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Vocational education: What works?

Report made in conclusion of a trip across EU member states, with the support of the Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände (BDA) and the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe.

Future of Europe

European Union

Population

511 522 671

GDP per capita

36 593

Visited

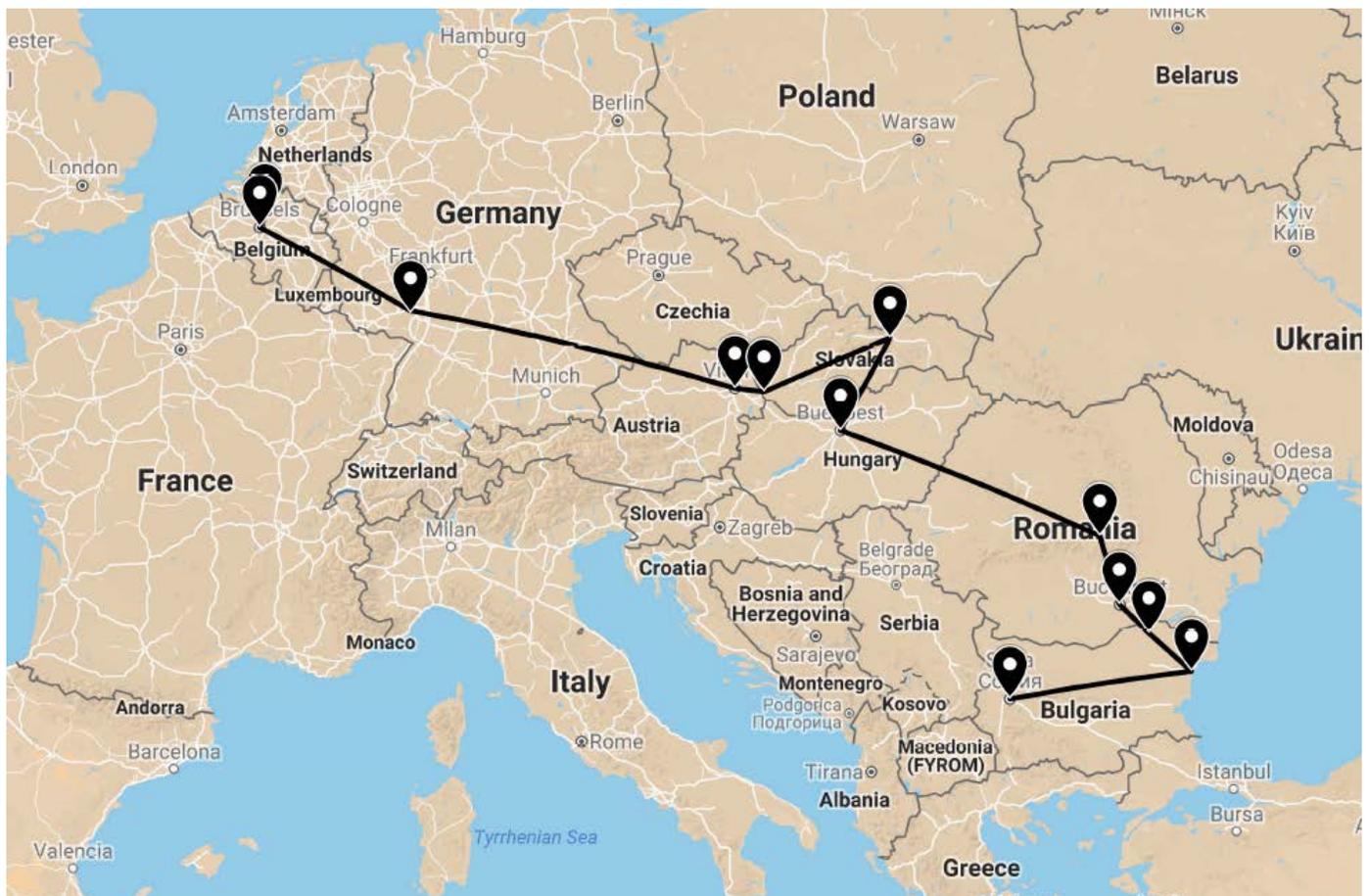
Belgium, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria

Unemployment rate

6,9%

Early leavers from education and training

10,6%



Concept, introduction

There are a lot of European reports and research that ask for a change in education. The Lisbon Agenda and the European Employment Strategy don't get the results they want. Yet it is essential –not only for our economy but for our happiness- that people find a job they're good at and enjoy. Finding the right education is an essential part of that process.

While all countries are innovating their education system to try and fill this hole as good as they can, they take little time looking at their neighbors and learning from other countries. Comparing the different innovations throughout different countries, each with their own advantages, and seeing what works well, grants us the opportunity to learn from each other's successes and failures, originating from a variety of visions.

To explore the differences in vocational training throughout the continent, I travelled from west to east, so I can see different influences and inspirations in this form of education. I visited a variety of school, training facilities and places of employment in each of these countries, while interviewing (ex-) students, teachers, professors, employer, employees,... This gave me a broad view of the different visions that different people have in the country.

I myself am a recent graduate in teacher education, and have done multiple internships at vocational schools. These were some of the internships I enjoyed the most: students that have found a trade or craft that really interests them, will be motivated! Next to that I was a student in vocational education myself, following evening classes of woodworking, as I am interested in learning a craft and creating something.

My trip started off in my home country, Belgium, and brought me to the other end of our continent, Bulgaria. On my way there I went through Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. In each of these countries I had the chance to learn some of the different techniques used to reach a maximum of learning and a good flow to the job market.

Belgium

Population

11 351 727

GDP per capita

43 582

Visited

Mechelen, Vilvoorde

Unemployment rate

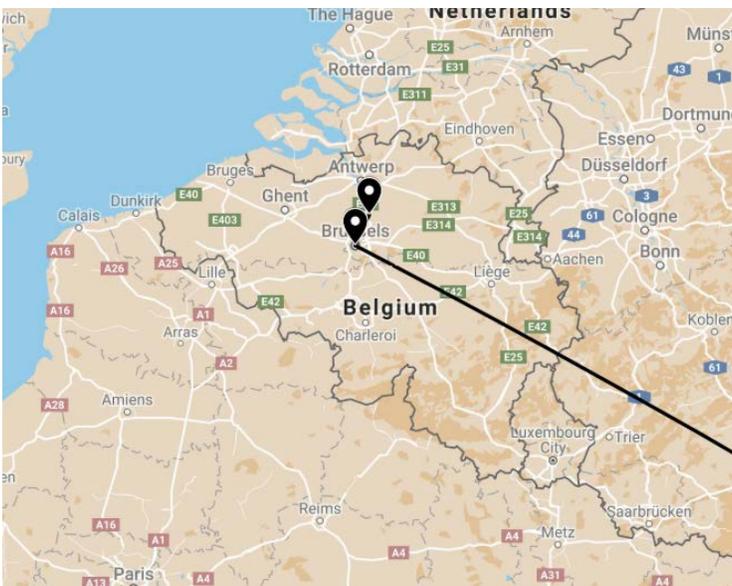
6,0%

Early leavers from education and training

8,9%

Good to know

Belgium has three different education systems: one for the Flemish community, the French community and the German community.



How I went to work

I started my travel by setting a baseline in my own country. I did several interviews with different friends of mine who attended a variety of vocational education and training.

I myself did internships at vocational schools and in the past, and have attended vocational training, so my own experience does add to this chapter.

What I learned during my visit here

A 'Belgian' school system in itself doesn't really exist: it is split up according to the three different communities, with each their own language. I myself am Dutch speaking and live in Flanders, so I studied in that system. While this project aims for European cooperation and learning from each other across our borders, it is important to note that a first step for this process would be to learn from each other within our borders. The results and scores of these three different education systems strongly vary, and there is the possibility of improving the respective systems with more cooperation within the country.

Vocational education is something necessary for our economy, and can be a true calling for someone. Pupils can develop their talents and become a true master in their work. Yet sadly, in the Flemish education system, people tend to look down on vocational studies. It often happens that pupils start with a more theoretical field of study, and when this doesn't go well, they go to a field of study regarded as 'lower', often less theoretical. This effect is often referred to as the 'waterfall-system'. A better career guidance and study guidance would help pupils with finding a field of study they like from the start, and to not lose their motivation while stuck in the 'waterfall-system'. Latest news states that the first 2 years of high school will change to a general education, where pupils are exposed to both vocational and more theoretical studies, and will pick the direction they will be going in after that. This would be a great improvement. I do have to note that in the interviews I conducted I did hear about a lot of success stories, where people did find a job they loved thanks to the path they took throughout their time as a pupil.

Germany

Population

82 521 653

GDP per capita

44 549

Visited

Bad Dürkheim

Unemployment rate

3,4%

Early leavers from
education and
training

10,1%

Good to know

Children have to choose between the 3 types of education forms at 10 years old.

How I went to work

I visited the vocational school in Bad Dürkheim, and visited many businesses around town that participated in the dual education system: garages, optician offices, archeological sites,... On these sites I was able to conduct interviews with both the pupils as well as the people guiding the pupils throughout their education process.

What I learned during my visit here

In Germany I tried to take a close look at the dual education system. This system receives a lot of praise, both from international sources as well as from the people I interviewed. It offers pupils real work experience and a first connection with a company, which often leads to a first employment opportunity.

Though this system has some great success, there still is some room for improvement. It seemed like there is often only little communication between the place of work and the school. The evaluation of this system also greatly depends on a chamber exam at the end of the school year, while school performance and performance at the place of work seem more relevant.



Austria

Population

8 772 865

GDP per capita

47 289

Visited

Vienna

Unemployment rate

4,7%

Early leavers from
education and
training

7,4%

Good to know

In Austria, about 250 apprenticeship training courses exist.

How I went to work

I visited the University College of Teacher Education in Vienna, where I was able to speak to different students, among them a lot of Erasmus students. I got to see different projects and products that the students made.



Connected to the University College, I visited the Future Learning Lab, where research and projects are done to improve learning in a modern society. I got talking to Hermann Morgenbesser, Future Classroom Lead Ambassador for Austria 2018, and his international colleagues through a video conference.

What I learned during my visit here

Talking to Erasmus students, I was once again reminded of the tons of advantages that this program offers. Being in a new context, meeting new people, triggers students to ask questions about how things work and maximizes learning. Hearing about different views lets students question and broaden their own view. Internationalizing results in better success all over, and the diversity is enriching.

If teachers have to guide pupils in dual education, they have to be prepared to work in this school system. Teacher education should be adjusted to the way of teaching that is preferred. That is why, with this system, the teachers-to-be make some beautiful projects themselves.

While visiting the Future Learning Lab, and talking to the Austrian Future Classroom Lead Ambassador, I witnessed some of the possibilities that innovation offers. New technologies create new possibilities to improve learning. Next to that, our world keeps getting smaller, and international cooperation becomes easier, which can improve learning and encourage innovation.

Slovakia

Population

5 435 343

GDP per capita

20 508

Visited

Bratislava, Poprad

Unemployment rate

6,9%

Early leavers from education and training

9,3%

Good to know

Slovakia makes the most cars per inhabitant in the world.

How I went to work

I visited the Volkswagen factory near Bratislava, and the Secondary Vocational Automotive School connected to it.

I also got talking to Mohammed, a guest in the hostel I was staying at. He is an Iranian student who just started his study in dentistry in Bratislava.

What I learned during my visit here

One of the main goals of education is to make the pupil a contributing member of society. An element of this is a good road to employment. Therefore, education must be well connected to the job market. In Slovakia, I was able to see some great examples of this principle, with schools both figuratively and literally connected to companies. Other than that, it is worth noting that this example, an automotive school, is specifically catered for the biggest industry in the nation.



Hungary

Population

9 797 561

GDP per capita

15 531

Visited

Budapest

Unemployment rate

3,6%

Early leavers from education and training

12,5%

Good to know

There are changes set out for how Hungarian Vocational Education and Training works: the former VET system will phase out by 2019.

How I went to work

In Budapest, I visited the Petrik Lajos Bilingual Vocational School of Chemistry, Environmental Protection and Information. I got talking to different pupils who told me about their experience with the school.

What I learned during my visit here

Education doesn't stop at the age of 12, 16, 18 or 21, nor does it stop when you are in another country or another city. Education is a lifelong process: one should never stop learning. That is why it pleases me, that in a lot of the worldly cities I visited, there were courses available for both high school as well as adults, often in multiple languages.



Romania

Population

19 644 350

GDP per capita

12 523

Visited

Braşov, Bucharest

Unemployment rate

4,5%

Early leavers from education and training

18,1%

Good to know

Romanians have 11 mandatory years of education.



How I went to work

I visited the American Hotel Academy in Brasov and got a full tour of their facilities, while interviewing teachers about how the school works and what the strengths of the school are. Next to that, I also visited the National Center for Railway Qualification and Training in Brasov, a school managed by and created for the Romanian Railways.

What I learned during my visit here

In Romania, I saw some of the tactics I learned about in other countries, used to their full advantage. For example, some companies were able to create their own schools, like the Romanian Railways, thus perfectly connecting schooling to the job market. Other than that I saw some great example of internationalization in education: guest lectures from all over the world, internships and exchanges abroad, cooperation between schools and universities crossing borders, ... This was a real pleasure to witness.

Bulgaria

Population

7 101 859

GDP per capita

8 064

Visited

Glavinitsa, Varna, Sofia

Unemployment rate

4,8%

Early leavers from education and training

12,7%

Good to know

Getting Vocational Education and Training set in Bulgaria is constantly being worked on: the VET Act has changed 22 times over the past 13 years.

How I went to work

I visited a school in Glavinitsa, High School Vasil Levski, where I was able to attend classes and talk to pupils, teachers, other personal and the director of the school. I was staying with one of the teachers, Philip, and my host shared a lot of information with me.

What I learned during my visit here

In Bulgaria, I was confronted with a whole different context. In the village of Glavinitsa, pupils came from smaller villages all around to attend classes. This countryside context provided some different effects. The pupils were strongly motivated to learn, with the vision of providing for a family later on. Next to that, pupils often already knew a lot about certain subjects, that they were confronted with at home. This difference in context can be used in the advantage of the teachers, using the passion and knowledge the pupils have.



Sources

Population

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GDP per capita

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Unemployment rate

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Early leavers from education and training

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Early_leavers_from_education_and_training, 2017

For a more visual report of this trip, you can look at the pictures I took on the following Instagram-page:

<https://www.instagram.com/v.ncent.s/>
