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# Convergence or divergence of continuing vocational training in Europe? Empirical findings and theoretical conclusions for adult education

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**Keywords:** Vocational training, enterprises, enterprise survey, Europe

**Abstract:** The paper describes trends of convergence and divergence in enterprise-provided continuing vocational training in Europe between 1999 and 2005. Based on the survey CVTS, the indicators for courses incidence, access, intensity, direct costs and the indicator learning at the workplace will be analyzed. The paper concludes with an outlook with references to sketches of an educational theory to be written for this field of adult education.

## Introduction

We are still in the aftermath of the global economic shock after the financial and economic crisis of the last few years. Although countries were certainly differently affected by the crisis, the recent events of daily politics are a good example of the increasing global inter-relatedness of our societies all over the world. In Europe, the European Union (EU) has an increasingly influence on national societies in order to pursue cohesion and to promote joint orientations like the Lisbon goals, which are mainly framed by the competition with the USA and Japan (e.g. Leney et al., 2004, p. 20). But what are real developments in enterprise-provided training in Europe beyond wishful political benchmarking?

Enterprise-provided training is one important area of adult education which receives increasing attention in the last decades. Transnational organizations like the OECD (Healy 2001; Pfeifer & Müller 2009) or the EU (Leney et al. 2004) try powerfully to push forward the human capital agenda in relation to training, education and economies. Since economic, financial and political globalization affects economies deeply all over the world, it might be also reasonable at the first sight to assume that learning and training structures in enterprises are converging in different countries (Aarkrog & Jørgensen 2008; Green, Wolf & Leney, 1999). This paper analyses and discusses if such a convergence is taking place in relation to enterprise-provided training in Europe or if there are also signs of divergence.

## Data and Methodology

Based on the European enterprise survey CVTS (Continuing Vocational Training Survey) quantitative analysis have been done for this paper. The CVTS has a research tradition of almost 20 years in Europe (see CEDEFOP, 2010; Behringer et al, 2008). It is a data source of rather good data quality which provides internationally comparable, detailed statistics on the volume, content and cost of training in enterprises, and on their training structure, policy and management. The respondents in the enterprises are mostly located on

the medium or upper management level and asked to provide information on training for the whole enterprise. Details concerning the data quality are accessible (CEDEFOP, 2010, pp 105-142).

The first CVTS enterprise survey was carried out in 1994 in the then 12 Member States of the European Union. The survey (CVTS1) was part of the action programme for the development of continuing vocational training in the European Community (FORCE). The growing policy interest in data on enterprise-based training together with the demand to extend the data to the by then 15 Member States led the European Commission to promote a second survey (CVTS2). This second survey was carried out in 25 European countries mostly by national statistical offices for the reference year 1999. Results of the survey are widely published. An overview is available by CESPIM (2005). Data on CVTS1 and CVTS2 can also be found at Eurostat's homepage (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/education/data/database> in the folder named 'Continuing vocational training in enterprises'). The third survey (CVTS3) took place in 2006, with reference year 2005. More than 100.000 enterprises in 28 countries replied to the survey. CVTS4 will deliver data for the reference year 2010 and is presently done in 28 countries.

Continuing vocational training is defined as 'a training measures or activity (...) and which is *financed at least partly by the enterprises for their persons* [Italic by author] employed who either have a working contract or who benefit directly from their work for the enterprise such as unpaid family workers and casual workers. Persons employed holding an apprenticeship or training contract must not be taken into consideration for CVT. (...) *The training measures or activities must be planned in advance and must be organised or supported with the special goal of learning.* [Italic by author] Random learning (...) and initial vocational training (IVT) are explicitly excluded.' (Eurostat 2005)

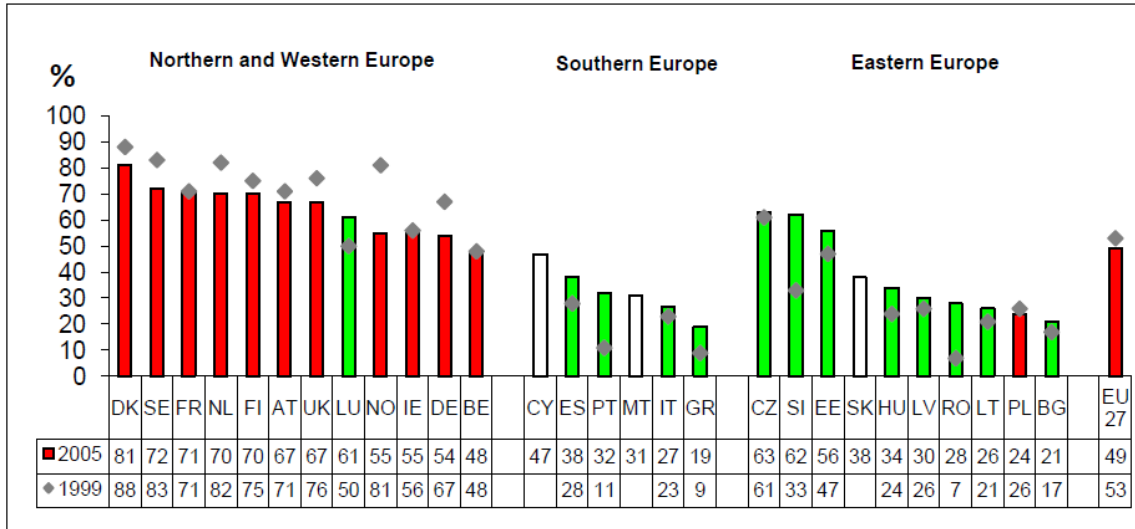
### **First result: Convergence between countries concerning many indicators**

Key indicators of CVTS are the percentage of enterprises offering courses<sup>1</sup> (course incidence), percentage of employees participating in courses (course access), the amount of training hours in courses in relation to hours worked (intensity for courses) and the money spent on courses in relation to labour costs (direct costs for courses). The results show that there are indeed significant signs of a convergence of training performance between countries:

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<sup>1</sup> By 'courses' are meant both internal and external courses within or outside the enterprise. The location of a course outside in enterprise is no exclusion criteria for 'enterprise-provided' training as long the enterprise finances the course totally or partly by direct costs (e.g. participation fees) or placing it within the working time of its employees.

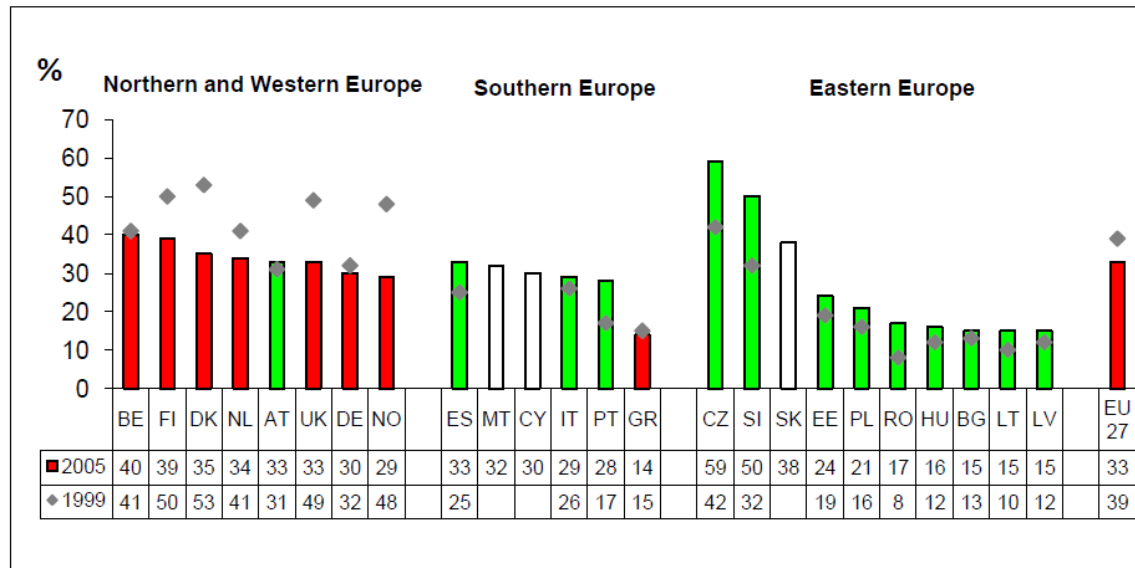
**Chart 1:** Incidence in training courses (enterprises with courses / all enterprises) in 1999 and 2005



**Methodological remark:** Data of Austria (AT), Denmark (DK), Norway (NO), Poland (PL) and United Kingdom (UK) are seriously limited in their international comparability (c. CEDEFOP, 2010). Cyprus (CY), Malta (MT) and Slovakia (SK) did not take part in 1999.

**Source:** <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/education/data/database>  
(date of data access: 15/01/2011)

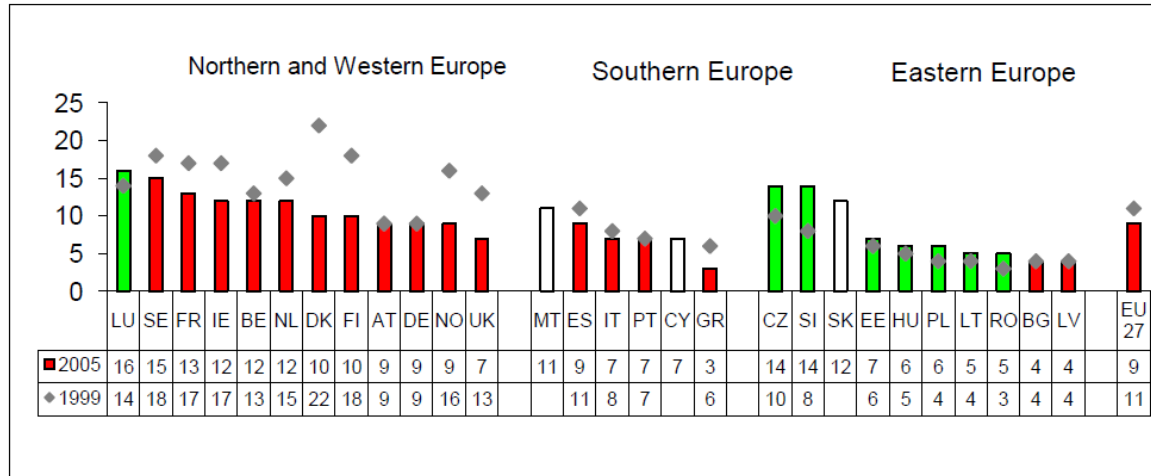
**Chart 2:** Access to training courses (employees participating in courses / all employees) in 1999 and 2005



**Methodological remark:** Data of Austria (AT), Denmark (DK), Norway (NO), Poland (PL) and United Kingdom (UK) are seriously limited in their international comparability (c. CEDEFOP, 2010). Cyprus (CY), Malta (MT) and Slovakia (SK) did not take part in 1999.

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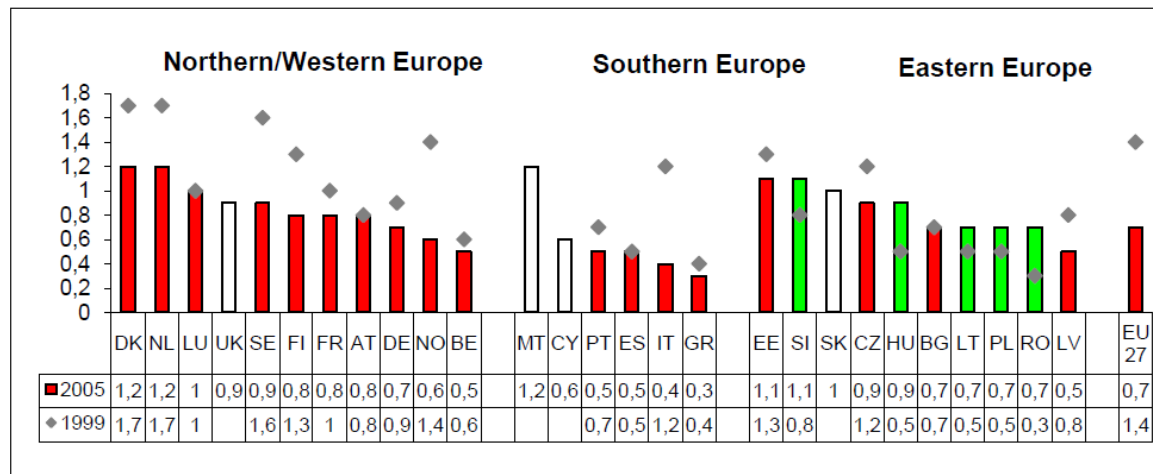
**Chart 3:** Intensity for training courses (total volume of courses / total number of hours worked by all employees) in 1999 and 2005



**Methodological remark:** Data of Austria (AT), Denmark (DK), Norway (NO), Poland (PL) and United Kingdom (UK) are seriously limited in their international comparability (c. CEDEFOP, 2010). Cyprus (CY), Malta (MT) and Slovakia (SK) did not take part in 1999.

**Source:** <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/education/data/database>  
(date of data access: 15/01/2011)

**Chart 4:** Direct costs for courses (total direct costs for courses in PPS / total total labour costs of all enterprises in PPS) in 1999 and 2005



**Methodological remark:** Data of Austria (AT), Denmark (DK), Norway (NO), Poland (PL) and United Kingdom (UK) are seriously limited in their international comparability (c. CEDEFOP, 2010). Cyprus (CY), Malta (MT) and Slovakia (SK) did not take part in 1999.

**Source:** <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/education/data/database>  
(date of data access: 15/01/2011)

The results for the four indicators demonstrate clearly an increasing convergence between the different European countries between 1999 and 2005. The countries were

arranged along three groups according an update of the welfare state typology by Esping-Andersen (1990). The trends are rather similar for all four indicators. Almost all Northern and Western European countries report decreasing figures for the enterprises in their countries. Only Austria (AT) and Luxembourg (LU) explicate increasing figures for at least some indicators, while all other countries have losses. The British data (UK) is of limited comparative value because of serious methodological problems, but heavy losses can be also observed. Especially the losses for the Scandinavian countries (DK, FI, NO, SE) are huge for many indicators. Although these losses can be partly explained by changes of the survey methodology by these countries between 1999 and 2005 (CEDEFOP, 2010, pp 105-142), but even other national surveys or references are supporting the likelihood of a trend towards a worsening of the often internationally admired national systems in Scandinavia (Jørgensen, 2008; Statistics Finland, 2008; Statistics Sweden, 2008). It will be very interesting to observe the Scandinavian results of CVTS4 which will deliver data for 2010.

In contrast, the Eastern European countries display strong increases. For example, the Czech Republic (CZ) has now the most inclusive system of enterprise-provided training in Europe. 59 per cent of all Czech employees have access to courses provided by their enterprises, while the best Western country is Belgium (BE) with only 40 per cent. Only for direct costs, the trends in the Eastern European countries are rather diverse. Here are five countries (SI, HU, LT, PL, RO) with raising figures, while four countries with lowering figures (EE, CZ, BG, LV). Overall, the volume of money spent on training courses in relation to the invested labour costs is clearly sinking in Europe. The European mean for this cost indicator has halved between 1999 and 2005 from 1.4 to 0.7. Although the investment in lifelong learning is generally accepted by all stakeholders, this result demonstrates clearly that there exists a discrepancy between rhetoric and facts in the implementation of lifelong learning.

The results of the Southern European countries are furcated. Firstly, while the first two indicators (incidence and access) for the countries of the olive belt are characterized by increasing figures, the last two indicators (intensity and costs) are demonstrating decreasing figures. Secondly, Portugal (PT) and Spain (ES) show mostly and often strong increases, while especially the Greek (GR) results are disillusioning. Already in 1999 rather at the end of the European range located, the Greek results fall even further behind in relation to the other countries in 2005. This is especially valid for the comparison with the Eastern European countries, which have obviously passed along its Southern neighbor Greece. The Greek economy is in danger to become 'left behind' in Europe.

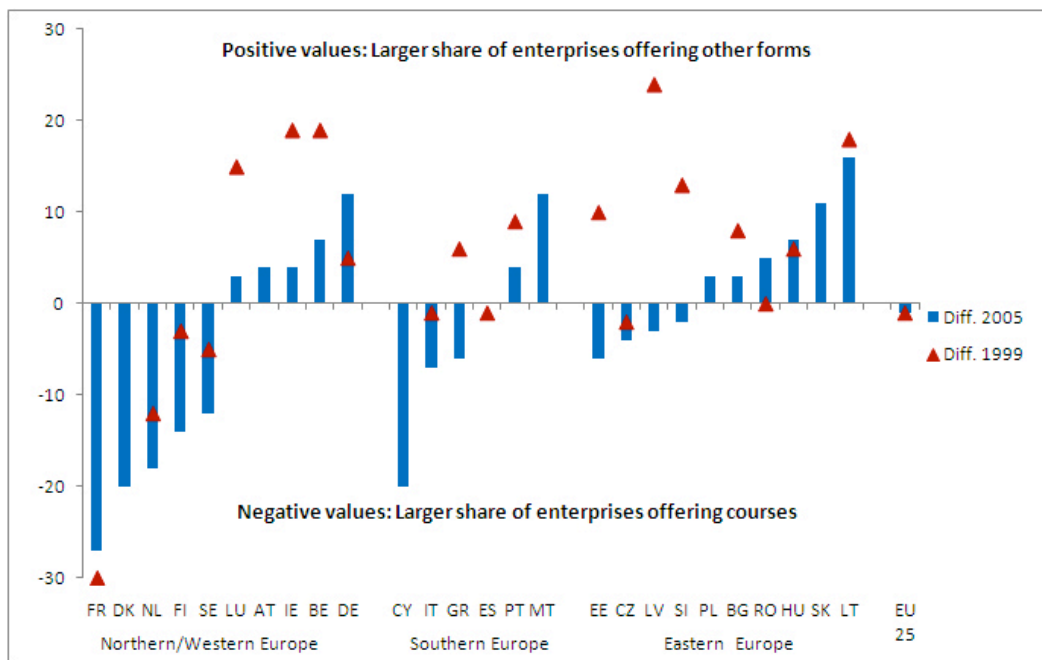
When returning to the overarching question of convergence or divergence, the results show a clear leveling of the results in Europe. The distances between the best and worst performers within country groups and whole Europe have significantly decreased. This is a strong indication for an increasing convergence in enterprise-based training. It is important to remark that this increasing convergence is accompanied by an overall decrease of the European average. Although this average is affected by the inclusion of countries (Malta - MT, Cyprus - CY, Slovakia - SK) in 2005 for the first time and already mentioned methodological problems, but the trend is not encouraging. The political goal of an increasing engagement in lifelong learning is not achieved by enterprises, but clearly missed. It would be interesting to analyze the distribution of financial shares between governments, enterprises and the individuals/employees on an international scale since CVTS tells only something about the engagement of enterprises. Perhaps there happened a redistribution of

shares with advantages for enterprises and with disadvantages - meaning an increased financial burden - for individuals/employees in the last decade.

**Second result: Divergence between countries concerning ‘other forms’ of learning at the workplace**

Nonetheless, there are also still fundamental differences between countries and even diverging routes of developments of countries and enterprises are becoming visible when doing data mining. This is for example especially valid for the different role of workplace-based forms of learning (so-called ‘other forms’ in the CVTS-terminology) in countries. Learning that takes place in seminars and courses is often ascribed diminishing importance, while workplace-based forms of learning such as induction, learning circles and computer-assisted learning are increasingly the focus of attention (c. Behringer & K  pplinger, 2011). In some countries, workplace-based forms of learning have an increasing importance, but in some countries it has an even decreasing role to play in enterprise-based training. This is illustrated by chart 5:

**Chart 5:** Comparison of offerings of courses and other forms of vocational training (Difference in % of enterprises with such offerings in 1999 and 2005)



**Source:** Behringer & K  pplinger, 2011 (constructed by Behringer and own calculation by her)

The chart shows the differences between offered courses and ‘other forms’ of vocational training for each European country. The columns reflect the relative importance of courses and other forms of vocational training in 2005, while the triangles indicate this for the year 1999.

The chart demonstrates that there is no clear preference for courses or workplace-based forms of learning within country groups. For example, when looking at the group of Northern/Western European countries it shows that there are countries like France (FR) which have a clear preference for courses while countries Germany (DE) have a clear

preference for workplace-based forms of learning. The same is valid for the groups of Southern or Eastern European countries.

In addition, even the developments between 1999 and 2005 point into different directions within country groups. There are countries which are in 2005 less in favor of courses (e.g. France, Germany) or less in favor of 'other forms' (e.g. Belgium - BE, Ireland - IE). There are even countries which changed totally preferences (e.g. Estonia -EE, Slovenia - SI).

The overall picture is very heterogeneous and the EU25 average difference for 1999 and 2005 is rather uniform despite the huge and partly increasing divergence between countries. The European average does in some way hide the divergence on national level. It is likely that the national micro data would even include a huge divergence between enterprises. It can therefore be said that the CVTS data do not support the hypothesis that other forms of employer-provided vocational training have generally increased. Institutional factors or cultural preferences for courses or workplace-based forms of learning might play a great role here. (c. Bouchard, 1998; Fukuyama 1996)

### **Conclusion and outlook**

Overall, CVTS shows simultaneously trends of convergence and divergence for enterprise-provided training. While for courses strong trends of convergence can be observed, 'other forms' of learning close to the workplace explicate still existing and even increasing divergent routes of development. It remains an open question for further investigations how to explain these differences. Perhaps class room learning is more easily affected by global influences and political goal-setting, while the way how we do our work is more deeply engraved by cultural traditions and institutional preferences.

It is also important to bear in mind that the CVTS data bridges just two decades of research. Although economic life seems often just a daily practice with rapid changes beyond historical perspectives, past researcher tell us that societal processes and processes of convergence and divergence have to be observed by longer perspectives (c. Elias, 1994; Braudel, 1997). Globalization is not a really new phenomena: 'All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, (...) national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature' (Marx & Engels 1848, p. 16). It is a modern mythos to assume that globalization has started somewhere in the 1980s or in the 1990s after the fall of the wall in Berlin. Bearing this in mind, it is more than likely that convergence and divergence will both happen simultaneously in our educational worlds in enterprises.

In order to analyze these divergence and convergence trends and their sources we need continuous research beyond narrow funding programmes with a clear orientation on political goals. Comparative research can be an important tool for dismantling national developments from their proclaimed lack of alternatives. The data of CVTS tells us that different routes of development are still possible even in a globalized world, although strong influences towards convergence are also visible. To accept these parallel and contradictive developments is not easy in a world which seeks for easy answers and less complexity. It



would be interesting to interlink European and American/Canadian research on enterprise-provided training (e.g. Turcotte, 2001; Livingstone & Scholtz 2006).

What we are lacking is an educational theory of enterprise-provided training. While in economics *human capital theory* (Becker 1993) is prominent and a rather weak (c. Bouchard, 1998) foundation for empirical research, we lack a similar body of educational theory which is broadly used. Such a theory could start from the analytical observation that adult education in enterprises is contingent. There are many - especially small - enterprises, which decide against training for their employees. Thus, it is important to analyze *different configurations in enterprises* on organizational, macro- and micro-didactical levels. There is no representative enterprise and there is no unique trigger for training in enterprises. We have to study the role of training for governments, societies, employers, employees and other important stakeholders. Training in enterprises fulfills many objectives, but without a theoretical foundation we are in danger of delivering either impressionist or too generalized results. The elaboration of a *configuration theory* of employer-provided training is presently work in progress by the author.

The author is looking forward to present European research results and theoretical thoughts to a mainly Canadian and North American audience and would like to come into a discussion with other researchers.

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