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Implementing Innovative Structures to Improve Lifelong Learning – A Social Innovation Process The Example HESSENCAMPUS

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The Example HESSENCAMPUS

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Contents

Abstract	4
1. Lifelong Learning: A “Grand” Challenge for Education and Training	5
2. Regional-Local Coordination of Lifelong Learning: Improving Participation of Adult People by New Learning Structures – HESSENCAMPUS.....	6
3. Social innovation process to improve Lifelong Learning opportunities.....	8
3.1 Implementation: Process Oriented Innovation (Open Social Innovation).....	9
3.2 Impact: Region, Institutions and Learners.....	10
4. Conclusion: Alignment and Improvement of Lifelong Learning as an Open and Ongoing Social Innovation Process	11
References.....	14

Abstract

On the background of the results of a project started six years ago (HESSENCAMPUS: www.hc-hessencampus.de), the improvement of participation in Lifelong Learning in adult life will be discussed not only from the perspective of a system-related approach but as a far-reaching and continuous social innovation process, including all the relevant stakeholders, institutions and policy makers as well as the inhabitants of the region and its related localities.

In the framework of the transition from an industrial to a knowledge-based society and its corresponding concept of lifelong learning, a more comprehensive orientation of learning and support structures is needed referring to the increasing heterogeneity of work, education and living biographies of adult people. The individual personality of a learner and the learning process (not just learning phases or punctual activities) have to be the starting and reference point for every learning offer, oriented by a comprehensive understanding of learning (taking into account all areas and forms of learning and competences) and the learners personality, environment and biography. This leads to a paradigm shift from an institutional to a strict learner's and learning process perspective and will lead to new overall and comprehensive structural principles of the education system: reconstruction and partly new construction of traditional structures of education are necessary, building up a lifelong learning system instead of innovating only within the borders of educational institutions and areas, arranging lifelong learning possibilities in a more flexible way at the regional level - usable when and where needed, fulfilling specific learner needs, taking into account and accepting formal, non-formal and informal competences, supporting educational and professional transmissions, etc.

New education and training opportunities have to be constructed overcoming existing borders between the different education and training systems, based on already existing successful structures and institutions. Modulation and certification, transmission management etc. have to be coordinated where people are living and using these offers of lifelong learning: at the regional level.

In this respect HESSENCAMPUS will be analysed as an overarching regional-local social innovation process – improving, changing, and creating new social practices concerning social roles, relations, norms and regulations, going beyond existing borders and pure networking and following the aim of a strict user focus instead of the traditional institutional focus.

1. Lifelong Learning: A “Grand” Challenge for Education and Training

In the framework of the transition from an industrial to a knowledge-based society and its corresponding concept of Lifelong Learning (LLL) as a European strategy to improve European competitiveness Lifelong Learning has to be seen and implemented as a middle and long-term competitive factor (Lisbon Strategy, Europe 2020) being an answer to constant and profound technological, social, economical and demographic changes.

As priorities for future European cooperation on the implementation of lifelong learning policies experts of the “Seminar on Critical Factors for the Implementation of Lifelong Learning Strategies and Policies” identified that besides early childhood education there is a high demand for improving adult education (also beyond working age), attracting of disadvantaged (adult) learners, valuing of non-formal and informal learning as well as for improving stakeholder collaboration and partnerships, not only focussing on employability, which is perceived as the predominant dimension today, but increasingly on its potential to increase social cohesion as this is a growing challenge in most European countries (Chabera 2010: 13).

Taking the concept of Lifelong Learning fundamental a more comprehensive orientation of learning and support structures is needed. Lifelong Learning in this sense:

- indicates a comprehensive alignment of learning opportunities and support structures responding to the increasing heterogeneity of work, education and living biographies of adult people.
- has to be an overarching structural principal of the education system in a whole, including the improvement, reconstruction and partly new construction of traditional structures of education.
- needs learning outcome orientation and the recognition of competences adopted on other ways than formal learning.
- is a growing demand and challenge for every single person to deal actively and self confident with constant changes in the world of labour and society.
- is - at the same time - a challenge for public responsibility to support those individuals who are not able to maintain active learning.
- has to be realised on the regional level, improving quantitative and qualitative participation of lifelong learning of the inhabitants of a region, giving access and support where people work and live.

The learning process has to be seen as the starting and reference point for every learning offer, oriented by a comprehensive understanding of learning (taking into account all areas and forms of learning and competences) and the learners personality, environment and biography. This indicates a paradigm shift from an institutional to a strict learner’s and learner and learning process perspective and new overall and comprehensive structural principles of the education system: reconstruction and partly new construction of traditional structures of education building up a lifelong learning system instead of innovating only within the borders of educational institutions and areas, arranging lifelong learning possibilities in a more flexible way at the regional level - usable when and where needed, fulfilling specific learner needs, taking into account and accepting formal, non-formal and informal competences, supporting educational and professional transmissions.

On this background LLL – and the following description of the HESSENCAMPUS will document this - has to be organised as an overarching regional-local *social innovation process*

- improving, changing, and creating new social practices concerning social roles, relations, norms and regulations,
- going beyond existing borders and pure networking (e.g. binding coordination structures),
- following the aim of a strict user focus instead of the traditional institutional focus and
- improving participation of adults in Lifelong Learning.

A successful implementation and a continuous development of LLL needs not only a system-related approach but a far-reaching and continuous social innovation process including all the relevant stakeholders, institutions and policy makers as well as the inhabitants of the region and its related localities. HESSENCAMPUS could be seen as an example of such an overarching regional-local social innovation process – improving, changing, and creating new social practices concerning social roles, relations, norms and regulations, going beyond existing borders and pure networking and following the aim of a strict user focus instead of the traditional institutional focus.

2. Regional-Local Coordination of Lifelong Learning: Improving Participation of Adult People by New Learning Structures – HESSENCAMPUS

The initiative HESSENCAMPUS was initiated by the Ministry of Culture in the German federal state of Hessen in 2006 in order to further develop adult education

- through a binding cooperation of *mainly public educational institutions* (e.g. adult evening classes / adult education centres, vocational training schools, special schools for adults)
- in a new and innovative regional-local partnership and structure („HESSENCAMPUS“)
- under different local framework conditions (rural/urban areas, structurally weak and prospering localities, different constellations of institutions and actors in the field of adult education and training).

HESSENCAMPUS follows the basic principle of a „*development in partnership*“ in which the federal state of Hessen and the participating municipalities and administrative districts cooperate “at eye level” and not by top-down orders. An agreement signed by all players involved provides a common ground of development aims and procedures. From the beginning, sfs TU Dortmund has provided the project with scientific advice and monitoring.²

HESSENCAMPUS does not aim at developing brand new educational institutions, but at making better and efficient use of latent or unused *cooperational potentials*. This happens where education is actually taking place: in the municipalities / localities. Thereby, adult education was forcefully put on the *communal agenda*; not only for the citizens, but also and foremost for the municipalities and administrative districts. “Localisation” in this context would mean not only new possibilities to get hold of and mobilise potential learners, but also an increased potential for education to become a “location factor” for integrated locational development (countering skills shortages, preventing “brain drain” from rural areas, enriching the employability and flexicurity of the inhabitants, human resources development etc.).

² First results of HESSENCAMPUS are published by the scientific monitoring group: Kruse/Schröder/Kaletka/Pelka 2010; Kruse/Pelka 2009.

Through HESSENCAMPUS structures and opportunities for adult learning are supposed to be better aligned to the demands and conditions set by employment and social situations of those citizens who are underprivileged or who have certain deficits in education. Therefore, HESSENCAMPUS links vocational education to other education opportunities strengthening cultural, social and political participation and “second chance” approaches. A central hypothesis of the project is that in the long run such a HESSENCAMPUS can only operate successfully if it can *facilitate integrational developments* by connecting institutions which used to be strictly separated, along with their competences, traditions and cultures, by creating synergies in spending resources, and by addressing the employees’ professional competences, creativity, and willingness to cooperate.

The new HESSENCAMPUS centres³ are, at their core, jointly operated by *public educational institutions for adults* (adult evening classes / adult education centres, vocational training schools, special schools for adults). Participation of further organisations is allowed and implemented in many cases. All HESSENCAMPUS centres share common *Hessian trademarks* and have, at the same time, *specific characteristics* following the needs of their locality.

HESSENCAMPUS started as an open innovation process based on the results of an evaluation of the Hessian Further Education and Training Act by starting with selected regions which already started different own activities to improve Lifelong Learning in their region. In the end this resulted in a dynamic, well-reflected process at the most important intersection of adult learning, namely between the *federal* and *regional-local* level, or: between federal and communal policy.

This kind of open innovation process was only structured and guided by a matrix of basic orientations: (a) *four general orientations* and (b) *three dimensions of integrational development* (Kruse/Schröder/Kaletka/Pelka 2010):⁴

(a) From a learner’s perspective continuous investigation in people through lifelong learning has to take into account *four general orientations*:

1. a *comprehensive understanding of learning* (competencies for life management, including but not only oriented on employability, including every type of learning - formal, non-formal and informal)
2. the *learners environment* (social environment/milieu, regional or geographical access to learning)
3. the *learners biography* (education and training pathways, employment and occupation biographies)
4. the *adult learner personality*, including that adult learning is different from child and youth education and learning (“andragogy”).

(b) In order to implement these pedagogic principles, a strong and sustainable cooperation of the institutions involved is required – overcoming existing institutional borders and restrictions. The increasing binding character of cooperation comprises *three dimensions of integration*:

1. *Pedagogic integration*: The development of new or better learning opportunities, counselling and guidance services, new learning settings, a common learning culture
2. *Organisational integration*: common administrative or directing structures, employees’ participation, common use of resources (rooms, equipment, monitoring instruments), corporate identity

³ „Centres“ do not always refer to a concrete place; there are commonly used buildings, but also decentralised learning sites and “virtual centres” now.

⁴ This model has proven to be helpful throughout the different stages of the project because it helped structuring all discussions in local steering groups as well as in federal panels.

3. *Regional integration*: a selection of activities and projects which reflect local demands, central or de-central organisation of learning sites, local networking, continuous communication with politics and administration, with social partners and enterprises.

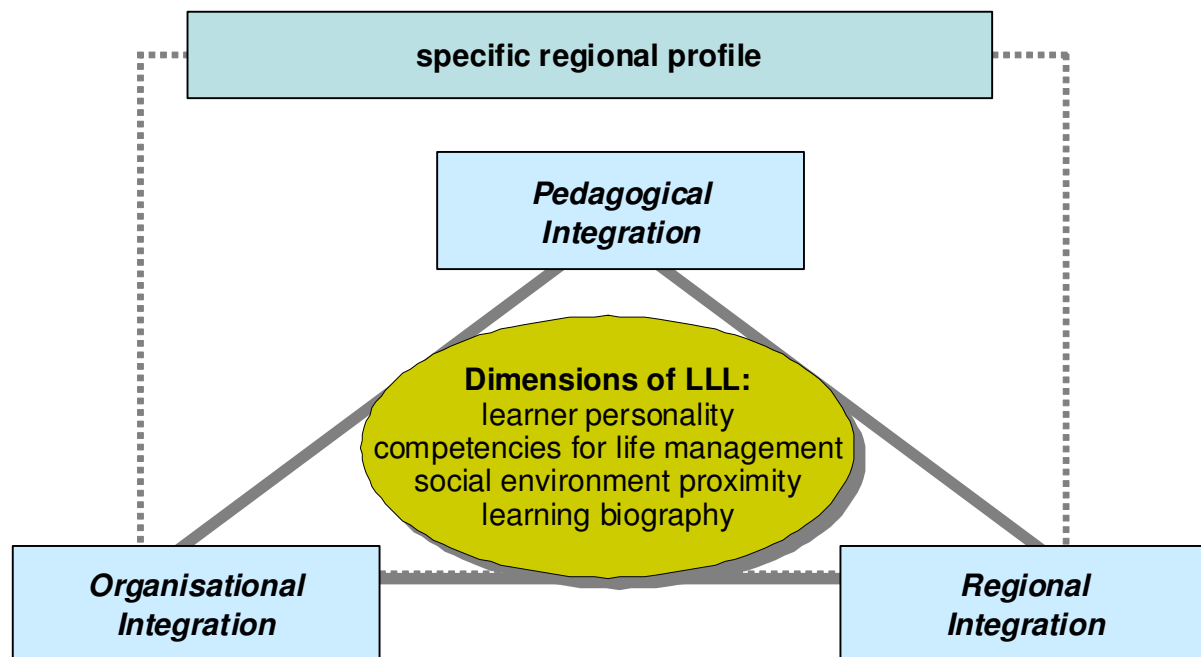


Fig. 1: HESSENCAMPUS Profile: Dimensions of LLL and Integration Areas

On the background of these common structural principles (and based on the agreement between the Land Hessen and the local administrations) different regional profiles of HESSENCAMPUS were developed and implemented on the regional and local level, depending on different regional-local demands and frameworks.

3. Social innovation process to improve Lifelong Learning opportunities

Because there was and is no adequate role model in Germany or elsewhere HESSENCAMPUS was set up as a system changing social innovation process in correspondence to the regional-local development and overarching cross-regional support and legislation structures. It was and is, in almost every sense, an experimental project living without a completely elaborated development scheme, but instead with a „corridor“ of development options, and is therefore in the best sense an open social innovation project. Referring to the four dimensions of social innovation by Hochgerner (Hochgerner 2011: 7) (idea, intervention, implementation, impact) HESSENCAMPUS could be described:

- as *idea* of quantitative and qualitative improvement of Lifelong Learning for adult people on the regional-local level in partnership (regional-local partnership of institutions and actors of education and training, partnership between the Land Hessen and the involved local and regional administrations),
- by *intervention* through public funding, scientific support, core coordination structures, normative settings (matrix of four dimensions of LLL and three integration levels), common framework and agreement,

- by *implementation* as an open innovation process based on development in partnership and public responsibility,
- by effectuating *impact* on
 - learners: improvement of quantitative and qualitative participation, flexible learning opportunities along the learning pathways (including all types of learning)
 - regions: improving education and training policies, establishing education as a locational competitive factor
 - institutions involved: professionalization, efficiency and effectiveness.

While the background (idea) and the framework (intervention) of HESSENCAMPUS have been already described in the following chapters the implementation as an open process oriented social innovation and its (potential) impacts will be considered in detail.

3.1 Implementation: Process Oriented Innovation (Open Social Innovation)

The basic approach of HESSENCAMPUS is focusing on *public responsibility* (especially for implementation and coordination between regional and local level), adult education and training (from 16 years / after school) with an explicit demand oriented learner and learning process perspective, in interrelation with regional and economic demands and progression.

The implementation process of HESSENCAMPUS could be characterised by a quick start with experiments and trials within a „corridor of possible developments“. New possibilities to get hold of and mobilise potential learners and an increased potential for education to become a “location factor” for integrated locational development (countering skills shortages, preventing “brain drain” from rural areas, enriching the employability and flexicurity of the inhabitants, human resources development etc.) are the (political) legitimation and stimulation for implementation activities and facilitation of integrational developments:

- by connecting institutions which used to be strictly separated, along with their competences, traditions and cultures,
- by creating synergies in spending resources, and
- by addressing the employees’ professional competences, creativity, and willingness to cooperate.

The main background for implementation and establishment of HESSENCAMPUS was the partnership agreement between the Land Hessen (Ministry of Culture) and the regional-local public authorities creating a binding regional-local corporate coordination and development of Lifelong Learning, cross-fertilising and ensuring a correspondent innovation process on the level of the Land Hessen, the regional-local authorities and the education and training institutions.

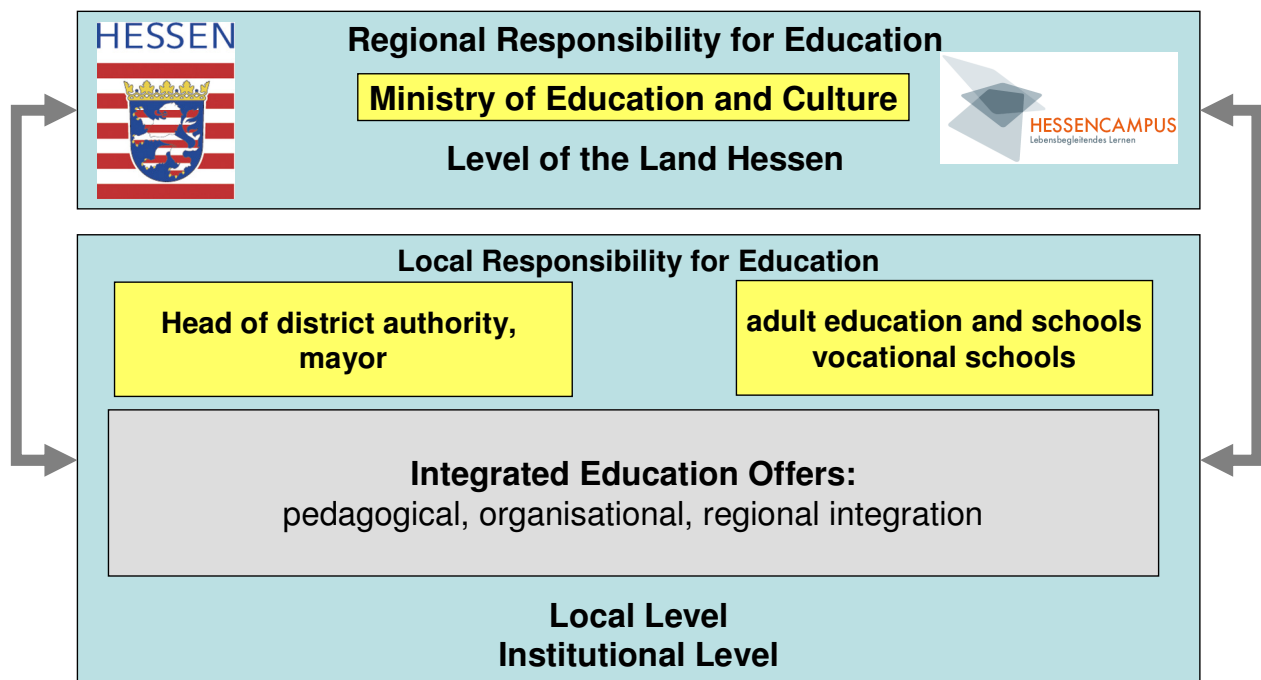


Fig. 2: HESSENCAMPUS: Regional-Local Corporate Coordination and Development

Scientific input and monitoring organised in an action research concept could be seen as a driving force and evaluating feedback for this innovation process. For example, through action research on the regional level all the relevant actors of lifelong learning were involved both as research subjects and experts for transfer, adaptation and evaluation of interim and final results, being the guarantee to reach the described objectives in the included regions and localities as well as guaranteeing on ongoing social innovation process, in interrelation with the regional-local possibilities, resources, and priorities. The action research approach provided impact in terms of developing tangible interventions in concrete regions in close collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

3.2 Impact: Region, Institutions and Learners

The motivation and mobilisation of stakeholders on the regional-local level to both further develop existing structures and develop new coordination or cooperation structures to improve the implementation of Lifelong Learning and to foster a comprehensive and sustainable social innovation process could be shown by the participation of 21 of the all in all 23 local authorities of the Land Hessen and about 200 local actors:

- 79 schools (mostly adult and vocational schools,
- 51 training institutions,
- 25 employers associations and employment agencies,
- 13 regional or local administration departments,
- and others.

In particular, the impact in this respect addresses the cooperation and coordination of stakeholders on the regional level. This means that the expected impact not only addresses one of the major challenges for improving the implementation of Lifelong Learning (cooperation and coordination on

regional level) but should ensure sustainable effects far beyond the projects length of time by establishing cooperation and coordination *structures* and a sustainable *social innovation* process on LLL.

Within these 21 regional HESSENCAMPUS initiatives more than 30 different operational fields and more than 100 different products were already developed. Up to now there are only two fields that are developed in common on the level of the Land Hessen: (1) improving information and counselling about education and training and (2) self organised learning (including new learning and teaching cultures, blended learning and e-learning). Referring to the three integration levels the impact could be described as follows:

- *pedagogic* integration:
new or better learning opportunities, counselling and guidance services, new learning settings, a common learning culture, etc.
- *organisational* integration:
common administrative or directing structures, common use of resources (staff, rooms, equipment, monitoring instruments), corporate identity
- *regional* integration:
activities and projects which reflect local demands, central or de-central organisation of learning sites, local networking, continuous communication with politics and administration, with social partners and enterprises.

Through the application-oriented approach HESSENCAMPUS is generating a higher-than-average level of operational impact primarily towards a) the learners in adult education themselves,⁵ b) the pilot regions involved and the Land Hessen, and c) the institutions for adult education. Impact on the *learners* themselves will involve improved access to education and training opportunities, transmission and permeability of education areas, new chances etc. *The regions* will benefit from the regional restructuring of adult. The main impact is expected on the level of the *institutions involved*: One might think that an innovation process that foresees an Lifelong Learning immanent paradigm shift from an education and training institution perspective to an unrestricted learner or learning process perspective will have problematic impact on the institutions involved. But quite in the contrary, HESSENCAMPUS serves an opportunity for different types of schools to initiate or accelerate a goal-oriented professionalization process in a region which takes a new approach in developing its adult education system by accepting responsibility and sharing it with local stakeholders. The institutions are provided with a theoretical background to reflect upon their up-to-date tasks and function in the local and regional learning community. This will have impact on the self-perception of the (not only educational) institutions and the significance of the learner in everything they do.

4. Conclusion: Alignment and Improvement of Lifelong Learning as an Open and Ongoing Social Innovation Process

The example of HESSENCAMPUS shows that beyond a systemic perspective the improvement of Lifelong Learning should be considered as a *social innovation process* based on scientific progress and practical experience. The understanding of innovation in this sense goes far beyond traditional

⁵ Up to now, there are only a few measurable results or impacts on the learners' level. This could be evidenced mostly in middle and long termed perspective.

innovation concepts which showed a strict orientation towards technological developments (Zapf 1989). The basic assumption is that the transition from an industrial to a knowledge and services-based society corresponds with a paradigm shift to a more general innovation system. This paradigm shift also implies an increasing importance of social innovation as compared to technological innovation. In particular for LLL such a concept (see Howaldt/Schwarz 2010; Howaldt/Jacobsen 2010) is characterized by

- a coordination and mediation between various different groups of stakeholders who are involved in innovation activities,
- the interdisciplinarity, heterogeneity, recursivity and reflectivity of the processes of implementation and an emphasis on historical, cultural and organisational preconditions,
- an increased involvement of users/citizens in processes of “co-development”,
- a systemic perspective on innovation in the sense of social innovation systems in which research, development, production and marketing are optimised simultaneously in an interactive process,
- a kind of “hybridization” at the boundary between society (practitioners/users) and science (experts/developers).

“As a process of collective creation, in the course of which the members of a particular total population learn, i.e. invent and establish, new ways of playing the social game of collaboration and conflict, in a word a new social practice, and in the course of which they acquire the necessary cognitive, relational and organizational abilities to do this” will take place (Crozier/Friedberg 1993). For the regional implementation of Lifelong Learning – this was proved by HESSENCAMPUS - all the relevant stakeholders, institutions and policy makers as well as the regional inhabitants in general have to be involved in this social innovation process of regional Lifelong Learning.

Only by embedding LLL implementation and coordination in such a comprehensive social innovation process it will be possible to overcome sustainably the main barriers of implementation of Lifelong Learning as stated in the LLL 2010 project: “In some countries there is clearly some confusion over responsibility for the development of lifelong learning and/or lack of a strategy” (LLL 2010, 2006: 11). HESSENCAMPUS showed that this confusion (stated for the national level) is much higher and much more practically relevant on the regional-local level. The LLL 2010 project stressed further: “However, whilst confusion over responsibility (and lack of strategy) seems to lead to lack of policy initiatives or limited development, (already) weak coordination may lead to important, but more piecemeal, initiatives.” “This suggests a clearly developed lifelong strategy which sets out the responsibilities of key agents is a prerequisite for the development of lifelong learning but that the coordination of those responsible needs to be sensitive to local contexts” (LLL 2010, 2006: 11). This is explicitly the research and application oriented social innovation process of HESSENCAMPUS.

Based on the experience of the five years running implementation of lifelong learning structures in almost every region of Hessen a *participating and dialogue oriented social innovation process* seems to be a successful way to improve participation in Lifelong Learning. Not only coordination (to overcome separation of the different education areas, institutional perspectives and lobbyism, unfruitful competitiveness, etc.) but a social innovation process is needed to implement new lifelong learning structures, embedding public education and culture organisations, public administration and education and training institutions (public and private). During the social innovation process it became and will be become evident which new obliging coordination structures at the regional level are a prerequisite for *effective and efficient* lifelong learning structures (in the sense that structure follows function) and which *support and (legal) framework structures* have to be given at a national (and maybe the European) level.

HESSENCAMPUS as a „holistic interpretation of innovation“ impacts (following Hochgerner 2011) all types of innovation (products, processes, marketing, organisation, roles, relations, norms, values), all functional systems (education and culture, economy, politics, law) and all intervention levels:

- on the micro level: behaviour of learners
- on the meso level: structural and institutional changes
- on the macro level: legislative framework, education system.

HESSENCAMPUS and other regional LLL activities showed, that an overarching regional coordination platform for common innovative tasks (e.g. to improve access to information and counselling about education/training, monitoring of regional learning demands of learners and the regional economy) and projects (e.g. the prevention of drop-outs, establishing new learning opportunities like e-learning) is needed. Therefore HESSENCAMPUS is concentrating on the regional implementation and coordination of lifelong learning *structures* that go beyond existing borders. Networking, seen as the solution to solve existing institutional and systemic (regulation) deficits, and existing approaches of networking (social, economic, innovation and education networks)⁶ are discussed more and more in line with the empirical experience of failure and malfunction, fragility and instability, not given sustainability as well as low efficiency and effectiveness. Therefore HESSENCAMPUS refer to an *institutionalisation* of cooperation going beyond pure networking. Reflecting regional examples, strategies and experiences (beneath HESSENCAMPUS e.g. learning centres, learning regions, technical colleges in the USA, etc.) there is a strong need for sustainable and *binding* support and framework structures for the involved institutions and public services to implement lifelong learning on a regional and local level going *beyond pure networking* and going beyond separated and not correlated developments of different education and training sectors or measures (Kruse/Schröder/Kaletka/Pelka 20120; Emminghaus/Tippelt 2009).

Therefore HESSENCAMPUS could be seen as a blueprint for a regional-local step-by-step social innovation process as a system and structure changing approach in correspondence to the regional-local development and overarching cross-regional support and legislation structures. Within a process of collective creation ((Crozier/Friedberg 1993) this social innovation process finds its challenges and success within binding structures (beyond law, not yet reflected by law, accepted by all the involved actors) and with increased demands for the organisational model and the management of this improved networking (Howaldt/Schwarz 2010: 58) characterized by

- heterogeneous structures, depending on the demands and framework of the local areas,
- different, heterogeneous innovation processes at the local level: in terms of time/speed, the focused products, organisational models, involved institutions (kind, number), investment of resources etc.
- but a common framework and overarching support structure and some common product developments (counselling of education, new learning arrangements, incl. new ways of adult learning and eLearning, blended learning).

⁶ See e.g. Becker/Dammer/Howaldt/Killich/Loose (Ed.) 2007; Emminghaus/Tippelt 2009.

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