

**Master's Thesis**

**The effect of EU's non-binding agreements on  
national policies**

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## Abstract

The European Union has in recent years been heavily criticised as they, in some Member States, seem not to have sufficient democratic transparency and their decisions often seem unlogic for the common EU-citizen. This has led the EU to focus more on transparency and creating initiatives that makes sense for the common EU-citizen and for the EU as a whole. One of the initiatives towards education is the Open Method of Coordination, where the objective is to transfer ideas and creating 'good practices' among Member States. However, this is a quite diffuse concept, which seeks to be examined in the research paper. Is it even difficult to detect these 'good practices' and ideas that the OMC is based upon on national policies? Especially when the EU is spending so much money on the matter (the education funds are a part of the Horizon 2020 EU Framework, which allocates approximately €80 billion to different initiatives within the field of research and innovation within the EU). Furthermore, there have been an increasing focus on the skill deficit among youngsters and adults in the EU, which is also the case in a nation like Denmark – especially among the vocational education and training-learners. Thus, this project seeks to examine how these non-binding agreements affect Denmark and its VET-system.

A theoretical framework of David Dolowitz and David Marsh's work on policy transfer provides an overall approach to the analysis of the project, in order to explain who, why, what and where the policy transfer occurs. The overall findings in this project is that Denmark only seems to choose the programmes that fits them the best. This is exemplified with their VET-reform from 2015, which shows a lack, or insufficient proof of sharing of the ideas and 'good practice' which characterises the Open Method of Coordination. However, when the study moves to the relation between Denmark and the Erasmus+-programme, it shows that the method of OMC is easier to observe in this case. Another observation, that has been made is the importance of institutions. It shows indications on that the stronger an institution a member state has the less influence come from the EU. On the other hand, it also shows that strong institutions, as is in the Danish case, cooperates with the EU, when there are equally strong – or stronger – programmes, with a historical anchoring and proven impact from earlier cooperation. Thus, the ideas of the Erasmus+-programme floats in the Danish approach to international programmes on the VET-sector.

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## Chapter one: Introduction

One of the core values of the European Union is the rule of law, which makes the EU able (in cooperation with the Member States) to decide what the Member States should do or what they should not do. Consequently, the Member States have given the final jurisdiction to the European Court of Justice. According to the EU, they are working on making their institutions more transparent and democratic by giving the European Parliament more power etc. They encourage people to interact and contribute to the democratic development (The European Union, 2018). However, the recent years have showed an increase in mistrust to the EU. Most significantly exemplified with the exit of Great Britain in 2016. Other events worth mentioning can be the (near) success of the French rightist and EU-sceptical political party, Front National, who almost won the French election in 2017 and have a strongly opposition towards the EU. In 2015 the EU sceptical party, The Greek political party, Syriza, won the election in Greece, which resulted in discussions on a possible “Grexit” (The Guardian, 2017; Business Insider, 2017) and in Denmark the debate about the EU has been ongoing for the last years as well. This scepticism towards the EU has even got its own phenomena; Euroscepticism, which is a political direction towards scepticism towards EU.

The reasons for the Euroscepticism are many. Some reasons are because of economic insecurity, some are because of a basic mistrust to the EU-systems and its legitimacy and thus the laws, initiatives and programmes, that are being done by EU. Some of the EU-systems are vital parts of the EU – the European Court of Justice, the European Commission and the European Council, just to name a few – are all places where EU policy are created or upheld. Some decisions are legally binding but, in some cases, the initiatives or programmes are not legally binding. They serve as inspiration or guidance to good practices in certain policy areas – examples on this are the Open Method of Coordination in education.

## Research question

Based on the above mentioned, this project seeks to examine how much influence does the EU actually have on national policies based on these non-binding agreements? Is it possible to identify? The research will take its starting point in the Danish VET, where Denmark have a well-functioning

VET-system, and try to identify how much influence the EU's non-binding agreements and the method of the Open Method of Coordination actually have on national policies. This leads to the research question of this project, which will be as stated:

*How do non-binding agreements from the EU, such as the Open Method of Coordination, affect the Danish vocational education and training system?*

To answer the research question, a single-case study will be made. Furthermore, a document analysis will be conducted in order to use the theoretical framework on explicit policy actions. The analysis will be based on two things; the Danish VET-system and how it has been designed in the national VET-reform from 2015 and the work that the Danish system has done in relation the Erasmus+-programme and the integration of this in the Danish VET-system. This will be done with a starting point of a theoretical framework, consisting of policy transfer and horizontal and vertical policy integration, which can help to identify whether or not a transfer of policies has been made. The hope/idea of the research is not to decide whether or not it is a bad idea that the EU creates these programmes or that the EU can or cannot be used to anything. The idea of the research is to examine if it has an impact – and moreover consider following research topics.

In this project, the *non-binding agreements* is understood as the agreements that have been made in the EU, that a Member State can get out of if needed and consequently, they cannot be prosecuted for doing so. Examples on such agreements are the Open Method of Coordination and the Erasmus+-programme. Furthermore, the word *affect* is in this case used as when a policy transfer successfully

[The Open Method of Coordination and Education and Training 2020](#)

This section seeks to explain the Open Method of Coordination (the OMC), as it is a vital part of the research question and can be seen as the frame of the project. Thus, the overall objective of the OMC is to create convergence through good practices and transferring of ideas within the field of education. In this project, the Erasmus+-programme and the Danish VET-reform from 2015 will serve as examples on how the OMC can create the convergence. Furthermore, the Education and

Training 2020 (ET2020) serves as examples on where the EU has concretised the work on education and training.

The OMC is probably one of the most significant methods, that EU have initiated. The OMC is a relatively new method of soft decision-making process, that has firstly been introduced in EU in relation to the Amsterdam-treaty in 1997 and formally introduced by the Lisbon European Council in 2000 (The European Parliament, 2014). It relies on spreading good practises, cooperation among Member States and generally focusing on achieving convergence towards EU goals in those areas, which falls under the partial or full competence of Member State. However, the OMC does not have any legal bindings which means that it cannot create any direct legislation. Instead, the OMC is a method of soft governance, which focus on spreading good practises in different kinds of policy-areas. The main target is to make Member States learn from each other. This is done through qualitative and quantitative measures, benchmarks, national and regional targets and several ongoing evaluations (Eurofound, 2010; Alexiadou, Fink-Hafner, & Lange, 2010). However, peer pressure and naming and shaming are often words, that are used in order to explain the OMC, which might hint that the soft governance is not as soft as it should be (The European Parliament, 2014). On the other hand, peer pressure etc. can be work as a way to be more efficient.

One of the policy areas in the OMC is education. Education is an area, where, as earlier written, EU does not have any legislative power, and where national laws and practises are determined in the respective states. In according to the Amsterdam Treaty, the EU's primary aim is to support and contribute to the development of high quality education-practises. In this case, the OMC serves as way of contributing to educational policies in EU Member States (or at least it is its intentions). In this context, the OMC will work as an example on policy transfer – not necessarily a perfect example, but when non-binding European policies can be identified in national policies, credit might go to the OMC. Thus, it is not an expression of perfect or imperfect policy transfer.

In relation to the initiation of the OMC in education, a strategic framework for education and training 2010 (ET2010) was released. The framework represented a shared set of intentions from the European Member States to move to a closer cooperation on the education field. This has later

developed into the framework for education and training 2020 (ET2020) (Alexiadou, Fink-Hafner, & Lange, 2010).

The strategic objectives of the ET2020 are as follows:

1. *“Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality*
2. *‘Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training*
3. *Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship*
4. *Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training” (Council , 2009)”*

This project will mostly work with the first objective, as it relates most to the project. In a brief explanation, *making lifelong learning and mobility a reality* is about how to develop national qualifications frameworks based on learning outcomes.

### Research limitations

Before moving on, there will be a brief note on what overall limitations there have been done in the work with the project. The single-case study has been chosen so that there can be conducted a deeper analysis of a few national policy programmes. Thus, this project limit itself from conducting a comparative study, as it fears that the analysis would be too superficial. Furthermore, this project intends to understand the policies and ideas that are horizontally transferred from the EU to national policies, which consequently means that it limits itself from looking at the implementation of the programmes/ideas in national policies. Further methodological delimitations and theoretical delimitations will be conducted in the chapter three.

### Project design

The following section will provide a brief examination of the chapters of the project and what the reader can expect.

The first chapter contained the introduction to the project, where the overall considerations of the theme of this project has been introduced. Furthermore, the research question has been introduced, together with the explanations on central concepts of this project – mostly circled around the OMC. Finally, the considerations of limitations of the project have been introduced in order to provide an overview of what this project will contain and what thoughts that have lied behind in order to limit itself. The second chapter will be a literature review of some of the research that have been done on the field. Chapter three will contain the methodical considerations of the project, including the considerations of the choice of case and what it does and does not do to the project. Chapter four will be about the theoretical framework that will be worked with in the analysis of this project. Chapter five will contain the analysis, which will tie it all together and make the basis of the answer of the research question. Chapter six will conclude the findings and answer the research question and finally chapter seven will provide ideas and discussions on further research.

## Chapter two: Literature review

This chapter seeks to briefly introduce some of the research that have been done on policy transfer in relation to the European Union and some of the research that have been done on the evaluations of the Erasmus+-programme. This is done in order to provide some initial considerations that have been done in the design of this project. Researching policy transfer is a rather new phenomenon. The research goes back to the beginning and the middle of the 1990's, where the concept of policy transfer was developed. However, since the late 1990's, the most cited scholars of policy transfer have been David Dolowitz and David Marsh, which will be further explained in chapter four. At that time, Dolowitz and Marsh mostly discussed the transfer of policy in relation to the United States of America and the countries around. Yet, research on policy transfer in relation to the European Union has been rather limited throughout the years. In this section, there will be conducted a review of two central research papers on policy transfer. Both research papers focus on the potential of policy transfer from an institutionalised point of view. The first research paper focus on the legitimacy problem of EU institutions and its relation to policy transfer, while the second research paper focus on a more holistic point of view, as it focuses on the different types of governance regimes and the relation to potential policy transfer.



Claudio M. Radaelli, PhD in political science and director of Centre for European Governance, has issued an article, where he discusses the limitations of the legitimacy problem of European institutions and how it stimulates policy transfer by catalysing isomorphic processes. He further argues how especially the European Commission can overcome the problem of limited legitimacy by forcing solutions into national political systems. He conducts three case studies and translate them into the policy transfer framework, developed by Dolowitz and Marsh. The case studies involve the single currency, the tax policy coordination and media ownership policy. First of all, the research concludes that *“coercion, normative pressures and mimetism have been instrumental in providing technocratic legitimacy”* (Radaelli, 2000, p. 37-38). Furthermore, based on the cases, he stresses, that national models of different policies might be a crucial condition for policy diffusion. Finally, the article shows the preliminary evidence that the concept of isomorphism has the potential to explain process and outcome, which strengthen the circumstances of combining the study of policy transfer with the study of legitimacy. The article ends up on presenting possibly further research on policy transfer (Radaelli, 2000).

Another research made on policy transfer in relation to the European Union, is made by Simon Bulmer, professor in European Politics, University of Sheffield and Stephen Badgett, University of Strathclyde, who have conducted a research on how the result and potential outcomes of policy transfer varies based on what type of governance regime there is. The general hypothesis from the article is that *“stronger forms of policy transfer occur in highly institutionalised governance regimes”* (Bulmer & Padgett, 2004, p. 103). The research first of all shows, that programmes like The Open Method of Coordination (which also is a relevant figure in this project) is not necessarily the reason for policy transfer in the EU. Policy transfer is more rooted in longer standing modes of hierarchical governance. Second of all, the research shows, that institutions do not play such a big role, as the literature previously has showed. More specifically, the research shows that more institutionalised governance has a stronger potential of policy transfer and they have a greater probability of transfer outcomes. Furthermore, the research conducted case studies, which emphasised that hierarchal structures and governance are more likely to have a bigger transfer policy potential than governances with soft compliance mechanisms. Above all, the research shows that policy transfer

outcomes and processes are dependent on which institutions the specific transfer is in, which furthermore means that there needs to be a special focus on the identification of the “borrower” and the “lender” (Bulmer & Padgett, 2004). Besides the conclusions on the research, Bulmer and Padgett stresses the fact that the dependency on governance and the institutions and its relation to the possible potential of policy transfer is based on a general scale of the EU. Further research can be made on specific fields – for example the education area and, as a result of the time the article is written, how further studies can be conducted on the EU enlargement in the East (Bulmer & Padgett, 2004).

The overall objective of the midterm evaluation of the Erasmus+-programme (2014-2020) is to examine the effectiveness, the added value and relevance, the coherence and the efficiency. The overall results show that the Erasmus+-programme is quite successful and lives up to all its objectives (The European Commission, 2018). However, this is not surprising, as 1) the Erasmus+-programme is a part of the Horizon 2020-budget, which is enormous (€80 billion) (The European Commission, 2013). And 2) one must be a bit critical towards all the findings, as, to the author’s own experience, some of the country reports that is conducted in relation to such an evaluation, is often created with one objective; to make the programme as good-looking as possible.

To conclude, the research on policy transfer in relation to EU has been discussed for the last 15-20 years, yet it has mostly been from an institutionalised point of view. The discussions have swerved around the legitimacy of the EU and the significance of types of governance in relation to the potential of policy transfer. This means that the research stresses the need and potential of researching the phenomenon of policy transfer on certain policy issues in relation to specific countries. Furthermore, the midterm evaluation on the Erasmus+-program showed, that the programme works after the intentions, which indicates that policy transfer has been successful in that case. All these examples of study have contributed to the interest in this field and, especially the studies made by Radaelli and Bulmer, shows that there is a reason to look more into the field of EU and its effects on national policies, whilst the midterm evaluations of the Erasmus+-programme has made this author to wonder how true that really is.

## Chapter three: Methodology

This chapter will provide a guidance through the methodical considerations that have been done. Firstly, there will be a brief examination of the theory of science and what significance it has to this project. Secondly, the theoretical framework will be examined in order to explain how this will be used. Thirdly, the approach of the analysis will be explained. Next, there will be a presentation of the case study and what the presentation of the case used in the project. Finally, there will be a section of the considerations of limitations of this project.

### Theory of science

Before going through the examination of the method of the project, this section seeks to explain and show some of the considerations of the scientific positioning this project has considered. This includes the position the researcher must take in order to observe the problem. However, this section does not intend to start a huge theoretical discussion on the matter, but rather show the considerations that have been done in this project. The observations which have been made in this study, have been done on the basis of a predominantly realistic position. This means, that the research has made the observations from an objective position in order to find an answer (Ingeman, 2013). The characteristics of the realistic position is, that one must take an objective position to its research. Within the realistic position, there are sub-positions, which among other includes rationalism, which this project can be categorised as. The position of rationalism is normally described as referring to *human sense*. On an epistemological plan, the rationalism relies on the human sense, which is seen as the only reasonably way to obtain knowledge. It is the human sense and its ability to think logically and abstract that really differ the human from animals – according to rationalism, humans are not easily distracted by senses when understanding phenomena's, which really creates the difference. So, as the rationalism states, humans can decipher itself to conclusions through deductions (Ingeman, 2013; Pecorino, 2000). It is the deduction, that are the foundation of this project, as it seeks to go from the general view on programmes initiated by the EU to the specific – the VET-systems on a particular member state, in this case, Denmark. This has led to the choice of the type of research question, which can be predominantly be categorised as deductive.

## Theoretical approach

This project seeks to explain how non-binding agreements within the EU affects the Danish VET-system. In order to do, the theory of policy transfer and the branches of that is used. Moreover, in order to identify how the policy transfer works, horizontal and vertical policy integration is applied to the policy transfer. The policy integration-theories will be based on Lukas Giessen's work, and with help from Guy B. Peters's observations on the matter. Policy transfer will mostly be discussed from the foundation of the work of David Dolowitz and David Marsh, but scholars like Colin J. Bennett, Diane Stone and Richard Rose will also be mentioned. Here the concepts of *voluntary transfer* and a presentation of a *Policy Transfer Framework* and a *policy transfer continuum* is vital and will be used in the analysis. Furthermore, the concept of *policy convergence* will be derived from the abovementioned scholars.

## Limitations on the theoretical framework

Several theories were discussed and considered prior to the creation of the project in order to answer the research question in the best possible way. Especially, the classical theories of integration, with intergovernmentalism and liberal-intergovernmentalism were considered. However, these were not chosen, as they work more with why states act as they do, which would mean that this project should change its approach and try to look at for example why Denmark adopt or do not adopt the programmes /initiatives created by the EU. This was not preferable. Also, the theory of neofunctionalism has been considered, but this was not either found adequate in order to answer the research question, as the research does not seek to work with spill-over effects within the EU. If the neofunctionalism was chosen the approach would be the implementation of the ideas of the programmes and not the policies being transferred, which would be the focus.

## Analytical approach

The theories that have been presented, will work as a framework to analyse the documents, that have been found – thus the main method of analysing in this project will be a document analysis. What that consists of and further considerations on this topic, will be explained later in this chapter. In this project, policy transfer will function as the main theory, where the Policy Transfer Framework will work as the foundation of the analysis. Here, the questions of who, why, what and where, will

be answered based on the work the EU has done towards the VET and Danish documents on VET and thus answer the beforementioned questions from The Policy Transfer Framework. Furthermore, the policy continuum will be used in order to provide an overview of where on the continuum this case can be placed. This will lead to a discussion of these non-binding agreements actually works on national policy-making, which also will include perspectives of other branches of the concept of policy transfer.

The following, is an attempt on creating an analysis design in order to illustrate how the analysis will be conducted:

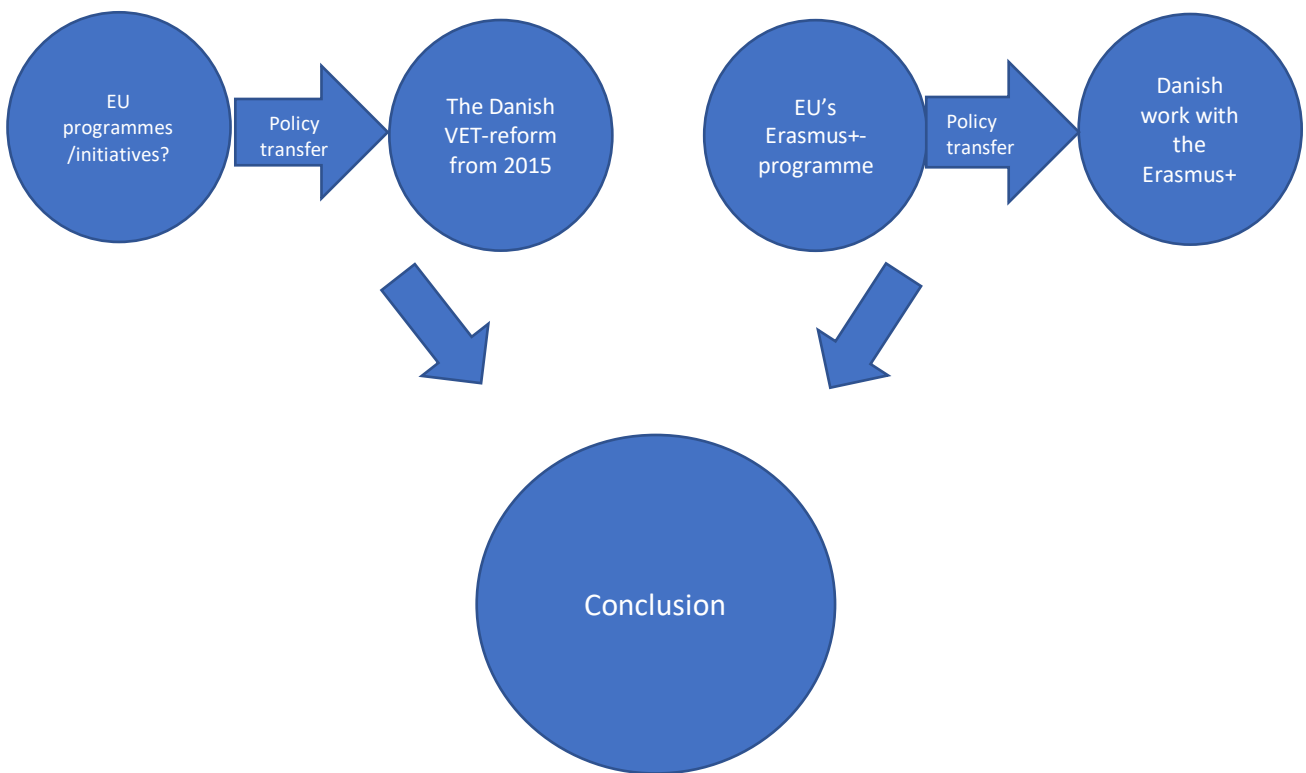


Figure 1: Design of analysis (self-created)

### Document analysis

This project contains different documents, which will be briefly examined here. EU is represented with different official documents from respectively the European Council and the European Union on the decisions of the Open Method of Coordination and the Education and Training 2020 and the Erasmus+-programme. In this study, there will be conducted a case study, which will be based on the

actions on vocational education and training in Denmark. Here, it is both legal documents, ministerial reports and articles, that will serve as major documents. These documents - both from the EU and the Danish VET-system - will serve as the base of the analysis and they will be interpreted from the theoretical framework that has been chosen. Besides, the theoretical framework is based on research papers, research articles and scholarly books. Thus, this gathering of documents contains many of the requirements that a document analysis normally is built upon. The following sections will explain what the gathering of documents includes in a document analysis.

When deciding to conduct a document analysis, there are certain considerations that needs to be made. First of all, the type of document needs to be considered. According to professor Kennet Lyngaard from Roskilde University Center, a document is *“a language, fixed in text and time”* (Lyngaard, 2015, p. 154). In this context text is considered as written texts, but other types of texts can also be a part of a document analysis – for example photography’s. In this case, the project will work with written texts formed as legal texts, academic reports and/or texts created by official bodies such as governments or the European Union. It is often emphasised that the time-spectrum needs to be taken into considerations, when working with documents. However, in this project the documents are typically an expression of the time of the event and most of them used in this project, serve around the same years. In comparison to, for example interviews, documents can give answers to the development of certain areas over time. Interviewed persons might not be able remember or was not present at the given time of the event – in this case the document then can give an adequate answer of how the things have been on that time the documents are written (Lyngaard, 2015).

The process of the gathering of documents have been done through a longer period of time. Where the first ideas were to conduct an examination of the impact of the Open Method of Coordination in education based on policy transfer, it soon changed into an examination of identification of policy transfer in certain policy areas. This progress can be identified as the “snowball method”, a method created by Jacob Torfing, PhD at Roskilde University Center. The method consists of a “mother document”, which serves as the base of all documents and from that you find documents that refers or slightly refers to the mother document. In this case, the mother document can be identified as

the initiative of the Open Method of Coordination, which ignited the thought of policy transfer and in the last end what this project works within. What Torfing is stressing, is the need to “follow” a certain document and all its links to other documents relating to the topic. This project has only done this to a certain point, as it has needed to limit itself, which is completely consistent with Torfing’s way of explaining the snowball method (Torfing, 2004). However, as Lyngaard stresses, the mother document can lose some of its importance. This happened with the documents of the Open Method of Coordination, as the interest in policy transfer grew and the OMC was set aside for a while. The OMC arguably turned into only a fragment of the entire project in the very end.

However, the key method of analysing in this project will be the execution of a content analysis. This project will, as earlier described, take a deductive methodical approach, which means that it will be operationalised on the base of the theoretical framework. The analysis will be based on two analytical frameworks, created by David Dolowitz and David Marsh, which will be further presented in chapter four. The two frameworks work together and contains questions on *why*, *where*, *how* and *who* on policy transfer and a policy transfer continuum. Thus, the programmes/initiatives made by EU and the different actions that have been taken towards vocational education and training in a Danish context will be applied to the frameworks in order to try to identify the possibility of policy transfer as showed in the design of the analysis.

#### Case study – why, how and what does it do?

Before examining the case that is being used in this particular project, an overall consideration of what a case study is and what considerations one must do before conducting a case study, will be done.

The normal assumption on case studies has for many years been, that from one case study you can never generalise. However, that is not necessarily the truth (Flyvbjerg, 2015; Bryman, 2012). Further studies have showed that it is possible to generalise – or at least not take the “you can never generalise”-issue as serious as first assumed. Bent Flyvbjerg stresses the importance of theory, reliability and validity in order to conduct a case study with enough quality (Flyvbjerg, 2015). On the other hand, some researchers emphasise that it is up to the individual researcher to relate to what

they want in terms of the beforementioned (Bryman, 2012). In this case, the reliability, validity and the generalisability will be discussed, which means that this project takes a position of somewhere in the middle of the two positions.

### *Validity*

In order to secure validity in the project, the empirical data – in this case, the documents – have been thoroughly examined. The data sources of the project seem reasonable valid, as they are created by respectively the European Commission and its organs and the Danish parliament. However, one must notice that changing governments affect policies, which might affect the way the programmes and initiatives from EU are interpreted. So, this project is a portrait of the current situation, and a similar study of this type might be different if it is conducted in another time.

### *Reliability*

In quantitative research, the reliability is about replicability, but in qualitative research methods the reliability refers to consistency. However, certain degree of deviations is acceptable. In this case, the reliability can be discussed from the choice of case. This means, that this particular case from Denmark is an expression of how (or if) policies and ideas of the EU are detectible in the more well-performing countries, who have well-defined welfare system and/or political or economic systems. This means that if the same research was conducted on a less well functioning country, the results might deviate and the influence from EU might be different. Qualitative interviews or studies from other cases could have helped on the reliability, but, as earlier written, the fear of being too superficial also played a part.

### *Generalisability*

The generalisability can also be discussed. Not just in this case, but in all case studies in general. It is difficult to generalise from only one or a few case studies. This is emphasised by several scholars (Bryman, 2012; Flyvbjerg, 2015; Steinberg, 2015). As Paul F. Steinberg stresses about generalisation and its relation to empirical confirmation;



*“This definition does not adequately capture the challenge of generalization, because even when a phenomenon has been observed repeatedly and in many contexts (whether through statistics, case studies, or mixed methods), documented “sightings” are small in number relative to the frequency and scope of occurrence posited by a theory” (Steinberg, 2015, p. 153)*

This stresses the fact, that it is difficult to generalise from a case study – but also that it is difficult to generalise from other kinds of studies. However, it is known, that this study might not be able to conclude on the entire EU, but, as earlier written, it might be able to conclude something on countries that are equally developed.

### Denmark as a case

When conducting a case study, there are – again – certain considerations one must do before starting. First of all, the type of case is important to how the research will end up. There are different kind of types of cases, but this particular case is categorised as a combination of a critical case and a representative/typical case, as Alan Bryman explains it (for further types of cases, see Bryman, 2012, p. 70-71). This case is chosen on the basis of the representative or typical case – or the exemplifying case, as Bryman calls it. The exemplifying case gives the reseracher the possiblity to “... *capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation*” (Bryman, 2012, p. 70). This means that the case can be chosen if it wants to exemplify a broader category, where it already is a member (here, it is assessed that Denmark is a part of the EU that are rather well developed). In this case, it is not an extreme case, but it wants to create a suitable context where similar or further research can be done. In this case, Denmark and its initiatives on VET is chosen as it can, as earlier written, most likely be researched in other (similar) countries.

The VET is chosen on the basis of an increasing focus on the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2008, which lead the EU into an economical and unemployment-crisis with a high percentage of youth- and adult-unemployment. Thus, this is both adressed as one of the reasons for the reform of the VET-system in Denmark and as one of the reasons for an increase of focus of VET in EU-terms (Undervisningsministeriet, 2014; The European Commission, 2017).

## Limitations on methodology

So far, this chapter has searched to explain the different methodological approaches of the project. However, there are also some approaches, that have been either deselected or have not been possible. One or more interviews would have been preferable, in order to explain some of the underlying reasons on why EU does or do affect national policy-making. Unfortunately, getting the interviews have been more difficult than first assumed. A potential national great conflict in the public sector in Denmark, made it impossible to reach potential government interviewees and after the conflict was cancelled, possible interviewees have cancelled the different appointments that have been made. At some point, the project needed to proceed into the analytical phase, which is why the interviews were dropped at a certain point. Furthermore, if these interviews were conducted, it would have changed the scientific approach to the project. In this case, the interviews would be an expression of the interviewee's understanding of the case, which would mean that the position of this project would move to a more idealistic position cf. Ingeman (2013) and Pecorino (2000). Another approach that could have been chosen, was the examination of a comparative case study in order to spot the differences the OMC and the EU have had. However, as already mentioned, this has not been selected, as there have been a fear of the project being too superficial.

## Chapter four: Theoretical framework

This chapter seeks to explain the main theory within this project; policy transfer. In this theory there are branches of other theories (which, nonetheless, are branches of policy transfer); policy diffusion, policy learning and policy convergence. However, this chapter limit itself to look at policy transfer and policy convergence.

In this chapter, there will, first of all, be an introduction to horizontal and vertical policy integration. Before moving on, there needs to be made a clear distinction of how this project looks at the differences between policy integration and policy transfer. In this context, policy transfer will be used to explain specific cases and try to identify *why, where, how and who* starts and works with the transfer of policies. The policy integration theories will be used as a conceptual framework and identify policy transfer as either being horizontal or vertical (or a mix). Afterwards, there will be an

examination of the key elements of David Dolowitz and David Marsh' Policy Transfer Framework. Next, there will be an examination of policy convergence, based on Colin J. Bennett's work on the field. Finally, there will be a theoretical discussion on the similarities and differences between the two approaches of policy transfer and policy convergence, whilst the policy integration theories will be applied in the beginning of that section.

### Horizontal and vertical policy integration

Horizontal policy integration can be defined from the view of different sectors of governance; the need for horizontal integration at supranational level, at an institutional level, at national level, at regional level and at local level. This project seeks to take its standing point in the cross section of the national and institutional level, as it will involve national policies and policy decisions made on EU-level. Horizontal policy integration can be described as

*"... attempts at being an advocate of extrinsic policy objectives to incorporate these into other sectors' policies at a given political level. Here, individual departments or ministries fulfil the task of horizontal or intersectoral coordination between a number of other departments."* (Giessen, 2011, p. 294).

This means, that some ministries or departments are created as a result of a need of cross sectoral coordination and cooperation. The need for horizontal policy integration of sectoral policies started when governing structures began to be differentiated into different departments, ministries and agencies. This has ever since resulted in the confusion of what each department actually do and to what extent does it affect other departments (Berger & Steurer, 2009). Examples on horizontal policy integration can be the establishment of the environmental ministries around Europe in the 1990's or the establishment of the Danish Ministry of Environment and Food in 2015, which was a merge of the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Food – it was assessed that there was a cross sectoral need of cooperation between those departments (Miljø- og Fødevareministeriet, 2016). Yet, there are challenges that needs to be stressed. For example, as Guy Peters stresses, the introduction of different public management approaches has disaggregated already existing and specialised ministries, and due to these approaches, the new ministries or departments more or less

focus more on their own objectives than the more system-wide objectives (Peters, 1998). On the other hand, as the example of merging two ministries shows, issues now seems to be so cross-cutting, that one issue might not be able to fit into just one ministry or department – which underpins the need of horizontal policy integration (Peters, 1998).

Opposite to horizontal policy integration, vertical policy integration is more “implementation-orientated” than the horizontal policy integration. In relation to this project, there could be a specific need for looking at how the implementation of educational policies is actually executed, but this should more be done in further research. According to Giessen, vertical policy integration originates from horizontal policy integration as when a policy is decided on cross-sectional sector it needs to be vertically implemented – this can for example be done directly by the government, who underpins and instruct the relevant department to include new policy objectives into their respective parliament. The parliament then reports directly to the ministry on how things are going (Giessen, 2011).

### [Policy transfer or policy convergence? An explanation of theoretical approaches to policy transfer and policy convergence.](#)

Before going into a deeper discussion of the theoretical approach of policy transfer, the role of institutions and networks needs to be clarified, which will be done below, as this is seen vital to the project.

Since the start of the 2000's, an increasing interest in the role of institutions and networks have risen when working with transnational policies. Furthermore, the growing economic competition and digital transition has made it easier for decision makers to look to the internet for information on policies that promise solutions to challenges concerning global economy (Legrand, 2012). In addition to this there have been an increasing policy influence from international organisations (such as the IMF, the UN and the World Bank) and supranational organisations (such as OECD and EU) and the conventions and treaties they have implemented, creates a formal layer to governance structures. The development has forced scholars to focus on the increasing role of other actors than the traditional governments in policy transfer. The role of policy entrepreneurs (think tanks,

consultancy firms, foundations and universities), experts, epistemic communities (informal networks of scientists and professionals) international issue networks, un-accountable bureaucrats, and supra-national institutions have all had the abilities to enhance or moderate the influences of international organisations (Dolowitz & Marsh, Political studies, XLIV, 1996; Stone, 2001). In relation to this project, it is interesting in the way, that EU has a big influence on how different policies are adopted and how the digital transition has had influence in the change of the labour market and thus the change of how educational policies are formed. In this way, when it comes to the analysis, it is important to be aware of structural conditions that might affect the way policy transfer.

### Policy transfer

Policy transfer is a term that has existed for a very long time, even though it has not been dealt with or concretised before the years after the Second World War, where the increasing interest in communication across borders became vital for the development of the concept. This led to further interest in using the policy transfer in more comparative studies and public policy. The term 'policy transfer' can be exemplified in all sorts of things; for example, in observations on how international capital flows, which in the end can lead to policy convergence. On the contrary, this exact observation has led to the questions of how international economic changes affects policy goals, policy contents and policy instruments. This approach to policy transfer will take its starting point in David Dolowitz and David Marsh, who are the two most significant scholars on the field of policy transfer since the beginning of the 1990's. Dolowitz and Marsh provides one of the most recognized and widely quoted definitions of policy transfer:

*"Policy transfer, emulation and lesson drawing all refer to a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place"* (Dolowitz & Marsh, Political studies, XLIV, 1996).

Dolowitz and Marsh has created a so called 'Policy Transfer Framework', which is illustrated in figure 1. This examination of the framework will first of all focus on the voluntary transfer, but also a so-called transfer continuum, which they have created. Also, some of the most relevant questions in

relation to the project will be explained – the before-mentioned *why, where, how and who* - questions will provide the framework of the analysis and will further be explained in the following sections.

**A Policy Transfer Framework**

Why Transfer? Continuum Want To..... Have To			Who Is Involved in Transfer?	What Is Transferred?	From Where			Degrees of Transfer	Constraints on Transfer	How To Demonstrate Policy Transfer	How Transfer leads to Policy Failure
Voluntary	Mixtures	Coercive			Past	Within-a Nation	Cross- National				
Lesson Drawing (Perfect Rationality)	Lesson Drawing (Bounded Rationality)	Direct Imposition	Elected Officials	Policies (Goals) (content) (instruments)	Internal	State Governments	International Organizations	Copying	Policy Complexity (Newspaper) (Magazine) (TV) (Radio)	Media	Uniformed Transfer
	International Pressures		Bureaucrats Civil Servants	Programs	Global	City Governments	Regional State Local Governments	Emulation	Past Policies	Reports	Incomplete Transfer
	(Image) (Consensus) (Perceptions) Externalities	Pressure Groups	Institutions			Local Authorities		Mixtures	Structural Institutional Feasibility	Conferences	Inappropriate Transfer
	Conditionality (Loans) (Conditions Attached to Business Activity)	Political Parties	Ideologies					Inspiration	(Ideology) (cultural proximity) (technology) (economic) (bureaucratic) Language	Meetings/ Visits	
	Obligations	Policy Entrepreneurs/ Experts	Attitudes/ Cultural Values Consultants Think Tanks Transnational Corporations Supranational Institutions	Negative Lessons			Past Relations			Statements (written) (verbal)	

Figure 2 (Dolowitz & Marsh, *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*, 2000 p. 9)

**Voluntary transfer**

The voluntary transfer happens when there is some sort of dissatisfaction with the status quo. The dissatisfaction normally originates from a perception by the government or the public that there is a policy failure – thus it can be categorized as a purely rational action-oriented way of dealing with public policy problems (Evans, 2010). This makes policy makers to look abroad for other solutions (Dolowitz & Marsh, *Political studies*, XLIV, 1996). Voluntary transfer can also be a consequence of poor performance, where a new government or newly appointed leaders for a specific management may affect the way policies are adopted (Evans, 2010). The approach is originally based on policy failure is non-contentious and easy to measure. However, this approach is heavily criticised for making too naïve assumptions on the rationality of the decisions. Yet, there are several examples of

policy decisions, which have been adopted as panacea to all sorts of political challenges (some would argue that the New Public Management and evidence-based policies would be such decisions). Those decisions are usually introduced without any prior assessment of their suitability to national contexts (Legrand, 2012). Consequently, the policy transfer can be voluntary without being rational. Dolowitz and Marsh argues, that this type of transfer is both uninformed and inappropriate. Uninformed, as the policy makers have incomplete knowledge about the different policies and inappropriate as the policy makers does not necessarily see the implications and contextual factors might act as barriers to a translation of a given policy. This means, the policy problems become subjective (Dolowitz & Marsh, *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*, 2000).

*A policy transfer continuum*

Before examining some of the key questions of the Policy Transfer Framework, there will be an examination of a policy transfer continuum

The literature states, that creating the before-mentioned distinction between voluntary and coercive transfer is to oversimplify it. Instead, Dolowitz and Marsh have tried to, what they call, look at policy transfer as a continuum between lesson drawing (which is defined as perfect rationality) and coercive transfer (which is defined as direct imposition).

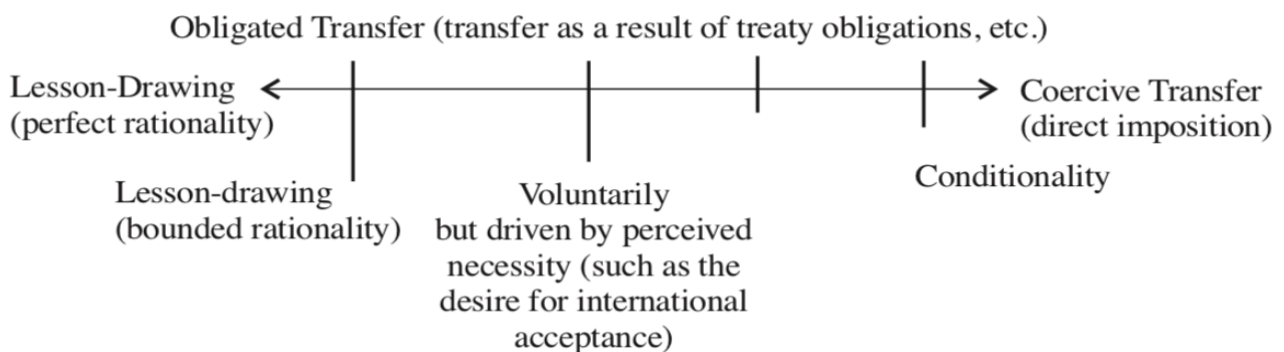


Figure 1 (Dolowitz & Marsh, *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*, 2000 p. 13)

This continuum gives researchers a possibility to look at policy transfer from different angles and see if the policy transfer change from one approach to another. In this case, one can use the

continuum to capture some of the differentiations there are in policy transfer. A key element of the policy transfer continuum is the emphasis on the policy transfer can change over time – which means, that in the beginning it can be identified as a bounded rationality but change into voluntary transfer.

Both ends of the continuum shall be seen as ‘extremes’. Understood in the way, that no policy-makers or agents are perfectly rational in the lesson-drawing understanding, nor are anyone into direct imposition in the coercive transfer understanding – even though that there are examples on transnational agencies forcing governments to adopt certain policies even though they did not wanted to do so in the beginning (Dolowitz & Marsh, *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*, 2000). Using this continuum also underpin the importance of being aware of policy transfer is not only about looking at a certain programme or policy being transferred, but also taking the time of the events into account. Thus, political change, economic change and socio-cultural change can all have effects on a policy transfer, as policy transfers very rarely happens ‘overnight’. Also, here there must be an emphasis on the role of institutions and how time changes the shape of these institutions. This also affects how policies are made and how they should be interpreted.

#### *Policy transfer – who, why, what and where?*

In order to explain the Policy Transfer Framework further and to give the analysis of this project a framework to work with, some of the relevant questions from the framework will be answered with what Dolowitz and Marsh means. The following questions will be used and answered in the analysis to identify the “who, why, what and from where” in relation to the research question of the project.

- *Who transfers policy and why engage in policy transfer?*
- *What is transferred?*
- *From where are lessons drawn?*

Some of the questions are left out of the explanation, as it is assessed that they will not benefit to the conclusion of this project or it has not been able to find information to answer the questions.



### Who transfer policy and why engage in policy transfer?

Dolowitz and Marsh defines the main actors as; elected officials, political parties, bureaucrats/civil servants, pressure groups, policy entrepreneurs/experts and supra-national institutions. This means that these are the ones who mostly are responsible for the transfer. The reason why these actors engage in policy transfer is that the lessons will always be used in a great variety and will always be selected from what is most beneficial for the given actor. (Stone, 2001; Dolowitz & Marsh, Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration, 2000).

### What is transferred?

In the literature, there is focus on eight different objects of transfer; policy goals, policy contents, policy instruments, institutions, policy programmes, ideologies, ideas and attitudes, and finally, negative lessons. The most important differentiation on this matter, is the distinction between policies (which is further sub-divided into policy goals, contents and instruments) and programmes. Policies in general are the direction and intention in which policy-makers wants to direct their policies, whereas programmes are the direct programmes – thus, the special means of action in which they want to implement the policies (Dolowitz & Marsh, Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration, 2000). As Dolowitz and Marsh states it; “... *each policy can have multiple programs, while a program is a complete course of action in and of itself.*” (Dolowitz & Marsh, Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration, 2000).

### From where are the lessons drawn?

The literature states that policy-makers can look into three levels of governance where lessons can be drawn; international, national and local. According to literature, lessons can be drawn from all sorts of levels. In a nation, actors who transfer policy can and will draw lessons from both equal government levels (an example will be the transfer of experience in municipalities to higher level of governance), higher government levels and lower government levels; lower government levels can for example also draw lessons from the national government levels. Furthermore, it is also common for agents and governments to transfer policies from one nation to another; also, on different levels of governance. However, the literature stresses, that geographical nearness does not equal policy

transfer. When transferring policies, the “learning” government does not necessarily look at the same level of government there are at themselves. It is also seen, that policies are learnt from both lower and higher levels of governance (Dolowitz & Marsh, *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*, 2000). Lessons can also be drawn from historical findings, even though the literature states that it should be dealt with as a subjective evaluation, as history opens up for subjective interpretations. Furthermore, the history is constant, while the current situation might be different, which also influence the policy (Dolowitz & Marsh, *Political studies*, XLIV, 1996).

### *Policy failure*

So far, this chapter has tried to explain more or less successful policy transfers. However, this is not always the case and this section seeks to explain why some cases fails to be transferred. In the case of lesson-drawing, governments mostly borrow already successful policies, which they expect also to be successful in their respective nations. This is not always the case. The research of policy failure is massive, yet this chapter seeks to briefly explain some of the reasons for policy failure.

Dolowitz and Marsh point at three reasons on why policy transfer can be unsuccessful; firstly, they point at insufficient information as a reason for unsuccessful policy transfer – this is also called uninformed transfer. Secondly, elements of the transfer are not necessarily transferred with the initial policy, which can lead to unsuccessful policy transfer – this is also called incomplete transfer. Thirdly, insufficient attention payed to economic, social, cultural, political or ideological can lead to unsuccessful policy transfer. This is called inappropriate transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh, *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*, 2000). Other scholar’s states that policy failure occur when policy goals is no longer achievable (Walsh, 2006).

### *Policy convergence*

In the field of policy convergence-research there is a broad consensus on the definition, which is based on Clark Kerr’s definition from 1983; “*the tendency of societies to grow more alike, to develop similarities in structures, processes, and performances*” (Kerr, 1983, p. 3). Yet, this project will work around the concept made by Colin J. Bennett’s article “What is Policy Convergence and What Causes it?” from 1991.

In mathematics, policy convergence means that two or more elements or parties move closer together, eventually emerging into one. Thus, policy convergence is present, when increasing similarities between policies can be observed (Bennett, 1991 ). This might be a simplification of the concept of policy convergence, which Colin J. Bennett studies in his article. In the article, Bennett presents a framework, which will be further examined below. The framework is a result of an examination of other scholar's use of policy convergence, which means that other scholars refer policy convergence to different phenomena, namely increasing similarity of either of the following; policy content, policy outcomes, policy goals, policy instruments and policy styles (Bennett, 1991 ).

According to Bennett, policy convergence may arise from five different occasions;

*Convergence through emulation:* policy makers look to other nations, regions or continents for successful solutions to policy changes, which are similar to the ones they are currently having. This is closely related to Dolowitz and Marsh's voluntary transfer, which was examined earlier.

*Convergence through Elite Networking and Policy Communities,* is a type of convergence, which occurs when "a relatively coherent and enduring network of elites engaging in regular interaction at the transnational level" (Bennett, 1991 , p. 224) share ideas and reach consensus on the shared strategies. Convergence is the result of an identifiable elite working closely together and bound by common knowledge and a shared concern of the specific problem. Thus, this elite tries to find a common solution to the problem (Bennett, 1991 ). Furthermore, Bennett compare policy convergence to Rose's lesson-drawing;

*"Cross-national lesson-drawing assumes that professional tribalism is as strong as national ethnocentrism. People who work in a given field - whether policemen, postmen, or pedagogues - have many professional concerns in common. This fact is made evident by a variety of transnational professional organizations that mirror almost every activity of government."* (Bennett, 1991 , p. 224)

Bennett argues that such policy communities have arisen and even though the nature and ties between the sectors may vary, the ties are still strong (Bennett, 1991 ).

*Convergence through harmonisation.* Here interdependence is the key word, when talking about reaching policy convergence. As a result of the apprehension of international disagreements, governments have accepted the need of transnational and international organisations, that possess authority and legitimacy to facilitate a; “*resolution of a common problem through the pre-existing structures and processes of an international regime.*” (Bennett, 1991 , p. 227). In this case intergovernmental and supranational institutions creates a response to common problems and to diminish unintended external consequences of domestic policies.

*Convergence through penetration,* suggest a process whereby an external actor using coercion can force an adoption of a certain policy (typically specific programmes or contents of a policy) on otherwise sovereign nations (Bennett, 1991 ).

Before explaining the exact differences, the integration policies need to be applied to policy transfer. In this project policy transfer is seen as an example on horizontal policy integration. This is explained based on the idea of the transfer is examined on a horizontal level, as it is the one governing body that transfers policy to another governing body (EU transfers to Denmark and both are seen as “governing bodies”). However, during the project there might be examples on vertically integration, but the overall approach is that the policy integration is horizontal.

### Policy transfer or policy convergence – what are the differences?

The previous sections have explained and given examples on the use of and the concepts of respectively policy transfer and policy convergence. However, this section seeks to present a brief discussion on where the differences really are in the concepts. But first, the integration policies need to be applied to policy transfer.

The most important concept of policy transfer is voluntary transfer, direct transfer and indirect coercive transfer, which contributes to the categorisation as a process-oriented concept (even though this project mostly will work with voluntary transfer). The process-oriented approach can be discovered in relation to the questions being asked in the Policy Transfer Framework, as they always seem to follow the process of a certain policy – either over time or through the different

departments/ministries. In this case, the dependent variable can be described as the transfer processes and transfer content.

On the other hand, policy convergence can be categorised as a more effect-oriented concept. This means that, policy transfer can lead to convergence, if the right circumstances are present. However, that is not necessarily the case, as policy convergence easily can be a result of something else – Mark Evans (2010) and Diane Stone (2001) both explains policy convergence as something that happens unintentionally. As an example, the newly adopted law on GDPR on EU-level, where the law has created closer cooperation and thereby created convergence through harmonisation, cf. Colin J. Bennett (Bennett, 1991 ; Stone, 2001; Evans, 2010).

A clearer overview of the differences in the concepts can be seen in figure 4:

	<b>Policy convergence</b>	<b>Policy transfer</b>
<b>Analytical focus</b>	Effects	Process
<b>Empirical focus</b>	Policy characteristics	Policy characteristics
<b>Dependent variable</b>	Similarity change	Transfer content and transfer processes

Figure 4. Inspiration taken from (Krill, 2005)

## Chapter five: Analysis

This section seeks to present the analysis of the project. To do this, there will first be an introduction to the relation between Denmark and the EU. Secondly, there will be an introduction to the different programmes/initiatives that the EU has initiated and also to the VET-reform from 2015, that Denmark has made. This is done in order to give an overview of the central programmes or initiatives and this will provide the backbone of the analysis.

## Denmark and the EU

In order to give another aspect of a potential discussion, Denmark's relation to the EU needs to be explained. Denmark has been a member of the European Union since January 1<sup>st</sup> 1973, where it entered together with Ireland and Great Britain (The European Commission, 2018). The relationship between Denmark and the EU has always been rather good and Denmark is a strong and active member of the union. However, Denmark has some opt-outs from the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, which have been repeatedly discussed over the years – latest with a referendum in 2015 about changing the opt-outs, which resulted in a “no”. The opt-outs means that Denmark has special agreements on the Euro-cooperation, the Common Security and Defence Policy, the Justice and Home Affairs and about Citizenships in the EU. Thus, some of the special agreements might be a breeding ground of discussion (Euronews, 2015).

There are several different programmes, that the EU has initiated in relation to education. As this project has a focus point on vocational education and training, it limits itself to exploit all of the programmes initiated by EU on education. This means that, initiatives like the Bologna-process and other initiatives relating to higher education, has been left out.

## Lifelong Learning and the Erasmus+-programme

The Lifelong Learning-programme was, in its original form, initiated in the period from 2007-2013. According to the European Commission, the programmes was designed to *“enable people, at any stage of their life, to take part in stimulating learning experiences, as well as developing education and training across Europe”* (The European Commission, 2018).

The programmes consisted of different sub-programmes; the Comenius for schools, Erasmus for higher education, Leonardo da Vinci for vocational education and training and Grundtvig for adult education. However, in the period from 2014-2020, all of the programmes are a part of the Erasmus+-programme. The Erasmus+ (EuROpean Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) is a programme, which embraces education, youth and sports. It takes its starting point in all the work that has been done throughout the years on the field. This includes

Lifelong Learning. In this project, the focus will be on the Erasmus+'s work with vocational educational training (VET) as it is an essential part of the case, which this project works with. The basis of the Erasmus+'s work with VET is the Leonardo da Vinci-programme from 2007-2013 (The European Commission, 2018). The programme was one of many funding programmes, which was initiated by the European Commission. It focused entirely on teaching and training needs in relation to VET and had an aim to build a skilled and mobile workforce in relation to coop with the challenges EU faced (and still is facing).

The Erasmus+ has taken up the task of the Leonardo da Vinci-programme and continues the work with VET. This is being done through the rather new policy initiative ErasmusPro, which has been initiated by the Communication "Investing in Europe's Youth" as a response to the European Parliament, companies, who have relations to VET and other stakeholders. The official objective of the ErasmusPro is to increase the quality, attractiveness and employability of VET learners through long-term stays abroad (The European Commission, 2017). The rationale of the objective comes from a demand of a better mobility among VET learners. Thus, the programme makes it easier for VET learners to take some of their education abroad. However, this project will put the entire work with the VET under the Erasmus+-programme as some initiatives are not a part of the ErasmusPro and due to its relatively new establishment (ErasmusPro was established in October 2017).

#### The European Certificate for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)

The ECVET is a European credit transfer system among vocational education. There are two main objectives of the programme; to promote lifelong learning and to increase the mobility among Member States. Thus, the ECVET is another way of establishing a common understanding and a transfer of acknowledgement around the European Member States. What is special about the ECVET, is that it does not focus on *how* learners have learnt what they learn, but the learning outcome – or, the abilities and knowledge that an individual can acquire (Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, 2017).

The background of the establishment of the ECVET is the work that was made on the Copenhagen Declaration from 2002, which was further developed in the Bruges Communiqué from 2002. Ever

since 2002 the European countries have worked on the implementation of the declaration – among the policy programmes were the ECVET derives from. The Copenhagen Declaration was revised in 2010 by the Bruges Communiqué and in relation to the ET2020, further work was done especially on the VET. The communiqué from 2010 emphasised the further work on the VET-system and focused on how VET can be more transparent and attractive – hence the ECVET was further implemented.

#### Denmark and the vocational education and training-system

This section seeks to explain the VET-system in Denmark in order to provide contribution to the empirical focus in this project. The section will contain a brief examination of the VET-system in overall to give an understanding of how it is structured together with an examination of the Danish VET-reform from 2015 (VET Reform 2015).

The history of the Danish VET-system started in 1889 with the first law on VET, where the objective was to give the apprentices better competencies than the work determined competencies they were given. This law formed the basis of the next laws, which were developed throughout the years. In 2001, the “Reform 2000” started. This reform focused more on individual organized learning and lifelong learning. In 2003, this reform was further developed, and the Danish parliament decided to increase the focus on the competencies of the students and how to use them wisely. In connection to this, educations with different levels were introduced (Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening , 2009).

In Denmark, the VET-system is based on three “paths”; you can go directly from elementary school; you can be under 25, but has left elementary school at least one year ago or; you can be over 25 years old and want to increase your skills (Undervisningsministeriet, 2018; UddannelsesGuiden, 2018). The theoretical part of the education takes part in a vocational school – it could be a business college, whilst the practical part of the education takes part in a company – for example an industrial company, kitchens etc.



## The 2015 reform of vocational education and training in Denmark

In 2015, the Danish parliament adopted a reform on the vocational education and training (VET-reform 2015). The main objectives of the VET-reform 2015, is:

1. More students shall choose the VET directly after 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade
2. More people shall complete a vocational education and training
3. VET-educations shall challenge every student, so that they can become as good as they can
4. The trust and well-being among students shall be strengthened (Undervisningsministeriet, 2014)

The reform consisted of several changes in order to be more transparent, efficient and flexible. This is also something, that has caused interest from other bodies such as the CEDEFOP (the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training), who emphasises that Denmark is a vital actor on the European continent in relation to VET-systems (CEDEFOP, 2012). The reform includes, among other things, changes in relation to admission requirements, general structures of the education system and a new way of educating adults who do not have prior education.

## International programmes in the Danish VET-system

There are different international programmes that the Danish VET-system cooperates with. This includes Interreg, Nordplus, The European Social Fund and the Erasmus+-programme. As already stated in chapter one, this project limit itself to work with the Erasmus+-programme. The main focus of the Danish work with the Erasmus+-programme on VET is based on internship and studies abroad among the Member States. The Danish Ministry of Education supports that, with websites concretely focusing on that issue (Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, 2018).

## Analysis of the Danish VET-reform 2015 and the Erasmus+-programme in relation to Denmark

The documents or the sources that have been presented, will now be used as a “framework” cf. the document analysis to analyse and thus come with an answer to the research question. To do this, the Policy Transfer Framework will work as the theoretical foundation of the analysis.

## Analysis of the Danish VET-reform of 2015

The VET-reform 2015 does not come with any explicit expressions or references to the EU or its programmes in its overall objectives of the reform. However, this does not necessarily mean that there has not been any inspiration from the EU. Cf. the OMC, whose objective is to create good practices among EU Member States, it is possible to identify parts of the VET-reform 2015 that might have been inspired or is related to the work done by the EU on VET – especially the ET2020-programme is identifiable.

Examples of this, could be chapter 3 of the VET-reform 2015, where the headline is *“Simpler structure and more clarity”* (Undervisningsministeriet, 2014). This matches with the EU’s higher focus on transparency, information and guidance cf. the Copenhagen Declaration (CEDEFOP, 2002). In the Copenhagen Declaration, this is done through implementation of information tools and integration of the European CV. On policy level, it is done through a strengthening of policies around all Member States, which also should provide better information and answer questions about how to access learning better. In the VET-reform 2015, the overall focus on better information tools etc. is done through:

- 1) *“A more manageable choice (for the upcoming students) between four main areas*
- 2) *New basic courses that have focus on uniformity and cross-sectional among main areas”*  
(Undervisningsministeriet, 2014)

If this is related to the objectives of the OMC, there are some indications on sharing best practices or ideas from the ideas of the Copenhagen Declaration which is further identified in the VET-reform 2015. Furthermore, the VET-reform 2015 focus on better possibilities of further education. Another of the VET-reform 2015’s focus points are to focus on the national qualifications framework as a way of upgrading the qualifications of the apprentices. This is also identifiable in the EU’s work with VET, especially in the Copenhagen Declaration, which provide a focus on the quality assurance, which has led the EU to create the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET). This serves as a reference instrument which provides help for EU members to improve their quality

assurance of their VET-educations (Undervisningsministeriet, 2014, p. 19; The European Commission, 2018).

Another example, where the VET-reform 2015 might have been influenced by the work on VET in the EU, can be the second objective, which states, that “*VET-educations shall challenge every student, so that they can become as good as they can*” (Undervisningsministeriet, 2014). Also here, there are signs of the Copenhagen Declaration, which, in overall works with improving learners quality in the sector. This is amongst other, done by creating the so-called Sector Skills Alliances (SSA), which later on has become a part of the Erasmus+-programme. The SSA’s objective is to align VET-systems in accordance to the needs of the labour market (The European Commission, 2018). As an addition to this, in the joint report from the European Commission and Council from 2015 about the ET2020, it states that new priority areas should be about recognising relevant qualifications in order to keep focus on employability, which only emphasis the influence that the EU seems to have had on the Danish VET-system (The European Commission & Council, 2015).

Finally, the VET-reform 2015, includes a focus on education for adults (EUV), which secures better conditions for the citizens from the age of 25 and above, without a high education, to get the possibility to get an education. This is also identifiable in the work with the ET2020, as they underpin the necessity of an effort on the field of adult apprenticeship, as it is stressed that only 1 out of 4 in Europe is caught in low-skill trap. This needs further attention, which is also seen on national level in Denmark

Even though there are little proof of specific policy transfer (the study needs some confirmation on the matter by policy-makers), this study will try to put it into the Policy Transfer Framework in the box below.

<b>Who</b>	<b>Why</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>Where</b>
X	X	Policy goals Ideas and attitudes Policy content	From international institutions (EU) – policies are integrated vertically

Box 1 (self-created)

The *who*-question is difficult to answer, as there is no specific evidence that an actual real transfer has occurred. However, one would argue that it is the political parties in Denmark, that serve as main actors in the discovered transfer of policy. On the other hand, a counter argument would be that there is no such evidence in this particular study, which shows that this would be the case.

The *why*-question is also found problematic to answer. This relates to the same problems that were found with the *who*-question, as there is only small empirical evidence that a policy transfer has occurred. However, one could easily discuss that there are certain indications on some kind of cooperation or inspiration deriving from the work that EU has done.

Concerning the *what*-question, the policy goals of both the VET-reform 2015 and the work EU is doing on the matter, are quite similar as they both want to make the VET-system more transparent – both on national level and on international (or at least European) level. This is done, as earlier written, with a focus on creating more transparency in the VET-systems in order to 1) make it easier for the students to see what they can use the education for and 2) to make it more aligned with the demand of the labour market. Where the EU is focusing on a more general level, Denmark has chosen to focus more on specific areas, which the students can choose from. This also relates to the ideas and attitudes, as it seems like the basic ideas of how the VET-systems should be, are identifiable in relation to both EU and Denmark. With policy content, it is more arguable whether or not it deserves a spot in the framework. This is mainly because, it is difficult to see which of the specific policy content in the Danish VET-system that relates specifically to the EU's policy content. However, the overall lines seem to be quite similar.

Finally, the *where*-question's answer is that transfer comes from international institutions – however, that might be a claim that needs some proof. In this case, it is not exactly proved that the ideas and practices come from the EU, but there are some indications on transfer coming from the VET-work on EU-level to national level.

Due to the difficulties in finding evidence on exact policy transfer, it is also difficult or even impossible to analyse the VET-reform 2015 from the perspective of the policy continuum, created by Dolowitz and Marsh, which is why it will not be applied in this part of the analysis.

#### *Partial conclusion*

In this section, as it already has been discussed, it has been difficult to prove that a policy transfer has really occurred. However, there are certain things that might imply that some sort of policy transfer has occurred, as some of the overall thoughts and actions towards the VET are the same, but that is mostly based on interpretations of the Danish policies in relation to the actions that the EU has done. One of the reasons that a policy transfer might not have occurred, could be the role of institutions. Denmark has a tradition of a well-defined VET-system, which is rooted back to the 1950's, where the principle of alternance was started. Later on, and especially since the beginning of the 1990's, there has been an increasingly focus on the matter, which has resulted in several reforms (Knudsen, 2004). Thus, in this case it is not the role of international institutions that actually have the impact, but more the role of the national institution that seem strong, which means that the Danish system might not feel like the need to look to international institutions to gain experience when developing their own policies.

#### *Analysis of the Danish work with the Erasmus+-programme*

When looking at the cooperation between Denmark and EU within the fields of education – and especially the Erasmus+-programme – one thing occurs; The ideas and experiences from the Erasmus+-programme seems to have been highly integrated in the Danish VET-system. Thus, this section seeks to examine the way the policies and ideas of the Erasmus+ is integrated in the Danish VET-system. This will be structured so that first there will be an examination of the Erasmus+-

program in Denmark and second the examination – the similarities and differentiations – will be put in the Policy Transfer Framework.

When going through the overall approach of the Danish work with the Erasmus+-programme, it seems to be very well adopted. Especially when the Danish adoption of the EU-regulation of no. 1288/2013, which is the foundation of the Erasmus+ programme, is examined. In overall, it states that an impact assessment came with the suggestion of a need simplification of the former system which was based on the Leonardo Da Vinci-initiative. The simplification meant that the actions towards an internationalisation of VET was limited to a few, but more specific and effective actions, which also created a steady flow of economic support (The European Commission & Council, 2013). This is something that Denmark has done rather effectively in their interpretation of the Erasmus+., A midterm evaluation from the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) and Ramboll, concludes that the three key actions in the Erasmus+-programme are rather effective in relation to their objectives. Especially key action 1, which deals with the mobility of individuals, has been given a lot of focus in Denmark. Here the Danish Ministry of Education and Research have integrated the Erasmus+-programme with an emphasis of the need of job mobility and have initiated different initiatives to do so. In accordance with the Erasmus+-programme the aim is to send more learners and teachers abroad (Erasmus+, 2018; Danish Evaluation Insitute, 2017; Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, 2017).

Besides, the Danish integration of the ECVET-system also proves that further policy transfer has occurred, as the Danish Ministry of Education and Research has chosen to focus on the mobility of the learners across borders in relation to the objectives of the ECVET. However, they have chosen not to live up to all of the objectives of the VET, as the Ministry states that Denmark limited themselves to only use the ECVET and their activities on educational mobility among learners and teachers (Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, 2017). Thus, they could have chosen to use it on national activities. Furthermore, the ECVET has developed a toolkit to make it easier for nations to implement the ideas of the ECVET. In Denmark, they have used it to create best practices and to put down a group of experts

Furthermore, the actions on the Erasmus+-programme in Denmark shows that the internationalisation is strengthened, which also complies with the overall objectives of the Erasmus+-programme (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2017). These cases show that there are concrete examples on successful policy transfer from the EU to the Danish VET-system – as stated earlier, the Erasmus+-programme seems to have been well integrated in the Danish VET-system.

If we look at specific initiatives that the Erasmus+ has initiated, the “VET Mobility Charter” should be mentioned. The Mobility Charter gives members (in this context members are nations) the possibility to share experiences of mobility activities and thereby develop their internationalisation strategies. The Charter gives permanent funds to send students and teachers abroad, which perfectly matches with the official statements of how Denmark works with it (The European Commission, 2018). In Denmark there are 19 “owners” of the Charter – with 619 schools/education centres in Europe, which implies that the Danish system has adopted the ideas of the Charter and thus a certain amount of policy transfer seems to have occurred.

So far, this section has shown that there are some indications on policy transfer, which leads to the use of the Policy Transfer Framework, in order to identify and clarify exactly who, why, what and where the policy transfer occurs, which will be done in box 2.

<b>Who</b>	<b>Why</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>Where</b>
International institutions Elected officials	Beneficial for the Denmark	Policy programmes Policy instruments	Erasmus Mundus Leonardo Da Vinci-programme

Box 2 (self-created)

In the *who*-question, the answer is that it is assessed that there are different actors, who transfer policies. First of all, the Erasmus+-programme and subsequently the EU, can be defined as the main actor, which seeks to transfer policy. Another main actor would be the elected officials, both in the EU and most dominantly in Denmark, as they have taken the programmes in. In this case, there have been a long history of cooperation on the former Erasmus Mundus-programmes, initiated by the

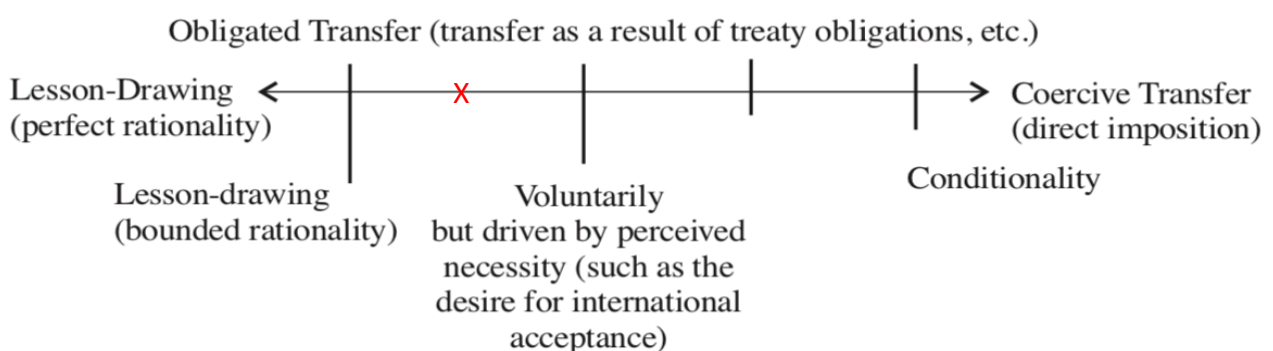
EU, which has given a natural conversion to the Erasmus+-programme in Denmark. Thus, there seems to have been a great interest in transferring the policy or the idea of the Erasmus+-programme, which further emphasises the work of the OMC.

The *why*-question can be answered as the transfer of the ideas and initiatives from the Erasmus+-programme, can be very beneficial for Denmark, as they, as most of Europe, tend to have a skill deficit. Because of that one of their focus points are the VET-systems and how to optimize it. In this case, EU gives an excellent possibility for Denmark (and the Danish learners and teachers) to gain experience from abroad and to get free consultancy, as it is the Erasmus+-programme that pays for the special consultants, which can help educational institutions to understand the ECVET correctly.

The *what*-question can be answered with that it is policy programmes, that have been transferred. Basically, that is what the Erasmus+-programme is all about. However, under these policy programmes, policy instruments have also been transferred. This is exemplified with the ECVET, which works as an instrument to measure and help integrate the Erasmus+-programme. Another example of an instrument, that Erasmus+ has created, is the VET Mobility Charter, which the Danish Ministry of Research and Education uses, as earlier mentioned.

Finally, the *where*-question – or from where the lessons are drawn and thus from where the programmes/initiatives are taken – can be answered with that its origins from policies within its own institution as the Erasmus+-programme comes from the Erasmus Mundus and Leonardo da Vinci-programme, but serves as a more simplified version of the two. Consequently, one can argue that the lessons are drawn from a higher level of governance (if we look from the Danish point of view) as it is the EU which has started it. However, it seems like it is up to each country to interpret the different initiatives.

If this study should be put on the Policy Continuum, it would be put as shown below.





Arguments here will be that of course the policy transfer is voluntary, as the programme is not legally binding. On the other hand, it is also assessed that there are also indications on lesson-drawing based on a bounded rationality. This due to indications on the lessons that Denmark are learning might also come from other places than inside the its own policy-area and how they have learnt their own lessons – specified with the Erasmus+-programme. In this case, the Erasmus+-programme originated from the Erasmus Mundus and the Leonardo Da Vinci-programme, which indicates that the “good” lessons that have been learnt have been further implemented in the “new” Erasmus-programme.

Furthermore, the decision to integrate the Erasmus+-programme into the VET-system in Denmark can be seen as a result of policy convergence through elite networking and policy communities as it seems like Denmark – especially with the Mobility Charter – have conferred with other Member States and accepted the Mobility Charter. On the other hand, the decision on integrating Erasmus+ can be a result of convergence through harmonisation, as the EU address a fellow challenge – the need of qualified labour force now and in the future not only from higher educations but also VET’s.

#### *Partial conclusion*

As a contrast to the first part of the analysis, the analysis of the Danish approach to the Erasmus+-programme has shown that policy transfer does occur to a certain level. In this case, the Erasmus+-programme has been examined and it shows that the ideas and competencies of the programme has been transferred rather well to the Danish VET-system. One of the reasons might be the well-defined actions and objectives that are stated in the Erasmus+-programme. This leads to, as in the previous partial conclusion, the role of institutions. If we look at the Erasmus+-programme and its historical anchoring, one can argue that it can be seen as a vital part of the EU’s educational programme, which gives a certain ballast and strength in order to be integrated or implemented in national policies. This because states who have had some kind of historical cooperation with a certain policy instrument or programme will, when thinking logically, most often choose to continue its cooperation or involvement in the programmes. This will, cf. the policy transfer theory, most likely lead other countries to do the same, as they 1) either see that something works well in the programme and thus adopts it, or 2) are afraid that they are going to miss out on something

important and thus adopt a certain programme. Whether or not one of the cases are the actual truth in a Danish VET-context, is difficult to measure or assess. But it seems likely, that it is the first case that has happened. Another finding is that it seems like a policy convergence through harmonisation has happened, as the EU has addressed a common challenge – the need of upgrading of qualifications on the VET-area, which the Danish VET-system has adopted.

## Chapter six: Conclusion

This studies' aim has been to examine how non-binding agreements affect the Danish VET-system based on the ideas of the OMC. In order to answer the question, the Danish VET-reform from 2015 and the Danish work with the Erasmus+-programme was chosen to analyse from. The theories on policy transfer from Dolowitz and Marsh have provided the theoretical Policy Framework in order to explain where the transfer occurs so that we understand how (the policies) – or how they are not - being transferred.

In general, the analysis showed us that there exists two “pillars” of policies, when non-binding agreements are transferred. The first one is based on Danish national policies towards the VET, which do not seem to cooperate or find that much inspiration in the work on VET that the EU has done in its written policies. The second one is based on the international programmes, that Denmark nonetheless have found inspiration and ideas from in some sort of way. Here they seem to have “cherry picked” the programmes that they find relevant and usable, exemplified with the Erasmus+.

In the work with the VET-reform 2015, the *who* and *why* questions in the Policy Transfer Framework seems to be impossible to answer. An answer to those questions seems to be quite important if we need to understand where the transfer occurs and subsequently where the ideas are potentially transferred. Furthermore, the strong institutions in Denmark was emphasised as a reason to why it has been difficult to detect any policy transfer. Thus, it can be concluded, that in a Danish context of the work with the VET, the OMC does not seem to have success, as the ideas that Denmark has built their VET-system on seem to be on their own experiences and opinions to the topic and not necessarily on what other countries within the EU have done.

On the other hand, the work with the Erasmus+-programme could be fully answered within the Policy Transfer Framework, as all the questions could be answered, which implies a successful transfer of policies. Here, a strong institutional relation seems to be important, as the Erasmus+ has earlier been working within the Erasmus Mundus-concept. Furthermore, a type of policy convergence could be identified in this section, as it was assessed that convergence through harmonisation seems to have happened due to a skill deficit among young people and non-educated adults. Here it can be concluded a policy transfer has occurred based on policy convergence, and the OMC seems to work perfectly, as the entire Erasmus+-programme is (among other) based on good practices from other countries.

The final conclusion on this project is will be, that non-binding agreements has affected the Danish VET-system in a way that the VET-system has only chosen the programmes or the initiatives, that works for them. Consequently, the OMC only affect national policies, when the national policies – or nations in general – chose to let the programmes affect them. Both of the studies showed that the institutional role had a great impact, which is in accordance with what Dolowitz and Marsh stated in the definition of policy transfer. Furthermore, the literature review also stated the focus on institutionalism as important factors, which this study also emphasises.

## Chapter seven: Further research

Based on the conclusion, this chapter seeks to discuss the potential of further research on the topic together with what the EU otherwise have done within the fields of education. The introduction of this project's analysis showed that there are quite a lot of initiatives from the EU on the education field. This is not only related to the VET-system, but also to higher education (through for example the Bologna-process – for more, see for example Brøgger, 2015), to primary schools, and high schools. All of this is related to each other through the OMC and the European Qualifications Framework.

However, it is known that the EU does work on exchanging knowledge on the field of education – also more than “only” creating programmes or initiatives that Member States can pick from. First of all, the OMC has been created, which focuses on education, but furthermore, CEDFOP has created

a policy learning forum, which focus on the challenge of young people leaving school too early and how the VET can help to create a solution to this. In this forum around 80 national, regional and local policy makers are represented combined with institutional level actors and social partners from different countries, who discuss the experiences the different actors have with their respective education both on national plan and on international plan (CEDEFOP, 2017).

The above mentioned are examples on that the EU are doing something to create convergence in the fields of education – and especially the VET. However, this research has showed that in the Danish case, there are two “pillars” to how a specific Member State works or do not work with these non-binding agreements. Furthermore, the result shows that countries can “cherry pick” what they want of the programmes – one must just bear in mind, that what works well with Denmark might work differently in other countries. This raises the questions of whether or not it is beneficial for the education “system” in the EU to spent so much money and energy, but “only” have effect on – for the member state – special selected policy areas? There have been conducted midterm evaluations on the different programmes, created by the EU and its partners, but due to this project’s findings it is assessed that further research on the matter is needed to give a clear answer. A similar methodological and theoretical study on other EU Member States would maybe give other results, which furthermore would give a more varied look on the field. One would argue, that this study could serve as a preliminary case-study on the field, and there could be a need for expansion of other cases.

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