1 Education System Trends and Developments in the Baltic Sea Region
Education systems are integral sub systems of regional, national and even international (or interregional) knowledge and innovation systems. The design, generation, application and networking of knowledge and, eventually, the use of such knowledge for the development and establishment of new products, services and processes require from protagonists involved in the innovation process enhanced needs for education and further training particularly in face of the rapidly increasing digitalisation and/or technological advances.¹ The countries and regions of the Baltic Sea Region also have to face this challenge and develop and establish modern education system structures via innovative education policy strategies and measures.

Against this background, this chapter covers mainly three priority areas: Firstly, an attempt is made to classify the Baltic Sea Region as education, knowledge and innovation area. Related to this it shall be outlined which necessities or, respectively, potentials a »Baltic Educational Area« and the associated collaborations and networks include.² In this regard, the conceptual approach »interregional education networks« as the basis for creating a Baltic Educational Area is indicated and will be explained in a later chapter of this publication in further detail.

Afterwards, characteristics and trends of the individual education systems in the Baltic Sea Region are presented. This information shall be considered as abridged country profile presentations on education system and policy peculiarities here, still making no claim to be exhaustive. In fact, the individual information on the Baltic Sea Region countries’ education systems are accentuated statements or trend statements³ based on selected literature as well as on experience reports from the South Baltic Programme project COHAB⁴. National accentuations of education levels, participation in education and education structures are pointed out for the different education fields or education levels (pre-primary level – primary level – secondary level I/II – tertiary level – quaternary level/further education⁵). The paper also covers the challenges many Baltic Sea Region countries face related to demographic change, migration/integration issues or even the global competition for specialists. In addition, the approaches state which education strategies have been developed and implemented by the countries over the last years in order to ensure that their education systems can meet the necessities of an education, knowledge and innovation society.⁶

³ The information provided in the second sub-chapter is based on international research and development work of the Chair of Business, Economics and Entrepreneurship Education at the University of Rostock. A group of students from the business pedagogy field elaborated a trend report titled »Education systems in the Baltic Sea Region – similarities and differences« within the context of a scientific project work in winter term 2013/14. This paper serves as the basis for the information provided in this chapter. The scientific process was supervised by the scientific staff of the chair respectively the staff of the EU project COHAB.
⁴ For further information on the EU project COHAB visit www.cohab.eu.
⁵ Cf. European Commission (2013a) regarding the structure or education levels of the education systems in the Baltic Sea Region.
The chapter is completed by an outlook regarding opportune development strategies of a transnational or interregional education policy in the Baltic Sea Region. The presented strategies can also be considered as recommendations for action aiming to an advancement of the Baltic Sea Region as macro-regional education, knowledge and innovation site.

1.1 The Baltic Sea Region as „Think Tank“ for Education, Knowledge and Innovation

The social, political and economic significance of the Baltic Sea Region derives not at least from its scope. Almost 150 million people live in the eight EU countries located directly at the Baltic Sea, economically responsible for nearly 30 percent of the gross domestic product of all EU states. In the field export, the countries bordering the Baltic Sea are also important for Europe. They sold, for instance, goods worth about 725 billion euro to other EU member states in 2009, which is about one third of all export deals within the European Union and about 7 percent of the world trade. The Baltic Sea Region countries had about 67 million employees in 2009 which means that nearly one third of all EU employees comes from the countries bordering the Baltic Sea.\(^7\) In addition, the number of jobs that are subject to social insurance contribution can be described as increasing since 1999.\(^8\)

The development of the Baltic Sea Region towards an important education, knowledge and innovation site has, in this regard, a mainly historical background. The distinctive traffic and trading routes in the Baltic Sea Region originating back to the Middle Ages have been the basis not only of international or interregional logistic lines to the present day but also of the people’s sensitiveness for intensive knowledge and innovation exchange in these regions.\(^9\) Benefitting from this »historical setting« and not least also from various EU funding programmes, the number of collaborations, networks, projects, special meta-institutions and strategic development concepts and structures\(^10\) has expanded significantly over the last years, ultimately also to cope more and more with the requirements of a modernized, interregionally networked »Baltic education, knowledge and innovation society« in the 21st century.\(^11\) Thus, excellent key success factors related to the advancement of a sustainable, interregionally networked education, knowledge and innovation area\(^12\) can be certified for the Baltic Sea Region even in the future. Here, the positive development indicators are mainly:

- A high education level in many parts,
- Various already cooperating education and research institutions,

---


\(^8\) Cf. Thönnies (2011), p. 3.


• A well-positioned innovation-oriented medium-sized business sector or many high-tech SMEs,
• Interregionally cooperating industry networks as well as technology, innovation and start-up centers,
• A very pronounced establishment of information and communication technologies in business, education and science,
• Already interregionally interrelated labour market systems or structures\(^\text{13}\),
• A high degree of internationally compatible products and services as well as, in particular, internationally demanded human resources,
• A dense network of maritime connections,
• Enormous scientific expertise and a strongly pronounced entrepreneurial know-how and interregionally-economic potentials in the forward-oriented sectors »Green Technologies« and »Maritime Industries«,
• Twinnings where cities and towns collaborate for a cooperative exchange providing impulses for the development of the Baltic Sea Region\(^\text{14}\) as well as, pointed out again,
• Numerous networks and cooperation institutions with a wealth of experience and expertise in transnational or interregional cooperation in fields relevant for civil society, political, economic, scientific and also and foremost education\(^\text{15}\).

Thus, the Baltic Sea Region has an outstanding model character as »think tank« of interregional cooperation for innovation strategies and subsequent education and knowledge-based implementation processes. For many years, it has already been a European benchmark macro-region, which manages, as inherently linked think tank, outstanding in many respects, to develop and implement constantly new education and knowledge strategies and, thus, innovations via generation, transfer, discussion and advancement processes.\(^\text{16}\) Therefore, the Baltic Sea Region is able to provide solution strategies for overcoming a multitude of current, globally relevant problems or issues to be faced in the future, here, mainly related to

• Social and economic threats related to demographic developments\(^\text{17}\),
• A modern migration and integration policy and, thus, an adequate integrative education policy,
• Combating environmental pollution or the climate change and, thus, saving natural living, education and working spaces,
• A sustainable, efficient, environmentally save transport and logistics business,
• An environmentally sound water and energy supply for the population and
• A peaceful coexistence of different cultures and ethnic groups based on social welfare and security and modern labour market conditions for the people.\(^\text{18}\)

In this context, only innovative education systems and a modern education policy in the individual countries as well as, in particular, a linking of the Baltic education systems with each other that has to be expanded further regarding best practice structures will enable a sustainable advancement and promotion of the Baltic education, knowledge and innovation area. The information provided in the chapter below shall provide some inspiration regarding possible education system innovations in the individual Baltic Sea Region countries which, structurally and conceptually adjusted, could be established even in other countries or regions of the Baltic Sea area.

1.2 Characteristics and Trends of the Education Systems in the Baltic Sea Region

Estonia

After becoming independent at the beginning of the 1990s, Estonia’s education system underwent fundamental change processes. New education laws were adopted and constantly reviewed in terms of a state-of-the-art education policy aiming to adjust to the given new market situations and to meet the challenges of global economy. Latest PISA study results show that the Estonian education system achieves good education levels among pupils and, thus, that the change processes have fulfilled their purpose in many respects. According to OECD information, Estonia is above OECD average in almost all fields and leaves e. g. Germany behind in a comparison related to mathematics or reading but also to natural sciences in general. Particularly notable within the context of Estonia’s education system development is the establishment of information and communication technologies in the country’s schools that has been intensified over years. It was initiated by the programme »Tiger Leap« started in 1997 aiming to improve the education quality by using new technologies. Apart from advancing the technology in education institutions, for instance, more virtual platforms have been established to provide the teaching staff with digitally networked training material within the context of this programme. In addition, there have been communications portals since 2003 that serve as link between school and parental home and shall integrate parents more actively into their children’s learning process. This happens, among others, by transparentizing marks, absences, training contents or even homework, e. g. via »online class registers« where teachers, pupils

20 The information provided in the second sub-chapter is based on international research and development work of the Chair of Business, Economics and Entrepreneurship Education at the University of Rostock. A group of students from the business pedagogy field elaborated a trend report titled »Education systems in the Baltic Sea Region – similarities and differences« within the context of a scientific project work in winter term 2013/14. This paper serves as the basis for the information provided in this chapter. The scientific process was supervised by the scientific staff of the chair respectively the staff of the EU project COHAB.
and parents have access at any time. This shows that Estonia’s education system has arrived in the communicative-networked era.22 
Over the past years, Estonia’s education system has been the subject of many additional reforms. As, for instance, the vocational training shall meet the demand to be accessible for many different target groups, the government adopted a review of the development plan for vocational training in 2009. This new development plan shall promote an innovative and knowledge-based development of economy and society via a modernized vocational training.23 
Thus, for instance, curricula were modernized in this context, vocational training institutions were renovated and equipped with latest technologies.24 Also the increasingly professional orientation of the secondary levels I and II allows pupils, for instance, an early insight into different professional specialisations. Partially, various subject contents from the general education field can even be credited in later professional trainings which can be considered as very innovative regarding the permeability between the education levels.

The (further) development of the national qualification system or qualification reference framework plays an equally important role. Already in May 2008, the reviewed qualification law was adopted with the principal aim to promote the willingness for lifelong learning and, thus, the mobility of the Estonian population and its competitiveness. Merging the recognition processes related to vocational and academic competences to a standardized Estonian quality system that is compatible with the European Qualification Framework is in the focus here.25 Also the reduction of the partially very high dropout rates on all education levels is considered as extremely important. To achieve this, various projects and programmes were (co-)financed by European support programmes – here, among others, comprehensive support systems for recipients of training at all education levels, optimized career and study advisory services or flexible study opportunities at universities.26

Within the course of the modification of the Estonian education system, the language policy, mainly related to national minorities in the country, is of crucial importance. Thus, the share of the largest minority, the Russian population, e. g. amounts to about 25 percent. Already since the mid-1990s, Estonia advocates for a protection of national minorities and supports, enshrined in laws, the ambitions of all national and ethnic minorities in culture and education. Thus, national minorities are enabled by the »Act on the cultural autonomy of national minorities«, for instance, to open private secondary schools where a language different from Estonian is taught.27 Thus, Estonia is one of the few European states that finance even the »non-official language school network« as part of the public education system. Furthermore, in order to enable or to facilitate the non-Estonian population the integration into the Estonian (education)

25 Cf. ibid., p. 2.
society, Estonia’s national integration programme (2008 – 2013) was started in 2008 as follow-up of the programme »Integration into the Estonian Society« (2000 – 2007). It also continues the basis of the state’s integration policy and eventually the integrative education policy in Estonia. Successes of the programme are, among others, the expansion of Estonian language learning opportunities, the improvement of teaching methodology and training materials in Estonian language and the language training, particularly in the pre-primary and primary school sector.28 One of Estonia’s areas of concern related to the pre-school sector is that, due to partly significant capacity bottlenecks, not every child gets the opportunity to attend a pre-school institution as, for instance, the waiting lists e. g. of kindergartens are very long.29

Due to the increasing opportunities for Estonian schools to create own curricula based on those issued by the state, pupils get more and more the chance to specialize individually by choosing between electives (especially at secondary level II) and to determine own general education as well as vocational preparation focuses themselves. This enhances their autonomy by planning their class schedule autonomously and, in addition, improves their social competences via learning in different course compositions instead of the only typical class communities.30

Vocational education shall, as stated above, be more accessible for many target groups which is why different professional qualification pathways exist. Still, learners predominantly aspire the general extended secondary education level (mainly gymnasium) after completing secondary level I to start studies later, while there is only limited interest in the vocational training approach. It can be stated that all education options are only aspired to a very limited extent where vocational training is concerned which mainly results in the current lack of reputation of this area of education.31 Besides, the drop-out rates in the field of vocational training, comparatively high over the last years as amounting up to 20 percent, are particularly problematic.32

Still, the Estonian education policy has recognized the problem and tries to make the vocational training and even the further education market more attractive. This shall be achieved via an increasingly permeable education system that shall allow crediting achieved degrees, competences and learning successes across all education levels.33 In addition, the modernization of education institutions (particularly vocational training schools) has been and will be expanded. Still Estonia is facing the challenge to make the vocational education system more attractive and, thus, increasingly establish it to enable sufficient acceptance mainly by the younger generations, will remain valid over the coming years. Many approaches, as, for instance, an enrichment of school education content with more and more (job-related) practical content, provide an excellent basis here for, subsequently, using this practical work in the general education stage of a later training and crediting it there.34

34 Cf. Eurydice (no year of publication), S. 36 pp.
Latvia

Latvia’s education system has, in many respects, specific characteristics and implementation strategies at all education levels. A one-year obligatory pre-school, for instance, ensures, that children are prepared for the learning content at the subsequent nine year general education school period and that it can, at least theoretically, profit from advanced education levels and contents. This, for instance, becomes apparent from the introduction of the school subject English already in form three. In general, the standardized nine year school ensures that pupils are not allocated to rigid school types as part of a possibly rigid confusing multiunit structure at an early stage and, thus, that individual education paths, professional orientations and, later, even training and study opportunities are kept available as long as possible and, in an ideal case, promoted by suitable support systems.\(^{35}\)

The conventional vocational training at vocational schools has been not very popular in Latvia over the last years, as a majority of the pupils decides to attend a general-education secondary school with the opportunity of starting higher vocational educations or studies. Still, there have been increased education policy efforts to make the vocational training in vocational schools more practice-oriented and, thus, more attractive.\(^{36}\)

The Latvian education system is, in many respects, strongly centralized. Central requirements determined by the state regarding general education, vocational training and university education are of, compared to other European countries, above-average significance. Thus, Latvia’s education landscape has little or even no regional specifics although this would partly enable a much more homogeneous education level in many Latvian regions as significant performance gaps resulting from specific regional education programmes and support systems would be avoided.\(^{37}\)

The dual vocational training system as implemented in Germany is internationally considered as success model. Still, this education model, probably also exposed to many challenges and improvement options, has been capable of being integrated or have been integrated in only few European countries with system relevance. Exceptions are some Scandinavian countries as well as Switzerland and Austria. In times of high youth unemployment in Europe, it is worth also for Latvia to consider related dual vocational training structures at least partly on system level. Because in Germany, where the youth unemployment amounts only to eight percent according to official statistics, the dual education system is considered as one key factor for combating it.\(^{38}\) Thus, the Republic of Latvia also has shown big interest in the German vocational training system because the Latvian vocational training system is organised only at school-institutional level, i. e. not in cooperation with companies. Resulting from this, a declaration of intent was signed by the German and the Latvian Ministry of Education in 2013 which foresees a close cooperation in the field of vocational training.

\(^{35}\) Cf. Latvian Institute (Latvijas Institūts) (2012), no page.

\(^{36}\) Cf. e. g. Döbert et al. (2010).


\(^{38}\) Cf. Astheimer (2013), no page.
Initial aim is to test elements of the German vocational training system in the Republic of Latvia in joint pilot projects to increase quality and attractiveness of the country's vocational training programme. The German side finances human resources at the German-Latvian Foreign Trade Chamber in Riga especially for this purpose. This even institutional localisation of the German-Latvian vocational training cooperation shall mainly serve the purpose of initiating or facilitating mutual exchange of knowledge and experience between German and Latvian vocational training experts, schools and companies.\(^39\) Despite increasingly successful acquisition and use of European funding, the Latvian education system is still partially characterised by severe financing and budget problems. Due to economic problems resulting from the global financial crisis, public spending has been reduced significantly since 2009 which results into a severe decline of employees in the state education sector and of related salaries. It should be noted that Latvia, similar to Estonia and Lithuania, was and is counted among the so-called »Baltic Tiger states« which were, mainly before the financial and bank crisis, assessed as countries with high economic growth in various sectors and, thus, even positive effects on public budgets.\(^40\) Currently, this country, as many other countries in Europe too, is on the way towards economic recovery which suggests even an improving of public education budgets.\(^41\)

One challenge Latvia is facing related to professionalising teaching or training staff is that teachers in Latvia are traditionally found among the low-paid workers. Thus, the average gross salary of a teacher with ten years professional experience amounts to converted scarcely 400 euro – compared to this, the average Latvian monthly gross salary amounts to about 700 euro.\(^42\) To remedy this, the Latvian trade union of employees from the education and science sectors demanded a budget increase for, converted, about seven million euro in 2013. According to recent surveys, a majority of the educationists is willing to enforce their demands for a budget increase in the public education sector with strike actions.\(^43\) The currently significantly increasing number of enrolments in Latvian private schools – at least in the nine-years lasting general education school sector – can, at least partially, be interpreted as a reaction of many parents to the partial deficits in Latvian public education sectors.\(^44\)

The financial crisis of the year 2009 had and still has an impact on the state-managed tertiary education sector, also related to the public academia. Due to the fact, that the general education budget was reduced by 48 percent over this period, partially radical saving measures were implemented also at Latvian universities. Resulting from this, parts of the university lecturer staff were dismissed, seminars were cancelled and university institutions were closed down. In addition, the number of free university places was reduced so that many students have to pay the

---


\(^{40}\) Cf. European Economic and Social Committee (2013), no page.


\(^{43}\) Cf. Caspari (2013), no page.

\(^{44}\) Cf. World data atlas (2013), no page.
partly very high tuition fee of in average 1,700 euro with the help of loans or side jobs, which is a truly difficult undertaking considering the rather low wage and salary structure in the entire country. Even university lecturers are – different from many countries in Western Europe – not among the higher earners in Latvia. This results into a situation where many lecturers and professors have to have side jobs in addition to their university work due to drastic salary cuts. One logical consequence is that teaching activities and research often cannot be implemented at the needed quality level.45

The partially very rigorous budgetary policy of the Latvian government, the high unemployment caused by the financial crises and the generally low wage level resulted into a situation were mainly young and highly qualified specialists left their home country over the last years – specialists which are urgently needed by the Republic of Latvia and here also and foremost the education system or the related institutions in their current economic recovery process.46 Nevertheless, one should credit the Latvian government with partly improving the economic situation thanks to implementing a rigid budgetary and reform policy, but this was foremost at the expenses of the »Latvian education generation« of recent years.47 It is to be hoped that the Latvian education policy will profit from the renewed economic boom and that, over the coming years, adequate models and financing concepts for modern education structures counter the in-depth education policy austerity measures of the past.48

Lithuania

Already since 2003, a large-scale national education policy funding programme in Lithuania has set itself the task to implement comprehensive national education strategies. It aims, among others, to optimizing resources, strengthening partnerships between public and private institutions, improving the quality assurance and infrastructure of open learning environments, making learning more attractive via promotion, enhancing competences, capabilities and skills needed for a knowledge society and optimizing human resource training and further education in all fields of education. The cooperation between school and parental home and the optimization of pedagogical decision-making processes are other important aims of Lithuania’s national education strategy.49

Lastly, a new law on education system changes and, thus, improving the education quality was adopted in 2009. The aim has been and is mainly to make the universities more attractive so that the students as »Lithuania’s educated elite« have a stronger motivation to remain in the country, which ensures the future specialist recruitment and retaining for Lithuania.50 The last specifically vocational education-related reform took place in Lithuania in 2011. Still, this was

only an amendment of the wording of the vocational education system, no fundamental innovations were initiated here. Still Lithuania continues to work, regarding vocational education but also at other education levels, intensively with education system development perspectives for the country and will presumably expand this even further by acquiring and using more and more European funding in the future.

One special feature of the Lithuanian education system is, amongst others, the strong focus the Ministry of Education and Sciences puts on prevention measures that aim to supporting pedagogical specialists with early stage recognition and promotion of children and adolescents from socially vulnerable groups. The measures intend to prevent violence among children, crime, prostitution, risk of suicide and other negative social and mental phenomena. With these measures, children are provided with intensive support systems and activity offers. Furthermore, the education chances and careers of children with an adverse background are expanded and pedagogical and legal awareness raising is implemented in the society. The parents shall be also included into the measures. There are special programmes, mainly for adolescents, as this group of persons is particularly at risk. Large-scale funding has been provided since 2005 to implement these programmes. Thus, 300,000 children and adolescents may participate in these programmes every year.

Despite the segmentation of the Lithuanian school system into primary level and secondary levels I and II, the schools or school types are composed according to an interconnecting or overarching principle. Many primary schools are not separated from the basic or secondary school. There are, for instance, secondary schools that include form 1 to 10 or grammar schools with the forms 1 to 12. In addition, there are schools in rural areas where several classes are taught in one group of pupils.

One problem that has been an issue in the Lithuanian education policy over many years can be found in the field of life-long learning. Currently, the system of professional and university continuing and further education is not variable enough and not sufficiently adjusted to the transition from one education level to the other. In addition, acquired competences are not accepted or credited adequately in many cases. Therefore it is hard for some persons or age groups to make up for education in form of a »second chance«. Challenges ahead are overcoming the separation of the educational programmes, strengthening the connection between vocational and academic education institutions, increasing the coordination of formal and informal learning processes and recognizing and crediting formally, non-formally and informally acquired competences. For these reasons, Lithuania improved the education policy structures for lifelong learning over the past years so that adults have improved further education oppor-

51 Cf. Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln e.V. (2008), no page.
52 Cf. Gries et al. (2005), p. 47.
55 Cf. ibid., no page.
tunities now. In special adult education institutions, vocational schools, universities of applied sciences, universities and the education centres of the employment agencies, they may participate in formal and non-formal training programmes, attend courses organised by private or public educational institutions or enroll at distance learning centres. However, the further education fields are still in the development phase. A lifelong learning strategy was elaborated in 2004 with the aim to reorganise not only the work in the education institutions but of the entire education system towards lifelong learning. The objective is to invest more into lifelong learning to achieve a more efficient treatment of human resources. Thereby, career advancements shall be facilitated and obstacles on the labour market shall be removed. The Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Sciences is currently investing more money into information campaigns about the necessity of lifelong learning but is still confronted with lacking acceptance of or interest in professional or university further education processes. The Lithuanian state offers, among others, the makeup of general education degrees, vocational trainings and partially extra-occupational further education study formats, fully financed by the state, to solve this problem. These and other programmes shall also support the integration of young unemployed adults who have no professional qualification, long-term unemployed, employees at a more advanced age (55 plus), disabled persons and ethnic minorities.

The Lithuanian education policy is, probably more than in other European states, very much depending on the country's economic success, which can cause financial difficulties in times of recession. Particularly in rural areas, a closing down of schools might be a consequence, which could jeopardize the country's education strategy. Furthermore, the decrease of population might turn into a financial structure problem in the future. In this context, the education system financing has already been gradually changed towards more effective financing related to the number of pupils from 2002 on. The so-called »school fees« are provided by the government and two thirds of it go directly from the state budget into educational institutions. It shall be used for paying the teacher salaries, the school managers, class books and learning aids etc. One third is provided to the institutions by the school authority in charge which shall ensure an efficient and rational administration of the funds. These funds must not amount to less than 6% of the GDP. One specific feature related to the Lithuanian education financing was adopted in 2003 by entitling inhabitants with place of residence in Lithuania to donate 2 percent of their income tax to legally predetermined public institutions (mainly education institutions).

One particularly positive financial aspect is the additional monetary progress not only in the educational field resulting from the rapprochement with Europe. Thus, numerous Lithuanian education institutions, here mainly the country's universities, have participated very successfully in many EU funding programmes and projects over the last years, such us, for instance, in the South Baltic Programme.

57 Cf. IBW – Institute for Research on Qualification and Training of the Austrian Economy (no year of publication), no page.
58 Cf. Gries et al. (2005), p. 47.
60 Cf. ibid., p. 412 pp.
Poland

Poland’s entire political system has been in a situation of change from the end of the 1980s respectively beginning of the 1990s. Since that time, »fundamental political, social and economic changes« took place. The education landscape is confronted with »new challenges that result from the system reforms, the extended autonomy, the privatisation, innovations and the new role in the European Union (Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004)«. As of now, two decisive education reform periods can be identified. The first one lasted from 1990 to 1999 and focused on the reform of the higher education system, the second took from 1999 to 2005 and its emphasis was on school and vocational education. The alterations have already started with expanding the care services for children under three years and progressed towards preschool education with new core curricula.

Innovations implemented in the general education sector were the introduction of a multilevel school system, the centralized final secondary-school examinations and the two obligatory foreign languages as well as the revision of the high-school system. In the vocational education field, vocational training profiles were renewed and new vocational school systems with reformed vocational school types were introduced. In addition, a vocational supplementary education was integrated into the system and the transparency between education, economy and labour market was increased. Regarding university education, the higher education act adopted in 1990 was comprehensively revised for the first time in 2005 and the last amendment took place in 2011 in which the universities became more autonomous. As a result, many new private but also public universities were established. The vocational education system and, thus, the basic vocational schools were reformed for the last time in 2011. Here, one innovation is mainly the closer meshing with vocational education and further education centres. The new system allows pupils an even more specific or individual qualification by passing courses and single examinations in different learning sites which are certified and accepted for the training.

With its partially comprehensive reforms of the past years, the Polish education system approaches Western EU standards. To achieve a sustainably successful implementation of these processes, the education policy can currently build on positive feedbacks and, thus, wide support of many education institutions, which can be interpreted as indicator for a functioning education system consensus policy and successful education strategies of Poland’s political decision-makers.

Still, the Republic of Poland’s young education system is in its initial stage yet and will have to combat changes even in the future, as, for instance, related to the obligation of teachers to

---

62 Ibid., no page.
63 Cf. ibid., no page.
evaluate and assess pre-schoolers before the primary school starts from 2014 on.\textsuperscript{68} The demand that children enter the education system at the earliest possible stage and to have a permeable education system with as smooth as possible transitions are a surely good basis for promoting the future education mobility of children and adolescents individually. Still, major efforts have presumably to be taken to reach the factual implementation respectively sustainable establishment. This includes the early introduction of foreign language classes and the reorganisation of university degrees. Language teaching often starts during the primary school period in Poland with English being the predominant foreign language here. Due to a lack of teachers, the language class options are currently very limited at most of the schools.\textsuperscript{69} Due to demographic and geographical circumstances, not all education institutions are available in all areas. Still, the municipalities are obliged to strive for a free transportation of the children to the closest education institution. Remarkable regarding the education system is the pronounced «national idea» in Poland and the related strong involvement of the population into the development of the Polish education system.

Poland is striving not only to best arrange the education paths of children, adolescents and young adults but also to enhance life-long learning and to improve and enhance continuing and further education structures in the context of EU education policy. Special training/qualification programmes and measures for specialists and executives from the education sector are, among others, in the focus here. Facilities from the so-called quarterny sector are here, for instance, state education centres, schools for adult education or further education departments at universities.\textsuperscript{70}

As an interim summary can be stated that Poland’s overall socio-political objective is human resources development. Looking to the future, Poland’s education policy will be strongly oriented to overall European strategies. The strategy »Europe 2020« that stands for sustainable, intelligent and integrative growth and shall improve the education level of European citizens serves as one of the probably most important European promotion strategies here. The promotion programmes in the context of the »Europe 2020« strategy offer, apart from many other European funding programmes, an excellent monetary framework for additional finances to the Republic of Poland, allowing further competence development of human resources. More ambitious than many other European countries, Poland set itself the related goal of reducing the share of school-leavers and of increasing the share of persons with university degree among the 30 to 34 years old population more strongly than determined by the European strategy.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{68} Cf. European Commission (2013 d), no page.
\textsuperscript{70} Cf. Federal Ministry of Research and Education (2012), no page.
\textsuperscript{71} Cf. European Commission (2013 e), no page.
Germany
Compared to other European states, the German education system has some specific characteristics. Among them, for instance, the federal states’ cultural autonomy (federalism) that highly influences the entire education system of the Federal Republic of Germany, the four-level-structure of secondary level I that results into allocating the pupils to different school types depending on their performances, or the vocational training in a dual system. Latest OECD reports stressed that the dual system is one of the main reasons why the business and education location Germany has coped so well with the global economic crises and the youth unemployment problem. Resulting from this, Germany’s dual system is considered as European best practice transfer model for modernizing vocational training, which is, among others, demanded in many Baltic Sea Region countries. Due to this, the dual system is presented in more detail hereinafter.72

The dual vocational training is implemented in two learning locations, usually over a period of two to, maximum, three and a half years. In the company, the trainee completes the practical training part that ideally has a strong content link to the theoretical lessons taught at the vocational training school. Based on a framework curriculum both, professional and general education competences are taught. In principle, both learning sites act independently regarding management, working and learning process structure here. Still, the regulations are coordinated in so far that a solid vocational training in one of the currently about 330 state-recognized occupations requiring formal training can be enabled.73 From this combination of theory and practice can be said that the practical occupational training is approached from a sound theoretical basis and, thus, can be considered as more productive or reflected. In addition, practically experienced things can be better implemented than those only addressed in theory.74 It is particularly the practical training part that qualifies for a comparatively smooth transfer to the work-process oriented professional world after completing the vocational training. The graduates do not need time and cost consuming on-the-job trainings but can quickly offer themselves as full-value manpower as enough applicable experiences had been gained already beforehand. Furthermore, the companies ensure to have their specialists whom they can train according to own needs. Still, the training always has to be in line with the training regulations which determines the framework conditions that have to be met. Through these framework conditions that are binding for the companies, a standardized job profile within the Federal Republic of Germany or respectively in all federal states can be ensured, which provides the opportunity to apply also in other companies in case the trained persons cannot be employed in the training company after the vocational training.75 The dual system is financed from private and public funds. Employers and social partners show a high commitment. They are controlled at national,

---

regional, local and company level to ensure that not short-term demands overrule the determined training objectives.\textsuperscript{76} Currently, the resulting trend in Europe is the export of Germany's dual system respectively its education system parts and structural elements to countries with high youth unemployment and inadequate vocational training structures, such as, for instance Spain, Portugal and Greece as well as, partially, also the Baltic Sea Region countries.\textsuperscript{77} The high number of education service providers in the so-called transition system in Germany shows that the dual system is by no means free from weaknesses or challenges. The transition system works with all those adolescents who have not obtained the needed adequate occupational qualification during the stage between general education to possible career entry. This can result, for instance, from the fact that the general education degrees or marks needed for starting a dual vocational training are not available or that a person lacks the sufficient training entrance maturity due to, for instance, psychological or social disorders. There is a multitude of different service providers that offer education formats below qualifying vocational training level (or accompany adolescents in addition to their dual education, e. g. in case of learning difficulties) to improve the individual lacks of competences of adolescents related to starting an education or employment within the context of the transition system.\textsuperscript{78} One current major challenge or education policy focus in Germany is the gradual improvement of the education system's permeability, which shall, also in the context of national or European qualification frameworks, allow to improve the recognition and crediting of existing degrees, competences and learning successes. It is mainly the permeability from vocational to university education and vice versa that shall enable a more open, more innovative education system. This shall allow even more individual education and career paths and, thus, counteract the serious education system problems of vocational training and study drop-outs or misallocation of future specialists and executive in Germany as well as in other European countries.\textsuperscript{79} The adequately pedagogically organised transition from elementary to primary level is to some extent a problem field in Germany. Pre-school institutions and primary schools as independent institutions have not binding cooperation structures, as it would be usually needed to enable a smooth change or transition in this particularly important education period. Possible measures could be, for instance, the enhancement of joint events, mutual »education visits« and joint further education measures for the pedagogical staff.\textsuperscript{80} An adequate migration policy and a related integrated education policy have been widely debated in Germany over the past years. For a long time, there was a lack of sustainably functioning concepts for integrating migrant families and, thus, also children and adolescents from a migrant background the German education system had to and increasingly has to

\textsuperscript{78} Cf. ibid., p. 541 pp.
\textsuperscript{79} Cf. e. g. Faulstich (2008), Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung (2010) and Kultusministerkonferenz (2013).
prepare for. Still, many federal states managed to improve the migration policy respectively to enhance a related integrative education policy via model projects, enacted laws or civil society support systems over the past years. Particularly worth mentioning here are integrated language classes in the school system right from the elementary or primary level on, continued over all education levels. As one thing is certain: children, adolescents and young adults who do not understand German language will not be able to achieve the same results as they would have reached with a comprehensive understanding. Role models for this approach were, among others, Swedish concepts and measures, which have intended state-wide efforts and support programmes over many years aiming to offer Swedish as second language for pupils of non-Swedish origin.\footnote{Cf. Stanat (2008), p. 741 pp.}

It can be stated that Germany’s education system, despite of many presumably modern education policy structures still includes, partially even a lot, education unfairness regarding possible education paths and options for children and adolescents from socially weak backgrounds or with disadvantages of any kind. Parents who cannot afford investing into their children’s education, for instance by paying private lessons or extracurricular education offers, are often confronted with inadequate and strongly formalized, bureaucratic structures to cope with the situation. Over the past years, not least supported by many inclusion concepts and projects, even this problem has been increasingly addressed in Germany through legislative amendments, support programmes and model projects. However, there is probably still a long way to go towards an »educational career« as fair as possible for all education recipients and Germany’s education federalism makes this additionally difficult.\footnote{Cf. Institute of Social Research, Computer Science and Social Work (2005), p.17 p.}

**Denmark**

Denmark considers education as main indicator for successful and sustainable research, development and innovation activities. Together with the Nordic states Sweden and Finland, Denmark is among the global top positions in the field of vocational and university education in 2010 according to the »Global Competitiveness Report«.\footnote{Cf. Niller (2011), no page.} However, Denmark achieved, similar to Sweden, rather unsatisfactory results in the PISA study in 2009. To take the results seriously and to respond adequately to it related to the education system, thus mainly reducing the youth unemployment rate, which affects Denmark as much as other European countries, the Danish government set the goal that 95 percent of the adolescents shall achieve an extended secondary level degree by 2015. Furthermore, 60 percent of the adolescents shall attend a university by 2020. An accordingly established national programme is the job and study advisory system »Act of Guidance« which has already existed since 2003 and shall support the adolescents with advice regarding the transition from primary to secondary school, from general education towards vocational training or study and thus eventually towards the labour market. The Danish Ministry for Children and Education is in charge of central coordination and control
here. Still, the relevant regional authorities are mainly responsible for organising and implementing the individual advisory processes here. 51 of these municipal Youth Guidance Centres exist all over Denmark. They advise mainly school leavers, disadvantaged adolescents and young people under 25. In addition, the so-called »eGuidance« system, which provides the additional opportunity to get consultancy via SMS, chat forums, telephone hotlines and email services, has been available since 2011. Even the social network »facebook« became part of the »eGuidance« system in January 2012.84 The state-financed incentive and support system aiming to motivate or guide disadvantaged adolescents towards a qualified education and school degree plays a particularly strong role in Denmark.85 Once again, the Danish education society’s claim or Danish government’s objective to let nobody alone on his/her course of education is illustrated here. Key objective is that all children and adolescents pass and complete a general education schooling that is individually suitable for them. Here, the specifically Danish school type, the production school, is an alternative for disadvantaged young people aged between 16 and 25. It gives them the opportunity to acquire general education, social and job-qualifying competences to get prepared for an adult life as independent and active as possible and potentially have the chance for a further professional education. The attendance is limited to one year or an even shorter period. Production schools, in addition, serve to promoting the education performance of adolescents as well as enhance social integration.86 Both, the state and the municipalities, are in charge of financing this school type. Production schools have been established as autonomous school type in Denmark since 1996. They are also a model for German production schools. They were originally introduced to reduce youth unemployment.87 Particular emphasis is put on equal opportunity or educational equality in the Danish education system combined with the claim of enabling every person his/her optimum educational career. Because established human resources are one of the most significant bases of the country’s high economic power. Thus, every learner shall get the same chances for accessing education. What has to be rated positively is that all pupils, independent from gender, origin or mental/physical disabilities, shall support each other in the schools and learn from each other. Thus, better education opportunities for all pupils shall arise and the social competence of all involved parties shall be strengthened. The pedagogical-conceptual approach of inclusion is one key element of Denmark’s education system. In addition, the Danish education system offers a very comprehensive and transparent structure in the quarternary sector. It comprises various lifelong learning opportunities that aim to enabling all persons an access to education and further education at any time. This is one of the reasons why people in Denmark have above-average chances for professional advancement compared to other European countries.88

84 Cf. Fachstelle für internationale Jugendarbeit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V. (2011), no page.
86 Cf. Cedetop (2012 b), no page.
The relatively high salary structures and resulting high taxes enable that cost-intensive »inclusion schools« as well as Denmark’s education system in total are fully financed by the state, with a few exceptions. Still, related to state financing or adequate budgeting of education issues, already the Danish »folkeskole« act adopted in 1993 effected an increasing competition for pupils as every pupil increases a school’s budget. This shows that, despite Denmark’s state-organised standardized school, education structures characterized by increasing market-orientation and economisation of education prevail. The question remains if a more efficient and productive school system allows meeting the objectives related to quality assurance and curriculum.\textsuperscript{89} International occupational mobility plays, mainly in view of the neighbouring country Germany, an important role in Denmark. In November 2013, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany and the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Denmark signed a joint declaration aiming to enhance the comparability of obtained occupational qualifications in Germany and Denmark. As a principle, a comparability of vocational qualifications is assumed, unless significant differences regarding taught skill and knowledge exist. Thus, mainly those people who live in German-Danish border regions profit from this. On the one side, it becomes much easier for employees to work in another country. On the other side, apprentices get more options when deciding for a vocational training.\textsuperscript{90} As an interim summary, a high standard of the Danish education system can be attested, mainly because of the education institutions’ good material and financial resources and well-qualified staff. The well-established lifelong learning system, the state support systems, the single school type concept, the use of most modern technologies in general education schools, vocational schools and universities and various education programmes for persons who are disadvantaged within the education system are, despite of the youth unemployment challenges, success factors of the Danish education system.\textsuperscript{91}

\textbf{Sweden}

The Swedish education system has been characterized by the »One school for all«-concept from the beginning of the 1990s on. All pupils shall get the necessary support processes they need to achieve the curriculum objectives. Already then, important instruments were the employment and establishment of special needs educationalists at schools. On the other hands, special needs education became an essential element of Sweden’s entire teacher training system.\textsuperscript{92}

Where the Swedish education system was strongly focused on formal education processes over the past decades this idea changed at the beginning of the 21st century. The importance of informal learning at school or other areas of education has been increasingly stressed and

\textsuperscript{89} Cf. Cedefop (2012 b), no page.
\textsuperscript{90} Cf. Fachstelle für internationale Jugendarbeit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (2013), no page.
\textsuperscript{91} Cf. Cedefop (2012 b), no page.
didactically integrated. In this context, informal learning refers to learning processes that take place in everyday life, within the family or during spare time. Informal learning is (related to learning objectives, learning time and learning support) not structured and generally does not result into certification. It can be target-oriented, but in most cases it is not intentional but, instead, incidental and unscheduled. The developments towards a stronger consideration of informal learning processes or informally acquired competences in Sweden takes place also against the background of developments in the entire European education in the context of lifelong learning.

Sweden is one of the wealthiest or socially prosperous European countries and has always been scored good or even very good in the Europe-wide education rankings and reports of the recent past. As other Scandinavian countries, Sweden is one of those EU states where the education system is structured in accordance with the school model, i.e. the state continues to play a particularly important and outstanding role and even vocational education is increasingly implemented at schools.

Resulting from the Bologna process and the related objective to harmonize degrees from all over Europe, Sweden is, as other EU countries, demanded to envisage a transparent, permeable education system to make Swedish degrees more recognizable or creditable everywhere in Europe. A higher competitiveness of human resources in the single countries is one of the issue addressed by the objective. Sweden follows this path partly very successfully. Many Swedish citizens take, for instance, the higher claims for international employability on the EU labour market very seriously and those who can afford it make increasing use of vocational and university education and further education even at an advanced age – mainly by using private education service providers. Sweden’s education policy has responded to this trend so that municipalities in Sweden are obliged to increase their financial support even for private schools or successful education service providers. The general tendency is that more and more state schools are shut down, particularly in rural areas, and more and more private education institutions open or expand their existing offers.

As indicated above, Sweden’s special needs education is of special importance and internationally considered as exemplary. Based on the 1960s education developments that included the introduction of the nine year general education schools, various reforms took place over the last years or decades, focusing particularly on the field of care for and integration of disadvantaged children and adolescents. Contrasting with the good outer perception of Sweden’s special needs education promotion structures, Swedish education experts are far more critical towards the current development status and see major challenges this area will have to face. Thus, for

---

95 Cf. Gries et al. (2005), p. 64.
96 Cf. ibid., p. 64.
instance, the integration of children and adolescents who need special pedagogical support shall be enhanced. In addition, special schools for particularly severe special needs education cases currently undergo further reform processes.\textsuperscript{99}

As other European countries, Sweden has been an immigration country for many years now. Many people from all over the world come to Sweden every year to secure a foothold on the modern labour market there and to profit from the stable welfare state Sweden. This requires, partly even major, efforts related to the state integration policy or the related integrative education policy in Sweden. The integration measures taken in the context of Swedish education policy are, in many respects, very modern and successful here. Thus, people from a migrant background get the opportunity to make use of an efficient recognition/crediting system related to the qualification acquired in their home country in various Swedish cities, e. g. via the nationwide funded large-scale programme »ULV«, which aims to employ persons with international pedagogical qualifications as teachers in Sweden. In this context, educational staff usually gets an individual post-qualification, for instance regarding Swedish technical language in the relevant pedagogical field or specific didactical/methodological issues related to the specifics of the Swedish education system. One other specialty related to Sweden’s integration policy is the Sami minority. It has an own primary school structure from form one to form six before all adolescents attend the regular (i. e. central) general education school from form seven on. The Sami minority got the right to control their education over the first years independently even in 1980 which still applies today.\textsuperscript{100}

One of the latest challenges in Swedish education is that education structures and offers are not always orientated to or relevant for current economic issues and that adaptation processes in respond to economic developments and trends, mainly in the vocational training field, are often started too slowly. Thus, school education misses working reality to some extent. Currently, for instance, the phenomenon occurs in Sweden that policy does not respond quickly enough to increased demands or declining demand situations from the economy side related to certain training courses by initiating needed education system adaptations or labour market reforms, e. g. via support programmes. This, again, forces an increase of youth unemployment as, because of this, too many young people may chose a training where not enough job are available or a training with too little practical relevance and, thus, insufficient labour market orientation. Due to this, there are efforts taken in Sweden to adopt aspects or structures from Germany’s dual system, mainly for giving greater priority to practical elements of the vocational education, as the education in Sweden has been currently too theoretically oriented, yet.\textsuperscript{101}

Finally, the high trust of Sweden’s population into state care and education firmly anchored in the national consciousness shall be indicated which, again, has education system effects. Wor-

\textsuperscript{101} Cf. Federal Ministry for Education and Research (2013 d), no page.
king parents are, for instance, significantly released by pedagogical full-day care for their children in Sweden. In addition, the state-financed nine year, full-day general education school is widely supported among the Swedish population.

**Finland**

The Finnish education path is characterized by many modern and innovative education system approaches. One specialty can be noted already at elementary level, considered as particularly important in Finland, as every child from the age of four can claim a place in a state daycare center which is available for free as soon as the parents need it for their offspring. In case the daycare centers of one region reach their capacity limits, the municipality usually expands the institutions very quickly or even accredits new daycare centers in the direct vicinity. Accordingly, no waiting lists exist at this education level, as, for instance, in many other European countries. Parents who do not use or need this kindergarten place get a 300 euro payment from the state as the early education is, in such a case, completely in the parents’ hands. The third, increasingly frequented opportunity in the early education context are private care centers, which are controlled by the municipalities.¹⁰²

The majority of parents in Finland place their children at daycare centers from an early stage on.¹⁰³ The share is above average compared to other European countries, which results mainly from the typical family model in the Scandinavian countries’ societies characterized by usually two working parents. Accordingly, reconciling work and family is a strong element of the Finnish education and labour market policy. A majority of the women works fulltime. Only about 14.8 percent work part time while the share amounts to, for instance, 24.9 percent in Denmark and 39.4 percent in Germany.¹⁰⁴

One particular strength of the Finnish elementary education level, but also applicable to other educational fields, is the high degree of professionalism of the pedagogical staff. The teaching staff in day care centres usually has a university degree and in-depth science-based and practice-tested pedagogical competences. The staff-children ratio on the elementary level indicates, in addition, a high number of educationalist per child to achieve a promotion and development of the child that is as individual as possible. On average, one kindergarten teacher, for instance, is responsible for three to four children here. To some extent, even 24-hour-kindergartens are available, mainly used by parents who work in shifts.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, the Finnish education system is characterized by pronounced pre-school lessons. They take place before the Finnish basic education, i.e. the primary school, starts and is implemented on voluntary basis for all children at the age of six.¹⁰⁶ No specific conditions of admission apply¹⁰⁷ and the municipalities have been obliged to offer such places from 2001 on. The aim

---

is to create beneficial learning conditions and to develop the children's social competences together with other children. The knowledge transfer is not obligatorily focused on fixed course or group formats here, but on subject areas such as language, interaction or mathematics. The education is based on already existing knowledge and the child's experiences. A positive view of life and playing as pedagogical method are in the focus here. 97 percent of all Finnish children take part in the pre-school lessons.\textsuperscript{108}

Other specific Finnish education features are the wide use of most modern technologies and the excellent material equipment at general education schools, vocational schools and universities. Many education institutions, particularly in the city of Helsinki and Helsinki region, meet most modern architectural requirements to innovative education facilities, classrooms with an explicitly learning-friendly design included. Usually, sufficient books or learning materials exist and numerous computers are available to the learner. It should be noted here that it is not only the good material and technical but also the above-average personal resources that characterize the Finnish education system as already indicated above related to the elementary education level. As not only teacher but also special needs teachers, social workers, psychologist, nurses or school nurses work at the schools.\textsuperscript{109}

Of great support for Finland’s education system is the public confidence in the respective pedagogical staff. Contrary to many other European countries, it is mainly the teachers who enjoy highest social reputation in Finland, which also additionally promotes the teaching-learning-process between pupils and teachers.\textsuperscript{110}

Admittedly, the Finnish education society and its education system faces, despite many positive framework conditions, some challenges. The share of non-nationals amounts only to 2.7 percent, so that Finland, from a social point of view, is a rather homogeneous country. But considering the global migration flows it can be assumed that the number of persons who come to Finland from various countries from all over the world to build up a career on the modern labour market and to profit from Finland's stable welfare state will also increase in Finland. This means that, partly major, efforts related to the national integration policy respectively the integrative education policy in Finland will have to be taken and even the financial burden the state will have in these fields will increase then.\textsuperscript{111}

Despite of the good results achieved in international educational comparison studies, in-deficit developments related to education can be identified even for Finland to some extent. Thus, for instance, the reading performance of Finnish people has radically changed. Only 70 percent of the Finnish people still like reading where it was still 80 percent ten years ago. 56 percent of the teachers complain in a study implemented in 2008 that, despite certain resources, there is not enough time for a sufficiently individual support of children and adolescents, which partly

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{108} Cf. Bennack et al. (2010), p. 228 p.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{109} Cf. Knoller (2011), p. 69.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{110} Cf. Oppacher (2010), p. 100.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{111} Cf. Knoller (2011), p. 72.}
reduces the always strong Finnish focus on pupil-oriented lessons.\textsuperscript{112} Furthermore, the share of pupils who are, despite of the good school resources, reluctant to go to school partially increases in Finland. The reason for this is an increasing level of mobbing at schools, partly advanced by anonymous mobbing in social networks like »facebook«.\textsuperscript{113} In addition, Finland, as many other European countries, has to combat the youth unemployment problem, which amounted 19.9 percent in 2013.\textsuperscript{114} In fact, this is beyond the EU average of 23.7 percent, but anyhow causes, mainly over the medium term, a major economic, but also educational and social, problem if no suitable political measures will be taken. Here, the Finnish education policy has to develop and establish appropriate structures and support programmes for an efficient and successful transition from school into vocational training or studies and, finally, into vocational.

Summarizing, Finland can be considered as benchmark of innovative education policy in many fields. »Knowledge and creativity as well as values like equality, tolerance and equal opportunities for men and women and a responsible handling of nature and internationalisation are basics of the Finnish society. All citizens have the same right to participate in education in accordance with their skills and the principle of lifelong learning«.\textsuperscript{115} These priorities and values, also relevant for the education system, are reflected in the main objective of Finland’s education policy: »[...] to ensure equal opportunities in the education system for all citizens, independent from age, place of residence, financial situation, gender or native language«.\textsuperscript{116} The right to education is considered as basic right in Finland, hence, a free basic education for all citizens is ensured. In addition, the state sees creating equal opportunities as its duty, not at least to offer all citizens the opportunity for following further education and career paths in accordance with their skills and capabilities after completing the basic education comprehensive school.\textsuperscript{117}

\subsection*{1.3 OUTLOOK: Future Development Strategies Related to Education Policy in the Baltic Sea Region}

The experience and knowledge exchange between educational protagonists from Baltic Sea Region countries or regions to be strongly further enhanced is presumably the most outstanding success factor for a sustainably prosperous Baltic education, knowledge and innovation area. Here, for instance the project »Baltic Education« summarizes, among others, the following project experiences respectively results in its final report as impulse for strategic further development approaches related to education policy in the Baltic Sea Region and, thus, additional support projects:

\textsuperscript{114} Cf. APF (2013), no page.
\textsuperscript{116} Bennack et al. (2010), p. 227.
\textsuperscript{117} Cf. Döbert et al. (2004), p. 143.
Learning from each other – particularly in consideration of culturally different national economies in the Baltic Sea region – and further development as a consequence of this help to increase the quality of [general education,] professional vocational training, [university education] and further education. Herein lies the potential of cooperating. Open information and experience exchange are indispensable for building trust. A stable relationship of trust which has been […] developed by involving the members […] is essential for unbureaucratic implementation […] The international project work has also shown that the relevant protagonists have only very few information on country-specific cultures, education systems, economic structures etc. An intensive promotion of the exchange particularly regarding such basic issues should absolutely be continued. In addition, the project work has shown that few information and reliable insights on specific mobility cultures are available and that there is a significant need for further investigations.\textsuperscript{118}

In the context of »Agenda 2020 – education policy and strategies for the Baltic Sea«, the Hanse Parliament issued the following continuing »Guiding themes for a future Baltic Sea Region education policy«:\textsuperscript{119}

**Prospects Baltic Sea Region**

The Baltic Sea Region is considered as one of Europe’s most innovative regions and as economically very strong, with its potentials still far from being fully exploited. At the same time, revolutionary developments are on the horizon that may limit the Baltic Sea Regions economic dynamics significantly and require a stronger commitment particularly in the education policy sector. Accordingly, one of the five ambitious objectives of the EU strategy »Europe 2020« is related to education.

**Changed labour markets**

Such a further development of education policy is a key factor for shaping a fulfilling life and for the social integration of every adolescent. Still, such improvements are also very much in the interest of the economy that is moving towards a completely modified labour market situation.

**Quantitative and qualitative bottlenecks**

Over the coming 20 years, the number of employed persons, with the exception of Sweden, will decrease for between 5 % and 18 % in all Baltic Sea Region countries. These quantitative problems will aggravate significantly due to qualitative bottlenecks. The entrepreneur’s demands towards young employees are high and further increasing. Personal and social competences are as important as factual knowledge. An increasing share of school leavers in most of the Baltic Sea countries has less and less required competences.

\textsuperscript{118} Hanse Parliament (2008), p. 91.
\textsuperscript{119} Hanse Parliament (no publication year a), p. 3.
**Increased competition**
An increased competition between medium-sized companies, larger companies, universities and administrations for qualified adolescents will occur. Small and medium-sized companies that provide about 70% of all jobs in the Baltic Sea Region will be at risk of losing it and of being pushed to a lower level. Securing the availability of young staff with good qualification and high innovation will become a question of survival for the Baltic Sea Region’s small and medium-sized businesses.

**Domestic labour potential and immigration**
Increased immigration to the Baltic Sea Region will be needed, attractive education offers are one decisive factor here. The society has to open up for multicultural challenges. In particular, the exploitation of domestic potentials has to be significantly improved. Education policy has to ensure that the share of adolescents without school-leaving qualification and the number of adolescents incapable of getting educated will be significantly reduced. No adolescent shall be excluded, everybody deserves a second chance.

**Holistic education**
The overestimation of a purely intellectual educational ideal has to be opposed to the eminent generally educating character of education that addresses all senses and promotes all mental, artistic and manual skills at the same time. School education seems to result more and more into egalitarianism. Even stronger individualized lessons with individual learning objectives and successes are imperative.

**Support of persons with learning disabilities and of fast and motivated learners**
Such a holistic education that includes the promotion of individual talents is urgently needed for both, persons with learning disabilities and fast and motivated learners. A genuine forming of elites is missed out in some countries and must no longer be a taboo subject there. A systematic promotion of the stronger without excluding the weaker is essential for integrating all of them.

**Early education**
The early education must be significantly expanded, following the example of some, few Baltic Sea countries. This particularly includes a provision of enough kindergarten places and an obligatory one year pre-school with the best and excellently paid educationalists.

**Priority to quality improvements**
Creating new structures alone cannot result into sustainable improvements if no far-reaching cultural reforms with quality improvements antecedent. New structures will almost inevitably result from a further development of cultures. School structures play a subordinate role, even a structured school system may achieve good successes if it is highly permeable. Long collaborative learning is no prerequisite for good school education but facilitates the teaching of personal and social competences and enhances sustainably integration. The successes achieved in most of the Baltic Sea countries are more pointing towards as long collaborative learning as possible.
Attractiveness and quality increase in vocational training
The attractiveness of vocational training has declined in all Baltic Sea countries and, with a share of 10 to 15 % of the school leavers completing a vocational training, has reached an alarmingly low level. The practical parts in vocational training have to be significantly increased particularly in countries with school systems. Wherever possible, the education should be implemented in a dual system.

Admission requirements and differentiation
Introducing Baltic Sea region wide standardized admission requirements for vocational training which are determined specifically for every occupation is desirable. Specific vocational education ways with complete permeability have to be created for fast and motivated adolescents as well as for those with learning difficulties.

Opening and permeability of the education system
The vocational training is too much disconnected from the other education fields and leads quickly into dead ends. A complete permeability within the vocational training as well as between this and the general and university education with smooth transitions and creditting opportunities are imperative. This includes even, following the example of some Baltic Sea countries, a Baltic Sea wide entitlement to study with apprenticeship or skilled worker status.

Opening for not qualified staff
The medium-sized business, particularly the skilled crafts and trades, have to open much more for not qualified persons (among others also student dropouts) and win them for a long-term employments. Tailor-made start-up training periods, custom-fit further educations and any opening of education processes and improved permeability enhance this important process.

Dual study course
Adolescents tend to avoiding vocational training and preferring studying. Still, most of the study courses are so much theoretical and, thus, little oriented to the practical needs of medium-sized companies, so that not enough young entrepreneur and specialist staff can be attracted despite of high numbers of students. Dual study courses that connect a vocational education or work to studying have to be established on a broad basis.

International exchange
Stays abroad during the vocational training, studies or occupational activity promote the increasingly important international skills and experiences as well as personal and social competences. The Baltic Sea wide unbureaucratic recognition of education and further education degrees is a decisive requirement here.
Education and site policy

Further decreasing transport and communication costs enhance the production factor mobility. Companies move to attractive sites with a high supply of skilled workers and employees to sites with attractive education offers and a manifold labour market. The competition of locations for (highly) qualified workforce becomes clearly more intensive. A Baltic Sea Region-wide education policy has to be embedded into the EU Baltic Sea Region strategy and to ensure that this competition takes place not only inside the Baltic Sea Region, in fact mainly strengthens the entire Baltic Sea Region compared with other regions and expands the existing lead via outstanding education offers.

Top priority for education policy

The Baltic Sea Regions considerable chances can only be exploited via highest innovations and outstanding qualifications. Education policy, to a large extent, is at the same time location, regional and spatial planning policy. Education promotes innovation and competitiveness and includes the most important support task for small and medium-sized companies. Thus, education policy must be superior to all other political fields and should have top priority even in the EU Baltic Sea Region strategy. According to the EU strategy »Europe 2020«, policy, economy and society of the Baltic Sea Region have to indicate the education policy's outstanding position and recognize that investing into human resources generates the safest and highest interests.120

The innovation capability and the education system development status that creates the basis for this in the Baltic Sea Region can be characterized as above-average in European comparison. Having more than hundred universities and research institutions and already being in many respects very well interlinked, the Baltic Sea Region is an education, knowledge and innovation area of global significance. Many of Europe's oldest universities are located in the Baltic Sea Region. Still, if these standards of technological capability and innovation performance shall be sustainably established or continuously developed, this needs innovative Baltic education systems and related modern labour market structures as well as further intensive research and development work. In principle, the Baltic Sea Region has an enormous potential of well to excellently educated specialists and executives. Still, the European macro-region Baltic Sea Region is confronted with major challenges mainly regarding demographic, migration and technologisation developments. To address them, it seems to be eminently important that, in addition to the many already existing networks and cooperations between universities and non-university research institutes, also more and more transnational cooperations or interregional education networks in the fields general education, vocational training and vocational and university further education should be established, e. g. in the form of sustainable school partnerships or exchange programmes.121

---

120 Hanse Parlament (no publication year a), p. 3 pp.
Another also eminently important strategic field of education policy advancement in the Baltic Sea Region is the increasingly internationally oriented professionalisation and the related exchange of expertise between teaching and educational staff from schools, vocational schools, universities as well as training staff of companies and industry-wide education service providers within the Baltic Sea Region to be intensified significantly. As it is mainly the pedagogical staff who will be a multiplier that is able to anchor the »spirit« of a future-oriented »Baltic education, knowledge and innovation society« of the 21st century among its learners – based on »innovation through intercultural exchange«.

The following chapter will provide some related inspirations or conceptual approaches by presenting specific features and tendencies of initial academic and further teacher training in the relevant Baltic Sea Region countries, showing to what extent increasingly international contexts can be located in the related national teacher professionalisation and where thematically sound options of exchange of expertise programmes between countries or regions are.

**Used Sources and Further Reading**


---


Gries, Jürgen; Lindenau, Mathias; Maaz, Kai; Walschkowski, Uta (2005): Bildungssysteme in Europa, Kurzdarstellungen. Berlin: ISIS Berlin e.V.


42


