

# ADULT EDUCATION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF LIFELONG LEARNING – INTERRELATED DEVELOPMENTS IN GERMANY AND EUROPE ON THE ROAD TO CONFINTEA

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## *Abstract*

The sector of adult education and learning has been receiving greater attention and recognition within the framework of lifelong learning, an area which has meanwhile become a major paradigm in the theory and practice of education, particularly within the context of global, regional, and national institutions such as UNESCO, the European Union, or the German Adult Education Association (DVV). The policies, programmes, approaches, and even funding procedures of organizations at all three levels have significant bearing on one another. The following article examines the upsurge of interaction in the field of adult education over the past few years in anticipation of the next World Conference on Adult Education - CONFINTEA VI.

Keywords: adult education, UNESCO, lifelong learning

## **Introduction**

In the light of contemporary documents and conferences on lifelong learning, and with reference to selected adult education organizations and professional adult educators and scholars, this paper is an attempt to illustrate the trend of mutual exchange which especially in recent years has been gaining momentum and strength in the adult education sector. In a lively exchange of ideas, concepts, and approaches, players in the field are in the process of leveraging synergies across national and international borders in theoretical perspectives and practical experience.

While collecting material for this contribution, I came across two particularly interesting articles. One, written by Wolfgang Seitter, looks at the international dimension of German adult education from the perspective of internationality as a 'horizon of reference'. In his article, Seitter states, "concisely postulated, it may be said that throughout its formative years German adult education concerned itself with foreign models, concepts, and institutions, fostering an international focus, systematically to an extent, through personal and academic contacts." For the period between 1890 and

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1930, Seitter cites university extension in the UK, residential folk high schools in Denmark, and public libraries in the USA as models for adult education centres (*Volkshochschulen*) and public libraries (*Volksbüchereien*) in Germany. He then goes on to state, “between the years 1960 and 1975, in a process of modernization and professionalisation within the framework of educational reform, adult education developed into an international programme that incorporated key concepts such as lifelong learning, recurrent education or *éducation permanente*. It was UNESCO and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which played the decisive role in introducing these concepts into the debate based on arguments relating to the economics and democracy of education.”<sup>2</sup>

The second article, written by Joachim H. Knoll, presents a history of the UNESCO world conferences on adult education (from Elsinore through Hamburg, 1949-1997).<sup>3</sup> This article contains a wealth of information on the development over time of educational concepts in theory and policy, and the individuals and organizations which were instrumental in bringing these concepts to the forefront of the adult education arena. Joachim Knoll is one of the few scholars in the field in a position to compile a contemporary history of adult education which he not only experienced first hand but also had a decisive role in shaping.

Paul Bélanger is another such personage. During a session of the CONFINTEA VI Consultative Group in June 2008 he pointed out that in 1960 he participated in his first UNESCO World Conference in Montreal and has not missed a World Conference since. His role is a prominent one especially considering that in the 1990s, as director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in Hamburg, he was the architect of the last and hitherto largest of these conferences, CONFINTEA V in 1997. Since the year 2000, when he returned to Canada to assume a professorship at the Adult Education Faculty of the University of Québec in Montreal, Paul Bélanger has served as president of the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE).

The present analysis does not attempt to cover such a long span of history. Its scope is confined only to the past three years. The object here is to illustrate the influence exerted on national developments by European policy, especially as promoted by the European Union (EU), and perhaps vice versa as well. The discussion will consider developments in Germany

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<sup>2</sup> Seitter, W., 2000, *Geschichte der Erwachsenenbildung. Eine Einführung. [History of Adult Education. An Introduction]* Bielefeld. Bertelsmann, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> Knoll, Joachim H. 2008. *Zur Geschichte der UNESCO-Weltkonferenzen für Erwachsenenbildung – von Helsingör (1949) bis Hamburg (1997) [On the History of the UNESCO World Conferences on Adult Education – from Elsinore (1949) through Hamburg (1997)]*. In *Bildung und Erziehung*, pp. 129-149.

by way of example, and will explore how these developments figured in the preparation of the coming UNESCO World Conference on adult education – CONFINTEA VI in Brazil. The focus will be on the Pan-European Preparatory Conference in Hungary as a case in point.

The analysis will follow a step-by-step retrospect in reverse order of time, beginning with the most recent function to which comparatively closer attention will be paid.

### **UNESCO: The Pan-European CONFINTEA VI Preparatory Conference in Budapest (December 2008)**

Every 12 years, UNESCO calls on the governments of its member states to participate in an International World Conference on Adult Education. In 1997, the conference took place at Hamburg under the designation CONFINTEA V, an acronym derived from the French title of the conference series “Conférence Internationale sur l'Éducation des Adultes”. The conference concluded with the adoption of two documents which are still worth reading today: the “Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning” and the “Agenda for the Future”. The Hamburg *Volkshochschule* and the DVV were both actively involved in the organization of the conference. Professor Dr. Rita Süßmuth, who was elected to preside over the World Conference, helped lead the often complicated negotiations to a successful conclusion. Many of the DVV's partners took part in the conference. The official CONFINTEA V website under the following internet address is a valuable source of information and well worth a visit

<http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea/documents.html>

Concrete preparations for CONFINTEA VI began in 2007. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in Hamburg set up an international preparatory committee to plan and organize the various steps leading up to the big event. Some of the main stages in the process included the drafting of the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) and the organization and implementation of a series of regional preparatory conferences. CONFINTEA VI, which is being organized under the motto “Living and Learning for a Viable Future – The Power of Adult Learning” was originally scheduled to take place during May of 2009 in Belém, Brazil, and has meanwhile been postponed until December 2009. Further details and extensive background information can be accessed at the official conference web pages under the following internet address: <http://www.unesco.org/en/confintea>.

The Pan-European Preparatory Conference for CONFINTEA VI, covering the UNESCO region of Europe, North America, and Israel, was held in Hungary from 3 to 5 December 2008. Under the “Regulations for the general classification of various categories of meetings convened by UNESCO”, CONFINTEA falls under Category II, making it a so-called

'Intergovernmental Meeting' subject to reporting requirements. The documents which must be submitted, including national reports and particularly the final declaration of the conference itself, are binding in nature. Delegations to the meeting in Hungary came from 33 countries and included representatives of civil society as well as experts from the field. The German delegation, which was headed by Mr. Oliver S. Lübke from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, comprised 10 persons, including Ms. Ulla Burchardt from the German Parliament, as well as representatives of the [Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany](#) (the *Kultusministerkonferenz* KMK), the Confederation of German Trade Unions (the *Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund* DGB), the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (the *Deutsche Industrie- und Handelskammertag e.V.* DIHK) and the German Commission for UNESCO (*Deutsche UNESCO Kommission e.V.* DUK). The keynote address was delivered by the DVV's president, Professor Dr. Rita Süssmuth. Professor Dieter Timmermann, Chairman of the Expert Commission on 'Financing Lifelong Learning' which was convened by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, gave a presentation at the plenary session on a variety of different financing options. Heribert Hinzen was appointed to the editorial committee responsible for elaborating the final conference declaration. As an organization accredited by UNESCO, *dvv international* was able to send a delegation of its own. In addition to Uwe Gartenschlaeger, the Institute's deputy director, and Professor Joachim H. Knoll, who is on the Institute's Board of Trustees, many of the Institute's project directors were also actively involved in the conference proceedings.

The final conference declaration was published under the title the "Pan-European Statement on Adult Learning for Equity and Inclusion in the Context of Mobility and Competition". Following are a few quotes from that document which are particularly relevant to policy, legislation, and financing of adult education. The abbreviation ALE in the text stands for "Adult Learning and Education", which has come to be used in the field is a comprehensive term encompassing all aspects of formal, non-formal and informal learning throughout adulthood.

5. ALE has a critical role in responding to these economic, social, cultural, political and educational challenges and since CONFINTEA V there have been sizeable gains for ALE on a number of fronts. Both the EU and the OECD recognize the centrality of lifelong learning...Policies on ALE exist in virtually in every country of the region...

7. The existing frameworks and thus the capacity of ALE to respond to the challenges...vary across the region. In all but a small number of countries, the response has been primarily vocational education and training for growth and competitiveness. However, the overwhelming view of the Conference is that there is a need for a more integrated approach that

addresses economic development, social cohesion, equity and diversity, democratic citizenship, sustainable development and community and personal development...

8. Policies, structures and measures to assure the quality of learning should be developed..."

11. Governance issues should be addressed with a view to creating the local, regional and national frameworks, structures and partnerships – including public authorities, social partners and civil society – essential for the development, coordination, funding, provision, quality management and monitoring of ALE. The involvement of civil society in policy development, policy implementation and governance should be particularly promoted and supported...

12. Robust public funding is key to the development of ALE, which is vital to the public and private interest. In many countries the financing of vocational, and particular, non-vocational adult education is not sufficient.

13. Funding should include public sources with support from national, regional, and local level, as well as multi-stakeholder contributions from the private sector and the individual. Under-represented groups need particular financial support. Timely and effective investments in ALE could prevent the higher social costs of unemployment or marginalization.

14. New financing mechanisms should be put in place to stimulate individual and collective participation and investment by enterprises...

18. Learning outcomes wherever, whenever and however achieved should be recognized and validated. This should take place within the context of coherent sub-national and / or national systems...

(The document can be accessed in its entirety at the UNESCO webpage cited above.)

It was the structural issues relating to policy, legislation, and finance in particular that prompted intense debate in the various working groups. This was true above all in the committee responsible for drafting the final declaration. It was not possible, for instance, to find consensus among committee members on the provision in the original draft calling for 'core public funding' in adult education. Reservations were voiced especially by representatives from countries which bank on liberal market strategies.

An important aspect about the document are the multiple references the document contains to global developments, not only to the current financial and economic crisis and its implications for the provision of social services and education, but also to the obligation which the Pan-European region has to support the regions of the world more seriously affected by these developments.

“There is need too for the Pan-European region to recognize its responsibility to act as a partner for the development of ALE in the rest of the world. The significance of North-South partnerships is stressed, since they enable mutual learning and aid to be directed to fulfil the EFA goals

and ensure the importance of ALE in pursuing the Millennium Development Goals is recognized.”

In preparation for the conference, a remarkable document containing an excellent overview of the field was compiled by Helen Keogh, Chairperson of Dóchas, the network of Ireland's development NGOs, under the title “Adult Learning and Education in the UNESCO Region of Europe, North America and Israel”. The first two chapters of this paper describe how ALE is regulated and financed. The document draws on the national reports which were compiled according to a common grid designed by the CONFINTEA VI Consultative Group, and submitted to UNESCO as background information on the developments in adult learning and education since CONFINTEA V. More than 160 such reports have meanwhile been submitted, and can be accessed at the above-cited UNESCO website. Synthesizing all these reports was not an easy task, but neither was compiling the data in the first place. For each separate country it involved identifying the processes of adult education and compiling the results which then had to be organized according to the stipulated guidelines and presented in a uniform format to facilitate comparability.

In Germany the country report was put together under the auspices of the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) and the [Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany](#) (KMK). The German Institute for Adult Education (*Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung* DIE) was commissioned to draft the report with the active participation of relevant German adult education organisations and experts. The person in charge of writing the report was Susanne Lattke. The task involved detailed discussions with relevant organisations and experts to determine their expectations from CONFINTEA VI and obtain an accurate picture of the current situation in theory and practice in the field of adult education. Policy developments needed to be explored and areas calling for action had to be identified. A workshop was held by the German Commission for UNESCO (DUK) to facilitate the process of preparing the report.

The result is impressive. Available in both German and English in a single volume containing more than 250 pages, the document is entitled "Leben und Lernen für eine lebenswerte Zukunft – die Kraft der Erwachsenenbildung. CONFINTEA VI-Bericht Deutschland / The Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) – National Report of Germany". It can be accessed as a pdf file from the Ministry's website at

<http://www.bmbf.de/de/1366.php>

Important topics addressed in this report include legal and political framework conditions, issues of organisation and competent authority, finance, provision and enrolment, quality assurance and benchmarks,

research and staff development. This authoritative reference work is a significant contribution to a better informed international debate.

### **Education Summit in Dresden (October 2008) DVV's Position Paper**

Political debate on the implementation of a comprehensive system of lifelong learning in the Federal Republic of Germany has become more intense in recent years. Increasingly, more and better education at all levels is held to be of vital importance in order to successfully cope with the challenges posed by the economic situation. This was the central issue at the Education Summit “Qualification Initiative for Germany – Advancement through Education” which brought together German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the prime ministers of the Federal States. A new catchword made the rounds with Chancellor Merkel's call for Germany to become an “Education Republic”.

Through a number of initiatives organized in connection with summit, the German Adult Education Association (DVV) took the opportunity to make itself heard. The position paper issued by DVV for the occasion (which can be accessed at [http://www.dvv-international.de/files/neu\\_positionspapierdvvbildungsgipfeleng.pdf](http://www.dvv-international.de/files/neu_positionspapierdvvbildungsgipfeleng.pdf))

stressed that “continuing education and learning throughout life must play a key role” in the process of building Germany into an Education Republic. Calling attention to the effects of globalisation and rapid technological change, it points out how crucial learning is to improve chances for people to obtain employment and participate in society and states that “the fundamental importance of continuing education for individual advancement as well as for the economic and social development of Germany has long been scientifically established beyond dispute.”

In a section of concrete demands entitled “Urgent Tasks” the position paper calls upon the government to strengthen the adult education sector in the interest of learners and in line with European and international cornerstones of lifelong learning. Among other things, specific claims are asserted for:

1. “Second chance” through continuing education...

It must be made bindingly possible for every adult – independent of income – to access literacy measures and attend programmes leading to primary, secondary, tertiary and vocational level certification

2. More education support for people over 30

Germany needs a transparent, goal-oriented and consistent financing system for continuing education that addresses in particular the needs and capacities of educationally disadvantaged groups and men and women in the second half of their working lives....

4. Access for all

The concept of lifelong learning for everyone can only be realized if the Federal, Laender and local governments acknowledge a public responsibility to ensure a comprehensive system of education that provides open and universal access to affordable opportunities for general, political, cultural and vocational continuing education. The desire to continue learning should not be thwarted by financial considerations in any sector of the population....

5. Six percent of the education budget for adult education

Within the framework of EU policy on the promotion of lifelong learning (from the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, 2000 to Action Plan, 2007) the European Union recognizes continuing education as an invaluable field of education in its own right. The future funding of continuing education in Germany must be oriented to European developments and international benchmarks. The target is to appropriate 6% of the entire national education budget for continuing education - including literacy and basic education programmes... Such an investment might even make it possible to reach the target set by the United Nations Literacy Decade and to halve the number of (functional) illiterates by the year 2015...

7. Creation of a reliable framework for continuing education

In the interest of the quality and attractiveness of continuing education, it will be necessary for the Federal, Länder and local governments to agree on standards and a binding framework analogous to the education standards set for the formal school system. Among the factors requiring regulation are guaranteed access, quality assurance and development, certification (also of informally acquired skills) as well as the time requirements of learning...

For now at least we have to be content with the opportunity that events such as this Education Summit offer us to focus public attention on continuing education's justified claims for political action. But we are far from accomplishing even our most modest objectives. Dr. Peter Faulstich, Professor of Adult Education at the University of Hamburg, and for many years President of the German Association for University Continuing and Distance Education, expressed his disappointment in the event, characterizing it as more of a “mole-hill” than an education summit. (cf. <http://www.bildungsspiegel.de/aktuelles/bildungsgipfel-ein-maulwurfhuegel.html> )

### **The Council of the European Union: Conclusions of 22 May 2008 on Adult Learning**

In the preamble of the EU Council's “Conclusions of 22 May 2008 on Adult Learning”, comprehensive reference is made to earlier European Union proclamations which had significant bearing on the development of a system of adult education in the context of lifelong learning. The declaration begins by citing the Lisbon European Council Conclusions which spell out



the intention to create a high-performance educational system capable of converting the European Union into the most modern economy in the world (and consequently the most competitive). And it concludes by calling attention to the most recent statements on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), to the need for a unified framework for adult education indicators and benchmarks, and to the importance of developing European instruments to identify and validate informal and non-formal learning achievements.

So far only partial success has been achieved on the difficult road toward upgrading the qualifications of low-skilled workers, reducing the high rate of early school leavers, and remedying the deficits of elementary schooling, all of which are basic prerequisites for bringing about social inclusion, widening participation and enhancing employability. In this respect, the following demands of the Council are the logical consequence:

1. adult learning should be given stronger emphasis and more effective support at national level, as part of overall efforts to develop a culture of lifelong learning; ...

5. the cross-sectoral nature, diversity, complexity and richness of adult learning impose the need for an integrated approach involving all stakeholders, including those at local and regional level, the social partners and NGOs.”

In the final section of the Conclusions, the European Council expressly invites the EU Commission to

- “pursue and intensify cooperation with the international organisations and relevant non-governmental bodies working in this field” and to “establish links with ... worldwide initiatives such as ‘Education for All’ and the Millennium Development Goals.”

The annex to the Conclusions puts it upon the Member States to

- “endeavour to ensure an adequate share for adult learning when allocating financial resources across the various educational sectors, in line with a lifelong learning approach.”<sup>4</sup>

### **German Ministry of Education and Research Concept of Lifelong Learning (May 2008)**

A government position paper on lifelong learning (*“Konzeption der Bundesregierung zum Lernen im Lebenslauf”*) was presented on 6 May 2008 by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) to the German Parliamentary Committee “[Education, Research and Technology Assessment](#)” of the German Parliament chaired by Ms. Ulla Burchardt.

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<sup>4</sup> Council of the European Union: Council Conclusions of 22 May 2008 on adult learning (2008/C 140/09). *Official Journal of the European Union*, 6 June 2008.

The paper is based on the recommendations presented by the “Committee on Innovation in Continuing Training” which was convened by the Ministry. DVV was represented on the Committee by Professor Dr. Rita Süssmuth and Professor Klaus Meisel. In the first paragraphs, the paper states:

- “Lifelong learning is one of the biggest political and societal challenges facing Germany. The realization of lifelong learning is decisive for the prospects of the individual, the success of industry and the future of society... Globalization and the knowledge society are confronting people with great challenges which are made even more demanding as a result of demographic change. Lifelong learning must serve to continuously adapt and expand knowledge and the ability to apply the knowledge acquired.”

Pointing out that learning enables people to enhance their employability and exercise their civic duty, and that it is also a crucial factor for integrating people with an immigration background into German society, the paper calls for the systematic improvement of continuing education schemes and the development of measures to increase participation in continuing education programmes by widening the range of programmes and measures. The paper does not leave any illusions about the fact that the strategies it describes require additional funding:

- “These objectives call for considerable effort on the part of all those involved in financing continuing education to mobilize resources above and beyond funding mechanisms that already exist. The responsibility of enterprises for the continued training of their employees must be clearly emphasized in this connection. Employers should be encouraged to step up their commitment toward financing continuing education. The same applies for unions and employers' associations, the so-called 'social partners,' and their responsibility to provide further training for employees.”<sup>5</sup>

A key objective is to increase participation in formal continuing education (courses and seminars) in the 25 to 64 years age bracket from the current level of 43% to 50% by the year 2015. Special efforts will be required in particular to reach people with low qualifications, considering the under-representation of this group in continuing education programmes.

The concept outlines a number of concrete strategies with suggestions on how to implement them. Many of the proposed measures involve improved

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<sup>5</sup> BMBF: Konzeption der Bundesregierung zum Lernen im Lebenslauf. Deutscher Bundestag. Ausschuss für Bildung, Forschung und Technikfolgenabschätzung. A-Drs. 16(18)353. Eingang am 6.5.2008 [German Ministry for Education and Research. The Federal Government Concept for Lifelong Learning. German Parliamentary Committee on Education, Research and Technology Assessment. Circular 16(19)353 issued on 6 May 2008].

financing schemes designed to create a wide variety of incentives and mechanisms that will facilitate access to continuing education and further training. Approaches include the concept of a continuing education voucher (*Bildungsprämie*), "time accounts" for learning (*Lernzeitkonten*), grants oriented to career advancement (*Aufstiegsstipendien*); and adopting legislation to promote further training geared to advancement (*Aufstiegsfortbildungsförderungsgesetz* - AFBG). Improved educational counselling is also stressed as a crucial element in the successful implementation of the proposed measures.

(for additional information see [www.bmbf.de](http://www.bmbf.de) )

The debate surrounding the means of financing adult education as part of lifelong learning was amplified in a parliamentary hearing on the topic "Lifelong Learning – Need and Funding" held in January 2007 by the German Parliamentary Committee "[Education, Research and Technology Assessment](#)". Questions no. 20 and 21 in the list of issues on which the hearing, which dealt with the potential of an Adult Education Promotion Act (*Erwachsenenbildungsförderungsgesetz*) and the legally defined right to continuing education focused, gave the DVV an excellent opportunity to advocate the need to subsidize infrastructure development not only in the school system, but also in Germany's system of community adult education centres, the *Volkshochschulen*.<sup>6</sup>

### **EU Commission Action Plan on Adult Learning (September 2007) and the Communication "Adult learning: It is never too late to learn"(October 2006)**

In 2000 the Directorate General "Education and Culture" of the European Commission published the "Memorandum on Lifelong Learning" which was very widely circulated throughout the European Union and is still well-worth reading today. Upon issuing the document, the Commission opened a consultation process which elicited thousands of replies. In 2001, after reviewing all the comments it received, the Commission issued a follow-up communication entitled "Making a European area of Lifelong Learning a reality", quoting the following Chinese proverb on the title page: "When planning for a year, plant corn. When planning for a decade, plant trees. When planning for life, train and educate people."

For more detailed information see [http://europa.eu/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/index_en.htm)

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<sup>6</sup> DVV: Lifelong Learning – Need and Funding. Answers to questions for the hearing of 29 January 2007, Committee for Education Research and the Implications of Technology, German Parliament, A-Drs. 16(18) 144. In: Adult Education and Development, 68, 2007, pp. 123-140.

This process made an important contribution to the growing perception of adult education as a decentralized system of universally available learning opportunities covering general education and citizenship education which is designed to enhance employability and organized close to the people through local learning centres. It helped to rekindle recognition for our good old four-pillar model of education (school, vocational training, higher education and adult education), even though in the wake of the PISA results more attention has been paid to improving permeability between the different education sectors and to the promotion of non-formal and informal learning.

The importance of adult education as part of lifelong learning is highlighted in a more recent policy paper issued by the European Commission. The Communication “Adult Education: It is never too late to learn”<sup>7</sup> stresses five key policy areas where intervention is necessary:

- Lifting the barriers to participation
- Ensuring the quality of adult learning
- Recognition and validation of learning outcomes
- Investing in the ageing population and migrants
- Indicators and benchmarks

The specific nature of adult education in the context of lifelong learning is spelled out in the document. The aim of the Communication is to outline a perspective for the educational policy of the Commission and the Member States and. The follow-up document entitled “Action Plan on Adult Learning. It is always a good time to learn”<sup>8</sup> translates this perspective into a concrete plan of action. The consultation process leading up to this document emphasized three key, strongly interconnected elements:

- the policies adopted to meet the needs and demands of society and the economy;
- the structures for governance including the quality, efficiency and accountability of the adult learning system; and
- the delivery systems including learning activities, learning support and recognition of learning outcomes which address the motivation and learning needs of learners in the context of the needs and demands of society and the economy.

The Communication proceeds with an invitation to the Member States and the Commission to participate in the Action Plan. Outlining five strategic lines of action, it urges them to

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<sup>7</sup> European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2008 on adult learning: It is never too late to learn [2007/ 2114(INI)].

<sup>8</sup> European Commission: Action Plan on Adult Learning. It is always a good time to learn. Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Brussels, 27 September 2007, [COM (2007) 558 final].

- analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training in Member States on adult learning;
- improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector;
- increase the possibilities for adults to go 'one step up' - to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before;
- speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and having them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes;
- improve mechanisms to monitor the adult learning sector.

The position of DVV in this process was clear:

“We expect national education policy at Federal, Land and local level to recognise the value of a nationwide professional adult education system that has been so heavily stressed by the EU, and to strengthen and expand continuing education as a fourth pillar of the education system”.<sup>9</sup>

The Communication was elaborated parallel to a number of studies which originally had been intended to serve as its starting point. In retrospect, at least from the perspective of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), this arrangement had the advantage of allowing the various groups to work fruitfully side-by-side and to a degree even in close cooperation with one another.

The final document passed through a total of four drafts reflecting thoughtful consideration by the EC officials in charge in consultation with the EAEA and taking into account the results of the studies with all their related discussions. There is no denying that the process was a fertile one for all concerned. From the opening statement of the Communication, the message is clear: “Adult learning is a key and vital component of lifelong learning”. This is the type of endorsement we hope to find in German policy statements at the federal, state, city, and community level.

### **EAEA Study “Adult Education Trends and Issues in Europe” (August 2006)**

Core policy statements are customarily prepared on the basis of studies. For the policy statement on adult learning, the European Commission launched several studies through a tender procedure. “Adult education issues and trends in Europe” was the theme of one study that was of particular interest to the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), along with another study, the object of which was to compile information on the most relevant providers of adult education in the countries of Europe.

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<sup>9</sup> Towards the European Adult Education Action Plan “It is always a good time to learn”, Declaration by the General Assembly of the DVV on the occasion of the German Presidency of the EU Council, [www.dvv-international.de](http://www.dvv-international.de)

EAEA assumed the role of lead agency of the consortium that won the first of these two studies. Janos Toth, then president of EAEA, served as team leader. For the second study, EAEA formed a partnership with several professionals from the field. Professor Joachim Knoll cooperated as an independent expert. Susanne Lattke was appointed to represent the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE), and Heribert Hinzen, then a vice president of EAEA, represented the DVV.

Studies of this nature normally have a very tight budget with respect to time and money. As a rule, however, the pressure resulting from limited resources is compensated for by the relevance of the finished product and a degree of dedication hardly conceivable in retrospect. Barely six months were available to complete the study from the date it was commissioned until its termination. And indeed, the result is presentable. Publication of the original English version of the report was made possible through an EU grant. The text can be accessed at the website of EAEA ([www.eaea.org](http://www.eaea.org)) together with a wide range of other documents.<sup>10</sup>

The study examined the situation of educational policy, legislation, and financing of adult education. It explored reasons for non-participation, and strategies for facilitating participation. It discussed basic skills and key qualifications, dealt with issues of certification and accreditation, shed light on the quality of training and retraining, and looked at the greater picture of adult education under considerations of demography and migration. In addition to a large number of conclusions and recommendations, the final chapter names five key aspects that require implementation and support:

- A holistic – total, integrated, systemic and all-embracing grasp and policy perspective on adult learning and the resulting provision.
- Core public funding, especially for the disadvantaged, with a stable and sustainable locally based infrastructure.
- High quality of provision and quality of the personnel involved.
- Recognition and credit for non-formal and informal alongside formal adult education and learning.
- Simple key indicators, together with support for and use of good research and statistics.

The study, which was translated into a variety of languages and distributed on a large scale internationally, has received widespread acclaim.

### **Prospects**

It has been the object of this paper to concentrate on a number of significant developments that have taken place in the field of adult education within a relatively short span of time. The issues left to deal with are many:

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<sup>10</sup> EAEA: Adult Education Trends and Issues in Europe. Restricted tender no. EAC/43/05 as completed by 11 August 2006. Brussels: EAEA 2006.

In what ways has the paradigm of lifelong learning had an impact on society? What place is accorded adult education in the context of lifelong learning? What significance is attached to the structures of adult education? What adult education strategies are being debated within the “magical triangle” framework of policy, legislation, and finance? The multitude of aspects that merit closer attention is clear from these and other certainly no less important questions pertaining to quality, basic and continued training of staff, research, accessibility, or target groups.

While the focus here was on European and German views and developments, the UNESCO focus has a global orientation. There is no question that the Pan-European Preparatory Conference dealt with above, and all the other regional preparatory conferences were successful. This is amply evidenced by their results and final documents. Now, however, we are called upon to focus our sights on CONFINTEA VI in Brazil, in an effort to ensure the conclusion of binding decisions that will lay the political, legal, and financial groundwork for securing our field and improving our chances of developing the sector and the profession of adult education for the future. In this process, the more affluent countries must work together with the world's development organizations to assist the poor and less developed countries in their attempts to reach our common goals. There are more than a billion children, youths, and adults in the world who are illiterate or have low literacy skills. CONFINTEA VI must benefit them, too.

People everywhere are looking to CONFINTEA VI with expectations as high as they are diverse, depending on their situation and perspective – from government representatives in industrialized countries, to adult educators in non-government organizations in the poorest of the developing nations, to professionals affiliated with global institutions dedicated to the promotion of multilateral cooperation. At every level we can derive satisfaction in knowing that after a long phase of lean years, our sector – the education of youths and adults within the context of lifelong learning – is growing in importance and recognition.

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