

**The VETNET Chronicle 1992 - 2006:
Part II: *Personal* reflections on the issues
'growth of knowledge' and *'European dimension'*
in the context of European VET Research**

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1. On the search for common identity for European VET research 1990 -1995 1(3)

Strategic options and choices

- **Before 1992: Individual researchers participating in diverse conferences – e.g. the ones of EARLI** (European association for Research on Learning and Instruction)
- **From 1992 on: The prospect of linking VET research to the EERA** (as the European umbrella organisation for Educational Research)
- **1992 - 1994: Explorations with the alternative option** (a separate European association for research in VET & HRD)
- **1995 - 1996: The steps to launch VETNET as a network of EERA** (with a respective network programme in the ECER conference)

1. On the search for common identity for European VET research 1990 -1995 2(3)

Strategic issues and conceptual implications

- **EERA:** Linking VET research to a broad educational research context (*Educational* systems, policies and practices)
- **EARLI:** Linking studies on vocational learning to psychological and interdisciplinary research (Focus on *learning and instruction*)
- **Independent association:** Putting forward VET and HRD as specific fields of research (Focus on **work & organisational contexts**)
- **Critical issue:** How to take into account the conceptual diversity within European VET research landscape?

1. On the search for common identity for European VET research 1990 -1995 3(3)

On the status of European VET research

- VET research was promoted by different *academic, interdisciplinary* and *applied* research institutes
- Use of research as support for VET policies varied from *ad hoc tasks* to *systematic* (national) *patterns*
- Conceptual openness for European cooperation varied and was linked to *different expectations on the results*

2. On the role of *earlier European cooperation* in the development European VET research 1996 -2000 1(3)

Steps forward in preparing VETNET sessions for ECER

- **1996 – 1997:** From presentations of individual projects (as such) to **cross-project dialogue** and to **debates on core structures of VET research**
- **1997 – 1998:** From linked topics to **knowledge enrichment** and to **debates on *trans-nationality in VET research***
- **1998 – 1999:** From presentations on current projects to **reviews on progress and achievements in VET research**
- **1999 – 2000:** From internal discussions within VETNET to **contributions to the EERA president's symposium**

2. On the role of *earlier European cooperation* in the development European VET research 1996 -2000 2(3)

Insights into mutual learning within European VET research

- **Capability to identify *complementary themes* and *methodological approaches* within cross-project dialogue**
- **Capability to identify *main strategies* and *sub-strategies* in different national VET policies**
- **Capability to discuss *boundary-crossing innovations* and their *implementation in diverse VET cultures***
- **How to *consolidate the knowledge bases* in the *further development* of European cooperation?**

2. On the role of *earlier European cooperation* in the development European VET research 1996 -2000 3(3)

Reflections on conceptual difficulties

- **Debate on core structures of VET research (ECER 1997):** Silent agreement to accept conceptual diversity – little progress in deeper learning from each other.
- **Debate on trans-nationality (ECER 1998):** Shift of emphasis from *system-centred comparisons* to *theme-centred working interests* – little progress in analysing the cultural factors.
- **Debates on work-related learning (1998 - 2001):** Efforts to bring research on ‘work experience’, ‘work process knowledge’ and ‘learning organisations’ into dialogue – little progress in drawing conclusions for the development of VET cultures.

3. On the impact of *newer European policies* on the development of European VET research 2003 – 2006 1(3)

Preparatory steps and initiatives

- **2002 – 2003: Joint debate on European VET research agenda.** The *I-Europe* note as a spin-off; erosion of the follow-up process.
- **2003 – 2004: Focused debate on 'VET PISA'.** Contrary (if not contradictory arguments; no agreement on joint follow-up measures.
- **2004 – 2005: Joint debate on the 'European dimension' of European policies and on the Maastricht study.** Instant reporting on the ECER conference blog but no direct follow-up initiatives.
- **2005 – 2006: Joint debate on the European Qualification Framework (EQF).** Instant reporting on the ECER conference blog and joint decisions on follow-up; Yet, a gradual erosion of the follow-up activities.

3. On the impact of *newer European policies* on the development of European VET research 2003 – 2006 2(3)

Developments in the European research landscape

- **Fading away of** earlier **key themes** and related **lead projects** and **networks** (e.g. ‘Forum’, the ‘Work Process Knowledge’ network)
- **Emergence of new themes** has led to *regrouping of interests* and to relative **marginalisation of VET** (e.g. with topics like ‘e-Learning’, ‘evaluation research’, ‘personal learning environments’)
- **Lack of interest in** making **group pictures of European VET cultures** as ‘*cultural clusters*’ and ‘*pattern families*’. (Partly due to the enlargement of the European Union.)
- **Lack of interest in** developing **deeper knowledge on each others’ reforms** and innovations. (The impact of shifting reform priorities, modifications of reforms, decentralisation and privatisation.)

3. On the impact of *newer European policies* on the development of European VET research 2003 – 2006 3(3)

New role models for *European* VET research

- **Support for implementation of pre-defined European VET policies** (e.g. *EQF, ECVET*) instead of exploring the scope for supporting national policies (e.g. the projects on “parity of esteem between ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ learning”).
- **Monitoring the attainment of Lisbon goals** (e.g. *the Maastricht study and the ‘Helsinki study’*) instead of exploring the scope for new European initiatives (e.g. the studies on educating new VET professionals).
- **Monitoring specific policy developments in all 32 countries** (e.g. *the current studies on ‘trainers’*) instead of working with samples of countries that represent specific cultural clusters (e.g. on the basis of prior groupings of VET cultures).

IV. Concluding remarks

Questions, Lessons and Challenges:

- ❖ The VETNET community has **reached stability** but ***lost the internal dynamics*** (that were embedded in the earlier phase of ‘networking the networks’).
- ❖ The VETNET community has **learned to discuss the results** of European cooperation but ***not to progress to European knowledge enrichment*** (e.g. the fate of publication initiatives).
- ❖ The VETNET community has **followed European VET & research policies** but ***failed in promoting a pattern of policy commentary*** (e.g. the initiatives related to ‘VETNET Forum’).
- ❖ The VETNET community has **opened debates** on the **role of VET-related know-how** in current innovations. Yet, there has been ***lack of progress in taking the ideas further*** (e.g. the initiatives on ‘research agendas’ and on ‘Enrich 3L’).