

Background Report: Germany (Regional report)

Lernende Regionen Deutschland e.V.

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1. General information on the Lake of Constance region, the biggest Learning Region in Germany

“Lifelong learning can only be promoted when informal learning receives more attention”

“The people who learn in a more self-determined way need supporting infrastructure and aid. A personal search-, valorization- and consulting service must be developed and that preferably on-site in a form familiar to the learner” (Günther Dohmen, professor of the University of Tübingen, lecture 1999)

The Learning Region “Lake of Constance” (Lernende Region Bodensee) was established in a very big region, which encompasses three administrative districts from the town Singen to Lindau. It formed an important supporting structure in the field of education for the inhabitants of the region, who traditionally rather were looking for education opportunities in other directions than their closest surroundings. The giant inland lake, which at the same time forms the border to Austria and Switzerland seemed to form a too big obstacle to overcome. The Learning Region performed an important task in this respect. The following subprojects were carried through:

- Cross-linking of the schools and of schools and companies for a better occupational orientation for students
- Education and supportive offers for parents (“How do I embrace a cactus?”)
- Promotion of employment measurements in SMEs through extra-occupational learning
- Education and educational counseling for migrants
- Establishment of about 30 “L-points” (learning service points) as local information and counseling points on education
- Educational and competence consulting services in three advisory centres
- Public relation work in the field of education through regional and supraregional expert conferences

The manifold activities have to a high degree been established on a permanent basis also after the implementation phase of the project. The L-points - the heart of this Learning Region - offer an easy accessible information and counseling infrastructure on education and educational institutions. Situated on-site in e.g. libraries, community or youth centres the L-points inform about the education possibilities nearby. They are used for example by adults looking for a new orientation in life and occupation, by students looking for material for their homework, but also by teachers who want to broaden their horizon. A contact person is on place for questions. An abundance of material is available in the form of brochures, books and maps that give hints on learning possibilities in the region. A terminal also offers the possibility to look into the data bank www.lernsee.de where information on education, regional educational

institutions, tests for different learning types, dates, news, addresses and offers around learning in the region can be found. The L-points are easy to recognize due to their corporate design and bundle the regional know-how around learning and education. They cooperate with regional institutions, organizations, schools, administrative offices, libraries, specialized centres and experts.

Another important offer of the Learning Region of Lake Constance is the competence counseling. In a one-on-one interview the talents, strengths and potential of the person seeking for advice are fathomed. The result is a record of merit and competence with the help of which realistic perspectives and goals can be developed. Help is also offered to find suitable further education offers and all information needed hereto. Advice is sought by people in phases of an occupational reorientation, career entry and re-entry into the working life for example after a parental leave. The competence counseling is integrated in the L-points.

2. Collaborative patterns

These Learning Regions were the most long-lasting ones, existing between 2000 and 2008. The cooperation in the region brought about that much more people could be reached as through the traditional offers of the educational institutions. The L-points experienced a great demand and acceptance, due to the fact that they are independent of the educational institutions (such as e.g. adult education centres or vocational training institutions). The free of charge number of the competence counseling also led to a high frequency of enquires of people looking for a competent advice. On average in the most frequent utilization phase eight enquires a day were responded to respectively appointments made.

1. *Locus of control*

The management of the Learning Region of the Lake of Constance rested in the hands of the manager of the association Lernsee, which was founded specifically for this reason. Monthly meetings with all collaborators took place and concerning the individual subprojects fortnightly. The manager of the network was in charge only of the management and the controlling. This also concerned the finances of the Learning Region. The contact to the German Aerospace Centre (DLR – Deutsches Zentrum für Luft-und Raumfahrt) was also carried through by him.

2. *Means of interaction and communication*

The respective project outcomes were continuously published in the DLR magazine respectively can also be found in the documentation to the Learning Regions.

3. Main actors of the Learning Regions network

The manager of the network was responsible for:

- the results, controlling and examination of the target performance comparison
- the context to the DLR
- the integration into the regional context, taking part in meetings to educational themes in the region

The network partners

The listed network partners (please see Appendix 1) included all with education concerned organizations, institutions and groups of the region. For the most part they came together for the first time, got to know and esteem each other and created complex cooperation structures, which partly exist up till today.

4. Management of the Learning Region network

The responsibility for the collaboration processes was assumed by a committee behind the Lernsee organization. This committee comprised relevant stakeholders of the region, such as the head of the district authority, some politicians from the participating cities (city councillors, representatives of the city councils and federal ministries, relevant representatives from trusts and companies). They met twice a year, in order to get informed about the development of the Learning Region of the Lake of Constance and to take decisions to further actions. The difficulty lay in the fact that the participating towns did not always cooperate in a harmonious way. Whereas the cities Lindau and Constance had a relatively good cooperation Friedrichshafen withdraw itself ever more from the thought of the Learning Region and in the end left the group in 2006.

The re-application for the theme transitions for the period 2006 to 2008 was consequently made only by the cities Lindau and Constance. In the long run the continuous provision of human resources at the L-points could not be managed throughout. This led to a close-down of a part of the L-points, which was a drawback for the Learning Region.

5. Quality issues of the network

The difficulty was to maintain the large network by a declining financial support. The four year period was characterized by that the first two years were supported to 80% and the last two years only to 60% of Federal and EU grants. Other Learning Regions went for a support model of 70% of all four years. This proved to be a disadvantage for the Learning Region of the Lake of Constance and was strongly reflected in the quality. Instead of being able to use the time to implement the project, the management had to concentrate their efforts to get together the co-financing.

The network was too big and had too many partners. The whole energy was consumed by keeping together the numerous small and bigger projects and products and reducing them to a common denominator, as well as to secure the normal course of action of the project.

In the end no large scale quality assurance took place. In 2008 after the project was finished this had as a consequence that only some L-points survived, namely only in the connection where the municipalities had taken over the financial part. This was the case also by the competence counseling, which were connected to the L-points. They too survived only when they were connected to the municipal responsibilities.

6. Role of EU policy

The Learning Region of the Lake of Constance had little to do with EU policy. At the most an orientation over the lake to the neighbouring regions and countries took place. For example an interexchange with Switzerland started in the last two years, which now leads to that Switzerland wants to found learning networks as an outcome of the Learning Regions in Germany and especially based on the experiences of the neighbor Lake of Constance.

7. Added value and impact

The manifold activities have to a high degree been established on a permanent basis also after the implementation phase of the project. The overall goal of the activities in the Learning Region was to promote the subject-matter Lifelong Learning and make it familiar to the public. Existing local initiatives were to be linked to municipal activities, new connections established in the region of the Alps and new offers further developed in the towns, administrative districts, the Euregio Lake Constance and in the Learning Region of Lake Constance. Special emphasis was hereby put on transitions in education – from kindergarten to school, school to vocational training, but also on further education and active citizenship in the retirement age. “The Learning Region has lead to networking between different stakeholders, in a way one could not have imagined a short while ago”, so Thomas Peter, network coordinator.

8. Transfer strategies

Transfer took place in two directions:

1. An internal transfer with regard to cooperation between the subnetworks, which came into being out of the teamwork. A part of the models and products which were formed here still exist today
2. Knowledge gained out of the Learning Region got a place in the evaluation carried through by Professor Tippelt.

The Learning Region of the Lake of Constance was a good example for the realization that a Learning Region should not exceed a certain size. This Learning Region was the biggest one and therefore especially threatened. Too many partners, too many products and projects led to that a common goal was not always recognizable and it was thus difficult to head for a road to success. Nevertheless the Learning Region existed until the end, the year 2008. Due to the abundance of results and the herewith connected difficulties it was, however, not possible to keep this Learning Region alive. The main reason for that was the abrupt end of sponsorship, since especially the focus on unprivileged learners and people in transition demand a strong sponsorship from public partners. If financing breaks off, so does the whole structure. This is what happened to this region, which meanwhile is a thing of the past and of which only isolated products still exist.

	Typology rationale and conceptualization	Lead Network – German Learning Regions	Active network- Lake of Constance
Policy framework	What legislative or statutory requirements do the networks aim to address (State, Regional or Local policy initiatives)?	The network Learning regions was evoked from the idea of Lifelong Learning and the intention of Germany to create a program to make education more flexible in the regions in a bottom-up way. The network Learning Regions was convergent with the national policy in this way.	Strong efforts to create a possibly broad range of education offers in the region, in order to realize the most differing intentions on the national and EU level
Scope	Is the scope of the network local, regional or part of a national directive/initiative?	both	both
Lead sector (goes to wiki)	Do public or private sector lead, or is it a mixture of the two?	both	both
Locus of control	What is the nature and form of control over network, policy and outcomes?	over network and policy	over network and outcome
Organisational network type	How is the network organized?	Formal network authorized by the Federal Ministry and officially supported with EU money from the ESF funding. The Learning Regions were founded as transfer instrument to make the existing educational institutions and ways more flexible.	Formal network. The transfer instrument was considered to cross the existing educational institutions and was therefore partly rejected or blocked in its implementation.
Dimensions	Is the structure vertical and inherently hierarchical or is it more flat/horizontal? Is it perhaps a mixture?	The cooperation in education took place between all existing institutions and groups on-site. Common solutions were looked for to overcome educational obstacles and homogenize existing diversities.	The cooperation in education took place between all existing institutions. Causes for conflict existed between individual educational institutions, which could not be overcome.
Key issues	What are the key issues that the network aims to address?	The aim was to strike new paths in education and create modern, innovative structures making education accessible to everyone.	Multiple educational paths were created where the inhabitants could participate in the educational processes. These were well used over the eight years. Formal and informal merged ever more.

Key elements of strategy	Could a core of key elements of the network activity/strategy be identified?	The elements social cohesion, capacity building, human capital development, economic, social and cultural regeneration could all be identified.	The intention to build up all the key elements from the national side was there. The LR tried to cover all factors, which was too much for a single regional network.
Financing	What are the resources needed for the network	A good base was given: 200 million in a mix of Federal and EU funds. Support also from Departments of the individual states and other sources. Problem: stopped financing after 8 years	Problems arose due to the abundance of subprojects and the over the years declining financial resources. The project was under considerable strain and the administrative input high.
Common paradigm, shared vision	What is the vision driving the network?	The Learning Regions covered all areas which are important within the field of education.	The abundance of formal and informal products, projects and subprojects led to a mixing of informal and formal questions, which led to problems with the existing institutions.
Time scale of networks	Related to financing and issues of sustainability. Is the timescale fixed or open-ended in relation to the network?	At first planned for 6 years and then prolonged with 2 more years. Sustainability was planned to be reached within 8 years.	6 years, prolonged with 2 more. It was not possible to achieve sustainability in this time.
Engagement	What are the levels of engagement by the actors in the networks?	The Learning Regions were to be built up as a community for education – a cooperative of all educational institutions: a regional educational network.	The Learning Region tried to build up such a network. However there were too many providers and not all could be captured in the end.
Role and importance of quality	How are issues of quality addressed?	Quality assurance was considered important but never defined, especially not for the informal areas. As a consequence educational institutions were blocked.	The informal and formal learning structures were mixed and no proper quality criteria developed.
Quality key issues	What are the networks key quality issues?	The intention was to address all relevant quality issues.	The reality in the Learning Region was that the intentions caused problems, since the network was left alone to deal with it.