

Lifelong learning in German learning cities/regions

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*This paper traces the policies and lessons learned from two consecutive German national programs aimed at developing learning cities/regions. Known as **Learning Regions Promotion of Networks**, this first program transitioned into the current program, **Learning on Place**. A case study chosen is from the Tölzer region where a network has self-sustained from its genesis in the initial program and conducts successful Learning Festivals.*

The German Government funded the Learning Regions Promotion of Networks Program from 2001 to 2008, with support from the European Union (EU) Social Fund. Over 70 regions were supported with a substantial budget on a phasing-out funding basis. When this program ended in 2008, a new program titled Learning on Place began, funded by the German Government and the EU Social Fund, commencing in 2009. This program has a focus on public and private partnership in supporting good educational management in cities and rural communities. In this way, by involving private

foundations as partners, a framework for civic engagement has been introduced.

To understand the purposes of and outcomes from these initiatives, it is important to grasp the European context within which the German Government and its Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF [Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung]) responded in answering the call to implement ‘coherent and comprehensive strategies for lifelong learning’ (European Commission 2001: 4). In setting this challenge, the Commission communication quoted from a Chinese proverb that has philosophically underpinned the approach:

When planning for a year, plant corn. When planning for a decade, plant trees. When planning for life, train and educate people. (Guanzi c. 645BC)

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Introduction

Based on concerns about moving into the ‘knowledge age’, the Lisbon (March 2000) and Feira (June 2000) European Councils of the European Commission foresaw a mandate—‘lifelong learning for all’ which led to the launch of a working paper, *A memorandum on lifelong learning* on 30 October, 2000. This embodied aims of active citizenship, social cohesion, and employability within ‘six key messages’ (2000: 10–19):

- *guarantee universal and continuing access to learning for gaining and renewing the skills needed for sustained participation in the knowledge society;*

- *visibly raise levels of investment in human resources in order to place priority on Europe's most important asset—its people;*
- *develop effective teaching and learning methods and contexts for the continuum of lifelong and lifewide learning;*
- *significantly improve the ways in which learning participation and outcomes are understood and appreciated, particularly in non-formal and informal learning;*
- *ensure that everyone can easily access good quality information and advice about learning opportunities throughout Europe and throughout their lives; and*
- *provide lifelong learning opportunities as close to learners as possible, in their own communities and supported through ICT-based facilities where appropriate.*

The 1996 European Year of Lifelong Learning had also influenced this emergence of policy needed for the 'new economies' of the 'knowledge age'. Broader visions of the nature of learning and learning environments were recognised as strengthening social, cultural and economic rationales for lifelong learning (Kearns 1999: 25). Paramount was an understanding of the value of learning.

Also having significant importance was the UNESCO International Commission on Education's Delors Report (1996) with its 'pillars' of 'learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be', reflected in the further debate of their Task Force on Education for the Twenty-first Century.

Coupled with these initiatives was the OECD work on learning partnerships and learning cities/regions especially. Thus, there were parallel influences and guidelines that had a deep impact on enabling Germany to shape and mould its programs.

Ten policy principles for creating learning cities and regions were published by the OECD (2001: 120) and were seen to be applicable to any national or localised initiative in embracing a learning

community purview, based on inputs to and mechanisms of the learning process. Developed in Europe, these policy principles were geared to improving economic performance and regional development with 'innovative-intensive activities'. While they might appear organisationally biased, the principles are transferable into other learning community environments.

Being implemented concurrently with the *Learning Regions Promotion of Networks Program*, but culminating in 2004, was the R3L (**R**egional **L**ife**L**ong **L**earning) initiative across Europe funded by the European Commission. German Learning Regions Networks were directly involved, coordinating four of the seventeen European R3L networks for cross-border exchanges on issues of good practice to achieving cooperation in the lifelong learning field for a more durable and sustainable footing.

Much was coalescing to have an effect on the initiatives taken in Germany.

Objectives in German Learning City/Region Networks

The *Learning Regions Promotion of Networks Program* was funded as a contribution to the European Commission development objectives arising from the Lisbon Conference of 2000. It was accordingly aimed at the development of networks to support the transition into a knowledge society, with these structures envisaged as improving access to learning.

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research published its framework to realise this future-oriented task in 'Learning Regions—Providing Support for Networks' to highlight the Program's process and proposals, which reiterated their lifelong learning society goals (2004: 6):

- Strengthening the learners' personal responsibility and self-management;

- Motivating disadvantaged groups that are currently less involved in education;
- Strengthening relations between all educational sectors;
- Cooperation of educational providers and users; and
- Improving the quality, quantity and structure of offers in order to promote user-orientation in particular.

In the first two years of operation, the Program sought public bids for Network funding. A study of the socio-economic demographics in potential learning regions provided a profile of settlement, population development, employment and unemployment which informed the most promising proposals from 2000/2001 for Federal government and states' selection.

In the early phase of development, the Networks chosen submitted four-year plans to support their evolving development, innovative measures to achieve the lifelong learning goals, and business models to increase a sustainable co-contribution financially (up to at least 40% as a goal).

Two years' continuation funds were contested for around 50 regions to extend their work and for about 40 focused learning communities in accord with the newly identified category on learning cities/regions. This was due to a 'consolidation' phase in ensuring transfer of successes and results through a revised agenda, namely, for projects that provided:

- *educational counselling to foster change management—organisational guidance and instruments for guidance through counselling institutions, youth authorities, employment offices (mandatory) and other agencies;*
- *the creation of learning centres—curricula, courses and certification;*
- *continuance between lifelong learning stages (from the cradle to the grave)—including transition from school to employment;*

- *small to medium enterprises as relevant partners and referents for training and qualifications; and*
 - *communities as specific learning centres—learning cities/regions.*
- (Thinesse-Demel 2010: 114).

In this extension of the *Program*, human resources costs were met totally by the grants, but in-kind contributions for facilities and equipment from the participating bodies and institutions met about 20% of budgets. Strengthening environmental education and rural development were also introduced as foci and new regional learning communities gave emphasis to education as a means to local transformation. Increasing inter-regional cooperation/networking and greater mobility in lifelong learning were strong purposes for improving transparency and information flows between regions to achieve the EU theme of 'lifelong learning for all'.

Over the years of available funding to 2007, phasing out in 2008, 118 million EUR were granted. Within this, approximately 51 million EUR came from the European (Union) Social Fund. Overall project management was outsourced to the service provider agency of the German Centre for Aerospace.

In April 2008, the Federal Government approved a *Concept for Lifelong Learning* under their 'Qualification Initiative', so this further integrated and complemented a focus on continuing education throughout life.

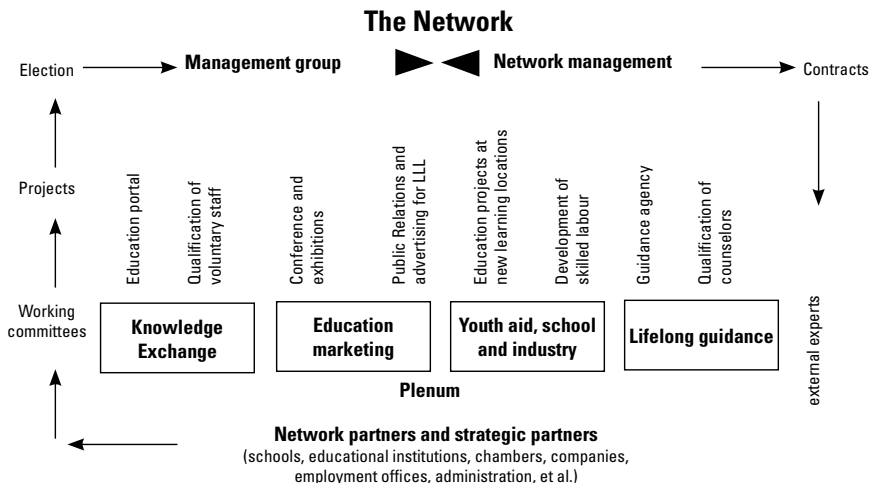
Support for Networks

As a regional strategy of cooperation and networking, stakeholders included all sectors of formal education, corporate and commercial related organisations/chambers/unions, cultural and socio-cultural institutions, bodies involved with youth activities, guidance and employment, as well as teachers and learners. An 'exemplary' organisational structure of a 'Network for Lifelong Learning' is set out

in Figure 1 (Federal Ministry of Education and Research 2004: 8). Networks operated as registered associations, non-profit limited liability companies, legal entities with memorandums, through agreements of cooperative intent, or foundations.

Because of the broad socio-economic objectives and relevant partners, Networks often had a significant number of members, 35% of the Networks having between 40–99 members, while eight per cent had over 100 members. This range of participation made communication, building social capital and coordination of effort key issues for the Networks. But, size achieved positive outcomes, such as comprehensive marketing and benefits from non-traditional partnerships.

Figure 1: Exemplary organisational structure



The *Learning Regions Promotion of Networks Program* illustrated an ambitious, bottom-up approach to socio-economic development with initiatives also influenced by American research prominent in the period by scholars such as Senge (1990) on learning

organisations. This approach meant that there was considerable diversity in the outcomes from individual Networks.

The significance of this Program's approach largely existed in the role of Networks as an organising principle for community and regional development with an impact on such aspects as building a shared vision, enhancing supporting attitudes, integrating strands of development and, in the long term, contributing to the creation of social capital and a learning culture.

Early innovations

A key to understanding what was being nurtured was how reflective practice came to the fore in the study of initiatives. It is notable that a serious evaluation ran concurrently with developments (this is discussed later). Formative exemplars were provided as representative for other Regions, also demonstrating different themes or emphases, and showing a diversity of possibilities. This early overview documented innovations and changes; ongoing achievements were then recorded in the magazine *Inform* and on a website (portal), both supported by the Federal Ministry and the emergent Board of the Association of Learning Regions Germany.

The first scan of implemented projects within the Program resulted in a joint conference with the OECD in October 2003, *Policies to Strengthen Incentives and Mechanisms for Co-financing Lifelong Learning* and the 2004 Federal Ministry publication already acknowledged. A selection of the Learning Region projects provides a wealth of resources and experiences in summary:

- **Lake Constance**—Learn service points (L-points), open to all ages with information and guidance available on anything to do with learning, training and further education, including competency assessment. Ten L-points exist in schools, further education institutions, libraries, youth centres and other public locations.

- **Lower Rhine**—Marketing and motivational campaign reaching people through regular media reporting (radio and print) about learning region activities, such as school to work transitions, mobility with learning, or using famous and high profile citizens to comment on the importance of learning.
- **Emmendingen District**—Economic stimulation by overcoming education deficits and up-skilling potential employees for small to medium-sized enterprises as a target group in the domestic economy with further education achieved through The College for Personal Development.
- **Central-Mecklenburg-Coast**—Improving quality systems in education and lifelong learning within an ecological, heritage and tourism city development to meet employer and community needs.
- **City of Mainz/District of Mainz-Bingen**—Reaching those ‘distanced’ from education, especially older migrants, created ‘Step On’, a series of seminars in accessible town halls, neighbourhood centres and network cafes to access information ranging from health advice, to culturally sensitive nursing, to job searches via the internet.
- **Marzahn-Hellersdorf**—Education and architecture have developed a ‘learning location at home’ project by renovating pre-fabricated housing remaining from a building Expo to receive cable programs produced in high school multi-media studies (for example, video reports of neighbourhood living, ‘Braindays’, elearning).
- **Oldenburg District**—Consolidating a learning-for-life approach, 50 partners in the Network sought to strengthen a new learning culture through five sub-projects on learning counselling, demand and supply education models, ‘Strong for Children’ activities, media competence in rural/countryside adult education, and tourism education.
- **Wartburg Region**—In preparing disengaged youth for the job market, companies and vocational training worked together in a ‘Learning Landscape’ matching individual skill to regional economic futures conceived as ‘Knowledge creates Perspectives’,

and also informing parents how to assist with teenager job preparation.

- **Unna District**—Culture and the arts capitalised upon a ‘New Learning World’ for youth and adult learning, and in building a Centre for Information and Education on an industrial ruin. New competencies have been learnt through photography, public art, museum visits and so on to build new motivations, business and confidence.
- **Pontes/Euroregion Neisse**—A multi-historical city seeing itself as a ‘borderless bridge’ between the adjoining three countries: Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. The Network, in conjunction with the International Higher Education Institute, worked as a Euro-regional education and knowledge server, enabling greater mobility linguistically and culturally.

Greater transparency in education and reaching the disengaged or disadvantaged were common issues for the Network alliances. Learner-centred approaches to making learning accessible and fun drove many innovations. A strong connection was forged between acquiring new skills that matched demand in the world of work, from a ‘new’ world of learning. So, the link between education, labour, as well as social outcomes and further education was improved. It was observed that at times there was a solution-oriented, competitive approach to similar problems between regions, and that the subsequent ideas exchanges stimulated ‘new impulses’ to maximise learning outcomes.

Impact on state and municipal education development

The January 2010 issue of *Inform*, the magazine of the Learning Regions Germany Association, cites a number of examples where the *Program* has influenced initiatives taken by state and municipal authorities. These are examples of the ripple effects that often accompany successful innovations carried forward as evident in the new *Learning on Place Program*.

The existence of the *Learning Regions Network Program* influenced initiatives that drew on the concepts and activities of learning regions within state or city jurisdictions. Examples cited in the last issue of *Inform*, acknowledging the central reform of making lifelong learning a reality, included the following.

State initiatives

- **Hessen**—‘**HESSENCAMPUS—Lifelong Learning**’, a consortium initiative that involved cooperation between five Learning Regions within the state.
- **Lower Saxony** founded an Institute for Infants’ Education and Development based on the networking principles being implemented in the state.
- **Schleswig-Holstein** promoted a state-wide network of twelve further education alliances with federal, state and EU funding. The alliances functioned as regional networks to foster information and knowledge flows, and promote cooperation. They met in a federal-state working group set up by the Ministry of Economy in which the Learning Regions in the state also participated.

In these examples, applications of networking principles in related fields extended the benefits from the *Program* and attempted to ensure sustainability.

Municipal/city initiatives

- **Lippe**, in North-Rhine Westphalia, established five learning centres with links to the Learning Region, offering innovative approaches to lifelong learning for a range of target groups.
- **Nuremburg** collaborated in the provision for lifelong learning through the Learning Centre South (Südpunkt) ‘House’ and mobile ‘Learning Lounges’.
- **Offenbach** championed the cross-departmental municipal management program to further develop sound infrastructure for urban education through a comprehensive regional database and a Self-Learning Centre.

These examples reinforce the important point that the outcomes of the *Learning Regions Network Program* reside not only in the activities and sustainability of individual networks but also, and perhaps more importantly, in the stimulus to initiatives taken by the states and municipalities which apply networking and cooperation principles in extending provision for lifelong learning.

Evaluation

The *Learning Regions Promotion of Networks Program* was subject to a careful evaluation throughout its duration by a team from the Ludwig-Maximilian University (LMU), Munich. This study led to a substantial report published in 2009 that is available in German only, but access to an English *Summary* of the report (Gylling: undated) produced by the Learning Regions Germany Association documented useful information on this study.

Outcomes and results

It was evident from discussions with LMU that the *Program* had mixed results, as might have been expected from the bottom-up philosophy process with a diversity of approaches. In this context, the success factors identified in the evaluation report assume particular significance.

The evaluation report *Summary* provided the results of the *Program* in the following structure:

- Innovation in networks
- Interlocking the sectors of education and facilitating transitions
- Quality assurance
- Marketing education
- Educational counselling
- New learning worlds.

This *Summary* showed the *Program* encouraged a good deal of innovation in areas such as fostering improved transition between sectors of education ('interlocking of the sectors of education'), marketing education, the use of e-learning and facilitating education in 'new learning worlds'. In some cases, the *Program* served as a trigger for innovation in regional education development and promoting new products for the region as well as influencing state and municipal roles in education.

Benefits of networking

The *Summary* identified three direct benefits of horizontal and vertical networking:

- Change in the attitudes of participants towards networking.
- Knowledge transfer between institutions.
- Increase in competence of the individual institutions.

These benefits are central to achieving clear synergies from network development. The benefits may also be seen as learning processes so that the Networks function as learning organisations with benefits that enhance the performance and productivity of network members while also building a culture that supports further development of the community or region.

Achieving each of these benefits involved addressing various barriers, such as competition pressures, that impeded achievement of the benefits. It was seen Networks needed to establish social cohesion and identity in order to survive. Maximising communication between the partners and building on individual strengths were seen as motivating factors for success.

Success factors

Success factors identified in the evaluation *Summary* involved a spectrum of elements including effective communication, good management practice, and strategies that built social, cultural,

educational and economic capital. When well executed, the Network led to synergy and productivity outcomes that clearly brought benefits to all stakeholders. A point of interest in the *Summary* was the achievement recognised by the geographic closeness of a regional approach accelerating exchanges:

... a better revelation and mobilisation of the resources ...
strengthens the problem solving potential of the Networks
... a correlation between societal, cultural and economic
development becomes clear and meaningful on a regional level.
(Gylling, undated: 6)

Identification of the Network partners with the Network and its goals was seen also as a key success factor. Fostering mutual trust and building social capital was obviously central to the Network concept. It is salutary to note also Reghenzani's (2002: 14) Australian case study assessment, in that partnerships must attend comprehensively to all impacts and are *heavily relational, dynamic and need to recognise the investment of all partners* in establishing and maintaining learning communities of practice.

While there was progress in many Networks, the *Summary* also pointed to difficulties in balancing cooperation and competition and the varying commitments to Networks by members and sectors so that the intensity of cooperation varied between Networks and partners.

Not surprisingly, leadership, sound communications and effective management in areas such as undertaking an intensive regional demand or needs analysis at the beginning were seen as important.

A useful overview of success basics and benefits in sustaining Networks was provided by Gnahn of the German Institute for Adult Education, which was included in *Inform* (January 2010: 7). These factors were seen as:

- *Learning Networks were generally created out of a concrete problem (e.g. high unemployment, problems in the further education market), and oriented towards enhancing the problem solving capability of the network and improving the situation.*
- *The implementation and success of Learning Region Networks is highly dependent on personal and institutional considerations. Personal and institutional hostilities and competition are often barriers.*
- *Learning Networks are especially successful when they are interlocked with other policy fields. Integrated in the larger connection (reducing unemployment, strengthening regional economic capacity) gives Networks legitimacy and promotes access to scarce resources.*
- *Learning Networks are most effective when they open up new opportunities for cooperation leading to synergy and productivity benefits.*
- *Learning Networks generally improve the conditions of the regional education market (e.g. through greater transparency), as supply and demand become more tailored to meet market needs, and more concrete and specific.*
- *Learning Networks often have a pioneering and innovation role in leading to guidelines for regional development that complement existing measures.*

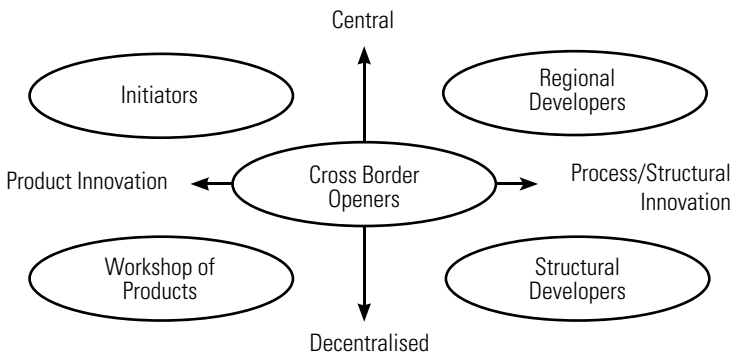
This précis reflects much of the experience documented in the Evaluation Report *Summary* which also synthesised key features of a Learning Network, noted as high performance against structure, function and proactive developments. Marketability of learning products was identified for those providing the 'biggest chances' for independence and sustainability.

Successful Learning Networks, such as the Bad Tölz Network, which is discussed as a case study, demonstrate what can be achieved in serving the learning needs of a community through a bottom-up approach to regional development driven by quality leadership, high regard for local conditions, cooperative partnerships and sound, systematic management.

Network typology

The evaluation team developed a Network typology with product/process and centralised/decentralised dimensions. Five positions were identified within the typology as ideal types (Gylling reproduced the LMU derived typology: 27). As the evaluation study was undertaken before the discontinuance of government funding, the subsequent relationship of sustainability of Networks in terms of typology positions would be a subject of considerable interest.

Figure 2: German Learning Regional Network Typology



Achieving sustainability

The *Learning Region Promotion of Networks Program* aimed from the beginning for Networks to achieve sustainability without government funding. Funding was provided on a decreasing basis to encourage exploration of alternative funding sources. While about half the Networks folded without continuing government financial support, Bad Tölz provides a fine example of a Network that has remained sustainable and independent.

Bad Tölz Learning Region case study

Bad Tölz *Landkreis* (District) in the state of Bavaria has a population of 121,373 (December 2010), with a distribution of 110 inhabitants per km². While there are 21 identified communities, or counties, three major towns are the focal points of the Learning Region: Bad Tölz (pop. 17,815), Wolfratshausen (pop. 17,992) and Gerest Reid (pop. 23,306) (<http://www.nationmaster.com/country/gm-germany/geo-geography>).

Considered the heart of the district, Bad Tölz is an historic, medieval town with spas, Alp views, pilgrimage site, Europe's first indoor waterpark, the Isar River flowing to Munich, and a neighbouring spread of service, commercial and rural industries. Unemployment is 2.4% (July 2011), significantly lower than the national average of 6.5% (August 2011). There has been described a tension between preserving the traditions of the old with modernisation.

Firsthand insights into the management and outputs of the Bad Tölz Learning Region (south of Munich) initiative were gained from the Chair of the managing Board of this *Network*, and his wife who is also active in the *Network* as an Advisor. As former journalists, the Chair having formerly served as managing editor of a business journal, they are seen as bringing expertise in communication combined with highly developed management skills, especially in marketing

practices for the development of the Learning Region. This expertise was recognised by the Ministry of Education and Research which gave them the leadership role in communication practice workshops for the whole *Program* nationally.

This role included the conduct of relevant conferences to pass on best practice in communication and marketing. The attention given to effective communications and business planning is evident in the success of the *Learning Festival (LernFest)* conducted by Bad Tölz every second year at a former monastery—Benediktbeuern. This *Festival* is promoted throughout southern Germany and has attracted 38,000 participants in a single day. On the intervening year, a *Health LernFest* is organised.

Structure

Bad Tölz Learning Region operates in a dual way with commercial projects (for instance, workshops and symposia) that bring in revenue, and community oriented, non-profit activities. This duality is reflected in organisational and financial arrangements. Training is conducted on a fee-for-service basis. The *Learning Festival* and *Family Compass* are examples of altruistic community-oriented projects. The Learning Region has a legal status with strong representation on its Board.

The important company role in the structure of this initiative is reflected in the ownership of the non-profit company that coordinates activities (LRTZ Gmbl in Bad Tölz), with shareholders including well-known companies in the region, as well as other project partners. Local companies support the *Learning Festival* in various ways, as well as sponsorship from major companies, for example, Audi, Roche, Sparkasse Bank, Sitec Aerospace, Radio Oberland and Tyczka Energy.

An office is maintained with full- and part-time staff in management, joint project control, event organisation, communication, advisors and office assistance, in addition to the voluntary committee.

The *Family Compass* project has a contact/coordination officer. A newsletter is published every two months, with an online request facility.

Function

Community resources in each of the three major towns of the Bad Tölz *Landkreis* are drawn upon in furthering the objectives of the Learning Region. Communication and marketing have been a priority from the beginning, giving the initiative a high visibility in the Region, especially with attractive mottos and catchphrases for projects. Transparency and communication are very important in providing the 'glue to bind' any Network. The transparency objective influenced an approach to outcomes, with precision in outcomes (data on outcomes and benefits) seen as important in promotion to partners and for success.

The lifelong learning messages in general programs and through *LernFest* furthered the interests of companies in attracting and retaining young people so that there was common interest in supporting the Learning Region initiative.

Proactive developments

Projects (products) other than the biennial *LernFest* undertaken by Bad Tölz have included:

- vocational guidance entrepreneurship activity for young people, a *Job Compass* aptitude test, programs for youth with special needs;
- conduct of a Health (and Wellbeing) Festival (*Health LernFest*);
- a transition management initiative involving all education sectors to solve issues in the movement from school to further training and professions;
- conduct of future-oriented Forums in the Benediktbeuern Monastery, for example, social and economic challenges for guidance and care organisations, management in turbulent times and so on;

- a Sustainability Declaration that was adopted by local organisations and alliances covering economical, environmental and energy sustainability resulting from the Benediktbeuern Forums;
- development of a career guidance manual covering school to work transition which is available as a free e-book ‘training offensive’ in conjunction with strengthening work-related skills; and
- conduct of a parent survey on information and service needs of families resulting in *Family Compass* (seminars, database guide for educational and counselling services towards family strengthening, interface between a school-family-circle within community education providers, care facilities, further education for parents with kindergarten age children, and active teen opportunities [such as Scouts])⁴.

The Bad Tölz *Learning Festival (LernFest)* provides a vehicle to focus community attention on emerging themes and issues; for example, bionics has been brought into the Festival as a major topic with a video that can be downloaded by the community in advance of the Festival. The Festival is supported by a 32-page program that directs community attention to highlights. In the *LernFest*, all ages and populations are catered for across themes designed to present the assets of the Tölzerland in the need for ‘active exchanges and ever new impulses’. The themes in 2010 were:

- **UNI Learning Fair** (discovering and experiencing science and technology)
- **Economy** (securing an entrepreneurial future through sustainable management)
- **Family** (working and shaping environments through family life)
- **Children and Youth** (developing incremental education and job opportunities)

4 Family support initiatives have been a feature of the Bad Tölz Learning Region in collaboration with relevant foundations and organisations.

- **Bio Mall** (finding bio products and services for demanding, healthy lifestyles)
- **Liveability** (using life values and cultural traditions for the future)
- **Health Services** (harnessing strength and natural tranquillity).

Festival success is reflected in the increasing high participation, attracting people from Munich as well as the surrounding area/ county. The 2008 Learning Festival was a winner in a Federal Government competition on ‘Germany—Land of Ideas’ in its approach to mobilising further learning by overcoming resistance or barriers to learning.

Just released programming for the 2012 *LernFest* is set around inspiring participants to know their abilities and build on potential. Approximately 300 ‘action stations’ have been arranged, with ideas workshops held in November 2011 and February 2012 for stakeholders on the themes:

- Youth need futures
- We all have great minds
- Strong family
- Sport as a cultural asset
- Values that survive historical turning points.

The role of this Learning Region in leading marketing for Networks has resulted in a series of conference documentations advising on, for example, the way to form a learning region, strategic collaborations, partner enthusiasm, target marketing, the way to a brand, and new approaches for site marketing. Professionals from economic development, regional tourism development, local government and education providers have been engaged in workshops, innovation forums and analyses to keep building knowledge and cooperation momentum for the future.

The Fourth Health (and Wellbeing) Festival was held in September 2011, adopting as its motto: *Feel Life—Conscious Health Experiences* with the ongoing entreaty to *Experience, Learn, Recall* among the 130 displays providing insights into health care and recreation. Many of the exhibitors arranged interactive and outdoor opportunities. A free, one-day congress preceding the Festival built on the historical Bad Tölz spa town economy with presentations personally and corporately on the latest scientific research and health policy/practice perspectives for this industry.

In initiatives such as these, the Bad Tölz Learning Region has demonstrated its relevance and value, and so achieved a basis for sustainability. A factor in securing the high visibility and continuity of commitment is in the acknowledgement received from national and state political and civic leaders engaged in opening, speaking or hosting roles within the *LernFest* activities.

The care given to good communication, sound management and regional identity are key factors in its sustainability, while the broad approach adopted that ranges across social, cultural, educational and economic development illustrates the value of holistic and integrated strategies of this nature. In these ways, the Learning Region initiative is assisting Bad Tölz in making the transition to a knowledge society and economy.

Learning on Place Program

With the ending of the *Learning Regions Promotion of Networks Program*, the German Government is now funding a new Program titled *Learning on Place* which commenced in November 2009. Forty projects have been funded in cities and counties with participation from all states over a three-year period with the option of two years' extension. Overall project management once again is undertaken by the German Centre for Aerospace on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. For the initial three years, 60 million EUR

are available from the Federal Government and the European Social Fund.

The Program is directed at public and private partnerships to support good educational management on 'site', 'spot' or 'location', that is, 'place', in cities and counties/rural districts.

Engagement with Foundations

The important role of Foundations in bringing a private sector partnership role conveys somewhat of a 'big' or 'civil society' flavour to this initiative which is both less ambitious and more highly structured than the former *Learning Regions Promotion of Networks*. The foundations form a national advisory body providing advice on directions for this current *Program*. In collaboration, the National Foundation Network will develop key findings and conclusions from the *Program*.

Foundations are seen to exercise interdependence in being 'catalysts for education innovation', especially in understanding the educational landscape of their locality. They can also sponsor and provide a mentor relationship. Twenty-six foundations began in a National Foundation Network (now there are 46) to be engaged in the Program overall, while individual foundations are specific to the 40 projects.

Thus, there are levels of foundation involvement beyond the National Network. More than 140 foundations compose a commitment to initiatives. A local authority might have a number of foundations contributing through an umbrella foundation, sometimes including a nationally operating foundation; or a local foundation is organised. If there is a cluster or consortium of foundations, at least one is represented on the National Network. Where there is co-sponsorship of projects, a cooperation agreement exists.

Efficiency and coordination are important themes with a key objective being to shift responsibility to the municipalities. New issues such as demographic change with an ageing population, under-education of migrants, and skill shortages with women under-represented in science and engineering, have arisen that now need to be addressed systematically so that more coherent and coordinated arrangements for education are developed in the participating cities and counties.

The *Program* thus aims to foster cohesive, integrated systems for lifelong learning, supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Foundation Network. The *Program* is important in testing a public/private partnership approach to fostering lifelong learning in communities. The concept of 'lifelong learning for all' remains central with the motto, *Advancement through Education*. It is foreseen that well-educated, creative and imaginative people will maintain economic and social development as well as city and regional competitiveness, in adjusting to life course changes.

Objectives of Learning on Place

Objectives of this current *Program* include:

- increasing school participation;
- strengthening employability;
- meeting labour supply requirements;
- improving the transparency of education;
- improving transitions between different phases of education;
- improving educational access;
- strengthening democratic culture; and
- managing demographic change.

This mix of educational, social, labour market, economic and cultural objectives is oriented to the needs and conditions of particular cities and counties so that place management will be an important theme.

Each of the participating communities has identified particular goals in applications, for example, five Bavarian communities being funded include the following objectives as examples guiding their initiatives.

Lindau

- An educational counselling centre will be set up with a network of support throughout the county;
- An early detection system for the regional training market will be developed;
- A new department of education and regional development is envisaged;
- The project will be supported by the Peter Dornier Foundation, the Lake Constance Foundation and the Foundation Lindau Citizens to build on lessons from the Bodensee Learning Region.

Kaufbeuren

- There will be a special focus on transitions between sectors, building on the work of existing bodies such as the Integration Forum and the City Youth Council;
- Educational guidance will be strengthened;
- Family learning and responding to demographic change will be priorities;
- The project will be supported by the Community Foundation of Kaufbeuren, the Hans Seidel Foundation and the Bavarian Savings Bank Foundation.

Landkreis Mühldorf am Inn

- To increase participation of citizens in lifelong learning will be a priority, thereby increasing regional human capital;
- A holistic approach to education will be adopted with strong coordination between sectors;
- The Mühldorf Education Network will be extended;

- The Roland Berger Foundation and a composite of local foundations will support the initiative.

Munich

- The initiative will develop responses to current structural changes in the environment set by families, including the increasing variety of life forms, a deterioration of the socio-economic situation and the labour market, and the segmentation of population groups;
- Initiatives will be built into a city-wide strategy;
- Neighbourhood-based education will be strengthened;
- A Munich conference on education will be established;
- Holistic education management will be progressed;
- Social diversity will be addressed through a strengthening of integration/diversity management;
- The initiative will be supported by the Eberhard von Kuenheim Foundation of BMW AG.

Nuremberg

- A coherent overall approach to urban education in the city will be developed;
- The Education Conference and Board of Education will be brought together in Education for the City of Nuremberg;
- Current human rights development will be extended;
- Integration/diversity management will be enhanced with cultural mainstreaming;
- The initiative will be supported by the Sparkasse Nuremberg for the City of Nuremberg, and the Foundation Nuremberg—A City of Peace and Human Rights.

These were all identified as what were termed ‘Individual’ projects. An example of a ‘Collaborative’ project comes from the north, as undertaken by a city-state.

Bremen and Bremerhaven (Bremen's harbour)

- A cross-departmental steering group bridging municipalities will oversee the design of a comprehensive education and lifelong learning system through the Senate for Education and Science;
- A parent education vision will be developed;
- Integration of neighbourhood oriented approaches will be part of an urban development strategy;
- Model projects will test improved tools for monitoring and quality control;
- The initiative will be supported by the German Children and Youth Foundation.

Similar objectives may be seen for other participating communities in the summaries available on the *Program* website: www.lernen-vor-ort.info.

The *Learning on Place* initiative will provide models for place management in building coherent arrangements to foster lifelong learning, while also addressing major challenges posed by social and economic change, such as the examples given above.

Related initiatives

German learning cities and regions have also been engaged in a range of international and nationally related initiatives, namely:

- PIE (Program of International Exchanges)—PASCAL (Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions) International Observatory, www.pie.pascalobservatory.org;
- EUROlocal, www.eurolocal.info;
- ELLI (European Lifelong Learning Indicators), www.elli.org; and
- Learning Regions Germany (LRD) Association, www.lrd-ev.net.

Comments on learnings from Germany

The German experience in building learning communities and regions is of interest in demonstrating the outcomes of a bottom-up networking approach, with top-down government support, to fostering lifelong learning and facilitating the transition of communities to a knowledge society and economy. While the results have been mixed, a good deal has been learned from success factors through the *Learning Regions Promotion of Networks*.

The approach adopted by the Bad Tölz region provides a critical exemplar of how leadership, communication and good management are exercised to achieve the benefits of synergy and enhanced productivity from networking to build social and human capital in cities and the surrounding countryside.

An important benefit resides in the influence of a lifelong learning strategy on state and municipal approaches which integrates cohesive planning and public/private partnerships for education and learning. The immediacy of addressing key policy and practice issues locally is seen in the current *Learning on Place Program*.

While the earlier German Network approach raised questions of sustainability when government money ceased, the understanding of educational, social, cultural and economic development was adopted as part of the fabric of a learned society. How to maintain and achieve this holistic approach is a key challenge for all communities moving forward.

Universities have not been leading players in the German programs, yet fostering social and human capital through service in building networks, raising student attributes and undertaking 'real time' research is essential for regional community engagement and development. The new *Learning on Place Program* encourages greater representation in collaborative efforts.

The role of private foundations both in advising general directions and in supporting individual projects brings a new wave of philanthropic responsibility and accountability that views lifelong and life-wide learning as purposeful and necessary.

In summary, the German experience has been a 'lighthouse' to learning community policy and implementation, with the key insights gained including the following:

- The value of a national role through funding frameworks such as the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and access to European Social Fund/European Commission grants;
- Sound strategies and structures in network building, interaction and in supporting relevant innovative projects;
- Fostering of creative, solution-oriented cross-fertilisation of processes and projects in the generation of cohesively, transparent responses;
- A balance between reflective continuous improvement and the importance of evaluative measures throughout;
- Holistic approach between various players and stakeholders in providing learning where it is needed, including the justification for elearning initiatives and communications;
- Monitoring of progress and adopting relevant transnational methods and models to inform wider audiences;
- Conduct of ongoing workshops sharing knowledge and expertise so that best practice is systematically integrated and promoted in maximising the take-up of 'big' ideas and products;
- Considerations for sustainability across all facets of learning for development, themes to address, and inclusion of those engaged, such as foundations and municipalities; and
- Understanding of lifelong learning as central to social, educational, cultural and economic development, with learning cities/regions as the societal mechanism to realise this potential.

Overall, the German experience in building learning communities based on the *Learning Region Networks* and *Learning on Place Programs* holds considerable interest as a laboratory for testing approaches to lifelong learning in cities and regions. The fundamental tenants of *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* and the OECD learning city and regions principles have been progressed.

Networking the networks in order to address important policy/practice issues brings together the benefits from local, regional, state and national partnerships and the policy thrusts of government to respond to major challenges. Many of these approaches are transferable to other international contexts and there are fundamental policies and key commitments Australia can adopt.

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