Peer review: education management in city districts - Local education facilities (BildungsLokale) in Munich (district of Neuperlach)

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BACKGROUND

This paper presents the conclusions from the peer review held during the meeting of the EUROCITIES working group inclusion through education (Munich, 1-2 March 2012). A peer review is a method used to get an in-depth knowledge and understanding of a certain topic or a programme.

The working group discussed the activities of BildungsLokale (district education facilities), which are part of the larger Local Learning (Lernen vor Ort)[1] project carried out in Munich. The discussion focused on the overall management of the local education policy and networking with neighbourhood stakeholders, as well as engagement with the district's inhabitants.

The group interview took place at the BildungsLokale in Neuperlach, which is a suburban housing area built in the 1960s. It is located in the southeast of Munich with around 40,000 inhabitants and around 11,000 households. The interviewees included managers from the Department of Education and Sports, BildungsLokale staff and representatives of local institutions, such as teachers and social workers.

1. LOCAL EDUCATION MANAGEMENT IN MUNICH IN CITY DISTRICTS

Focussing on the management of local education policy in Munich, Helga Summer-Juhnke, the local education coordinator, gave an overview of how the city council manages education policy in the city. This included outlining the main actors and how priorities and actions are identified. This presentation was followed by questions from the participants that focused on the impact of local education management on the mainstream education practices in the city. The sections below give an overview of the presentation and the key points discussed.

1.1 Governance

Local education policy management in Munich is carried out by a dedicated unit within the Department of Education and Sports in Munich city council (Local Education Management,- Kommunales Bildungsmanagement). The unit's activities are supported by the Local Learning project (Lernen vor Ort). The goals of the project are to develop integrated and evidence-based solutions for promoting lifelong learning in the city. The project is divided into 12 sub-projects ranging from

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[1] The Local Learning project was launched in the spring of 2009 by the Federal Education Ministry and Stiftungsverbund (German association of foundations). The project is due to end in August 2012 but can be extended for two more years. In all, 40 cities and regional districts take part in the project. More information on the project: www.lernen-vor-ort.info (In German).

developing a research base on education in the city and education management in the city districts to diversity management and monitoring. One of these sub-projects is BildungsLokale.

The Local Education Management works together with other departments in the city and with a wide range of actors, such as chambers of commerce, Bavarian state authorities, universities, non-profit organisations and businesses.

1.2 Identification of challenges and priorities for action at local level

The challenges and priorities for action are identified in the Munich Education Report[2] that analyses key data concerning the education sector. The report is prepared by the Department of Education and Sports every two years. Part of the report focuses on the relationship between the socio-economic status and educational performance of students.

The two most important challenges in educational policy that Munich faces are the close correlation between social status and education on one hand and disparities in educational attainment and choices on the other. For example, of all children in Munich that move into secondary education after primary school (at 10 years of age), 51% choose a secondary school that prepares them for university (Gymnasium)[3]. This rate is higher than the national average. However, this rate differs greatly between districts, depending on the socio-economic status of their inhabitants. In Munich's poorest districts, only 15% of students go on to the Gymnasium and the rest choose secondary schools that lead to vocational education. In the wealthiest areas, 97% of pupils move to a Gymnasium.

Through the Munich Education Report, the city administration identified three areas with specific educational needs: Hasenbergl, Neuperlach and Schwanthalerhöhe. In these districts, the city set up the BildungsLokale.

1.3 The impact of local education management on the mainstream practice in the city

Helga Summer-Juhnke admitted that there is a growing need for a more integrated approach to education and that stakeholders need to see education in the wider social context of a neighbourhood and the city as a whole. To this end, the local education policy in the neighbourhoods should follow the integrated approach developed in the framework of the Social City programme (Soziale Stadt)[4]. The BildungsLokale (BL) make an additional step in bridging the gap between the social and education policies by bringing teachers, social workers and parents together. This approach is new in Munich, as in many cities, and has the potential to develop further. Cooperation between the social affairs department and those working in the education system is becoming more

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[2] Munich Education Report 2010: www.muenchen.de/media/lhm/_de/rubriken/Rathaus/scu/zahlen/bildber/mbb2010_pdf.
[3] Overview of the German education system: webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Germany:Overview.
[4] The national programme started in 1999, and promotes the principles of integrated local development in urban areas, capacity building of local partnerships, joining up funding streams and developing sustainable solutions. More information: www.sozialestadt.de/programm/ (in German only).

common but has to bring 'different cultures' together. The Regional Network for Social Work in Munich (REGSAM)[5] made initial attempts to work with teachers but was unsuccessful. One of the reasons for this failure was the reluctance of the teachers to take on a role that would go beyond the classroom.

This experience showed that the local education programmes would benefit from more integrated education and youth policies. At the moment, youth and education are addressed by two different departments in the city; youth by the social affairs department and education by the education department. This makes the coordination of youth and education policy more difficult from an organisational point of view.

2. NEIGHBOURHOOD-BASED ACTIVITIES OF THE BILDUNGSLOKAL IN NEUPERLACH

Interviewees:

- Helga Summer-Juhnke, project manager of 'local education management in City districts'
- Mareike Ziegler, local education manager in BildungsLokal Neuperlach
- Petra Heinen, local education counsellor in BildungsLokal Neuperlach
- Mrs. Ettmeyer / Renate Bumes, School teacher/principal
- Mrs. Gabler-Raabe, Intercultural officer.

The responses to the questions addressed to the interviewees are summarised in the sections below.

2.1 Overview of activities

BildungsLokale (BL) is an educational facility located in a city district. At the moment, there are three BLs set up in three disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Munich. The aim of the BL is to develop and manage local education partnerships and to develop quality education in the district. The BL also offers counselling and support on educational opportunities to local residents and develops cooperation on educational counselling in the city.

The three BLs are part of the Local Learning project. Each of them is managed by a local education manager and supported by a local education counsellor. The manager is responsible for the overall coordination of the BL's activities and relations with local actors, working with community schools, developing the local education strategy and supporting local cooperation in education. The counsellor is responsible for implementing a neighbourhood-oriented counselling strategy and

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[5] REGSAM's website: www.regsam.net.

advising local residents and actors on the best possible way to improve their skills.

The activities carried out by the BL include:

- organising 'drop in/open door' activities on the BL's premises. These include workshops on using IT (computer and Internet), 'German for foreigners', literacy;
- being partners in projects, for example in the project 'Combined work with parents for school and day care'. The project encourages parents to get more involved in their children's education. One of its activities is to organise 'parents' cafes' at schools to introduce the parents to the teachers and the education system;
- stimulating local networks, for example facilitating cooperation and the exchange of experiences between local schools and day care centres;
- liaising with local workers, for example intercultural officers[6] who work in the area and can inform local residents about the activities of the BL.

2.2 Reaching the target groups

The ultimate target group of the BL are students and their parents. They are reached in different ways. The BL organises activities on its premises but it also works together with several organisations and institutions in the district. Therefore, it can reach its target group both directly and indirectly. The meeting participants suggested that the BL could organise more outreach activities that do not concentrate on institutions but would aim at a wider group of people. In many cases, those who need help the most are those who are the hardest to reach and often are not in touch with many institutions. A participant from Amsterdam suggested parking a mobile unit in the neighbourhood, surrounded by tables and chairs, inviting passers-by to join. A similar scheme in Amsterdam, known as 'I am in', attracted a large number of people who would otherwise be hard to reach, such as school drop outs.

2.3 Support offered by BildungsLokale

The BL's support is important since many individual institutions such as schools, kindergartens or community organisations do not always have the resources and know-how to liaise with each other. BL also helps these organisations mobilise resources to carry out various activities.

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[6] Intercultural officers are employees of the city of Munich (Department of Education and Sports). Their main objective is to liaise between the public authority and migrant communities, usually of non-European origin. There are about 50 intercultural officers working in Munich.

2.4 Working with local actors

The managers of the BL are members in different structures, such as a network of social workers or local education committees. They plan to establish a local education council that will gather all stakeholders in the field of education in the district. At the moment, the managers chair roundtables with headmasters of all types of schools in the area.

2.5 Issues highlighted during the interviews

The main point stressed by the BildungsLokale staff is that the problems in local schools cannot be tackled without looking at the broader context in which they occur. This not only includes the socio-economic situation of the households the children come from but also the support they get from their parents in their education. The school principal reported that it is important for teachers to find out more about their pupils backgrounds, which are increasingly more diverse in Neuperlach, with most families of migrant origin.

One of the problems mentioned by the teacher interviewed is the high turnover of teachers in local schools. This is further complicated by the fact that local authorities have no say in teacher recruitment and career development is regulated by the state.

3. FEEDBACK FROM THE PARTICIPANTS - ANALYSIS OF STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS (SWOT) AND SUGGESTIONS

The interview participants discussed the project and gave feedback to the hosts in the form of a SWOT analysis.

3.1 Strengths

One of the biggest strengths of the project is its integrated neighbourhood approach where the project coordinators work across sectors and with a wide array of local actors. The project takes into consideration not only the need to work across sectors but also to tailor the provision of education and related services to the context and the needs of an individual neighbourhood. The project also succeeded in bringing the education and social sectors together, which is a step forward, as learning does not only occur at school and its outcomes depend heavily on the socio-

economic background of a pupil. Moreover, interventions that are coordinated are likely to be more effective and take less time.

Another strength of the project is the neighbourhood counselling which aims to keep local residents informed about educational opportunities and advise local actors on working together. Counselling and taking the role of a broker/intermediary are two of the most efficient policy interventions that make use of existing resources (such as educational offer in the city) and foster the creation of new partnerships.

Furthermore, the project succeeded in encouraging schools and teachers to engage with parents. This is important as, aside from the socio-economic background, parental influence is one of the key factors that affects children's learning outcomes. In addition, the parents have the opportunity to liaise with other parents and build relationships in the community, which, in case of migrants, may be otherwise difficult.

3.2 Weaknesses

The main weakness of the project is its lack of sustainability after the funding is finished. The Local Learning project supports local education management in the city and as such facilitates the changes within the mainstream local policies. However, such specific activities as carried out by the BildungsLokale, and in particular the wealth of experience gathered by the coordinators, may be lost if the funding does not continue.

In their responses to the feedback, the coordinators acknowledged the fact that the project is a short-term initiative. They added that in many cases innovative approaches to education can often be implemented exclusively on the basis of project grants. In such cases, there is always a problem of how to continue the project's activities and how to keep experienced and expert staff. The coordinators also highlighted that in order to mainstream the results of any project financed externally, there is a need for strong political support.

3.3 Opportunities

The project has great potential to change the approach to local cooperation from thinking in terms of one sector to working across different sectors. It has already facilitated the forging of links between the social and education departments, especially at primary school level, in engaging with parents and opening up the school to the local community. It also has the potential to lead to further cooperation between different actors.

The activities supported by the project show that the coordinators, together with their partners, adopt a broader view to education. The coordinators aim to make education a community resource and a vehicle for personal, and not only labour market, development. This approach encourages a cultural change in how the function of education is regarded and promotes moving away from sole focus on the academic performance of a student to a more global understanding of their skills and their cultural background.

Furthermore, the project has an undoubted value in providing context-related information on the policies and projects currently delivered by public services. It therefore offers an opportunity by showing the positive results of the public interventions and valuable lessons on how such actions can be improved and transferred to other areas of the city. It can also demonstrate what challenges and barriers lie ahead.

Another opportunity offered by the project is the exchange of experience between the three BLs. Although each of them has to respond to similar problems, these responses vary due to the different contexts in which they occur. They therefore offer a great opportunity to learn about factors for success or failure of public interventions.

3.4 Threats

Given the short-term nature of the project funding, one possible threat is the lack of knowledge transfer in the mainstream policy delivery (mainstreaming) and the loss of experience gained while developing new practices. It is clear that the Local Learning project supports local education policy and its very aim is to be mainstreamed. However, once the project is completed, the funding for many activities that were carried out may not be replaced.

Another threat may come from insufficient evidence of the project's results and impact. Although the evaluation plan for the project and its activities is in place, it would benefit from a more context-related analysis of its impact and a more qualitative analysis. This applies especially to the analysis of the effects of activities such as local networking and parental involvement, which are carried out over a longer term and whose results are often indirect.

Thirdly, a potential risk is also a dependence on personal input and the coordinator's dedication to the role. While the coordinator's dedication to a role is not negative in itself, it carries a risk of losing the experience and contacts if the person leaves the project.

Finally, there is also a risk that the project fails to reach those who actually may need support the most. At the moment, the project engages with specific target groups, such as local schools, teachers or parents. However, the parents that are involved in the local activities are in general open to working with the school and interested in their children's education. Those parents who do not see the need to get involved in their children's education or those who are hard to reach by local social services may therefore still be beyond the reach of the support offered.

CONCLUSIONS

The peer review highlighted several important issues related to educational inequalities and educational disadvantage. The BL project shows that it is possible to bridge the gap between the education system and social services at local level. Moreover, it shows that reducing educational inequalities does not always require increased service provision – this can also be done effectively by bringing these services closer to the people who need them and ensuring that they are taken up. Another issue that emerged from the discussions was the problem of the short-term nature of projects and funding and the fact that it is often not sufficient to address long-term needs. Finally, the participants discussed the difficulties associated with the qualitative evaluation of social projects. Many admitted that although it was difficult to design qualitative evaluation criteria, it was nevertheless crucial in order to assess the progress made by the project.

The peer review also highlighted topics for future consideration by the EUROCITIES working group inclusion through education. They include:

- the role of local authorities in stimulating networking between various actors at the local level (in the neighbourhoods) and the work across different sectors;

- how to promote parental involvement in their children's education and the benefits of such actions;

- exploring how to embed/integrate short-term grant funding into longer-term local development strategies; and

- using outreach activities in reaching to wider groups of beneficiaries.