

Barriers to and triggers of policy innovation and knowledge transfer in Slovakia

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Executive Summary

This paper explored the impact of actors' and policy characteristics on policy innovation and diffusion of youth employment policies in Slovakia. More specifically, it examined which actors promoted the policy innovation and why, what capacities they drew upon and which diffusion mechanisms were used. Following policy innovations, i.e. policies new to Slovakia, were examined: (1) reform of the vocational education system along the model of the dual system, (2) Project KomPrax, which aimed to enhance competences of young people through informal learning activities outside the school, and (3) the cross-sectoral coordination of youth policy.

WHAT was transferred? There was a substantial knowledge transfer in all examined cases. Policy learning was enhanced by participation in networks, such as those established by the European Union. The case of VET reform further involved the transfer of institutions. The new Slovak dual education law was a hybrid of VET systems in "corporatist" welfare states, such as Germany, Switzerland or Austria. The hybrid transfer was motivated by the need to better fit the dual education model to Slovak conditions. Finally, the pilot testing of the dual education model within Project RSOV – "Development of secondary vocational education" was associated with a massive transfer of personnel from employers associated in ZAP SR – Automotive Industry Association to ŠIOV – State Institute of Vocational Education.

WHO was involved in the transfer? A number of internal actors, external actors and go-betweens were involved in the policy transfer. Policy innovation in project KomPrax and Cross-sectoral Working Group was driven by internal actors, particularly IUVENTA – Slovak Youth Institute, a state organization directly managed by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (hereafter, Ministry of Education). VET reform was driven by employers in the car producing sector, who were concerned about shortages of qualified workforce. This supports the view that motivation to innovate increases with increasing perceptions of the problem pressure. Employers acted as policy entrepreneurs who developed their preferred policy solutions in advance and sold them to policymakers when the economic crisis opened the window of opportunity. For example, the first draft of the dual education law was prepared by the Automotive Industry Association – ZAP SR before it approached the Ministry of Education. Other go-betweens acting across multiple governments included professional associations, foreign chambers of commerce, transnational corporations, consultation firms and supranational organizations.

The European Union acted as a facilitator of learning and a funding agency. To induce policy learning, the EU relied on the facilitated coordination, i.e. it did not produce European legislation but operated like a forum for discussion and a platform for policy transfer. In July 2013, the European Commission launched the European Alliance for Apprenticeships to support the aims of the European Commission's "Youth Guarantee". The Alliance served as a platform which brought together relevant stakeholders and encouraged them to pledge to increase the quality, quantity and attractiveness of apprenticeships in the European Union. Actors, such as Nestlé and Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKÖ) pledged to implement pilot projects in order to establish a dual apprenticeship system in Slovakia. Studies commissioned by WKÖ were used as background materials in the working group responsible for drafting the law on dual education. Furthermore, Slovakia and Germany began to cooperate closely to reform Slovak VET system based on Germany's model. In case of project KomPrax and the Cross-sectoral Working Group, the European Union contributed to policy learning through diffusion of European policy documents.

Second, the European Union contributed to policy innovation and adoption of policies as a funding agency. Some of the pilot vocational schools, as well as project KomPrax were funded by structural funds. Initial project proposals therefore had to be modified to fit into the format and eligibility criteria. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that some of these projects would never have become reality without the EU funding. The length of the funding programme period was cited as an obstacle to policy innovation. As regional operational programmes had to be approved by the European Commission prior to the outbreak of the crisis, they reduced flexibility of organizations to respond to new challenges.

WHAT CAPACITIES did the actors draw upon? The empirical evidence supports the view that the policy innovation depends on financial, bureaucratic and epistemic capacities. Policy innovation was enhanced by epistemic capacities in all examined cases. Inefficient administrative capacity was the main obstacle to policy innovation in case of project KomPrax and cross-sectoral coordination of youth policy. Interviewees pinpointed the lack of communication within and between relevant ministries. Finally, financial capacity was crucial for policy adoption. Employers had significant resources and therefore could proceed with establishment of pilot centres extremely fast. In contrast, implementation of project KomPrax was delayed due to lack of funding.

WHICH diffusion mechanisms dominated? Actors relied exclusively on policy learning. As already noted, policy learning was stimulated by participation in networks, high epistemic capacity and various EU initiatives. The evidence in favour of the hypothesis about the relationship between the policy characteristics and the learning-based diffusion is mixed at best. Dual education was associated with high relative advantage, high observability and relatively low trialability. All of these traits are predicted to induce policy learning. Low compatibility should reduce the role of learning in the diffusion process. Nevertheless, interviewees explicitly cited lack of compatibility of dual education system with the existing legislation as an impulse for policy innovation and subsequently policy learning. In contrast, the hypothesis does not seem to hold for the project KomPrax and the cross-sectoral coordination of youth policy.

Key words:

Policy innovation, knowledge transfer, youth employment policy, VET reform, Slovakia

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Abbreviations

ALMP	Active labour market policies
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NSRF	The National Strategic Reference Framework
ŠIOV	State Vocational Education Institute
EU	European Union
VET	Vocational education and training
WKÖ	Austrian Federal Economic Chamber
ZAP SR	Automotive Industry Association

1. Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to examine policy innovation and policy diffusion in youth employment policy in Slovakia. More specifically, it aims to examine how actors' characteristics and policy characteristics influenced the process of policy innovation and policy diffusion. To this end, the following three cases studies were undertaken: (1) reform of the vocational-education system along the model of the dual system, (2) Project KomPrax, which aimed to enhance competences of young people through informal learning activities outside the school, and (3) the cross-sectoral coordination of youth policy. Each case study was organized along four key questions: (1) what was transferred? (2) who was involved in the transfer? (3) what capacities did the actors draw upon? and (4) which diffusion mechanism dominated?

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section two describes youth unemployment trends and the role of labour market policy and institutions in facilitating access to employment. Section three reviews the literature and proposes the analytical framework. Section four describes the methodology. Sections five to seven present the findings from the cases studies. The final section discusses these findings and concludes.

2. Background

Youth unemployment peaked in 2012, when the unemployment rate for those aged less than 25 years reached 34 percent, 10.7 p.p. above the EU-28 average and 14.7 p.p. above the pre-crisis level. By 2014 the youth unemployment declined slightly to 29.7 percent. However, there is a lack of consensus on whether youth unemployment is a problem in Slovakia. It was pointed out that high youth unemployment rate does not imply that the group of unemployed persons aged between 15 and 24 is large, as many young people are studying full-time and are therefore neither working nor looking for a job (so they are not part of the labour force which is used as the denominator for calculating the unemployment rate). This is particularly true of Slovakia: the share of those aged 20 to 24 years with upper secondary or tertiary education attainment was 90.9% in 2014, far above the EU28-average of 82.3%. It makes therefore more sense to look at two additional measures. First, youth unemployment ratio is calculated as the share of unemployed youths among the whole of the youth population, including students. In 2013, the youth unemployment ratio equalled 10.4. This implies that each tenth young person, rather than each third, was unemployed. Furthermore, the youth unemployment ratio was below the total unemployment rate, which in 2013 reached 13.2 percent. Second, the percentage of young people aged 15-24 not in employment and not in any education and training (NEET) equalled 12.8 in 2014 (the EU-28 average was 12.4). It was therefore argued that it was the total unemployment rather than youth unemployment, which was a real problem in Slovakia (Goliaš 2013, Šípoš 2012).

The centre-left government led by Robert Fico, which came to power in 2012, perceived youth unemployment as a pressing problem. The government has already implemented various projects to tackle the problem and further projects and reforms are planned as a part of Youth Guarantee. The main aim of the Youth Guarantee is to provide employment, continued education or training for people younger than 25 within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. The Youth Guarantee will be implemented in two phases, the preventive and the corrective phase (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic 2014).

2.1 Active Labour Market Policies

According to the European Commission, labour market services and active labour market policies (ALMP) have not proved sufficiently effective (European Commission 2013: 21). This view is supported by Goliaš (2014: 6) who points out that there are countries, such as the United Kingdom, which spend less on ALMP and yet have below average unemployment rates. Furthermore, the unemployed are more likely to participate in ALMP in regions with low unemployment than in regions with high unemployment (ibid). Improving effectiveness of ALMP thus remains a key issue.

In dealing with youth unemployment, the government of Robert Fico initially relied on ALMP, particularly employment subsidies in the private and the public sector. However, employment subsidies were criticized as ineffective and costly. For example, the Institute of Financial Policy, the Finance Ministry, points out that internship subsidy did not significantly increase employability of participants in the period of 2006-2009 (Harvan 2011: 2). On average, the participants in the program were 3.3 percentage points more likely to be employed than non-participants at the end of the program but the costs of employment of one participant were higher than GDP/capita (in 2007).

2.2 Labour market regulation

Although the labour market remains flexible, the Labour Code amendment that entered into force on 1 January 2013 increased labour costs and discouraged employers from hiring when the economy was weak (European Commission 2013: 23). Several changes created a disincentive for employers to hire or keep recent graduates. First, people employed under “dohoda” – a temporary agreement on work performed outside the employment relationship – gained the same protection in the area of maximum working time, work break, minimum wage and time off from work for medical inspections. As a result, the number of “dohoda” contracts fell by one third compared with the previous year (Dinga 2013). It is reasonable to assume that it was mostly young people who lost their jobs because it is mostly young people employed on temporary contracts (Beblavý and Hudáčková 2013: 9). Second, the parallelism of the notice period and the severance allowance was re-introduced. As the length of the notice period and the amount of the severance allowance depend on the time spent in the company, it is less costly to fire a recently employed person.

On the supply side, the tax and benefits system provides insufficient incentives for the longer-term unemployed to take up low-paid jobs because social benefits are withdrawn rather quickly and not through a more gradual phasing out (European Commission 2013: 22). For people moving from inactivity with an activation allowance to minimum wage work, the marginal effective tax rate, which measures the part of a person’s income that goes on taxes, exceeds 60 % (ibid).

Finally, some analysts cite minimum wage as an obstacle for the transition from the unemployment to employment. For example, Goliaš (2014: 8) points out that the minimum wage is too high for poor regions, young people and women. In 2012, the ratio of minimum wage to average wage for young people up to 19 years of age varied from 57% in low unemployment Bratislava region to 70% in Banská Bystrica and Košice regions, which struggle with high unemployment (ibid). Thus, the minimum wage may create a disincentive to hire low-skilled young people without work experience.

2.3 Education System

A highly stratified education system was re-introduced after the collapse of the communist regime in 1989. The first tracking of children occurs at the end of the fifth grade (age of 11) when approximately 5% of age cohort is transferred to multi-year gymnasia for gifted children. The rest of the children are tracked into four-year gymnasia and secondary technical schools at the age of 15. Gymnasia are considered as the general stream of education, whereas secondary technical schools (“stredná odborná škola”) are recognized as providers of initial vocational education and training (VET).

Despite the perceived shortage of qualified workers, the student demand for vocational schools has been falling. Enrolment in technical and vocational schools as a percentage of total secondary enrolment fell from approximately 78% in 2000 to approximately 70% in 2011 (Thum, Potjagailo and Veselkova 2013). This reflects the gap in wages, as well as unemployment rates between graduates of secondary technical schools and university graduates. The unemployment rate of university graduates of year 2011/2012 was only 4.5%, whereas 19.3% of secondary technical school graduates registered as unemployed (Herich 2012). Furthermore, university graduates were registered as unemployed for only 5.6 months, whereas high school graduates were registered as unemployed for 7.4 months in 2013 (ibid: 13). To increase employability of high schools graduates and attractiveness of vocational education and training, the government decided to reform the VET system along the model of the dual system (see below).

3. Review of Literature and Analytical Framework

For the purposes of this paper, policy innovation is defined as “a program or policy which is new to the states adopting it, no matter how old the program may be or how many other states may have adopted it” (Walker 1969: 881). In contrast to policy inventions, which are new both in a global and in a historical perspective, policy innovations are “new” only to the adopting agent (Downs and Mohr 1979: 385). Diffusion refers to the process through which policy inventions and policy innovations circulate and possibly enter into common use (Jordan and Huitema 2014: 719). Two major approaches to the study of policy diffusion focus on (a) actors’ characteristics and (b) policy attributes.

The first approach to the study of policy diffusion examines the impact of actors and their characteristics on policy innovation and policy diffusion. Policy diffusion literature differentiates between three sets of actors: internal actors, external actors and go-betweens (see Graham et al. 2013; Stone 2004). Internal actors are those within the government that may be considering an innovation, i.e. official agencies, such as bureaucrats, politicians and government experts. External actors are those in the governments from which policies may diffuse. Finally, go-betweens are those who act across multiple governments. Policy transfers then occur vertically between states and international organizations, such as the European Union (Stone 2004) or between transnational non-state actors, such as think tanks, consultancy firms, professional societies, private organizations (Stone 1999, 2004) or mass media (Dolowitz 1997).

The characteristics of internal actors and the environment, in which they operate, have an impact on policy innovation. The motivation of internal actors to innovate depends on the perceived problem pressure or expected electoral gain (Karch 2006: 405). (H1): The higher the perceived problem pressure, the more likely the policy innovation. (H2): The more imminent (distant) the election, the more likely the innovation in case of (un-)popular policies. The capacity of internal actors to innovate depends also on state capacities (financial, bureaucratic, epistemic; see Graham et al. 2013: 13-14; Berry and Berry 2007, Stone 1999). (H3): The weaker the financial and nonfinancial capacities and (H4): the greater the perceived financial or electoral costs of adoptions, the less likely the policy innovation (Graham et al. 2013: 13-14).

There are four mechanisms of diffusion: learning from earlier adopters, economic competition, imitation and coercion (Shipan and Volden 2008, 2012). Policy learning is enhanced by networking across borders (Shipan and Volden 2012: 790). (H5): States that actively participate in professional networks are more likely to innovate (Berry and Berry 2007: 228). The spread of policies from one government to another is eased by epistemic communities, such as think tanks, research institutes or

academic entrepreneurs (Stone 1999). It was hypothesized that diffusion could occur also through “neighbours” effect, i.e. that states are more likely to adopt the policy, if the proportion of its neighbouring states that have previously adopted the policy increases (H6; see Makse and Volden 2011: 111). However, the evidence in favour of this hypothesis has eroded (Matisoff and Edwards 2014). Finally, the wealth or size of certain countries may induce learning, as smaller states copy their “best practices” (H7; Crain 1966, Walker 1969). (H8): Diffusion through competition is more likely when states compete for inward investment or want to avoid becoming a “welfare magnet” (Jordan and Huitema 2014: 723). Finally, coercion is most likely in the hierarchical context (the federal level in the United States or the European Union in Europe). (H9): External actors are better able to engage in coercion when internal actors are recovering from an economic crisis (Stone 1999). The mechanisms of diffusion may change throughout the diffusion process (Kwon et al. 2009). Competition is more likely among early adopters of the policy (Mooney 2001), whereas coercion is more likely among late adopters (Welch and Thompson 1980). Furthermore, the importance of policy learning increases over time, as knowledge accumulates (Gilardi et al. 2009).

The second approach to the study of policy diffusion focuses on what is transferred, rather than who transfers. This approach examines how characteristics of the policies themselves affect the speed of policy diffusion and the mechanisms through which diffusion occurs (see Makse and Volden 2011; Rogers 2004). Rogers (2007) proposes five attributes of innovations that affect diffusion patterns: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, observability and trialability (see Table 1). Rogers postulates the following Policy attributes hypothesis (H10): The relative advantage, compatibility, observability, and trialability of a policy innovation will be positively associated with its rate of adoption. The complexity of a policy innovation will be negatively associated with its rate of adoption.

Makse and Valden examine also an interaction of policy attributes with diffusion mechanisms and propose the hypothesis (H11) that high relative advantage, high compatibility and high observability enhance the role of learning in the diffusion process, whereas high levels of complexity and high trialability diminish the role of learning in the diffusion process. The logic behind this hypothesis is straightforward. Without awareness of what others are doing (observability) and its positive effects (relative advantage), actors cannot engage in policy learning. High levels of compatibility with existing law or practice will shorten the time span between learning of policy innovation and translating it into legislation. In contrast, high levels of complexity and trialability hinder policy learning. Policymakers find it difficult to draw lessons from policy innovations undertaken in complex policy arenas. Finally, when the trialability is high, policymakers have little incentive to learn from others because they can easily try the policy internally.

Table 1 Attributes of innovations that affect diffusion patterns

Policy attribute	Definition	Operationalization*
Relative advantage	“The degree to which an innovation is perceived as being better than the idea it supersedes” (Rogers 2004: 112)	The greater the perceptions of the effectiveness of the new policy compared to the one it supersedes, the greater its relative advantage.
Compatibility	“The degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters” (Rogers 2004: 224)	If the passage of the policy does not require statutory changes in other areas of state law, it can be perceived as compatible with previous policies
Complexity	“The degree to which an innovation is perceived as relatively difficult to understand and use” (Rogers 2004: 242)	The complexity is low, if (1) the policy’s purpose and likely results are clear to most legislators and (2) the policy idea is easy to translate into legislation.
Observability	“The degree to which results of an innovation are visible to others” (Rogers 2004: 244)	The easier it is for policymakers in other states to observe the result of the policy, the greater the observability.
Trialability	“The degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis” (Rogers 2004, 243)	Policy is trialable, if (1) policy makers perceive implementation of the policy on a trial basis as useful and (2) the costs of abandoning the policy, if it were found to be ineffective, are low.

*Makse and Volden 2011: 111.

4. Methodology

Slovakia adopted a number of policy measures to increase employability of young people and ease their transition from school to work. This paper examines the following institutional and policy innovations: (1) reform of the vocational-education system along the model of the dual system, (2) Project KomPrax, which aimed to enhance competences of young people through informal learning activities outside the school, and (3) the cross-sectoral coordination of youth policy.

The data for this study was collected between January and March 2013 through content analysis of documents and personal interviews. Content analysis was applied to all relevant official documents and records released between 2002 and 2015, which were accessible online. At the outset of the investigation, a list of potential participants was developed from those who directly participated in the key reforms and initiatives listed in the Slovak National Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan. Individuals were contacted by e-mail and asked if they would be willing to participate in the research project seeking to gain a better understanding of policy innovation and policy learning. Translated transcripts of interviews served as the primary texts on which the following interpretative account is based. The semi-structured interviews ranged from 40 to 100 minutes. Interviews were held at participants' places of professional work. For the purposes of this study, 7 officials have been interviewed in Bratislava in the period of February to March 2015, as follows.

1. 19 February 2015, IUVENTA, Slovak Youth Institute

- Mrs. Ľubomíra Véberová, Project Manager, KomPrax - Competencies for Praxis, IUVENTA
- Mrs. Jana Miháliková, Youth Policy Expert, IUVENTA

2. 25 February 2015, IUVENTA, Slovak Youth Institute

- Mrs. Eva Masárová, Director of Youth Department, Directorate General for State Care for Sport and Youth, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (hereafter, Ministry of Education), Chair of the Cross-sectoral Working Group on Youth Policy
- Mr. Tibor Škrabský, Methodist of Education, IUVENTA

3. 2 March 2015, ŠIOV - State Vocational Education Institute

- Mr. Stanislav Pravda, Expert guarantor of Activity 2: Participation of employers' representatives through professional associations, National Project "Development of secondary vocational education", ŠIOV - State Vocational Education Institute.

4. Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic

- Mrs. Žaneta Surmajová, Acting Director of Department for Legislation and Law Approximation, Ministry of Education
- Mr. Karol Jakubík, State adviser in Department for Secondary Technical Schools and conservatories, Ministry of Education

In addition, interview with Mr. Jaroslav Holeček, President of ZAP SR – Automotive Industry Association (ZAP SR 11 Mar 2014) was used as a source.

5. Case study 1: Reform of the VET System

Reform of the vocational education and training (VET) system and re-introduction of the dual education system in Slovakia is a long-term process, which started as an employer-led training initiative and culminated in the passing of the so-called dual education law (Act no. 61/2015 Coll.). The new law aims to strengthen the ties between employers and schools and blend classroom learning with hands-on work experience. The share of practical training will account for 60 to 80 percent of the total number of lessons. In practice, students will receive a placement in the company and will be entitled to remuneration for their work, while companies will be motivated by tax relief. It is important to note that the new law does not overhaul the existing system of school-based vocational education but allows it to co-exist with the new dual education system.

Box 2 Timeline of the VET Reform

2002 – Automotive Industry Association (ZAP SR) created 13 pilot centres in vocational schools

2007 – ZAP SR initiated new VET legislation

2009 – Act No. 184/2009 on vocational education and training introduced educational fourpartism

July 2010 – Eugen Jurzyca (SDKU-DS) became the Minister of Education in the centre-right government led by Ivetta Radičová

April 2012 – Dušan Čaplovič (SMER-SD) became the Minister of Education in the centre-left government led by Robert Fico

April 2012 – Štedan Chudoba, Director of Automotive Cluster Slovakia, member of ZAP SR, became Deputy Minister of Education

May 2012 – European Council urged Slovakia to introduce “an apprenticeship scheme”

15 June 2012 – Transformation of vocational education and training announced at international conference of ZAP SR titled “Employability for each school leaver”

December 2012 – Germany, Slovakia and five other countries, in association with the European Commission, signed a memorandum, which included concrete measures for introducing vocational education system based on Germany’s model

April 2013 – Slovakia pledged to link vocational education to labour market through National Project RSOV – “Development of secondary vocational education”

2013 – National projects RSOV, “Dielne” and “National System of Qualifications” (NSK) started

2013 – Professional associations and the Ministry began to work on the new Act on VET

April 2013 – International conference on dual system of VET in Bratislava

July 2013 – European Commission launched the European Alliance for Apprenticeships

April 2015 – “Dual education law” (Act no. 61/2015 Coll.) came into force

There is some anecdotal evidence that remuneration and promise of future employment increase attractiveness of vocational education and training at both upper secondary and post-secondary level. The Ministry of Education and the Austrian Embassy to Slovakia introduced the Young Stars pilot project (see below), which should serve as an example of implementing the dual education scheme in Slovakia. The vocational school in Zlaté Moravce, which cooperates with a consortium of 8 Austrian, German and Slovak companies, was initially worried that it would not find enough students to fill a single class (Mr. Jakubík). In September 2014, it opened two classes of 33 students. Similarly, when Volkswagen Slovakia offered a two-year post-secondary mechatronics course in its new Centre of Dual Education in September 2013, it selected 24 students from 300 applicants. However, it must be noted that the college wage premium and lower unemployment rates of university graduates compared to high school graduates create an incentive for students to seek higher education.

Attractiveness of the dual education scheme for employers was questioned by employers themselves, as well as education experts and politicians. It was argued that the law was tailored to fit the needs of big employers who already participate in National projects co-funded by the European Social Fund (Chren 2015). Small and medium-sized employers could be discouraged by high costs, as well as high administrative burden: an employer who wants to implement dual education needs a contract with a professional association and has to submit seven documents (Chren 2015). The law also created a disincentive for schools to join because the more hours a student spends at the workplace, the less money per student the school receives from the state (MP Miroslav Beblavý quoted by TASR 11 March 2015, Chren 2015).

To sum up, it is not clear yet whether the new act will have a significant impact on the number of students in the dual-track VET programmes. According to the Ministry of Education (2013), only 3.8% of all students in technical secondary schools participated in the practical training at the workplace in 2013, compared to 5.75 % two years before. The dual education law came into force on 1 April 2015. Within two weeks, 130 firms committed to open 1800 vacancies for VET students. This represents approximately 1.2% of all students enrolled in secondary technical schools. Majority of interested firms were medium-sized firms (20 to 100 employees) in sectors, such as commerce and tourism, motor vehicle service and electronics.

5.1.1 The VET Reform was Driven by Employers' Concerns about Workforce Shortages

The transformation of the Slovak VET has been driven by a broad range of internal and external actors and go-betweeners (see Table 2). The first attempts to re-introduce elements of dual education in Slovak vocational education system can be traced back to 2002, when the Automotive Industry Association of the Slovak Republic (ZAP SR) established 13 pilot centres in existing vocational schools and invested in their equipment and teacher training.

Table 2 Main actors in Transformation of Slovak VET

Internal	Ministry of Education, ŠIOV - State Vocational Education Institute, Government Council for Vocational Education and Training
External	Austrian Embassy, EHB/SFIVET - Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training SFIVET, German Federal Ministry of Education
Go-betweeners	Professional associations (ZAP – Automotive Industry Association of the Slovak Republic, AZZR SR – Federation of Employers' Associations of the Slovak Republic, RÚZ – The National Union of Employers, SŽK – Slovak Chamber of Entrepreneurs, SOPK – Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry, SPPK – Slovak Agriculture and Food Chamber, SLsK – Slovak forestry chamber, SBK – Slovak Mining Chamber), foreign chambers of commerce (WKÖ – Austrian Federal Economic Chamber), transnational corporations (Volkswagen, Miba, etc.), Slovak employers, consultancy firms (WKÖ/WIFI International, Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft), supranational organizations (European Union, OECD)

Policy innovation responded to the environment, in which the automotive companies in Slovakia operated. Bottom-up initiatives of employers were motivated by shortages of skilled workforce (Mr. Pravda, Mrs. Surmajová and Mr. Jakubík). ZAP SR itself listed participation in determining the direction of vocational education to ensure sufficient skilled labour as one of its main strategic objectives.

Mr. Pravda: “The arrival of big investors caused the outflow of the workforce from car services to big factories. We identified that we needed three hundred new auto mechanics per year. Schools produced 3100 auto mechanics each year – there were 129 schools back in 2002 – but we still faced acute shortages of workforce. We identified quality of education as the main source of the problem.”

Mr. Holeček: “We markedly perceived shortages of qualified workforce for the first time in 2002 when the sub-supplier industry began to develop in Slovakia. That's when we created our 13 pilot centres of automotive industry.”

This supports the view that stakeholders are more likely to innovate, if the perceived problem pressure is high (H1).

However, ZAP SR was dissatisfied with the implementation of the pilot centres. It linked the failure to the low compatibility of dual education with the existing legislation (see also below) and began to push for the reform of the Slovak VET system.

Mr. Pravda: “In 2008, after six years of cooperation with schools, we [employers] found out that we did not manage to change the quality of education although we provided the funding, training, support. (...) We realized that we needed to change the legislation because it was impossible to change the vocational education through volunteering. Therefore, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, we initiated the Law on vocational education and helped to draft it.”

Mr. Holeček: “In 2007 we in the Automotive Industry Association discussed what to do to ensure the continuity and further growth of production and we stated that education was the key. Up to that point we survived on past success of the education system but we realized it was impossible to survive on that. The existing workforce was not sufficient for three automotive companies in Slovakia. Without a reform of the vocational education we would miss our goals. That's when we initiated the new law on vocational education and training and the Ministry of Education was sympathetic of the idea.”

The Ministry of Education was eager to respond to the calls of automotive companies for qualified workforce because the automotive sector has been the key driver of economic growth in Slovakia. Slovakia is the world's leading per-capita car producer. The car production is dominated by three automobile manufacturers, namely Volkswagen (Bratislava); PSA Peugeot Citroën (Trnava) and KIA Motors (Žilina). In 2011, the automotive sector represented 20% of total exports and employed 14% of all employees in industrial production; it directly employed 60 828 people and indirectly generated further 140 000 jobs (Luptáček et al. 2013). This accounts for 9% of total employment.

There is evidence in support of the view that change will have had to be prepared in advance (Birkland 1997) by policy entrepreneurs, who develop and sell policy solutions. Mr. Holeček stated that prior to approaching the Ministry of Education there were a number of informal working groups, which analysed the VET systems in Germany, France, Austria, Hungary and Switzerland.

Mr. Holeček: “(...) based on this we drafted strategic steps necessary for the modernization of the vocational education in Slovakia. In a couple of private workshops we defined what had to be done. Subsequently we prepared the draft of the Act on vocational education and offered it to the Ministry [of Education]. The new legislation for vocational education in Slovakia was built on this foundation in 2008 and 2009.”

Vocational Education Act adopted in 2009 increased the influence of employers over the development of educational and training curricula and school leaving examination and introduced new VET governance (Vantuch and Jelinkova 2013: 28). The Act stipulated the establishment of Slovak Government Council for Vocational Education and eight regional VET councils. These four-partite advisory bodies consist of representatives of state administration, self-governing regions, employers and representatives of employees. Although the Ministry of Education remained responsible for the development of the overall VET strategy, the advisory bodies were responsible for the supply of regional VET strategies and plans of labour-market needs.

However, employers were dissatisfied with the implementation of the Act and declared the assessment of labour market needs a failure (Employers in the Government Council for VET 2015: 5, Mr. Holeček). Professional associations lacked capacity and expertise to provide comparable data for the prognosis of labour market needs, which would serve as the basis for VET strategies. Furthermore, employers argued that the state did not create conditions necessary for the functioning of the new Fund for the development of vocational education, headed by Július Hron, vice-president of ZAP SR and funded by employers, which was supposed to fund the equipment and teacher training at secondary technical schools.

In 2011 employers began to work on the proposal for the transformation of VET in Slovakia (ibid). Eugen Jurzyca, at that time the Minister of Education in the centre-right government of Iveta Radičová, was not sympathetic of the idea (Mr. Holeček). He argued that unemployment rates of graduates of secondary technical schools were higher than unemployment rates of higher education graduates (Jurzyca 2012). Therefore, it made little sense to direct students into secondary technical schools. Furthermore, he pointed out that expenditures on vocational education were higher than expenditures on general tracks of secondary education. However, ZAP SR managed to persuade Jozef Mihál, the Minister of Labour at that time, of the need for the VET reform.

Mr. Holeček: “We showed Minister Jozef Mihál statistics – 30 percent of graduates went straight to the labour office. This argument worked.”

The bargaining position of employers improved after the general election when in April 2012 Dušan Čaplovič assumed the post of the Minister of Education in the centre-left government led by Robert Fico, and Štefan Chudoba, Director of Automotive Cluster Slovakia, member of ZAP SR, became Deputy Minister of Education. The transformation of VET in Slovakia to ensure “employability for each school leaver” was officially announced at an international conference on dual education in June 2012. The transformation rested on five pillars: (1) identification of labour market needs, (2) calibration of school performance, (3) new model of primary school aimed at vocational preparation, (4) new model of secondary technical school/system of dual education and (5) testing the quality and

employability of school leavers. These five interrelated pillars were translated into three European Social Fund-funded national projects:

1. Project RSOV – “Development of secondary vocational education”. This joint project of the Ministry of Education, ŠIOV, self-governing regions, secondary technical schools and 7 professional associations aimed to increase the quality of VET. The project – still ongoing – focuses on pilot testing of dual education, as well as modernization of curricula and career counselling for students. The pilot centres will continue to exist after the end of the project.
2. Project “Dielne” (“Workroom”) aims to increase attractiveness of vocational education for primary school students through vocational counselling and improved polytechnic training in selected pilot primary schools.
3. Project NSK – “National System of Qualifications” aims to identify competences acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning and promote the recognition of these competences in the labour market. The project also aims to relate the National System of Qualifications to the European Qualifications Framework and ease recognition of competences acquired in Slovakia in the rest of the European Union.

The policy transfer occurred both within a country and across countries. First, employers played a crucial role in the within country transfer. The RSOV project was prepared by employers, who nominated all employees of ŠIOV working on pilot Centres of Vocational Education (Mr. Pravda). The RSOV project thus involved a massive “transfer of personnel” (Stone 2012: 486). Employers were also a central force, which promoted policy learning. To inform the policy decisions, they helped to identify labour market needs based on the data from the Social Insurance agency, labour offices, Ministry of Education and employers. To illustrate how it worked in practice, consider the case of CPA SR – the Guild of car dealers and car maintenance providers. CPA SR trained its members to estimate the future labour market needs based on the number of workers needed to replace retiring employees and expected industry growth (Mr. Pravda).

Second, pilot centres established as part of the RSOV project built on the idea of 13 pilot centres created by ZAP SR in 2002. Therefore, the across-country transfer must be viewed in the context of the overall reform of VET system (see also below). Investigating the origins of the RSOV project points out to a hybrid transfer, which attempted to fit policy solution to local conditions.

Mr. Pravda: “We analysed French model, German, English model, Finnish model. We analysed Swiss model, Austrian, Israeli model. We analysed approximately 10 foreign countries but we knew that we could not use any of these models directly. Slovakia has its specifics and we tried to pick those elements of the particular model, which would enable us to meet our goal. And the only goal we have is for each school leaver to be employable.”

Finally, the official website depicts the project as a response to Europe 2020 strategy, the Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020, as well as Youth Opportunities Initiative. It is not entirely clear to what extent the European agenda shaped the final design of the RSOV project. The interviews suggest that the timing of EU's calls for the reform of European VET systems opened the window of opportunity and this way enabled employers to push forward their agenda of VET transformation (see also below).

5.1.2 European Union as Facilitator of Learning

At approximately this time, the European Union began to push for the VET reform. To tackle Slovakia's high youth unemployment, the European Council urged Slovakia to "implement the youth action plan, in particular as regards the quality and labour market relevance of education and vocational training, including through the introduction of an apprenticeship scheme" in its Recommendation on the National Reform Programme 2012 of Slovakia (p. 12). National Reform Programme of the Slovak Republic 2013 pledged to link vocational education to practice through the above-discussed National Project RSOV.

To induce policy learning, the European Union relied on the "facilitated coordination" (Radaelli 2004: 13), i.e. it did not produce European legislation but operated like a forum for discussion and a platform for policy transfer. In July 2013, the European Commission launched the European Alliance for Apprenticeships to support the aims of the European Commission's "Youth Guarantee". The Alliance served as a platform which brought together relevant stakeholders and encouraged them to pledge to increase the quality, quantity and attractiveness of apprenticeships in the European Union. Germany's involvement in the Alliance for Apprenticeships initiated by the European Commission was represented by agreements on bilateral cooperation between the Federal Ministry of Education (BMBF) and six countries, including Slovakia. The memorandum signed in December 2012 included concrete measures for introducing a vocational education system based on Germany's dual education model. Slovak policymakers found German model attractive for two reasons (Government Council for VET 2013). First, Germany is the largest trading partner of Slovakia and second, policymakers believed that the dual education model helped Germany to better navigate the crisis. This supports the view that smaller states tend to copy "best practices" of wealthy states (H7). Johanna Wanka, Federal Minister of Education and Research, discussed the proposal for help in VET transformation during International conference on dual education in April 2013 in Bratislava.

Box 2 Pilot schools established under the “Project of cooperation between providers of vocational education and training and employers, as well as their parent companies in countries with dual education system”, National Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan

Project “Young Stars” is a joint project of Ministry of Education and WKÖ – Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, Austrian Embassy in Bratislava and Austrian, German and Slovak employers in engineering and automotive sectors in Nitra region (Miba, ZKW Slovakia, Pankl Automotive Slovakia, HTP Slovakia Vráble, Matador Automotive Vráble, Secop, Bauer Gear Motor Slovakia, ŠVEC a SPOL). Two pilot classrooms (33 students) opened in secondary technical school in Zlaté Moravce. The ratio of practical training (apprenticeship) to formal schooling is 60:40. Similarly to other pilot centres, this pilot project was motivated by workforce shortages. Peter Chudoba, the Managing Director at Miba AG, said: “According to our strategic plan, we want to double the turnover by 2020. Therefore, we need approximately 100 additional qualified workers within 4 to 5 years.” Corporate culture was another important factor. Peter Chudoba stated: “Our parent company MIBA AG is a pioneer in dual education in Austria: approximately one third of the current employees started as an apprentice in one of the Austrian plants.” Miba Sinter in Dolný Kubín introduced dual education in the pre-crisis year 2007.

Swiss-Slovak project “Vocational Education and Preparation for Labour Market” is a joint project of ŠIOV – State Vocational Education Institute, Government Office of the Slovak Republic and Embassy of Switzerland in Bratislava. The project is funded via Swiss financial mechanism. The main project partner, EHB/SFIVET - Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training SFIVET, is the Swiss governmental centre of competence for the provision of tertiary-level basic and continuing training to VET actors, for the development of professions and for VET research. EHB/SFIVET provides consulting services on how to set up dual education system, holds a seat on the steering committee and provides continuing training courses for vocational school teachers specialised in various occupational fields.

Swiss multinational food and beverage company Nestlé signed up to the “European Alliance for Apprenticeships” and pledged to increase the number of high quality apprenticeships and traineeships by 50% over a 3-year period (2014-2016) to 10 000. Nestlé Slovakia proposed a 3-year apprenticeship scheme. The secondary technical school neighbouring Nestlé factory plans to enrol first 12 students in September 2015. Nestlé was motivated by shortages of qualified workforce. Lenka Ilčíková, HR manager Nestlé, stated that unqualified workers increase labour costs. “We need people who know what food hygiene is, what manufacturing is, we need them to have experience with food” (Pravda 26 Feb 2015).

Two of the stakeholders, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKÖ) and Nestlé pledged to implement pilot projects in order to establish a dual apprenticeship system in Slovakia. Both projects run under the National Youth Guarantee initiative “Project of cooperation between providers of vocational education and training and employers, as well as their parent companies in countries with dual education system” (see Box 2).

Following the Council Declaration of 15 October 2013 on the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, Slovakia pledged to “introduce apprenticeships schemes through the new act of vocational education and training and enable the smooth transition from education to the labour market.” Dual education legislation was later listed as a key reform aimed at integration in the labour market in the Slovak National Youth Guarantee Plan.

The new Slovak dual education law was a hybrid of VET systems in what Esping-Andersen (1990) refers to as the “corporatist” welfare states. Policy learning was not limited to a single jurisdiction. A multiplicity of lessons were drawn predominantly from German, Swiss and Austrian VET systems and subsequently adapted to fit domestic conditions.

The empirical evidence supports the view that transnational networks established during co-operation of the Ministry of Education and stakeholders such as chambers of commerce and research institutes contributed to policy learning (H5). Studies conducted by EHB/SFIVET or Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft were used as background studies in the working group responsible for drafting the law on dual education.

Mr. Jakubík: “These sources were used examples of how dual education works in these countries. (...) Employers needed to understand how it works in Austria, what the roles and responsibilities of employers and professional associations are, that in these countries they have to do much more than they do in Slovakia.”

These studies influenced also the decision to keep the mixed system with both formal schooling and apprenticeship track. The idea to “let the market, students and parents decide, which of them is better” (Mr. Jakubík) was inspired by the recommendations of study commissioned by WKÖ/WIFI International within Austria-Slovakia Cross-border Co-operation Programme and conducted by Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft (Petanovitsch 2014: 7).

There is a debate on whether it is the facilitated coordination or rather domestic politics that leads to changes in domestic policy (Borrás and Greve 2004; Ferrera et al. 2002, Radaelli 2003, Scharpf 2002, Wincott 2003). The case of the transformation of the Slovak VET system supports the view that the domestic economic environment mattered more than European agenda. Calls for the reform of the VET system and first instances of co-operation between secondary technical schools and

employers predated the outbreak of the crisis in 2008. In contrast to EU initiatives, these calls were motivated by shortages of qualified workforce rather than rising youth unemployment.

When the economic crisis opened the window of opportunity, employers used it to push forward their agenda. This was the case of the pilot centres established as part of the RSOV project, as well as pilot projects established as part of the “Project of cooperation between providers of vocational education and training and employers, as well as their parent companies in countries with dual education system”.

Mr. Jakubík: “When Austrian firms sensed that the debate about the dual education started moving forward and the reform could progress, they became very active. For example, with the help of Austrian Embassy in Bratislava and WKÖ – Austrian Federal Economic Chamber they arranged a meeting with the Ministry of Education. We listened to their requests and told them that the idea was good because they financed it from Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Slovakia – Austria. (...) A working group was established. When things reached the stage where it was necessary to meet with schools, everything was prearranged.”

Nevertheless, the European Union shaped national projects through program funding. Three national projects introduced in 2013 were funded by the European Structural Fund. Up to 2005 employers – in cooperation with ŠIOV and the Ministry of Education – funded the teacher training in 13 pilot centres established by ZAP SR from EU funds. As these projects must have fitted into the relevant funding programme, the European Union de facto shaped their final design. Furthermore, the EU Structural Funds were crucial for the implementation of these projects. This can be illustrated on the failed attempt to modernize school buildings. This project never became reality because ZAP SR did not find the funding for it. Availability of funding is thus crucial for adoption of policy innovation (H3).

5.1.3 Policy Learning Enhanced by High Relative Advantage and Observability

Dual education system was characterized by high perceived relative advantage and high observability. Policy makers in Slovakia perceived dual education system as more effective than formal schooling system and linked it to low youth unemployment rates in Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

Dušan Čaplovič, Minister of Education (April 2012-July 2014): “I believe that successful projects, which ensured the lowest youth unemployment rate for those younger than 29 years in countries such as Germany or Austria, will be good for and feasible in Slovakia as well (Úspešná škola 29 April 2013).”

Miroslav Lajčák, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs: “In the neighbouring Austria, this [dual] system pushed youth unemployment below 10%” (Lajčák 2014: 34).

Juraj Draxler, Minister of Education (November 2014-present): “Everyone in Europe is talking about it [the dual education system]. Excellent results in Germany and Austria” (aktuality.sk 9 January 2015).

Robert Fico, Prime Minister: “We took a look at countries, which have excellent experience with dual education, such as Germany, Austria or Switzerland. Combination of practical training and theory ensures low unemployment rates for young people who graduated from secondary schools and universities” TASR (1 April 2015).

The empirical evidence on the compatibility of the dual education with the existing legislation is mixed. Mr. Jakubík believed that existing legislation was flexible enough. The Slovak system consists of two-levels, the state educational programme and the school education programme. State educational programme or the national curriculum is published by the Ministry of Education. This binding document defines educational objectives and outcomes. Each school then develops its own school educational programme, which allows it to meet the needs of the employer.

Mr. Jakubík: “According to Austrian and Swiss partners, flexibility is the main advantage of our [VET] system.”

Majority of newly established pilot schools still operate within the old system. However, ZAP SR, which has the longest experience with the co-operation with secondary technical schools, believed that their bottom-up initiatives were incompatible with the existing legislation.

Mr. Pravda: “Education is like an army, it operates in a certain legislative environment and you can achieve a change only if you change the environment, if you change incentives for all the stakeholders – students, parents, teachers. All of them must call for the change. (...) This kind of synergy is necessary for (...) the transformation to begin.”

The complexity of the dual education was initially high. Mrs. Surmajová noted that “[w]hen we sat together [with employers] for the first time and started looking for a definition of dual education, we realized that everyone imagined it to be something else.” The complexity gradually declined as a result of policy learning (Mr. Jakubík, see also above). However, the institutional change was not easy to translate into legislation. Employers were concerned about the funding and tried to shift the costs of vocational education and training on taxpayers.

Finally, two measures of trialability provide mixed results. The number of established pilot schools suggests that employers, schools, self-governing regions as establishers of secondary technical schools, and the Ministry of Education perceived implementation of the policy on a trial basis as

useful. Mr. Jakubík noted: “It is good that there are so many [pilot] projects because they generate more information for our use.” However, costs of abandoning the policy were high. For example, ZAP SR invested 1.5 million euro in a single pilot centre in Bratislava in 2004. Closing these centres would lead to sunk costs. In other words, the institutional change could be experimented with in a limited manner in a couple of schools but this experimentation required substantial funding.

The case study of VET reform in Slovakia provides some evidence in favour of the hypothesis that a policy with a significant relative advantage, high compatibility, high observability but low complexity and low trialability will induce policy learning. In contrast to Makse and Valden (2011) who linked low compatibility to low levels of policy learning, this study finds that low compatibility with the existing legislation enhanced policy learning: employers were eager to draw policy lessons from multiple jurisdictions to fit the new dual education legislation to local conditions. Second, Makse and Valden adopted a static view of policy characteristics. However, the case study of VET reform in Slovakia documents that (1) the process of policy innovation is lengthy and (2) scores of policy characteristics may change over time. This was the case of complexity of dual education, which gradually declined as a result of policy learning.

6. Case Study 2: Project KomPrax

Project KomPrax – “Competencies for Praxis” focused on three activities. First, it enabled young people to acquire competencies through informal learning activities outside the school. Skills, such as project management, communication, presentation, financial literacy and teamwork, were expected to increase their employability. In practice, young leaders (aged 15 to 17) participated in three weekend seminars and received 200 euro for a project, which enabled them to test the newly acquired skills in real life. The project did not specifically target early school-leavers or low-skilled young people. It is reasonable to assume that those who decided to participate were active young people rather than those who needed assistance in their transition from inactivity to activity. Second, project KomPrax aimed to increase soft skills of youth workers and volunteer youth workers through informal education. The training was led by professionals, some of whom came from other organizations, such as UNICEF. Third, project KomPrax promoted recognition of informal learning through activities, such as round tables with employers and providers of formal education. Those convinced about the merits of nonformal learning then signed the “Declaration on the Recognition of Contribution of Non-formal Education in the Youth Work” in the international Innovative Learning Forum held in Bratislava in June 2013. Signatories of the Declaration gained access to the Database of participants in project KomPrax, which lists the type and the level of competencies they acquired.

The idea to develop competencies of young people through informal learning dates back to the Young Leaders Education Framework (Konceptia vzdelávania mladých lídrov v SR), which was adopted by the Ministry of Education in 2007. The framework aimed to (1) develop leadership of all young people through the development of key competencies, (2) increase the expertise of youth workers, and (3) create a system of support for young leaders, youth workers and youth workers, as well as build capacities for their formal and informal learning. This nascent version of project KomPrax for the first time defined terms, such as “young leader”.

Box 3 Timeline of Project KomPrax

2006 – Young Leaders Education Framework prepared by the Youth Department of the Ministry of Education
2008 – working group for the project “Education of young leaders” created
2008 – Youth Work-Support Act n. 282/2008 defined basic terms, such as “young leader” or “leader in youth work”
2010 – EU Youth Strategy
2011-2015 – implementation of National Project KomPrax

21 June 2013 – stakeholders signed the “Declaration on the Recognition of Contribution of Non-formal Education in the youth work”

To reach the goals set by the Young Leaders Education Framework, IUVENTA created a working group for the project “Education of young leaders”. The working group consisting of representatives of civic associations, education and training institutions and public institutions proposed a project, whose aim was to promote the recognition of informal education in the area of youth work. To achieve this goal, the working group argued in favour of developing key competencies of youth and young leaders. This project proposal formed the basis of the future project KomPrax. With the approval of the Ministry of Education, IUVENTA decided to apply for ESF funding. National Project KomPrax was implemented from January 2011 to May 2015. Project was later listed in the Slovak National Youth Guarantee Plan.

6.1.1 Policy Innovation Drew upon State Capacities

The capacity of internal actors to innovate depends on state capacities. In case of project KomPrax, IUVENTA drew heavily upon its epistemic capacities (H3). In an early phase of the project, IUVENTA commissioned research to identify key competencies of the young leader, youth leader and youth worker. The resulting studies drew on a variety of sources, leading to a hybrid transfer. For example, to identify key competencies of the young leader, Hulín et al. (undated) analysed the conceptualization of core competencies for youth workers or youth leaders in the United States, Singapore and New Zealand. Furthermore, Hulín et al. also looked at sources, such as European portfolio for youth leaders and youth workers (Council of Europe 2003) or OECD PISA survey. The final model of key competencies for youth workers was based on the “Teacher assistant competences” defined in the Czech National system of occupations and the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Framework.

Table 3 Main Actors in Project KomPrax

Internal	IUVENTA, Ministry of Education, regional governments
External	Czech National Institute of Children and Youth
Go-between	EU and its institutions, youth organizations, employers, UNICEF

Substantial policy learning occurred between IUVENTA and Czech National Institute of Children and Youth (Národní institut dětí a mládeže), which together with the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth

and Sports implemented project Keys for Life 2009–2013. Similarly to project KomPrax, Keys for Life aimed to improve the non-formal education of youth workers.

Mrs. Miháliková: „We discussed it [KomPrax] with Czechs a lot. (...) We draw inspiration but we know exactly what we can transfer and what we cannot because it would not work here.”

Mrs. Miháliková attributed the need for adaptation to local circumstances to differences in the evolution of youth sectors in Slovakia and the Czech Republic after the collapse of the communism. Tradition of youth association was strong in the Czech Republic, where youth organizations operated, albeit unofficially, even before the collapse of the communism. In Slovakia, the situation was different. Christian youth organizations went underground and operated illegally, “they learnt to cooperate only among themselves and it is extremely difficult to break the ties and make them cooperate [with IUVENTA] (Mrs. Miháliková).

Inefficient administrative capacity was the main obstacle to policy innovation (H3). First, policy innovation was hampered by the lack of communication between the departments or entire ministries. This led to curious policy outcomes. At a certain point, the Ministry of Labour proposed establishment of youth centres very similar to those proposed by IUVENTA.

Mrs. Miháliková: “The cross-sectoral collaboration in the area of youth policy is a huge topic at the moment. (...) And this, in my opinion, is a huge problem in Slovakia or in post-communist countries in general. Take, for example, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education. State secretaries decide what to do but the information never reaches the lower levels. We have to find a willing official and propose to cooperate on a particular issue.”

The ability of the administration to perform its functions and achieve objectives has been undermined also by the absence of the permanent bureaucracy charged with thinking ahead.

Mrs. Véberová: “When it comes to ministries, it is a huge problem. When you replace people every four years and these people completely change the vision, (...) if they change the goals, priorities, we will never work towards a common goal.”

However, it is not clear whether the existence of the career civil service could tackle the lack of continuity in youth policymaking. For example, the U.S. “permanent bureaucracy” got accustomed to presidents trying to reinvent the system every four or eight years (Zeller 2009: 708).

6.1.2 European Union as Facilitator of Policy Learning and Funding Agency

The core Slovak Youth Policy documents were prepared and adopted before EU documents. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that project KomPrax was one of the initiatives which have been

“facilitated by tentative Commission’s white papers and socialisation processes orchestrated by the European Commission” (Radaelli 2004: 10). The Young Leaders Education Framework reflected a relatively old strategic document Millennium: the national programme of training and education in the Slovak Republic for the next 15-20 years (Ministry of Education 2001) but predominantly built on the following EU documents, which defined volunteering as a key priority in youth policy and emphasized the importance of informal education:

- European Commission white paper of 21 November 2001 – A new impetus for European youth
- Council Resolution of 25 November 2003 on common objectives for participation by and information for young people
- Council Resolution of 15 November 2004 on common objectives for voluntary activities of young people
- Council resolution on “addressing the concerns of young people in Europe – implementing the European Pact for Youth and promoting active citizenship”, November 2005
- Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning.

Policy learning was enhanced by participation in networks (H5). For example, Mrs. Miháliková participated in an expert group working on the European Commission report titled “Developing the creative and innovative potential of young people through non-formal learning in ways that are relevant to employability” or an expert group on transition from education to employment. The latter expert group was proposed by the Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 20 May 2014 on a European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2014-2015.

The final draft of KomPrax project was shaped by ESF rules and regulations. Although KomPrax project built on the Young Leaders Education Framework from 2006, the project proposal had to be modified to fit into the format and eligibility criteria required.

Mrs. Miháliková: “We started studying what the ESF actually meant and we understood that with our rhetoric, if we spoke our language, we would never get the funding.”

The EU gained importance as a funding agency. When asked whether KomPrax would have been possible without structural funding, Mrs. Miháliková replied: „Definitely not. It was one of the incentives to pour more funding into the education in youth sector.” The reasoning behind was simple: big youth organizations receive funding from the state and can afford to provide systemic education. However, youth workers outside of these organizations can do so only as volunteers.

Policy innovation was influenced by the length of the funding programme period. The National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) for the period of 2007 – 2013, which provided baseline for the drawing from EU funds, was prepared prior to the outbreak of the crisis. The NSRF, as well as regional operational programmes, had to be approved by the European Commission before any implementation. This reduced flexibility of organizations to respond to new challenges. For example, IUVENTA was not able to implement projects, which aimed to enhance the employability of young people through non-formal education because these projects were not eligible for funding under the existing Operational Programme Education. This was the case of the initiative “Hej, ľudia” (Hej, People), which later evolved into an ESF-funded National Project “Praktik”. The project aimed to create 7 youth centres in every Slovak region (with the exception of Bratislava). These centres were later used for the implementation of KomPrax at the local level.

EU funding thus contributed to a significant capacity building. IUVENTA built 7 regional offices, which brought together the youth, parents, employers and regional governments. However, funding limited to the duration of the project makes a systemic change difficult. Mrs. Véberová noted that Bratislava-based IUVENTA will not have the funding to run these regional offices once KomPrax ends. “We went to regions to be closer to the young people, now we come back,” noted Mrs. Véberová.

6.1.3 Policy Characteristics of Project KomPrax

The perceived relative advantage of informal learning compared to other policies was low. Both interviewees explicitly stated that activities of the youth sector were complementary to formal schooling and active labour market policies. However, they viewed this complementarity as an advantage. The specific position of youth workers enables them to build trust with the clients.

Mrs. Véberová: “We do not intend to replace the social function of the state but we can complement it.”

Mrs. Miháliková: “You have to realize that as a youth worker you are in a totally different position compared with a person who works in the labour office. When you go to the labour office, you are always a bit of a loser. When you go to a youth centre, it is fun.”

Compatibility of project KomPrax with existing legislation was initially low. Terms, such as “young leader”, “youth leader” or “volunteer” were not defined in the legislation when Young Leaders Education Framework was prepared in 2006. This “provided sufficient flexibility for the third sector but caused practical problems” (Ministry of Education 2007: 3). However, the compatibility with the existing legislation increased when Youth Work Support Act came into force in 2008.

Complexity of informal learning was high. Purpose of informal learning and its likely results were not clear to key stakeholders, particularly the Ministry of Labour and employers. Mrs. Miháliková noted

that the Ministry of Labour was interested in the vocational education but “when it comes to non-standard areas such as ours, they do not quite understand the potential there is”.

Mrs. Miháliková: “You have to speak a different language when dealing with employers. (...) One of the first recommendations [of the European Commission's Report ‘Developing the creative and innovative potential of young people through non-formal learning in ways that are relevant to employability’]: Translate the outcomes of what you do to the language of employers.”

IUVENTA was aware of the high complexity of informal learning and KomPrax explicitly aimed to increase awareness of informal learning and its merits. IUVENTA organized round-tables with employers, NGOs, civic associations, universities and the local administration, as well as one-on-one meetings with those employers who did not participate in the round-tables.

Mrs. Véberová: “We invited HR managers from some companies to our trainings. We wanted them to see these young people, to witness what they have to tell, what the implementation of projects gave them (...) Young people got feedback from employers and at the same time they learnt to communicate, to sell the competencies they gained.”

However, it is not clear to what extent these activities reduced the complexity of informal learning. The Declaration was signed by 40 employers and formal education institutions. Majority of employers were big foreign-owned companies with a strong tradition of corporate training and education.

The observability of informal learning was low. This was given by the very nature of informal learning, whose results are not immediately apparent.

Véberová: “Each government wants to leave a legacy, something substantial and visible but then we cannot talk about strategic, long-term planning. Everyone wants to see the immediate impact, something to show people, he wants to be able to say that he contributed to this and did that but that is against the logic of the strategic planning.”

Miháliková: “And it cannot work in education. If you educate a citizen, you will not see immediate impact. It will show up in a couple of years.”

Finally, the trialability of KomPrax was relatively high. During the four-month pilot phase, 50 000 euro was divided between 334 local projects all over Slovakia.

The case study of project KomPrax provides very limited evidence in support of the hypothesis about the relationship between policy learning and policy characteristics. As documented above, policy learning was substantial despite low observability, low relative advantage and high complexity of the policy. Actors' characteristics, predominantly epistemic capacity and participation in transnational networks thus seem to be more important when explaining the extent of policy learning in case of project KomPrax.

7. Case Study 3: Cross-sectoral Coordination of Youth Policy

In 2013, IUVENTA and the Youth Department of the Ministry of Education prepared Slovak Youth Strategy for 2014-2020. Interviewees identified cross-sectoral cooperation and focus on projects of cross-sectoral relevance as the major policy innovation in Slovak Youth Strategy.

Mr. Škrabský: “We had a bad experience with a strategy based on action plans. (...) A good example. The Ministry of Agriculture told us that it would increase the number of young farmers in Agrokomplex exhibition by 20 percent. But how that would improve the situation of young people in Slovakia, the Ministry did not tell. Therefore, we tried a different thing. We decided to include only things, which require a cooperation of multiple actors. The strategy is not based on action plans but on strategic goals.”

To reach these goals, relevant stakeholders are expected to propose the so-called “implementation projects”. Cross-sectoral Working Group was created to serve as a platform for coordination and implementation of these activities. In practice, it networks people, provides facilities and counselling. The Cross-sectoral Working Group consists of relevant stakeholders, such as representatives of ministries with youth agenda, representatives of regional government, representatives of Slovak Youth Council or Confederation of Trade Unions.

Although no implementation projects have been approved so far, cross-sectoral strategy was exported to several European countries through two channels (Mrs. Masárová). First, IUVENTA has strong partnerships with similar organizations in countries such as Belgium/Flanders or Serbia. The cooperation with these partner organizations often involves knowledge transfer during seminars or a lobby co-operation on a European level. Second, IUVENTA initiated regional cooperation in the area of youth work with other Visegrad Four countries. During its 2015 presidency, it invited the Eastern Partnership countries to join. The main aim was to promote the idea of cross-sectoral cooperation.

Mrs. Masárová: “[Partners in Serbia] asked us to share our cross-sectoral strategy with them. They used the strategy and some of our programs of youth organizations support. Approximately five countries asked us to introduce our programs and explain our philosophy, why we emphasize the cooperation between organizations. (...) Up until now we were receivers of knowledge but now we are in a position to provide the know how to other countries.”

7.1.1 Policy Innovation Drew upon Epistemic Capacity

IUVENTA drew upon its epistemic capacities when drafting Slovak Youth Strategy for 2014-2020 (H3). The Strategy was based on IUVENTA's in-house youth research (see IUVENTA undated). The strategy was drafted by 9 working groups (one for each field of action identified by the 2012 EU Youth Report), which consisted of researchers, representatives of the state and regional government, employers, NGOs and young people.

Lack of administrative capacity was identified as the main obstacle to policy innovation in the area of cross-sectoral, cross-administrative cooperation in youth policy (H3).

Mr. Škrabský: The lack of tradition of cooperation is the main barrier [to policy innovation]. (...) It is not merely about the cooperation among ministries, it is about the cooperation among different departments within the same ministry. This is a problem at big ministries, such as the Ministry of Education, where the cooperation between the department responsible for the primary and secondary education and the department responsible for youth agenda is very difficult.

Furthermore, electoral cycle breaks existing partnerships. There is no civil service or permanent bureaucracy in Slovakia. Each change of government therefore implies change of officials at all levels of government.

Mrs. Masárová: "People change every four years. That is a disadvantage. As a part of the project "Partnership", IUVENTA ran an education program for those employees of the regional government, who were in charge of the youth agenda. But when the time had come for them to get to work, the elections came and these people were replaced by different people who did not want to have anything to do with the project. (...) People at the ministries are replaced and partnerships vanish."

Mr. Škrabský: "It is about people when it should be about structures. (...) This could not happen in the United Kingdom."

Successful program implementation must be tailored to the local context.

Mrs. Masárová: "Majority of the work should be done on the local and regional level. We at the Ministry [of Education] may formulate the strategy but the implementation must be decentralized to places where the young people are. We cannot solve problems of Svidník [small town in the Eastern part of Slovakia] from Bratislava because we do not know these problems. Therefore, our priority is to communicate more with regional and local governments."

However, partnerships were not yet established between different levels, including national, regional or local levels. One of the key conclusions of Youth Employment Week, a joint initiative of the EPIC non-profit organization, the American Chamber of Commerce in the Slovak Republic, IUVENTA and the Representation of the European Commission in Slovakia, was that a successful implementation of the Youth Guarantee Program requires cross-sectoral cooperation of all relevant stakeholders (Polacková 2014). It was also argued that awareness about the Youth Guarantee Program was very low and stakeholders did not have sufficient information needed for meaningful involvement.

7.1.2 European Union as Facilitator of Learning and Cooperation

The European Union contributed to policy learning through knowledge diffusion via its documents. Slovak Youth strategy emphasized its compatibility with European frameworks, such as:

- EU Youth Strategy (2010-18);
- Youth in Action Programme (2007-2013);
- Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee;
- Article 165(2) of Lisbon Treaty, which calls for action aimed at encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe;
- “The future of the Council of Europe youth policy: AGENDA 2020”.

The Strategy claimed to be “fully compatible with the European framework” and its aims (Ministry of Education 2014: 2). “To ensure the maximum interconnectedness between the European and domestic level”, the strategy set objectives and targets in eight domains identified by the 2012 EU Youth Report, which among others include Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship and Education and Training (ibid).

European Union contributed to cross-sectoral coordination through its initiatives. The importance of Youth Guarantee, which explicitly called for a “holistic approach and cross-sectoral cooperation” (European Union 2013), was acknowledged during the interviews.

Mr. Škrabský: “We are often pressured by some legislation or European measures. Had there been no Youth guarantee, people would never have been brought together. They are often forced to cooperate.”

The European Union enforced cross-sectoral cooperation also through regular reporting exercise. The EU Youth Report was based on responses from the EU countries to a Commission questionnaire covering all the 8 strategic fields of action. The cooperation of Slovak ministries on filling in the questionnaire was coordinated by the Cross-sectoral Working Group.

7.1.3 Policy Characteristics of Cross-sectoral Coordination of Youth Policy

Interviewees pointed out to relatively low compatibility, low observability and high complexity of cross-sectoral approach to youth policy. The low compatibility of cross-sectoral initiatives with the existing legislation reflects both the lack of legislation innovation and the fast-changing environment.

Mr. Škrabský: “Some occupations did not exist five or ten years ago and the School Act is based on the Act from year 1921. If you compared those two laws, you would not find many differences. This is a typical example of the inability to engage in forward thinking.”

The cross-sectoral cooperation has a high level of complexity and low perceived relative advantage. Its purpose and likely results were not clear to the relevant stakeholders.

Mrs. Masárová: “Lack of interest is the first thing you encounter. You come up with an idea and they tell you that it is not their agenda. They are narrow-minded; they do not see the value-added. And there is another argument: we do not have funding for that. But it is not about money. Money is often of secondary importance. What matters is the willingness and the ability to see that all things are interconnected.”

Youth work in general was described as having “low visibility” (Mr. Škrabský). However, Mr. Škrabský did not necessarily view it as a disadvantage. According to him, the lack of political attention to the youth sector could be viewed as an advantage because the youth work agenda was not politicized, “so if we find the right people at the right place, we can push our agenda to the government”. Things began to change only when the European Union shifted the attention towards the youth employability.

Similarly to project KomPrax, there was a substantial amount of policy learning – especially from the European Union – although policy characteristics predict otherwise. Although it is impossible to draw any conclusions about the relationship between the policy characteristics and the speed of adoption, the case study of cross-sectoral strategy suggests that this relationship is not straightforward. Low “visibility” was associated with low politicization, which reduced the time needed for the adoption of the policy innovation.

8. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper explored the impact of actors' and policy characteristics on policy innovation and diffusion of youth employment policies in Slovakia. More specifically, it examined which actors promoted the policy innovation and why, what capacities they drew upon and which diffusion mechanisms were used. Following policy innovations, i.e. policies new to Slovakia, were examined: (1) reform of the vocational-education system along the model of the dual system, (2) Project KomPrax, which aimed to enhance competences of young people through informal learning activities outside the school, and (3) the cross-sectoral coordination of youth policy.

WHAT was transferred? There was a substantial knowledge transfer in all examined cases. Policy learning was enhanced by participation in networks (H5), which “represent a soft, informal and gradual mode for the international diffusion and dissemination of ideas and policy paradigms” (Stone 2001: 15). Actors participated predominantly in professional networks established by the European Union. The case of VET reform further involved the transfer of “institutions” (Stone 2004: 2). The new Slovak dual education law was a hybrid of VET systems in “corporatist” welfare states (Esping-Andersen 1990), such as Germany, Switzerland or Austria. The hybrid transfer was motivated by the need to better fit the dual education model to Slovak conditions. Finally, the pilot testing of the dual education model within RSOV project was associated with a massive “transfer of personnel” (Stone 2012: 486) from employers associated in ZAP SR – Automotive Industry Association to ŠIOV – State Institute of Vocational Education.

WHO was involved in the transfer? A number of internal actors, external actors and go-betweens were involved in the policy transfer. Policy innovation in project KomPrax and Cross-sectoral Working Group was driven by internal actors, particularly IUVENTA – Slovak Youth Institute, a state organization directly managed by the Ministry of Education. The core Slovak Youth Policy documents were prepared before EU documents. However, there was transfer of knowledge from the European Union, as well as Czech National Institute of Children and Youth. IUVENTA also exported its cross-sectoral strategy to youth policy to approximately five countries.

VET reform was driven by employers in the car producing sector, who were concerned about shortages of qualified workforce. This supports the view that motivation to innovate increases with increasing perceptions of the problem pressure (Karch 2006). Employers acted as policy entrepreneurs who developed their preferred policy solutions in advance (see Birkland 1997) and sold them to policymakers when the economic crisis opened the window of opportunity. For example, the first draft of the dual education law was prepared by ZAP SR before it approached the Ministry of Education. The case of VET reform is particularly interesting because of a big number of go-betweens

acting across multiple governments, such as professional associations, foreign chambers of commerce, transnational corporations, consultations firms or supranational organizations.

The European Union acted as a facilitator of learning and coordination and a funding agency. To induce policy learning, the EU relied on the “facilitated coordination” (Radaelli 2004: 13). The European Union engaged in the debate on the VET reform “with strong normative assumptions about how governments should learn” (Dunlop and Radaelli 2013: 600). The European Alliance for Apprenticeships launched to support the aims of the European Commission’s “Youth Guarantee” operated like a forum for discussion and a platform for policy transfer. Actors, such as Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKÖ) and Nestlé pledged to implement pilot projects in order to establish a dual apprenticeship system in Slovakia. Networks established in response to EU initiatives contributed to policy learning. Slovakia and Germany began to cooperate closely to reform Slovak VET system based on Germany’s model. Studies commissioned by WKÖ were used as background materials in the working group responsible for drafting the law on dual education. In case of project KomPrax and the Cross-sectoral Working Group, the European Union contributed to policy learning through diffusion of European policy documents.

Second, the European Union contributed to policy innovation and adoption of policies as a funding agency. Some of the pilot vocational schools, as well as project KomPrax were funded by structural funds. Initial project proposals had to be modified to fit into the format and eligibility criteria. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that some of these projects would never have become reality without the EU funding. The length of the funding programme period was cited as an obstacle to policy innovation. As regional operational programmes had to be approved by the European Commission prior to the outbreak of the crisis, they reduced flexibility of organizations to respond to new challenges.

WHAT CAPACITIES did the actors draw upon? The case studies support the view that policy innovation depends on state capacities (financial, bureaucratic and epistemic; see Graham et al. 2013: 13-14; Berry and Berry 2007, Stone 1999). Policy innovation was eased by epistemic capacities in all examined cases. Inefficient administrative capacity was the main obstacle to policy innovation in case of project KomPrax and cross-sectoral coordination of youth policy. Interviewees pinpointed the lack of communication within and between relevant ministries. Finally, financial capacity was crucial for policy adoption. Employers had significant resources and therefore could proceed with establishment of pilot centres extremely fast. In contrast, implementation of project KomPrax was delayed due to lack of funding.

WHICH diffusion mechanisms dominated? Actors relied exclusively on policy learning. As already noted, policy learning was stimulated by participation in networks, high epistemic capacity and various

EU initiatives. The evidence in favour of the hypothesis about the relationship between the policy characteristics and the learning-based diffusion is mixed at best. Makse and Valden (2011) suggest that a policy with a significant relative advantage, high compatibility, high observability but low complexity and low trialability will induce policy learning. Dual education was associated with high relative advantage, high observability and relatively low trialability. All of these traits are predicted to induce policy learning. Low compatibility should reduce the role of learning in the diffusion process. Nevertheless, interviewees explicitly cited lack of compatibility of dual education system with the existing legislation as an impulse for policy innovation and subsequently policy learning. In contrast, the hypothesis does not seem to hold for the project KomPrax and the cross-sectoral coordination of youth policy.

The differences in the results most likely reflect differences in the methodology. Makse and Valden asked policy experts to rate each attribute of a policy on a scale of 1 to 5. This static approach led to a classification of policies as “high” or “low” for each attribute. However, the case studies examined in this paper document that the process of institutional/policy innovation is lengthy: 12 years passed between the establishment of first experimental schools in 2002 and passing of the so-called dual education law in 2015. Complexity of dual education system gradually decreased over time as a result of policy learning. Interviews therefore provide a more nuanced view of policy attributes and their change over time.

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WP6 MISMATCH: MIGRATION**Re-emerging migration patterns: structures and policy lessons.**

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WP7 SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND BUSINESS START UPS**Business Start-Ups and Youth Self-Employment: A Policy Literature Overview**

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Ortlieb and Weiss (2015)

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Masso and Paes (2015)

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Business Start-Ups and Youth Self-Employment in Spain

González Menéndez and Cueto (2015)

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From entry jobs to career employment

(forthcoming)

STYLE Working Papers, WP10.2

Flexicurity and Subjective Insecurity

(forthcoming)

STYLE Working Papers, WP10.3

11. Research Partners

- | | |
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| 1. University of Brighton – BBS CROME | – United Kingdom |
| 2. Institute for Employment Studies | – United Kingdom |
| 3. Institute for the Study of Labor | – Germany |
| 4. Centre for European Policy Studies | – Belgium |
| 5. TARKI Social Research Institute | – Hungary |
| 6. University of Trento | – Italy |
| 7. National University of Ireland Galway | – Republic of Ireland |
| 8. Democritus University of Thrace | – Greece |
| 9. University of Oxford | – United Kingdom |
| 10. Economic & Social Research Institute | – Republic of Ireland |
| 11. University of Salerno | – Italy |
| 12. University of Oviedo | – Spain |
| 13. University of Tartu | – Estonia |
| 14. Cracow University of Economics | – Poland |
| 15. Slovak Governance Institute | – Slovakia |
| 16. Metropolitan University Prague | – Czech Republic |
| 17. Grenoble School of Management | – France |
| 18. University of Tilburg | – Netherlands |
| 19. University of Graz | – Austria |
| 20. Copenhagen Business School | – Denmark |
| 21. Norwegian Social Research | – Norway |
| 22. Swedish Institute for Social Research | – Sweden |
| 23. Koç University Social Policy Centre | – Turkey |
| 24. University of Turin | – Italy |
| 25. EurActiv | – Belgium |

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12. Advisory Groups

Consortium Advisory Network

Business Europe

www.buinessseurope.eu

ETUI: European Trade Union Institute

www.etui.org

European Youth Forum

www.youthforum.org

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

www.eurofound.europa.eu

ILO: International Labour Office

www.ilo.org

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

www.oecd.org

OSE: Observatoire Sociale Européen

www.ose.be

SOLIDAR: European network of NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe

www.solidar.org

EurActiv

www.euractiv.com

European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1036>

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