

EAEA STATEMENT ON TERRITORIAL COHESION

Spring 2009

Territorial Cohesion: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems.

A response to the consultation on the Green Paper from the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)

The EAEA welcomes the publication of the Green Paper and the opportunity provided by the Commission to participate in the debate on how education policies may better address the challenges posed by turning territorial diversity into strength.

The EAEA is an association which promotes adult learning (AL) and the widening of participation and access to formal, non-formal and informal adult education (AE) for all, particularly for groups currently under-represented by

- providing policy advocacy for lifelong learning (LLL) at an European level;
- developing practice through publications, projects and networks;
- international co-operation with other stakeholders in the AE field

The EAEA has 131 members from 41 countries (of which 25 are EU members). The majority of the members' organizations are NGOs. Many of our member organizations provide professional and non formal education for different target groups including employed people.

Introduction

The EAEA recognizes the importance of coordinating policy for an incredibly rich EU territorial diversity. Territorial cohesion is about ensuring the harmonious development of all EU territory and about making sure that their citizens are able to make the most of inherent features of these territories. As such, it is a means of transforming diversity into an asset that contributes to sustainable development of the entire EU. Increasingly, competitiveness and prosperity depend on the capacity of the people and businesses located there to make the best use of all of territorial assets. Cooperation along with the flow of technology and ideas as well as goods, services and capital is becoming an ever more vital aspect of territorial development and a key factor underpinning the long-term and sustainable growth performance of the EU as a whole.

Towards a more balanced and harmonious development.

The key challenges of the 21st century are rapid change, technological growth, demography and globalization. The directions of the Lisbon strategy and these challenges make us look for innovative solutions to increase economic growth and employment, to become competitive in the rapidly changing world. One of the solutions is to increase the role and effectiveness of AE by finding new opportunities for adults to improve their knowledge and perfect their skills throughout the lifespan turning them not only into more effective and informed employees but also active citizens.

The European Commission, in the documents „Adult learning: It is never too late to learn" (2006) and Action plan on Adult Learning „It is always a good time to learn" (2007), has stressed the necessity for the improvement of accessibility of AE and motivation of the population to engage in it. The participation rate of adults in AE rises very slowly. One of the education benchmarks is the participation in lifelong learning, which should be 12.5% by 2010. In many of EU countries adult participation rate is low, for example, in Latvia it is 6.9%. Lithuania, Italy, Bulgaria and Greece and many other countries are in a similar or worse situation. One main reason is the unbalanced territorial development, which is based on:

- weak accessibility to adult education institutions;
- little financial capacity;
- a weak IT infrastructure;
- long distances to education institutions.

All these reasons stand in the way of increasing of human capacity.

POLICY RESPONSES

Improve accessibility

The Green Paper stresses the balance among different EU regions. EAEA wants to underline the importance of adult education. By connecting territories, increasing road building and providing public transport services, the EU will improve people's access and participation in AE, and help to provide adults with pathways to improving their knowledge and competences for better life and promote they competitiveness in labour market. A better distribution of adult education centres in less-populated areas will also contribute to the social cohesion and well-being of people living there.

Improve IT nets

Using new technologies will help many people to provide access to opportunities for lifelong learning. Many people will use the Internet for learning; communication and distance education as one of tools for raising their education level. It will realize lifelong learning possibilities in their every-day lives.

Raise the financial capacity

In many of the new EU countries adult education is expensive. People, who want to participate in non-formal education, have to contribute a lot, but the unemployment, low skills and knowledge force them to stay outside of lifelong learning. Harmonious EU development with more and better support for adult education and learning will improve the situation. By acquiring new competences, these people can upgrade their standards of living, which will contribute to a better and more democratic society.

There is a large role of territorial cohesion that can provide better access, motivation and conditions for LLL.

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[\[1\]](#) Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion Turning territorial diversity into strength. Brussels, 6.10.2008.