The concepts of ‘learning region’ (LR) and ‘learning city’ are closely associated. The related concept of the ‘Educating City’ is long-standing and is associated with a well-known OECD (1973) initiative and a more recent global network of educating cities established at a Gothenburg conference (Hirsch, 1992). The term ‘learning city’ became more popular parlance in the 1990s, reflecting a more general tendency to emphasise the fusion of both economic and social factors, and an awareness that the word ‘learning’ invokes a wider involvement with, and by, the person who is doing the learning. Taken further, the concept of a learning city or region also implies the possibility of learning on a metropolitan scale (Tippelt and Schmidt, 2007).

Firstly, taking a systems science perspective on learning regions, where learning processes are more than simply analysed at the personal and organisational level, we may observe a set of cluster-oriented initiatives organised around the concept of business ecosystems. An example is the Öresund Region that crosses Southern Sweden and Northern Denmark (see www.uni.oresund.org), where biomedical science, the food industry, nanotechnology and information technology amongst other industries seek to find common and shared values not only for internal cooperation and competition within the ecosystem, but also for joint marketing to the world.

A second departure is the decision of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF, 2004) in 2001 to launch the programme ‘Learning Regions – Providing Support for Networks’. The German LR programme might be seen to be the most ambitious national initiative in this area. In close co-operation with the Länder, and co-financed by the European Social Fund, the aim of the programme was to facilitate structural progress in lifelong learning networks. Unlike the aforementioned foci on the specific
roles of enterprises in Öresund, this German network emphasises the LR as explicitly related to structural improvements of the education and training system. The networks chosen for attention in Germany each focused on the needs of the ‘customers’ and the personal circumstances of learners. In order to perform this function they needed to be able to develop local co-operation between all the stakeholders across educational sectors and training providers.

Since that time the term ‘learning region’ has been used in a broad generic sense referring to a region, city, urban or rural area, regardless of whether its identity is defined in administrative, cultural, geographical, physical or political terms. The learning region must, however, be big enough to encompass and mobilise the key players for the purpose of developing lifelong learning (European Commission, 2002).

This chapter relates the story of learning regions in Germany. The initiative started in 2001 and it remains active in further development today.

The German idea: learning regions – providing support for networks

The basic objective was to apply the Lisbon strategy 2000 for Germany in a nationwide initiative. This was designed to bring to fruition its main recommendation that ‘the European Union must become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’. As a result a bottom-up programme was initiated across selected German regions.

One key for structural progress in lifelong learning is to proliferate networks that systematically focus on the needs of the ‘customers’ and the personal circumstances of these learners. This can only be assured by local cooperation of all stakeholders across the educational sectors. In 2001, therefore, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) launched the Germany-wide programme ‘Learning Regions – Providing Support for Networks’ in close co-operation with the German states, and co-financed by the European Social Fund. The programme supports 71 model regional networks which develop a tailored supply of guidance, learning, and further education services, thus contributing to improving employability, strengthening small and medium-sized enterprises and promoting regional development. It aims
at the creation of long-lasting partnerships which are supported and financed in the longer term by their users, private and public institutions, and companies.

In the mid-term-conference in Berlin 2004, Viviane Reding, the Director-General for Adult Learning in the European Commission, stressed that ‘One of the commitments undertaken by member states under the Lisbon strategy is that by 2006 they should all have adopted coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies. The national strategy, jointly adopted by the German authorities at Federal and Land level respectively, is explicitly identified as a response to this commitment, and is to be greatly welcomed. It demonstrates *inter alia* that institutionally complex situations do not prevent member states from finding solutions where the will is strong enough. More importantly, by bringing together those responsible at different levels of government, it can tailor solutions to the needs identified by those familiar with the situation on the ground and in different regions.

By focusing on the individual learner and stressing the learner’s need to be able to direct his or her own learning processes, it allows for a comprehensive lifelong and life-wide approach that recognises the fact that learning takes place in many situations, both formal and informal, in learning institutions, in the workplace and even in the individual citizen’s own living environment.

The ‘Learning regions – providing support for networks’ programme, announced by the German authorities on 29 October 2000, brings together the various organisational structures, both public and private, with whom the individual learner interacts. This is appropriate, because when the individual learns, he or she is not the only one to benefit: the current or – in the case of unemployed people, the prospective – employer benefits, and so does wider society. Paradoxically, one of the challenges arising from this win–win situation is the need to ensure that countries do not get trapped into self-defeating arguments over who should bear the cost of lifelong learning, leading to underinvestment. The public authorities, and also the social partners through collective bargaining, have a role to play in ensuring that Europe is a high-skill, knowledge-intensive society, and achieving this objective, which involves values as well as economic mechanisms, also involves partners at different levels in the different Member States.
**Basic conditions**

At the beginning of the programme, around €144 million was made available for promoting learning regions – half of it financed by the Federal Ministry and half by the European Social Fund. Around 90 regions (for the research year) and (for the later testing phase) 71 regions throughout Germany were selected and financially supported. The amount of support decreased year on year: year 1: 100 per cent, years 2 and 3: 80 per cent, years 4 and 5: 60 per cent.

The first period had a duration of 6 years and then another period of 2 years followed. For that next step separate funds were allocated from the Federal ministry and the European Social Fund.

**Involved partners**

The partners in each region included all relevant representatives of civic groups and other stakeholders, including general and vocational schools, institutions of higher education, funding agencies and institutions offering out-of school education and off-the-job or inter-firm training, trade union and industry training organisations, adult education centres, education funding agencies of the churches, commercial providers and other educational institutions, companies (explicitly SME), chambers of commerce, trade unions, business development organisations, education guidance institutions, youth authorities, employment offices and other administrations, cultural and socio-cultural institutions such as libraries, museums, art and music schools as well as youth, senior citizens’, women’s, sports and environmental groups and projects, self-organised learner groups, representatives of consumer protection organisations, teachers and company training course tutors, as well as developers of teaching and learning material, education and training advice centres, youth welfare offices, employment offices and other agencies, and make-work companies.

All these groups were included into these regional contexts so that a common solution for regional gaps within the educational systems could be worked out at multiple levels.

**Purpose of funding**

The main objectives to be achieved by learning regions were to boost motivation, foster independent learning abilities and increase user orientation. The aim was to achieve both qualitative and quantitative improvements in order to lead, not least, to a greater degree of user orientation. Thus new learners had to be mobilised – particularly those people who have previously
been disadvantaged, or reluctant or without easy access to education and training. The intention was to serve people through the provision of education centres in the local neighbourhood like a one-stop shop. That way education could be embedded into the social life of a community and provide an easy level of access. Marketing was to be linked up by, for example, cross-provider advertising campaigns such as learning festivals which could be at a national or regional level.

Making lifelong learning active through networking and co-operation as a major goal means adopting strategies to strengthen learners’ personal responsibility and self-management, to motivate disadvantaged groups that are currently less involved in education, to enhance relationships between all the educational sectors and to ensure the co-operation of educational providers and users. In particular, quality, quantity and an accessible structure should be paramount in order to promote user-orientation.

The funding was provided to promote innovative projects in the field of lifelong learning, particularly those which aimed at building or rebuilding networks linking the different education and training sectors and providers, at developing existing cooperation with multi-sector and multi-provider networks, and at increasing the range of tasks covered by existing multi-sector and multi-provider networks. Furthermore, the networks must promote the application of the principle of gender equality in the education and employment systems. In order to achieve this, funding was provided to establish and build up regional networks linking the various education and training sectors and providers, with a view to developing and testing innovative projects in these aspects of lifelong learning. This could be achieved by increasing flexible transition between the different education and training sectors, in order to interlock general, political, cultural and vocational education and training to a greater degree, and to reinforce cooperation between education policy, employment policy, labour market policy and other policy fields, in order to foster personal development and proficiency and to enhance peoples’ employability.

The concrete selection criteria for the networks eligible for funding were those whose description and 4-year strategic plan included an effective structure of goals and tasks, implementation plans, planning, composition, organisational configuration and resources clearly in line with the strategic goals and requirements of the federal ministry and the operating organisation in charge, the German Aerospace Centre (see LRD website). The regional span of activity including the likelihood of a successful implementation of
tasks on the one hand, and on the other the transferability of concepts and measures, had to be clearly indicated.

**Terminology: ‘network’ and ‘learning region’**
The term ‘network’, as used here, means a lasting relationship between the various education and training providers from disparate education and training sectors, users of education and training, and other stakeholders in the field of lifelong learning. Such networks were designed to increase peoples’ willingness to participate in education and training measures, and to create enhanced and improved formal and informal learning opportunities across the board in a joint effort. Available resources were optimised within the framework of a communication- and cooperation-based partnership in order to nurture a new cooperative learning culture, to increase participation, self-sufficiency and the independence of learners, and to stimulate innovation and the transfer of competence. It was required that all relevant partners should become engaged in the networks, and should consolidate existing experiences and co-operation structures. With this decentralised approach, each network could adapt easily to the regional strategy and develop its own best participation strategy to implement it.

**Designing the networks – general remarks on the content**
Many personally tailored services have become a common matter of course: For example, at a travel agency one can receive detailed information on offers, prices and promised features of different tour operators. If one likes it, one can book it on the spot. The interaction of all parties involved is routine. The same could be possible for a lifelong guidance agency. Here also, the prerequisite for success is a large network, market transparency, intensive information exchange and quality assurance of the participating stakeholders and funding agencies. This, for example, is how a structural innovation for lifelong learning could look; its creation requires investment and patience but on a broad base it clearly leads to better orientation and market dynamics. This was one of the goals of the programme.

Through intra-regional cooperation, the stakeholders complemented each other and benefitted from the advantages of their size: for example, joint education marketing activities promoted opportunities for qualified training and further education and encouraged greater participation in education in the region. Cross-provider guidance and quality development activities helped individuals to understand their own needs, and motivated and introduced students to the network. Central learning management systems allowed virtual learning at different locations and were also available to smaller
suppliers via the network. The recognition of informal skills and the net-
working of learning locations encouraged the inter-changeability of both
educational experiences and life choices, and improved the quality of
education programmes. In particular, this helped small and medium-sized
companies in the region to fulfil their requirements for skilled workers, thus
increasing their innovative capacity. Closer co-operation within a regional
partnership promoted shared ideas and mutual trust – factors that are decisive
if institutional changes are to occur, and a learning culture extending beyond
the partnership is to evolve. Learning regions now emerged in which intra-
regional cooperation was improving education and new, previously unknown
and unrealised horizons were opening up.

To ensure that they fulfilled their purpose, the networks chose priority areas.
The networks were designed to encourage and support the creation and
implementation of innovative projects, especially those which increased
flexible transition and transfer of expertise solutions between the various
education and training sectors, thus enhancing the interlocking of general,
political, cultural and vocational education and training. This increased the
cooperation between education and training, employment and labour market
policy, the promotion of economic development and other policy areas in
order to increase peoples’ employability and proficiency. The transparency
of education and training services was improved by making them more
user-friendly, e.g. by combining information, advisory and agency services
and providing new services, including for self-directed learning. All these
steps led to improving the quality and usability of education and training
services.

Common criteria for quality had to be agreed and ideas and information on
procedures for quality development exchanged. Moreover, further training
modules for personnel (e.g. on learning techniques, methods including teach-
ing, learning counselling and support and on network management) had to be
tested. New learning arrangements were designed, developed and tested to
encourage creativity and individual responsibility in both formal and informal
learning. Finally, certifications of learning success were developed to enhance
sustainability.

Many learning regions were focused on improving access to the new informa-
tion and communication technologies to increase media competence and try
out new ‘blended’ learning arrangements. Improved results were exchanged
in the form of cross-programme thematic networks. They provided ‘tracks’
along which the results were systematically processed. Sustainable structural
and organisational regional networks were developed for lifelong learning, and quality development.

There were five main aims for learning regions:

- education marketing: improvement of exchange processes between suppliers and prospective users, publicity for lifelong learning, creation of trademarks;
- training and further education guidance: orientation, competence and education guidance, improvement of transparency;
- new ‘learning worlds’: innovative forms of teaching and learning, new learning locations and e-learning;
- new transitions between learning and education phases, recognition of informal learning, improvement of permeability of educational sectors;
- involvement in, and co-operation with, small and medium-sized companies.

Within the overall framework of the thematic networks, the German Aerospace-Centre (see LRD website) sponsored, parallel to the developments in the individual regions, nationwide conferences and conventions in order to compare individual projects, and identify success factors, recognise and propagate models of good practice. These initiatives were accompanied by the creation of important media messages for the nationwide transfer of results. They included Inform – the learning regions magazine – and the Internet platform (www.lernende-regionen.info) set up by the LRD project management agency.

Consolidation of learning regions: ‘Integrative educational services of regional networks for lifelong learning’

After the first planned five-year period of the national project a subsequent supported period was necessary to consolidate the improved results, to foster their implementation and to ensure sustainability.

Transfer topics were developed and every learning region had to re-apply for a continuation within one of the offered subjects in order to re-create the success factors achieved to date in their respective areas. These transfer areas were the following:

- educational counselling to foster change management – organisational guidance, instruments for guidance;
- the creation of learning centres: curricula, courses, certification;
- continuance between relevant stages (from the cradle to the
grave): transition from school to employment;
- SMEs as relevant partners and addressees for training and qualification;
- communities as learning centres: learning communities.

For the first four named areas above around 50 regions were selected for continuation work. The last aspect – communities – was newly identified. Around 40 were selected in this category. So finally around 90 learning regions were newly established to continue for a two-year period (2006–2008).

The main purposes for this period were to reinforce regional educational and employment development, to increase inter-regional cooperation, networking and mobility in lifelong learning. Embedded within that were goals to improve transparency on regional and interregional information about learning regions, to strengthen environmental education and rural development. The weakness was that regional rural development was not regarded to be a main focus. Therefore, new regional communities joined the project, and emphasis was given to education in rural, local, and regional transformation.

To distinguish it from the former programme the learning regions were totally financed (100 per cent) in personal costs and subcontracts. The co-financing had to be contributed by the total funding of the facilities, room-rents and equipment which was within the responsibility of the supported institutions and communities. Overall the financial split could be calculated as 80 per cent: 20 per cent. After the two year period, the funding fell upon regions and local communities.

**Sustainability of the networks ‘learning regions’**

As already explained, networks were intended to be established on a permanent basis. The funding provided for a network within this programme was to diminish progressively (from 100 per cent in the planning phase to 80 per cent in the first two years of the project phase and 60 per cent in the last two years), in other words, at an early stage, before the period of funding expires, the networks must consider ways towards becoming financially self-sufficient in the long term. The learning region movement was defined as good only as long as it has had an impact and long-term-implementation in the ‘educational market’ in Germany.

Therefore, during the formal application for funding (including for the planning phase), applicants were required to explain how their networks intend to generate their own financial resources in the long term and increase
that proportion of the funding during the term of the programme. Sustainability was a main objective. Material and financial support needed to be sought from local authorities or from education and training providers (e.g. provision of premises, other benefits in kind or, if appropriate, direct subsidies) in the form of contributions by users, sponsors, and others.

Within the networks, support has been given to one major objective – that of developing, coordinating and sustaining the network in each participating region. This has usually occurred through a professional administrative office which simultaneously developed central educational programmes and took care of the marketing. In addition, several sub-projects were usually linked to the main project. These were concerned with offering services relating to specific subjects and business fields that promote Lifelong Learning. An average of four to six persons per network were usually responsible for carrying out the necessary expert and organisational work; other persons were also involved on a temporary basis. In many cases, the development of the network was initiated by an adult education centre, but also the chambers, institutions of higher education and business development societies often provided a decisive impetus in the regions. In order to ensure lasting cooperation, most networks operated, in pursuance of their objectives, in the form of registered associations (incorporated society, registered association), non-profit limited liability company (limited liability company) or foundations. All networks were open to additional members.

The reality was different. Near the end of the whole learning region period in 2008 it transpired that learning regions couldn’t survive by themselves without any other source of support. Of course registered organisations were built-up but the main problem of basic finances could not be solved. One of the reasons is the low-cost model of education in Germany. In Germany a very small amount will in general normally be spent on lifelong learning, because it has always been the duty of the state to take primary care of the costs of further education – especially vocational training.

Other weaknesses which led to a failure of the long-term plan for learning regions were the issue of regional development and the identification of communities as important integral entities responsible for education. Empirically this is demonstrated by the fact that within the newly developed regional networks there are few partners from innovative knowledge-creating universities, RTD agencies or firms. Recent evaluation showed a significant lack of systematic knowledge regarding the determinants and mechanisms of learning in and throughout regional networks. Also, there were yet more
barriers in local LR policies, and in the directing of regional learning systems towards sustainability. This has caused learning regions in some areas to encounter difficulties after the supported project’s lifespan. The SWOT analysis below highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the German learning regions experience.

**Short SWOT analysis**

**Strengths**
The horizontal cooperation between regions and the executive board was very effective. We came into direct contact with the ministries and they had to accelerate decision-making processes beyond the normal ways of ratifying decisions. Due to our direct access to other transfer projects and inter-regional cooperation with important partners and bodies we could build-up networks between the different stakeholders. Finally we were able to identify and implement new structures across existing systems – e.g. new job-creation which was officially accepted by the ministries of the Länder and at the federal level. Finally, we identified that the best way for sustainability was to combine bottom up with top-down: e.g. the Dachau AGIL learning region developed new jobs in the field of nursing: we created – bottom up – a curriculum and two test-phases for a two-year apprenticeship for nursery assistants. We collaborated from the beginning with the two responsible Bavarian ministries for social affairs and education – bottom up – and brought the development team with the responsible department chiefs of the two ministries together. Thanks to this process we were able to get approved easily the two test-phases after a two-years-period (normally in Germany a new job-creation takes minimum of five years!). All these successes were good models for EU and international projects.

**Weaknesses**
There was great deal of complicated administrative work. Within the executive board, we had to cope with numerous changes of contact persons and administrative methodologies. When we started, official bodies, accustomed to top-down-policy distrusted learning regions with their bottom-up initiatives. Very often we had to work without any pre-experience. Therefore we operated a ‘trial and error’ process which inevitably produced some failures.

**Opportunities**
The learning region movement strengthened regional cooperation and, through it, development, combining horizontal and vertical levels. It created in nearly all supported regions new flexible systems against antediluvian educational structures. The main success was the growing interest of other...
European countries, even worldwide, in the learning region concept and the German way of implementing it.

**Threats**

Bottom-up education (learning-focused) means different conditions, aims, objectives, outcomes, structure and impacts – real benchmarking is not possible. Many learning regions even now have difficulties in getting the concept fully accepted in their regions – some groups and stakeholders are more interested than others. As a general point, a mere 90 learning regions comprise a ‘drop in the ocean’ in a country with more than 70 million inhabitants. One potentially positive answer to that is the ‘new wave’ – the continuation activity ‘learning on place’, as described below.

**The ‘new wave’: ‘Learning on place’**

Recently, the federal Ministry of Education and Research has decided to persevere with the focus on communities as relevant and responsible bodies for learning and education. In November 2009 a new programme ‘Learning on place’, with a focus on communities, was launched in Berlin. This is based on the results and experiences of the learning regions programme, and goes ahead on that basis. The Ministry of Education and Research is again taking over the leading role, this time together with a consortium of German foundations whose main focus is education and learning. These have been active participants so far in communities, supporting or enhancing learning in local and regional contexts. Around 30 foundations of different sizes are included and embedded very closely in the chosen 40 communities for ‘Learning on place’. The main aim is to develop local educational management of place in order to enable lifelong, coordinated, complementary learning and the development of successful educational biographies for all citizens.

€60 million will be invested (again partly ministry and partly European social fund) in a three-year period with an optional opportunity for a two-year extension. This public–private partnership intends to set the course for establishing lifelong learning in the communities. The educational system should facilitate more transparent, straightforward access.

Permeability is inherent! Education for All should be created for all phases of life. It starts in the family and continues in vocational education. Thereafter lifelong learning takes place right into the third age and strategies will be
designed to implement lifelong learning throughout life. This initiative aims at enhancing the competitiveness of every single community based on the notion that the educational level of the citizens plays an important role for economic and social development of the region. The main emphasis will be given to the collection of data and case studies of good practice, the exchange between all educational institutions and the coordination of educational content.

**LRD (Learning Region Association of Germany)**

Lernende Regionen Deutschland e.V. (LRD) is a national association, which emerged from the German national learning regions programme. It is aiming to mainstream the products and results derived from 71, later 90, German learning regions to interested umbrella-organisations, city or regional councils in Germany. The main emphasis is on the European and worldwide context. LRD intends to market the German idea of learning regions, helping to create pilot-regions for learning region initiatives in order to support inter-regional and intercontinental networking by the growing importance of regions worldwide. Furthermore the association is offering guidance and concrete educational programmes to cities and regions that can benefit from them. At the present time, LRD is involved as partner in four European projects promoted by the European Commission, one of which, EUROlocal, brings together a store-house of European-wide knowledge, ideas and experiences of learning regions into one interactive website so that regions throughout Europe can learn from them.

**General résumé**

The European Vocational Training Organisations, CEDEFOP, advocates learning region development. Its position statement is as follows ‘Regional networking on the basis of trans-sector partnerships, particularly in education and labour policy must become a new focus in learning and employability strategies all over Europe’ (see Gustavsen, Nyhan and Ennals, 2009). This aspiration was realised in Germany with the model of the nationwide initiative of learning regions. It was in a way also promoting regional development by focussing on educational development for all. Regional proximity has promoted frequent interaction enhanced by regional associations. Common regional cultures and understandings were advocated and institutional suppliers of knowledge were integrated within regional innovation systems.
From this point in time, some additional features of a learning region can be explored and enhanced:

- the creation of European societal frameworks (EU policies);
- the quality of social and civil dialogue;
- inter-organisational cooperation/learning regions/learning networks;
- building up a learning society – developing social capital;
- projecting the learning organisation model onto the mainstream of learning region activities.

The wider social and-economic context will be, defined by creating a framework for a European learning society. Lifelong learning is the European policy driver for local and regional regeneration. The development of a learning society in which social capital is strengthened by encouraging the learners’ personal responsibility and self-management, motivating disadvantaged groups that are currently less involved in education, strengthening relations between all educational sectors, and fostering co-operation between educational providers and users, is a task for all nations.

The learning regions project, with its emphasis on building up lifelong learning capabilities and outlooks in communities, has blazed the trail for further initiatives in developing Germany’s, and Europe’s, capacity to survive in a rapidly changing world. By embedding now the results into the community-networks ‘learning on place’ programme, future participants are expected to acquire sustainability and long-term-stability.

**Perspectives for the idea of ‘learning regions’**

Finally we note that in diagnosing the nature and working of modern societies and economies, there is a dramatic increase in complexity, emanating from de-institutionalisation, desynchronisation and deregulation. It is important to develop a conceptual framework for investigating human behaviour and interaction in the newly developing networks (such as learning regions) and to explore the notions in complexity theory. The art of managing complex systems is to eschew the sequential model of research-development-production-marketing, and instead try to engage with all these activities in holistic and interactive mode.

This was stressed in the recent CONFINTEA VI, the world-conference of UNESCO (2009) in Belem. The first-ever global report on adult learning and education was based on 154 National Reports submitted by UNESCO member states on the state of adult learning and education. It is intended to
collect similar basic statements on adult education worldwide for the next 12 years. This global report notes multiple structural causes for low and inequitable access to adult learning and education by identifying three kinds of barrier: the institutional, the situational and the dispositional. Examples of measures to increase participation and address inequity are suggested, including targeted policies, developing programmes focusing on specific groups, and establishing learning communities.

In the report on this conference (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009), it is emphasised that a vastly increasing rate of participation is a clear demand. This can be fostered by:

Establishing learning communities: While learning is inherently an individual activity, it takes place in sub-cultures that reflect different ways of life. Community education, learning cities, learning festivals and other collective efforts that extend individual learning into the realm of community and societal learning can contribute substantially to the promotion of adult learning and education. For example, Saudi Arabia’s ‘illiteracy-free society’ programmes are models of good practice with a number of innovative features. Learning cities and regions in Europe and Asia or ‘Education Cities’ in Southern Europe and Latin America make for a new learning ecology in which the entire city actively participates as a provider of adult learning opportunities and activities.

In the conclusion it suggests:

In 1997, the Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning identified adult learning as ‘both a consequence of active citizenship and a condition for full participation in society’. Since that time there has been an increasing shift to a perspective in which adult education is located within a lifelong learning context that, at its best, integrates both empowering and instrumental rationales for adult learning. This in turn needs to be located within a capability approach, which considers the overall expansion of human capabilities and includes not merely personal and economic development but also the capability to interact socially and participate politically.

((ibid., 2009)
Learning regions are one realistic instrument in achieving this objective and strengthen the following extension to UNESCO thinking:

Perhaps more importantly, governments should mobilise other stakeholders – the private sector, NGOs, and, in some contexts, the international community – and clarify with them mutually agreed resource and funding expectations for adult education in their country. The combination of policy-making and additional funding should establish clear roles and responsibilities – an essential component in constructing the stable but flourishing platform for adult learning and education.

(ibid., 2009)

The main key issues emphasised in the end of the report mention ‘Good practice can be shared and comparative studies planned to build a critical momentum for measurement.’ (ibid., p. 157). The EUROLocal project, with partners from Germany, Italy, Hungary and the United Kingdom, is building the foundation for such sharing. Finally the official quotation from the LRD given in ‘future tasks’ at the website of LRD (www.lernende-regionen.info) of 2004 is still relevant today:

Both the individual and society benefit from investments in competence promotion and expenditures in Lifelong Learning. In combination with the development of networks and supporting structures, these are the central components of an overall system of Lifelong Learning that is being implemented at a European level.

We believe that learning regions are a vital concept for its implementation. As a consequence they can signpost a better future not only for Germany and Europe, but also worldwide.

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**Notes**

1 The author supported the applications of two learning regions, including one in the Bodensee, and applied and ran a third one herself: ‘Learning Region Dachau’. In addition, she co-organised the pre-conference of the status-conference in March 2004 in Cologne and was a member of the preparatory team of the status-conference in Berlin. She founded the association ‘Lernende Regionen Deutschland’, which was
established in 2007 and is still the chair of the board. Since 2003 she has attended and contributed to German, European and world-wide conferences to report on German Learning Regions and to market the idea to install pilot regions. She also ran a workshop on this topic in the mid-term conference of UNESCO V in Bangkok (2003) and co-supported the integration of the concept of ‘Learning regions, cities, communities’ into the European and global paper of the UNESCO world conference in Belem in 2009.

2 See http://www.eurolocal.info

3 See also the Belém Framework for Action, UNESCO (2010), p. 10.

4 See UNESCO Institute of Education (1997)