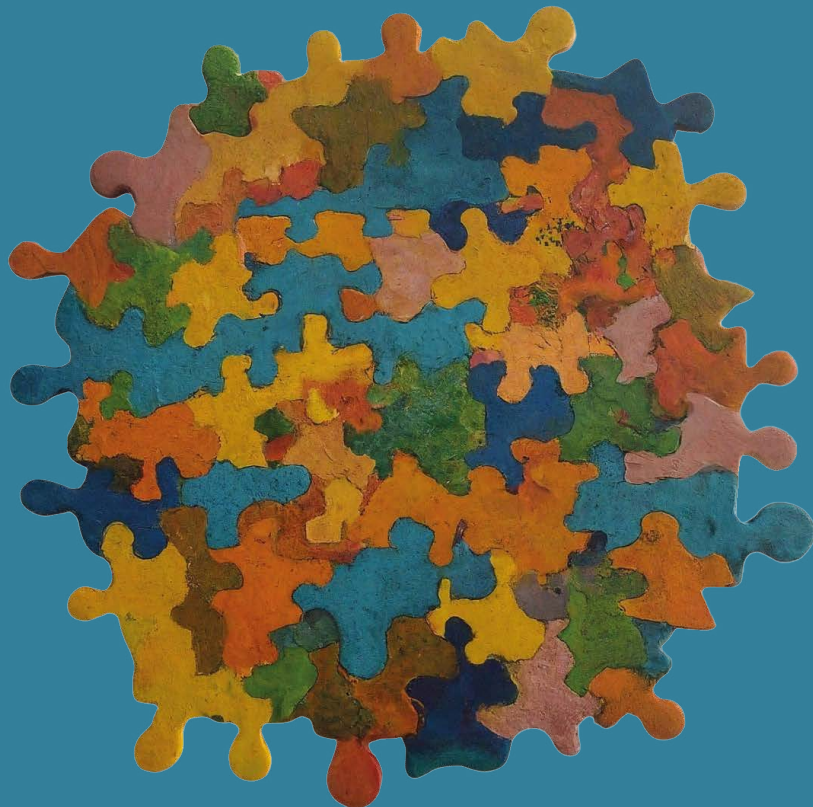


Paolo Bertuletti, Johannes K. Schmees, Fabienne-Agnes Baumann,
Dietmar Frommberger & Francesco Magni (Eds.)



Vocational Education in European Regions

Lower Saxony and Lombardy in Comparison

DAAD

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
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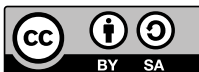
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Preface

Comparative studies on vocational education and training (VET) models take different theoretical approaches, and numerous classifications have been developed over time. The problem with these typifications is that they tend to overlook the real-world complexity and for this reason scholars have begun to emphasise case-specific differences within types. Despite the close link that VET systems have with the world of work and local institutions (even when the governance of the system is centralised), the distinctive characteristics of regional VET systems are rarely investigated.

In this book, we summarise the research findings of a collaborative project conducted by VET research teams of the University of Bergamo and Osnabrück University, which was funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The focus of this cooperative effort was on comparative studies of VET in European regions, especially Lombardy (Italy) and Lower Saxony (Germany).

The term 'region' refers to geographical divisions at the subnational level and happens to coincide with the political-administrative boundaries of the region of Lombardy in Italy¹ and the Federal State of Lower Saxony in Germany². It should also be noted that a particular focus of the project was on the apprenticeship systems in both Lower Saxony and in Lombardy. Zooming in on the specificities of these two regional cases has revealed a wealth of insights into the establishment of VET programmes that would otherwise have remained hidden under the conventional blanket of national types.

In her introductory chapter, Fabienne-A. Baumann describes the skill ecosystem approach as a potential lens through which researchers can attend to the regional aspects, rather than those that emerge only at the national level, when investigating VET systems. Although thus far applied only to a limited number of case studies, the concept of the skill ecosystem, when equipped with comprehensive data, can be particularly useful for examining regional VET systems.

Dietmar Frommberger then problematises the focus on dual apprenticeship systems frequently found in research on German VET, arguing that the diversity within German VET should be discussed, especially in terms of comparative approaches. This is justified by the fact that while roughly two-thirds of a cohort in Germany were found to opt for some type of VET at the upper secondary level, only half of them chose the dual apprenticeship system. In Frommberger's view, it is therefore crucial to shed light on other VET programmes.

Regarding the regional level, Tim Migura focuses on the structures and challenges of the dual apprenticeship system that have emerged in Lower Saxony. In particular, he

1 With a population of 9.9 million, Lombardy is the most populated of the 20 administrative regions in Italy.

2 By land area, Lower Saxony is the second largest among the 16 federated states in Germany and twice the size of Lombardy, but with a smaller population of eight million.

discusses the issues of gender-specific interests in occupations, the so-called ‘fitting problem’, and the high rate of early contract termination, as well as increasing academic drift. Considering the long-term consequences of these challenges on the local as well as the national level, Migura questions why the structural changes required to improve the dual apprenticeship system seem not to be part of any political agenda.

Building on the idea of the diversity of the German VET system and following the regional focus of this book, Silke Lange introduces the landscape of VET schools in Lower Saxony. Specifically, she argues that while they are an integral part of the dual apprenticeship system, VET schools provide a much wider array of educational options for different target groups. In particular, these schools not only vary with respect to the vocational fields they cover and their general organisation, but also in the levels of their offered credentials, which range from vocational preparation for a dual apprenticeship to the so-called bachelor’s professional track. Despite these differences, however, Lange argues that these schools share a common purpose of integrating general education with vocational training and fostering personal development alongside the acquisition of occupational qualifications.

In the last contribution which focuses on Lower Saxony, Silke Lange, Kristina Trampe, Christoph Porcher, and Dietmar Frommberger introduce the VET teacher training process used in the region. Departing from the fact that there is a persistent shortage of VET teachers, the authors attribute this outcome to the structural heterogeneity of the VET teacher training programmes. As universities try to increase the attractiveness of their study programmes through alternative study models that fit individual needs, educational pathways to becoming VET teachers are becoming increasingly more confusing. Accordingly, this chapter systematically examines this trend of heterogenisation, analyses its implications, and discusses whether it is still the right solution to attract new students.

Turning to the case of Lombardy, Francesco Magni and Virginia Capriotti explore the VET system in this region within the framework of Italian VET, aiming to highlight both its strengths (‘light’) and challenges (‘shadow’). They argue that the VET system has long been trying to strengthen its links with the world of work, increase the number of students who participate, cope with early school leaving and educational poverty, and improve the quality of learning. They delve into specific regional policies, institutional frameworks, and pedagogical approaches at play, thereby presenting Lombardy as one of the most industrially advanced regions in Italy and thus a microcosm of broader national trends. The paper ends with some recommendations for enhancing the efficiency and inclusivity of the VET system, which would ensure that it continues to meet the evolving needs of the workforce and the economy.

Evelina Scaglia then uses a historical lens to investigate the development of the Italian VET system in general, and the Lombardian VET system in particular. This contribution provides two exemplary cases, taken from the local history of Bergamo, Lombardy, that illustrate the conflict between local and national jurisdiction in Italian VET, where, since unification, the increasing attempt by the state to centralise the gover-

nance of the school system has clashed with the Lombardian idea of a more adjusted approach that fits the needs of a successful regional economy and labour market.

In the following chapter, Giada Ragone argues that Lombardy is a laboratory of innovation in VET from a constitutional perspective. While after the 2001 Constitutional Reform, she argues, Italian VET fell under the exclusive legislative authority of the regions, the Italian Constitutional Court played a pivotal role in reshaping the landscape of Italian regionalism by reinterpreting the allocation of legislative competences in favour of the state. This contribution examines the regulatory initiatives implemented by the Lombardy region to establish its own VET system, thereby highlighting how regional innovation and experimentation can contribute to the broader realisation of constitutional rights, including the right to vocational education. Through her analysis, Ragone suggests that innovations tested at the local level can serve as catalysts for transformative changes that can benefit the entire nation.

Paolo Bertuletti and Andrea Potestio make another regional case in their effort to show how and to what extent Lombardy's short-cycle tertiary education system supports innovation. This explorative research, based on semi-structured interviews with representatives of nine higher technical education institutions, reveals that this branch of the regional VET system is not necessarily fully market-driven, despite its strong ties with the world of work, and may instead play a proactive role in contributing to the skill ecosystem and promoting, within certain limits, the development of new professional profiles. As a result, the higher technical education institutions in Lombardy can be seen as 'intentional' agents committed to improving the school-to-work transition through the development of professional profiles that can guide companies in their innovation and growth processes.

In the final chapter, Paolo Bertuletti and Johannes Karl Schmees synthesise the findings presented in the prior chapters in light of the theoretical perspective of skill ecosystems, arguing that Lombardy, much more than Lower Saxony, differs from the overarching model. The authors conclude that by using skills formation systems closer to the territories, regional specifications can be met, and a better alignment of the economy and the VET system can be achieved, with more sustainable outcomes in the long run.

Bergamo, Derby/Trondheim, Munich, and Osnabrück

Paolo Bertuletti, Johannes Karl Schmees, Fabienne-Agnes Baumann,
Dietmar Frommberger, and Francesco Magni

