

# Contradictions in adult education structures and policies in Austria: their interrelation with the professional development of educators

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## Abstract

*This article analyses the structural influences on the professional development of adult educators and their relation to education policy using Austria as a fairly average example of the diversity in European adult education. The position of adult education is first analysed in the course of the development of a lifelong learning strategy, showing a set of basic contradictions that are institutionally embedded in educational practices and policies. The consequences of these constellations for professional development in adult education are then examined, and a policy analysis undertaken based on institutional theory and using literature, documents and secondary data. This analysis shows that the contradictions in the institutional structures and policies inhibit both the development of a lifelong learning strategy as well as the professional development of adult educators. The competence development and quality assurance approaches adopted in Europe contribute only very modestly to the development of adult education in Austria.*

**Keywords:** lifelong learning; Austria; adult education; teachers and trainers; professionals

## Introduction

This article relates to the questions of the structural influences on the professional development of adult educators and how these are related to educational policies. The purpose of this article is to offer an understanding of the situation and policies regarding teachers and trainers in Austria within the wider framework of adult education and related policies. Three topics are linked to each other here: 1) professionalism in adult education; 2) policy making (in particular the development of a lifelong learning (LLL) strategy); 3) the existing adult education institutional framework as determined by the

various actors involved and their coordinating mechanisms. We use both a pragmatic and a meso-level theoretical approach in our analysis to combine institutional theory (cf. Hall & Taylor, 2006), in particular actor-centred institutionalism based on Scharpf (1997) and historical institutionalism based on Thelen (1999), with meso-level approaches to co-ordination and governance (cf. Thompson, Frances, Levacic & Mitchell, 1991) and elements of ‘old’ and ‘new’ professionalism theory (cf. Evans, 2008; Ozga, 1995). These approaches allow for a more open analysis of complex interrelationships between ‘rational’ market behaviour and culturalist notions of ‘meaning’, whereas the generalised ‘governmentality’ approaches (cf. Burchell, Gordon & Miller, 1999) would push the analysis prematurely towards a more abstract interpretation in the ‘neoliberalism’ debate. The chosen theoretical framework contextualises professionalism in a twofold manner: first, the development of professionalism in adult education is conceptualised as a part of policy making; and second, adult education policy is in turn seen as being institutionally embedded in the structures behind the provision of adult education by a complex set of actors. Our analysis ultimately leads us to two main conclusions: first, whereas professionalism theories are based primarily on the analysis of established professional structures, the establishment of new professional structures is far more dependent on the policy context; second, the policy process is to a large extent determined by the complexities and contradictions in the field it seeks to govern. As a result, the development of a comprehensive and coherent policy strategy in the LLL paradigm lags well behind what could not only be devised rationally, but would also be expected based on the hypothesis of a sound neoliberal strategy.

Austria can be considered to be a good ‘case’ of the wider European and international attempts to develop ‘lifelong learning’, and within it also adult learning.<sup>1</sup> In quantitative terms, the participation levels of Austrians in adult learning lie at the EU average, and many of its qualitative characteristics are also fairly similar to the common picture: a wide range of providers (including the competing vocational and non-vocational ‘liberal’ adult education sectors), a low degree of organisation and institutionalisation, a low level of public involvement and support, and a diverse range of practitioners working in the field, albeit with little known about or attention paid to their terms of work. Therefore, many of the findings of our analysis might in some respect also apply to other ‘cases’.

The basic rationale behind our analysis builds on an earlier study on professionalisation in vocational education and training, which pointed to the strong influences of certain institutional structures on professional development. This means that ‘professionalisation’ cannot be developed easily as a strategy for change, because it is strongly embedded in given structures and policies (cf. Lassnigg, 2002). Since many researchers have argued that ‘professionalisation’ is a complex concept if its use is more than merely descriptive (cf. Milana & Skrypnyk, 2009), we use the concept in the professional development sense in a looser, more open way to denote the building of an organised community of practitioners, who are somehow both visible in and able to shape their field. The following statement from the *Adult Learning Professions in Europe* (ALPINE, 2008) study with regard to non-vocational adult learning (NVAL) can also be applied to the wider field of adult learning:

The country studies clearly show that data on NVAL staff is often poorly recorded, stored, organised and accessible. (...) ...there are hardly any organisations representing NVAL staff (especially in the non formal part of the sector) that could negotiate for better employment situation. In the cases they are, these organisations are often not very powerful. Overall, there is a strong need for new organisations that come up for the rights

and employment situation of NVAL staff. We recommend to develop professional associations in the field, or to take initiatives for this at the European level. (ALPINE, 2008, pp.13-14).

In a professional development sense, this would mean that the ‘professionals’ should ideally be able to influence and shape the development of adult learning. European policy documents, however, tend to see professional development more as a quality development and quality assurance issue (e.g. qualifications as access criteria, obligation to professional development) and, as such, subordinate to other actors like providers or policy makers. In this article, we trace the relationship between education and training structures, adult education policies and professional development and show how these elements influence each other in certain configurations, basically restraining rather than supporting the latter in a broader professionalism sense.

In Austria, an LLL strategy paper has recently undergone broad consultation at policy level, and a summary has been presented as a commissioned expert proposal. An administrative task force is currently developing an operative strategy paper to be implemented in 2010 or 2011.<sup>2</sup> Noteworthy here is how issues relating to the professionalisation of teaching and training staff are addressed in this strategy. A deep gap is apparent, and prominent adult education researchers have been rightly pointing to a lack of professionalisation in this field for many years (Gruber, 2004; Lenz, 2005/2006). Despite this, the documents published during the consultation process do not highlight this issue as a major point for potential action, and there is no explicit line of action with regard to professional development. Some such action proposals are included in other lines of action in the form of indicators and benchmarks:

- professionalisation is strongly highlighted in a *guidance line of action* proposing training for the persons responsible;
- a total of 1,000 people should complete a specific programme (*Weiterbildungsakademie-WBA*: [www.wba.or.at](http://www.wba.or.at)) to train and recognise the competences of adult education and training (ET) professionals over a period of three years (i.e. just over 300 of an estimated 90,000 such professionals per year);
- qualification of personnel should be used as an item in *quality assurance and quality development* models.

To explain this lack of ‘strategy’ for professionalisation, we will endeavour to find an institutional explanation in the Austrian adult ET structures and the related employment traditions and practices both in this sector and in the policy process. In section (2), we analyse adult education in the course of the development of an LLL strategy and show some of the basic contradictions institutionally embedded in practices and policies. In section (3), we determine the consequences of these constellations for professional development in adult education. Our methodology centres on an institutional policy analysis based on literature, documents and secondary data.

### **Basic traits and contradictions of adult education in Austria**

Driven more by European recommendations and demands than by national impetus, adult education in Austria has been reluctantly placed on the policy agenda as a part of the development of an LLL strategy. Despite the gradual steps taken since the launch of

the European Employment Strategy (EES) in 1997,<sup>3</sup> no actual operative LLL strategy has resulted to date, and the knowledge base relating to ET structures in general and adult ET in particular is still fairly weak (as is also the case in many other countries; see ALPINE, 2008). In this section, we present a set of phenomena and contradictions that make the development of a coherent and comprehensive strategy difficult to achieve.

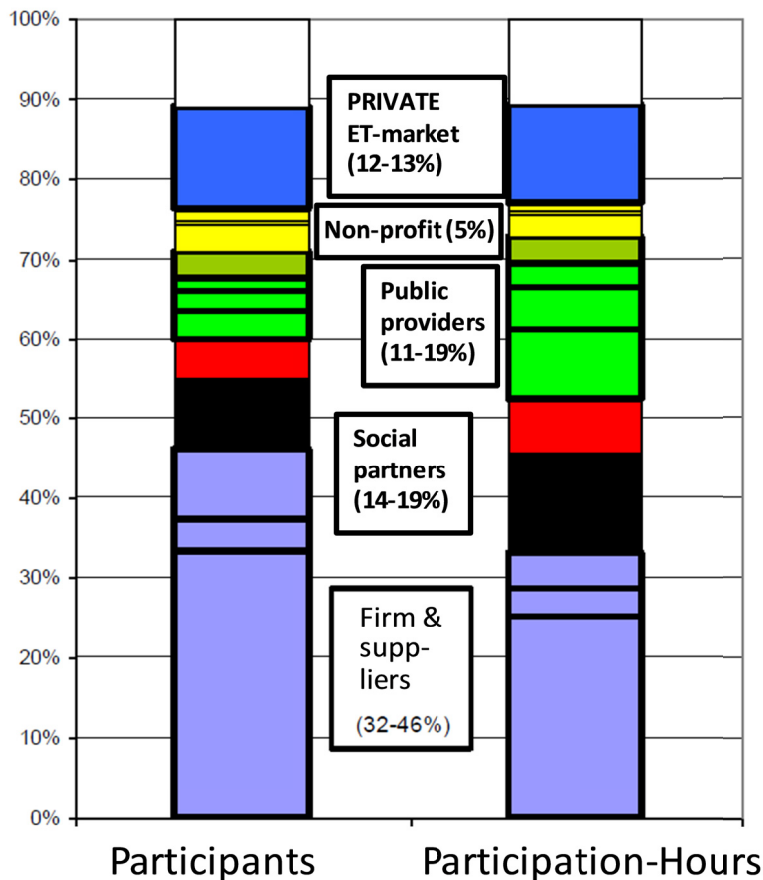
*Collective providers and market rhetoric*

The Austrian adult education system is driven mainly by ‘collective provision’ through institutions run by various interest groups (employer and labour associations, churches, political parties, etc.), with some traditional providers reaping a large part of the market share. These are generally ‘non-profit’ organisations with mixed financing structures that vary from institution to institution, including support from ‘owner’ institutions, public support, commissions from public institutions (primarily the Public Employment Service; see 2.2 below) and contributions from learners. More recently, a large number of new private sector financed providers have also emerged. These are generally very small establishments (often one person enterprises).

In the policy and practice discourse, however, this system of collective provision is termed ‘market-driven’. This indicates that it is not always easy to classify in empirical terms the kind of coordination mechanism(s) on which a system is based. At first glance, a large proportion of the students would seem to be individual ‘customers’ who access adult ET through market channels (like course catalogues, etc.) and pay for their courses. On more close inspection, however, there are some complex support mechanisms that complicate this assessment, as illustrated by empirical accounts from various different sources.

Firstly, the information about participation can be broken down into the different types of providers (Figure 1). This shows that ‘normal’ market-driven providers (private for-profit institutions) only reap a small share of the market (12-13% of total participants or course hours).

Figure 1. Providers of adult ET in Austria by distribution of participants and course hours



Source: Statistics Austria, Microcensus 2003, estimation Lassnigg, Vogtenhuber & Steiner, 2007

Secondly, surveys about participation in adult ET show that only a minority of students has to bear their own costs. ET courses are paid for mainly by companies with, as in many other countries, various kinds of public (financial) support. This is frequently not directly related to specific training interests; many companies support employees in attending ET courses they have themselves chosen based on their own interests. Overall, about 70% of adult ET students in the 2003 survey did not make any personal contribution to the costs. The 2007 Austrian Adult Education Survey (AES) confirms this figure, showing that more than 80% of students in paid employment did not bear any personal costs for their participation in non-formal adult ET. These observations are in line with much of the relevant economics-based research, which consistently shows that – contrary to human capital theory – firms also pay for general training (and not just for specific training which is directly of use for work and immediate productivity; O’Connell, 2007; Bassanini, Booth, Brunello, De Paola & Leuven, 2005).

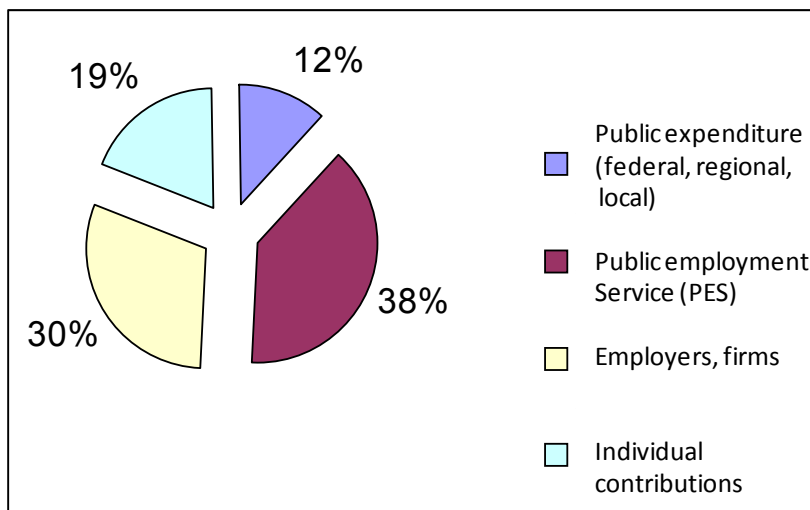
All in all, we can already see a contradiction here between ‘market rhetoric’ and the actual, publicly supported, collective provision of adult ET. We can also see on a more general level that it might sometimes be difficult to ascertain the coordination mechanisms on which a system rests. It is questionable whether a system that at first glance includes market-like transactions, yet whose main sources of funding are indirectly reaped in the background by transacting agents, can be termed ‘market-driven’.

This issue relates directly to policy proposals and mechanisms of support. Many policy proposals intended to support individual demand are based on market mechanism ideas and the concept of providing incentives to the agents involved in the transactions. If participation and transactions are guided primarily by ‘third party’ actors (public support, firms and labour market policy institutions), the feasibility of such policy instruments must be questioned.

*The public employment service (PES) as a quasi-monopolist player*

If we look at the sources of funding in the Austrian system, we can take the argument one step further. Here, one single player – the PES (see Figure 2) – covers about one quarter to one third of the funding. This means that the PES also has an indirect influence on a major part of the system of provision via different channels.

Figure 2. Estimated distribution of expenditure for adult ET in Austria



Source: Statistics Austria, Microcensus 2003, estimation Lassnigg, Vogtenhuber & Steiner 2007

This single organisation puts about three times as much money into the system as the public federal, regional and local budgets and thus assumes a fairly monopolistic position, both as a buyer of services from the providers and as a provider of services to its clients (mainly the unemployed). To some extent, the PES is also trying to influence employer practices through the training support schemes it offers to employed persons under certain conditions. The main mechanism the PES uses vis-à-vis the providers is market-like contracts setting specific selection conditions for the provision of training to the unemployed. These conditions are highly formalised, set requirements for facilities and trainers, and are based on fairly strict price competition. The quality criteria also include the short-term placement of clients in the labour market, which sets strong constraints on providers.

This creates a second contradiction, as it is a non-educational mission which explicitly drives the main player in the adult ET system. The PES’ mission is rightly determined by the goals and objectives of labour market policy, with its main objective being to support access to employment and to provide related training assistance. The available funds are driven by the development of the labour market and labour market policy (LMP) goals. This leads to a cyclical development of resources. From PES and LMP logic, this is not considered a problem, however, it is a problem when one part

assumes such a large proportion of overall adult ET, as it exerts an emergent influence on overall practices in the system. The following indications serve to illustrate this point.

Firstly, account has to be taken of the well-known ‘Matthew effect’ of unequal distribution of access to adult ET, and the unequal distribution of the educational attainment of the unemployed. From this, it follows that labour market training provides access to students who are unfamiliar with (adult) ET, many of whom would otherwise not have had access to training. However, their experience is driven mainly by instrumental practices, and the quality of provision is driven by price competition and achieving the lowest costs possible. Secondly, this constellation has consequences for the supply side, as adult ET providers have to accept PES conditions, and a high proportion of teachers and trainers have to work under these constraints (see Zilian, Lassnigg & Wroblewski, 1999; Mosberger, Kreiml & Steiner, 2007; MAGAZIN erwachsenenbildung.at, 2008). Thus, the PES shapes practice in adult ET to a considerable extent, without having educational objectives of its own, yet is heavily constrained by its own efficiency goals and objectives (which differ to those applicable for ET). Thirdly, the players in adult ET are weak and fragmented. To some extent, they are also competitors who are driven by market rhetoric.

*Lack of clear public responsibility: many players in competition without coordination*

The distribution of political responsibility for governing the system in Austria is complex, leading to a lack of coordination and shared purpose in the public sector. Responsibility is distributed among the individual states or *Länder* (Austria has nine *Länder* each with considerable government responsibilities) and the federal ministries of education (for general ET), science (for higher education), economic affairs (for apprenticeships and employer based training) and labour (for labour market training), as well as some others (e.g. the ministry for agriculture runs a nationwide project to develop ‘learning regions’). Issues relating to support for enterprises and innovation, which are also linked to ET, are handled by other ministries (economic affairs, infrastructure, science and research), while regional development and innovation lies in the administrative and policy domains of both the *Länder* and the federal government (see Lassnigg, 2006).

Strengthening the adult ET agenda would therefore require a great deal of policy coordination between different areas and layers of government, creating a classical governance problem *outside* the official structures of politics. However, this is very difficult to achieve in the complex structures of the Austrian political system.

There are also strong divisions within the ET community and among the various providers. An important division is drawn between general, vocational and professional providers who are approached differently by policy and compete for resources. Providers of general ET, for instance, are represented more strongly in the Conference of Austrian Adult Education (KEBÖ)<sup>4</sup>, while some of the main vocational and professional providers have recently set up their own network (*Plattform für berufsbezogene Erwachsenenbildung*, [www.pbeb.at/](http://www.pbeb.at/)), thus further aggravating the lines of division within adult ET. This division is also related to the policy structure: vocational ET is largely organised by the employer and labour organisations, while general adult ET is traditionally provided by local adult education centres (*VHS-Volkshochschule*), partly with the strong involvement of employee organisations. The employer and labour organisations themselves run separate ET institutions, the former constituting the largest provider of continuing enterprise-related ET, while the latter is heavily involved in labour market training. Due to the complex distribution of political

responsibilities, the provider organisations, the employee and labour organisations and the VHS are also primarily organised at a regional level. Their activity core is focused on regional sub-organisations, with only weak federal structures. At federal level, general and vocational ET are linked to different federal ministries: general adult ET is the domain of the ministry of education, while vocational ET (via the PES) is the domain of the ministries of labour and (to some extent) economic affairs. As higher education institutions also increasingly provide professional continuing ET, the ministry of science and research is now also involved to some degree.

The support structures are partly influenced by a network structure that creates ‘insiders and outsiders’; some of the main traditional providers are represented in KEBÖ and have privileged access to public resources, while others are not. A feasibility study funded by the City of Vienna regarding the potential for development of a more coherent and cooperative structure inspired by the notion of the ‘learning city’ has shown that competition outweighs a drive towards cooperation from the provider perspective (Steiner, Steiner, Lassnigg & Prenner, 2002). More recently, an umbrella network of regional adult ET networks (*Ländernetzwerk Weiter.Bildung*<sup>3</sup>) was set up, but has still to overcome existing divides and establish its voice as one to be heard.

These structures create an overall situation in which the combination of fragmented policy responsibilities and market rhetoric weaken the overall position of adult ET by creating many divisions based on the differing and conflicting interests and traditions of the various actors. Indeed, these divisions constitute a third contradiction between public responsibilities and the more short-term market interests of providers. Thus the semi-public, non-profit providers are inclined to maximise their position on the market, and thus only follow their public objectives indirectly via short-term imperatives. At the same time, a structure that could lead to the formulation of clear public goals and objectives is lacking.

#### *Market logic vs. institutional coordination*

Another somewhat paradoxical contradiction comes to the fore at the policy level in the discourse on the development of an LLL strategy. On the one hand, the various players state that a successful, working and growing adult ET market is effectively in place (thus presenting and ‘selling’ their capabilities in the best light). On the other hand, these same players call for a framework of increased political and institutional co-ordination that primarily provides public funding and support. This is essentially a fourth contradiction, as – at least in market rhetoric – a functioning market does not need political co-ordination. It might be interpreted as a reflection of the prevailing structures that intermingle public and private objectives and a broad range of different players in a complex manner without providing sufficient mechanisms for the development of clear goals and objectives based on demands for adult ET.

#### *Coordination initiatives reflect rather than resolve these contradictions*

In recent years, there have been developments towards a more comprehensive adult ET agenda. These are more or less strongly linked to the strengthening of LLL and the development of an LLL strategy. Since we have too little room here to elaborate in any detail (see Lassnigg, 2009a, pp. 480-484), the following offers a summary of these initiatives with respect to professionalism and the contradictions mentioned above:

- *The inclusion of an LLL action line in the European Social Funds programme for 2000-2006 has primarily supported school level education; as far as adult*



education is concerned, the ESF has promoted a project-oriented approach (a general tendency worked out in the ALPINE study) and a shift towards employability (that was criticised by the adult education sector). In the following period (2007-2013), adult ET was strengthened, and the project-oriented support procedures were mainstreamed within the education ministry through a move to performance contracts for adult ET.

- In a *programme for a comprehensive LLL strategy by employer and labour organisations* (Chance Bildung, 2007), most of the proposals also concern school level ET. The benchmarks only include an overall increase in participation in continuing ET to 20% (measured by the European Indicator); the action lines primarily set framework conditions and general policies that only include adult ET indirectly as part of LLL; the only action line directly addressing adult ET is the proposal for a streamlined national learning account (LA; there are currently various such models in place at a regional level, see Wagner & Lassnigg, 2006; Bauer, 2009).
- Some additional *provider and regional adult education networks* have been established to represent the different and partly competing political interests and provider groups. These are having a particular effect in reinforcing existing contradictions and have also adopted different proposals with regard to professionalism. One such regional network (*Ländernetzwerk*) is in fact a platform of nine regional networks that combine providers (often those organised in KEBÖ) and other regional administrative, political and corporatist bodies. Because the main organisation for non-profit adult ET providers (KEBÖ) does not extend to commercial and private providers, a separate platform has been built by organisations in the vocational and professional fields around the employers' association and an existing higher education continuing ET unit (*Plattform für berufsbezogene Erwachsenenbildung*). Another initiative has seen some 25 providers and KEBÖ members, including the labour organisation and the VHS, form a consortium of employers in adult ET to conclude a collective agreement with the trade union for adult ET sector employees.
- *Coordinating initiatives at federal level*. Support for adult ET at federal level has been strengthened considerably in the ESF programme planning for 2007-2013,<sup>6</sup> and a new strategy for financing adult ET has been launched through the replacement of state subsidies for providers by performance contracts. The regions, however, seem to have been almost left to one side in this procedure, and another federal level initiative has set up a task force to streamline regional policies in specific adult ET fields in an attempt to match federal and regional funding based on detailed quality criteria.

### Teaching and training as a profession within the Austrian ET policy framework

When we compare the Austrian situation with common structures at international or EU level, we can see some basic similarities (Nuissl & Lattke, 2008; ALPINE, 2008), but also some specific differences. Market rhetoric, a diverse system with little coherence and scattered responsibilities, and a lack of information on adult ET are common characteristics. However, the high proportion of labour market training, the strong divisions between general and vocational adult ET related to the different governance systems, and the complex public responsibilities seem to be more marked in Austria

than elsewhere. There is not even a single core interest group working in the common public interest of the overall sector. Instead, there are many sets of different interest groups with conflicting interests each trying to maximise their own interests (e.g. general ET vs. VET; regional vs. federal; employers vs. employees; employment vs. leisure; employed vs. unemployed; etc.). The various experts are also more or less attached to some of these individual groups, providers and policy camps. The need to establish viable structures for a common discourse was proposed some years ago, but would seem to be a demanding enterprise given the many players involved. Some steps in this direction have been taken over the last 10 years with some success, such as the development of an adult education research network (*Forschungsnetzwerk Erwachsenenbildung*<sup>7</sup>) or the launch of an online journal (*Magazin Erwachsenenbildung*<sup>8</sup>). However, common operating structures would also be needed to provide a base for longer term strategic policy development. Some first steps were taken through the initial moves towards the development of an LLL strategy, however these would since seem to be driven too strongly by – seemingly ‘pragmatic’ – short-term political interests.

#### *Basic structures of employment for Austrian teachers and trainers*

So far, we have looked at the shape of adult ET in Austria. To understand the position of teachers and trainers in this sector, we must also take into account the structures of the overall ET system. Two aspects must be mentioned here: the bureaucratic and politicised structure of the school system (cf. Lassnigg, Felderer, Paterson, Kuschej & Graf, 2007) and the strong role of VET in secondary school level ET (Graf, Lassnigg & Powell, *forthc.*).

Bureaucracy and politicisation have two main structural consequences for the professionalisation of teachers. Firstly, teachers operate within tight structures, yet enjoy great freedom and little external influence and control with regard to their classroom teaching. Secondly, their work is aggressively protected by a trade union that follows a policy of narrow interest, not professionalism. The recruitment of teachers is still controlled politically at the regional level, and the trade unions with their tight links to the political parties are exerting a very strong influence on all issues at all levels of the system. There is no genuine professional organisation in place. Teacher education is split across different institutions at different levels – again with different interests and strong competition for status.

The strong role of VET in school level ET is divided between enterprise based apprenticeships and full-time schools, thus resulting in a variety of teachers and trainers in this sector (Lassnigg, 2002). Enterprise training is mainly provided by employees alongside their normal work duties, and teachers for occupational subjects are recruited from practice and frequently work elsewhere outside their teaching role. While the number of apprenticeship training personnel is roughly similar to that of compulsory school teachers, they are in fact not visible as a group. Likewise, because preparation for this role forms part of the examinations required to run a business, the primary interest in this sector comes from the employers organisations (chambers of trade and commerce). Consequently, there has been a mix of interests in this important area of VET that has for years led to a low and even decreasing emphasis on training issues. Pedagogy is a somewhat secondary issue in this system, and VET teacher/trainer ET is traditionally weak (with the exception of business administration subjects for which separate university programmes: *Wirtschaftspädagogik*) have been established). The strong school level VET system is also linked to the comparatively average level of participation in adult ET; those enterprises with apprenticeship schemes seem in

particular to offer below average incentives for continuing ET (Lassnigg, Vogtenhuber & Steiner, 2007). In the policy discourse, the high levels of participation in adult ET in some countries are frequently presented as a compensation for weak school level VET.

Seen as a whole, the labour market for teachers and trainers in Austria would appear to be segmented: teachers in schools work in a highly sheltered internal market and enjoy high job security, markedly seniority-linked pay scales and great discretion in their working hours (cf. Lassnigg et al., 2007; Delannoy, McKenzie, Wolter & van der Reel, 2004); adult ET teachers and trainers work in a classic secondary labour market, with low wages, high insecurity and several different market segments each with very different conditions (from corporate or business related trainers on the one extreme to social services trainers working with disadvantaged groups in precarious conditions on the other); hourly pay rates range from a minimum of EUR 10 to a maximum of between EUR 80 to 100; the median hourly rate is EUR 24 (cf. Mosberger et al., 2007).

Even if we are aware of the basic structures, we don't know much about the specific empirical distributions and conditions within these structures. There are some vague estimates of the overall numbers of people working in adult ET, their job profiles and working situation. A study some years ago (Zilian et al., 1999) showed that many trainers in the labour market training sector often did not know whether they would be training the unemployed for the next month (sometimes even the next week) or whether they would be unemployed themselves.

If we look at the position of teachers and trainers in adult education, we can see that they do not exist as a separate interest group and do not even exist in terms of visibility. There are no valid and comprehensive figures available about how many teachers and trainers work in Austrian adult education (cf. MAGAZIN erwachsenenbildung.at, 2008). If we try to collate the sparse and scattered data, we obtain – besides many open questions – a picture of two main groups: those who receive some additional income from secondary employment in this field, but primarily work in other areas (e.g. schools, enterprises), and a second group who earn their living in this sector and work under more or less severe precarious conditions. Both these forms of employment pose a weak position for professionalisation: the first group has little spare time and thus little interest in professionalisation, while the second group does not have the incentives, time and resources to invest in it. Since the contradictory environment does not provide room for the development of a policy towards professionalisation, this main contributing factor to a good adult education sector does not really receive any support from the system. Overall, if we take the classical stage-model of professionalization (Wilensky, 1964; Hwang & Powell, 2009) that has conceptualised full-time employment as the first stage, we have to say that even the first stage has not been achieved in Austrian adult education.

Moreover, the co-ordinating organisations mentioned above take fundamentally conflicting positions towards professionalization. The key charges of the *Ländernetzwerk* have been (1) to support professionalisation in the sector and (2) to top up federal investment in adult ET. Professionalisation here means an increase in funding for full-time employees and improvement in their training.<sup>9</sup> The *Plattform für berufsbezogene Erwachsenenbildung* takes a contrary position to professionalism by protecting the self-employed secondary occupation status of teachers and trainers in adult ET to ensure they remain primarily 'experts' in their regular occupation. The collective agreement for employees working in adult education became compulsory for about 9,000 employees in some 500 provider organisations in October 2010.<sup>10</sup> As collective agreements are only applicable to 'regularly employed' workers, this move has also created some tensions.<sup>11</sup> Parallel to this agreement, the Austrian social security

agency and PES have set requirements for the transformation of atypical employment into regular employment for teachers and trainers in PES-financed ET. Thus some steps to strengthen the employment position of regular workers in adult education have been taken.

The above mentioned new initiative by the WBA was established in recent years by a group of providers at a federal adult education competence centre and is widely seen as a European ‘flagship’ project. This academy provides qualifications for teachers and trainers in adult education, based on a mixture of accreditation for prior learning and the provision of missing competences. However, the approach seems rather individualised, as the employees in adult ET have to apply and pay for this recognition and these qualification themselves (with the possible support of their employers).

If we take into account the specific structure of employment matched to the WBA, some major impediments must be noted. Firstly, only a minority of staff in adult ET work here on a primary employment basis; most of them (in particular the teachers and trainers) perform their duties as a secondary occupation alongside their ‘regular’ work. According to available (incomplete) statistics from one provider pertaining to a main adult ET sector (KEBÖ),<sup>12</sup> only about 5,000 of a total of around 90,000 staff are employed in this sector on a primary basis, the remainder hold these jobs either as a secondary occupation (about 60,000) or on a voluntary, unsalaried basis (about 25,000); The majority of the 55,000 teachers and trainers working in this field do so on a secondary occupation basis. However, according to these statistics, working on a secondary occupation basis might frequently and increasingly mean that the ‘primary occupation’ is in fact with another provider (this indicates that there are many people working in different forms of flexible – and sometimes precarious – employment for different providers; unfortunately, there are no exact figures available).<sup>13</sup>

The people whose primary occupation is in adult ET are mainly managers, programme developers, etc. The WBA provides qualifications in four areas: teaching/training; management; counselling and librarianship. Given the structure of employment, it seems plausible that the providers will prefer to support their primary employees rather than the teachers or trainers they employ on a secondary basis, and who are expected to demonstrate their qualifications in the often fierce competition for training posts. The cost of a full WBA diploma is about EUR 1,100-1,350 for the certification process alone, and this does not include the costs of any necessary additional courses (accordingly, the 1,000 certifications proposed in the LLL strategy bring in some EUR 1.2 million for the WBA).

If we reasonably expect that it will primarily be those people who can already demonstrate their competencies who sign up for the programme, its impact for competence development will not be very strong. Conversely, if the providers set the WBA qualification as a standard recruitment requirement, they can force applicants in more flexible and/or precarious situations to take these qualifications at their own costs. However, we should also point out here that the WBA is seen as *the* European pioneering model for the professionalisation of adult ET.

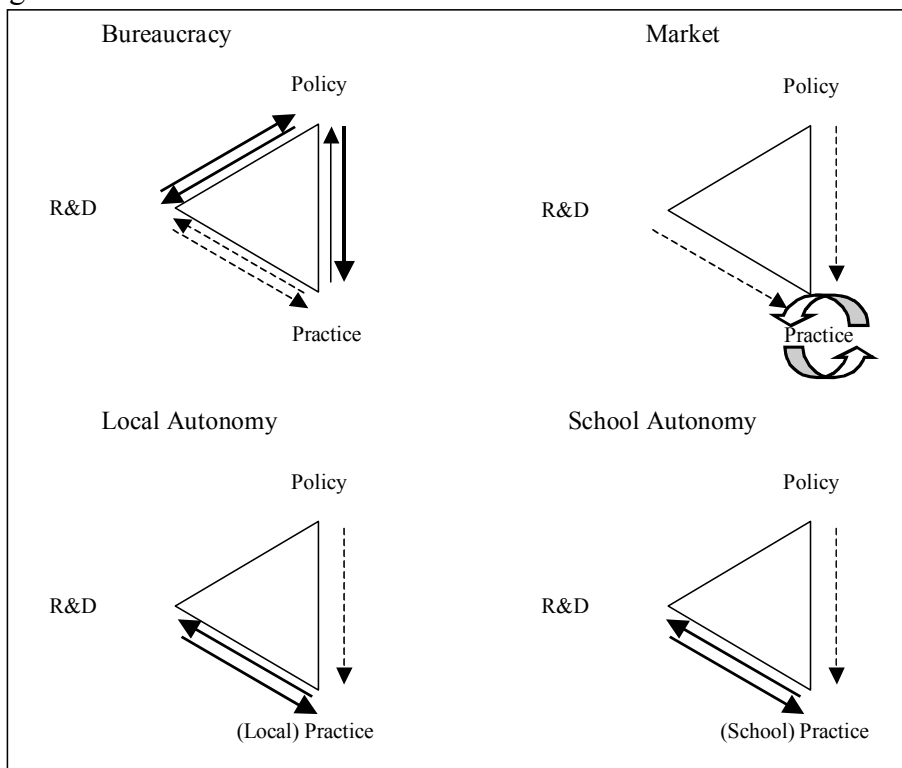
Despite the related problems, the WBA clearly seems to be a step forward in the provision of at least some professionalisation standards in adult ET. But there have also been objections from other players against awarding this institution a quasi-monopoly position. Likewise, the question still remains: will professionalisation be possible without an improvement in actual working conditions or the development of a more sustainable infrastructure that might serve as a basis for working in adult education?

*What are the basic traits and contradictions regarding professionalisation in Austrian ET?*

The main aspects of professionalisation are (1) how the criteria and standards for content and assessment are established, and (2) how the status and organisation of the occupation is constructed (cf. Glazer, 2008). There has been a long and contradictory debate about professions and professionalisation in the social sciences which we do not intend to discuss or reproduce here. Instead, we will only raise two main points related to the aspects mentioned above. The first of these concerns the issues of ethics and self-organisation, the second addresses status and pay.

The recent discussions on evidence-based policy and practice (EBPP) can be seen implicitly as a new way of bringing professionalisation to the fore. EBPP relates research and development (R&D), policy and practice in a systematic way, as stylised in Figure 3. The triangle shows three relationships: R&D and policy, R&D and practice, and policy and practice. This clearly shows that evidence-based policy is not the same as evidence-based practice. Policy provides a framework for and tries to influence practice, and thus poses different questions and problems than ET practice at the direct provision of services and teaching-learning processes levels. The third relationship (between policy and practice) is perhaps the key relationship, as its shape influences the other two. This shape is given by the governance system in its different forms (Glatter, 2002), with bureaucracy and the market serving as the main alternative forms, along with institutional and local forms of autonomy.

*Figure 3. Stylised relationship between evidence-based policy and forms of governance*



Source: Own picture, see also Lassnigg 2009b

If we relate the governance forms to the structure of EBPP, we can expect certain patterns:

- in bureaucracy, policy controls the flow of evidence, and evidence-based practice is materialised in the rules and structures of the system;
- in the market, the providers are free to act within the framework, and incremental adaptation to market signals will rule practice (not the evidence bought by the actors);
- in the two types of autonomous systems, policy has delegated discretion to practice, leaving room for evidence-based practice.

The latter thus gives room to the content aspect of professionalisation (a necessary, but in itself not sufficient condition).

The second aspect to professionalisation, its positive relationship to status and pay, raises questions of affordability. These are reflected in adult ET by the differences in pay between the more professionalised and precarious sectors (see above), with people trying to move from the latter to the former. From a customer perspective, the fact that the classic professions still enjoy a rather privileged position in Austria does not support the creation of a new profession. Here, the objections may come from some of the employer related providers and interest groups.

If we now return to the basic traits of the Austrian system, we can see a weak basis for professionalisation in the bureaucratic school level ET system that basically sets the scene. Since its governance system is a mixture of market and uncoordinated institutional autonomy, the adult ET system is more difficult to assess. The scope for professionalisation is structurally present, but the contradictions discussed in this article now come into play:

1. the market rhetoric diverts the institutions from professionalisation,
2. the non-educational mission of the PES rejects professionalisation,
3. the lack of coordination does not provide a framework for professionalisation, and
4. the policy emphasis on the market also does not provide such a framework.

Overall, the structural conditions do not support professional development in Austrian school level or adult ET. Incremental steps have been taken with the establishment of the WBA, but it is questionable whether this approach alone can provide a strong impetus for professional development. The key issues and questions behind such a development are:

- If the criteria and conditions posed by the PES structure the market to a high degree – are they actually reasonable? So far, they have been strongly based on formal ET, with experience rated low. A link to the WBA standards could improve this situation.
- How can wages and working conditions be improved to make them affordable to the players in the system? Two issues seem most relevant here: the first is the relation between the tradition of working in adult ET as a secondary occupation (which leads to lower pay and a lack of institutional base); the second is how to organise the increasing proportion of people working in adult ET on a full-time basis with a view to professionalisation. If this growth takes place mainly in LMP, where people largely work with disadvantaged students, this will work against professionalisation. The recent moves towards establishing minimum wages and providing social security through collective agreements are basic

steps towards improvement. However, a strategy based purely on a market solution does not benefit professionalisation.

- How can the building of a stronger infrastructure be reasonably financed? An important question here concerns the assessment of the potential and efficiency of existing providers in relation to a demand-oriented policy. If (a fact we do not know for sure) the majority of existing providers are weak and under-sourced, a move towards demand-based financing cannot be reasonably expected to bring about improvement. Instead, it would tend to support the large (collective) providers. The existing figures and statistics are inconclusive on these issues, and there would seem to be large gaps between the recent EU surveys and other statistical sources (e.g. PES).<sup>14</sup>
- How can the dangers of inertia and inflexibility be avoided in a more strongly institutionalised system? A major issue working against the institutionalisation of adult ET on the policy side is the expensive, bureaucratic and reform-resistant structure of secondary schooling, whose well-established teachers union serves as a main obstacle to change. Accordingly, there are fears that stronger institutionalisation of adult ET would lead to similar structures and attitudes.

### Summary and conclusion

The paper has related issues of professionalisation in Austrian adult ET to some of the overall characteristics of the ET system and adult ET policy. The more general question raised concerns whether professionalisation reflects the overall structures and practices instead of being an instrument for reform. In line with Lassnigg (2002), the answer tends to the first alternative.

We have shown that in the dominant, heavily bureaucratic and politicised school level ET system, professionalisation is either weak or non-existent, while trade unionist interests are very strong. People traditionally tend to work in adult ET primarily as a form of secondary employment, although there has been a recent increase in the number of primary workers in some sectors, e.g. labour market training. Market rhetoric dominates at the policy level and cannot be expected to contribute to increased professionalisation.

The two main EU policies concerning the professionalisation, development and implementation of a competence model (which is also to be used as an element in quality assurance) are in place in Austrian policies. However, given the overall institutional constellation, these initiatives cannot really be considered as steps towards professionalisation since they would probably not result in the practitioners increasing their influence on the development of adult education in Austria. Much is needed to resolve the structures and contradictions described in this article and to establish a more coherent vision and strategy for adult education in LLL. Whether and how the professional development of adult educators might contribute to this remains an open question. Yet if we were to turn once more to the given structures and contradictions, it would be fair to say that there are clear demands for a more reflexive practice and a stronger voice for adult educators.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See other 'cases' in the 2 June 2009 issue of the European Journal of Education, Vol.44.

<sup>2</sup> See BMUKK (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Austria has included a sub-programme for LLL in the policy supported by the European Social Fund (ESF), has participated in the OECD study on adult education, and also organised a broad consultation process in 2000 on the LLL memorandum; see OECD (2004) and BMBWK (2001).

<sup>4</sup> See BMUKK (2011a).

<sup>5</sup> See LNW (2007).

<sup>6</sup> The proportion of support for adult ET in the LLL line of action has been increased from a quarter (EUR 28.1 million) to about a half (EUR 49.9 million); however, the publicly funded secondary school level ET still receives half this support, despite many evaluations showing that it is already comparatively 'rich', despite demonstrating only average achievements in large-scale assessments (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS).

<sup>7</sup> See KBE (2011).

<sup>8</sup> See BMUKK (2011b).

<sup>9</sup> See LNW (2006).

<sup>10</sup> See Friesenbichler & Hackl (2010).

<sup>11</sup> At first sight, the hourly wage is lower compared to the other forms of atypical employment because of several social security items included in the collective agreement that have to be financed individually from gross income in atypical employment. Schmidt (2008) has shown that a similar net annual income that is comparable in social security and work benefits terms has to start with very different gross hourly wages: based on the Austrian social security system, an annual net income of EUR 18,200 is achieved from a gross hourly wage of EUR 13 in regular employment based on the collective agreement in comparison with EUR 33 in an atypical contract (*Freier Dienstvertrag*), or EUR 57 in a performance contract (*Werkvertrag*).

<sup>12</sup> See KEBÖ (2008).

<sup>13</sup> "For example, a German study shows that about a quarter (23 percent) of the freelancers interviewed are referred to as full-time freelancers, i.e. do not have any other employment in addition to their adult education job. The remaining 87 percent, however, do have another job or, indeed, several other jobs." (ALPINE, 2008, p.105).

<sup>14</sup> The AES has found about 70,000 unemployed persons in non-formal adult ET with 120 hours in the programme, however, PES reports between 120,000 and more than 200,000 persons in training. The average duration of commissioned courses is 75 days (if we adjust this to 60 and assume 5 hours per day, the average duration would be 300 hours).

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