

The MASON target group

The principle target audience of the MASON project is strategic policy planners and decision makers in the field of LLL at cross-national, national, regional, local and institutional levels.



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e-Demos is a portal dedicated to the generation, promotion, discussion and reflection upon new ideas for policies and practices promoting lifelong learning (LLL) in Europe

Upcoming event

THE MASON WORKSHOP II

SOCIOCULTURAL DYNAMICS INFLUENCING PROGRESS IN LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEMS: FROM NATIONAL TO REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

28th of September 2012, Sofia, Bulgaria

Lifelong Learning strategies can be more efficient and effective when they take into account the underlying national and regional/local socio-economic and cultural dynamics. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to promote participation and equity in education and training.

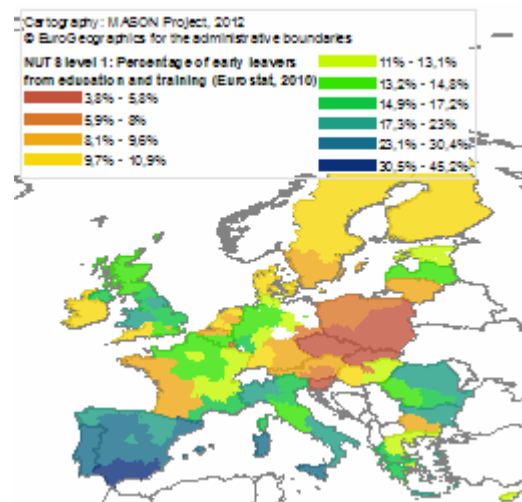
The development of context-sensitive LLL strategies aims to increase their relevance to regional/local needs, and facilitate the cooperation and transfer of innovative LLL initiatives and practices across EU countries and regions which face common socio-economic, cultural and educational realities and challenges.

The 2nd MASON workshop is dedicated to an in-depth discussion of evidence-based methodologies and tools for promoting the development and implementation of LLL strategies in a manner which is context-sensitive.

Among others, the workshop will include discussion upon

- 'Learning region/city' approaches and initiatives
- Case studies of comprehensive LLL strategies and initiatives at regional/city level
- Relationships between regional/city LLL capacities and socio-economic and cultural realities
- Action Plans for widening engagement in LLL at regional/city levels.

At the Sofia workshop the work of the MASON team will be presented and discussed with experts and LLL policy planners at regional level. Current work is focused upon the evidence-based constru-



ction of **profiles of EU regions which share common education and training challenges** (for example, the challenge of early school leaving, regional low education attainment of the adult population etc). These **profiles are mapped into socio-economic and cultural indicators at regional level** in order to explore underlying common patterns (for example, regional unemployment levels, regional GDP, etc). This approach will provide grounds for the development of LLL strategies that are better adapted to the needs of EU regions on the basis of Action Plans applicable to socio-economically and culturally similar regions for the promotion of participation and equity in LLL and the transfer of socio-culturally relevant innovations in the field of LLL between EU regions.

The MASON team invites the participation of Lifelong Learning policy planners and implementers (particularly at regional/local levels) as well as experts and the research community in the field of LLL to the workshop in Sofia. *For more information about the upcoming event in Sofia, Bulgaria (28th of September 2012) please contact Paideia Foundation at office@paideiafoundation.org*

About the MASON project

MASON's overall goal is to support the establishment and implementation of **coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning (LLL) strategies** and complementary policies at national, regional and local levels.

More specifically, the MASON project seeks to develop frameworks, methodologies and tools anticipated to increase the coherence and comprehensiveness of LLL strategies at national, regional and local level from socio-economically

and culturally relevant perspectives. The MASON project is now in its second year (March 2011-February 2013). During the first year the MASON project performed a comparative critical review of the national LLL policies of Finland, Greece, Slovakia, Germany, Bulgaria, Poland and Spain.

Furthermore, the MASON partners organized a workshop on 'Socio-cultural factors and practices shaping the lifelong learning landscape in Europe, Implications for LLL policy coherence' (17-1-2012, Heraklion, Greece).¹

¹ See <http://e-demos.iacm.forth.gr/index.php/en/masonworkshopi>

The Mason project partners

Project coordinator: Foundation for Research and Technology-Hellas (Greece)



Universitaat der Bundeswehr Munchen, Faculty of Education (Germany)



Catholic University in Ruzomberok, Faculty of Education (Slovakia)



Paideia Foundation (Bulgaria)



University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszow, Institute of Economics (Poland)



Joensuu Regional Development Company JOSEK Ltd (Finland)



Universitat de Barcelona, Department of Didactics and Educational Organization (Spain)



MASON's comparative analysis of LLL realities in selected European countries¹

In the comparative report on European realities on LLL the analysis of media and wider public discourse on LLL in the national contexts studied revealed similarities in issues raised on different action fields and between different countries. In Finland and Germany attention is given to the issue of the better integration of migrants in primary school and secondary education and to the improvement of vocational training.

In Germany and Slovakia there is a concern on shortages of qualified workers. In Poland one of the main issues is reductions in the number of schools. In Greece, Poland, Spain and Slovakia a critical issue in public debates is that there are not enough jobs for university graduates. Differences that are observed in the media and wider public discourse on education and LLL originate from variations in the education traditions and structure of education systems, but above all by the current economic and financial condition of each country.

The influence of different administrative structures and traditions can be seen especially in the comparison of Spain and Germany on the one hand and Greece and Finland on the other hand. In Spain and Germany, traditionally the regions and communities enjoy a high degree of autonomy, and therefore have a strong influence on the E&T system. This requires greater coordination and harmonization of individual interests and actors. As compared to Spain and Germany, Finland, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Greece have a rather centralized education governance system and can therefore enforce country-wide reforms.

However, in Greece the economic situation is so critical that currently all efforts to reform the education system are challenged or driven by drastic cuts in public spending on education and training. Spain is also facing great challenges due to reductions in public spending in education.

Finally, this report synthesises the *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats* regarding national LLL systems and strategies.

Strengths

In Spain and Germany participation in early childhood and care (ESEC) is widespread. Finland

and Bulgaria although still lagging behind, they have made huge progress with regard to participation in ESEC. Finland is the top achieving EU country in the PISA 2009 assessments and in parallel the most equitable in terms of the impact of the socio-economic background of students on their performance. Poland is also among the top PISA achievers, specifically in reading and science. Finland has one of the largest shares of 30 to 34 year olds with tertiary attainment level in EU, along with Spain. Slovakia, Greece and Bulgaria have among the lowest shares of early school leavers in EU. Finally, in Bulgaria there is a well-trained teaching workforce. According to 1st OECD TALIS research, Bulgarian teachers benefit by more than 30 days in-service training (2008-2009) – one of the best rates between EU countries.

Weaknesses

Weaknesses according to particularities in education governance systems can be identified. In Finland and Greece changes in governments are also accompanied by changes in the Lifelong Learning strategies; the implication is that introduced reforms may not have the necessary time to establish. In Germany the federal system could hinder mutual learning and exchange of good practices between the states. The gap between those who can afford private remedial tutoring and those who cannot increases impeding later equitable access to post-secondary education based on academic performance. This is an important issue in Germany, in Greece and in Poland. One further weakness is a lack of counselling and vocational guidance services at schools, particularly in Slovakia, Greece, Bulgaria and Poland. In Bulgaria, Slovakia and Greece there is over-centralisation of decision making in education and LLL, allowing little autonomy to schools and local/regional authorities to decide on curricula and timetables. In these two countries education is also of highly academic nature with little links between theory and practice; there is a disconnection between learning at school and “outside” realities in the world of work, and society at large. Finally, one of the most pressing challenges in Spain is the high share of early school leavers.

Threats to education and training systems in Europe due to the economic crisis

The economic crisis poses common threats to education systems but there are also differences in the threats faced by the EU countries studied in the MASON project, which related to country-specific circumstances or socio-cultural factors.

The introduction of tuition fees in Finland might challenge equality in education; socio-economic and cultural factors related to the background of parents have an impact on students' school achievement and on the risk of early school leaving in Germany; the economic crisis in Greece and more recently in Spain has consequences to all education levels and sectors, more visibly experienced by drastic cuts in all types of public spending on education; the small number of kin-

dergartens in Poland is a core problem; lack of coordination among the institutions at national, regional and at local level in Spain is posing a threat to the country-wide coherence of LLL policies, which are also affected by the economic crisis; the availability of qualified workforce in specific job positions/sectors (IT, technical fields, R&D, etc.) is threatened by a brain drain trend in Slovakia, Finland and Greece. In Bulgaria school teaching is considered by many teachers as “part-

¹ For the full report, see <http://e-demos.iacm.forth.gr/index.php/en/masoncomparativellstrategies>

MASON's contribution to EU policies

MASON actively supports the realisation of a European area for Lifelong Learning through the development of frameworks, methodologies and tools anticipated to increase the coherence and comprehensiveness of LLL strategies at all levels and stages of education and training from socio-economically and culturally-sensitive perspectives.

In particular, MASON looks at socio-cultural dynamics and learning traditions affecting the effectiveness of the implementation of LLL strategies in diverse contexts. This perspective is highly productive towards the promotion of inclusiveness in education, training and informal learning opportunities to all, irrespective of gender, age, race, ethnic/cultural background, religion or belief, health, and socio-economic status.

time" job due to low salaries. This is largely the case in tertiary education, but is also very frequent in school education.

Summing up, the main threats to education, training and participation Lifelong Learning are posed by the economic crisis and resulting cuts in public spending in education at all levels, by potential shortages in qualified workforce due to

brain drain, and by the lack of close links between world of education and the labour market demands which in turn could have a negative impact on the motivation of students to continue with their studies or on the motivation of low-qualified employees to receive further vocational training.

Results of the 1st MASON workshop on 'Socio-cultural factors and practices shaping the lifelong learning landscape in Europe, Implications for LLL policy coherence' (17th of January 2012, Heraklion, Greece)

The workshop promoted a discursive and consensus building approach to LLL policy making and implementation, in line with the broad aim of the MASON project, which is to put in place a trans-national peer learning process under the scope of enhancing the development of mutual understanding across the LLL actors and between the prevailing educational traditions in Europe on coherence and comprehensiveness of Strategies on LLL. Among the invited participants were:

- Dr Eleftheria Argyropoulou (University of Crete, Department of Preschool Education, Greece)
- Dr Romuald Normand (Laboratoire Triangle, Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon, France)
- Dr Yanka Totseva (University teacher and visiting Professor at Sofia University, Bulgaria)
- Drs. Bob van de Ven (President of the Dutch Forum for Management in Education, Netherlands)
- Dr Marita Mäkinen (Research director, University of Tampere, School of Education, Finland)
- Peter Kaubisch (Freelance Trainer and Coach, Germany)
- Euthimis Karoyzakis (VET teacher, Greece)

School leadership, and teachers' professional development and networking

One of the main workshop discussions reflected upon two approaches to the provision of continued professional development applicable for teachers and school leaders. On the one side there is a trend and pressure towards professionalisation through formal training programmes, and therefore a need for a training market, and on the other hand a trend which stresses the importance of self-development. The 'professional self-development' trend suggests that teachers and school leaders should follow different paths in their careers and take charge of their own professional development, following new

strategies towards self-learning. This approach requires networking, a lot of self-direction, and autonomous learning. The need for context-specific, school specific management and negotiation of teachers' personal development on the basis of the needs of the school and of the individual teachers was recognised. This could be called the 'bottom up' approach to teacher's professional development.

Dr Romuald Normand (Laboratoire Triangle, Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon, France) discusses regional approaches to improve education through partnerships, networking and self-learning



Further, a gap between the policy of introducing change at the teacher/school level and the policy of implementation was brought up. School managers and teachers who try to improve their competencies and implement them at work need local level policy frameworks, incentives, and political support. Issues of resources were brought up (teaching hours, working hours, training hours, curricula-based demands) which link to the system-level policies and incentives, and of accountability for the overall quality of school performance and development.

Different levels of regulation may be distinguished to bridge this gap: at school level (sharing knowledge and practices among teachers), in the way local or national authorities develop support to improve outcomes (in-service training schemes, mentoring, induction), in the way institutional conditions of teaching are transformed (the move from traditional training to 'self-development'), and in the creation of intermediary and transversal functions in management, assessment, innovation, etc. The process may also be considered through a systemic perspective: professional development of teachers is effective if it changes according to related critical dimensions such as self-assessment, leadership, personalized learning, and networking.

Dr Marita Mäkinen (Research director, University of Tampere, School of Education, Finland) presents Finland's approach to promote equity and engagement in education

