



# Policy Making in Adult Education

A Comparative Approach  
across 21 European Regions



Agentur für Erwachsenen-  
und Weiterbildung

Aktuelles aus Erwachsenen- und Weiterbildung



Agentur für Erwachsenen- und Weiterbildung (Hg.)

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# REGIONAL



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# Preface

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This volume presents and discusses the results of the European project „Comparative Analysis of Regional Policies for Adult Learning“ (REGIONAL) which compares formulation, implementation and financing of adult education policies in 21 regions across six European countries.

Policy making and funding of adult education are challenging issues, even for people who are firmly established in the field of education. In times of globalization, understanding how systems and structures of policy making work becomes even more difficult. Engaging with adult education policy making frequently raises the questions of how to decide on priorities, how to distribute funds and, after all, of who exactly takes all these decisions.

As umbrella and service organisations for publicly funded adult education providers, it is important for us to know which strategies our political system draws on and which stakeholders it involves. We have to make these processes transparent for all those involved in this system – from the level of politics to the level of practice. Only transparency allows us to see which changes are necessary to improve frameworks and situations for each stakeholder involved in adult education.

Furthermore, we must not forget that we are embedded in a European context. It is important to know what structures and strategies are used in different European countries, so that we can, on the one hand, compare processes and find other ideas of organizing adult education policies and, on the other hand, understand that every country has its individual framework that is related to specific economic, social and cultural contexts.

We are convinced that this volume contributes to the endeavour of increasing the transparency of policy making processes in adult education and sincerely hope you enjoy reading through the different reports.

Dr. h. c. Jürgen Walter

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Niedersächsischer Bund für  
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and Further Education /  
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und Weiterbildung





# 1 Introduction

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LORENZO COSTANTINO AND HENNING MARQUARDT

In *Mind the Gap: Education Inequality across EU Regions* (Sep. 2012) the European Commission stresses that major geographic disparities exist in educational opportunities and outcomes, across and within European regions. The main conclusion of this report is that “big regional disparities in terms of adult participation in lifelong learning in the EU” (p. 13) still persist and undermine the achievement of EU 2020 policy objectives of smart, inclusive and sustainable growth. A key message of the report is that “policy solutions must be tailored rather than generic” (p. 11). Adult education policies had then already been in focus of the Commission for a number of years; already in 2006 the communication *Adult Learning: It Is Never Too Late to Learn* highlights that “barriers to participation by individuals may be policy-related.”

A key implication of demanding tailored rather than generic policies is to move the policy making process as close to the learners as possible, thus following the principle of subsidiarity as defined in Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union, which envisions that decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen. Hence, regions should be positioned at the forefront of adult learning policies and programmes. Yet, at the moment policies remain somehow detached from education practice in many European regions. In 2010 the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning finds that there are “wide gaps between legislation, policy and implementation, with weak relationships between formal policy-making and practice” (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 29).

More effort, it seems, is necessary to better link adult educational practice with its policy framework. A first step in improving policies and their effectiveness, though, is to find out how policies are actually developed and formulated. Over a period of 22 months in 2014 and 2015, the project “Comparative Analysis of Regional Policies for Adult Learning” (REGIONAL) did exactly that. The starting point of REGIONAL was the awareness of the importance of regions and local policy makers in shaping and implementing policies that accommodate and pursue greater policy objectives, often elaborated at national and supranational levels. The regional policy dimension has been selected in consideration of the key role played by regional and local authorities in defining adult learning (AL) policies, implementing AL programmes and managing Structural Funds, among which the crucially important EU Social Fund devoted

to human development. In a multilevel governance Europe, regions and local authorities are at the forefront of policy formulation and implementation: regional authorities are tasked with the formulation of policies and implementation of programmes for the overall educational system, with a particular focus on AL.

Based on these considerations, REGIONAL carried out a comparative analysis of adult learning policy initiatives to support policy makers at regional level throughout Europe in formulation, implementation and funding of more effective adult learning policies. The project thus benchmarked formulation, implementation and funding of adult learning policies across 21 regions in Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Serbia and Slovakia to gain detailed insights into (regionally diverse) processes of adult learning policy making, to pinpoint drivers and inhibitors at regional level as well as to extrapolate key success factors of regional policy making. In doing so, the partners in all six countries engaged in extensive research on different levels. Relying on scientifically sound methodology established under the leadership of experienced academic project partners, all members of the consortium conducted guided interviews with regional policy makers as well as detailed secondary research and analysis of existing policy documents since 2011. Each partner consolidated the findings from their regions researched in a country profile, which then formed the basis for the comparative analysis of regional policy making in all 21 regions. From this the partners developed a set of tools to be flexibly used in diverse policy contexts: the regions investigated vary greatly in terms of social and economic status, development strategies, policy making and legal systems. As such, the REGIONAL partners faced the challenge of developing analytical tools that could encompass the diversity typical of the European Union: in some Member States education – hence also AL – is delegated entirely to regional authorities, while in other Member States it is the national authority that defines adult learning. Financial transfers and fiscal autonomy are other key differences that permeate the development and implementation of public policies in the various contexts analysed. As such, the research and analytical tools developed in the REGIONAL project do not have the ambition of being the sole means to gauge policy formulation, implementation and funding in the domain of adult learning, but they provide valuable insights into these previously underresearched yet essential aspects of education.

European adult education is an extremely heterogeneous field and the processes of adult education policy making are accordingly diverse. The comparative analysis could therefore only produce useful results when organised along very clearcut categories. Breaking down the processes into the three main aspects of formulation, implementation and financing proved very helpful in this respect. These broad categories were further subdivided for a maximum of clarity in the comparison. ‘Formulation’ includes the processes behind adult learning policies in the respective regions, the influence of national and European as well as further regional policies, stakeholder consultations both within and outside the relevant services, the use of data and evidence based approaches to policy making as well as evaluation systems. ‘Implementation’ includes the mechanisms and programmes for the implementa-

tion of policies and their priorities as well as challenges and problems policy makers experienced in turning policy into actionable measures. Finally, 'funding' includes financial sources and resources, and their shares in the overall budgets as well as type and status of public-private-partnerships in the area of AL. The questionnaire that was used for interviews reflects those categories; at the same time it adds a set of open questions to complement these categories to respect the individuality of the regions and their policies to the full extent.

The diversity in policies comes with a diversity in stakeholders from education, politics, academia, economy and civil society who have different (and at times diverging) ideas on adult education policies and practices. This diversity is reflected in the project consortium to avoid onesided considerations of this multifaceted field. The project is coordinated by *Niedersächsischer Bund für freie Erwachsenenbildung e. V.*, a German regional umbrella organisation of publicly funded adult education providers. The consortium furthermore includes the Italian private training and consulting company *IDP European Consultants*, the *National University of Ireland Maynooth*, the Italian think tank *Association for the industrial development of Southern Italy (SVI-MEZ)*, the Slovakian NGO *Academia Istitropolitana Nova*, the Serbian *Regional Economic Development Agency for Sumadija and Pomoravlje* as well as the Hungarian *Ministry for National Economy*. This setup of the consortium not only represents various types of stakeholders in adult education but also reflects the different stages of European integration – Germany, Ireland and Italy represent EU15, Hungary and Slovakia EU28 and Serbia is included as a Membership Candidate.

Representatives of all seven partner organisations have contributed to this volume, mainly in the form of their country profiles, which are collected in chapter three. Henning Marquardt writes on adult learning policy making in Germany, Ádám Horváth and Péter Palotai on Hungary, Michael Kenny and Michelle Kinsella on Ireland, Lorenzo Costantino and Stefano Prezioso on Italy, Marijana Bozic and Marica Gajic on Serbia and, last but not least, Katarína Cigánová and Marta Jendeková on Slovakia. This main chapter is preceded by Giuseppina Testa's article on the project's methodology and followed by the comparative analysis of the findings presented in the country profiles, which was led by Michael Kenny and Michelle Kinsella. The volume is concluded by a critical reflection of the comparative elements of the project and their place within large multinational surveys on adult education by Michael Kenny.

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