

**„...use of the current best evidence“ –
 promises and illusions,
 limitations and contradictions
 in the triangle of research, policy and practice**

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...if there are no solutions, what can we do?

- ...search for solutions anyway



- ...search for solutions anyway



- ...set priorities, take decisions



*to put one's own
house in order...*



Agenda

- Production of 'evidence', different meanings and their consequences
- Research and policy on transnational and national level:
 - Qualification Frameworks (QF) and Learning Outcomes (LO), cases of evidence based policy and practice?
 - The Austrian case of QF: does involvement of research in policy mean production and use of evidence?
- The relationship between policy and practice: Is there evidence-based policy without (evidence-based) practice, and vice versa? The issue of governance
- Conclusions: avoiding shortcuts, understanding decoupling-coupling of fields/areas/systems

Production of ‚evidence‘

- Questions:
 - Meaning: What do we mean by ‚evidence‘?
 - Judgement: How to find/select/judge ‚the current best evidence‘?
 - Improvement: How to improve ‚the current best evidence‘ further?

- Many meaning(s) of ‚evidence‘
 - Epistemological issues: Constructivism vs. causality; quantitative-qualitative
 - Rigour: Academic vs. applied; information>(forms of) knowledge>evidence
 - Functionality: Producer- vs. user/buyer-orientation (who makes the distinction/decides about evidence?)

- Judgement about / selection of ‚evidence‘ vs. ‚non-evidence‘
 - Access to/overview about available information>(forms of) knowledge>evidence
 - Discourse-theory (power of knowledge); meta-analysis; brokerage

- Improvement of available ‚evidence‘
 - R&D-policy/financing; players; how can improvement be influenced/planned?

„Evidence-based/informed Policy&Practice“...

- ...is itself a **policy proposal** by OECD, adopted by EU (recursivity)
 - Policy and practice should be based on/informed by „the best available evidence“

- Key elements/concepts
 - theory/methodology: **what does „best evidence“ mean?**
OECD research cycle

 - mission and knowledge types: how should the **evidence be produced?**
Knowledge types (academic-applied; mode 1,2; „pasteurs quadrant“)

 - brokerage: how to **transfer R&D into PP?**
OECD triangle
different „channels“: R&D to policy, R&D to practice; from policy to practice

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OECD research cycle

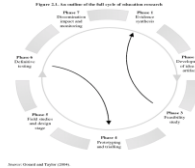


Figure A: Pasteur's Quadrant

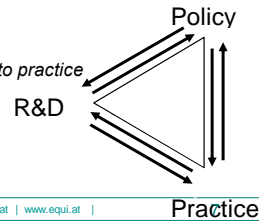
		Consideration of Use	
		Low	High
Quest for Fundamental Understanding	Yes	Pure Basic Research (Bohr) 1	Use-inspired Basic Research (Pasteur) 2
	No		Pure Applied Research (Edison) 4

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- brokerage: how to **transfer R&D into PP?**

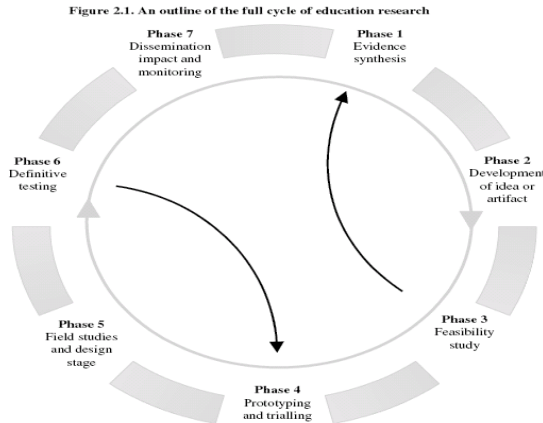
OECD triangle

different „channels“: R&D to policy, R&D to practice; from policy to practice



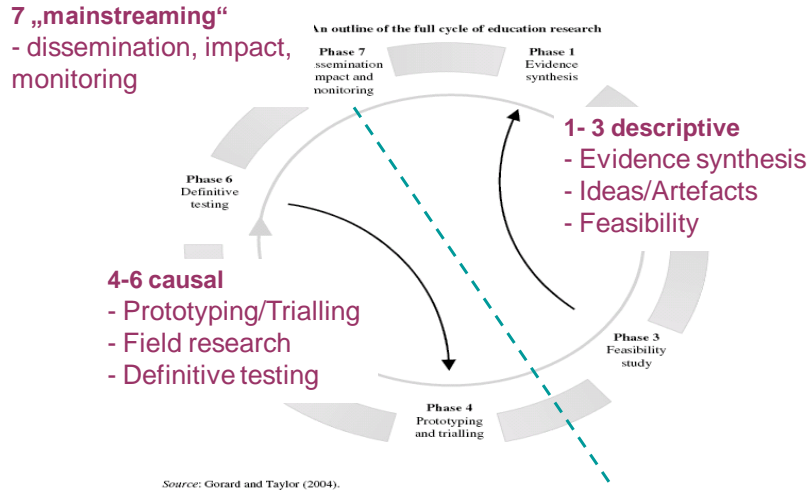
What does „Evidence“ mean? descriptive und causal analysis (OECD'07)

Model of the research cycle



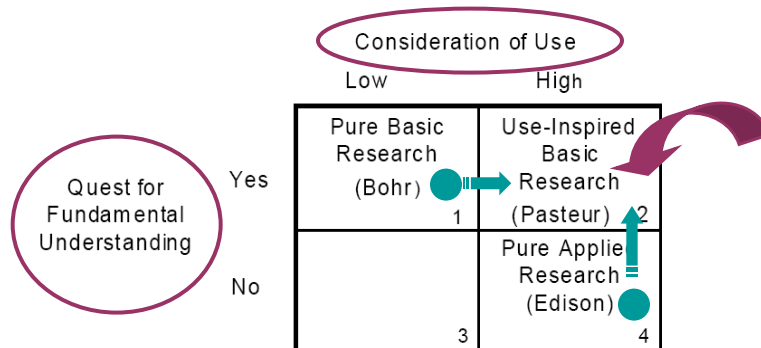
Source: Gorard and Taylor (2004).

What does „Evidence“ mean? Research cycle: 2 sub-cycles



How should evidence be produced? (Stokes 1997)

Figure A: Pasteur's Quadrant



Transfer of R&D into Policy and Practice 2 Divisions

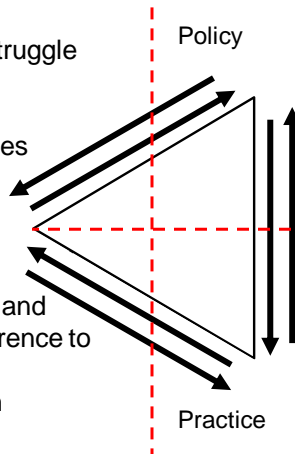
Division 1

R&D : P&P

- Many signs/forms of struggle (basic-applied, critical-advocacy)
- (in)dependence/linkages

R&D

- Practicians (teachers) and evidence (analogy/difference to health/Medicine)
- Quality and evaluation



Division 2

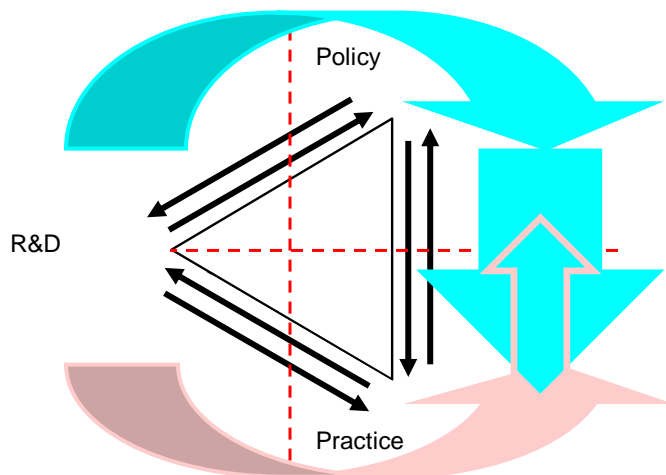
Policy : Practice
Old story of reforms & reformresistance

Organisation theory:
„Micropolitics“

Systems theory:
„horizontal thesis“

Economic theory:
Public choice

Transfer of R&D into Policy and Practice 3 channels



Transfer of R&D into Policy and Practice summary

- What do we learn from this simple scheme?
 - We can have **evidence based practice** without influence of policy,
 - we can have **evidence based policy** without influence on practice...
 - ...and **both can conflict with each other**...
 - ...and the more influence of R&D at both dimensions, the more complex the channel from policy to practice might be...
- If we don't expect simple truths, the EBPP proposal **rather can make relations more problematic than more easy**
 - Several divisions within R&D and conflicting evidences between P&P...
 - ...might reinforce demand and quest for „real evidence“... see reseach cycle

Reflection on ‚embeddedness‘

- Politics, education, economy and society...
- ...related to the constructivism-causality issues
- Two questions:
 - How can politics influence education, given the complex interrelations with other actors/fields/systems?
 - How much is evidence based on epistemological assumptions and beliefs?
E.g., which kind of policy model lies behind the rigorous evaluation approach?

Models of policy making

- Different models of policy making have different consequences for the role of R&D and evidence

- Two basic variants:
 - a vertical control model
 - a horizontal functional model

Models of policy making

- **VARIANT 1: vertical**

Education activities:

Learning, teaching, informing, counseling, organising, examining

Models of policy making

- **VARIANT 1a: vertical, politics controls**

Political activities:

*Deciding, implementing, influencing, electing-being elected
setting of frames, negotiating...*

,TOP DOWN‘

,Control‘



Education activities:

Learning, teaching, informing, counseling, organising, examining

Models of policy making

- **VARIANT 1b: vertical, politics controls + education is heard**

Political activities:

*Deciding, implementing, influencing, electing-being elected
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,BOTTOM UP‘

Education activities:

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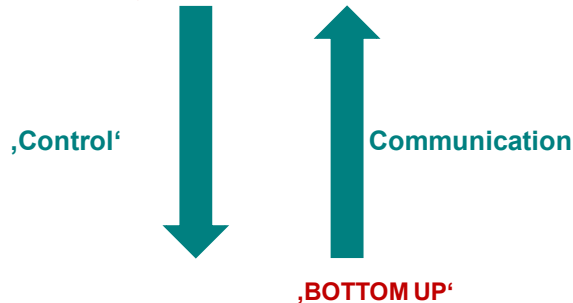
Models of policy making

- VARIANT 1b: vertical, politics controls + education is heard**

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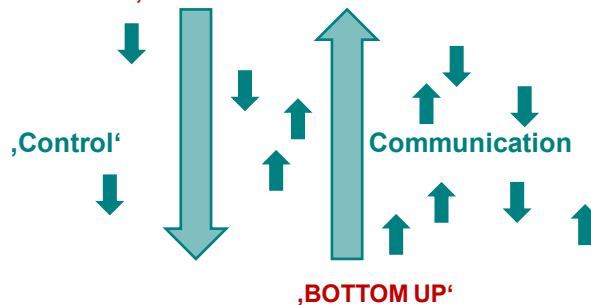
Models of policy making

- VARIANT 1c: vertical, but more complex and permeable**

Political activities:

*Deciding, implementing, influencing, electing-being elected
setting of frames, negotiating...*

,TOP DOWN'



Education activities:

Learning, teaching, informing, counseling, organising, examining

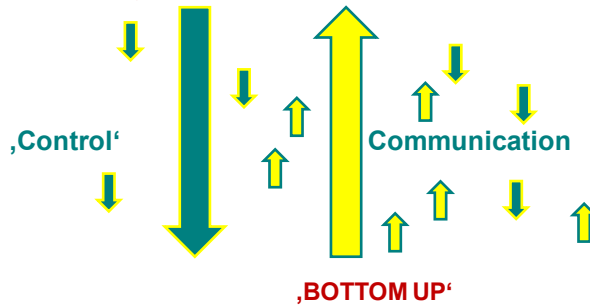
Models of policy making

- VARIANT 1d: vertical, more diverse, different channels**

Political activities:

*Deciding, implementing, influencing, electing-being elected
setting of frames, negotiating...*

,TOP DOWN'



,BOTTOM UP'

Education activities:

Learning, teaching, informing, counseling, organising, examining

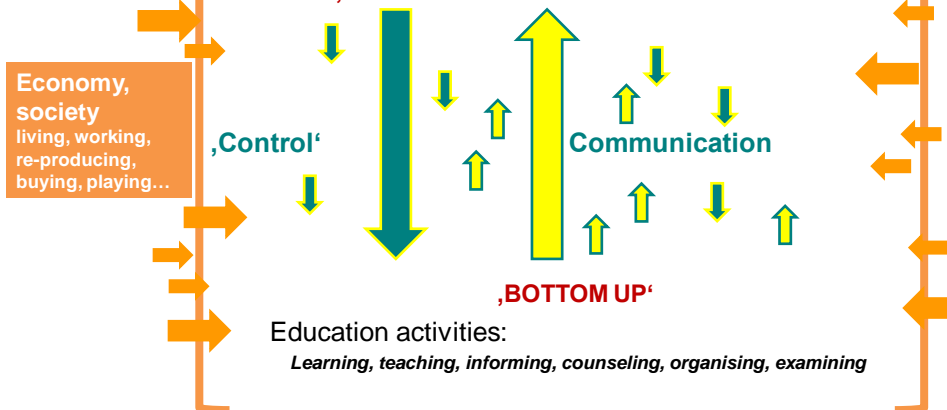
Models of policy making

- VARIANT 1: Embedded in society, influence of the economy...**

Political activities:

*Deciding, implementing, influencing, electing-being elected
setting of frames, negotiating...*

,TOP DOWN'



,BOTTOM UP'

Education activities:

Learning, teaching, informing, counseling, organising, examining

Versions of variant 1a, b, c, d...

- ...constitute very different patterns of influence, audiences of R&D and kinds of evidence
- ...the more complex the versions, the less will simple models work (however there might be the illusion that they work, if there is no evidence...)
- ...the more complex the perspective, the more complex will proposed policy approaches become (and charge too much from politics)
 - ‚Transitional labour markets‘
 - Danish flexicurity
 - Proposal for higher education market
- Full causal model of evidence based policy and policy variant 1a might be relatives?

Models of policy making

- **VARIANT 2**



an alternative view



Models of policy making

- **VARIANT 2: functional, horizontal**

Political activities:
Deciding, implementing, influencing, electing-being elected, setting of frames, negotiating...

Economy, society
living, working, re-producing, buying, playing...

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living, working, re-producing, buying, playing...

Education activities:
Learning, teaching, informing, counseling, organising, examining

,Control' Communication

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Models of policy making

- **VARIANT 2: autopoietic, coupling**

Political activities:
Deciding, implementing, influencing, electing-being elected, setting of frames, negotiating...

Economy, society
living, working, re-producing, buying, playing...

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living, working, re-producing, buying, playing...

Education activities:
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,Control' Communication

- Politics as 'self-sustainable' system, securing power, optimization of electorate > **stalemate in substance...**

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Variant 2...

- ...R&D becomes a player among others in a complex system...
- ...can make only ist business best, cannot predict outcomes...
- ...what is its business? Production of evidence > back to the beginning...

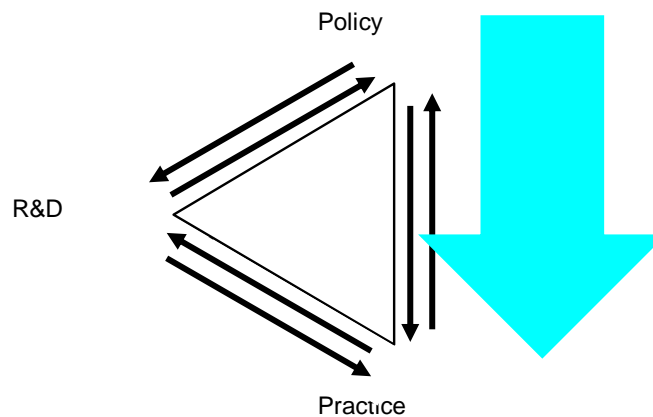
Research and policy at transnational level

- Outcome orientation as an example of a main policy proposal/paradigm at transnationale level...
- ...how is it related to the concepts of evidence-based policy and practice?
- We look at its
 - position in the triangle
 - position in the research cycle

„Outcome orientation“ conceptual meanings

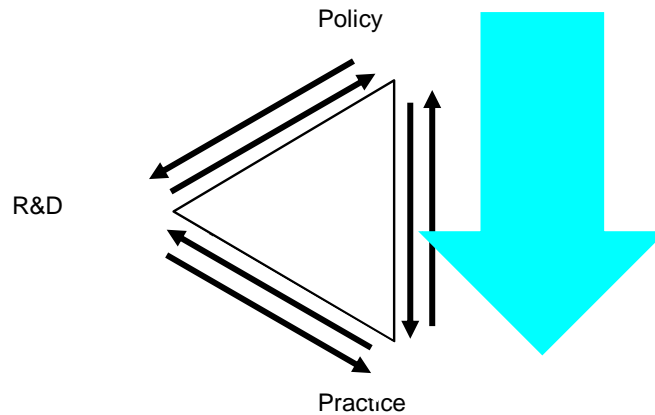
- Outcome orientation is first and foremost a **policy proposal**
- Key elements
 - a „topological“ shift of attention **from input & process to results**
 - results related to **goals & objectives** („processual, teleological“)
 - a „normative“ attention to the goals achieved by inputs and processes
(*goals and objectives – results = quality*)
- Outcome orientation situated at **policy** level, determined to influence **practice** towards some change
 - this important distinction between **policy & practice** tends to be underestimated by both advocates and critics
- Main drivers/instruments towards outcome orientation
 - New public management (**NPM**)
 - Large scale assessments, PISA etc. (**LSAs**)
 - EU Lisbon-Goals **Education Training 2010 > 2020**
 - Qualification frameworks („**Learning outcomes**“ and the **EQF/NQF**)

Outcome orientation in the triangle



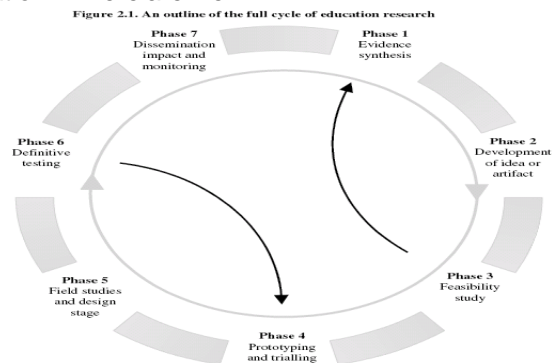
Outcome orientation in the triangle

- Policy at the center...
- ...tries to influence/change practice



How is R&D involved?

- Is outcome orientation a case of evidence-based policy and practice?
- Let us apply the model of the research cycle to R&D/knowledge about outcome orientation: Where are we?



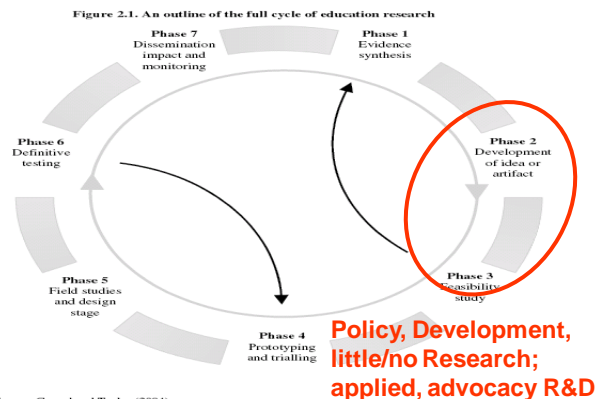
Source: Gorard and Taylor (2004).

Outcome orientation a case of evidence-based policy?

- Step 1 „**evidence synthesis**“ was not possible, because the concept was borrowed from other sectors (business) ...
- ...so the second step was taken first: **to develop ideas and artefacts**, and indeed, plenty of them have come up, already mentioned
 - the **EU ET 2010**, including the Open Method of Coordination, and the procedures of reporting, indicators, peer learning activities, benchmarks
 - the **Large Scale Assessments** as outcome measurement and data production, used for production of evidence
 - the increasing focus on **learning outcomes**, including competence/y models, standards and quality assurance (CQAF, EQARF)
 - the **qualification frameworks** EQF/NQF process that pushes towards learning outcomes, including validation and recognition of prior learning
 - and the **Bologna-process** has also been driven towards outcome orientation
- **what about the following steps?** Rather „evidence“ created by policy than evidence by research...
 - EQF/NQF: new artefact, before the previous (learning outcomes) has been implemented....

Outcome orientation a case of evidence-based policy?

- Step 1 „**evidence synthesis**“ was not possible, because the concept was borrowed from other sectors (business) ...
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 - the **EU ET 2010**, of reporting, indicators
 - the **Large Scale Assessments** used for production of evidence
 - the increasing focus on standards and quality assurance
 - the **qualification frameworks** outcomes, including validation and recognition of prior learning
 - and the **Bologna-process**
- **what about the following steps?** Rather „evidence“ created by policy than evidence by research...
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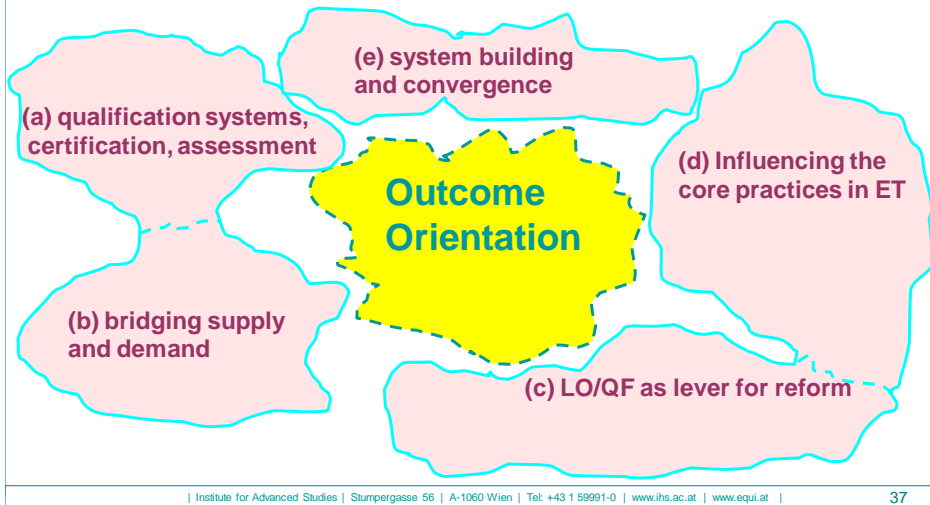
...finally the tail wags the dog?

- Step 1 „**evidence synthesis**“ was not possible, because the concept was borrowed from other sectors (business) ...
- ...so the second step was taken first: **to develop ideas and artefacts** – many of them have come up, already
 - the **Open Method of Coordination**, and the procedures for learning activities, benchmarks
 - the **CEDEFOP-study** as outcome measurement and data production,
 - the **CEDEFOP-study** on **learning outcomes**, including competency models, standards and quality assurance (CQAF, EQARF)
 - the **qualification frameworks**: EQF/NQF procedures towards learning outcomes, including validation and recognition
 - and the **Bologna-process** towards outcome orientation
- **what about the following steps?** Rather „evidence“ created by policy than evidence by research ...
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Expressions by advocats

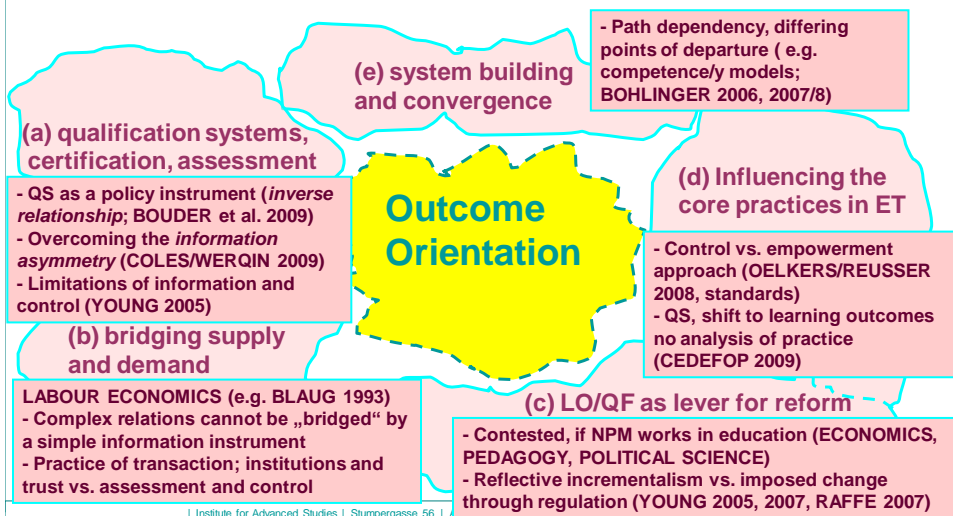
- Bjørnåvold and Coles (2007/8, 228): “Based on experiences and responses it may be argued that the limited available time (six months) successfully focused attention and left no time for discussions to drift and become weak and inconclusive.”
- “Introducing NQFs based on learning outcomes alters the point of equilibrium of governance in education and training systems. Additionally we propose there are general shifts of position of the key actors where consumers of qualifications, mainly individuals and businesses are likely to be empowered at the cost of providers.” (Bjørnåvold and Coles 2007/8, 231)
- Proposal to build qualification frameworks on basis of implicit criteria (first step), and then transform into learning outcomes based criteria (second step)

Recent research: a conglomerate of evidence against policy/practice?



Recent research: a conglomerate of evidence against policy/practice?

▪ Some quotes...



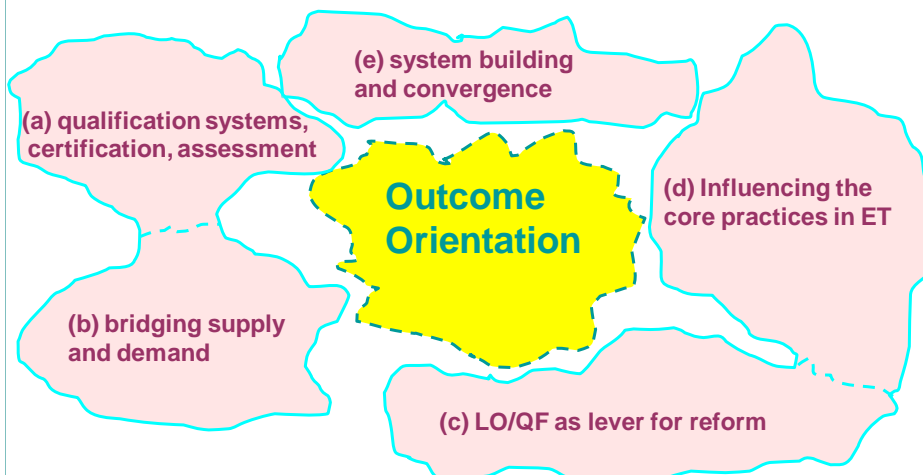
Research and policy at national level Austria

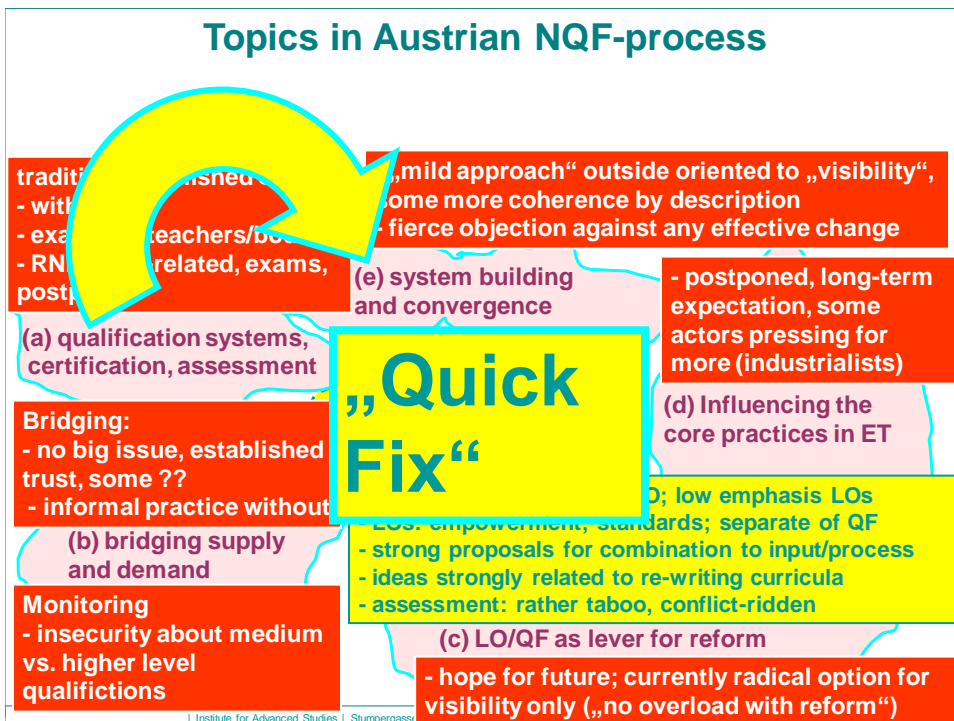
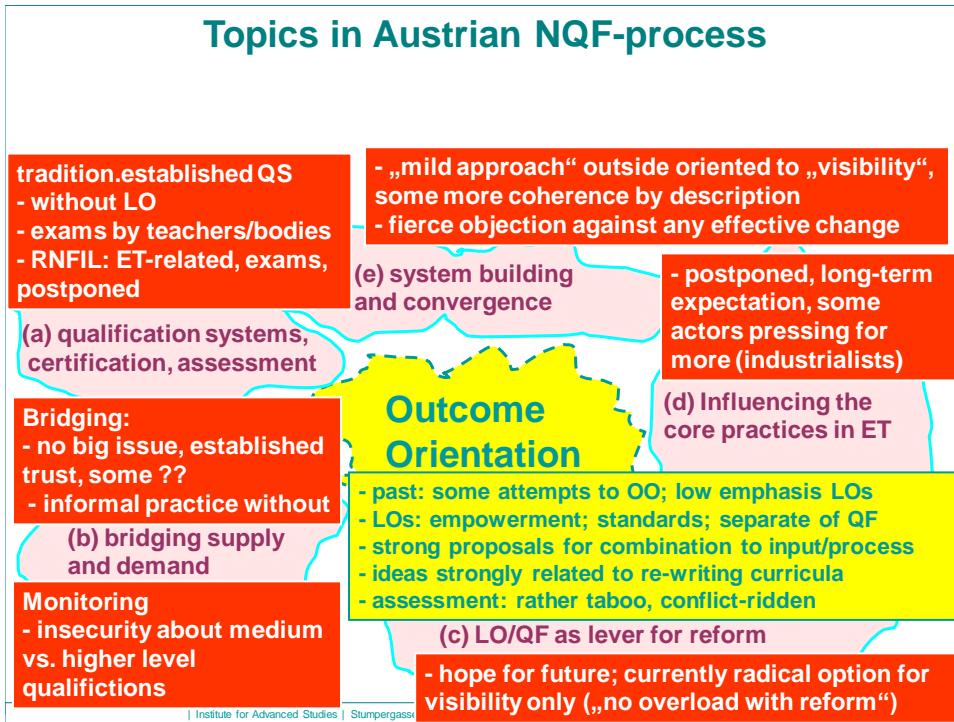
- **Background: comprehensive qualification system existed**
 - fragmented to different sectors of VET, some parts not included
 - not based on learning outcomes but on formal qualifications with weak assessment procedures
 - high selectivity and high trust in the system

- **Development of QF initiated by European policy, quickly adopted with a consensual agenda**
 - main players on policy level, practitioners sceptical and excluded, researchers +/-
 - only transparency tool, improvement of the transnational standing of the Austrian system
 - emphasis first on formal qualifications, non-formal and informal postponed
 - broad interest in learning outcomes, but also emphasis on inputs

- **Process supported by research projects under high time pressure and very little funding**
 - understanding and producing artefacts, applied and advocacy-oriented
 - feasibility studies, networking among experts and researchers

Topics in Austrian NQF-process

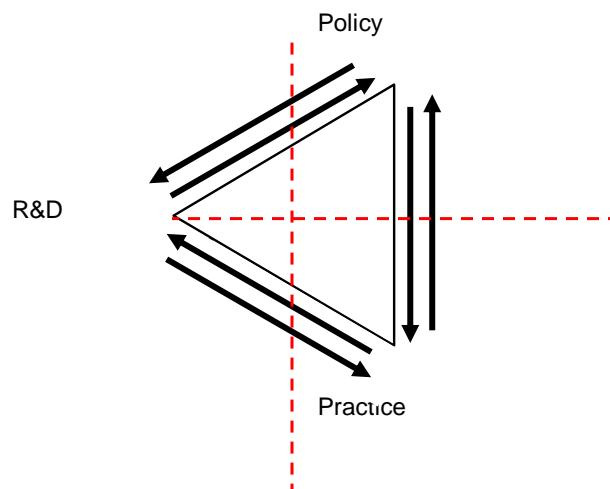


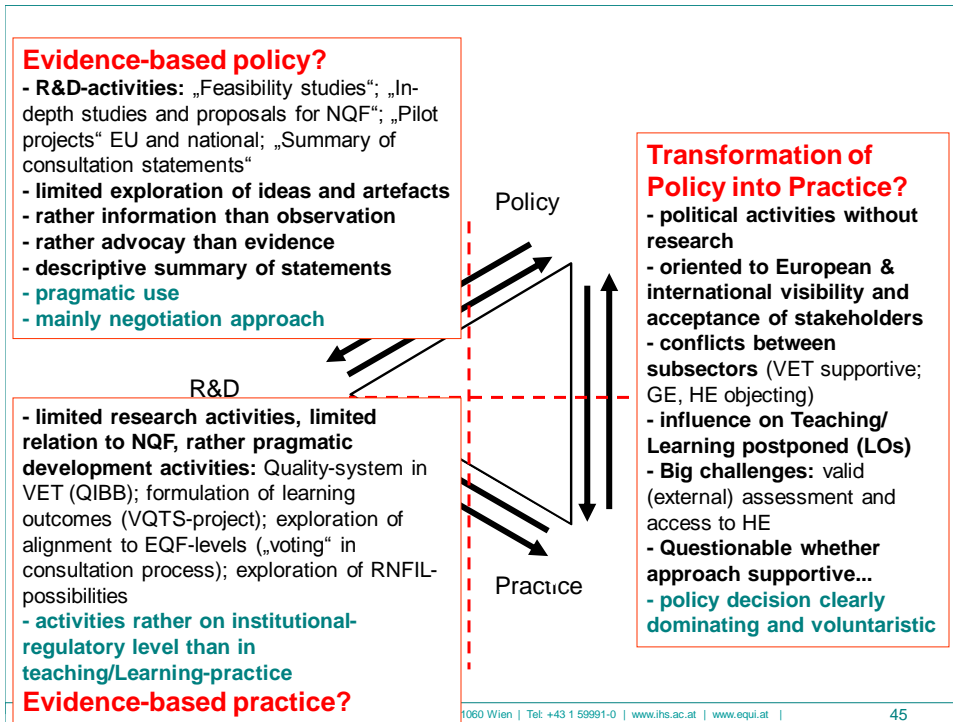


AUSTRIA - outcome orientation: evidence-based policy and practice?

- The case of NQF

AUSTRIA - outcome orientation: evidence-based policy and practice?





What can the example of outcome orientation tell us?

- Which issues/problems are involved in this case?
 - policy has taken action without evidence, using applied research
 - academic research has taken a sceptical/critical position, partly based on (weak) evidence
 - expectations, assumptions and beliefs of advocates mainly not supported by research

- Is it ,typical‘? Other examples:
 - Quality indicators, benchmarks: easy solutions
 - Equity of ET systems: not enough evidence
 - Labour market policy evaluation: misleading conclusions
 - Effects of educational governance in comparative research: aggregation problem
 - Effects of standards: contradictory evidence
 - New public management instruments: no proof that they work

Policy and practice: governance

Administrative Reform March & Olsen 1995

- „One of the most common forms of democratic institutional adaptation is **comprehensive administrative reform** ... Consequently, most democracies under take comprehensive reforms of administration from time to time ... A study of comprehensive administrative reform in eight countries ... observed that administrative reforms, as a rule, **seemed to result in neither improved administrative performance nor improved economic performance**, nor did they lead to increased adaptability ... Reformers learned from their experiences, but often they learned more about the difficulties of learning than about what worked.“
(March & Olsen 1995,194-195)

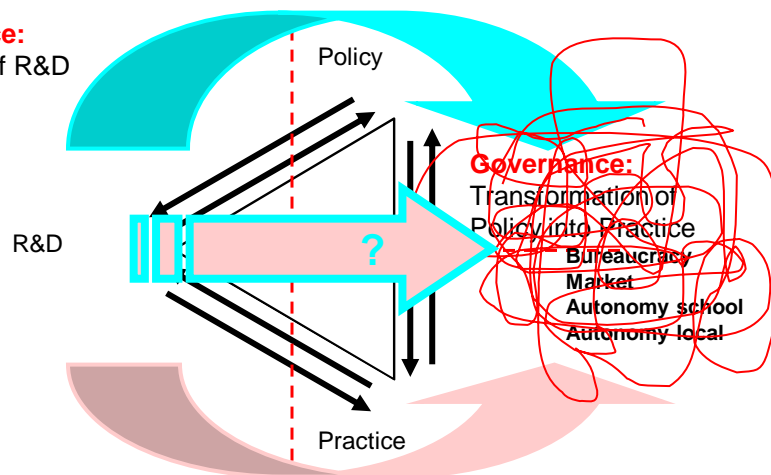
March J G & Olsen J P (1995) Democratic Governance. New York et al.: The Free Press.

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Transfer of R&D into P&P 3 channels

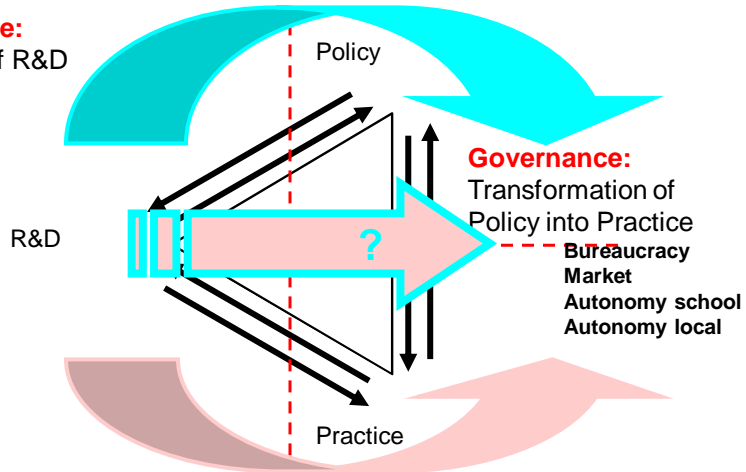
Governance:
Utilisation of R&D



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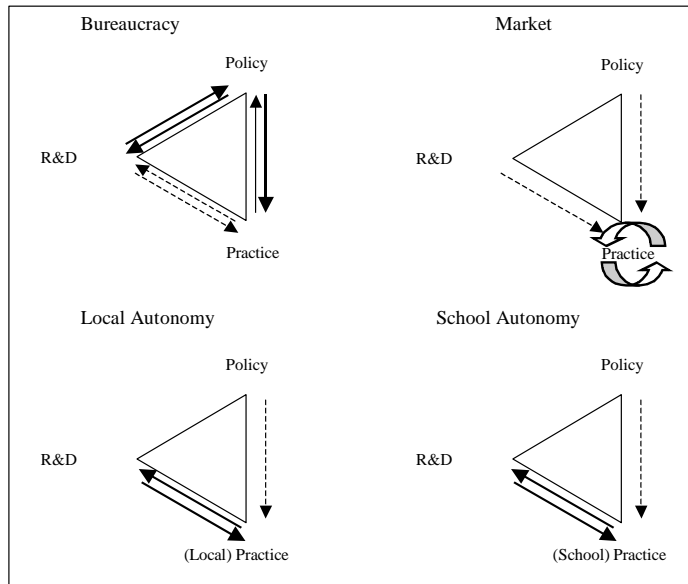
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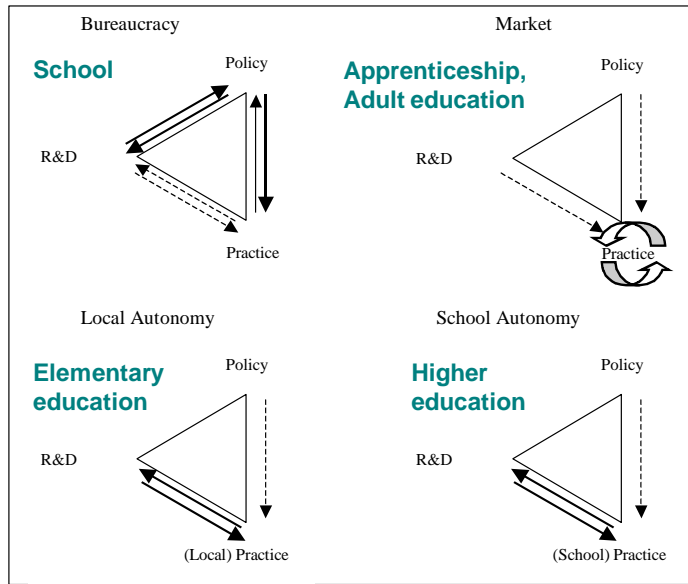
Different governance models, different use of R&D



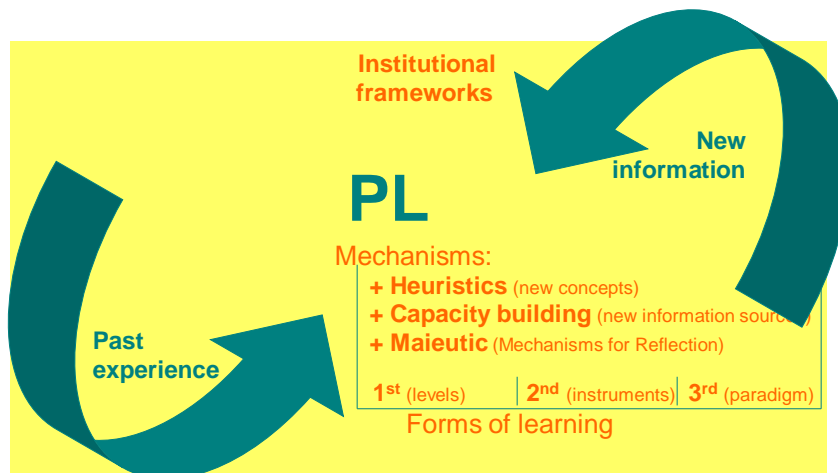
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Different governance models, different use of R&D



Policy learning



Conclusions

■ Problems

- J.M.Keynes: „There is nothing a government hates more than to be well informed; for it makes the process of arriving at decisions much more complicated and difficult“ > keep room for discretion...
- H.L.Wilensky's law: „The more evaluation, the less programme development, the more demonstration projects, the less follow-through „ > camouflage unwillingness to act...
- H.Taine: „Vergeblich beklagt sich die Vernunft, daß das Vorurteil die Welt regiert; denn wenn sie selbst die Welt regieren will, muß sie sich ebenfalls in ein Vorurteil verwandeln [if reason were about to govern, it must become a prejudice itself]; > evidence is always behind demand: hare and hedgehog...

MINOR

- Application gap: enough evidence, which is not used? wrong
- Brokerage as a solution? misleading hype

■ What to do? set priorities

- first and foremost: strive for improvement of evidence, whatever this means...
- seek improvement at the practice level (not at policy level)
- seek for understanding politics/policy (instead of following demands)
- fight opportunism: ‚speaking truth to power‘

The End



Material



Material

- Blaug M (1993): Education and the employment contract. *Educ. Economics* 1(1), 21-34.
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- Oelkers J/ Reusser K (2008): Qualität entwickeln - Standards sichern - mit Differenz umgehen. *BMBF Bildungsforschung Bd.27*. Bonn/Berlin.
- Raffe D. (2007): Making haste slowly: the evolution of a unified qualifications framework in Scotland. *EJE 42(4)*, 485-502.
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- Young M (2007): Qualifications frameworks: some conceptual issues. *EJE 42(4)*, 445-457.