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Education as a local quality of life: European Medium-sized towns proactive in education

(Bildung als lokale Lebensqualität)

An initiative by the towns of Rodgau, Hoyerswerda and Chomutov
for a European working group of Medium-sized towns proactive in education

Education is and remains a critical factor for Europe's economic, social and cultural future *and* at the same time for quality of life in the here and now. Even the current crisis in many European countries with regard to utilising acquired education in the job market does not fundamentally call this into doubt.

Over the last decade, the understanding of the "education question" has changed in two main respects:

Firstly, an orientation towards the concept of "life-long learning" is becoming increasingly established, comprising formal and non-formal learning. Understood in this way, the difficult transition from school to regular employment should be regarded as a long period of setting the course for the educational biography.

Secondly – partly in light of demographic change, but mainly based on social-state principles – attention is focusing on the problems associated with continuing *unequal* access to education. In terms of life-long education, today the problem of access no longer arises only in the early stages of educational biographies, but recurs time and again throughout life. Thus the *barriers* to access and success which exist *in* education, work and guidance institutions are also coming under scrutiny.

Both points suggest that education has an *extremely close* relationship with people and their life contexts, with educational pathways opening up from here. The *local sphere* is becoming increasingly important as an *education area*. Accordingly, alongside central government and federal responsibilities for education, local authorities are gaining practical significance as educational actors.

Rodgau in the state of Hesse and *Hoyerswerda* in Saxony are towns where the local authority has assumed responsibility in the field of education. Originally starting by shaping transitions from school to regular employment, for several years both towns have pursued an approach which aims to accompany the entire educational biography and is based on the broad participation of many local actors. To this end, the towns actively collaborate in the *Weinheimer Initiative working group*.

Municipal coordination for Rodgau and Hoyerswerda means responsible lead management by the municipal authority within a local *community of responsibility* for successful educational biographies. This view is shared by partner town *Chomutov* in the Czech Republic.

The towns that were invited to collaborate have worked *proactively* in the field of education for quite some time. They represent a leading role for *municipal coordination of education* within a *local community of responsibility for education*.

Meanwhile, as *medium-sized towns* – regardless of national differences in the institutional structure – they all see themselves as being in an *ambivalent* situation:

Even if they perform key regional tasks, to a certain extent medium-sized towns stand in the shadow of the major cities and larger regional authorities. But at the same time, a large part of the population lives in medium-sized towns, and their importance for people's quality of life should not be underestimated.

Education is becoming an extremely important factor contributing to quality of life particularly in medium-sized towns, also in the opinion of the people who live there. On the other hand, *unsuccessful* educational biographies present the risk of multiple problems particularly for medium-sized towns. Medium-sized towns need conducive conditions to play a proactive role in education.

Therefore hereby it is proposed to set up a *European working group of medium-sized towns proactive in education*.

Such a *European working group of medium-sized towns proactive in education* would face two main tasks: firstly – understood entirely as a form of "transnational education alliance" – it seeks to help the towns improve their own practice through an exchange of experience and expertise, and hence create *resonance*. Secondly, it seeks to use its voice, as it were, to advocate an improvement in conditions for medium-sized towns in Europe that are proactive in education.

The *working group* will develop its joint activities step by step. First of all, mutual fact-finding will take place to ascertain the state of development of proactive education and the challenges in this field. Particular attention will be paid here to activities in the transition from school into regular employment. Funding opportunities from European and national programmes will be explored.

An initial European meeting is planned as part of the annual forum of the Weinheimer Initiative working group in 2014 at Rodgau (8 and 9 of May).

The undersigned welcome the fact that the *town of Rodgau* is willing to act as coordinator in this phase. The signatories will find an appropriate solution for meeting the costs incurred here.

Partners:

Chomutov (Czech pronunciation: [\[xomutof\]](#);) is a town in the [Czech Republic](#), in the [Ústí nad Labem Region](#). Chomutov has been a statutory town since 1 July 2006. It occupies an area of 29,26 km² and has 50 782 inhabitants (2008), thereby making it the 20th largest town in the Czech Republic, the 4th largest in the Ústí nad Labem

region and the biggest in the Chomutov district. There are almost 80 000 inhabitants in the town's wider metropolitan area.

Fast development in the 19th century resulted from the growth of coal mining and the iron industry. The town grew and upon joining Horní Ves in 1938, the number of inhabitants amounted to thirty thousand. After World War II, the industrial businesses and housing development expanded. New urban settlements, constructed during the seventies, connected Chomutov with the neighbouring Jirkov. After 1989, heavy industry decreased and the environment in the town significantly improved. The development of recreational activities in the Alum Lake resort, Podkrušnohorský zoo-park and Bezruč Valley became the priority.

Hoyerswerda. The town of Hoyerswerda is situated in the Free State of Saxony on the north-eastern border of the Dresden administrative region, which is the seat of Saxony's government. It has the particular advantage of proximity to the German capital, Berlin (140 km), the capital of Saxony, Dresden (60 km), the cities of Bautzen (35 km), Görlitz (60 km) and Cottbus (50 km), as well as neighbouring countries Poland and the Czech Republic.

Major changes got underway in the 1950s, when the Hoyerswerda district was attached to the coal and energy-producing region of Cottbus. In June 1955, the Council of Ministers of East Germany decided to form the "Schwarze Pumpe" combine. A large-scale plant would be built to process the rich brown coal deposits of Lusatia. It became the main gas supplier to the East of Germany. The workers would be housed together in a newly built town. Hoyerswerda was chosen as the optimal location in terms of transport links, air quality and urban development.

In the initial phase, a town of 38,000 people was envisaged, for which the foundation stone was laid in August 1955 – at the same time as the groundbreaking ceremony for the "Schwarze Pumpe" plant. Following the first new additions on the outskirts of the small town, in June 1957 work began on building a completely new town on the other side of the Black Elster river. Seven housing complexes and a new town centre were planned. In the mid-1960s it became clear that the town would have to accommodate more people than previously forecast. The population of Hoyerswerda grew rapidly from 24,549 in 1960 to 34,095 by 1963 and 53,472 in 1968. It peaked at nearly 72,000 in 1981. By the end of the 1980s, ten housing complexes had been built along with the town centre.

After the question was put to the 'Round Table' discussion forum in 1990, it was decided that the town of Hoyerswerda should be part of the Free State of Saxony. Over the following years, the region around Hoyerswerda experienced dramatic structural transformation. The collapse of the defining mono-industry – mining and energy – brought far-reaching changes to the Lusatia region. Some 100,000 to 150,000 jobs in all fields simply disappeared. New job creation was patchy at best. This situation resulted in high unemployment and high outward migration (46% of the population). Since 1999, numerous empty concrete apartment blocks in the new town have been demolished.

Until 1995, Hoyerswerda was the district town of the Hoyerswerda administrative district. Following the latter's dissolution on 1 January 1996, Hoyerswerda gained the status of an autonomous town (*kreisfreie Stadt*).

By 2006, the town's population had fallen to just 40,912. The town's administrative area was enlarged to incorporate the districts of Bröthen/Michalken (1 June 1993), Knappenrode (1 January 1994), Schwarzkollm (1 January 1996), Zeissig (1 January 1996) and Dörghenhausen (1 July 1998), but the population continued to decline.

Since 1 August 2008, following administrative and functional reform in the Free State of Saxony, Hoyerswerda has been part of the large district of Bautzen and is therefore no longer an autonomous town.

Rodgau .Centrally situated in the Frankfurt-Rhine-Main business region, the town of Rodgau, with a population of around 45,000, is an important residential and business location in the Offenbach district. With parts of the town dating back to the 8th century, tradition and modernity coexist here. The townscape is characterised by new architecture alongside old half-timbered buildings.

Rodgau's five districts of Weiskirchen, Hainhausen, Jügesheim, Dudenhofen and Nieder-Roden are excellent places to live and work, offering a great quality of life. Mature, family-friendly infrastructure is available to young and old alike: all types of schools, diverse childcare options, a wide variety of shops and businesses, seniors' clubs and facilities, and much more.

People here benefit from free leisure and recreation options right on their doorstep: with fields, forests, the lake and public bathing beach, there are plenty of opportunities for walking, cycling, swimming and relaxation. Good social activities and a wide range of cultural offerings make the town even more attractive.

Weinheimer Initiative working group

The Weinheimer Initiative working group is an association of more than 20 [towns and districts](#) as well as numerous other actors. It supports the concept and practice of [municipal coordination](#) in shaping the transition from school to regular employment locally. The working group sees itself as having two key and closely related tasks: to advocate the recognition of municipal coordination and ensure that conducive conditions are put in place.

The current spokespersons for the working group are the mayors of Hoyerswerda and Weinheim (Bergstrasse). Information: www.kommunale-koordinierung.de

