

VET and Higher Education: two worlds, two frameworks?

Lorenz Lassnigg
(lassnigg@ihs.ac.at; www.equi.at)
International Conference on

“Employability of Graduates & Higher Education Management Systems”
Vienna, 22 - 23 September 2011

Agenda

- Research questions and methodology
- Starting point: the Austrian development
- Hypotheses for an explanation
- Findings
- Conclusions and further questions

Research questions and methodology

■ Research questions

- In Austria the relation of VET and HE is continuously disputed under the catchword of parity of esteem („gleichwertig aber nicht gleichartig“). The EGF/NQF process has put this relationship on the agenda. Despite the deliberate plan to develop a comprehensive overarching NQF, the political process has led to a split of two frameworks at the levels 6-8: Dublin descriptors for HE, EQF descriptors for VET qualifications
- how does this experience fit into a comparative picture? Is the gap between VET and HE a common phenomenon, or specific to certain structures of systems?
- which factors can explain a gap between VET and HE? Is it a gap between different kinds of knowledge, or a certain embeddedness in the social structures, or have political mistakes been made during the development and implementation process? or all of this?
- how is this development related to questions of permeability of the system?

■ Methodology: institutional analysis

- case study of QF in Austria
- comparing institutional structures of VET and HE
- relationship of institutional structures of VET and HE to QF

Starting point: the Austrian development

- Feasibility study of QF and HE (2006): an overarching frame
 - conditions for QF in HE
 - Relationship to other processes: Bologna, University reform act 2002, lifelong learning
- Set up of political-institutional structure of QF-development (2007-08)
 - main player: federal VET-administration
 - layered process of management and steering bodies
 - provider institutions not included in the process
- Consultation process (2008)
 - issues: character of QF; learning outcomes; forms of learning; levels
 - mixed results
- Conflicts and political decision: two frames at level 6-8
 - separation of higher education programmes and post-secondary programmes

Hypotheses for explanation

- (1) there is a **lack of language** for the political communication of the different kinds of knowledge processed in different parts of education, in particular about knowledge needed for innovation; because of this lack the relationships of VET and HE tend to be traditionally posed into a contradictory frame
 - theory vs. practice
 - radical vs. incremental innovation
 - VET vs. HE
- (2) a tendency to increase **a social gap and competition** between VET and HE is inherent in systems which are still resembling to past structures of elite HE systems
- (3) a **political structure related to status competition** makes the development of an overarching qualification framework particularly difficult

Findings

(1) Kinds of knowledge and lack of language

- Key aim of Austrian QF-policy: to present the system in a better way compared to other systems
 - Key problem: comparatively low rate of higher education
 - ‚Solution‘: Austrian sec./post sec. programmes equivalent to HE elsewhere
- Political proposal during EQF-consultation: to eliminate research as a main descriptor of levels 6-8 (research should not be distinctive)
 - Successfully accepted in revised EQF; difference Dublin / EQF descriptors
- Steps toward overarching frame that would allow to bring post secondary programmes at levels 6-8 have been taken
 - Feasibility study about QF in higher education: proposal of overarching frame seemed undisputed
- However, no debate about what makes HE distinctive, ‚power-game‘
 - Resulting in defensive power dispute between HE-stakeholders and VET-stakeholders

Findings

(2) Social gap and elite systems

- Structures of ET-systems differ according to how the expansion of HE has been institutionalised
 - parallel sectors of elite, mass, and universal HE, related to each other by ‚cooling out‘-mechanisms (USA)
 - blocking mass and universal systems by institutional segmentation/layering and academic drift within HE: ‚educational schism‘ (Austria, Germany)
- VET plays a key institutional role in the development of HE structure
 - different kinds of VET-systems: early VET vs. delayed VET
 - early VET is related to a ‚blocking-mechanism‘, tendency to retain ‚elite structure‘ in HE despite factual ‚massification‘
 - Key point in Austrian discussion: lack of resources (estimates: one third missing)
- early VET constitutes, processes, and retains social gap to HE
 - ‚gleichwertig aber nicht gleichartig‘ (equivalent but not uniform)
 - retaining language problem about knowledge
 - basic rhetoric: theory versus practice
 - (1) *conceptual simplification/onthologisation*; (2) *practice over theory (devaluation)*

PISA 2006: A first classification of VET structures

1: one programme, 1st selection 16, no VET at 15

AUS, CND, NZ, UK, US

DK, FIN, IS, N, S

PL, E, LV

2: 1st selection 13-15, low VET at 15 (below 20%)

EL, IT, PT, LUX, EE, LT

3: 1st selection 13-15, medium VET at 15 (20-40%)

IRL, JP, KOR, RO

4: 1st selection 10-12, low VET

CZ, HU, SK, BG, MEX, TR

5: 1st selection 10-12, medium VET

BE, GER, CH

6: high VET

AT, NL, SI

**Comprehensive, late selection,
(no early VET)**

Early VET, early selection

PISA & EAG 2006: A second classification of VET structures

1: early selection and low/medium VET

HU, MEX, TR

2: med/late selection and low/medium VET

EL, IRL, IT, JP, KOR, PT

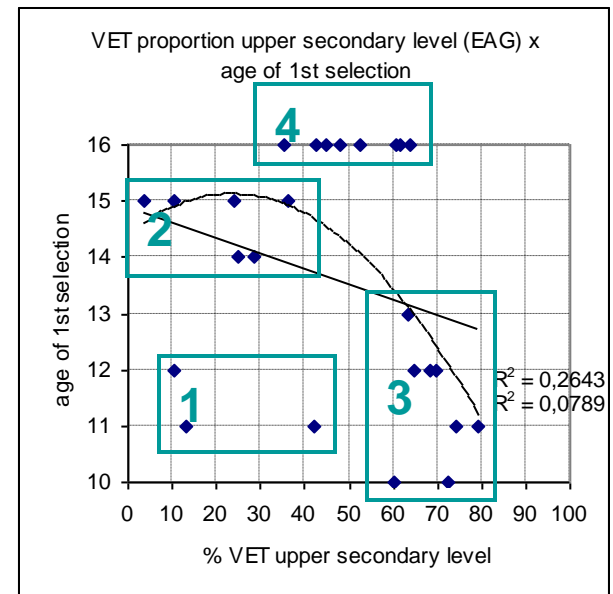
3: early/med selection and high VET

AT, BE, CZ, GER, LUX, NL, SK, CH

4: late selection and medium/high VET

AUS, DK, FIN, IS, N, PL, E, S

NOTE: the anglo-saxon countries, and some new member states are missing in the EAG-classification

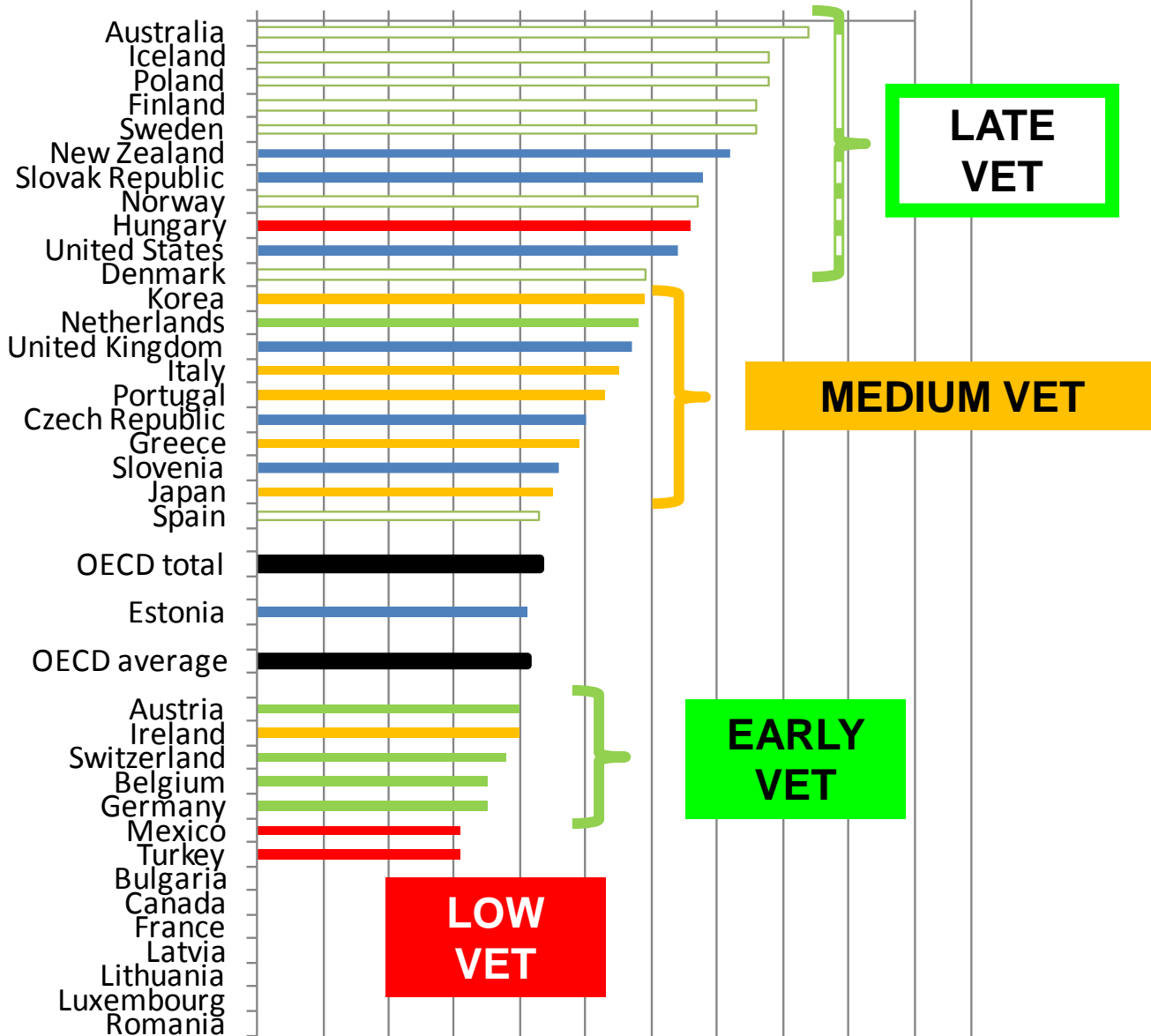


VET Classification 1(15y) x VET Classification 2 (upper secondary)

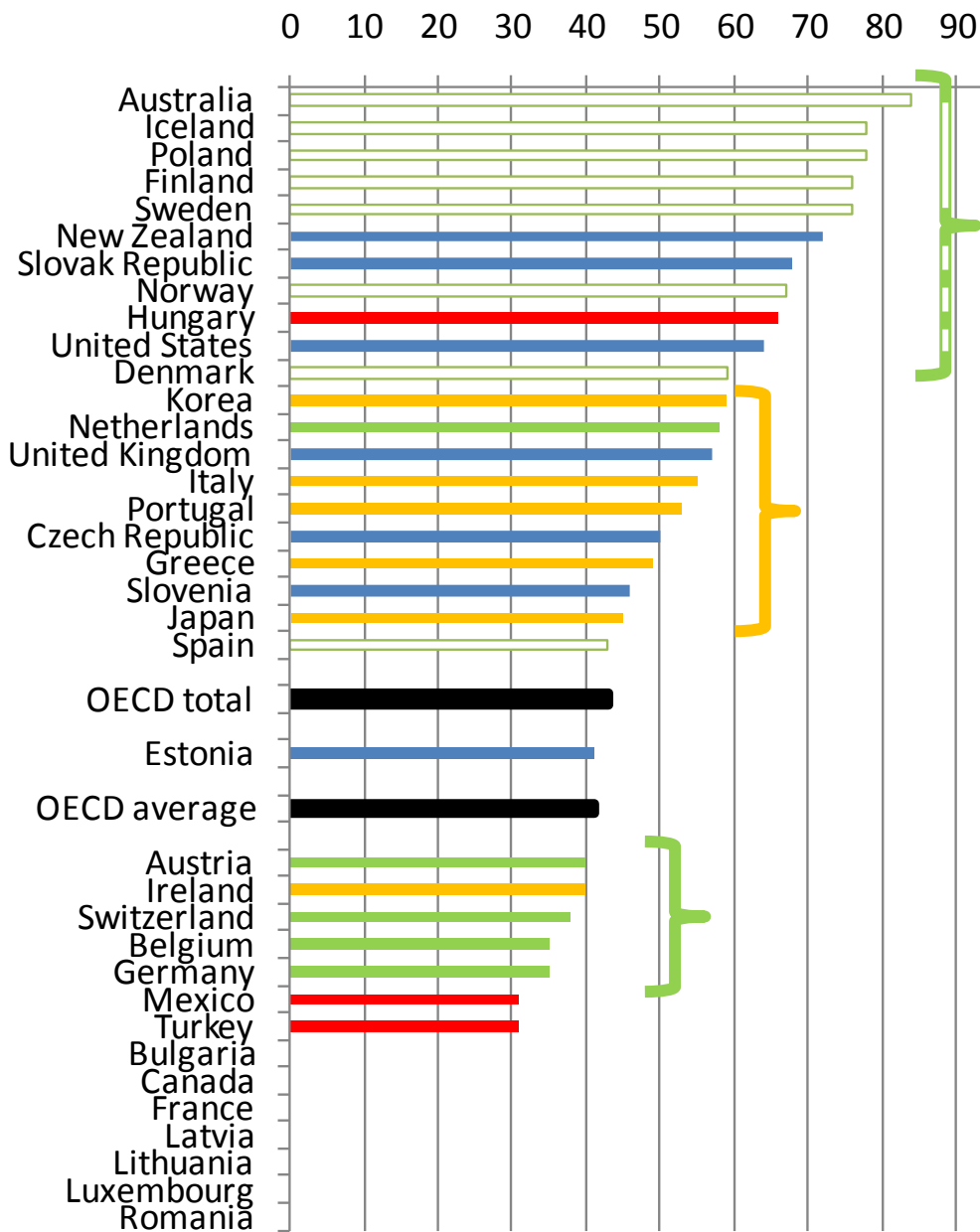
	(1) early sel., low-med VETupS	(2) med/late sel., low-med VETupS	(3) early/med sel., high VETupS	(4) late sel., high VETupS
(1) late sel., no VET15 (CND, NZ, UK, US, LV)				AUS, DK, FIN, IS, NOR, S, PL, E LATE VET
(2) med.sel., low VET15 (EE, LT)		EL, IT, PT, MEDIUM VET	LUX	
(3) med.sel., med VET15 (RO)		IRL, JP, KOR,		
(4) early sel., low VET15 (BG)	HU, MEX, TR LOW VET		CZ, SK,	
(5) early sel., medium VET15			BE, GER, CH EARLY VET	
(6) early sel., high VET15 (SI)			AT, NL,	

VET & HE Tert A

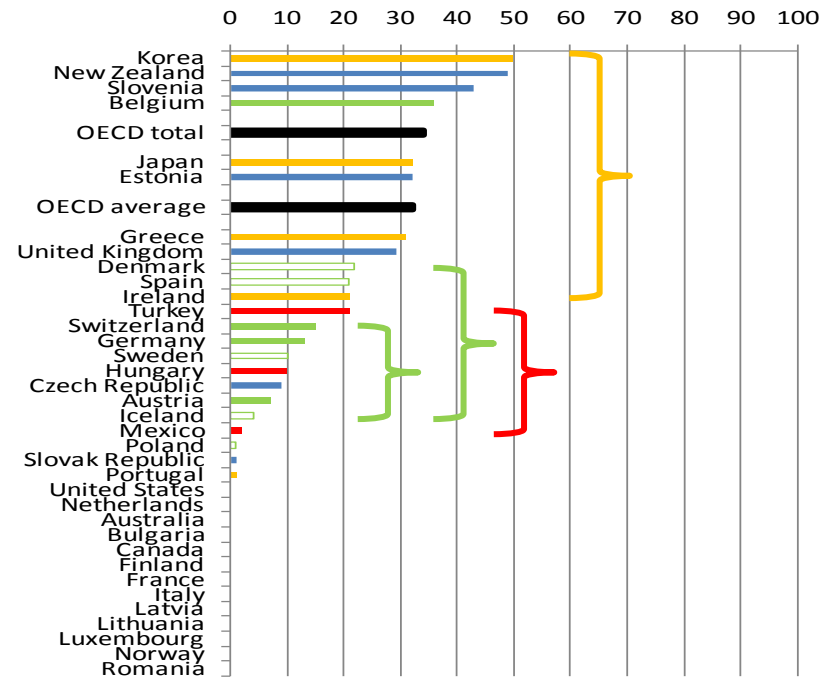
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100



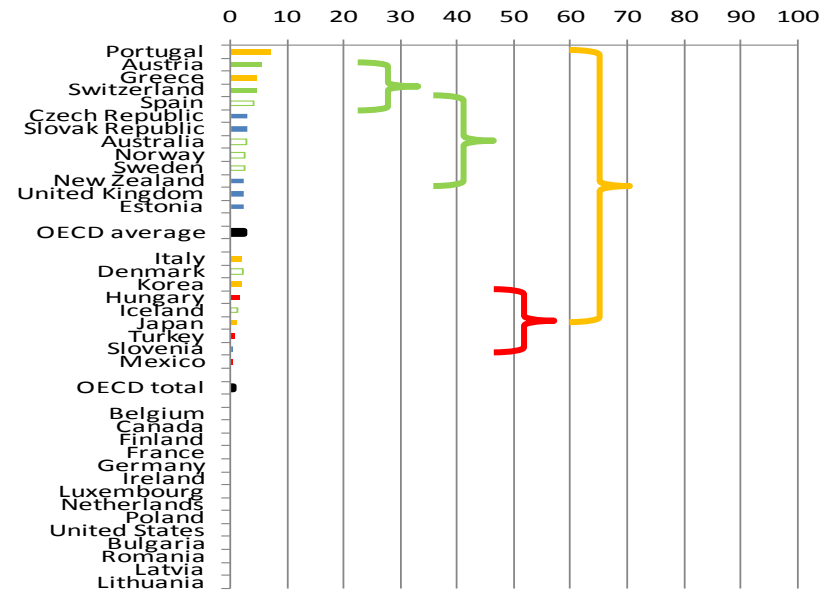
VET & HE Tert A



Tert B



Tert C



Findings

(3) Political structure and status competition

- QF policy process strongly controlled
 - between administration, stakeholders and social partners
 - education/training providers not included in the process
took part in consultation
 - strong leading function by VET administration
- Consultation process strongly focused and oriented to levels in initial ET
 - time pressure: allocation to levels before implementation of learning outcomes
 - low emphasis on conceptual issues
 - main aims on implicit agenda
- Finally no resultion between VET and HE
 - ‚Y-model‘ with separate frames at levels 6-8

Permeability: VET and HE

- Higher education: small elite-system, dominated by traditional universities
 - University access still controlled by upper secondary institutions
 - Speciality: VET-colleges provide similar entitlement as academic secondary schools
- Second tier (Fachhochschule-FH) established in 1990s
 - New framework, established from scratch (no upgrading of existing institutions)
 - New governance framework based on accreditation and institutional autonomy
 - Should provide new advanced VET-qualifications for industry and services
 - Should provide additional opportunities for access from apprenticeship, did not work, instead has shifted on top of VET colleges
 - Substantial ‚academic drift‘ (main qualification after Bologna: master)
- Consequences
 - VET-colleges are substantial pipeline to higher education
 - Many students are ‚doubling-up‘ their upper secondary qualifications in same field
 - FH only partly ‚real‘ new business related opportunities for additional students
 - Substantial increase of costs of educational pathways

Conclusions

- A divided system ever produces new divides
- The university is constantly fighting against devaluation of theory, however has highest status socially from tradition
- The Fachhochschule is characterized by academic drift, trying to become a university
- The VET colleges are fighting for reputation, trying to get somehow at the upper levels
- Overall a language for the debate of ‚professionalism‘ is missing, and cannot be developed because all actors/institutions are defending their position (‚nothing fails like success‘)

The End



Material

