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The role of social dialogue in the transfer of the dual system of vocational education and training: The case of Serbia

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73 WORKING PAPER



The role of social dialogue in the transfer of the dual system of vocational education and training. The case of Serbia

Vienna, June 2023

Margarita Langthaler
Proloeng Top

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List of Abbreviations

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
ADC	Austrian Development Cooperation's
AHKs	German Chambers of Commerce Abroad
BIBB	Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training
BMBF	German Federal Ministry of Education and Research
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Development and Cooperation
CEEP	European Centre of Employers and Enterprises
CVAE	Council for Vocational and Adult Education
DCdVET	Donor Committee of Dual VET
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EU	European Union
FDI	foreign direct investment
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GOVET	Central Office for International Vocational Training Cooperation
IAEU	Institute for the Advancement of Education and Upbringing
IC-VPET	International Cooperation in Vocational and Professional Education and Training
ILO	International Labour Organization
LSGU	local self-government units
MoESTD	Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development
NES	National Employment Service.
NGOs	Non Governmental Organization
NQFC	Council for the National Qualifications Framework
QA	Qualifications Agency
RS	Republic of Serbia
SCC	Serbian Chamber of Commerce
SCTM	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
SERI	State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation
UEAPME	European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
VET	vocational education and training

Abstract

The international transfer of dual systems of vocational education and training (VET) has grown on a global scale. This is due to low youth unemployment rates and high economic productivity in German-speaking countries, where the dual systems are historically rooted. At the governance level, an institutionalised tripartite dialogue between government, employer representatives and organised labour underpins dual VET in German-speaking countries. In the transfer processes, there is an observable trend towards reducing this tripartite institutional setting to a dialogue between employers and the government. However, neglecting the role of employees and their interest groups might jeopardise expected human development effects of dual system transfer such as decent work, improved standards of living and social cohesion. This paper will analyse the policy transfer process to Serbia where a dual VET track was introduced in 2017. To visualise political interests rather than VET improvement as main drivers of the VET reform, the paper will deploy a political economy and institutionalist lens. It argues that tripartite social dialogue is an important element of dual VET transfer if the latter is supposed to contribute to human development.

Key words: dual vocational education and training, education policy transfer, social dialogue, human development

1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2008/09, the interest in dual systems of vocational education and training (VET) has grown on a global scale. This is due to empirically observable low youth unemployment rates and high economic productivity in German-speaking countries, where the dual systems are the predominant mode of VET. Just as interest in adopting such systems has increased, so have endeavours amongst German-speaking countries to export them. Development cooperation agencies have been important, but not the only, actors in the multitude of transfer activities that have unfolded since.

From a policy perspective, the attractiveness of the dual system is generally seen in the close cooperation between VET institutions and employers. Indeed, public discourse describes this as the driving force behind the high level of skills and employability generated by this form of VET provision in its countries of origin. Yet, this perspective rarely acknowledges the particular patterns of social organisation of work in German-speaking countries, condensed in what has been coined “Berufsprinzip”, as a determining feature of the dual system. In fact, the dual system rests embedded in a complex web of institutionalised negotiation processes that, historically, follow patterns of corporatist social relations. At the governance level of dual VET, this translates into an institutionalised tripartite dialogue between government, employer representatives and organised labour.

However, in the transfer processes, both at conceptual and implementation level, there is an observable trend towards reducing this tripartite institutional setting to a dialogue between employers and the government, thereby minimising the role of employees and their interest groups. While through an employability and productivity lens, this trend might appear to be of negligible significance, at least in the short run, it is not from a human development perspective. Improved standards of living, decent working conditions as well as social equity and cohesion are essentially dependent on the involvement of the third party, organised labour and civil society actors, into the systems’ governance and broader institutional embedment. Moreover, the track record of manifold attempts to transfer the dual system is mixed. In countries where social relations do not follow corporatist patterns it has proven difficult to establish such a VET model at systemic level.

In this paper, we argue that, in order to fully understand the qualities of and driving forces behind the dual system, it is essential to consider the institutional embodiment of the underlying tripartite dialogue. Applying an institutionalist view, we ask whether and in which manner tripartite social dialogue in transfer processes occurs and how this affects outcomes. Our hypothesis is that transfer processes, when conceptually and practically deprived of their tripartite institutional settings, might eventually generate institutional shifts that, contrary to the models in German-speaking countries, undermine rather than strengthen social cohesion. We have chosen the example of Serbia to sustain this hypothesis since such dynamics are easily discernible there.

At the conceptual level, this paper intends to contribute to a strengthening of political economy approaches to VET and, in particular, to dual system transfer research, thereby serving to broaden the academic debate, which has, so far, largely neglected the political dimensions of VET transfer. At the level of transfer practice, we intend to contribute to discussions above all in the field of development cooperation and development policy. Development activities are usually framed in normative rather than pragmatic terms. Hence questions of whether or not educational policy transfer helps or undermines wider development objectives are more important than in strictly economic or commercial fields. Against this background, political economy approaches can be helpful to explain the mixed results of many transfer attempts to developing countries so far and to shed light on potential institutional outcomes that might undermine development objectives.

This paper is structured as follows: After briefly setting out our methodological approaches, we will discuss political economy and comparative educationalist literature to further an

understanding of the dual system as embedded in corporatist socioeconomic relations that mould its underlying tripartite institutional arrangements. Subsequently, we will draw on approaches from policy transfer analysis in comparative education to view educational transfer not so much as a technical, but rather as an essentially political process, shaped by political and economic interests of actors in both sending and receiving countries. This is followed by an analysis of policy prescriptive and academic literature on the role of social dialogue in dual system transfer processes. The empirical part of the paper will discuss the example of Serbia. We will analyse the transfer process that has led to the establishment of the Serbian system of dual VET in 2017 through the lens of Rappelaye's 'political production model' (2012b). Thereby we aim to explore how the specific socioeconomic context has shaped the dual VET reform in Serbia with a particular focus on tripartite social dialogue. With a view to development policy and development cooperation the last section of this paper will outline policy implications and recommendations. Conclusions will sum up.

The paper is based on insights from academic literature on the political economy of the dual VET system in German-speaking countries and on educational policy transfer. Analysis of the Serbian dual VET reform is based on a literature review including academic publications from educational, political and economic disciplines, as well as policy papers from Serbian, EU and bilateral (mainly German-speaking) donor sources. However, detailed monitoring data covering the implementation process is lacking, and academic literature is generally scarce. Between August and November 2021, 16 semi-structured expert interviews (Bogner et al. 2009) were conducted with Serbian academics, Serbian and non-Serbian representatives from institutions involved in the transfer and implementation process, as well as experts from bilateral and multilateral donor agencies. Interviews were assessed using content analysis (Mayring 2010).

Given the limited data available on the dual VET reform in Serbia, our arguments are supported, where appropriate, by reference to interview data. Interviews are indicated with sequential numbers. An anonymised and institutionalised list of interviewees can be obtained from the authors.

2. The dual system in German-speaking countries: 'Berufsprinzip' and social dialogue

As Deissinger (2001) states, it is paramount to distinguish 'the organising principle' of each VET system from its outward appearances, i.e., the specific way in which work is organised as well as how education and work relate to each other in a given societal context. Consequently, the organising principle of the dual system in German-speaking countries is not, as commonly assumed, the duality of learning sites, i.e., work-based and formal learning in schools. Rather, their core element is the concept of 'Beruf' (Deissinger 2001; Greinert 2001). The German term 'Beruf' designates a set of operations for which a range of specific knowledge and abilities are required, whose execution encompasses self-reliance and autonomy and which comprise multidimensional work processes (Paul-Kohlhoff 1997). In this holistic understanding, 'Beruf' is often seen as opposed to the Anglo-Saxon model of work processes fragmented into narrowly defined tasks, for which a restricted set of skills without prior qualifications are sufficient (Allais 2012; Wheelahan/Moodie 2011).

A 'Beruf' is a formally recognised social category. In a dialectic way, it structures the VET system and the labour market and, in turn, is structured by them. As Allais and Nathan (2012: 13) state, this mutual correspondence between VET programmes and the regulated occupations ('Berufe') in the labour market reduces competition at the level of intermediate qualifications and helps to secure employment for graduates.

Context-specific and complex ensembles of formalised bargaining processes between state and non-state actors typically underpin VET systems structured by the concept of 'Beruf'. From

a comparative-institutional perspective, the political economy of skills approach defines them as ‘collective skill formation systems’ (Busemeyer/Trampusch 2012: 12), emphasising the cooperation of several social actors in the provision and governance of VET (Busemeyer/Trampusch 2012; Streeck 2012; Thelen 2004).

Collective skill formation systems are typically associated with coordinated market economies with corporatist socioeconomic relations,¹ of which the German-speaking countries are well-noted examples. One basic characteristic of such relations is what is called ‘social dialogue’, i.e. more or less institutionalised negotiation processes between the government, employers and organised labour. Ideally, social dialogue succeeds in striking a balance between employers’ and employees’ interests, and by doing so fosters economic stability and non-conflictive social relations in workplaces and beyond.

However, the concrete form of these negotiation processes, as well as the bargaining power and influence of the various state and non-state actors, differs across the German-speaking world². For instance, while in Austria and Germany, employees’ organisations and labour unions assume an important role at all levels of the system, in Switzerland their impact is more indirect (Deissinger/Gonon 2016; Emmenegger/Seitzl 2020).

A comparative historical perspective emphasises that differing political and economic relations, conflictive to a greater or lesser degree, have determined the development of dual systems in German-speaking countries. As Trampusch (2014) describes, in both Germany and Austria, craft policy during the early industrialisation period conferred control over vocational education to artisans for political reasons rather than due to particular skill requirements. Yet, the political objectives of this ‘bulwark of the middle classes’ (Wolf 2017: 617, translation by the author) differed. In Germany it was directed against the emerging power of social democracy, in Austria against emerging economic liberalism. Consequently, also coalitions of forces differed³. From the 1920s onwards, the driving force for the collectivisation of vocational education in Germany was tariff policy, while in Austria it was state legislation.

Indeed, the concrete shape and outcomes of the current dual system in its countries of origin are influenced by their historical trajectory and depend on the (transforming) relations between the state and the involved actors, leading to greater or lesser political weight of their respective interests. For instance, Emmenegger and Seitzl (2020: 40) describe that, due to the weaker role of trade unions in the Swiss dual system, apprentices’ wages are relatively lower than in Germany, and apprentices spend more time in productive work than their German counterparts.

Whatever the concrete relation of forces between the state and non-state actors, the collective form of skill formation points to a corporatist societal model, whose stability is based on a balanced and consensus-seeking integration of employers’ and employees’ interests.’. Even in cases where the employees’ side appears to exhibit a weaker position in governance, such as in Switzerland, many of the dual system’s features that are deemed internationally attractive cannot be explained without considering the tripartite – rather than the dual – social dialogue in which the system is embedded.

This applies first and foremost to the admired employment effects, which stem from the organic linkage between dual VET and the labour market due to the ‘Berufsprinzip’ rather than from the high share of training at workplaces alone. This correspondence and the resulting labour market regulations are a product of the corporatist institutional arrangements in German-speaking countries. Similar observations can be made for the quality standards of the training, social protection, remuneration and security of apprenticeship, which historically have been monitored by trade unions (Deissinger/Gonon 2016; Šćepanović/Martín Artiles 2020; Wolf 2017).

¹ See also the Varieties of Capitalism literature, e.g. Hall/Soskice 2001

² For comparative studies see e.g. Deissinger/Gonon 2016; Emmenegger/Seitzl 2020; Graf et al. 2012; Trampusch 2014.

³ On Germany see also Mayer 2001; Thelen 2004; Wolf 2017.

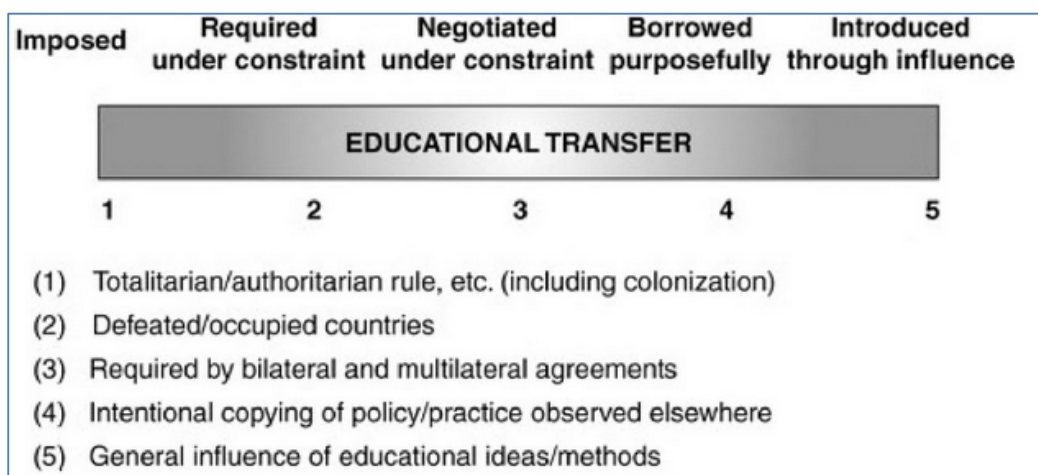
3. Education policy transfer as a political process

Insights from the academic literature (e.g. Wiemann et al. 2018) and evaluations of transfer to developing countries (e.g. Stockmann 2014) report limited success of dual system transfer. Findings show some successful examples at company level, but rarely at the systemic level, and point to the system's limited suitability for different socioeconomic contexts⁴. The current vogue for such transfer, despite its mixed success rates, calls for a broader analytical perspective to help understand its underlying reasons and objectives. A political economy perspective on policy transfer in education can be helpful in this regard.

A growing body of literature from diverse disciplines (for an overview see Li/Pilz 2021; Wiemann et al. 2018) analyses different aspects and levels of educational and VET policy transfer. The notion 'policy transfer' was originally coined by political science (Dolowitz/Marsh 1996), whereas the terms 'policy borrowing and lending' have been framed by scholars in comparative education research (Steiner-Khamsi 2012: 6). The meanings of the various notions overlap⁵ but indicate important contextual differences, such as whether it is the sending or the receiving country driving the transfer or the degree of voluntariness of the transfer processes.

To draw attention to these contextual factors, Philips and Ochs (2004) have developed the influential 'Spectrum of Educational Transfer' that distinguishes five stages between 'imposed' transfer and policies introduced through influence.

Figure 1: Spectrum of Educational Transfer



Source: Philips/Ochs 2004

In a similar vein, Barabasch et al (2021) highlight the tradition of asymmetric policy transfer processes in VET in the context of development cooperation. Transferred VET policies were chosen to respond to Northern economic interests rather than to well-defined national needs of recipient countries.

Rappleye (2012a: 402) further elaborates Philips and Ochs' spectrum to allow for a nuanced description of the multiple, complex influences, dynamics and (internal as well as external) interests that shape policy transfer processes, in particular in contexts of power asymmetries. He adds the two categories "Learning from within" and "Circumscribed learning" in order to work out additional differentiations in the area of "voluntary" policy borrowings. In addition, he

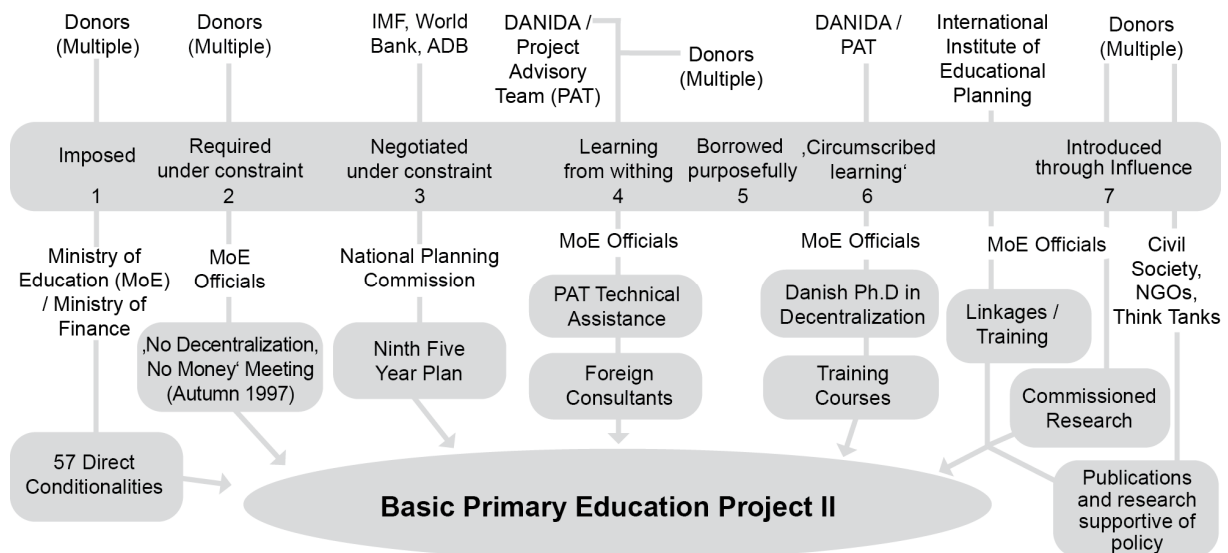
⁴ Šćepanović and Martín Artiles (2020) discuss dual system transfer process across the EU, pointing to improvements in labour market transition, but also significant trade-offs in terms of training quality, inclusiveness or sustainability.

⁵ Across and within disciplines, a variety of terms is used such as 'policy transfer', 'policy borrowing', 'policy lending', 'policy diffusion', 'policy learning', 'lessons drawing' etc. For a discussion on their differing, but often overlapping meanings see Wiemann et al. (2018). In this chapter, we will use the term 'policy transfer'.

questions the unit of analysis of the (national) state. Indeed, transfer often takes place on different levels, many non-state actors such as NGOs or the private sector have gained considerable influence, and internal conflicts between state actors (such as different ministries) frequently occur. Rappleye emphasises that transfer processes have to be thought of in terms of their multiplicity and simultaneity.

As an example, Rappleye visualises the multiple policy transfer processes, involving a multitude of national and international actors and occurring simultaneously at different levels, that have led to the establishment of the Basic Primary Education Project II in Nepal.

Figure 2: Revised „Spectrum of Educational Transfer“ with reference to BPEP II in Nepal



Source: Rappleye 2012a: 402.

In order to emphasise the political, rather than technical character of educational policy transfer, Rappleye (2012b) elaborates another framework, which he calls the ‘political production model’. Adding to debates in comparative education between world culture theory (Meyer et al. 1992; Meyer/Ramirez 2000; Ramirez/Boli 1987) and systems theory (Schriewer 2000, 1990; Steiner-Khamsi 2004, 2000)⁶, Rappleye develops a hybrid approach based on actor-centred realism, systems theory and post-structuralist perspectives (Rappleye 2012b: 140). This theoretical approach underpins his ‘political production model’, which he distils from a comparison of educational policy transfer from Japan to the USA in the 1980s and from the UK to Japan in the early 2000s. The model essentially postulates that often political objectives determine transfer decisions to a greater extent than the technical attraction of particular education policies in other countries.

Rappleye uses a theatre metaphor to compare policy transfer processes to a theatre stage production that help political actors to get “‘their message out’ by articulating it in ‘references to elsewhere’ (Rappleye 2012b: 137)”. To explain this metaphor, he divides the transfer process into four sequential stages denominating each with terms used in a theatre production.

- Scripting phase: This initial stage brings together powerful political actors to discuss a long-standing political goal in the form of a concrete reform proposal. Drafting of the script often coincides with times of heightened political sensitivity (e.g. upcoming elections).
- Production phase: First, a ‘discourse of crisis’ is developed through the creation of specific institutions, background materials and discourses. Subsequently, a foreign example – a ‘lesson from elsewhere’ (ibid: 138) is produced and proposed as a possible solution.

⁶ For an overview of the debates see Langthaler 2017; Wiemann et al. 2018.

- Staging: The script is acted out for a public that has already been primed by the '*crisis discourse*'. Typically, in this phase, the political origin of the project is masked, as are shortcomings or critiques of the foreign policy in question.
- Response or reaction phase: This includes concrete policy outcomes, acted out according to factors such as the target audience, the credibility of the drama, and the urgency of the reform need. Eventually, however, real effects in terms of innovations in the education system, whether they occur or not, originate not so much from the 'outside', but rather from powerful coalitions of actors transmitted via discourses in the 'inside'.

Rappleye (2012b) uses the 'political production model' to explore transfer processes occurring in contexts of flat power asymmetries and high degrees of voluntariness. In this paper, we draw on his model to analyse a transfer process in a context of substantial power asymmetries. Precisely in such contexts, it is instructive to question the perceived neutrality of transfer processes and to scrutinise their apparent voluntariness. Asymmetric power relations between outside and inside actors might give the former a bigger role than described in Rappleye's original model (see the example of BPEP II in Nepal above). In post-colonial settings, outside actors, such as donors or multilateral organisations, might even be the drivers of such transfer processes⁷.

Applied to the analysis of dual system transfer processes, Rappleye's model can help to discern their political features. It allows us to distinguish economic and political legitimisation interests in sending countries, as well as political interests in the receiving countries, to present (easy) solutions for real or perceived crisis scenarios. In cases of dual system transfer, such crisis discourses often refer to high youth unemployment rates presumably caused by skills mismatch and outdated VET systems. Typically, dominant discourses accompanying the transfer rarely discuss the transferred system's complexities, such as the multifaceted rather than direct causal relation between low youth unemployment and the dual system (e.g. Lassnigg 2016). In the same vein, problematic issues, such as the dual system's historical gender bias (Mayer 2001), its stratifying nature (Atzmüller 2011; Ribolits 1998), lack of social mobility (Protsch/Solga 2016) or the fact that in its countries of origin it is itself increasingly under pressure of being displaced by higher education (Graf 2013), are frequently left aside. In addition, such dominant discourses tend to marginalise critical views inside receiving countries (see the example on Serbia below).

Before applying Rappleye's (2012b) political production model to the case of dual system transfer to Serbia, in the following section we will discuss the observable trend of omitting or reducing tripartite social dialogue in dual system transfer processes.

4. Social dialogue lost during transfer?

Over the last twenty years, and reinforced by the financial crisis in 2008/9, a policy shift has become notable in many multilateral organisations, emphasising the (rediscovered) significance of VET for employment. This 'renaissance of VET' included a focus on work-based learning (as opposed to merely school-based VET) and an increasing interest in dual system type VET provision such as apprenticeships⁸.

The EU, for instance, has increased its efforts to improve the overall quality and attractiveness of VET in Europe since the signing of the Copenhagen Declaration in 2002⁹, while less specific in its recommendations in the first years, the EU incrementally began to focus its VET policy on patterns of dual learning (Martínez-Izquierdo/Torres Sánchez 2022). In 2013, the EU

⁷ This is aptly exemplified by (Auld et al. 2019) analysing how multilateral organisations essentially drove the adoption process of 'PISA for Development' by the Cambodian government.

⁸ See e.g. The World Bank 2018; UNESCO-UNEVOC 2013

⁹ See <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/content/copenhagen-declaration> (25.04.2023)

established the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. Since then, dual VET systems have become a key reference point of EU VET policy¹⁰.

Parallel to the EU developments, bilateral activities of dual system transfer have intensified over the last ten years, in particular across German-speaking countries. However, the volume of and institutional settings underpinning these transfer activities differ substantially between the sending countries.

In recent years, policy discourse has abandoned the idea of whole-system transfer. Rather, transfer processes seek to contextualise dual education in the institutional setting, VET traditions and requirements of receiving countries. A range of literature (Bliem et al. 2014; Gonon 2014; Pilz 2016; Strahm et al. 2016) discusses categories that are decisive for the functioning of the dual system and recommend these categories be implemented according to receiving countries' contexts.

In this section, we will first review existing policy prescriptive and academic literature on VET and dual system transfer in order to gain an understanding whether and how tripartite social dialogue is reflected as a constitutive category. Based on these literatures, we will then briefly discuss the consequences of omitting social dialogue in dual system transfer, above all from a human development perspective.

At the EU level, social partners (ETUC, BusinessEurope, UEAPME, CEEP¹¹) are active participants in the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. As Šćepanović and Martín Artiles (2020) highlight, it was upon their initiative that the EU formalised basic requirements of dual training (e.g., legal regulations, contracts, remuneration of apprentices) in the 2018 European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships. The latter reflects the criteria of the ETUC framework proposal (European Trade Union Confederation n.d.).

Since a few years, the ILO has been promoting apprenticeships as one efficient form of skill development within the normative framework of 'decent work'. In accordance with its mandate, the ILO emphasises the necessity of meaningful social dialogue and the involvement of strong workers' and employers' organisations in the apprenticeship systems. The following six building blocks are identified for quality apprenticeship: (1) robust regulatory framework, (2) meaningful social dialogue – involvement from employers' and workers' organizations, (3) clear roles and responsibilities, (4) equitable funding arrangements, (5) strong labour market relevance, and (6) inclusiveness (International Labour Organization 2021: 8).

Among bilateral donors, Germany can be considered the most active one in terms of dual system transfer comprising a multitude of different public and private actors. Fontdevila et al (2022) identify three categories: a) actors in the economic arena (e.g. companies, business associations and German Chambers of Commerce Abroad – AHKs); b) actors in the development arena (e.g. German Federal Ministry for Development and Cooperation – BMZ, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit – GIZ etc.), as well as c) actors in the education arena (e.g. German Federal Ministry of Education and Research – BMBF, Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training – BIBB). These three groups have different, partially contrasting, transfer rationales and approaches. While those from the economic arena engage in transfer activities to respond to the workforce requirements of German industries operating abroad, the development actors refer to humanitarian and development oriented rationales. In the education arena, rationales are predominantly of a political and reputational nature. There are equally differences in approaches, mandates and instruments.

The German government has been striving to coordinate this multitude of VET transfer actors and activities. As an outcome of its 2013 Strategy Paper on international VET cooperation (Der

¹⁰ See, e.g., the 2015 Riga Commitment (European Commission et al. 2015) as well as the 2018 Council of the EU Recommendation on a European framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (Council of the European Union 2018). For a discussion on EU policy on dual system transfer see Šćepanović/Martín Artiles 2020.

¹¹ ETUC – European Trade Union Confederation, UEAPME – European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, CEEP – European Centre of Employers and Enterprises

Bundestag 2013), it has established the Central Office for International Vocational Training Cooperation (GOVET)¹² at the BIBB and a Round Table¹³ composed of various stakeholders (Fontdevila et al. 2022).

In recent years, attention to social dialogue as a constitutive feature has been rising within German public discourse on dual system transfer. The 2013 German Parliament's Strategy Paper on international VET cooperation mentions "cooperation between social partners, business associations and the state" (Der Bundestag 2013: 3) as an important element. The 2019 update by the German government outlines it as one of five key principles (Die Bundesregierung 2019: 2):

- Joint responsibility of the state, trade and industry and the social partners
- Learning within the work process
- Acceptance of national occupational, training and examination standards
- Qualified vocational education and training staff at companies and vocational schools
- Institutionalised VET and labour market research and VET consultancy

On its website, GOVET identifies five success factors for the transfer of the dual system, including "Cooperation of government and industry". Under this heading, the benefits of a broad dialogue between many stakeholders, including social partners, trade unions and civil society are explained¹⁴.

Among other funding priorities, the German government has been financing cooperation projects intended to support dialogue between employers' associations and organised labour in VET¹⁵. In 2022, a funding framework was published that references the above mentioned principles (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung 2022).

In the practice of transfer activities, however, there appears to be far less emphasis on social dialogue. In its 2017 strategy paper on TVET cooperation, German development cooperation refers to five success factors that are similar, albeit not identical to the five principles mentioned above (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development 2017: 10):

- Foster dialogue between governments and the private sector;
- Make sure that TVET is practice-oriented and responsive to labor market needs;
- Invest in training for TVET personnel;
- Develop uniform standards;
- Institutionalize research and career guidance.

Interestingly, in the wording of the first success factor, reference to the joint responsibility of state, trade and industry and the social partners is reduced to dialogue between governments and the private sector (Die Bundesregierung 2019: 2). This resonates with evaluation reports of German TVET projects in Egypt and Kenya which refer to cooperation with the private sector, without mentioning stakeholders from the employees' side (Abdel-Massih-Thiemann et al. 2021; Ganier-Raymond/Ojwang 2022).

While being traditionally more cautious than Germany (Langthaler 2013), Switzerland established international VET cooperation as a national priority several years ago. The 2014 strategy paper (SBFI et al. 2014) was jointly published by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC),

¹² See <https://www.govet.international/en/index.php> (25.04.2023)

¹³ See <https://www.govet.international/en/2353.php> (25.04.2023)

¹⁴ See <https://www.govet.international/en/13711.php> (25.04.2023)

¹⁵ See https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/shareddocs/bekanntmachungen/de/2019/08/2595_bekanntmachung.html (20.04.2023)

the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and other governmental bodies. The SERI runs the Website International Cooperation in Vocational and Professional Education and Training (IC-VPET)¹⁶ as a common platform for all stakeholders. It also leads the IC-VPET coordination group, which maintains a network of stakeholders from business, education, science and civil society and fosters coordination and exchange among them.

There is little information available from publications as to the significance Swiss actors attribute to social dialogue in dual system policy transfer. The “International Strategy on Education, Research and Innovation” mentions social partners under the heading “professional organisations (...) [which] contribute to international cooperation in [VET] (State Secretariat for education, research and innovation SERI 2018: 18)”. However, inter-ministerial (see Oertle/Swars 2016; SBFi et al. 2014; State Secretariat for education, research and innovation SERI 2018) and development cooperation papers (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation 2017) tend to emphasise cooperation with employers’ organisations as a key principle, while any mention of employees’ or civic organisations is marginal.

Austria, being the smallest of the three German-speaking donors in terms of budget and capacity, applies a politically more restrained approach (Langthaler 2013). Dual VET transfer is less of a national priority, and inter-ministerial cooperation is more informal (Langthaler 2015). Austrian Development Cooperation’s (ADC) policy paper on VET (Austrian Development Agency n.d.) strongly emphasises partner country ownership, and cooperation with non-state actors includes private sector and other interest groups as well as civil society organisations. In its latest Three-Year Programme (Bundesministerium für europäische und internationale Angelegenheiten 2022: 18), ADC refers to cooperation in the field of VET with companies, the Austrian Chamber of Commerce as well as Austrian VET institutions, while trade unions or the Austrian Chamber of Labour are not included in this list of preferred partners. This resonates with the practice of ADC. Austria’s main activities in international dual VET being linked to cooperation with Austrian enterprises and the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, there is a focus on dialogue with employer organisations (Langthaler 2015).

In 2016, the Donor Committee of Dual VET (DCdVET) was founded to coordinate transfer activities of Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein and Switzerland. The DCdVET emphasises cooperation with the private sector in its policy papers (Donor Committee for Dual Vocational Education and Training n.d.; Jäger 2016) and on its website¹⁷. By contrast, involvement of workers’ and civil society organisations receives marginal attention, if at all.

As for the trade union side, international cooperation in dual system transfer is only incipient. In 2015, the German Trade Union Confederation initiated the project ‘Unions4VET’¹⁸, a network of several EU and non-European countries aiming to improve VET through strengthened trade union involvement. A common challenge reported by many partner countries is that, historically, institutional contexts have been more conflictive and less corporatist than in Germany and, therefore, often lack a tradition of trade union involvement in VET. Consequently, trade unions commonly have neither capacity nor substantial legitimacy to build on, while other stakeholders might see little advantage in involving them in the dialogue.

Analysis of the academic literature draws a more complex picture. Some studies refer to the social partnership principle found in German-speaking countries and emphasise the significance of consensus-based approaches in terms of dialogue with all stakeholders (Euler 2015, 2013; Euler/Wieland 2015; Gonon 2014). Pilz (2016) refers to ‘privileges’ in his ‘6P-strategy for VET transfer’ describing necessary pay-offs for skilled workers. Others mention

¹⁶ See <https://www.sbf.admin.ch/sbf/en/home/education/international-cooperation-in-education/swiss-international-cooperation-in-vpet--ic-vpet-.html> (20.04.2023)

¹⁷ See <https://www.dcdualvet.org/> (25.04.2023)

¹⁸ See <https://www.unions4vet.de/en/> (20.04.2023)

social partner dialogue only marginally, focusing rather on bilateral cooperation between the state and the private sector (e.g. Bliem et al. 2014; Strahm et al. 2016).

At the empirical level, literature reports little evidence on the involvement of employees' organisations in transfer processes to transition and developing countries¹⁹. Analysing German transfer efforts in Latin America and Africa, Frommberger et al. (2020) point to general difficulties in involving interest groups, especially when they lack cohesion and influence in the respective countries. In Costa Rica, stakeholder dialogue on the introduction of a dual system did involve trade unions, but no agreement was found with employers' organisations over the question of apprentices' legal status, protection and remuneration (Láscarez-Smith/Baumann 2020; Láscarez-Smith/Schmees 2021). Maitra et al (2022) describe the process of implementing a German-inspired dual training system in India as a basically top-down endeavour with little involvement neither of employer nor employee organisations (see also (Mehrotra et al. 2015). Langthaler (2015) reports a trend towards omitting dialogue with employees' organisations in Austrian transfer activities, mainly in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. At the EU level, Šćepanović and Martín Artiles (2020) describe the institutional weakness of both employers' and employees' organisations as an impediment to dual system implementation. Weak employee organisations in many EU countries, especially at the local and company level, translate into limited control over implementation and fuel fears that the quality of training might suffer.

To sum up, there is a recent discursive trend to emphasize the importance of tripartite social dialogue for dual system transfer. However, this is manifest mainly in German, EU and ILO policy literature, while the other German-speaking donors focus on state–private sector dialogue. On the other hand, at the empirical level there is little to suggest that in the practice of dual system transfer tripartite dialogue would play a significant role. Here, the main criteria to categorize a VET policy as 'dual' is formalised work-based learning and institutionalised cooperation between the state and the private sector. Social dialogue, where mentioned, mostly figures as an add-on. In addition, the term's meaning is blurred, often not including organised labour. Conceptually, the key negotiation processes are mostly reduced to employers and the state.

At this point, the question arises how a diminished or omitted role for social dialogue between employers' and employees' organisations might impact dual system type VET arrangements in recipient countries. While employer-VET school cooperation might suffice to ensure improved skill supply at the company level (Pilz/Wiemann 2021), when employing a human development perspective some issues arise. Often trade unions and civil society organisations in recipient countries oppose the introduction of dual system VET models on the basis of concerns over exploitative work arrangements for apprentices with limited learning, as well as fears of wage dumping and the undermining of social security systems (e.g. Láscarez-Smith/Schmees 2021). Other risks include distortions of the teaching processes, reducing them to the narrow, immediate requirements of employers (Busemeyer/Vossiek 2016; Šćepanović/Martín Artiles 2020; Wolf 2017) and unsustainable company engagement beyond their short-term recruitment needs (e.g. Langthaler 2015). At a more general level, the involvement of trade unions and other employees' organisations is deemed important for social acceptance and esteem of VET (e.g. Council of the European Union 2018; Euler 2013; European Trade Union Confederation n.d.). As discussed below for the example of Serbia, in recipient countries with strong VET traditions – as in much of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe – concerns include impoverished VET curricula, reduced budgets for school-based VET and limited educational mobility and equality for working-class youth.

Busemeyer and Vossiek (2016), comparing Ireland and England, describe an altogether different dynamic. They explain that, owing to the deployment of deliberately corporatist policies, Ireland was more successful in establishing dual training arrangements than England, where the government dismissed such consensus-seeking endeavours. In fact, employers'

¹⁹ See also de Amesti et al. 2021; Martínez-Izquierdo/Torres Sánchez 2022; Oeben/Klumpp 2021

reluctance to (financially) engage in work-based training has turned out to be a major problem in many transfer processes. This has much to do with poaching, which is equally among the oft-cited challenges in dual system transfer processes (e.g. Euler 2015; Pilz 2016) and points to the lack of cooperation between social partners, but also between companies themselves.

In this paper, we will use the example of Serbia to argue that from a political economy perspective the omission of social dialogue substantially impacts dual system transfer. Not being based on a balance of interests of various social actors, including organised labour, such transfer processes may result in institutional shifts in favour of certain interest groups to the detriment of others. This may have the adverse and unintended effect of damaging, rather than strengthening, social stability.

5. Serbia: is dual VET a panacea?

In this section, we will draw on Rappleye's (2012b) 'political production model' to examine the dual system transfer process to Serbia. A short description of the Serbian socioeconomic context will be followed by the outline of the implementation process of dual VET so far. Finally, the processes' impact on institutional and socioeconomic relations will be analysed loosely based on Rappleye's concepts.

5.1. The socioeconomic context

VET in Serbia is embedded in a complex and unfavourable socioeconomic context. In the 1990s, the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the sanctions imposed on Serbia induced devastating deindustrialisation processes. In 2000, Serbia embarked on a transition pathway to establish a market economy and to join the EU, and in 2012, it was granted EU candidate status. After average growth of over 5 % of GDP between 2001 and 2008 (Uvalic et al. 2020: 38), the economy faced a sharp decline with the financial crisis of 2008/09 and is still struggling to recover. Recent data show an increase in growth rates in the aftermath of the Covid 19 pandemic. However, it is yet to be seen whether this dynamic will last and translate into increased employment and income (Uvalic et al. 2020; Uvalić 2021).

According to World Bank data, 21.7 % of the population lived below the national poverty line in 2019, while 2.3 % lived on less than 2.15 US\$ per day²⁰. In 2021, the overall unemployment rate amounted to 11 %, and the youth unemployment rate to 26.4 % (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2022: 10–11). The minimum wage, fixed at Euro 423.60 per month in 2022²¹, is considered to be below the cost of the average consumer basket (Đokić/Jovanović 2019: 90, Stadler/Adam 2022). Outward migration, especially among the young and well-educated has led to constant decline of the population since 2000. Informal employment is still relevant, with a rate of 18.7 % of total employment according to an ILO report (ILO 2021).

As part of an economic liberalisation strategy, attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) has been among the government's priorities. Policy measures include a favourable tax system, government subsidies, low wage levels and flexible labour regulations (Stadler/Adam 2022; Uvalic et al. 2020). As a result, FDI has arrived mainly in the low and mid-tech labour-intensive sectors with little technology transfer to local firms and weak incentives for technological upgrading (ibid.). Among the biggest foreign investors are the German-speaking countries, together with Italy, the Netherlands, and China (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2021). In 2020, 143 Austrian companies had establishments in Serbia, employing altogether a workforce of 28,769 persons²².

²⁰ https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=SRB (25.04.2023)

²¹ <https://countryeconomy.com/national-minimum-wage/serbia> (20.04.2023)

²² Data provided by Statistik Austria: https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/pages/183/Auslandstoechter2020-4_Laender_absolut_Verteilung.ods (29.03.2023)

Although employment has increased in recent years, this has occurred mainly in the low-skill segment and particularly in jobs with precarious labour relations (Stojiljković 2021; Uvalic et al. 2020; Uvalić 2021). The government has launched programmes to incentivise youth employment by facilitating job arrangements outside the scope of the labour law and the minimum wage regulations (I-6). In addition, the decline in unemployment rates is mainly attributed to the application of new statistical methods as well as to the effects of emigration and an ageing workforce (Stadler/Adam 2022; Stojiljković 2021).

At the political level, both Serbian and Western voices have increasingly expressed concerns over the state of democracy, including election irregularities (Burazer et al. 2020; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2022). Following the boycott by opposition parties at the parliamentary elections in 2020, there is a considerable power concentration in the hands of the government party SNS. With presidential and parliamentary elections in April 2022, President Vučić and his party secured a renewed mandate for power. Serbians are growing increasingly disenchanted with the government, political parties, with the EU and, more generally, with the entire transition process. The latter is perceived by many as an “externally-led project of state-building” (Džuverović/Milošević 2021: 192), with national authorities being accountable to external actors, such as the EU or the IMF, rather than to their own citizens. While citizens feel excluded from any meaningful process of decision-making, they see the national authorities as highly susceptible to foreign interests (ibid.).

In 2001, the government officially founded the Social and Economic Council as an institutionalised body where social dialogue is supposed to take place. Its members include the prime minister as well as representatives from various line ministries, from two trade union confederations and from the Serbian Association of Employers²³. Introduced partly to fulfil EU guidelines and partly to mitigate popular discontent with the transition process, the council is considered to be, at best, the “*façade of a social dialogue*” (I-6). Its composition is not reflective of the whole spectrum of social actors involved in labour issues. Influential business associations (e.g. the Association of Foreign Investors) are not part of the Council. An opinion shared by many is that the Council has been marginalised from key decision making processes (e.g. Ladjevac 2017; Paunović et al. 2016; Stadler/Adam 2022; Stojiljković 2021).

The insignificant role of official social dialogue reflects the weakness of the Serbian trade unions and, more generally, of social and political actors representing the interests of workers and a largely impoverished population. The trade union landscape is highly fragmented, with all unions suffering dwindling membership, especially those in the private sector. Government liberalisation policies since the beginning of the transition have helped to increasingly marginalise and discredit trade unions. Concerns with safeguarding material properties and traditional channels of political influence inherited from former Yugoslavia have, in a way, transformed some trade unions into bodies with vested interests. This raises doubts as to what extent trade unions can still either represent substantial parts of the working population, in particular in the private sector, or speak for major grass-root dynamics staging political discontent (Džuverović/Milošević 2021; Ladjevac 2017; Stojiljković 2021).

5.2. Dual VET in Serbia

A legacy of Yugoslavian times, Serbia has a well-established VET system, whose share in upper secondary student population is remarkably high at around 73 % (European Training Foundation 2020). The system has so far been entirely school-based and administered by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD). In public and donor discourse, it is considered to be theory-biased and not sufficiently market-responsive (Euler 2015; European Training Foundation 2020).

German and Austrian development cooperation started VET activities early in the 2000s with the aim of better aligning the VET system with private sector requirements. In particular, the

²³ See <http://www.socijalnoekonomskisavet.rs/eng/clanovi%20saveta%20eng.htm> (24.05.2023)

German GIZ's programmes have been strongly influenced by the dual system (Grujic 2021). In the 2010s, the government showed increasing interest in adopting the dual system and, supported by Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the EU, began preparing the necessary legal, institutional and political framework. President Vučić declared dual system implementation to be a strategic priority (Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development 2019: 6). In 2017, the parliament adopted a law to implement a nationwide dual system alongside the traditional school-based VET system²⁴. Traditional VET schools offer tracks of dual VET where the majority of practical training has to take place in a company. Participating companies are selected and accredited by the Serbian Chamber of Commerce (SCC) (Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development 2019).

Government objectives included reducing youth unemployment, attracting foreign investment to foster economic development and minimising the emigration of the country's young workforce, together with commitments to modernise the education system, made as part of the EU accession process (Grujic 2021). At the institutional level, a complex network was created, positioning the MoESTD and the Chamber of Commerce as leading actors (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 3: Main actors in the implementation of dual education at different levels



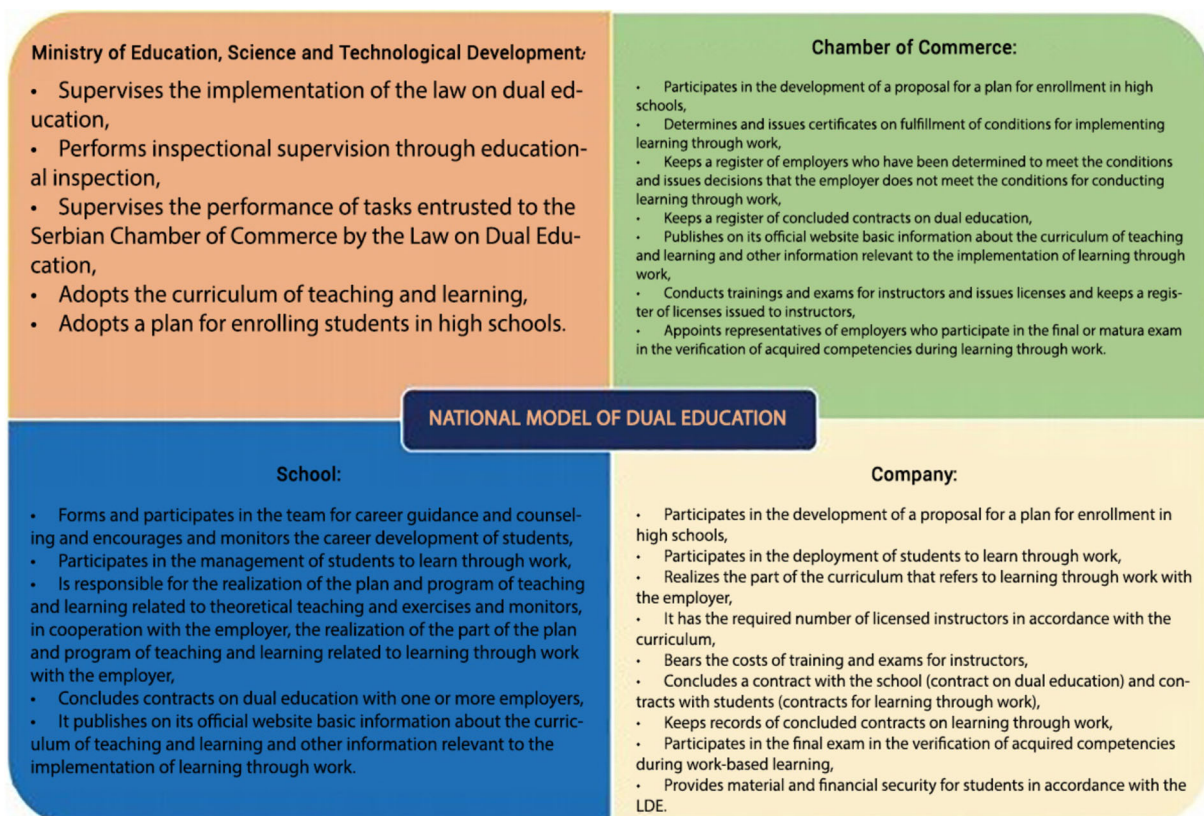
Notes. RS – Republic of Serbia, MoESTD – Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, SCC – Serbian Chamber of Commerce, IAEU – Institute for the Advancement of Education and Upbringing, CVAE – Council for Vocational and Adult Education, NQFC – Council for the National Qualifications Framework, QA – Qualifications Agency, SCTM – Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, LSGU – local self-government units, and NES – National Employment Service.

Source: Grujic 2021: 143

As for the role of tripartite social dialogue, the law mentions social partnership including all stakeholders (Government of Serbia 2019 Art. 3.2), but does not define stakeholders in detail. In the Masterplan on Implementation, trade unions are listed among the members of the Council for Vocational and Adult Education (CVAE), although this has only an advisory mandate (Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development 2019: 10). As outlined in Figure 4 below, the main negotiations take place between the MoESTD, the vocational schools, the SCC and participating companies.

²⁴ In 2018, a law on the introduction of a dual system in higher education followed (Grujic 2021: 145). This chapter discusses only the introduction of dual VET at secondary level.

Figure 4: Overview of the main roles of key actors in the Serbian national model of dual education



Source: Grujic 2021: 144

Numbers on student, VET school and company participation in dual VET differ²⁵. Grujic reports that as of 2021, 10,038 students were inscribed in the dual-track in vocational schools, 30 % of vocational schools offered at least one of 47 dual educational profiles, and 900 companies participated in the implementation of the work-based component (Grujic 2021: 146). While the government emphasises increasing participation rates, other observers point to a constantly very small share of all VET students who are enrolled in dual VET.

Since the implementation process is young and the national monitoring system is still under construction, there is no data on the expected outcomes of increased employability, let alone reduced emigration. The ETH Zürich conducted sample surveys covering the years 2018-2021, and their findings point to increasing participation rates and satisfaction among students, parents and companies. However, they also report mixed, albeit increasing, willingness by companies to provide contracts and remuneration to students, as prescribed by law (Caves/Oswald-Egg 2019; Renold et al. 2021, 2020a, 2020b). Findings from expert interviews evaluating the implementation process so far are contradictory; some describe very positive accounts, while others report numerous problems. Many experts involved in the implementation process hold a positive view highlighting progress in developing appropriate institutional settings as well as participation by and satisfaction of stakeholders (I-1, I-4, I-9, I-14, I-16). They point, moreover, to the reform and modernisation momentum induced by the law on dual VET, which also positively affects the traditional VET system (I-4, I-9). Challenges include administrative capacity constraints at schools, reluctance by companies to sign contracts and to pay remuneration to students, as well as reported cases of work abuse (I-2, I-6, I-16).

²⁵ See for instance: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/tekst/en/129780/dual-education.php> (24.05.2023)

In 2022, work began on amendments to the Law on Dual Education at the initiative of the Serbian Employers' Union. Its aim is to make dual education more consistent with the needs of companies by increasing the number of work-based learning hours, establishing gradation in monetary compensation for work, introducing subsidies for employers who participate in dual education, as well as facilitating the process of accreditation of companies for dual education²⁶. On the other hand, the United Trade Unions of Serbia "Sloga" have described the planned amendments to the law as „legalisation of exploitation”²⁷.

5.3. Analysing the transfer process of dual VET to Serbia

In the following, we apply a political-institutional lens resonating with many aspects of Rappleye's (2012b) 'political production model'. This is helpful to shed light on the manifold interests of the actors involved in the transfer of the dual system to Serbia. We will focus on the role (or absence) of tripartite social dialogue.

In the German donor countries, domestic political interests in strengthening economic ties and enhancing international influence through dual system transfer is an explicit goal in German and Swiss strategy papers (Der Bundestag 2013; SBFi et al. 2014) as well as a discursive one in Austria²⁸. Besides obvious economic interests as leading investors in Serbia and the Western Balkans, there might also be a domestic legitimation interest to take into consideration. Indeed, the dual system in the German-speaking countries is in itself under pressure. One might expect successful export to help increase domestic popularity (cfr. Maurer/Gonon 2014).

On the Serbian side, high youth unemployment and emigration rates frame a difficult political situation. Blaming skill mismatch and an outdated VET system for these complex socioeconomic issues resonates with Rappleye's 'discourse of crisis'. While youth unemployment is certainly a matter of concern, it would be too simplistic to seek its causes only in inappropriate training²⁹. As Euler (2015) states, in Serbia the lack of qualified jobs as well as unfavourable working conditions and wage levels are equally relevant factors to consider. This has been confirmed in a number of interviews (I-6, I-8, I-11, I-14). Indeed, many experts agreed that the traditional VET system was in dire need of reform, yet raised doubts as to how appropriate the dual system could be as a reform model in the particular Serbian context (Spasenovic 2017 and I-2, I-6, I-8). In the 2015 GIZ feasibility study, Euler marks an important distinction between the dual VET system (as existing in Germany, Switzerland and Austria) and the dual principle of combining theory and practice, which can be implemented in various forms of VET provision.

Nevertheless, rather than considering other options of VET improvement the government pushed through the law on dual VET. As one expert emphasised "*It was a clear political decision. Otherwise, something more appropriate would have been selected.* (I-2)". This again resonates with Rappleye's (2012b) 'production of a foreign example'. In the German-speaking countries, relatively low youth unemployment and a generally productive economy appear to confirm the dual system's superiority in terms of employability with respect to school-based VET. Transferring this system to Serbia allowed the government to position itself as applying useful strategies against unemployment. At the same time, transfer efforts came along as a useful message to bilateral donors and the EU.

Echoing Rappleye's (2012b) 'staging phase', the government, supported by the German-speaking donor countries, launched both targeted and broad promotional campaigns to convince stakeholders (e.g. companies) to get actively involved in dual VET as well as to raise

²⁶ See <https://novaekonomija.rs/vesti-iz-zemlje/unija-poslodavaca-trazi-izmene-zakona-o-dualnom-obrazovanju> (24.05.2023)

²⁷ See <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/sloga-izmene-u-dualnom-obrazovanju-tek-nakon-donosjenja-novog-zakona-o-radu/> (24.05.2023)

²⁸ See e.g. <https://www.go-international.at/foerderungen/bildungsexport.html> (24.05.2023)

²⁹ See Allais & Nathan (2012) for a critical discussion of the mismatch concept against the background of complex relations between education, VET and the labour market.

public awareness about its benefits (Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development 2019: 35). Inevitably, these campaigns also helped weaken Serbian opposition to the implementation of the dual system, as did a perceived top-down approach by government, reducing possibilities for democratic participation and consultation (Pešikan/Ivić 2021). The Social and Economic Council was not consulted on the draft law, although this would clearly fall within its remit (Social and Economic Council of the Republic of Serbia 2018: 10). In addition, the involvement of academia, civil society and organised labour was scarce and the public discussion on the draft law took place late in the process (Pešikan/Ivić 2021 and I-6, I-8, I-11, I-15). Critique raised largely by academics and civil society organisations³⁰ included concerns over wage dumping (the legally agreed compensation for dual system students being 70 % of the minimum salary), exploitative learning arrangements for students working in companies, as well as erosion of social protection systems and employment rights. The latest report by the UN Committee on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights confirms these risks (United Nations Economic and Social Council 2022: 8). VET teachers and their unions expressed fear of lay-offs due to the reduction of instruction time at VET schools (Euler 2015: 56 and I-6, I-15).

Many interviewees did not perceive any form of social dialogue throughout the legislative drafting process (I-1, I-4, I-6, I-8, I-11, I-16). *“From the position of the ministry, they do not recognise the role of social partners (I-15)”*, as one interviewee highlighted. Nevertheless academics, civil society organisations and trade unions succeeded in securing important amendments, e.g. a legally required compensation for dual VET students of 70 % of the minimum wage. Other amendments included protection of the students by labour law, the involvement of the labour inspectorate, mandatory contracts between companies, schools and students rather than between companies and schools alone, and the preservation of access to higher education upon completion of a 4-year VET track (I-6, I-12, I-15).

At the level of the education system, concerns included an institutional shift of decision-making powers. As Pešikan and Ivić (2021) describe, while previously the National Education Council was elected by parliament and held decision-making powers, education reform (which includes the law on the dual system) reduced its role to an advisory body appointed by the government. By contrast, the influence of the Chamber of Commerce (SCC), previously not involved in educational affairs, has increased substantially.

With support from the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, SCC has undergone an extensive institutional capacity building process. Part of this was the controversially discussed introduction of mandatory membership for companies. Following the Austrian example, mandatory membership appeared indispensable for SCC to fulfil a coordinating role in dual VET and to overcome initial scepticism among companies (I-1, I-16). Yet, since there exist other influential employer organisations, mandatory membership was perceived by some as a demotivating measure for companies to get involved in dual VET rather than the opposite (I-2, I-6).

Beyond the issue of membership, the assessments of SCC’s role in dual VET differ substantially. Stakeholders and experts who are directly involved in the implementation process tend to view SCC’s key position as the main reason for the relative success of dual VET so far. This would stand in contrast to earlier VET reform efforts carried out without involvement of employer associations (I-1, I-4, I-9, I-14, I-16). From this perspective, institutionalised cooperation between the government and the private sector is sufficient a form of stakeholder dialogue to ensure for a smooth functioning of the system. This seems also to be reflected in quality improvements and innovations that emerged out of this cooperation and came to stimulate reform in traditional VET schools (I-4, I-9).

Contrary to this, critics point to two concerns regarding SCC’s role in dual VET. SCC, being a partisan body with vested interests, is perceived to be ill-placed for accrediting training

³⁰ E.g. MODS (Network of Organizations for Children of Serbia, see e.g.: <http://zadecu.org/analiza-nacrt-zakona-o-dualnom-obrazovanju/> (14.04.2023))

companies (I-6, I-11). Additionally, SCC has historically never had any stake in education. This raises fears that under SCC coordination, dual VET might induce quality losses in the Serbian VET system as a whole, which has, so far, taken pride in providing holistic education as a recognized pathway to higher education (I-6, I-8, I-11). Taking a longer-term perspective, this could contribute to locking the country into low-skill-low-wage patterns of economic development (Pešikan/Ivić 2021).

Behind this reasoning appears to be a collective understanding of education, widely shared in academia and civil society, that confers far less value to the economic employability of education than it does to its social dimensions. One expert emphasises that *“dual education is still education. It might be a heritage from old Yugoslavia (...) that equity is something important in our country. All students should have equal opportunities (...), and the education system has responsibility to represent their best interests”* (I-2). From this perspective, the political focus on dual VET as a preferred educational model has generated fears that this could entail dynamics of subordinating curricula under narrowly defined and transitory employability criteria. This could have negative effects on young people’s cognitive development and, consequently, on social equity (I-6, I-8, I-11, I-15). Another interviewee pointed out that *“in Yugoslavia, it was possible that you are from a poor background, workers background, and through free education you could reach the highest level of education. (...) Now we have social differences. We have now reproduction of social classes in society, only few poor students can afford to go to faculties. (I-15)”*

The tension between economic employability and the social purposes of (vocational) education has influenced public sentiment on dual VET in Serbia, as one interviewee demonstrates: *“What is the purpose of education? (...) What do we want to get from education? Do we need education that lasts 8 or 12 years? Because with dual education (...) you don’t need to have children in schools for 10 or 12 years. They can have vocational training, one month, even less ... We believe that (...) education should really prepare children for today’s life, which is very dynamic. Industry needs workers to have basic literacy and that’s it. With this approach we are stuck in the 19th century. (I-11)”*

This tension is also an indicator for the lack or weakness of any meaningful tripartite social dialogue that could strike a balance between the interests of employers, the state as well as organized labour and civil society. The fragmented trade union landscape and their dwindling membership, especially in the private sector (Ladjevac 2017) contributes to this dilemma. In Serbia, as in many other countries with predominantly school-based VET, there is no tradition of trade union involvement in VET governance and implementation. In addition, VET students cannot be trade union members (I-4, I-6, I-7). All of these factors limit trade unions’ involvement in debates on dual VET legislation as well as their capacity to act as an institutionalised counterpart to the state and employers in dual VET governance.

In Serbia, social dialogue in dual VET has been largely reduced to state-private sector cooperation. In terms of the system’s function, government agencies (such as the ministry of social affairs and the labour inspectorate) have been conferred the role to watch over employees and learners’ interests. Overall, the dual system in Serbia lacks institutionalised integration of independent stakeholders representing employees’ (and learners’) interests. As a matter of fact, the trajectory of the Serbian dual VET system shows that without intervention by critical civil society and organized labour, as weak and informal as it might have been, the law on dual VET would be lacking the most basic provision for students’ rights and safety. In the context of economic development strategies inspired by neoliberal tenets, the absence of any independent counterpart to the state and the employers inevitably generates the perception that dual VET serves as a tool to further subordinate the future workforce under employers’ interests.

However, it is worth noting that many stakeholders and experts acknowledge a need to strengthen tripartite social dialogue in dual VET and beyond (I-1, I-2, I-4, I-6, I-7, I-8, I-11, I-15, I-16). The challenge here appears to be, on the one hand, the absence of an appropriate social

or political actor and, on the other hand, reluctance by the state, rather than on the employers' side, to promote such a tripartite dialogue (I-1, I-6). As expressed by an academic expert, "*The dual system (...) is so politicised (...) that the state would be a problem in this kind of institutionalised [social] dialogue*" (I-6). Interviewees highlight that even the involvement of government bodies in a supervisory function such as the ministry of social affairs and the labour inspectorate initially arouse suspicion among state and private sector stakeholders, and required persuasive efforts from the donor's side to be accepted (I-16). This suggests that Serbian actors, due to the overall absence of a meaningful social dialogue in Serbia, are much less sensitive to bringing a 'counterpart on board' than the donors are, who are familiar with this form of social dialogue in their home countries. Similarly, in their study on working conditions in Austrian foreign branches in Serbia, Stadler and Adam highlight that often Austrian management staff, who is accustomed to cooperating with trade union and workers representatives at company level, is more open to dialogue with organized labour than their Serbian counterparts (Stadler/Adam 2022).

Echoing Rappleye's (2012b) 'political production model', it appears that political interests might have framed the transfer process of the dual system to Serbia to a greater extent than its actual suitability to the Serbian context. However, as extensively discussed in educational transfer debates (e.g. Steiner-Khamsi 2004), transferred policies are rarely simply implemented in the recipient country but rather re-negotiated and re-appropriated by local actors, often with unexpected outcomes. This is tangible also in our case in Serbia. While the weakness of organized labour will most probably result in institutional shifts against their interests, the introduction of dual VET might generate reform dynamics in other aspects. For instance, the extensive regulation and standardisation at the company-VET school interface, accompanying the implementation process of dual VET, might generate improvements in the wider VET system. Regulation of the work-based component in the dual VET tracks, including that of instructor training, might also induce momentum to improve the quality of work-based learning for the majority of school-based VET tracks, where such regulation and quality standards currently seem to be lacking (Euler 2015: 62–64 and I-4, I-9).

6. Policy implications and recommendations

The above reflections on the transfer of the dual system to Serbia provide important insights to be considered at policy level.

In terms of the policy transfer debate, the Serbian example widely confirms Rappleye's (2012b) claim that political rather than technical motivations frame educational policy transfer. Moreover, the example suggests that beyond the political level there might be **important factors at the socio-cultural level** that significantly shape transfer processes. In the Serbian case, it is captivating how strongly **collective conceptions and imaginaries of education** have underpinned the opposition of academics, trade unions and civil society actors against the transfer process. Clearly, this level has been underresearched so far. In terms of dual system transfer, the Serbian example illustrates that many of the **dual systems features and social effects**, as appreciated in the German speaking countries, are **highly context-dependent**, rather than inherent. At the economic level, these most prominently include increased employability of learners and productivity of companies. At the level of human development, increased learners' agency, strengthening of holistic and appreciative imaginaries of work and VET as well as democratic and inclusive social dialogue in the work places and beyond deserve to be highlighted. In German-speaking countries these features stem from the corporatist socioeconomic relations the dual systems are embedded in.

Like Serbia, most recipient contexts of dual system transfer are **not framed by corporatist patterns of social relations**, which has some immediate consequences:

- First, it means that there is **no negotiated regulation of the labour market in terms of occupations that directly correspond to VET programmes** and lead to **reduced competition** at the level of intermediate qualifications. Hence, the expected employment effect, erroneously only attributed to the high share of work-based training, might not occur or prove to be much weaker than expected.
- Second, non-corporatist social relations tend to **jeopardise successful implementation** of dual VET at the **systemic level**. Empirical literature reports employer reluctance to get involved in dual VET in many parts of the world. In the case of Serbia, evidence is scarce, mixed and dependent on the partisan position of the respective observer. However, the limited share of VET students participating in the dual VET track tends to confirm the above empirical finding on unlikely systemic implementation.
- Third, in cases where dual VET has been implemented successfully this was frequently done at local or regional level, as an additional track to existing VET systems (such as in Serbia) or at the level of single companies/VET schools. Empirical literature reports that these implementation processes were mostly state-driven and **reduced tripartite social dialogue to a dialogue between the state and employers**. Concrete outcomes differ according to the given context such as the economic structure, labour legislation and government policies, among others. It is obvious, however, that bilateral, rather than tripartite institutional arrangements bestow important agency to private companies without an independent counterpart. Whether or not learners' and workers' interests are cared for in such an institutional setting depends highly on the involved state institutions. As the Serbian case exemplifies, the omission of organised labour puts at risk many of the effects relevant in a human development perspective. This includes first and foremost decent and safe working condition, adequate remuneration, learning processes that are broad and connective to further learning opportunities as well as social acceptance and appreciation of VET. The risk of dual VET becoming a tool for economic exploitation and social inequality is obvious.
- Fourth, as in the case of Serbia, many recipient countries do have traditions of independent interest groups, such as employer associations, trade unions and civil society organisations. Even though they might be restrained or weak and relations between them and the state might not follow corporatist patterns, these traditional structures and practices can serve as entry points to further contextualised forms of social dialogue. Yet, many other countries where dual system transfer is attempted or envisaged have no or very fragile structures of organised labour or other forms of independent representation of workers' and civil society interest groups. Also, in some cases political systems might not allow for any form of dialogue between the state and civil society at all. The question arises whether in these contexts, VET reforms should refer to the dual system as a viable model.

The **economic structure**, the structure of the **education system** and prevailing **social norms and conceptions of education** in recipient countries **frame how dual VET might affect social allocation** through different educational pathways. In economic settings predominated by low skilled production, the risk of dual VET becoming a dead-end for low qualified workers is obvious. In settings, such as the Serbian example, where school-based VET is traditionally a recognized pathway not only to the labour market, but also to higher education, dual VET might be perceived as quality risk for the whole VET system jeopardizing social mobility of VET students. In opposite contexts, where VET traditionally suffers from low social esteem dual VET might indeed act as superior VET track. In this case, students might choose dual VET to increase their chances of accessing higher education. As a side product, traditional school-based VET might suffer from even lower social recognition³¹.

³¹ See Hernández-Fernández et al. (n.d.) on the example of Mexico.

Based on these reflections, the following recommendations for development policy and cooperation as well as research arise for the case of Serbia and dual system transfer in general³²

In the case of Serbia

- tripartite social dialogue should be substantially strengthened.
- Government should strive to **include trade unions** and civil society organisations on an equal footing as stakeholders into dual VET governance.
- Donors should encourage and support the Serbian government and the involved stakeholders to do so.
- **Donors** should seek **cooperation with organised labour** (trade unions, chambers of labour etc.) **in their respective countries** in terms of policy dialogue and implementation of international dual transfer projects.
- **Donor country companies**, especially those from German-speaking countries, should be encouraged to strengthen **social dialogue at company level in their establishments in Serbia**. This should include encouragement of domestic work councils to strengthen international cooperation³³.
- Monitoring and **evaluation** of the dual VET reform should include educational performance, conditions of company-based learning, labour market competitiveness, effects on social standards and prospects of further learning and social mobility, among others.
- Subsequent **reforms** should be designed to improve the whole, rather than only the dual VET system in a balanced and holistic way, potentially capitalising on the regulatory dynamics of company-based learning introduced by dual VET. Eventual reform efforts should particularly focus on securing of social standards for dual VET students.

Beyond these, the following recommendations might be considered for dual system transfer in general:

- In striving for VET reform in developing and transition countries, **dual VET should not automatically be considered the gold standard**. In countries with weak offer of skilled employment, strong school-based VET traditions, fragile structures of organised labour and/or civil society and weak practices of social dialogue, it might be preferable to develop **alternative reform approaches**.
- The traditional economic framing of (dual) VET in development policy and discourse requires reconsideration. Strengthening a **human development lens** on VET can help to broaden expectations of VET that are traditionally restricted to employment and economic productivity. Such a human development perspective draws attention to the hitherto neglected sociocultural potential of dual VET including youth agency, democratic participation, social dialogue, decent work and social equity.
- **Tripartite social dialogue** between the state, employers and organised labour should be considered an important feature of dual VET and attention should be paid to avoid discursive reductions to a dialogue between the state and employers in policy papers and public discourse.

³² Important input to these recommendations was provided by the international workshop “Human development perspectives on the transfer of the dual system of TVET: Potentials and challenges”, held on September 26, 2022 in Vienna: <https://www.oefse.at/veranstaltungen/rueckblick/veranstaltung/event/show/Event/human-development-perspectives-on-the-transfer-of-the-dual-system-of-tvet-potentials-and-challenges/> (24.05.2023).

³³ Cfr. the recommendations by the Austrian Chamber of Labour and Trade Unions for work council representatives in the Western Balkans (GPA et al. 2022).

- In countries without established formal or informal practices of **social dialogue**, introducing or strengthening it should be considered **part of creating an enabling environment** for dual transfer projects. In case traditional labour organisations such as trade unions are absent or unable to assume a meaningful role in VET dialogue, other independent stakeholders representing the interests of learners and future workers should be sought (e.g. appropriate civil society organisations).
- In donor countries, especially the German-speaking ones, **cooperation with domestic labour institutions and organisations** (i.e. trade unions, chambers of labour, appropriate NGOs, etc.) should be sought at the level of policy dialogue and implementation of dual transfer projects.
- In dual VET transfer processes, special attention should be placed on **avoiding top-down political reforms that are met with resistance by stakeholders** (i.e. teachers, civil society etc.). Rather, interventions should be adapted to local contextual conditions and strive for policy ownership including all stakeholders.
- With respect to a human development perspective, dual transfer processes should pay increased attention to **equity** of access and outcome, **gender equality, quality learning processes, decent working conditions and youth agency**. An example for such a **human development framework** for dual VET transfer has been elaborated by Vanderhoven et al based on the findings of a research project on dual VET transfer to Mexico and India (Vanderhoven et al. 2022: 10):
 1. *Equitable Access:*
Learning motivations and preferences should be incorporated as one of the central criteria for pre-selection into the programme.
 2. *Quality Workplace Learning:*
Selection of dual firms should be based on rigorous assessment of capacity and commitment to fostering transferrable skills, and quality standards should be enacted through capacity building and external monitoring of learning conditions
 3. *Decent Working Conditions:*
Formal agreements between firms, schools and trainees must include a charter of trainee rights, and stipulate the institutional mechanisms by which they will be upheld.
 4. *Gender Equality:*
State/education authorities should pursue proactive strategies to support young women in dual VET programmes, during and beyond participation, and equality compliance frameworks for firms and schools should be produced and enforced.
 5. *Core Competencies:*
Learning programmes should be adjusted to ensure sufficient time and instructional contact is dedicated to theoretical content and sufficient weight is given to core competencies (e.g. Languages, Maths, and Sciences) to allow graduates to pursue a variety of onward trajectories.
 6. *Supporting transitions:*
Common talent pools should be formalised, offering open and transparent employment opportunities to all dual VET graduates.
 7. *Youth Voice:*
Evaluation strategies should be implemented that use a variety of young people's perspectives to inform programme development and produce relevant support resources for future students.
- At the level of **research, multi- and transdisciplinary approaches** to educational and VET policy transfer should be strengthened in order to increase attention to **socioeconomic and political factors, working, industrial and gender relations and human development impact**.

- Specifically, **cultural factors** underpinning and framing educational policy transfer should be increasingly in focus. Sociocultural norms, values and collective imaginaries on education and VET and how they interact with socioeconomic and political factors appear to offer substantial explanatory potential.
- The predominant donor perspective in research, embodying research interests focused on successful implementation, should be complemented by **learners' and recipient country perspectives**.

7. Concluding remarks

In this paper, we have argued that applying political economy approaches helps us understand how the dual VET system's international attractiveness is related to the corporatist institutional structure underpinning it in the German speaking countries, where this system is a traditional form of VET. Viewing transfer processes through a political and institutional lens allows us to explain how and why these corporatist institutional arrangements tend to be fragmented in many cases. In scrutinising the involved actors' political interests, political objectives emerge as powerful drivers of transfer processes to the same, if not a greater extent, than the mere technical attractiveness of the dual system. Often, as empirical research shows political interests in recipient countries as well as predominantly economic considerations on the donor side result in narrowing down tripartite social dialogue to arrangements between the state and employers jeopardising both systemic implementation and desired human development effects. As Wolf (2017) points out, the classic social partnership with well-established trade unions and institutionalised representations of interest typical for cooperative market economies will hardly be replicable in most contexts of transition and developing countries. However, what should be taken into account are forms of 'new social partnership', with the classic roles of labour unions being assumed by civil society organisations or other collective actors.

The example of Serbia visualises that the introduction of dual VET has served government interests (of presenting themselves as tackling youth unemployment) rather than effective VET reform. It shows moreover how the omission of organised labour from the institutionalised dialogue underpinning dual VET governance risks emptying dual VET from human development effects, such as decent work, improved standards of living and increased agency of (future) workers and social stability. It suggests that while different VET reform approaches might have been more adequate, regulatory effects of work-based learning stemming from dual VET could indeed introduce dynamics of improvement also in school-based VET. With a view to policy implications, it recommends to strengthen trade union and civil society actors in an endeavour to generate contextualised forms of social dialogue and holistic VET reforms.

Serbia has certainly some specific characteristics not to be found in other recipient countries of dual system transfer, such as a well-established pre-existing VET system, strong traditions of organised labour and deeply rooted collective imaginaries of education embracing human rights rather than human capital tenets. Evidently, these characteristics might limit the transferability of findings from this case study to other settings of dual system transfer.

Indeed, the issues raised in this paper provide but a starting point for further in-depth studies with regard to how dual system transfer is shaped and in turn impacts socioeconomic and cultural relations in the specific contexts of each recipient country. As dual system implementation in Serbia continues, this might offer a useful example for analysing how fragmented understandings of social dialogue with marginal integration of organised labour play out institutionally and the outcomes, both expected and unexpected, that this will generate.

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