

VET research as a contribution to the development of lifelong learning - requirements and pitfalls

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Agenda

- „Lifelong learning“ as an **innovation project** – implications for VET-research
- **2 dynamics in the framework conditions: Internationalisation & Commodification**
- **The Austrian structure** as a specific case – strengths and weaknesses
- **Some conclusions and generalisations**



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- „Lifelong learning“ as an **innovation project** – implications for VET-research



LLL a “radical” innovation?

LLL as a paradigm shift in education and training policy...

new emphasis in LLL on: learning; foundation; universal access
recurrent education – lifelong learning: incremental – radical innovation

... poses several challenges for educational research and development...

to go beyond ongoing practice
& to remain accepted/applicable

...however, innovation in education and training reflects national innovation system patterns

variance in an innovation system: regional, industry based, etc. ?
how to go beyond an overall “incrementalistic” pattern ?



The paradigm shift

Previous paradigm

- Externally prescribed learning
- Scientifically preplanned curricula
- Coherent systematic sources
- Instruction oriented
- Theoretical, verbal learning
- Teacher-learner interaction
- Receptive knowledge storage
- Certificate, qualification oriented
- Specific (formal) institutions
- Alternation learning - work
- Government large role
- Social demand

New paradigm

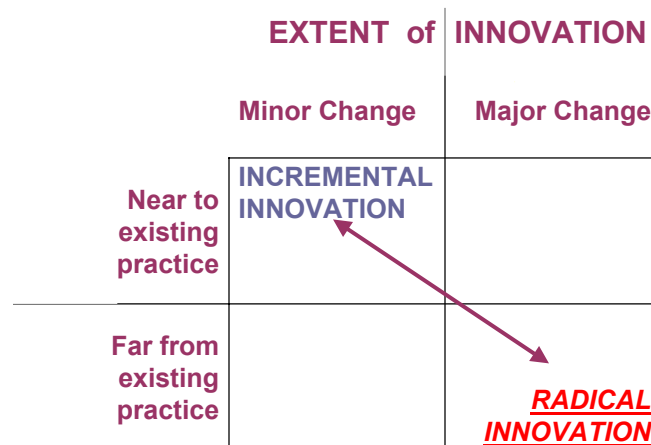
- Selfdirected learning
- Learning on demand, learners' choice
- Problem, interest oriented sources
- Task, project oriented
- Practical, situation oriented learning
- Learner-problem interaction
- Active knowledge construction
- Competency, problem solving or.
- Various contexts, environments
- Integration, on-the-job learning
- Partnership, various actors
- Individual demand

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Source: Ni Cheallaigh 2001, Dohmen 1998, OECD 1996

“Radical innovation”



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Source: Hargreaves 2003

“Radical innovation”

TYPES of INNOVATION	Technology Methodology Importation Organisation	EXTENT of INNOVATION	
		Minor Change	Major Change
Near to existing practice		INCREMENTAL INNOVATION	
Far from existing practice			<u>RADICAL INNOVATION</u>

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Source: Hargreaves 2003

Challenges for VET research

Close relation to practice as a distinguishing criteria of VET research: a weakness in radical innovation?

Conditions for „radical innovation“ in VET:
creation of new ideas – motivation, organisation
uncertainties (technical, market, organisational, resources)

Challenges from the OECD review (*Beyond Rhetorics*)

- consensus among the key groups about the need to invest
 - financial commitment
- org. structure, responsibilities, cooperation, and partnership
- priorities among kinds of learning, including financial priorities
 - institutional responsibility and quality assurance
 - support for target groups
- monitoring, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms
- integration of adult learning in general ET policies

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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

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A “non-academic” system

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

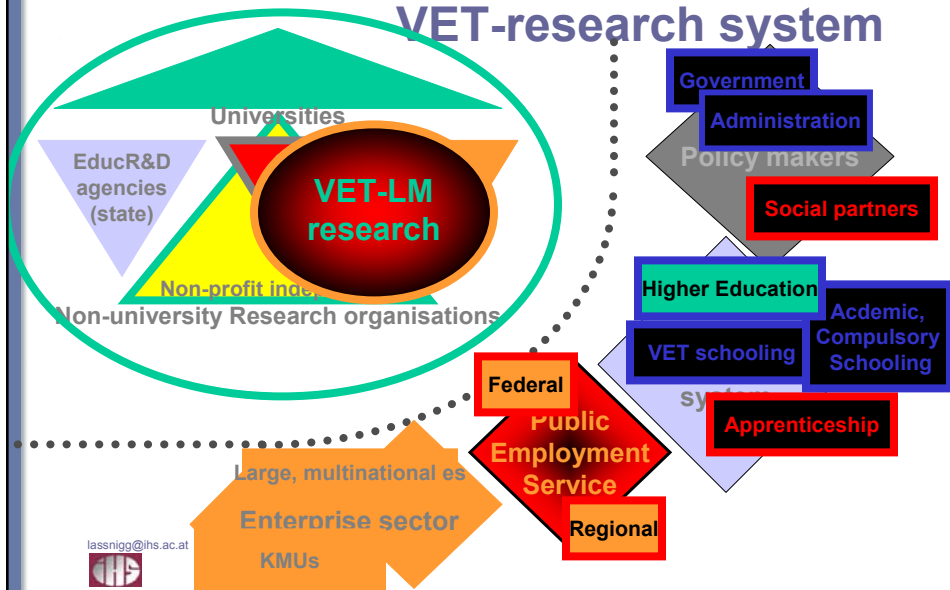
- It started to grow in the 1970s with the foundation of institutes related to the **social partners’ interest organisations** (ÖIBF, IBW, + IBE, IWI)
- Since the 1980s the VET research scene is in a period of very dynamic change, as a **growing number of market oriented research units** perform a big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

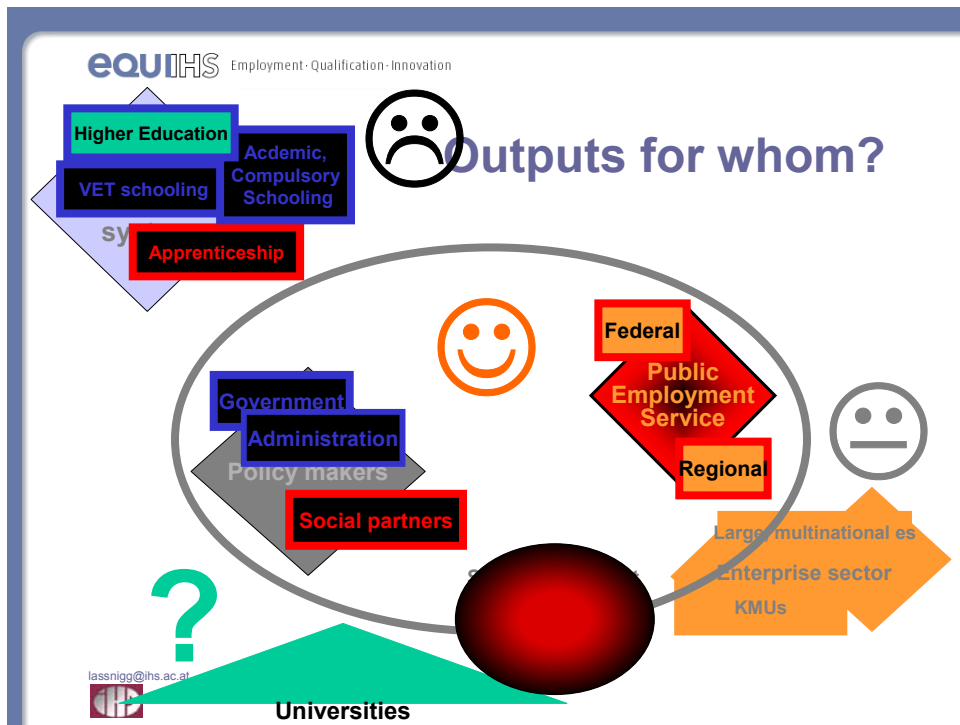
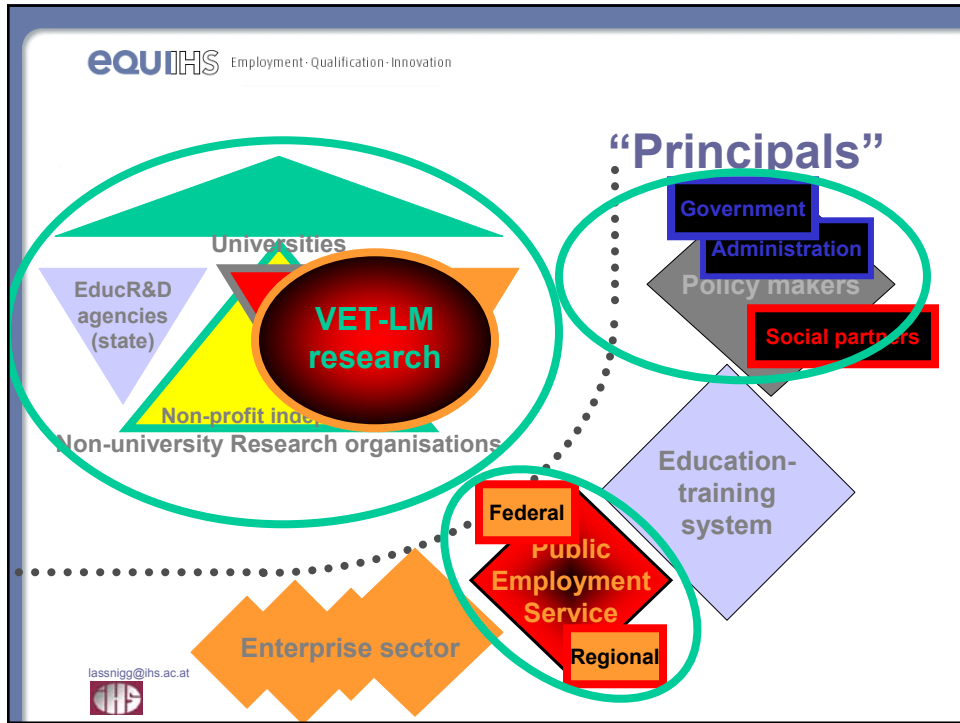
VET research and labour market (LM) research are different „worlds“

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VET-research system





some key characteristics

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

However some **particularities** in VET as compared to the overall system of social partnership

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

Only part of players within the system, VET institutions and enterprises not fully included

VET and LM research separated



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

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

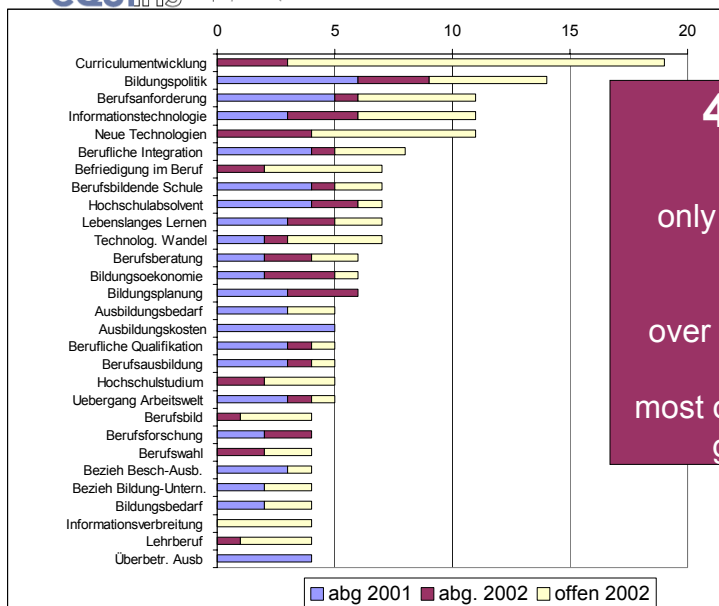
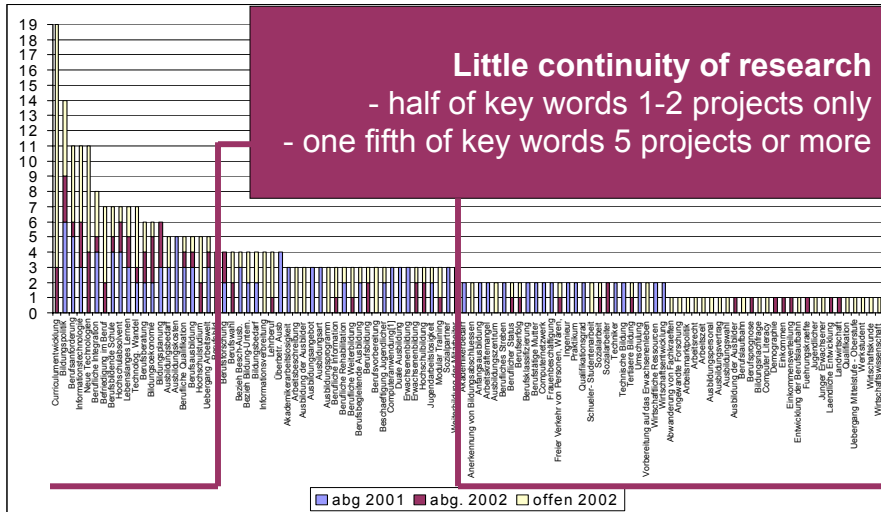
- lack of foresight, lack of time
- weak „absorption-potential“

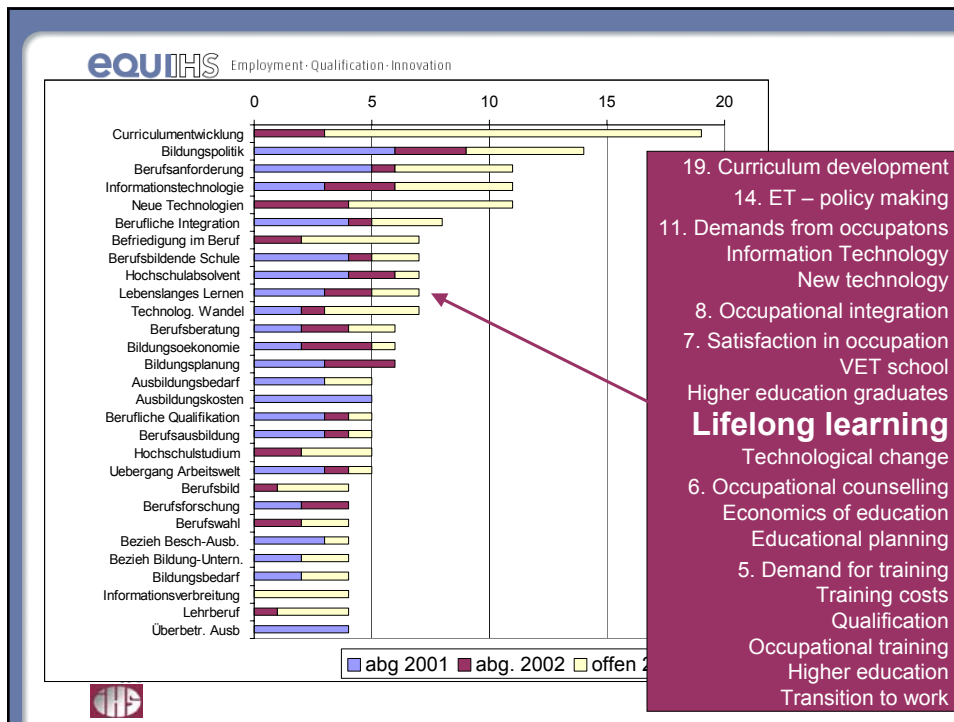
Practitioners in education and training institutions not involved in research

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



VET-research topics 2001-2002





equiHS Employment · Qualification · Innovation

Explorative Analysis

Visibility of Austrian VET research in Europe: analysis of the EC- „briefing papers“ from TSER-projects on educational R&D

Quantitative:

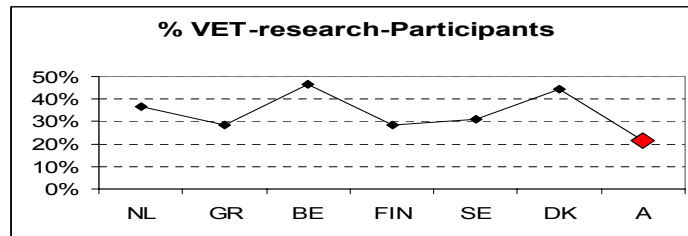
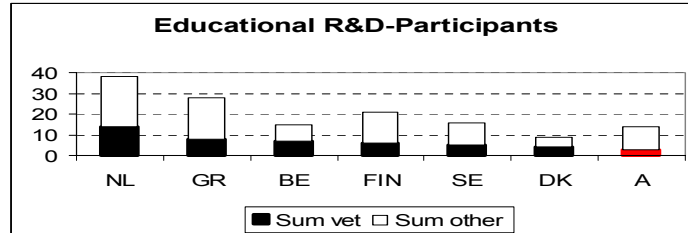
- Representation of Austrian teams compared to 6 small countries
 - VET-research projects vs. other educational research projects
 - proportion of university-based teams, and non-university-based teams

Tentative qualitative:

according to **innovative topics** are Danish teams strongly represented, despite a small number of visible projects from Denmark – might reflect an effective and creative networking and collaboration among a small number of university and non university based teams

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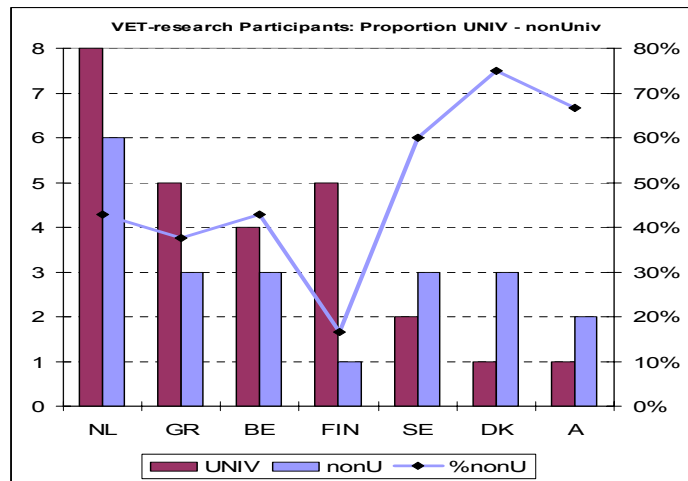
Explorative Analysis



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Explorative Analysis



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Reflections and conclusions I

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)

Traits of overall **innovation system** might be reproduced in educational research: bias towards incremental innovation obstacle to lifelong learning strategy

Structure of VET research system might be biased towards incremental innovation: lack of inclusion of actors at the meso and micro level

Reflections and conclusions II

The establishment of lifelong learning as a radical innovation needs support by **basic research**

The **involvement of the university** as a core institution of research is necessary for the production of inputs

The involvement of **actors at all levels** (macro, meso, micro) in the research system is necessary, in order to provide for motivation and the flow of knowledge (top-down and bottom up)

Key dimensions for radical change are

- motivation and initiatives for change
- consensus building
- provision of an institutional framework for effective partnership

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Reflections and conclusions III

Costs and uncertainties are important drawbacks of radical innovation, research can contribute to lower both

Some **key issues for research** about lifelong learning are

- resource allocation between initial and continuing education
 - the inclusion of foundation competencies in initial VET
- the interplay between formal, non-formal, and informal learning
- identification of the demand for CET from different angels (economic, social, cultural)
 - the identification of market failure and the demand for public intervention
- instruments for effective inclusion of disadvantaged target groups

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The End

Thank you !



Further material

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