International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training

IJRVET

Impressum

IJRVET is the official organ of VETNET European Research Network in Vocational Education and Training (European Educational Research Association) in cooperation with the Network IRNVET Internationalisation of Research in Vocational Education and Training (World Education Research Association).

IJRVET is a double-blind peer reviewed quarterly journal and provides immediate open access to its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge.

IJRVET is available on: http://www.IJRVET.NET

Europeanization in VET Policy as a Process of Reshaping the Educational Space

Krista Loogma
Tallinn University
Institute of Educational Sciences
5 Uus Sadama, 10120 Tallinn, Estonia
E-mail: krista.loogma@tlu.ee

Abstract: The EU represents a transforming educational space, where national and supranational boundaries in educational governance are becoming blurred. The EU has become an important actor in educational governance and an important arena for policy learning and transfer. This paper explores how the process of reshaping the educational space manifests itself in the process of the Europeanization of VET policy in the case of Estonia. In Estonia, this process was followed by the growth of executive VET institutions and has developed from rather uncritical initial policy transfer to more active learning from the EU, although conformism can still be seen in cases of the introduction of standardizing policy tools.

Bibliographical notes:
Prof Krista Loogma is currently working at the Institute of Educational Sciences, Tallinn University. Her research interests focus on vocational education, professionalism, the teaching profession and workplace learning.

1   Introduction

The education sector, which has been mainly based on territorially bounded national education systems over the last century, is transforming into an educational space (Seddon, 2014) that focuses on "globally networked lifelong learning" (Field, 2006, p. 10). Two processes are embodied within this remaking (Seddon, 2014) or redevelopment. First, a shifting social logic is placing learning instead of teaching at the centre of education, and therefore, is expanding the educational space to include "learning sites" other than schools, and simultaneously, the locus is shifting to a lifelong course of learning. Second, changes are occurring in the governance of education through globalization, as the flows of ideas and policies in education intensify, and the power of supranational agencies (e.g. OECD, EU), supported by comparative data sets (e.g. PISA, TALIS, PIAAC, comparative statistics) and quality standards is growing in the field of education (Seddon, 2014). The other side of this trend is that national states have ceded some of their traditional responsibilities in education to inter/supranational agencies, which in turn, is a manifestation of a broader trend – a shift from government to governance (Seddon, 2104). Furthermore, this tendency is rearranging the power relations not only between the EU and its member states, but between domestic actors as well (Saurugger and Radaelli, 2008).

The European Union (EU) represents an educational space where the boundaries between national and supranational educational governance are becoming blurred. Common European education space has become the main arena to understand the education in Europe (Grek and Lawn, 2009). The discourse surrounding the common educational space is explicitly articulated in "post-Lisbon" strategic documents, such as the Communiqués, which set goals and steer the Copenhagen process. The EU has become an important actor in the sphere of educational governance and an important arena for policy learning and transfer (e.g. Bulmer et al., 2007; Toots and Kalev, 2015). For Estonian VET, the EU strategy toward a uniform, transparent vocational educational space, set by the Copenhagen Declaration, provided the impetus for the intense Europeanization of Estonian VET policy.

Through this paper, I would like to contribute to our understanding of how shaping the educational space can occur in vocational education and training (VET). More specifically, I am looking at how the shaping of the educational space is manifesting itself in the process of the Europeanization of VET in the case of Estonia. The paper departs from the concept of Europeanization and the educational governance mechanisms implemented by the EU, and looks at policy transfer and learning through VET reform in Estonia. I try to identify how the domestic institutional dynamics have related to the goals and principles of the Copenhagen process through the open method of coordination (OMC) by the EU. Particular attention is paid to the emergence and expanding of executive governance institutions and agencies that are carrying out "boundary work" (Seddon et al., 2007) or in other words, mediating flows of information and resources between domestic and EU actors. Methodologically, the paper is based on the analysis the EU framework documents, related to the Copenhagen process and the domestic VET policy documents, primarily the National Action Plans (NAP), to identify how the guidelines of the Copenhagen process have been transferred into domestic VET strategy and identify the "hotspots of change" where national and EU education relations are intersecting (Seddon et al., 2013, p. 4;

Seddon, 2014, p. 11), and therefore, are shaping the educational space and governance pattern. The paper argues, that in the process of Europeanization the power of domestic executive institutions in governance of VET has grown and at the same time, the capacity of domestic VET policy actors to critically analyse and formulate own education policy has risen.

2   The Concept of Europeanization Layout

Europeanization has generally been understood as a convergence process, leading to greater similarity of national policies as a result of the adoption of EU policy goals and instruments (Bulmer et al., 2007; Radaelli, 2008; Ure, 2015). However, Europeanization is also seen as a contested concept, suffering from concept stretching (Olsen, 2002; Radaelli, 2008; Flockhart, 2010). A more comprehensive definition offered by Radaelli (2000) encompasses the process of the construction, diffusion and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ways of "doing things" and shared beliefs and norms, which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated into the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies (Radaelli, 2000, p. 4; Saurugger and Radaelli, 2008, p. 213). Changes in the direction of the common EU goals are one indicator of Europeanization (Radaelli, 2008).

Within this broad understanding, two meanings of the concept can be distinguished that refer to policy learning: a broader, *thick*, socio-historical understanding of Europeanization and *thin* form of Europeanization (e.g. Radaelli, 2008; Grootings, 2009; Flockhart, 2010), although different authors attribute different meanings to both – to the concept itself and the thick and thin versions. Thick Europeanization refers to the facilitation of policy reforms (Bulmer et al., 2007) that involve policy learning and capacity building for domestic policy actors to enhance their own policy formulation capacity (Grootings, 2009). Furthermore, according to Radaelli (2008), the distinguishing feature between thick and thin learning from Europe is whether the domestic policy changes comprise changes in policy preferences or actors are learning to cope with problems without changing the policy preferences as a consequence of an EU strategy.

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) was launched by the EU officially at the Lisbon Summit in 2000 as the principal governance tools to direct policy changes in the direction of the common Lisbon goals. The OMC represents a learning-based model of governance providing support for member states to adopt policies suggested by the EU in a deliberate way and involving stakeholders (Radaelli, 2008; Toots and Loogma, 2015). The OMC includes several policy tools and instruments, such as guidelines and recommendations for member states, benchmarks, indicators, monitoring and multilevel steering – reporting, evaluations against the benchmarks, EU and national action plans among others (Radaelli, 2008).
The OMC presumes that the activity of domestic policy actors and "learners" is central, and the process can benefit from a deep understanding and consideration of local/domestic needs, and the cultural and policy context (Grootings, 2009).

Because of the focus on learning in educational governance according to the EU, the process of policy transfer and/or learning itself and the mediating mechanisms that are applied (Grootings, 2009) have become (next to the policy context) the central object of the study of Europeanization in public policy analysis (Bulmer et al., 2007; Toots, 2009). In this paper, however, Europeanization is

understood as the process of how member states adopt EU rules and implement EU policy (Toots and Kalev, 2015). In other words, the process whereby domestic policy actors utilize objectives and principles adopted at the European level in national policy making (ibid). In this process, the development of institutions plays a central role, and the process of domestic institutional change and/or the institutionalization of EU policy serve as the operational dimension and indicator (Bulmer et al., 2007).

The educational space has been treated as an active force rather than a container of educational policies that involve socio-cultural and historical dimensions, as well as the institutions and activities of actors doing "boundary work" (Seddon et al., 2013; Seddon, 2014, p. 12). Lawn and Grek (2012) have drawn attention to the various mechanisms, which contribute to the creation of common education space. At the same time with the direct creation of common policy space by the regulation, "policy space is reconfigured constantly by new emerging policy spaces, that are created by networks, cooperative projects, associations" (p. 17) and that is governed by agents, comparative data sets, discourse creation and regulation by standards (ibid).

From the perspective of shaping the educational space, institutions play a crucial role in that they impact on the interaction patterns of actors and the resulting pattern of governance (Bulmer et al., 2007), and therefore, affect the power relations between actors. As Saurugger and Radaelli (2008) emphasise, Europeanization is related to power creation. Europeanization can affect power relations in the EU as well as at the domestic level in member states via various mechanisms, such as resources (distribution), discourse creation and ultimately, learning, regardless of whether the process has contained more or less learning (Grootings, 2009; Radaelli, 2008).

3   VET Reform in Estonia: principal legal regulations

After the regaining of independence in 1991, the Soviet VET system and entire institutional setup collapsed in the course of the deep, revolutionary change of society. At this time, the local VET actors lacked all the resources they needed – appropriate levels of expertise, finance and time to build up the new VET system in such circumstances, when all other societal systems, particularly the economy and employment systems, were simultaneously going though rapid change (Loogma, 2004; Toots and Loogma, 2015). In the early 1990s, there was not even an institution at the state level that was responsible for the governance of VET (Neudorf et al., 1997). Emerging social partner organisations, including new entrepreneurs and economic actors and unions, were too weak to take any responsibility for VET (Loogma, 2004).

Therefore, VET reform in Estonia, as in most transition countries in the early post-Soviet period, was primarily led by external donors and designed by international experts (Grootings, 2009).

In the VET reform process itself, several stages can be identified which led from an initial liberal developmental stage to a regulated and highly standardized VET system.

1990 – 1996/97: the liberal adjustment of schools to the upheaval encountered in the economy and labour market
In this period, state intervention was minimal and the single factor for change was the liberal adjustment of VET schools in step with a radically changing economic and societal environment (Loogma, 2004; Loogma, 2010). The EU Phare

programmes for supporting reforms and negotiations between social partners have been in operation since the mid-90s. The Danish Aid Programme for VET teacher training and the development of VET curricula (1993–1995) Phare VET reform programme (1995–1998) on VET curricular development were also launched. In this period, very first steps were made to build up VET governance and the legal regulation of the system. However, during a very short period, the VET system in Estonia developed from a highly centralized "distorted dual" system as part of planned economy under Soviet rule to a school-based system. In this period, horizontal learning and the adoption of best practices from other (rather random) systems dominated (Toots and Loogma, 2015).

1997 – 2000: building up the legislative framework for VET
In 1998, the National Strategic document, the Conceptual Basis for Estonian Vocational Education, was adopted by the government, symbolizing the beginning of a strategic period, and at the same time, the beginning of national VET reform. The department of Vocational Education and Training within the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) had been re-established. Soon after, many legal regulations were adopted, including The Vocational Education Institution's Act (passed 1998). The Chamber of Commerce and Industry also started to create a professional qualification system in 1999, establishing 12 professional councils. Furthermore, at the same time, the process of restructuring the VET school network began with negotiations between social partners. At this time, the main trigger for network restructuring was the fact that the school curricula and infrastructure was no longer compatible with the demands of the emerging deindustrialized economic structure.

In 2000, when the Lisbon Strategy was adopted by the EU, many significant legal and institutional changes happened in Estonian VET. An important milestone in the reform process was the adoption of the Professions Act in 2000, which provided the legal foundation for building up the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Furthermore, coordinated by the National Observatory of Vocational Education and the Labour Market, an informal agreement between social partners to cooperate in the development of VET was signed.

2001 – 2004 (pre-accession period): This stage in the VET reforms can be marked as the beginning of *standardization* in VET (Loogma, 2010). In this period, the Estonian Qualification Authority (EQA) was established and the 5-level National Qualification System was introduced followed by the establishment of Professional Qualification Committees and vocational examinations.

The restructuring of the VET school network in direct response to demographic changes (diminishing students´ cohorts) continued through changes to the employment structure. The idea behind the school network reform was to establish multifunctional VET regional centres which would specialize according to the needs of local employment for both young and adult learners.

2005 – 2009: Establishment of national curricula and beginning of a transition to a learning outcome-based approach in VET. Increase of flexibility and better access for vulnerable groups.

The process of preparing the National curricula in VET also started in 2004/05; 44 national curricula in different domains of study had been created and legislated by 2009. In this period, several flexible new forms of vocational training targeting vulnerable groups (students without basic/ comprehensive education, prisoners, apprenticeship trainees, learners with special needs) were ratified. The ratification of several new types of flexible education and training curricula for the

inclusion of disadvantaged groups marked an important shift in VET policy preferences: beside the emphasis on the economic and labour market related functions of VET a shift occurred towards greater social responsibility (Toots and Loogma, 2015). In the same period, the new standards for VET were ratified and implemented: The VET standard and Professional Standard for vocational teachers. The Occupational Qualifications Act was adopted in 2008 to provide the legal basis for the transformation to an 8-level qualification system.

From 2009 onwards, the introduction of the Learning Outcome (LO) based approach in VET curricula development started, and the process was almost completed by 2013. The Vocational Education Institution Act and Vocational Education Standard were updated to create the legal basis for changes in VET quality standards suggested by the Bruges Communiqué (European Commission, 2010).

4 Institutionalization of EU VET policy in Estonia: development of the domestic executive institutions/agencies and National Action Plans

In 2002, the same year that Estonia's accession negotiations with the EU began, the Education and Training Programme (ET2010) was adopted and the Copenhagen process launched. In November 2002, even before joining the EU, Estonia joined the Copenhagen Declaration (MER, 2005). At the same time, the National Action/Development Plans (NAP) for VET were introduced. Estonia joined the EU in May 2004 and the European Structural Funds (ESF), targeted modernization and making use of EU policy tools in VET (e.g. EQF, EQAVET, Europass etc.) which were opened to Estonia in 2005. As the EFS programmes for improving VET were mainly coordinated, mediated and accomplished by the executive agencies, these agencies began to grow fast; the scope of their activities extended year by year and they became important actors or mediators in the transfer of EU VET policy tools to the national VET framework.

4.1 The development of domestic VET institutions, in relation to the implementation of EU guidelines

This part of the article deals with the question of how the goals, principles and (standardizing) tools, adopted by the EU as part of the Copenhagen process in the course of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (The Copenhagen Declaration, 2002) have impacted the development of the institutional structure of VET institutions, particularly executive institutions, involved in *boundary work*.

Even before the Copenhagen process began, the establishment of the agency *Vocational Education Reform Foundation* and the National Observatory of Vocational Education and the Labour Market by the European Training Foundation (ETF) in 1996 denoted the beginning of the Europeanization of VET. Although the main responsibility of the National Observatories was the steering of VET reform, horizontal learning from other VET systems and from the EU took place as well. Later, in 2003, the Vocational Education Reform Foundation was reorganized to form the Innove Foundation with the aim of developing the VET innovation centre. The table below shows how the executive institutional activity has related to EU policy guidelines.

Table 1. Institutionalization of EU VET policy in Estonia: the central/main activities of the domestic executive policy institutions during the Copenhagen process

Copenhagen process: EU policy principles, goals, instruments, tools and guidelines	Implementation of the EU policy guidelines for VET by executive institutions
2003	*Establishment of Innove Foundation, successor to the *Vocational Education Reform* Foundation for the coordination and implementation of EU Structural Funds (ESF) programmes
2004 Maastricht Communiqué on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in VET	*Establishment of the Estonian Education Information System – a common database for the governance of the education system *Elaboration of the Quality Assurance System for VET began with support from ESF programmes
2005	The National Centre for Europass was established by the Qualification Authority
2006 Helsinki communiqué	*Introducing the European credit point (ECVET) system in VET *The renewed agreement between parties: *The common agreement for development of the VET system and preparing qualified labour in 2006-2009*
2008 Bordeaux communiqué (the alignment of the NQF with EQF, implementation of the ECVET and EQARF	An eight-level EstQF was established according to the EQF, based on the legal framework of the Occupational Qualifications Act of 2008. *Shift to a learning outcomes approach in curricular development
2010 Europe 2020 strategy Bruges Communiqué December 2010 on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training	*The EQA became the National Coordination Point of European Qualifications' Framework and the National Reference Point NRP for vocational qualifications *Transition of EstQF to EQF: relation of all formal qualifications to the EQF in order to coordinate and link the National Qualifications Framework and European Qualification Framework (EQF).

From 2004 onwards, Innove has become one of the most important institutions responsible for the coordination and exchange of information between EU and domestic VET actors via various networks, such as ReferNet, and the coordination and accomplishment of ESF programmes and other international projects. The functions of Innove have considerably expanded over time, incorporating the coordination of VET national curricular development, compiling learning resources, VET teacher networks and teacher training (http://www.innove.ee/en/VET).

In 2004–2006, Innove was responsible for all ESF and ERDF measures in education. In 2007–2013, Innove coordinated the Structural Funds assistance in the areas of education and working life within the Operational Programme for Human Resource Development and the Operational programme for the Development of the Living Environment. Innove mediated European Social Funds (ESF) assistance (over 397 M€ in total) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) investments (over 213 M€in total) (http://www.innove.ee/en/organization).

Another institution, the Estonian Qualification Authority Foundation (EQA), was established in August 2001 in order to develop the occupational qualifications system. The EQA serves as a support structure for the occupational qualifications system and is responsible for developing, assisting, recognizing and comparing the occupational competence, and organising and coordinating the activities of sector skills councils (http://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/kutsekoda/tutvustus). Most importantly, for the development of the NQF, the EQA is responsible for implementing the standardizing policy tools of the EU through several ESF projects, such as *Development of Professional Qualifications 2008–2013*, *The development of the Estonian Qualification Framework (EstQF)* and many others. In 2008–2012, the EQA developed the reference system for EstQF to the EQF (http://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/kvalifikatsiooniraamistik/ekr_tutvustus). Therefore, the EQA has become an important *boundary* agent, mediating the EU and national agents to improve the coherence between National and European Qualification Frameworks and the quality standards of VET.

Both institutions, doing *boundary work* have expanded considerably during the Copenhagen process and later, particularly in terms of the growing scope of their functions and responsibilities to support the adoption of the EU VET policy into national frameworks. For example, while the Foundation started with less than 10 staff members, today Innove employs 460 (www.innove.ee).

4.2 Implementation of EU VET policy governance tools: Action/Development Plans and ESF Programmes

From 2001 onward, the VET reform process became much more coordinated and was governed by the NAPs for VET, prepared for 4 or 5-year periods. NAPs were considered framework documents that establish strategic goals, specified by measures and indicators and allocate resources for the modernisation of VET for the defined period. At the same time, the NAPs functioned as a main/important mechanism, transferring the goals and guidelines suggested for member states in the Copenhagen process to Estonian VET policy. The NAPs were usually based on the principles and goals of the Copenhagen process and originated from common benchmarks, indicators and keywords, proposed in the Copenhagen process. The NAPs also formed the basis for the allocation of resources and provided indicators for measuring progress towards goals (Toots and Loogma, 2015). The European Structural Fund Programmes adopted in Estonia were also important policy tools embedded in the NAPs and at the same time provided the foundation for widening the scope of the *boundary activities* of the executive agencies. The concept of VET was followed by the first NAP.

The first Action Plan for Developing the Estonian VET System in 2001–2004 was prepared in cooperation with social partners and adopted by the government in 2001. This was based on the estimation of national needs and challenges, emphasising the need to rationalize the VET school network and its relevance to labour market needs, and there was almost no reference to the EU.

The next NAP (2005–2009) was explicitly based on the principles presented in the Copenhagen Declaration (MER, 2005; Toots and Loogma, 2015). This document called *Development plan for the Estonian Vocational Education and Training system 2005–2008* was elaborated consistently with the strategic documents *Estonian National Development Plan 2004–2006 for the implementation of EU Structural Funds*. The plan explicitly stated that Estonian VET policy has to follow the priorities set for the member states. Furthermore,

referring to the Lisbon Strategy, the Copenhagen Declaration and the Maastricht Communiqué, the NAP set the objectives and planned activities according to the EU common strategic principles and objectives (MER, 2005). The NAP also allocated the resources provided by ESF projects, such as *Development of continuous training for VET teachers*, *Developing Curricula for Vocational Institutions*, *Development of a Professional Qualification System* to achieve this. Most of the projects were coordinated by executive institutions.

The third National Development Plan for the Estonian VET System for 2009–2013 emphasises career guidance, quality of VET, accessibility and other EU VET policy priorities. The priorities and activities of the third NAP basically rely on the priorities emphasised in the Bordeaux communiqué, particularly those related to the enhancement of the quality of VET. Many policy tools, including ECVET, the learning outcome approach to developing VET curricula, the implementation of the EQF and ECVET, the quality assurance model and others, were referred to in NAP 2009–2013.

In 2011, the compiling of the comprehensive Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy started in cooperation with the civil sector and state representatives. The project of the strategy along with background analysis by national experts brought out the main challenges confronting Estonian education and proposed strategic actions to improve the situation (The Five Challenges of the Estonian Education, 2011; HDR, 2012/2013). The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy (ELLS) 2020 was adopted in 2014. This is a comprehensive strategy that embraces all levels and sectors of education, including adult learning over the life course of an individual. Although the goals and principles of the strategy to a great extent overlap with the EU priorities, the ELLS 2020 is explicitly based on domestic challenges and needs, taking the domestic context into consideration. Therefore, ELLS 2020 can be considered a qualitatively new level of policy learning (Toots and Loogma, 2015), demonstrating the capacity of domestic actors to formulate their own education policy in the context of the Europeanization of education policy.

Generally, the discourse in the last two NAPs reflect the adoption of EU guidelines, priorities and goals, set in the Copenhagen process. Discursive Europeanization is explicitly manifested in the NAP 2005–2009, since joining the EU. The third NAP was elaborated in a much more detailed manner and, although EU guidelines were not explicitly used, the activities were in accordance with the guidelines provided by the Bordeaux communiqué.

5 Discussion and conclusions

It has been argued that Estonia, like many other new member states and post-socialist countries, has been more receptive to EU education policy goals and tools (Raudsepp, 2010), and tends to accept EU norms and policy goals less critically, without lengthy discussion (Toots and Kalev, 2015; Toots and Loogma, 2015) than older members, who already have a well-established institutional setup/structure for their VET governance. In the case of transition countries, which have undergone systemic regime change, at least two factors can contribute to this kind of conformist orientation.

VET reform largely coincided with a period of radical change for the European VET framework (Grootings, 2009). In a way, Estonia *entered* into the Copenhagen process at a time when no established Estonian institutional setup for VET was in place (in contrast to the situation in old member states). This can be

seen as one reason, at least partly, as to why "Estonia has been eagerly adopting the pan-European instruments for VET and Lifelong learning" (Raudsepp, 2010, p. 4). Secondly, the general liberalization and marketization tendencies in education make a good fit between the Lisbon values and the Estonian national goals in education (Toots, 2009).

The process of Europeanization in Estonian VET policy has emerged from random interventions from foreign aid packages and horizontal learning from best practices of other countries, after Estonia regained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Since then, it has developed via the Copenhagen process, into a multilevel VET governance system, where EU and domestic policies are interwoven (Toots and Kalev, 2015). EU policy goals, principles, guidelines and instruments/tools, such as creating a common VET space through the implementation of EQF, developing common quality standards, recognition of prior learning among others, have played a crucial role in reforming VET, and thereby, remaking the VET space.

Europeanization in Estonia has been accompanied by the strengthening of the executive agencies. The executive VET institutions, mediating between the EU and domestic policy actors, and executing the reform policies, including those transferred from the EU, play a significant role through *boundary work* in integrating Estonian VET into the European common framework. The institutional setup of domestic VET policy has remarkably changed and become to a great extent coherent with common EU goals. The largest role in this convergence process was played by the VET policy executive agencies that have become influential VET policy actors at the domestic level mainly because of their central role in the *boundary work*. The important aspect in this work that has increased the power of executive bodies has been the coordination and implementation of ESF programmes and projects, intended for the modernisation of VET.

In the course of the Copenhagen process, various ways of learning from Europe can be identified in Estonian VET policy making. Examples of the learning can be: an emphasis on social partnership in the very early period of VET reform, and the shift in preferences, manifesting itself in the acknowledgement of the social functions of VET next to achieving better responsiveness to the labour market. The latter change refers to *thick* learning from Europe.

Generally, Europeanization in VET started from the horizontal lesson drawing from the episodic best practices of EU countries within the framework of bilateral aid projects in the first period of chaos and liberal adjustment of the VET system to the changing context. The period is characterized by uncritical attempts to transfer foreign policy goals into the domestic reform policies. Discursive Europeanization can be considered a further, albeit rather conformist, method of learning. EU VET policy has greatly influenced VET policy formulation in Estonia. The EU's influence on the content and style of the domestic policy documents, or discursive Europeanization, manifests convergence in its "talk" (Radaelli, 2008, p. 24). This is obvious in Estonian education generally (Toots and Loogma, 2015), and particularly in domestic VET policy documents (NAPs).

The uncritical approach has slowly declined and even the principles have transferred from the EU, and the policy tools and instruments have developed, considering national/local needs and challenges (Toots and Loogma, 2015). This tendency is already obvious in the third NAP. However, the standardizing policy tools and activities have been adopted almost without discussion, regardless of whether and how they may contribute to the quality of VET (in terms of labour

market relevance, the lifelong learning capacity building of vocational students etc.). The adoption of the comprehensive strategy of lifelong learning (ELLS202) in 2013, manifests even deeper *thick* policy learning by domestic actors, and raises their capacity to formulate their own education policy.

References

Bulmer, S., Dolowitz, D., Humphreys, P., & Padgett, S. (2007). *Policy Transfer in European Union Governance. Regulating the utilities.* Routledge: London, New York.

European Commission (2010). The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011–2020. *European Commission website*: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy /vocational-policy/doc/brugescom_en.pdf. Accessed 16 October 2015.

Field, J. (2006). *Lifelong Learning and the New Educational Order.* Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Flockhat, T. (2010). Europeanization or EU-ization? The Transfer of European Norms across Time and Space. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 48*(4), 787-810. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02074.x.

Grek, S., & Lawn, M. (2009). A Short History of Europeanizing Education. The New Political Work of Calculating the Future. *European Education, 41*(1), 32–54. doi: 10.2753/EUE1056-4934410102.

Grootings, P. (2009). Facilitating Policy Learning. Active learning and the Reform of Education Systems in Transition Countries. In R. MacLean, & D. Wilson (Eds.), *International Handbook of Education for the Changing World of Work*, (pp. 499–512). Springer: Toronto.

Loogma, K. (2004). *Töökeskkonnas õppimise tähendus töötajate kohanemisel töömuutustega [The meaning of learning at work in adaptation to work changes]*. Tallinn: Tallinn Pedagogical University Publishers.

Loogma, K. (2010). The situation of VET teachers in Estonia. In: S. Kirpal (Ed.), *Changing roles and competences of VET teachers and trainers. Final Report 2, National Summaries of Interview Results* (pp. 97-116). Bremen: University of Bremen.

Ministry of Education and Research (MER) (2005). Eesti kutseharidussüsteemi arengukava aastateks 2005-2008 [The National Development Plan for Development of Estonian VET System]. www.hm.ee/ index.php?popup=download&id=3812. Accessed 03 January 2015.

Neudorf, R., Annus, T., Orro, L., & Jõgi, K. (1997). *National Observatory Country Report. Report on the vocational education and training system, Estonia.* Tallinn: National Observatory of Estonia/ European Training Foundation.

Olsen, J.P. (2002). Many Faces of Europeanization. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 40*(5). 921-52.

Radaelli, C.M. (2000). Whither Europeanization? Concept stretching and substantive change. *European Integration Online Papers (EIoP), 4*(8). http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.302761. Accessed 16 October 2015.

Radaelli, C.M. (2008). Europeanization, Policy Learning, and New Modes of Governance. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, *10*(3), 239-254. doi: 10.1080/13876980802231008.

Raudsepp, K. (2010). *A bridge to the future: European policy for vocational education and training, 10.* National Policy Report, Innove, Estonia.

Saurugger, S., & Radaelli, C. M. (2008). The Europeanization of Public Policies: Introduction, *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, *10*(3), 213–219, doi: 10.1080/13876980802276847.

Seddon, T. (2013). Making educational spaces through boundary work: territorialisation and "boundarying". *Globalisation, Societies and Education, 12*(1), 10-31. doi: 10.1080/14767724.2013.858396.

Seddon, T., Ozga, J. and Levin, John S. (2013). Global Transition and Teacher Professionalism. In T. Seddon, & J.S. Levin (Eds.), *Educators, Professionalism and Politics. Global Transitions, National Spaces and Professional Projects* (pp. 3-24). London: Routledge.

Toots, A. (2009). Brussels Comes via Helsinki: The Role of Finland in Europeanization of Estonian Education Policy. *Halduskultuur 10,* 58-73.

Toots, A. & Kalev, L. (2016). Governing in the Shadow of Bologna: Return of the State in Higher Education Quality Assurance Policy. *International Journal of Public Policy 12*(1), 54-74. doi: 10.1504/IJPP.2016.075216.

Toots, A. & Loogma, K. (2015). Õppiv euroopastumine Eesti Hariduspoliitikas [Learning Europeanisation in Estonian Education Policy]. In: Estonian Human Development Report (259−264). Tallinn: Eesti Koostöö Kogu. www.kogu.ee/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/FINAL_EIA_2015_ENG.pdf. Accessed 16 February 2016.

Ure, O.B. (2015). Governance for Learning Outcomes in European Policy-Making: Qualification Frameworks Pushed through the Open Method of Coordination. *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training 2*(4), 268-283. doi: 10.13152/IJRVET.2.4.2.