



Country Profile: GERMANY

REGIONAL Comparative Analysis of Regional Policies for Adult Learning

**Niedersächsischer Bund für freie Erwachsenenbildung e.V.
Agentur für Erwachsenen- und Weiterbildung**

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Executive Summary

In the course of the REGIONAL project, that aims to comparatively analyse Adult Learning (AL) policy formulation, implementation and financing in 21 regions in six countries within Europe, the project partners conducted interviews with policy makers and, in support of the interviews, analysed policy documents released between 2011 and 2014 in order to gain detailed insight into policy making processes. In Germany, a total of nine interviews with policy makers from the Federal States of Baden-Wuerttemberg, Lower Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt were conducted between April and September 2014. Additionally, a variety of policy documents has been reviewed in order to complement the findings from the interviews. Due to Germany's federal structure, AL is politically located on the level of the Federal States, i.e. NUTS1. The research revealed that general policy making procedures and basic policies are quite similar in the German federal states, with the noticeable exception of regulations of paid educational leave and with large differences in public funding. Policy makers have consistently identified networks and exchange as well as international, national and regional surveys, studies and data collections as key tools for successful policy making.

Introduction: REGIONAL Project and Germany

The main motivation for the project *Comparative Analysis of Regional Policies for Adult Learning* (REGIONAL) is the need to identify and exploit key factors influencing adult learning policy making. In doing so, the project pursues objectives on three different levels: firstly, detailed insights into the processes of policy making and their differences across Europe, secondly, the improved effectiveness and impact of policies and therefore, thirdly, the project will contribute to the overall objective of reducing major geographic disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes across and within EU regions.

More specifically, on the level of insights into policy making processes REGIONAL aims at supplementing large international comparative studies that comment on regional disparities in performance of adults but also in participation in adult learning programmes. In their communication "Adult Learning: It Is Never Too Late to Learn" (2006) the European Commission highlights how "barriers to participation by individuals may be policy-related". The project therefore facilitates insight into the process of policy formulation, implementation and funding to shed light on the formal aspects of policy making and their influence on adult learning.

In doing so, nine interviews have been conducted in the German federal states of Baden-Wuerttemberg (2), Lower Saxony (4) and Saxony-Anhalt (3) between April and September 2014, using a standardised questionnaire comprising open and closed questions on formulation, implementation and funding of AL policies. These three regions were selected because they represent a cross section of German Federal States in terms of a variety of indices, among them unemployment, inhabitants per square kilometre, GDP, AL providers per inhabitant and the status of AL in legislation and constitutions. No city state (Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg) has been included, because this would have overemphasised them in relation to the majority of 13 territorial states in Germany.

In all three regions selected there was an elected and a non-elected policy maker among the interviewees. In addition to that a member of a regional advisory board in Saxony-Anhalt as well as representatives of two different public agencies in Lower Saxony were interviewed. The results were rather homogenous in large parts of the answers. However, there were some interesting differences for example in the perception of the relevance of funding.

Furthermore, a number of policy documents from 2011 until 2014 and those from before that period with major significance for current practice have been analysed to complement the findings from the interviews where necessary. Here again, similarities in the most important aspects could be observed: all three regions researched base their AL actions on Adult Education Acts that regulate general procedures as to the eligibility of AL providers to basic funding and the distribution of these funds. These acts are complemented by bye-laws regulating the funding details. Differences occur in the status AL receives in the constitutions of the individual federal states – Baden-Wuerttemberg and Saxony-Anhalt mention AL explicitly in their constitutions, Lower-Saxony refers to education in general. However, this does not have practical consequences. A further major difference that has consequences concerns the regulation of paid educational leave. Lower-Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt have laws granting

employees five days of paid educational leave per year, Baden-Wuerttemberg has not. However, the regional government in Baden-Wuerttemberg is currently negotiating to introduce a similar regulation, which exists in the majority of German federal states. The problem here is the opposition of industries and trade.

In addition to the directly relevant policies, which for example also include strategies and tenders for ESF-funds where those have been changed or amended after 2010, there is a vast number of policies which indirectly influence AL. These can roughly be divided into four subcategories: 1.) Regulations of professional fields mentioning Qualification / Training / Further Education as requirements for certain positions; 2.) Regulation of professional fields mentioning who is responsible for providing or supporting Qualification / Training / Further Education; 3.) Regulations mentioning Qualification / Training / Further Education as part of general procedures; 4.) Funding programmes that do not focus on AL but list qualifications eligible for funding. The large number of documents in these categories – between 35 and 118 per region¹ – shows how deeply AL is integrated into other policies, especially economic ones.

The key trends in the German regions under research are firstly the use of networks and exchange and secondly the relevance of studies and other data collection for AL policy making. Policy makers from all three regions agreed that these are the tools that best support their work but they also indicated that these tools have to be developed and extended further for successful AL policy making. The findings will be compared to those from sample regions in Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Serbia and Slovakia in further publications in the course of the REGIONAL-project.

¹ The significant difference in the number of regional level policies in different regions is probably due to the narrow time frame of this research. The majority of these policies are long-term policies and many are likely to have been developed before 2011. Furthermore, the survey method of searching for a small number of keywords in large data bases may have led to deviations.

Key data for Germany:

| | Germany | Baden-Wuerttemberg | Lower Saxony | Saxony-Anhalt |
|--|------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Population (2011) | 81,779,000 | 10,769,000 | 7,918,000 | 2,323,000 |
| Area in km ² | 357,167.94 | 35,751.46 | 47,634.90 | 20,446.31 |
| GDP/capita (2011, in PPS) | 123.0 | 137.9 | 109.9 | 85.9 |
| ESF Region Type 2007-2013 | | competitiveness | competitiveness/ phasing out | convergence/ phasing out |
| ESF Region Type 2014-2020 | | more developed | more developed/ transition | transition |
| Employment rate (2013) | 77.1 | 80.5 | 77.4 | 75.9 |
| Unemployment rate (2013) | 5.3 | 3.4 | 5.0 | 9.0 |
| Participation in LLP (2013) | 7.8 | 8.7 | 7.1 | 7.0 |
| Participants in labour market policy measures (training, 2012) | 1,407,985 | | | |

Map of relevant regions in Germany:²



² This map has been adapted from the file "Germany location map.svg" by NordNordWest, published under the Creative Commons [Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/) license, and is here published under the same liscence.

Policy Formulation

Most interviewees identified formal education as the main type of AL promoted through their policy actions. Only in Lower Saxony (L-S) the two representatives of public agencies say that they focus their efforts on non-formal education and the non-elected policy maker indicated that s/he focusses on both formal and non-formal AL. This may suggest that Lower Saxon AL policies have a stronger focus on non-formal education. This idea is, however, not backed by the findings from the policy documents. It may therefore rather be due to the positions of the interviewees themselves, because there were no representatives of public agencies among the interviewees from Baden-Wuerttemberg (B-W) and Saxony-Anhalt (S-A).

In terms of the goals of their policies, eight out of nine interviewees indicated theirs to be social. The same holds true for cultural goals. The more striking aspect here is that only six out of nine interviewees consider economic goals to be important and that none of the interviewees from S-A does so. The fact that vocational AL in S-A is located in a different government department which also determines the responsibility of the elected policy maker interviewed and the member of the advisory board interviewed may account for this finding. However, a similar distribution of AL-responsibilities can also be found in B-W, where economic goals play a role according to the interviewees. Furthermore, the question which policy actions have been realized throughout the last years reveals that two out of three policy makers from S-A have realized AL policies for life as well as for work. The difference between policy makers from S-A and B-W therefore rather seems to be in the perceived purpose of generally rather similar policies, which can be explained with the help of economic figures. While the unemployment rate of B-W is only 3.4%, that of S-A is 9%. Similarly, the GDP per capita of Baden-Wuerttemberg is 137.9, that of S-A is 85.9. It may well be that work-related AL is perceived as a social measure in more difficult economic situations and as an economic measure in more comfortable economic situations. Consequently, in B-W AL policies are relevant for the employed, which becomes obvious in one of the suggestions to the regional government in B-W that was formulated by a commission of inquiry on vocational and adult education in a report published in 2010: The regional government was requested to campaign for extending the focus of the Federal Employment Agency to include prevention of work place loss rather than only supporting the unemployed. However, this does not mean that AL policy in tighter economic situations focuses on the unemployed – none of the interviewees from Saxony-Anhalt indicated that they have realized actions for this target group.

Corresponding to the fragmented responsibilities, all but one interviewee indicated that AL policy is included in general education policy, even though the representative of a Lower Saxon agency and the non-elected policy maker from B-W identify AL as an independent field at the same time. Only the elected policy maker from S-A considers AL a stand-alone item in regional policy, which emphasizes the interviewees perceived role as an advocate for AL on the political level – a role that the elected policy maker from L-S equally takes on.

In Germany, education is a political field that is not allocated to the central government but to those of the Federal States. Consequently, almost all stakeholders indicate that they run their

own needs assessment on regional level on which they base their policies. Only the representative of a Lower Saxon agency states that her/his institution develops their policies on the basis of European guidelines, this is however due to the agency's explicit focus on European funding programmes. In addition to the own needs assessment, a number of interviewees state that they follow national guidelines and customize national guidelines to local needs. Strikingly though only the two Lower Saxon interviewees from public agencies but no elected or non-elected policy makers refer to European strategies under the 'other'-option that is given. That does not mean that these strategies do not play a role in regional policy making, especially since they have not been explicitly named in the answer options and since they may come in through national strategies, but it indicates that they do not play a major role.

In their own needs assessment and in transforming national strategies into regional policies, all interviewees indicate that they carry out consultations, the majority of which is classified as formal. The interviews from S-A stand out in so far as all interviewees agree that their consultations are mostly formal and voluntary, whereas the agents from other regions gave diverse answers. This may be due to the fact that all major stakeholders in S-A are part of a formal network organized through the Regional Advisory Board for Adult Learning that is established on the basis of S-A's Adult Education Act of 1992.

From the answers the interviewees gave, it becomes clear that there are public consultations but that this rather refers to consultations with stakeholders contacted through existing networks rather than through publishing policy proposals and therefore opening discussion with the general public. If there are, these refer to publications and conferences that aim at experts in the field. The stakeholders to be consulted in the policy making process are mainly selected through existing structures and networks. In these, regional umbrella organizations play a major role, because they provide networks and they equally provide access to consultation structures for new stakeholders. In all three regions these networks are formalized beyond the umbrella organisations, such as in S-A through the Regional Advisory Board (*Landesausschuss für Erwachsenenbildung*), in B-W through the Alliance for Lifelong Learning (*Bündnis für Lebenslanges Lernen*), which brings the major stakeholders together, and in Lower Saxony through the Lower Saxony League of Liberal Adult Education (*Niedersächsischer Bund für freie Erwachsenenbildung*) and the Agency for Adult and Further Education (*Agentur für Erwachsenen- und Weiterbildung*). In all cases the selection of consultants is of mutual interest since the policy makers require the input of the stakeholders, who in turn benefit from being able to influence policies. The stakeholders that are consulted are somewhat similar throughout the regions and comprise all categories named in the questionnaire: universities, business associations, think tanks, trade unions, civil society and AL providers. In addition to that, welfare organisations and foundations were mentioned as relevant stakeholders. Consultations are mostly carried out at need identification stage, when the necessity for policy action is given. Especially in formalized networks, regular meetings are held. Some policy makers also consult stakeholders at later stages in policy making. In many cases, the results of these consultations are not publicly available. They are, though, in case of

parliamentary hearings of stakeholders and in case of conference minutes as well as in case they feed into publications or reports.

In addition to stakeholders from the field of AL, all interviewees also indicated that they consult other units, departments, services within their organization or within public administration. These mainly include regional government departments responsible for AL such as departments for education, culture, social affairs, agriculture, economy, labour, science. Furthermore, parliamentary groups are frequently consulted. The elected policy maker from B-W emphasizes, though, that exchange between government and opposition parties in the parliament does not usually take place. This has been changed through the parliamentary commission of inquiry, though. Virtually all interviewees mentioned the regional government department for finance as a partner for consultation in questions of budget, which gives these departments a rather large role in AL policy making. All interviewees view these intra-service consultations as a way to ensure that AL policies are integrated into social and economic development schemes. An interviewee from B-W explicitly refers to ESF-funding and the associated aims. One interviewee from L-S and two from S-A stress the importance of AL for social strategies. This fits the Adult Education Acts of all three regions, which all stress non-economic aspects and benefits of AL.

When asked for their consideration of other cultural, social or economic policies when making AL policies virtually all interviewees indicated regional, national and European strategies to be relevant. Only one non-elected policy maker did not mention regional strategies. It became obvious though that s/he considered that point made with having answered another question. One representative of an agency stressed the executive function of her/his institution that leads to them only considering regional policies. The interviewee stressed, however, that national and European strategies are taken into account at other stages in the policy making process. Only two interviewees mentioned international strategies as relevant to their policy making, of which one commented that they play a very small role and the other did not comment any further. Hence, international strategies seem rather not to influence regional AL policies in Germany directly – they may, however, influence them indirectly through regional, national and European strategies. As opposed to that, the influence of national strategies is quite obvious because one interviewee from B-W and two from S-A mention national strategies for improving literacy to influence their policy making. This influence is not surprising because the Federal Government Department of Education and Research funds literacy-related projects.

When designing AL policies all interviewees consider specific data-sources: mostly regional, but also national, European and international materials. It is striking though that three out of nine interviewees had no knowledge of the PIAAC study and two did not have knowledge of AES.

All but two interviewees indicated, that they exchange their policy making practices with other regional administrative or political bodies in Germany. These two were the elected policy makers from L-S and S-A. The elected policy-maker from B-W confirms that the regional parliaments generally do not exchange their practices but that the federal branch of her/his

political party as well as the publicly funded foundation that is associated with this party facilitates exchange within Germany. This supports the impression that elected policy makers, i.e. members of the regional parliaments, do not contribute to policy making as actively as their non-elected counterparts. However, this also depends on the personal involvement and on political circumstances – the parliamentary inquiry on adult and vocational education in B-W facilitated relatively active involvement of elected policy makers, which would not have been possible in other circumstances.

The interviewees from B-W also report on international exchange in the form of the parliamentary committee on education travelling abroad and s/he informing her-/himself on developments and good practice from other European countries, and in the form of the non-elected policy maker being involved in European work groups. In the other regions international exchange does not play a large role, only the elected policy maker from S-A reports on occasional EU-exchange on literacy policies.

Finally, the answers concerning an evaluative system for AL programmes revealed that there is no comprehensive one in either of the regions. In all regions, the AL providers quantitatively assess their programmes but beyond that hardly any quality assurance is implemented. This is also due to the fact that the Adult Education Acts in all three regions guarantee that providers must not be influenced in their programmes by government institutions. Most interviewees agree that more could and should be done in terms of evaluation of AL policies.

In Germany, education is the domain of the federal states, which is why regional government departments, regional MPs and other agents on the regional level are mainly responsible for and involved in AL policy formulation. Hence, the influence of national politics is rather small, even though it is there. Furthermore, there is some exchange and coordination of policies beyond the federal states, for example through the permanent conference of regional ministers of education (Kultusministerkonferenz).

In general, AL policies in the three regions researched are rather similar concerning their general setup, because they are based on very similar Adult Education Acts that provide for broad basic funding of eligible AL providers within the federal states. Similar systems are in operation in all federal states. A striking difference between B-W and the two other regions is that there is no legislation providing paid educational leave in B-W at the moment.

Concerning the processes of policy formulation, regional networks and umbrella organizations are most important. Furthermore, personal contacts of individuals play a role. However, it can be concluded that formalized networks are most helpful, because new agents in the field of AL can access them and therefore participate in the ongoing processes. In all three regions umbrella organisations of AL providers are active and fulfil this function. Furthermore, there are formalized networks in all regions that connect these umbrella organisations with stakeholders from trade and industry, academia, politics and civil society.

Shifting the focus from general processes the interviewees describe to the role of the individual interviewees themselves reveals their different significance for the policy making

process. Formally, the non-elected policy makers represent the executive authority and the elected policy makers represent the legislative authority. In practice, it seems that the non-elected policy makers have a significantly larger share in AL policy making in all three regions. This is due to two factors: firstly, many policies take the form of bye-laws, which do not have to be passed by the regional parliament but which can rather be made by the responsible government department and hence by non-elected policy makers. Secondly, non-elected policy makers are indeed involved in policy formulation when it comes to proper laws since the usual procedure is that they formulate policies and pass them on to the regional parliament to modify and adopt them. Since the government departments responsible for drafting such acts virtually always have a majority in the regional parliament, the influence of elected policy makers is generally rather small (cf. Patzelt 2006, 115). Hence, the role that some elected policy makers adopt is rather one of advocating AL and of establishing networks. This may be different however in cases of parliamentary committees of inquiry, as has recently happened in B-W.

Policy Implementation

In each region, various actions arise from AL policies, among them grants covering tuition, fees, books, materials, and support services, general funding for institutions to assist adult learning, funding of partnerships between educational institutions to promote adult learning, funding of partnerships between industries and educational institutions to promote adult learning, launching campaigns with other institutions to encourage adults to update their knowledge and skills as well as organizing conferences to reach adults. In individual cases, these actions also include the establishment of networks and the implementation of QA measures. All but two interviewees perceived the general funding of institutions to be the most important aspect of their policy implementation. This corresponds to the regional Adult Education Acts, which all emphasize and ensure this activity. Furthermore, launching campaigns to promote AL is perceived as an important issue by many of the interviewees.

In their policy implementation, the policy makers interviewed identify a variety of problems. Especially the Lower Saxon interviewees stressed that limited funds are an issue, which is a point that only the non-elected policy maker from S-A explicitly shares. Two interviewees from S-A stress that the field of AL is politically marginalized. This is an issue that also shows in the Lower-Saxon complaints about the lack of funding, because these factors appear to be directly related. In B-W the issue of political marginalization of AL does not play a role in the interviews but it is emphasized by the report of the parliamentary commission of inquiry on AL and vocational training.

A further problem that is observed by interviewees from different regions is that AL has a negative image because it is either associated with deficiencies that have to be corrected or it is reduced to arts and crafts. Further problems that are highly relevant, even though they have not appeared repeatedly, are the lack of a closed conception of AL within the regions (B-W), the lack of motivation especially of those social group that would benefit the most from AL (B-W), double funding (B-W), shotgun approaches to AL funding (B-W), the lengthy process of policy formulation (L-S), the rapidly changing requirements to AL especially because of demographic and technological change (L-S) as well as the importance of individuals in political processes rather than established political structures (S-A). A rather interesting contradiction can be observed in the statements of the non-elected policy makers from S-A and L-S: while the interviewee from S-A considers the lack in lobby work as a problem, the interviewee from L-S sees the only problem in the vested interests of AL providers and their lobby organizations. Lobbying seems to be a double-edged sword, supporting the claim for importance of political institutions and at the same time pressurizing these very institutions.

AL Funding

All three regions under research have Adult Education Acts which regulate basic funding of eligible AL providers. In all cases, these acts determine regular payments to AL providers for them to set up programmes independently. These payments are determined by the hours taught in the previous years, so that eligible providers can work with predictable funds. Interviewees from B-W and S-A remark that it is a political aim that this regional public funding makes up for one third of the costs of those providers, while the rest shall be divided between the providers (local administrations in many cases but also trade unions, churches etc.) and the participants. However, this is not possible at the moment; the regional administrations do not provide as much funding would be needed.

Six interviewees have given a ranking of different types of fundings, of which three stated that regional funding made up the largest share and the other three rated it second after EU-funds (2x) and private funding (1x). According to a study commissioned by the trade union associated Max Träger Foundation regional funding is about 22,277,500 € or 2.50 € per adult in B-W, 51,377,000€ or 7.84 € per adult in L-S and 4,801,640 or 2.38 € per adult in S-A in 2014. It is difficult to establish a clear figure of EU-funding because it is hardly possible to helpfully decide what is AL and what is not. Two interviewees understand EU-funding to amount to the largest share in their funding, while three rate it second and one third. However, one of the interviewees who rated EU-funding first works in an agency that is responsible for the distribution of exactly these funds, which is therefore not representative of this region. Only the Lower-Saxon non-elected policy maker gives an approximate figure for the EU funding, which is € 1.5 million per year, the others only provide the ranking, if at all. An interesting situation occurs in S-A where all three interviewees provided a ranking and those actually differ: While two interviewees rank regional funds first and European funds second, the third one does it the other way around. As indicated above, a clear distinction of EU-funds is difficult, which is probably why the answers differ.

Furthermore, national funding plays a role, but – just as EU-funding – this does not cover basic AL courses but is allocated to temporary projects which is due to the nature of EU-funding on the one hand and to the fact that education is a political task allocated to the federal states rather than the federal government on the other hand. Private funding does play a large role when it comes to participation fees or the providers' own funds (in the case of churches for example). Apart from that, private foundations sometimes add to the AL funding. Private funding is considered most important by one policy maker while being considered least important by the other five who have provided rankings. Due to the fact that private funding is generally rather not received by the policy making bodies but rather by AL providers themselves in addition to public funding, clear statements are very difficult here.

Finally, there is a significant private AL sector that is not publicly funded and that is only indirectly affected by AL policies – mainly through policies of indirect relevance, which regulate procedures or professional fields and thereby determine training as a part of those.

In spite of the massive differences in funding, especially between L-S and the other two regions, the ways to allocate those funds to AL measures are rather similar in all three regions.

Due to the very similar Adult Education Acts from all regions, a large part of the funds are used for the basic funding of eligible AL providers: the total volume of this funding is 15,654,300 € in B-W, 47,327,000 € in L-S and 3,196,100 € in S-A in 2014 (cf. regional budget plans for 2014) The modalities are regulated in the Adult Education Acts and in bye-laws. The latter organize in detail what the former outline. In terms of policy maker involvement this means that elected policy makers have been responsible for passing the general framework, i.e. the act itself, and that non-elected policy makers decide on the details of the funding. Effectively, it is highly likely, though, that non-elected policy makers have a large share in the formulation of the Adult Education Acts as well, as has been discussed above.

The second important way to distribute funds is to allocate it to individual projects, even though this is far less than the basic funding. These funds are either distributed on application, which is mainly the case for ESF and national funds but also for some regional funds, or as required. Decisions are ultimately taken by the responsible government departments – either directly or through bye-laws that delegate the evaluation of applications and the distribution of funds to a public agency. The formulation of these bye-laws is a typical occasion for including stakeholders, since policy makers here feel an urgent need to formulate them in a way that makes sure that the funds can be distributed at all. Therefore stakeholders are involved to establish the needs and requirements and to ensure a procedure that is practicable for the applicants.

Public Private Partnerships also play a role in AL funding in the three German regions under research. The interviewees' answers reveal that there are very different perceptions of what actually is a PPP and what is not, which is why they give very diverse answers. As mentioned above, the basic funding distributed by the regional administrations does not cover the complete costs the AL providers have. They therefore require far more funds which, depending on the provider, may include private means to a rather large extent. This includes participation fees as well as funds provided by foundations, trade unions, churches etc. Furthermore, some interviewees mention projects that have been realized with the help of private investors, but these are only a few.

The attitudes towards PPPs are ambivalent and the role policy makers have in them is perceived differently by the various interviewees: Some interviewees would welcome more of these partnerships and they consider their position in those partnerships as a very strong one that enables them to pursue political and public aims. Others consider the vested interests of private investors as problematic and fear that politics cannot influence programmes enough this way. This is due to the Adult Education Acts that lay out clear rules to grant regional public funds and to the understanding that publicly funded AL should mainly cater for AL for life rather than for work. One interviewee from L-S suggests that the relatively comfortable funding situation might be the reason for the relative insignificance of PPP in her/his region, which appears to be very plausible.

The perception that funding is comfortable is not a common one among the interviewees, not even among those from L-S. It is especially striking, however, that none of the interviewees from B-W complains about the funding situation, even though funds are much

lower than in L-S. This may be due to the fact that the prospect of a substantial increase in funds has been presented. Furthermore, this could be due to the comparatively comfortable overall economic situation in B-W (indicated by the relatively high GDP/capita and low unemployment rate, see above) which suggests that higher participation fees could pose less of a problem than would be the case in S-A. This assumption is backed by the yearly statistical analysis of the Volkshochschulen, which is the largest nationwide network of publically funded AL providers in Germany. In 2013, 57.5% of the funds of the Volkshochschulen in B-W was raised through participation fees, while it was only 36% in S-A and 28.4% in L-S (cf. Huntemann and Reichart 2014). The low figure in L-S appears to be possible because of the comparatively large amount of public funding. The difference between S-A and B-W is especially striking when considering that public regional funding is about equal when represented per inhabitant. The high amount of participation fees that AL providers in B-W can obviously charge and the low amounts that providers from S-A charge clearly correlate with the respective economic situations.

Key findings

The interviewees themselves were given the opportunity to identify major challenges and the main drivers in policy making and implementation as well as the major tools they use in these processes. The challenges identified were rather diverse: several interviewees emphasized the problems of reaching participants, especially migrants as well as uneducated and unqualified people. This ties in with a lack of acceptance and the unclear relevance especially of non-work related AL with the potential participants as well as political agents. Furthermore, demographic change and the lack of funds have been mentioned as major challenges. Concerning the lack in funding, it is especially striking that the interviewees from B-W have not mentioned this, even though their public spendings per head are almost as low as that of S-A. Rather, the respective interviewees stressed political issues not related to funding, which the interviewees from L-S and S-A did not mention, namely the distribution of AL-related responsibilities over various government departments and the lacking clear-cut political aim that all policy makers can follow. Due to the small sample size these regional variations can, however, only be taken as an indicator and no reliable conclusions on political practices can be drawn.

Concerning the main drivers in policy making, the interviewees provided answers on different levels. Concerning structural features and current developments, they predominantly named the needs of participants and providers (social, cultural, economic), demographic change, a shortage of skilled labour, current research and surveys as main drivers for AL policy development. Individuals added the increased relevance of Lifelong Learning and the continuation of existing structures as drivers. On the institutional and personal side, the interviewees named government departments, MPs, AL providers, umbrella organisations, trade unions, academia and individuals from those fields as main drivers. In spite of the variety of challenges for AL but also of drivers of AL policy making, the policy makers interviewed indicated that they use a very small selection of effective and helpful tools to cater for the needs and to confront the challenges. These are firstly the exchange among policy makers and stakeholders through conferences and networks and secondly surveys, specialized literature and statistics. Especially the importance of networks and exchange also results from the other questions asked in the interviews and may therefore be considered a major factor in current policy making processes in B-W, L-S and S-A.

Conclusions

The REGIONAL-project aims at identifying and analysing policy making processes on regional level. Furthermore, the project wants to make suggestions how to make policy making processes for AL more efficient. In doing so, we have not only assessed what policy makers actually do and how they do it, but also what they would need to better support their work, since those involved in the processes may know best what is helpful. In the German regions under research, there were two major aspects that have repeatedly been mentioned by interviewees from all regions. Firstly, this is networks: Even though the interviewees have indicated that networking and exchange among colleagues and stakeholders is among the tools they already successfully use for policy making, there seems to be a need for even more exchange. There are organisations and institutions in all three regions that organize exchange on regional level. What the interviewees consider helpful above that is an exchange on national and European levels as well as subject-specific exchange and policy suggestions from network partners.

The second major aspect that policy makers find necessary is substantial information to base policy decisions on. They formulate the need for systematic collection and provision of relevant data. This is also a tool that is already used across the regions but which obviously needs to be improved and extended. The interviewees here refer to regional studies providing details on the situation in the individual regions as well as to supra-regional comparative studies.

In addition to these aspects that are largely shared between interviewees from all regions, a number of further tools have been named that would help policy makers. These include the introduction of quality assurance systems, an increased significance of AL both with the regional MPs and with the general public as well as an increase in the speed of policy making processes. Finally, interviewees from L-S and S-A also mention that an increased funding would help AL policies in their regions. Opinions on these final aspects are not as coherent as those referring to networks and data availability.

When shifting the focus from the concrete answers to the meta-level of interview formalities, a further relevant though anecdotal finding should be mentioned as an epilogue: B-W is the only region under research where all interviewees allowed their names to be published with the results. This is again only a trend that is difficult to draw conclusions from – still, it indicates that policy makers from B-W tend to be more open about their work than others. This can of course also be a result of the comprehensive parliamentary inquiry into AL that has been undertaken recently, which has shed light on the political processes concerning AL including the institutions' and possibly individuals' different positions and vested interest, which would make talking openly about relevant processes much easier. Inquiries like this might therefore be a suitable means to (re-)start political structurings of the field of AL.

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