

# Laboured Learning



**CRT**  
CENTRE for REGIONAL  
& TOURISM RESEARCH



**AALBORG UNIVERSITY**  
DENMARK

Towards a theoretical framing for the investigation of challenged localities through a geography of education systems

# The problem & the context

---

- Increasingly disparate development trajectories across Denmark
- Research and policy focus on access to the highly educated
- This, in spite of local labour market structures
- VET educated in demand
- VET system is challenged
- VET system is extremely complex
- National policy to increase the number of VET educated

# Identifying the pertinent spaces of education

---

- Thiem: call for an outward-looking approach (and Bradford (1990) + recent call by Nguyen et al (2017). Education and education systems as active agents of resistance. Education systems as producers of space....
- What are the primary spaces of processes of peripheralisation and centralisation and what roles do particular education systems play in these (Kühn & Matthias 2013 + Kühn, 2015)?
- Processual, dynamic, multi- and inter-dimensional, multi-scalar
  - Economic, political, social, discoursal
  - Mobility-related (Forsey, 2017; Waters, 2017).

# Identifying the spaces of education in relation to processes of peripheralisation

---

- Economic dimensions: Labour markets and their spatialities
  - Perez: shifts in techno-economic paradigms
  - Education systems in response to such shifts
- Political dimensions
  - Herrschel: shifting scales of power
  - Copus: networks, nodes & in-between nodesA lack of access to influence
- Socio-spatialised processes of marginalisation
  - Ethnicity, race, gender, 'rurality'
- Mobility patterns, mobility imperatives
- Discourse: legitimises inequalities through 'difference'



## OUTCOMES 1:

The VET system: Education systems that lead to expanding and recessive labour markets



‘Gymnasium’: Learning to leave  
Regional conveyor belt to man  
knowledge industry in urban areas



VET: a residual system  
Much more complex vocational and spatial  
structures  
What mobility patterns?  
Potential to man local labour markets in  
challenged localities

## OUTCOMES 2: The Governance Clash 1 + 2

---

### **1. National coalition partners at the dominant scale of power**

The regional and local scale is weak

Challenged by neo-liberal national governance model (based on demographic competition)

### **2. Mind the gap**

Strong coalition partners, yet up to 16-17 year olds to bridge gap from the school-based Basic programme to the labour-market logic based apprenticeship position



## OUTCOMES 3: Socio-spatial shifts in student intake (marginalisation)

---

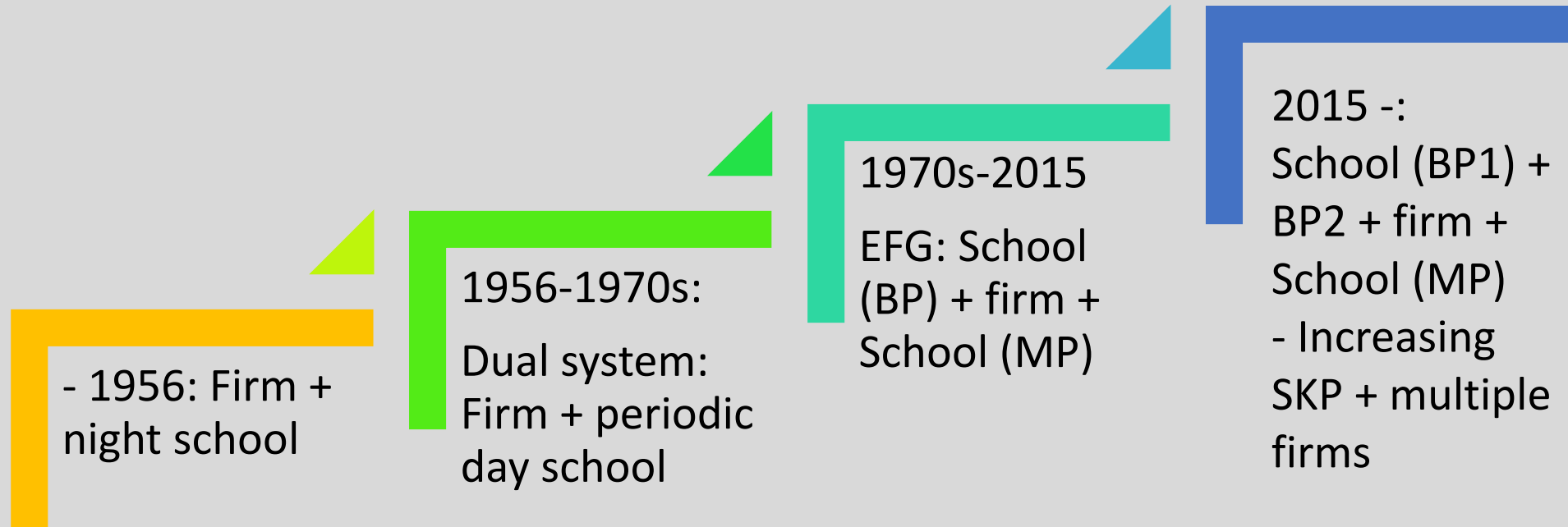
- Loss of prestige vis-à-vis the dominant 'Gymnasium' system: *"a system for those who are not clever enough to become academics"* (discourse)
- Increase in share of youth who seek 'gymnasium', decrease in share who seek VET.
- Today, majority of students in VET system are youth from rural areas and academically "weak" students in urban spaces (ethnic minority groups – especially boys). Children of vocationally educated become academics (gender differences), but the children of the formally unskilled have difficulty obtaining a vocational education.



## OUTCOMES 4: Increased mobility demands:

---

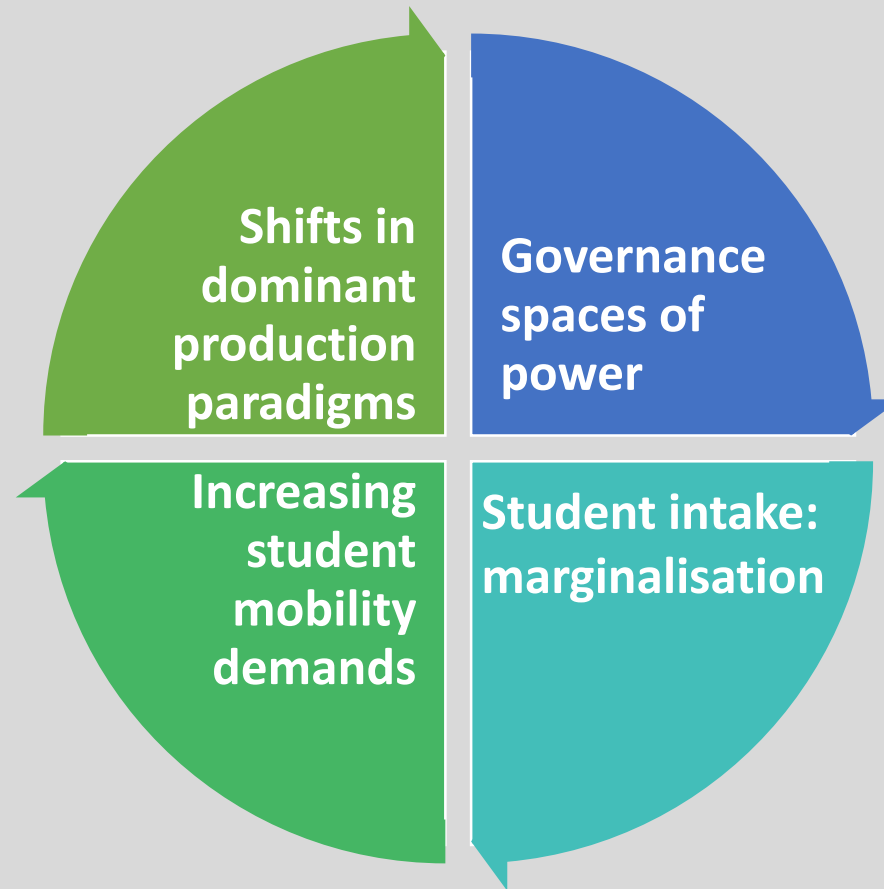
### Unaddressed complexity





# Outcome: The peripheralisation machine of the Danish VET system

---



# Conclusions

- The VET system could contribute to sustainable access to demanded vocationally educated and trained labour on labour markets outside largest urban areas.

BUT

- Tensions between governance partners at national scale combined with education governance embedded in neo-liberal management policymaking

AND

- Marginalisation of those who choose a VET instead of an academic track and general social mobility connected to obtaining an academic education

AND

- Increasing mobility imperatives in VET transitions. Combined with empirically-based research on students and their mobility trajectories into the system, we may differentiate between the included for whom the VET system is an opportunity structure (to vocational identity, to mobility and to jobs), while the excluded are....excluded

HAMPER a large number of students from entering and completing a VET education (those who lack 'vocational socialisation' from their home).

This is to the DETRIMENT of local development in already challenged localities

# Thank you!

