

Infrastructures and lack of infrastructures in Austria: one step forward, two steps backward, or the reverse?

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Agenda

- Trying to address the question of **infrastructures for use** of research, distinguished from infrastructures for research...
- ...and the question of **broader conditions** for the use of research (governance, culture)...
- ...in a triangle of research – policy/politics – and practice field...
- ...with a main message that the culture and positioning of policy/politics in the triangle, and thus governance, might be more important than infrastructure (the best infrastructure cannot overrule problems in governance and culture)
- Questioning the concept of **‘brokerage’** as a device for an infrastructure for use

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Infrastructures for research: necessary, but not sufficient for ist use...

- Two problems, which somehow might produce **vicious circles**:
 - 1st: sufficient **research infrastructure** is necessary; if it is too weak, the produced inputs are too weak to be useful
Question: how to assess sufficient scale of research infrastructure? (% financing?)
 - 2nd: even the best **inputs from research** are not sufficient for being used, there is no ‚automatic application‘, in particular if the role of R&D is contested
Question: what are the conditions for use? Is this only a technical problem of the transfer of information, or is this more complex? MORE COMPLEX, QUESTION OF CULTURE/GOVERNANCE
 - **Vicious circle**: if R&D infrastructure starts from a low scale, problems of use might compromise further development/investment via criticising the insufficient products/inputs
Question: how can this be broken? ‚COUNTERFACTUAL‘ BELIEF IN POTENTIALS OF RESEARCH NECESSARY? This belief Cannot be produced by experience, because insufficient infrastructure must produce insufficient results...
- This is basically the situation in Austria, ‚belief‘ is contested and widely missing, undermined in the political and practical discourses
 - politically supported building of research infrastructure from a weak basis...
 - ...continuously undermined by powerful adversary forces
*Socialdemocratic vs. Conservative party; policy makers vs. teacher trade unions...
researchers, practitioners ‚caught in the middle‘ of supporters and adversaries*

Quite substantial infrastructures for R&D built up in recent decades

- IMST, project for improvement in Science teaching, based on TIMSS
‚Action research‘ based, interested teachers involved, networking
- Quality development framework, networking of researchers (2001)
School programme as key instrument, quality improvement strategy, not implemented
- Leadership Academy (2004)
‚Community of practice‘, generations 250-300/gen. (6.000 schools, 4.500 compuls)
- Didactical centres at universities (founded 2005-06)
Austrian Educational Competence Centres AECCs (Sciences, Math, German language)
- Relaunch, foundation of a state institute for R&D [BIFIE], 2008
Shifted research money to one institution
- Periodic Austrian Educational Report (statistical; topical)
2009, 2012, crit. compilation of state-of-the-art
- Competence standards projects, 4th, 8th grade, VET
German, Math, English; 1st round started 2011
- National examinations at advanced level schools
Actually before implementation...
- New teacher education 2013 framework
Implementation before starting

Key products and their use

- Quality framework, Q.I.S. Quality in schools
 - Webbased platform, structuring quality improvement at school level
 - too little support, abandoned, transformed
- Leadership academy
 - Mentoring and networking of school principals
 - Interesting approach, no assessment of performance, no public visibility of effects
- State Institute
 - Participation in LSAs (TIMSS, PISA, PIRLS)
 - Development projects
 - Standards approach, Testing at grades 4 and 8, aggregate reporting, 'secret' individual reporting for feedback*
 - National Exams*
 - Periodic National Education Report, two editions exist, 2009 and 2012
- Teacher education (political problem; 2 layers, integrating low sec.)
 - Compromise, problematic and contradictory solutions between different layers

What are the infrastructures for use?

- How to analyse them?
- What kinds of instruments/mechanisms/actors/institutions are mediating between research and practice?
 - differentiation ,R' & ,D'
- Three concepts/types:
 - market, brokers (commercial intermediaries, shaping/constructing the market)
 - research results, artefacts: supply of information – demand for information, differentiation of brokering actors (OECD?)*
 - institutions, intermediaries, policy/politics (governance sets roles, potentially shaping by policy/politics) > Austria (centralised, bureaucratic model)
 - professional model (direct ,symbiosis' between research and practice) ,Fourth Way'?

Conceptual view: triangle of R&D, policy/politics, practice

- 2 separate Divisions concerning use of R&D:
 - (1) R&D vs policy/politics ; practice field (education)
 - (2) policy/politics vs. practice field (education)

- relations structured by governance

- culture/context plays role

Transfer of R&D into P&P 2 Divisions

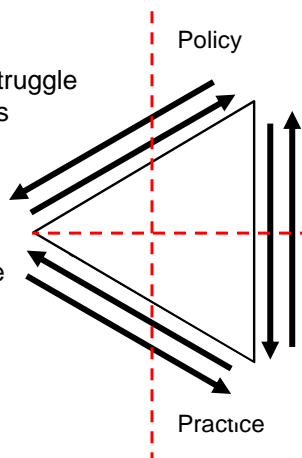
Division 1

R&D : P&P

- Many signs/forms of struggle
- independence/linkages

R&D

- teachers and evidence



Division 2

Policy : Practice

Old story of reforms & reformresistance

Organisation theory:

„Micropolitics“

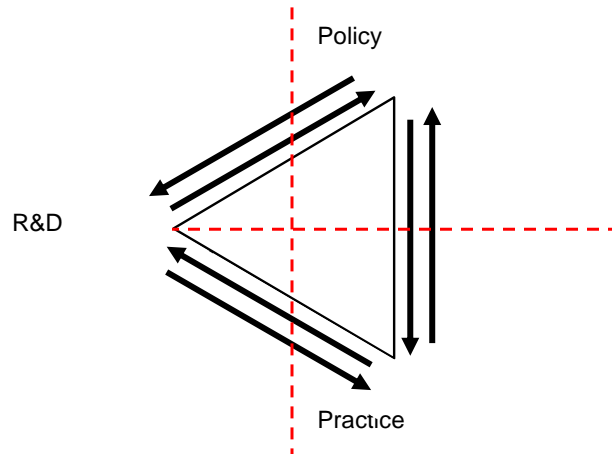
Systems theory:

„horizontal thesis“

Economic theory:

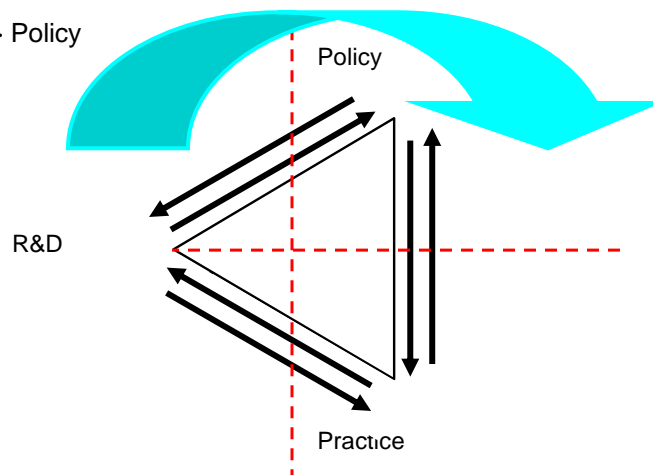
Public choice

Transfer of R&D into P&P 3 channels

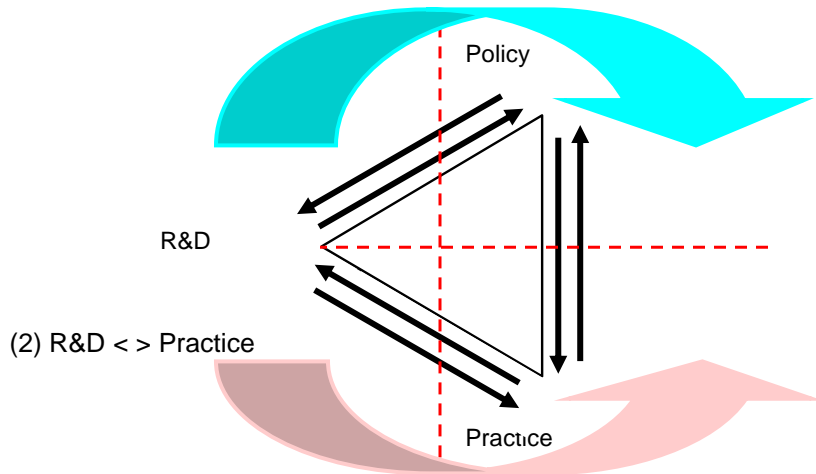


Transfer of R&D into P&P 3 channels

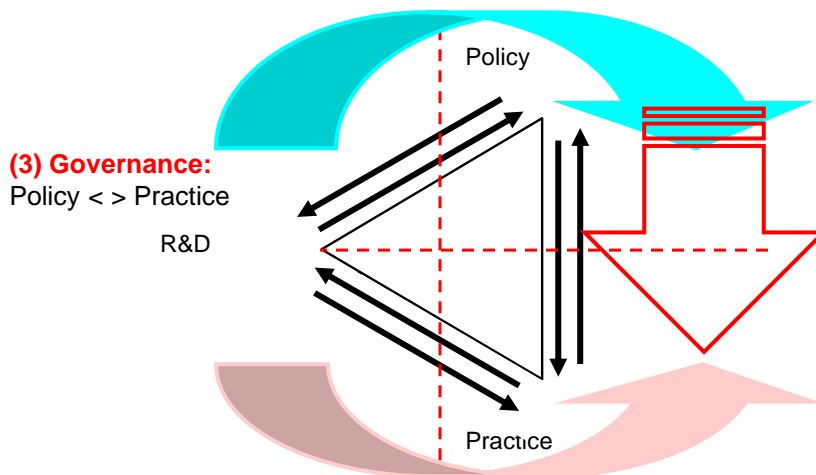
(1) R&D <> Policy



Transfer of R&D into P&P 3 channels

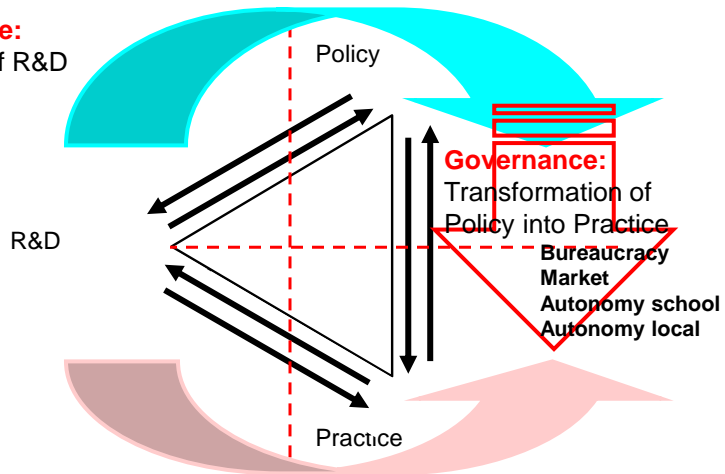


Transfer of R&D into P&P 3 channels



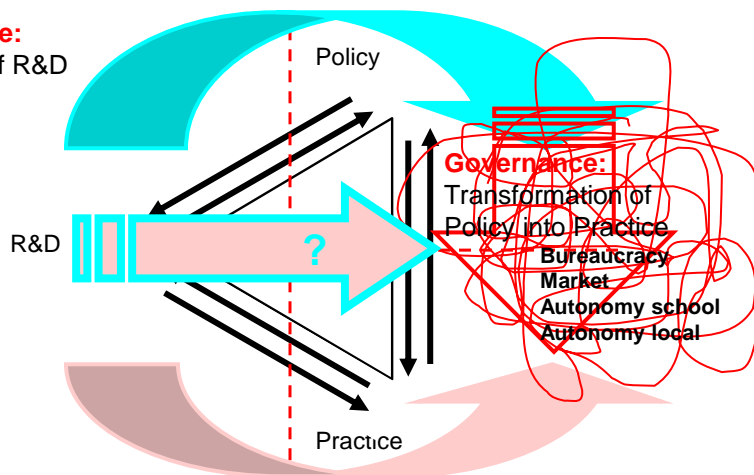
Transfer of R&D into P&P 3 channels

Governance:
Utilisation of R&D



Transfer of R&D into P&P Utilisation ???

Governance:
Utilisation of R&D

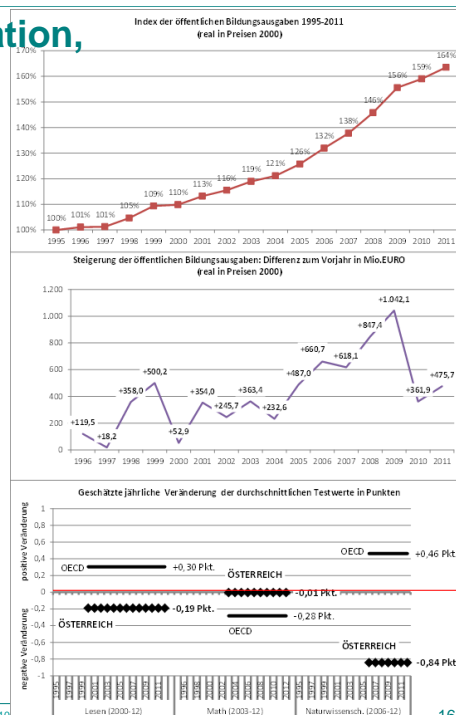


Relation R&D to policy/politics: commissioned R&D, contested by trade unions

- Quality improvement under fire by teachers' trade unions, and disputed among policy makers and experts, no clear support
- LSAs, strongly politicised and disputed for purpose
 - Constructive reaction to TIMSS results, set up of an improvement project, analysing results, and involving teachers (however, small scale)
 - PISA depressing from the beginning:
main messages: high costs, mediocre results
No improvement through the process
 - PIRS and PIACC not much attention
- Standards, imposed on schools/teachers,
 - Assessment started, depressing results
 - Concept disputed
- Teacher education reform mainly left to implementation
 - Compromise driven by political disputes/agendas
 - Two issues (1)segmented system/teacher education; (2)research-practice

Expenditure for education, change PISA-Scores

- Index, prices 2000
- Absolute change to last year
- OECD, annualised change of PISA scores (Pts.)
 - Oecd and Austria
 - Literacy / Math / Science



Relation to practice field mostly top-down in critical-hostile environment

- Basically trade unions articulating views of practice field, no separate professional organisations...teachers somehow ‚hostages‘
- ...thus account of relation of R&D to practice only known in two ways...
 - informal knowledge of directly involved actors
 - Knowledge from interventions (development, evaluation, support activities)
 - formal research, mainly surveys
- ...overall results in the direction, that the interventions or new instruments do not help, little open resistance, little strong support...
- ...public discourse polarised and mainly hostile against the practice field and the teachers, hostility partly supported by ‚popular experts‘...
- Exception: Leadership Academy, however, separate from the other activities,
 - creating some kind of elitist ‚corporate spirit‘...
 - ...creation of competences for change and improvement not visible

Policy and politics strongly divergent

- **Policy** some use of R&D, however, two main trends
 - Separation of R and D, two different strands,
‚D‘ practically/politically driven, not driven by ‚R‘
‚R‘ strongly politicised, legitimating function dominating
- **Politics** making own decisions, downplaying R&D, to some extent instrumentalising it
 - Main case: story of reform of lower secondary school: agenda to install new type of common lower secondary school: heterogeneous pedagogy instead of setting into achievement groups (‚detacking‘), basic point: 2nd teacher in main subjects, very expensive
 - (1) Misuse of a high level expert panel for legitimating predetermined plan
 - (2) Set up of new practice without proper preparation
 - (3) No thorough evaluation
 - (4) Whole process under political control (regional party negotiations)
 - (5) Result: a new school type costing ~50% more, and achieving ~same results as before
 - Other case: teacher education
 - Recently stop of data gathering (withdrawn from PISA, justified by some issues with data security), attempts to dismantle state institute...

Quality system in VET: positive example for ‚D‘ & targeted ‚R‘?

- QIBB, set up on basis of the early quality improvement model in 2000s...
- ...flagship project in Austrian presidency 2006...
- ...continuous improvement model within a relatively closed environment
 - small number of schools
 - open and flexible participation (schools choose yes/no, topics)
 - mainly insiders, selected experts for accompanying surveys
 - currently big project redefining curricula towards competences, wide expert network from within the system
 - system provided by a theory-based practical handbook how to construct and use competences (PhD-Thesis of an administrator, collaborative handbook with a colleague from the ministry)
 - basically a strategy, according to how it worked in the past decades

Some conclusions, challenges

- How to strengthen research in a climate, where it is...
 - ...mainly misused by its primary ‚godparent‘ and gatekeeper...
 - ...constantly challenged and downplayed by powerful stakeholders...
 - ...and itself weakly developed ?
 - **Case for development of independent academic research, international cooperation ?** LONG TERM MISSION... (RE-INSTALLING BELIEF...)
- Can the rhetoric of evidence-based policy/practice help in this climate?
 - ...has been taken during last years, made things rather worse than better...
accusations instead of arguments
necessary debate about values avoided
- What role can **infrastructure of use** play in this situation?
 - ‚Applied‘ state institute rather counterproductive than supporting
 - VET quality improvement approach lacks critical view from outside
 - Media are rather making situation worse, by blowing into every conflict

Epilogue... looking from another angle...

- ...the overall system seems to work very successfully, VET and apprenticeship...
- ...this evolves completely incrementally, without research...
- ...even knowledge that is created in ‚sister-systems‘ (Germany, Switzerland) is lacking in Austria...
- ...what does this tell us about research and its use?

Literature

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 - Biology, Chemistry, Physics (<https://aecc.univie.ac.at/>)
 - Mathematics <http://www.uni-klu.ac.at/idm/inhalt/1.htm>
 - German language <http://www.uni-klu.ac.at/deutschdidaktik/inhalt/1.htm>
- BIFIE <https://www.bifie.at/>
- Standards <https://www.bifie.at/bildungsstandards>
- VET Quality improvement system: <https://www.qibb.at/de/home.html>

The End



Material

