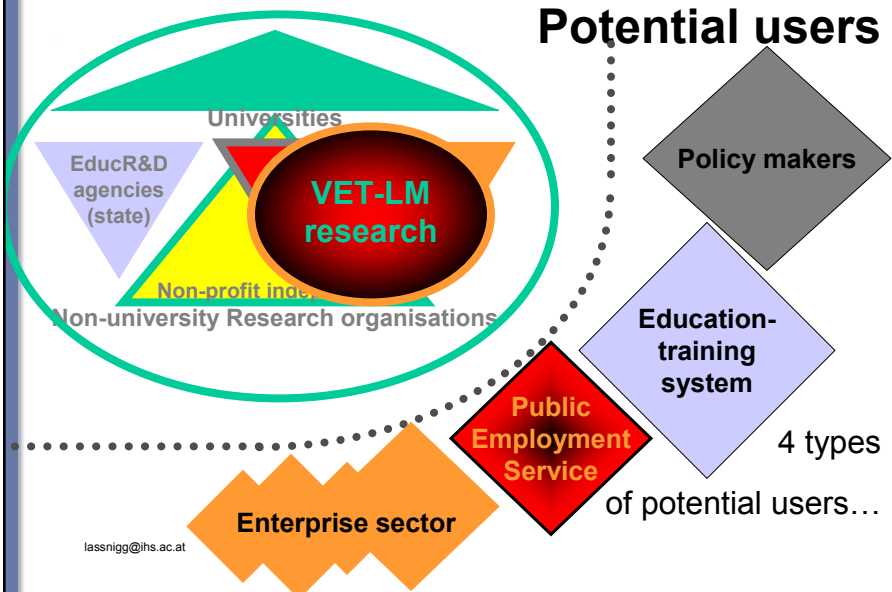
VET research



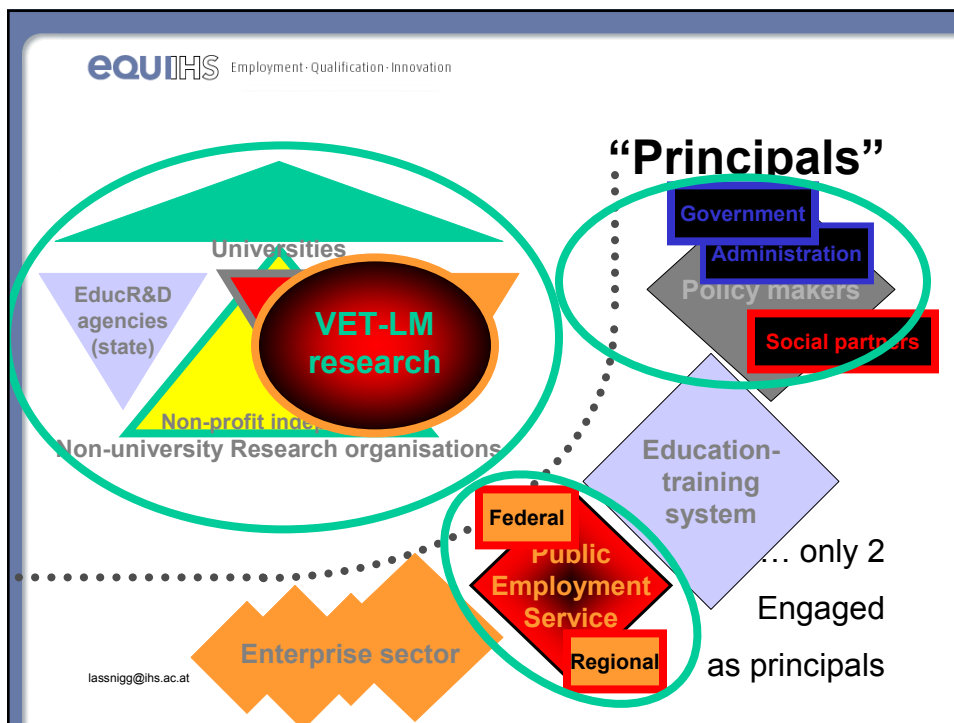
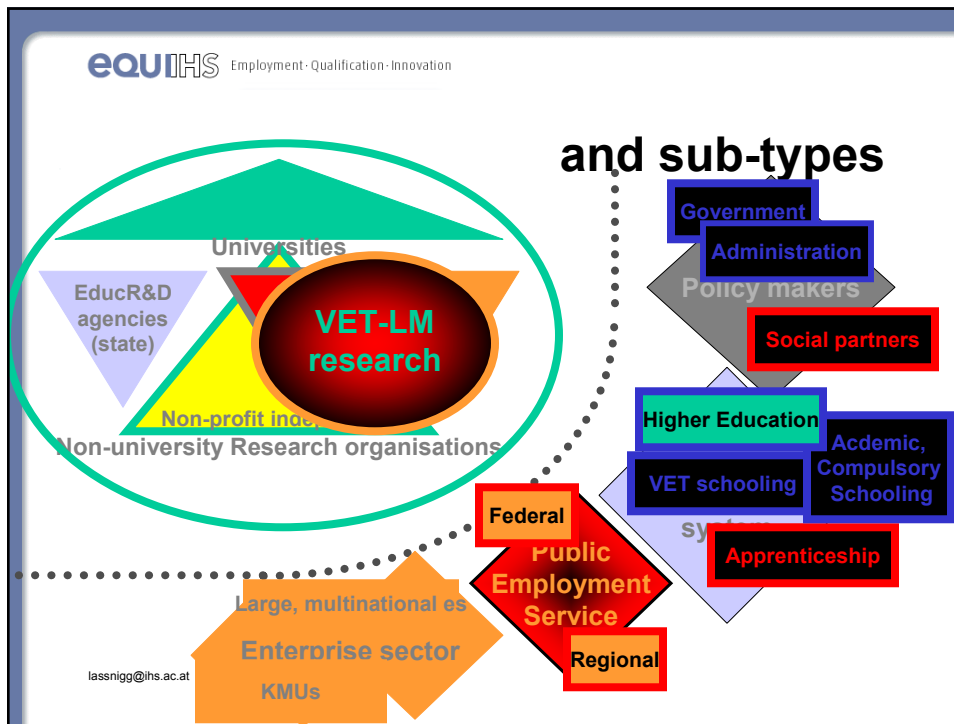
...thereof only 2-3 types
strongly engaged in VET-research

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Potential users



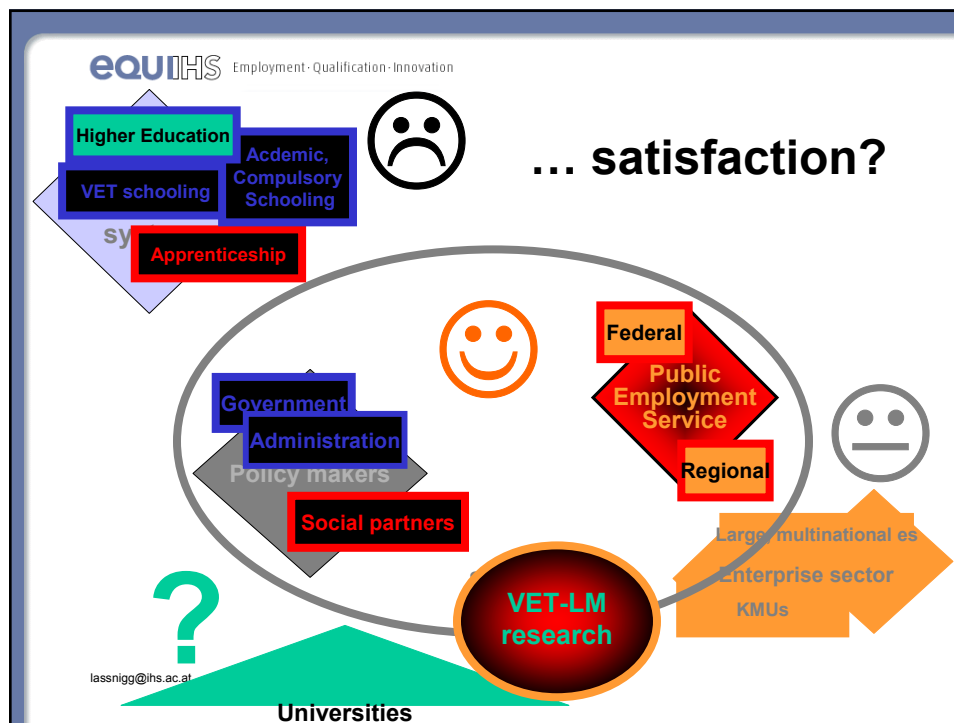
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... might (not) satisfy whom?

- ☺ High satisfaction among the insiders of the system (policy makers, **public employment service** and insider part of **researchers**)
 - ☹ Neutrality among **enterprises** because of little interest in research results
 - ⊗ Low satisfaction among **VET education and training institutions** because of no/little involvement in research
- ? **Unclear situation among universities**, no attempts to be involved more strongly in VET research

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... satisfaction?

VET system and VET research embedded in overall system of social partnership

- Common „**definition of the situation**“ among actors
important aspect of social partnership
- **independent** economic and social research institutes
included as part of the system via an advisory council

However some particularities in VET as compared to the overall system

- research institutes affiliated **to either side**, not to both sides
- not whole system under control (schools, colleges state contr.)
 - control over apprenticeship unbalanced (employers > employees)

Reflection

Strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

High „**usability**“ - not an „ivory tower“

- Strong potential relation of VET research to policy (as a mechanism of „turning results into practice“)
- Strong potential relation of LM-research to practice

High share of **commissioned research** related to practical issues – („cost-efficiency“)

- short term orientation, targeting

High density of **relationships** among „insiders“

- actors know each other and what to expect from each other

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Weaknesses

Lack of **basic** research and weak **international** linkages

Low level of **innovation**

- „nothing fails like success“
- Austrian "performance paradox"

Little **usage** of research in political-practical decisions

- lack of foresight, lack of time
- weak „absorption-potential“

Practitioners in education and training institutions not involved in research

„**Lock-in**“ – cleavages to outsiders

VET and innovation

Overall R&D and innovation

Austrian „**performance paradox**“: good performance, but a weak innovation system
Innovation: mainly imported and incremental

Role of VET-system?

Why should innovation in VET be different?
The overall innovation system is **reinforced by the VET system**

- apprenticeship
- low level of basic research and internationalisation

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Dynamics I: internationalisation

There have been **big improvements** on the international and European levels (Indicators, various comparative analyses, VET-research report, various networks, etc.)

National “capitalisation” of international improvements does not go automatically

- “absorption capacity” (involvement, content, resources, time)
- adaptation/renewal of national practice: “from one way to two way lane” (use of information sources, data, indicators)
- practical-political exploitation vs. “enlightenment”

Policy learning as a new concept, would imply “internalisation” of policy research into VET research (knowledge building about policy vs. instrumentalisation of research)

Dynamics II: commodification

The institutional framework for VET research has evolved towards **market like structures** – attempts for the creation of a comprehensive R&D-institute in VET failed

Many new **small institutes** have been created - their main activities are in LM-research/evaluation, not VET research

Too **little resources** are invested very **unevenly**, some fields developed very good (short term micro-prognoses of the labour market) - most projects underfinanced, due to fierce competition, low expectations, and high data generation costs

Consequences: privatisation of data; rising cleavage between academic research – applied research

Outcomes and pitfalls

- Much knowledge about Austria coming from international/European sources, often without contributions from „native“ research: **low recognition**
- **knowledge gaps** in several important issues, e.g. empirical basis for lifelong learning policy
- several **underresourced projects**: „dumping“ traps, leaving questions open does not lead to further research
- European support does **not compensate** for the gap

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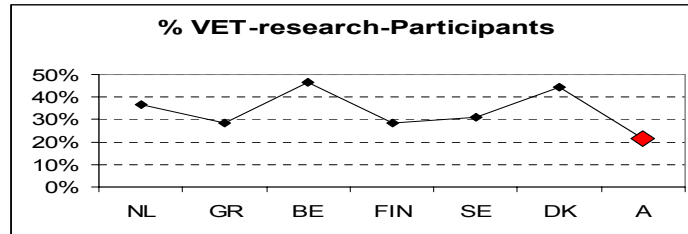
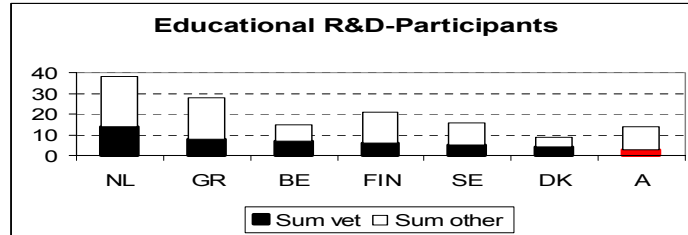
Some quantitative illustrations

based on the „**Briefing papers for policy makers**“*
show participation in European educational research projects 1995-2003 from some selected smaller countries in comparison to Austria
document can be taken as information about projects considered as being „policy relevant“

* EC Directorate-General for Research (2003) European Union-supported educational research 1995-2003. Briefing papers for policy makers. Report Editor: A.S. Agalinos (EUR 20791). Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

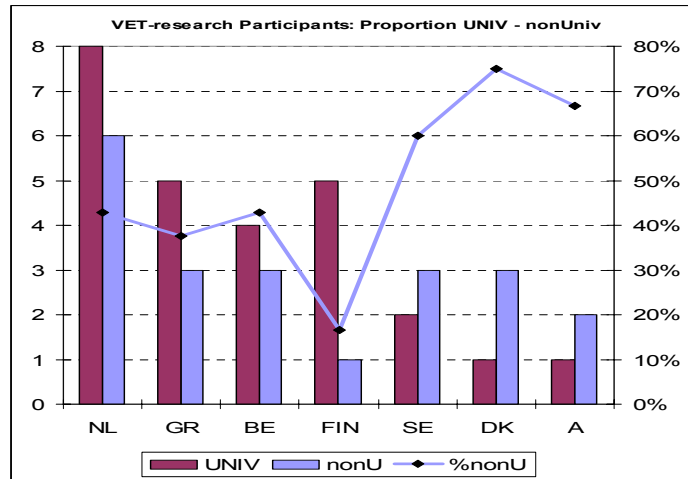
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EC “Briefing Papers”



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EC “Briefing Papers”



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Some quantitative illustrations

- Austria has the **smallest number of participants** in „policy relevant“ educational research projects among selected countries
- and the **smallest share of VET-research projects** among them, despite the strong VET system
- **Non-university institutions** are more strongly represented among VET research participants in countries with less overall participation, thus **integration of VET research in universities seems important** even for the participation in „policy relevant“ EU-projects

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Reflections and conclusions

The „**application-gap**“-thesis, if it's true on a certain level, must not hold for every field/country (deserves analysis)

What might be **innovative** somewhere must not be innovative everywhere (e.g., apprenticeship system)

Internationalisation/Europeanisation does not work automatically at national level (support of demand?)

Commodification of VET-research might produce downward spirals (privatisation of data, cleavage academic-applied research)

Resources: not sufficient for excellence but necessary (= not substitutable by other instruments)

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The End

Thank you !

Further material

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