LIFELONG LEARNING AND EMPLOYABILITY – IS THE EUROPEAN MODEL OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN CRISIS?

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1. Introduction

For some time now, two of the buzz-words of European vocational training policy have been "lifelong learning" and "employability". These have replaced transparency, mutual recognition of qualifications and guaranteed freedom of movement, which were the dominant goals in the eighties and nineties – even though the latter still remain on the list of objectives. This shift of emphasis can also be seen in the document entitled "Employment, Economic Reforms and Social Cohesion – towards a Europe based on Innovation and Knowledge" tabled by the Portuguese government for its EU presidency during the first six months of 2000. Attention is now focussed on promoting innovation and knowledge as crucial resources for achieving economic growth, and in this context the two terms „employability„ and „lifelong learning„ are also used in the document. Of the four areas identified as subjects for European economic, employment and social policy, two are of direct relevance to our topic:

- "Improving the efficacy of active employment policies as regards employability" and
- "Strengthening the synergies between adaptability and lifelong learning".

This new emphasis on employability and lifelong learning also signifies a shift of perspective. My thesis in this context is that it is this precisely this new focus on the personality that is engendering a crisis in the traditional European model of vocational training.
I intend to do the following

- Provide an overview of some examples of vocational training systems in Europe and answer the question as to whether one can speak of there being a specifically European model;
- Describe briefly some European trends in industries and companies which are of importance for vocational training;
- Look at an issue which still remains unresolved throughout Europe - the question of lifelong access to vocational training provisions;
- Finally I will examine the crisis and need for change in the European model of vocational training.

2. The European model of vocational training

Systems in Europe

A superficial glance at the vocational training landscape in Europe reveals a clear differentiation between countries with „dual„ systems involving a combination of taught courses and in-company training and those with school based training only. If one looks more closely, however, it becomes obvious that in fact a wide range of different approaches and systems exist – for even institutionalised courses can have an element of in-company training, and there are also school sub-systems in countries with „dual“ systems. The situation becomes even more complex when further training is also taken into account.

In the early nineties, the notion of "*competition between vocational training systems* " and competition to find *optimum solutions to problems* was declared an official instrument of European vocational training policy. The idea was that, as a „European training and qualification area„ developed, national systems and examples of best practice would compete

with one another and this would lead to an improvement in vocational training provisions. Without being explicitly mentioned, three national systems were at the forefront of the competition (CD ROM 1998):

- the German „dual„ system as a *model for initial training*,
- the French further training system as a *model for regulation*,
- and the British National Vocational Qualification system as *a model for certification*.

Germany

Training under the *German dual system* alternates between companies and vocational colleges, but is characterised by the de facto dominance of the company over the school element. Training is provided in state-recognised occupations and trades established on a long-term basis and tailored above all to the needs of the labour market and the companies themselves. The idea is that this ensures that the training is of a practical nature and therefore guarantees employability and relevance to the labour market. Both management and labour are involved in regulation at the level of the system as a whole – defining training standards – and implementation in the companies. Some 60% of an age cohort receives such dual training - an unusually high proportion of young people in international terms.

France

In France, the focus is more on vocational further training. This is regulated through „interaction„ between government legislation and agreements signed by management and labour. This approach is based on a consensus reached between the government, employers' associations and trade unions in 1970 on the need to improve training levels amongst employees. At the time, an individuals' right to further training was first of all proclaimed in an agreement signed by management and labour, and later defined as a right to leave of absence and incorporated as such in labour legislation. Over time there followed agreements on instruments for realising this right, all of which came into being on an „interactive„ basis between management, labour and the government. This led to the development of a system of joint arrangements by management and labour for the „administration„ of further training provisions. Basically this system today consists of training leave, with two forms of individual training leave - CIF („congé individuel de formation") and training time credits CTF („capital temps de formation"), skills assessment to identify an individual's training requirements ("bilan de compétences") and joint institutions set up by management and labour for generating and administering the necessary financial resources. There is a right to training leave, but this can, in fact, only be made use of according to the decisions of the particular organisation which administers the funds for such training. Further training also covers company training plans, which are entirely the responsibility of the companies themselves, and measures to integrate young people.

Great Britain

The British National Vocational Qualifications have been developed as a certification system since the early nineties. The point of departure was recognition that employees lacked formal qualifications as a result of inadequate training by industry and the state. An attempt has been made to solve this problem not by organising a wave of training provisions but by providing certification for existing skills. Qualifications are defined in terms of simple modules and are granted - irrespective of an individual's previous initial or further training - on the basis of demontrating competencies in an assessment procedure. In principle it is possible to acquire

individual certificates one after the other and thus gradually achieve/demonstrate complex qualifications. Qualifications are defined at five different levels of requirement which more or less correspond to the European five-stage scheme for classifying qualifications. Assessment is carried out under practical conditions in companies or in recognised outside institutions. The task of defining the requirements for each module is carried out by "industry lead bodies" - which are dominated by the companies so as to ensure the practical nature of the modules. The trade unions can take part in the process, but – unlike in France – do not play a key role. The British system is aimed at removing the traditional differentiation between initial and further training: the question of the type of course and the stage in a person's career that a qualification was acquired is of secondary importance – all that matters is an individual's ability to carry out practical tasks. However there are now a large number of courses providing training in the required skills, and formal courses for young people are also on offer: "modern apprenticeships", which lead to Stage 3 qualifications and "modern traineeships", which lead to qualifications at the lower, Stage 2 level. However the length of these courses is not formally laid down – so here, too, what is important is for an individual to be able to prove that he or she has the required skills.

Transferability to other countries

In comparing these three systems I would like initially to stress two aspects: the different patterns of regulation for recognition of qualifications, and the question of securing employability and lifelong learning.

With regard to *recognition of qualifications*, the French system can be described as *input-oriented*: access is largely dependent on previous participation in school education. This is reflected in the fact that many courses end in a "diploma", and the leaving-certificate from the lycée enjoys the best reputation of offering prospects of occupational promotion. Vocational courses are effectively only selected by those who have dropped out of the higher status general education system. Compared with this, the German system - at least in terms of vocational qualifications - is more *process-oriented*: participation in regulated training courses under the "dual" training system largely leads to qualifications which are recognised on the employment market. Participation in these courses is not formally dependent on having a school-leaving qualification. Then, finally, there is the *output-oriented* British system: qualifications are awarded on the basis of demonstrable competencies, irrespective of the type and duration of formal initial and further training.

With regard to *employability* and *lifelong learning*, the German system for many years could claim high levels of employability amongst those undergoing training, thanks to the practical nature of the courses; the French further training system claimed that the built-in obligation to carry out regular dialogue with management and labour guaranteed that the system was constantly adjusted to new requirements; and the British model claimed that the modular nature of the training courses offered individuals scope for lifelong learning.

For many years, the southern states within the EU modelled their systems on the *French one*. There were two reasons for this: firstly in those countries in which, until recently, compulsory education ended at an early age (Italy, Portugal, Greece), the main emphasis was on vocational further training for employees. Secondly, the specific type of co-operation between management and labour under state supervision matched the predominant political model in these countries. By contrast, the *British idea* of modularization of qualifications tended to be the one adopted by northern member states. This pragmatic approach would

seem to be transferable, largely independently of existing systems. (One exception to this is Germany, where the legislative framework has hitherto not made such an approach possible). What many countries have borrowed from the *German system* is the element of practically oriented, "alternating training": with school-based training supplemented by practical placements in companies. This does not, however, mean that the German model was fully adopted: the characteristic features of the German model - independent participation of companies in training and consultation of management and labour when it comes to regulating both the system as a whole and what goes on in the companies - are part and parcel of an overall tradition and culture of training which cannot easily be transferred to other countries.

Denmark

The other countries tended to stand on the sidelines. One country that nevertheless has had considerable influence - is Denmark. It has a specific variant of the "northern European model" - which one could describe as an *innovation model*. Alternating training is the responsibility of educational institutions - the vocational schools - and there is also a broad infrastructure of educational institutions for training of employees and the unemployed: AMU - centres for vocational training and VUC - centres for general education. Management, labour and the government co-operate in regulating the system. Similar co-operation occurs for implementation of the actual vocational training in the vocational schools: companies, trade unions and the local authorities are equally represented on the boards of these schools. With regard to innovative capability, it is striking that far-reaching reforms of the entire system take place at roughly ten year intervals. At the end of the 70s, the traditional apprentice system was replaced by training under the aegis of vocational schools. The latest reform, which will come into force at the beginning of 2001, replaces "closed" training courses with individualised routes to training. The existing 90 or so "closed" occupations are replaced by seven main "access gates" (six technical and one commercial "family"), following which training modules lead to individually selectable profiles. It is also possible to select modules which give access to higher level courses and even to university. Training can be taken on the basis of an employment contract (but under the responsibility of the vocational school) or on the basis of trainee status (but in this case alternating with practical elements). The main goal of this reform is to achieve greater flexibility and a greater degree of individual control on the part of participants. One innovation that gained considerable publicity for Denmark in the 90s was the so called job-rotation model, which links in-company training with labour market policy. Following specific training, unemployed people are used to replace individuals in companies who are undergoing further training, or on educational or parental leave. This idea has now been taken over in project form by many European countries, with the result that it is possible to describe it as a European approach to the integration of in-company and labour market training.

The European Model

The question is whether these systems have enough in common to make it possible to talk in terms of a *"European model"* of vocational training. I think the answer is yes. The features of the European model are as follows:

- a consensus that all young people should be given a basic vocational qualification and that this is, in principle, a matter of public responsibility,
- the involvement of companies in vocational training,

- and - crucially - social dialogue and a tripartite approach to regulation of the system. Social dialogue is the name given to the organised dialogue between trade unions and employer associations on matters relating to economic, social, employment and training policy. When the government is also involved in such a dialogue one speaks of a "tripartite approach". This means that vocational training follows the general European social model, whose main feature – in contrast to the USA and the countries of South East Asia which are the two other areas forming the "triad" of globally competing countries – is the involvement of management and labour in the process of reaching consensus.

The actual form taken by this model, however, varies from country to country. This is the case, for example, when it comes to actual realisation of public responsibility for initial training: in most countries this is organised by the state itself, whereas in Germany the task is undertaken by the companies on behalf of the state. Even Great Britain has now recognised this principle of public responsibility, following a phase of deregulation under the Conservative government. There are also important differences in the way the participation of management and labour in social dialogue is organised: whereas in Germany this is subject to strict statutory regulation, and in France is also highly politicised and ritualised, in Denmark it seems to be based on a culture of trust which is probably only possible in smaller countries.

European Vocational Training Policy

The development of the European Treaties from the Treaty of Rome in 1957 to the Amsterdam Treaty of 1998, demonstrates the development from a "common vocational training policy" for Europe (Treaty of Rome) to a "policy of supporting and supplementing the Member States" (Maastricht Treaty - unchanged in Amsterdam Treaty). The Treaty of Rome setting up the European Economic Community stated the following in 1957:

„The Council shall, acting on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, lay down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development of both the national economies and of the common market.„ (original Article 128)

Interestingly enough this was never used to harmonise vocational training. For many years, vocational training policy focused on the question of *transnational recognition* of qualifications. But it was only for the so-called „regulated professions“ that formal mutual recognition of training was made obligatory via various European Community directives. Regulated professions are ones which can only be practised by individuals who can supply proof of previous training - examples are doctors, lawyers, medical auxiliaries or ships’ pilots. What lies behind this is the existence of quality and safety requirements for those practising such professions. Where unregulated professions are concerned, there are still no regulations on recognition throughout Europe. All that has happened here are various attempts to create a degree of transparency with regard to job descriptions and training certificates: examples are the *equivalence procedure* which has been in existence for more than 10 years, the *portfolio approach* for European job application forms, *transparent certificates*, the attempts to set up *national reference and information centres* and the latest idea of a "*Europass"* to document periods of training spent abroad.

European vocational training policy has been largely regulated via so called "soft law". When the economic policy strategy of promoting "human resources" was adopted, vocational training enjoyed a huge increase in importance, but resistance began to grow in member States to any uniform EU policy on vocational training. The result was that in the Maastricht Treaty which came into force on the 1st of January 1993, responsibilities for training policy were clearly laid down and limited. On the subject of vocational training the treaty states:

„The Community shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of vocational training.„ (Article 127, Paragraph 1 Maastricht Treaty, Article 150 acc. to numbering of Amsterdam Treaty)

In other words: in line with the *principle of subsidiarity* the *responsibility of the Member States* for the organisation and content of training systems is specifically stressed. The task of the European Union is to *support the Member States education and vocational training policy*, contribute to improving this and promote the development of a European dimension. The Treaty specifically mentions co-operation between educational institutions, exchange of information and experience, promotion of mobility for teachers and students, facilitation of adaptation to industrial change and vocational integration and re-integration into the labour market.

Thus the European Union gives precedence to national responsibilities and primarily has a supporting role, though also a responsibility to show the way forward in vocational training policy. What is largely undisputed, however, is the fact that educational policy in the Member States must not be "community-unfriendly". This fact is guaranteed by the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice and to that extent is regarded as being part of the "acquis communautaire".

Social dialogue

As we have already said, at the heart of the European social model - and vocational training is no exception - lies social dialogue, in other words discussion and negotiation between employers associations and trade unions. At European level this is based on the lines of the French model, which involves management and labour in the process of reaching a political consensus. This model was taken as the basis for European policy under the administration of the long-serving President of the Commission Jacque Delors. In 1988, social dialogue was incorporated into the Single European Act as Article 118b and thus gained something of the nature of a European constitution. The European Commission was explicitly given the task of supporting social dialogue between employers associations and employees organisations:

“The Commission shall endeavour to develop the dialogue between management and labour at European level which could, if the two sides consider it desirable, lead to relations based on agreement.” (Article 118b)

The participants in this dialogue are the European Commission, the industrial employers’ association UNICE, the public enterprise associoation CEEP and the European Trade Union Congress. For almost 10 years, vocational training was on the agenda for these talks in addition to macro-economic problems and strategic issues related to revision of the Treaty. It is clear, however, that this was a "soft dialogue" and did not have the nature of binding

"collective bargaining" - indeed the European social partners have not hitherto had any mandate to do this from their national member associations.

Between 1987 and 1995 the social dialogue produced a total of eight "joint opinions". The topics and contents of these cover the full spectrum of European education and vocational training policy: transition from school to work, access to further training, vocational training for women and combating unemployment. The focus is repeatedly on transnational recognition of qualifications and promoting European mobility. But in the joint opinion on transition to working life of 1990 a description is already given of an issue which - under the title of "*employability*" - was to become a leitmotiv of European vocational training policy. And with the declaration on access to further training (1992) *lifelong learning* was put on the agenda as well. This issue subsequently, in 1996, became one of the four main areas of focus of social dialogue.

To sum up: social dialogue has the nature of a process. Within its institutional framework, joint ideas on European vocational training are developed and these are taken up by the European Commission in formulating its programmes - e.g. PETRA, FORCE, or LEONARDO. To that extent, social dialogue in the 90s provided much of the impetus for the development of European vocational training. However it cannot be denied that in the last two or three years this has stagnated. I will return to this point later.

Employment strategy and preparation for the knowledge-based society

The way that vocational training has moved to the very centre of European policy on growth and employment can be seen from two white papers produced by the EU Commission in 1994 and 1995. These give employability and lifelong learning a new status:

- The White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment (1994) mentions the lack of transparency and the lack of transnational recognition for qualifications as being problems, but focuses mainly on the permanent recomposition and redevelopment of knowledge and know-how as a result of economic and social change. With this in mind, more practically-oriented training and the systematic development of further training for employees become programmatic.
- The white paper entitled Teaching and Learning – Towards the Learning Society (1995), describes the consequences of internationalisation of the economy, and development of an information-based society and a scientific-technical civilisation for the formation of a new "knowledge-based" society. Vocational training is seen in the context of the "employment question" and the development of a knowledge-based society. The answer is "the development of employability". A number of suggestions are added as to how employability of individuals can be assured through lifelong learning. Several policy goals are identified in the white paper: broad-based knowledge, an ability in two foreign languages and practically-oriented training which is closer to the world of work.

The next step was to include an *employment chapter* in the Amsterdam Treaty (1997). The task of the European Union is now seen to include formulating a co-ordinated employment strategy, with a central role being assigned to vocational training:

“Member States and the Community shall …. work towards developing a co-ordinated strategy for employment and particularly for *promoting a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce* and labour markets responsive to economic change....„ (Article 125)

On the basis of this, the Luxembourg Summit in 1998 approved the first European *employment policy guidelines* for the member states. The four "pillars" of employment policy which have to be renewed or modified each year are

- Employability of individuals,
- Adaptability of companies and workers
- The development of entrepreneurial initiative
- The strengthening of equality of opportunity between men and women.

Following this summit – in what is referred to as the "Luxembourg process" - the Member States have to draw up annual *Employment Action Plans* which are then evaluated by the EU Commission. Evaluation of the success of these action plans represents a sort of European benchmarking process - and this is what is new in European employment policy.

3. European trends: the learning society

Economic development in Europe is characterised by certain trends which are important for vocational training from the point of view of employability and lifelong learning: economic macro-trends, new forms of employment, new types of further training. These culminate in the concept of the learning society.

Macro-trends

The above-mentioned white paper *Teaching and Learning – Towards the Learning Society* mentions three macro-trends in European development to which the concept of the "learning society" is supposed to be a response: informatisation, globalisation of the economy and scientific and technical renewal.

- *Informatisation* transforms the way work, services and production are organised and also has a deep impact on daily life. Knowledge and information are the raw materials of the future. Access to these - above all via education - will in future be crucial to individuals’ chances of taking part in working, social and cultural life.
- The second macro-trend is *globalisation*. Internationalisation of the economy and increasing competition on world markets mean that national labour markets, which in the past were relatively isolated from one another, are growing together. This affects the way in which new jobs and new employment are created and also has an impact on the way employees compete on company and supra-company labour markets. In this context individual employability is very important.
- *Scientific and technical knowledge*, according to the white paper, are paving the way for the traditional type of manual work to be replaced by information-related work as the predominant type in the future. On the other hand, scientific and technical progress also creates uncertainty, fear of the consequences of technology and social conflict. This is why the white paper comes out in favour of strengthening education as a tool for achieving greater social cohesion.

In addition to these trends, there is also a movement towards greater individualisation and a change in the relationship between the genders. Both these alter the demands which individuals make of work and training and their participation in initial and further training. New forms of work and employment are a response to these.

New forms of employment

These macro-trends are what underlies certain developments in companies which have a direct impact on work and training: an increase in service activities, new forms of work organisation and new corporate structures, tele-working, working in virtual organisations and the erosion of the normal employment contracts.

Service activities are increasing both at the macro-economic and micro-economic level within companies. Linked to these are *new forms of work organisation and corporate structures* that are replacing the Taylorist approach which predominated for decades. The best known form of this development is group work. The result is to some extent a greater degree of autonomy for individuals at their workplace. These ongoing changes require an ability and willingness to adapt to new forms of organisation, to continue to learn, to co-operate and to display creativity and responsibility. In other words, personal competencies are required which build on longer-term participation in training processes and on individualisation.

Tele-working is the best known form of an approach to work which removes the traditional constraints of time and space. Tele-working makes it possible to operate more flexibly and with greater control over an individual's time than under a Taylorist system - outside the formal organisational structures of a factory or production processes. Working in *virtual organisations* is another new way of organising work. This is project-based, takes place in a continually changing context of co-operation - sometimes in different locations - and is held together via electronic networking.

All these are indications of the way that the normal working set-up is being eroded. The traditional job based on lifelong employment in an occupation for which an individual had been trained, with a standard eight hour day and tasks determined from above - and with a regular income regulated by law or by collective agreements - developed historically around male working roles. This is now increasingly being replaced by flexible, insecure forms of employment. Within companies, work is increasingly being removed from spatial constraints, and group or project work or flexibilisation in terms of specialism are becoming increasingly common. To these can be added "atypical" forms of employment such as short-term contracts, temporary work, part-time work and pseudo self-employment.

> The development of organised work could end up with the creation of "labour entrepreneurs" ("Arbeitskraftunternehmer") as have been described in sociological analyses (Voß/Pongratz 1998): these people no longer sell their labour potential but rather products created through their autonomous activities, though they are otherwise dependent on the company for whom they work and are incorporated into its division of labour. This new, individualised production economy requires a large degree of self-monitoring and planning of an individual's own work capacity. The traditional nature of professions or trades "crumbles away" and individuals have to ensure that their labour potential is cultivated in a way that makes them employable according to the current needs of the market. Personal competencies come to the fore, and general qualifications are added to or even replace lengthily acquired specialist qualifications. There is no doubt that these new

forms of work will have a major impact on the nature of "vocational" training and opportunities for access to training and employment. There will be a new relationship between general and vocational training, with further training during working life becoming more important than one-off vocational training.

The new type of in-company further training: development of competencies

Within the companies themselves we can also see a „new type of further training„ such as was described in the sectoral studies carried out under the FORCE programme in the mid-90s. This has the following features:

- there is a direct relation to work, and training is carried out close to the workplace,
- it is integrated into the context of organisational development and company quality policy,
- it is extremely specific to individual companies,
- there is a move away from formal organisation of learning,
- all employees in the area concerned are virtually obliged to take part.

This type of further training is very well characterised by the following example of a Swedish insurance company, which we described in our compendium of European social partners with examples of "good practice" of further training in 1996 (Compendium 1996):

In the insurance company *Länsförsäkringar Uppsala*, private customer operations (car insurance, life insurance, fire and contents insurance, accident insurance) were changed from structures based on functions to customer-oriented ones. Whilst still retaining their specialisms, the employees were also required to take on generalist activities. The economic objective of this restructuring was to increase efficiency and improve the level of service provided to customers. In terms of staff development, the objectives were to achieve a degree of identification with the new professional role, to promote mutual learning amongst employees and to establish it as an ongoing process which ran parallel to work. In order to implement this change in the organisational structures of the company, a project was launched involving some 50 employees in the area concerned. It received financial support from the "learning organisation" programme supported by the „Arbejdsmiljö-Fond„ - an organisation jointly set up by Swedish management and labour. The project was co-ordinated by a steering group consisting of representatives of management, the head of the training department of the association of *Länsförsäkringar*, academic specialists from the University of Uppsala and representatives of the local and company trade union organisations.

> Working in several study groups, the employees themselves identified the requirements which would result from these new organisational structures and developed a profile of the skills they would need in the future. Attendance at these groups was obligatory and they met outside working hours. The spokespeople for the group regularly met the project leaders and the academic advisors.
>
> The result of this largely self-organised process was that descriptions of the functions and skills required of the employees in the new groups were drawn up. The profiles described subject-related skills (general and specialised knowledge of insurance products), strategic skills (corporate strategy, economic background, competition), personal skills (dealing with customers), social skills (working together, understanding others) and functional skills (problem-solving, work organisation,

ability to display initiative).

On the basis of these skills profiles, the study groups identified their own training needs, which were then put into practice in self-organised learning processes: one member of each working group who had sufficient knowledge and experience in a particular area passing his or her knowledge on to the other members of the group. These informal learning meetings were organised by the employees at times when the workload was relatively light.

This example shows some of the main features of the new type of further training: it is closely related to organisational aspects, it takes place close to the working place, involves all employees, is largely informal, and is self-organised, but with the support of external advisors or coaches.

This new type of further training is in no way confined to new sectors or high level service industries as was the case in this example from Sweden. The other two examples of organisational development which are described in the compendium produced by the European social partners come from Italy and Ireland and concern manufacturing companies (a meat-processing and a peat-producing company).

This type of training or skills development is only formalised to a limited degree, which means that transferability to other working and professional situations is limited because there is little or no formal assessment and recognition. In other words, the close link to the individual company means that this type of training only has limited usefulness in promoting occupational mobility; on the other hand, mobility is regarded as virtually a basic right in a situation of structural change in Europe.

The fact that employees are obliged to participate means that one can expect groups of workers who were largely excluded from training measures in the past to participate to an increasing extent. Ongoing further qualification during ones working career thus becomes a normal aspect of working life. It would, however, be a mistake to believe that this means that the conditions for lifelong learning have been fulfilled and there is no need for any structures to be set up outside the company context. We can observe at the same time that this new type of further training and traditional further training for promotion within a company continue to co-exist side by side. If individual needs in terms of further training are to be fulfilled in the context of lifelong vocational learning, then reliable structures are still required.

4. The problem of lifelong access to vocational training

A glance at the European situation reveals that access to vocational training remains an unresolved problem. In the context of European discussion, what is at stake here is access to initial vocational training for all young people and facilitation of access to further training during people's entire working life. Politically speaking, "lifelong learning" can be operationalised as the possibility of lifelong access to vocational training.

Access to initial training and employment

There is a European consensus in education policy that access to initial vocational training should be made available to all young people. This principle is implemented using the structures of the national education systems but with additional support from European education programmes such as the former PETRA and the present LEONARDO programme. In order to provide access to training and ensure employability, two basic strategies are utilised in Europe:

- Linking training and practical work in *alternating training courses*. In a number of countries, attempts are made to ensure individual employability via forms of training which alternate between school and companies and to improve the transition from training to employment. To some extent these attempts appear to be successful. But even in the well-established dual training system in Germany or Austria, problems related to the transition to training and employment have increased in recent years. Under these systems, young people have to overcome not one but two hurdles - they have to move from school to training and from training to employment. A traineeship under an alternating system is thus no guarantee of employment but merely a favourable precondition for it. This problem can be very well observed in Germany and Austria. Parallel to the erosion of so-called „normal“ working relationships there is also an erosion of „normal“ training relationships taking place, with the guarantee of permanent employment - often in the same company for the rest of one's life - also being eroded.
- Specific *transfer programmes* for unemployed young people. Examples are the "Nouveaux Services – Emplois Jeunes" programme in France, the "New Deals" in Great Britain or the JUMP programme in Germany. These were launched as part of the national action programmes for employment and are therefore a result of the European employment strategy. They involve young people who do not fit into the normal national pattern of development - training followed by employment - being prepared directly for employment or for the transition to higher levels of training and qualification. The three programmes display interesting differences with regard to the status of vocational training: the German *JUMP* programme tries to compensate for functional deficits in the "normal" system of dual training by introducing measures which lead to a regular form of training. The *British „New Deals“* try to strengthen the personality and empower young unemployed people to gain access to employment through the use of modular training provisions. In the *French "Nouveaux Services – Emplois Jeunes"* programme, on the other hand, provision of training only plays a subordinate role; the programme tries to place young people directly in low-paid service jobs from which later on new occuaptions or even "professions" could develop.

One further strategy for creating training which leads to greater employability has - significantly enough - not been pursued: *Europeanisation of training content* by the introduction of European curricula or certificates. However, as the European labour market grows together, the ability to work in another country is becoming important. Up till now, European vocational training policy has tried to solve this problem by introducing greater transparency to national training qualifications. However this has not led to any success so far. But even the definition of common European training modules which could be provided in the training courses of all national systems would be a step towards creating a "European qualifications area". So far this has failed because of national resistance to a joint European policy of regulation. All that has happened so far is attempts in a few national training systems outside official regulation and some of these were developed in LEONARDO projects.

Access to on-the-job learning

The second problem is how to make access to vocational further training available during an individual's entire working life.

In 1991, the European social partners in their *Joint Statement on Access to Vocational Further Training* were in general agreement that all employees should have access to further training during their entire working life. Two important aspects of lifelong learning are mentioned: the scope for identifying individual needs with regard to further training, and certification and recognition of further training after its completion. Management and labour see this being implemented within a framework of the national systems and do not suggest any form of framework regulation at European level.

The *Recommendation on Access to Further Training* (1993) from the European Council to the Member States did not envisage such framework regulation either. What it did was to list the possibilities for promoting lifelong further training: from company further training plans, via technical assistance for small and medium-sized companies and the promotion of various risk groups on the labour market, right down to the development of optimal teaching and learning methods.

What was new about this recommendation, however, was the fact that the Member States were to report every three years on implementation of the recommendation and the progress they had made in improving access to further training; furthermore, management and labour had to be involved in drawing up the report. This obligation to produce a report could - and this was clearly the hope - trigger a self-perpetuating development towards improving access to further education.

What is the situation with regard to access to further training during working life? In a report produced for the European Trade Union Confederation on the impact of the recommendation of the European Council on access to further education written in 1996 (ETUC 1996), we came to the conclusion that at the macro-level little progress had been made in improving participation in vocational further training. On the other hand, there had clearly been an increase in further training at company level - within the framework of the corporate reorganisation strategies which we have described. What is revealing is the fact that this increase in participation in further training took place in the context of the *collective strategies* and goals of the companies rather than to satisfy individual needs. Thus, at a time of individualisation, it has been collective access which has been strengthened. Above all, lasting and reliable mechanisms for individual access to further training are still underdeveloped.

Structural conditions for access

Access to ongoing further training requires not just specific attitudes and motivation amongst the individuals concerned, but also certain *structural conditions*. In this context three resources are particularly important and these have to be organised at two levels:

- The resources are: time, money and recognition.
- The two levels are: the system of vocational training and company organisation.

I will now sketch out some examples of the organisation of time, money and recognition at the levels of the vocational training system and the company.

The level of the vocational training system: time - money - recognition

Training leave is regarded as a "classic" example of how time is organised as a resource. It takes various forms in a number of European countries. It is intended to offer an opportunity to select further training provisions according to individual needs. The experience gathered indicates, however, that little use is made of the traditional forms. This can be demonstrated using the example of France.

Training leave

French training leave („congé“) was often regarded in the past as a good example of regulations which were potentially transferable. It represents the core element in French further training policy and since 1970 has been developed within the tripartite system. Today it is organised by joint organisations set up by management and labour at regional level and via a levy imposed on companies of 0.4% of the total wage bill. There is an individual right to leave, but funding of the training - the cost of the course and accommodation and board - has to be approved by the organisation concerned. Decisions are made according to the criteria of individual need and labour market policy necessity. In order to establish the individual requirements of the applicant there is an instrument called a „bilan de compétences“ (skills assessment) which is drawn up by special consultancy bodies. In 1992, in view of the fact that participation rates in training leave left much to be desired, part of the resources were reallocated through the introduction of a new instrument the so-called "training time capital" („capital temps de formation“). This makes it possible to use individual training time within the framework of company further training and the company training schedule. The intention is to make training leave more closely related to needs and benefits. But even this new instrument has not increased level of participation. Today, out of a total of some 12 million employees in manufacturing industry who would have a right to training, only some 30 to 35,000 applications are received each year, of which 25,000 are approved. In other words, the participation rate is approximately 0.2%. By contrast, the participation rate in further training under the company training schedule is about 25%. One should, however, not forget that further training provisions under the training leave scheme are longer in duration - the average length being 900 hours.

Even in Denmark, which is regarded as a society with high levels of training, participation in individual training leave since the mid-90s has declined steadily. Since 1995, the participation rate has gone down from about 1.5% of employees to 0.4%. Even if training leave is an important instrument for participants as part of a training strategy it is clear that it has not generally increased access to further training to any significant degree. It is certainly not a panacea.

The second *crucial resource* for participation in further training is *"money"*. In some sectors, distribution of funding is also regulated by agreement between management and labour. New ways of ensuring that individuals have the necessary financial resources to take part in further training are „learning accounts“ and „learning vouchers“. An example for this is the learning account system introduced in 1994 in the federal state of Upper Austria in the Republic of Austria:

Learning account

A learning account offers employees a financial incentive to take part in further training. They can apply for reimbursement of 50% of their costs for vocational further training at recognised further training institutions. There are two types: the general learning account reimburses 50% of the costs up to a maximum of 10,000 ATS (= 726 euro) for courses leading to vocationally relevant additional qualifications. Participants in further training have to produce evidence of attendance. On the other hand, the special learning account is used to fund further training leading to a recognised certificate (e.g. a master craftsman's certificate). If the participant passes the examination up to 20,000 ATS (= 1,450 euro) is reimbursed. The fact that such courses are only funded if they are offered by providers who are registered and recognised in the region is intended to ensure the quality of training provided.

In Great Britain, the Labour government has now put forward a programme, the pilot phase of which involves 1 million „Individual Learning Accounts“ of £150 each, on condition that the individual himself saves at least £25. In Germany, a group of experts from the Hans Böckler Foundation came up with a proposal that goes even further, but is very controversial amongst trade unions: a general switch of funding of post-school training to a system of saving accounts and subsidies for individuals - in other words a change from institutional to individual funding.

Recognition is a third important resource: recognition of qualifications acquired during working life can encourage people to take part in further training. An example of this is the British modular certification system of National Vocational Qualifications. In Finland this idea was implemented in the form of *skills-based qualifications*:

Modular qualifications

In 1994, a far-reaching reform of the system of recognition of vocational qualifications was undertaken in Finland. Its aim was to develop a skills-oriented testing procedure as part of adult education which certified vocational skills, knowledge and experience irrespective of how these had been acquired. It is even possible to test and certify skills acquired during the course of an individual’s working life without a specific training course having been attended beforehand. The standards for these qualifications are laid down by the education ministry. The new qualifications are incorporated into the existing system of adult education and the examinations are linked to the necessary further education courses. The new system relates to two types of qualification: initial vocational training qualifications for adults, which are of equal status to the recognised training qualifications for young people, and specialised qualifications based on job-related activities. Exams and certificates form part of a new "second level" qualification system which aims to increase skills, boost vocational development opportunities and harmonise further training for employees and the unemployed. An important role is played by the joint fund for vocational training and redundancy payments administered by management and labour: this provides financial support to participants in exams or training measures leading to the exams for these new qualifications.

The level of the company: four gateways to further training

The report produced by the European Trade Union Confederation in 1996 on access to further training established that the greatest progress in this field had been made at the level of the companies. It is here that crucial conditions for lifelong learning are created in form of the structures used for organising work and company processes. Traditional forms of company

organisation and division of labour ("Fordism" and "Taylorism") are known to hinder learning processes. In recent years, patterns and "cultures" of corporate and work organisation have changed. Developments in the *organisational structures* of companies are linked with - usually informal - forms of vocational and further training. This is where the new type of company further training described above comes in. It operates parallel to traditional further training to help employees adapt to new technology and prepare to take advantage of promotion prospects.

An analysis of company agreements signed between personnel committees or works councils and company management undertaken by the Hans Böckler Foundation identified four access routes to further training which have developed in recent years (Heidemann 1999):

- Traditional access to the *annual further training programmes* in the company. Access can be improved by advertising the courses on offer and enabling individuals to apply to participate in them. This is regulated by company agreements.
- The process of *establishing company further training needs*. Recent years have seen increasing numbers of participatory or "communicative" approaches to establishing needs within the company - for example the one we developed as part of a (Communicative Method 1995) project in the printing industry. By involving the workforce in establishing individual training needs as part of company organisational and personnel development, new possibilities of access are opened up.
- Access via *individual interviews with employees* and agreements on goals as part of a modern approach to personnel development. These instruments also involve the employees in identifying their own training needs and lay down binding steps towards fulfilling these needs.
- In-company *organisational projects* in which participation in further training is more or less a precondition for continuing to work. We found examples of these above all in the context of work organisation, particularly the introduction of group-work or forms of project organisation.

These roads to access that we identified in German companies can also be found in other countries. However the first one - via the provisions offered by companies' training departments - is largely limited to large-scale companies which have a long tradition of personnel work. And there are significant differences between the countries according to whether works councils or company trade union organisations were involved in designing these access routes.

The Internet as an informal source of training

In addition to the institutionalised training system, the important role of companies - and in future also the Internet - for access to further training should not be underestimated.

Multimedia and computer-assisted learning have already changed the traditional training landscape. Computer-assisted learning also takes place during periods when there is little work, self-directed learning through new forms of co-operation and learning arrangements is becoming possible, distance-learning is being introduced and virtual learning worlds are being developed on CD ROM and the Internet. For some time now, traditional distance-learning has been undergoing a radical change as a result of the new information and communications technologies. With the growth of the Internet, an informal training possibility is developing which could well soon become more important than the traditional further training institutions.

All this means that training is becoming less formalised and access more democratic, but at the same time there is an increasing danger of new forms of social exclusion and inequality developing. That is why the ability to acquire and handle information - and also use the necessary electronic aids - is becoming a crucial aspect of any educational and vocational training policy aimed at equality of access. As the information society develops, the question of opportunities and access to lifelong learning is changing in its nature. In addition to the traditional socio-economic inequalities, for example membership of a social class - and socio-cultural inequalities, for example the relationship between the sexes - new forms of exclusion related to information technology are developing which partly overlay the old forms and partly strengthen them.

5. The European model undergoes change

Social dialogue in crisis?

It cannot be denied that social dialogue in Europe is stagnating - and not just in the field of vocational training. The working group on education and training has not met for the past two years and nor has the group on employment policy which was supposed to deal also with questions of vocational training. One of the reasons for this is the inability of the European Employers' Association and trade unions to draw together European interests in the further development of vocational training. The divergence of national interests on both sides blocks any European solution which goes beyond vaguely-formulated demands. However, if one looks at the development of the joint statements produced by the social dialogue, then it also becomes clear how difficult it is to identify the problems which really have to be solved at a European level. What actually needs to be regulated at this level? So far this is an issue to which the European players have devoted too little attention.

But this is perhaps only a superficial explanation. One comes closer to the problem if one looks at the development of the labour systems which we have just described. We have established that training activities have shifted to the level of the company or even into individual corporate units. This new type of company-based further training can undoubtedly not be regulated at European level; regulation has to occur at company level. The goals of employability and lifelong learning point in a similar direction. The priority being given to these in European vocational training policy means a shift of perspective: in order to achieve the older goals of transparency and recognition of qualifications and mobility what is required above all are political and administrative regulations. For more than a decade, European vocational training policy focused on these. By contrast, lifelong learning and employability need a much greater involvement of individuals. There is a much greater degree of subject-orientation involved here, and this gives the training institutions a more prominent role to play in the Europeanisation of vocational training.

It should not be forgotten however, that there are certain structural preconditions if lifelong learning and employability are to be guaranteed and these can only be realised through political decisions and administrative measures. In addition to European programmes - for example the LEONARDO pilot project - the question of recognition of qualifications at a European level therefore remains firmly on the agenda.

In the member states too, there are signs that social dialogue is stagnating. Significantly, the three special programmes we have described on integrating young unemployed people in Germany, France and Great Britain were not developed as part of the social dialogue but launched by the governments of these countries. Management and labour are involved in their

implementation, but in Germany and France at least, they have not shied away from expressing criticism as well.

There is also a crisis in the tripartite pattern of regulation of vocational training in *France*, the "home" of European social dialogue. The French Employers' Association has just - in January 2000 - announced that by the end of the year they will have withdrawn from all parity-based bodies and structures for social and economic policy including those related to further training. The main reason given is their annoyance at the imposition of the 35-hour week by the government, but the real reasons seem to lie deeper. There have been complaints about the inefficiency of further training systems for some time now and labour minister Martine Aubry stated in the autumn of 1998 that the tripartite system developed since 1970 had not significantly helped participation in further training. Here, too, the reasons seem to lie in the enormous increase in the importance of the company level for developing professional skills. And it is precisely this level that lies outside the well-constructed regulation system. A further problem seems to be the fact that, with low levels of union membership (now less than 10%), the trade unions are not really in a position to act as a focus for interest in this area. It becomes clear that the classic pattern of a centrally-organised tripartite approach cannot sufficiently promote and secure lifelong learning and employability of individuals.

There are, however, some examples of social dialogue functioning well or being strengthened. As a result of the change of government in 1997 in *Great Britain*, the trade unions have become more closely involved in shaping vocational training. However, this process has been a typically Anglo-Saxon pragmatic process without formally establishing new patterns of regulation. In *Italy*, 1999 saw an agreement reached on a new central fund for financing further training - though interestingly enough this agreement made on the level of central state is foundering on the fact that the constitution gives priority to the regional level of regulation.

In *Scandinavia*, the tripartite regulation pattern seems to be as strong as ever. The second reform of vocational training in Denmark emanated from this pattern of dialogue. And in Finland the joint suggestion for financing training leave which we have already mentioned has been made.

These examples show that tripartite patterns of regulations are far from being things of the past. But there are certain conditions required for them to survive:

- The organisations concerned have to be able to draw together individual interests.
- At European level, those problems which are susceptible to European framework regulations have to be identified.
- Finally: the regulation system has to respond flexibly to more individualised training interests; thus for example the new requirements which are emerging cannot easily be forced into traditional forms of training or recognition of qualifications; new, flexible training courses and forms of recognition need to be found. This would seem to point in the direction of modular forms of training, a greater emphasis on the role of company-level regulation and at the same time parallel, non company-specific means of access to further training.

6. New models

Without doubt the developments described here mean increased individual freedom and a greater chance of participation on the one hand, but they also bring with them the danger of

social exclusion of those who do not have the ability to organise themselves and/or do not have any opportunity to gain access to training provisions. Against this background a sea change in the European trade unions can be observed which is of interest for the development of lifelong learning and the ensuring of employability. A Scandinavian trade unionist once described this as the change from participation in economic success via participation in social security to participation in knowledge and information:

- In the early days of the trade union movement - and right up at least until the Second World War - the main focus was on achieving a *just share of economic output*.
- During the next phase - which began before the Second World War and lasted until recently - it was *participation in the institutional benefits of social security* which was the main focus.
- Now, as we move into an information-based society, *participation in knowledge* has to become a central element in trade union programmes and policy.

In future it will be access to information and knowledge which is crucial in enabling individuals to secure their standard of living. Education and training may be all about individualised preconditions and consequences; but the conditions for participation and the opening up of opportunities require a more general, "collective" form of regulation either by legislation or by collective or company agreements. The art of regulation within the framework of the European model - social dialogue and the tripartite approach - consists of finding a *balance between collective framework conditions and individual freedoms* - in other words between regulation and the market - and also between the European and the national level.

If we look at the "map" of cultural and training "philosophies" in Europe then we can identify two poles - which also emerge from the current policy discussion in the trade unions and the Social-Democratic parties:

- One approach focuses on strengthening *individual responsibility* in order to empower individuals to find their own way in a constantly changing society. This is the approach that at present determines the British policy for integration and training of young people. Each and every young person has an individual potential which he or she is personally responsible for realising, but society has to open up opportunities and provide support. In the paper on "The third way / Die neue Mitte" produced by Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder in June 1999 this is expressed as follows:

"Lifetime access to education and training and lifelong utilisation of their opportunities represent the most important security available in the modern world. Therefore governments have a responsibility to put in place a framework that enables individuals to enhance their qualifications and to fulfil their potential".

- The alternative approach concentrates more on securing status. This comes out clearly in the paper "Vers un monde plus juste" produced by the French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin for the Congress of Social Democratic Parties in Europe in October 1999:

"C'est un état qui assume sa responsabilité irremplacable dans le fonctionnement d'une économie de marché, en garantissant à chacun sa place dans la société." („It is a state which shoulders its irreplaceable responsibility for the functioning of the market economy by guaranteeing everyone their place in society")

> This approach is not limited to the traditional left-wing of French society. It results in a different form of educational and vocational training policy - which comes out in the programmes for integration of young people. In essence it is this: the ultimate aim is not primarily to provide each and every person with training which allows them to fulfil their potential but rather to offer them opportunities during each stage in their careers and enable them to secure their status.

I suppose that in a situation of economic globalisation and social individualisation, it is the first of these two approaches which is most likely to be successful.

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