

Lifelong Learning in Germany

The promotion of Lifelong learning in Germany is seen as the central goal of the contemporary educational politics. Different actors – principally the governmental department for Education and Research (BMBF) - are working to create ways to stimulate individual, social and economical development-process, challenging the actual dynamics which are quickly changing the society (i.e. demographic change).

Politics on lifelong learning aim to help individuals to cope with the challenges of their everyday life, with particular attention to their capability of fitting in the dynamic job-market. (BMBF p. 11f.)

To grant more people access to education, new paths are being created and existing not-official educational formats are being valorized and recognized.

In Germany both, the EU and the OECD definitions of formal, informal and non formal learning, are well known: the EU-ones are though more accepted than the other ones. According to this definition-set all those educational paths which are understood as "Weiterbildung" are recognized as non-formal learning. (ibid., p. 11)

Strategies to develop and recognize non-formal and informal learning have been developed by the BLK (Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung und Forschungsförderung) - following the Education Forum 2002 whose results are summarized in the document: "Empfehlungen des Forums Bildung". The strategical plan of the BLK, which consider learning on the base of different life-phases and it is organized on the basis of different core areas - like i.e. networking, modularization or learning cultures - is retained in the following document: „Strategiepapier für lebenslanges Lernen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland“. (ibid., p. 95)

BLK created between 2000 and 2005 also a test-programme (BLK-Modellversuchsprogramm "Lebenslanges Lernen") which aimed to foster innovative projects dealing with the development of a new learning culture. (ibid., p. 97)

Recently it has also been created by the German Ministry for Education and Research two working groups: „Innovationskreis Weiterbildung“ deals with the connection between formal and informal learning and „Innovationskreis Berufliche Bildung“ with modernization of the structural mechanisms regulating the access to vocational education. (ibid.)

An obstacle to the improvement of lifelong learning is the fact that most of the educational offer is on the free-market: that means that different subjects and interests have to come together. (ibid., p. 99)

The costs of the learning-offers are covered by enterprises - which pay for their employed-, by private organizations, often by the participant himself and obviously by the State - whose contingent was 2006 according to the Konsortium Bildungsberichterstattung decreasing (ibid.). As well as the National State, Länder and Cities are important funding institutions.

Often the institutions which offer learning experiences look themselves for funding: usually courses are paid partly by participants, partly by the Land and the City and partly by third-parties.

In our case - Department of Intercultural Business Communication of the (public) University of Jena - the offer is almost entirely paid by the State. Our interest for lifelong learning manifests also in our research-field (Learning-cultures and learning-styles are one of our objects of research) as well as in our one-year "Weiterbildung" in blended-learning which aims to form professionals in the field of intercultural trainings and conflict mediation.