



# **Study of the impact of Comenius Regio**

*Final Report*

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Contractor:



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## Executive summary

Purpose of the study	This study analysed the impact of Comenius Regio, a strand of the EU's main funding programme in education and training, the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-13).
Comenius Regio	Launched in 2008, Comenius Regio has been supporting cross-border projects through which organisations in two regions in Europe aim to improve school education in a field of shared interest. EU funding is provided for two years. Comenius Regio was designed in such a way as to give the leading role in the inter-regional partnerships to local/regional authorities with a role in school education and to include, as project partners, other organisations which are not necessarily directly involved in the provision of school education such as employers, universities or youth organisations (referred to as "third partners" in this study). Each partnership involves at least one local/regional authority, one school and one third partner from each of the two regions. Since 2009 the EU supported 698 projects involving partner organisations from 33 European countries.
Focus of the study	The study focused on the contribution of Comenius Regio to education changes at different levels. It primarily assessed the finalised projects funded under Call 2009 and Call 2010 (245 projects) and, when possible, referred to the projects funded under subsequent calls in order to compare findings across time. The study was carried out by Public Policy and Management Institute between November 2012 and August 2014.
Levels of analysis	The study analysed the impact of the action at several levels: participants, partner organisations (local/regional authorities, schools and third partners), local communities and education systems. It also offered insights on obstacles and opportunities to improve similar partnerships in the future.
Methodology	The study relied on the evidence gathered using qualitative and quantitative methods: 1) desk research and analysis of administrative data; 2) interviews with the participants from 12 projects selected for the case studies; 3) interviews with relevant stakeholders at the EU level; 4) a survey of project participants and a survey of the Comenius Regio coordinators at the National Agencies <sup>1</sup> and national decision-makers involved in the Lifelong Learning Programme Committee 2007-2013; and 5) social network analysis.

## MAIN RESULTS OF THE STUDY

### Relevance and design of the partnerships

Links to recent development in school education	The thematic areas and topics of Comenius Regio projects corresponded well to the key school education priorities established at both national and European levels. Also, the design and implementation modalities of the action were conducive to producing synergies and complementarities between the partnerships and school policy developments.
Innovative role of the action	The Comenius Regio action played an innovative role in terms of bringing together different organisations – educational policymakers,

<sup>1</sup> National Agencies promote and implement the EU Programme at national level and act as the link between the European Commission and participating organisations at local, regional and national level.

administrators, inspectors and advisors at the local/regional level, local community partners and schools – from two European regions. The development of inter-regional partnerships of this type was timely in the context of the decentralisation of many school education systems, widening school autonomy and growing emphasis on local community involvement in school education.

High variety of projects

The diversity of the projects vary when it comes to the number of partners involved (small partnerships of six or large partnerships of more than twenty partners, with an average of nine partners) and type of partners in terms of pre-primary or secondary school, economic actors (i.e. chamber of commerce), academic sector (i.e. universities), social partners or NGOs etc. Local authorities, secondary and primary schools were the most frequent participants, while regional authorities, education support organisations, non-profit organisations, vocational schools and training centres were also often involved.

Main aims of the projects

By initiating or joining Comenius Regio projects, the partners mainly intended to improve the educational process, to exchange good practice examples with partners from other European countries, enhance the training of teachers/local authority staff and strengthen cooperation between relevant stakeholders – at local level and at European level.

### Overall assessment of the partnerships

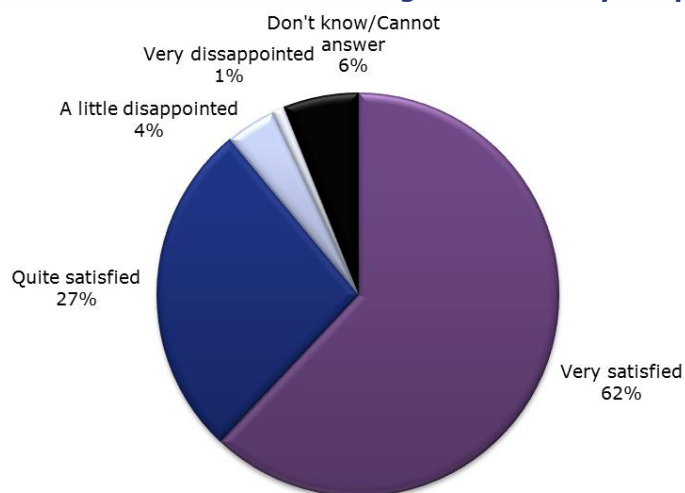
Successful achievement of the objectives

The data gathered during the survey of project participants and the survey of the Comenius Regio coordinators at the National Agencies and national decision-makers indicated that Comenius Regio was successful in achieving its general objectives, which include strengthening the European dimension in school education and developing tools for sustainable cooperation across borders. The vast majority of participating organisations succeeded in achieving their project objectives.

Level of satisfaction

The project participants considered the overall experiences of partnerships as very satisfactory (see Figure 1) and the majority of them were satisfied with the way their project was developed.

**Figure 1. Satisfaction with Comenius Regio indicated by the participants**



Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

Note: survey was completed by 460 respondents (31.34%) from 207 Comenius Regio projects (i.e. 84% of the projects funded under Call 2009 and 2010).

Role of local and regional authorities

The study also showed that there was considerable variation in the role of local/regional authorities in the partnerships. The results of the social network analysis demonstrated that overall they were the most active participants in terms of participating in multiple projects and developing links with multiple

partners. Despite the formal coordination role of the local and regional authorities, the survey data and findings from the case studies showed that in some cases the schools also played a leading role in the partnerships funded under Calls 2009 and 2010.

### Impact at individual level

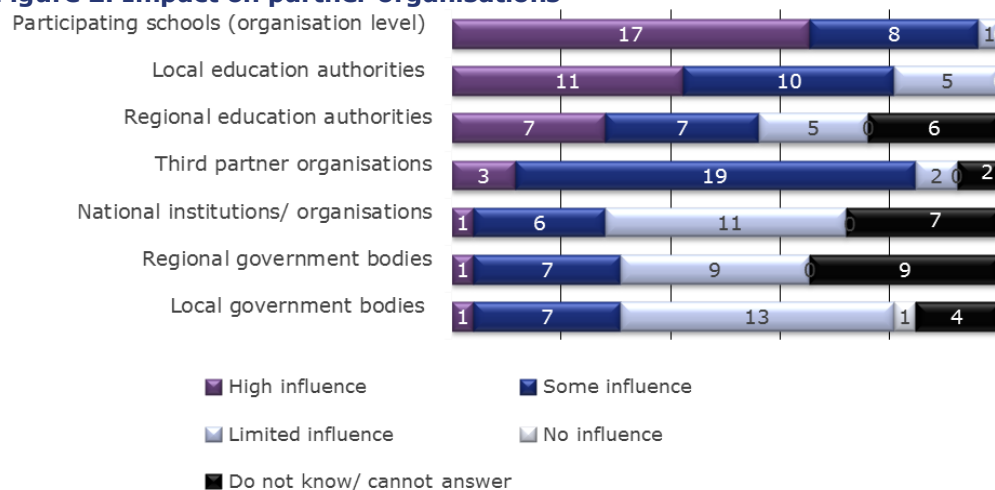
**Professional and personal development** Participation in Comenius Regio had a positive impact on the professional and personal development of individuals directly involved in the projects. They learned about educational systems in other countries, increased their awareness of European cultural diversity and became more involved in professional international networks.

**Differences between partners** Staff from local and regional authorities more often than participants from schools and third partners acknowledged that participation in the project improved their administrative and management skills. The participants from schools felt a bigger impact on their professional and personal competences. The third partners were encouraged to join international projects in the future.

### Impact at institutional level

**All types of partners influenced by the action** Participation in the Comenius Regio action was perceived by National Agencies as having a considerable impact on all types of partner organisations. The highest influence was felt on participating schools, followed by that on local education authorities, regional education authorities and third partners (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Impact on partner organisations**



Source: survey of the National Agencies and National Authorities, PPMI.

Note: responses to the survey were submitted from 26 out of 33 National Agencies, corresponding to a 79% total participation rate.

All types of partners influenced by the action	As a result of the Comenius Regio projects, the local and regional authorities mostly strengthened their links with other local and international partners involved in school education. The projects resulted in improved professional competences and foreign language skills of the staff, improved their administrative and inter-regional project management capacities and helped them to better address educational issues in their region.
Impact on local and regional authorities	The schools strengthened collaborative relationships with other partners, developed sustainable cooperation across borders, learned about innovative ways to adapt educational practices to the needs of the community and develop more effective pedagogical practices. In most cases the projects also contributed to changing teaching and learning styles in the classrooms.
Impact on third partners	Third partners mostly benefited from strengthening links with schools and local authorities in their own region and abroad. The representatives from third partners also considered that they were able to build their expertise and gain valuable knowledge on various school education issues and thereby better address these issues in their local environment.

#### Impact at partnership and local community level

Visibility and recognition	In the majority of cases the participants acknowledged that their involvement in the projects increased the visibility of the Comenius Regio action and the whole Comenius programme at the local community level, and also improved the recognition of participation in international cooperation by educational authorities.
Cooperation between partners	In about half of the cases the projects resulted in the establishment of official school partnerships and collaboration agreements between the local authorities with a role in school education from both partner regions and influenced a greater involvement of other local stakeholders in school education. A significant number of organisations continued to collaborate actively by continuing their involvement in the projects funded under the subsequent Comenius Regio calls.

#### Impact at regional and system level

Added value of the partnerships	The Comenius Regio Partnerships were created as bottom up initiatives. They mainly focussed their work and brought local changes and tended to be effective at the local level. They provided opportunities for those involved in education at all levels to undertake field visits in order to learn together, broaden their experience and bring that experience to bear in their professional context. Some projects did have considerable effects at regional level – and even in a very few cases may have influenced national policy and practice of school education.
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## LESSONS LEARNED

Overall conclusions of the study	<p>The design of the actions supporting interregional partnerships, which allows the schools and third partners to participate fully in project content development with the local/regional authorities, was regarded as beneficial.</p> <p>Implementing successful and lasting change in schools or creating an internationally integrated network of education professionals across different European countries takes a lot of time and requires a very thorough and fully developed approach. Comenius Regio and any subsequent successor programme can play an effective part in this process.</p>
Design of the partnerships during the application stage	<p>The involvement of the local/regional authorities as project coordinators is regarded as one of the key features contributing to project success although there was a considerable variation in the role of local/regional authorities were playing in Comenius Regio Partnerships. The nature and roles of third partners also varied widely, but the opportunity to involve a broad range of third partners, however, constituted one of the strengths of Comenius Regio. Overall, the development of balanced partnerships can be regarded as an important factor contributing to the positive results of the partnerships.</p> <p>The projects funded under the Comenius Regio action cover a range of different themes. They address a number of educational topics corresponding to school education priorities and initiatives pursued by responsible national authorities, as well as local and regional authorities with responsibility for education. This indicated a good potential for using the results of Comenius Regio projects to inform educational policy developments.</p>
Execution of the partnerships	<p>The active involvement of local and/or regional authorities and the effective planning of dissemination activities are important already in the project design stage for successful dissemination of project results and their possible application in other contexts. The third partners can also play a significant role in disseminating project results.</p> <p>The study revealed considerable variation in the role of local/regional authorities as project coordinators in Comenius Regio Partnerships. Local, regional authorities do not always cooperate as they are expected and schools often – of necessity – play a very significant role, sometimes the role of a <i>de facto</i> leading organisation. The level of support and involvement of the leading organisations (local/regional authorities) was revealed to be a significant feature for the engagement of non-school partners as well.</p> <p>Process-related factors such as the effective exchange of information between the project partners, effective project management, effective activity planning and monitoring during the project implementation, effective problem-solving and decision-making contributes to projects success.</p> <p>The personal commitment of project coordinators can be regarded as one of the principal factors of both the overall success of a project and its influence on participants. The effective coordination of a Comenius Regio project required a considerable amount of time, devotion and enthusiasm.</p>

Dissemination  
of project  
results

The Comenius Regio projects tend to be effective at a local level. Although the partnerships seem to produce mainly local results, multiplier effects, however, may take place in the regional contexts – and regional authorities can be supportive in enabling a wider impact for project results.

The impact of the Comenius Regio Partnerships at local, regional or system level was related to the quality of their results, effective dissemination activities and the extent to which the project results reached relevant target groups. In addition to local and regional authorities, third partners, the National Agencies also play an important role while disseminating the project results to the wider public.

It is important to map and mainstream the innovative practices in school education that were developed by the Comenius Regio Partnerships through various European, national and regional networks, dissemination platforms and websites, promotional activities and events (such as the Comenius Regio conferences), as well as special mainstreaming or follow-up projects.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Erasmus+ programme should retain the advantages of Comenius Regio by continuing to support regional cooperation with partnerships involving local and regional authorities together with schools and other relevant community third partners.
2. Improve synergies between Erasmus+ results and various school policy initiatives and instruments at EU and national level in order to better inform educational policy developments based on the results of transnational cooperation in school education.
3. Given the inevitable complexity of transnational school education partnerships and the time required for project implementation and the dissemination of results, consideration should be given to ways of extending cooperation undertaken in partnerships of proven worth, in order to provide continuity of development and time to effect lasting change in educational practice.
4. Promote the development of balanced partnerships significantly involving all three types of partners during the application phase by demonstrating to third partners the value of their involvement and assessing the proposed partnerships in terms of balance.
5. In designing cooperation projects in school education on the bottom-up basis the focus should be placed on important issues of school education that correspond to EU, national or regional priorities for education policies.
6. More attention should be paid to planning for sustainability and dissemination at the project design and application stage. A coherent and clear dissemination plan should be elaborated, showing how local and/or regional authorities will be involved.
7. The local/regional authorities should retain the main responsibility for the projects, but their actual role as project coordinators should be well defined and maintained.
8. Sufficient resources should be allocated within project funding to enhance the capacities of participating organisations, partnership development and joint activity execution (e.g. face-to-face preparatory meeting between partners), as in the current Comenius programme.
9. The local/regional authorities and the National Agencies should reinforce their efforts in dissemination and exploitation activities during and after the project implementation, within Erasmus + Key Action 2 “Strategic Partnerships”.

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10. Mapping and mainstreaming the innovative practices in school education, which were developed by the Comenius Regio Partnerships, could be promoted by developing an Erasmus+ Network.

## Résumé analytique

Objectif de l'étude	La présente étude analyse l'impact de Comenius Regio, un des axes du principal programme de financement de l'UE dans les domaines de l'éducation et de la formation, le programme d'apprentissage tout au long de la vie (2007-13).
Comenius Regio	Lancé en 2008, Comenius Regio soutient des projets transfrontaliers qui permettent à des organisations situées dans deux régions différentes en Europe de chercher à améliorer l'enseignement scolaire dans un domaine d'intérêt commun. Le financement européen est assuré pour deux ans. Comenius Regio a été conçu de manière à donner aux autorités locales/régionales œuvrant dans le domaine de l'enseignement scolaire un rôle prépondérant dans les partenariats interrégionaux ; le programme prévoit également d'inclure comme partenaires de projet d'autres associations qui ne sont pas forcément liées directement à l'enseignement scolaire, comme les entreprises, les universités ou les organisations de jeunesse. Ces associations sont appelées dans la présente étude les « partenaires tiers ». Chaque partenariat implique au moins une autorité locale/régionale, une école et un partenaire tiers provenant de chacune des deux régions. Depuis 2009, l'UE a financé 698 projets impliquant des organisations partenaires dans 33 pays européens.
Angle de l'étude	L'étude s'est concentrée sur la contribution de Comenius Regio aux changements dans le monde de l'éducation, et ce à différents niveaux. L'étude a principalement évalué les projets finalisés financés dans le cadre des appels à projets 2009 et 2010 (245 projets) et, quand c'était possible, a également cité des projets financés dans le cadre d'appels à projets ultérieurs pour pouvoir comparer les résultats dans le temps. Le Public Policy and Management Institute (institut de gestion et de politiques publiques) a organisé l'étude entre novembre 2012 et août 2014.
Niveaux d'analyse	L'étude analyse les effets des actions à différents niveaux : participants, organisations partenaires (autorités locales/régionales, écoles et partenaires tiers), communautés locales et systèmes éducatifs. Elle donne également un aperçu des obstacles et opportunités pour améliorer les partenariats similaires à l'avenir.
Méthodologie	L'étude s'est appuyée sur les éléments probants collectés à l'aide de méthodes qualitatives et quantitatives : 1) des recherches documentaires et analyses des données administratives ; 2) des entretiens avec les participants de 12 projets sélectionnés pour les études de cas ; 3) des entretiens avec les parties prenantes concernées au niveau européen ; 4) une enquête auprès des participants aux projets, et une autre auprès des coordinateurs Comenius Regio au niveau des agences nationales <sup>2</sup> ainsi qu' auprès des décideurs impliqués dans le comité du programme 2007-2013 sur l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie ; et 5) une analyse des réseaux sociaux.

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<sup>2</sup>Les agences nationales assurent la promotion et la mise en œuvre du programme européen au niveau national ; elles font également office de lien entre la Commission européenne et les organisations participantes au niveau local, régional et national.

## PRINCIPAUX RÉSULTATS DE L'ÉTUDE

### Pertinence et intention des partenariats

Liens avec les évolutions récentes dans le domaine de l'enseignement scolaire	Les domaines et sujets thématiques des projets Comenius Regio correspondent bien aux grandes priorités de l'enseignement scolaire, établies au niveau national comme européen. Par ailleurs, la conception et la mise en œuvre des modalités d'actions ont favorisé la production de synergies et de complémentarités entre les partenariats et les politiques sur l'enseignement scolaire.
Rôle innovant de l'action	L'action Comenius Regio a joué un rôle innovant pour rassembler les différentes organisations – décideurs politiques dans le domaine de l'éducation, administrateurs, inspecteurs et conseillers au niveau local/régional, partenaires des communautés locales et écoles – provenant de deux régions européennes. La création de partenariats interrégionaux de ce type est arrivée au bon moment dans le contexte de la décentralisation de bon nombre de systèmes d'enseignement scolaire, de l'élargissement de l'autonomie des écoles et de l'importance de plus en plus grande accordée à l'implication des communautés locales dans l'enseignement scolaire.
Une grande diversité de projets	Les projets diffèrent en termes de nombre de partenaires impliqués (petits partenariats de six ou grands partenariats comportant plus de vingt partenaires, avec une moyenne de neuf partenaires) et de type de partenaires, à savoir écoles primaires ou secondaires, acteurs économiques (ex. chambre de commerce), secteur universitaire, partenaires sociaux et ONG, etc. Les autorités locales, les écoles primaires et secondaires représentent les types de participants les plus fréquents, mais les autorités régionales, les organisations de soutien à l'enseignement, les organisations à but non lucratif, les centres et écoles de formation professionnelle sont également souvent impliqués.
Principaux objectifs des projets	Quand ils mettent en place ou rejoignent des projets Comenius Regio, les partenaires cherchent principalement à améliorer le domaine de l'éducation, à échanger des exemples de bonnes pratiques avec des partenaires d'autres pays européens, à améliorer la formation de leurs enseignants/du personnel des autorités locales, et à renforcer la coopération entre les parties prenantes concernées – au niveau local comme européen.

### Évaluation globale des partenariats

Atteinte des objectifs	Les données collectées lors de l'enquête menée auprès des participants aux projets et de l'enquête menée auprès des décideurs nationaux et des coordinateurs Comenius Regio dans les agences nationales montrent que Comenius Regio a atteint ses objectifs globaux, qui incluaient notamment le renforcement de la dimension européenne dans l'enseignement scolaire et la création d'outils permettant une coopération durable entre les pays. La grande majorité des organisations participantes ont réussi à atteindre les objectifs de leurs projets.
Niveau de satisfaction	Les participants aux projets estiment que d'une manière générale, les partenariats ont été très satisfaisants (voir Graphique 1), et la majorité d'entre eux sont très satisfaits de la manière dont leur projet a évolué.

**Graphique 1. Satisfaction des participants par rapport à Comenius Regio**



Source: enquête auprès des participants aux partenariats Comenius Regio, PPMI.

Note: l'enquête a été remplie par 460 répondants (31,34 %) provenant de 207 projets Comenius Regio (soit 84 % des projets financés dans le cadre des appels à projets 2009 et 2010).

#### Rôle des autorités locales et régionales

L'étude montre également qu'il existe d'importantes différences dans le rôle joué par les autorités locales/régionales dans les partenariats. Les résultats de l'analyse des réseaux sociaux prouvent que d'une manière générale, celles-ci sont les plus actives en termes de participation à des projets multiples et pour le développement de liens avec de nombreux partenaires. Malgré le rôle formel de coordination des autorités locales et régionales, les données de l'enquête et les résultats des études de cas montrent que dans certains cas, les écoles ont également joué un rôle important dans les partenariats financés dans le cadre des appels 2009 et 2010.

#### Impact au niveau individuel

##### Développement professionnel et personnel

La participation à Comenius Regio a eu un effet positif sur le développement personnel et professionnel des personnes directement impliquées dans les projets. Elles ont découvert les systèmes éducatifs d'autres pays, elles sont plus sensibles à la diversité culturelle européenne et se sont plus impliquées dans les réseaux professionnels internationaux.

##### Différences entre les partenaires

Les personnels des autorités locales et régionales sont plus nombreux que ceux des écoles et des partenaires tiers à reconnaître que leur participation aux projets avait amélioré leurs compétences administratives et managériales. Pour les participants des écoles l'impact le plus important a porté sur leurs compétences professionnelles et personnelles. Les partenaires tiers se sont sentis encouragés à rejoindre des projets internationaux à l'avenir.

#### Impact au niveau institutionnel

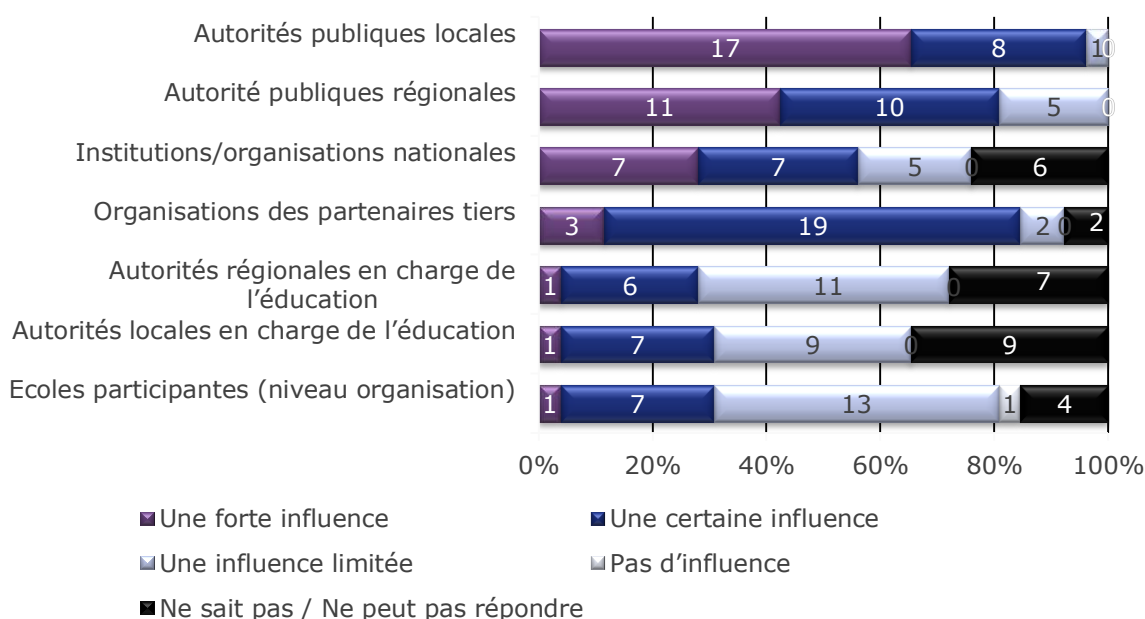
##### L'action a influencé l'ensemble des différents partenaires

Les agences nationales ont perçu la participation à l'action Comenius Regio comme ayant un impact important sur l'ensemble des différents types d'organisations partenaires. L'influence la plus importante a été ressentie dans les écoles participantes, puis auprès des autorités locales éducatives, des autorités régionales éducatives et des partenaires tiers (voir Graphique 2).

##### Impact sur les autorités locales et régionales

Suite aux projets Comenius Regio, les autorités locales et régionales ont principalement renforcé leurs liens avec les autres partenaires locaux et internationaux impliqués dans l'enseignement scolaire. Les projets ont amélioré les compétences professionnelles et les compétences en langues étrangères du personnel, ont amélioré leurs capacités administratives et de gestion de projets interrégionaux, et les ont aidées à mieux traiter les questions d'éducation dans leur région.

**Graphique 2. Impact sur les organisations partenaires**



Source: enquête sur les agences nationales et les autorités nationales, PPMI.

Note: 26 des 33 agences nationales ont donné des réponses à l'enquête, ce qui correspond à un taux total de participation de 79 %.

#### Impact sur les partenaires tiers

Les écoles ont renforcé leurs collaborations avec d'autres partenaires, développé une coopération durable entre les pays ; elles ont découvert des manières innovantes d'adapter les pratiques éducatives aux besoins de la communauté, et développé des pratiques pédagogiques plus efficaces. Dans la plupart des cas, les projets ont également contribué à la modification des styles d'enseignement et d'apprentissage dans les classes.

Les partenaires tiers ont principalement profité du renforcement des liens avec les écoles et les autorités locales, dans leur propre région et à l'étranger. Les représentants des partenaires tiers estiment également qu'ils ont pu renforcer leur expertise et acquérir des connaissances importantes sur les différents problèmes en matière d'enseignement scolaire ; ils estiment donc être mieux à même de traiter les problèmes dans leur environnement local.

#### Impact au niveau des partenariats et des communautés locales

##### Visibilité et reconnaissance

Dans la plupart des cas, les participants reconnaissent que leur participation aux projets a amélioré la visibilité de l'action Comenius Regio et du programme Comenius dans son ensemble au niveau des communautés locales ; ils reconnaissent également qu'elle a amélioré la reconnaissance, par les autorités responsables de l'éducation, de leur participation à la coopération internationale.

##### Coopération entre les partenaires

Dans environ la moitié des cas, les projets ont débouché sur la création de partenariats scolaires officiels et d'accords de collaboration entre les autorités locales ayant un rôle dans l'enseignement scolaire dans les deux régions partenaires ; ils ont également facilité une meilleure implication des autres parties prenantes locales dans l'enseignement scolaire. Un nombre important d'organisations continuent à collaborer activement, en poursuivant leur participation dans les projets financés dans le cadre de nouveaux appels à projets Comenius Regio.



## Impact au niveau régional et au niveau des systèmes

Valeur ajoutée des partenariats	Les partenariats Comenius Regio ont été conçus comme des initiatives ascendantes. Ils ont principalement concentré leurs travaux, apporté des changements et été efficaces au niveau local. Ils ont permis aux personnes impliquées dans l'enseignement à tous les niveaux de réaliser des visites sur le terrain pour apprendre ensemble ; ces personnes ont également pu élargir leurs expériences et les mettre en pratique dans leur contexte professionnel. Certains projets ont eu des effets importants au niveau régional – dans certains cas plus rares, ils ont même influencé les politiques et pratiques nationales en matière d'enseignement scolaire.
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## ENSEIGNEMENTS

Conclusions générales de l'étude	Les actions soutenant les partenariats interrégionaux, permettant aux écoles et aux partenaires tiers de participer pleinement au développement de projets avec les autorités locales/régionales, ont été perçues comme bénéfiques.
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Mettre en œuvre des changements réussis et durables dans les écoles, ou créer, dans différents pays européens, un réseau international de professionnels de l'éducation prend beaucoup de temps et exige une approche approfondie et parfaitement mise au point. Comenius Regio et tout programme qui lui succèdera pourront jouer un rôle efficace dans ce processus.

Conception des partenariats pendant la phase de candidature	L'implication des autorités locales/régionales en tant que coordinateurs de projet est perçue comme un des éléments essentiels contribuant à la réussite des projets, même si on observe des variations importantes du rôle des autorités locales/régionales dans les différents partenariats Comenius Regio. La nature et les rôles des partenaires tiers varient également considérablement, mais la possibilité d'impliquer un large éventail de partenaires tiers représente néanmoins une des forces de Comenius Regio. D'une manière générale, la création de partenariats équilibrés peut être considérée comme un facteur important pour la réussite des partenariats.
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Les projets financés dans le cadre de l'action Comenius Regio couvrent un large éventail de thèmes différents. Ils traitent un certain nombre de thèmes éducatifs qui correspondent aux priorités et initiatives dans le domaine de l'enseignement scolaire poursuivies par les autorités nationales concernées et par les autorités locales et régionales exerçant des responsabilités dans le domaine de l'éducation. Il existe donc un bon potentiel d'utilisation des résultats des projets Comenius Regio pour alimenter l'élaboration des politiques éducatives.

L'implication active des autorités locales et/ou régionales et la planification efficace des activités de dissémination sont déjà des éléments importants au stade de la conception de projets, pour une diffusion réussie des résultats des projets et leur éventuelle application à d'autres contextes. Les partenaires tiers peuvent également jouer un rôle important pour la diffusion des résultats des projets.



Réalisation des partenariats	<p>L'étude a montré des différences importantes dans le rôle des autorités locales/régionales en tant que coordinateurs de projets dans les partenariats Comenius Regio. Les autorités locales, régionales ne coopèrent pas toujours comme prévu, et les écoles jouent souvent – par nécessité – un rôle majeur, parfois de fait le rôle d'une organisation leader. Le niveau de soutien et d'implication des organisations leaders (autorités locales/régionales) semble être un élément important pour l'implication des partenaires non éducatifs.</p> <p>Les facteurs liés aux processus comme l'échange efficace d'informations entre les partenaires du projet, la gestion efficace du projet, la planification et le suivi efficaces lors de la mise en œuvre du projet, la résolution de problèmes et la prise de décisions efficaces contribuent à la réussite des projets.</p> <p>L'implication personnelle des coordinateurs de projet peut être considérée comme un des facteurs principaux à la fois de la réussite globale d'un projet et de son impact sur les participants. La bonne coordination d'un projet Comenius Regio nécessite d'y consacrer beaucoup de temps, d'ardeur et d'enthousiasme.</p>
Diffusion des résultats des projets	<p>Les projets Comenius Regio ont tendance à être efficaces au niveau local. Même si les partenariats ne semblent engendrer que des résultats principalement locaux, des effets multiplicateurs peuvent néanmoins se produire dans des contextes régionaux – et les autorités régionales peuvent contribuer en élargissant l'impact des résultats du projet.</p> <p>Les effets des partenariats Comenius Regio au niveau local, régional et des systèmes dépendent de la qualité de leurs résultats, de la diffusion efficace des activités et de l'importance de l'impact des résultats du projet sur les groupes visés. Outre les autorités locales et régionales, les partenaires tiers, les agences nationales jouent également un rôle important lors de la diffusion des résultats des projets au grand public.</p> <p>Il est important de cartographier et d'intégrer les pratiques innovantes en matière d'enseignement scolaire, créées dans le cadre de partenariats Comenius Regio, en s'aidant des divers réseaux européens, nationaux et régionaux, des plateformes de diffusion, des sites internet, des activités promotionnelles et des événements (comme les conférences Comenius Regio) ainsi qu'au travers de projets d'intégration ou de suivi.</p>

## RECOMMANDATIONS

1. Le programme Erasmus+ doit conserver les avantages de Comenius Regio en continuant à soutenir la coopération régionale, avec des partenariats impliquant les autorités locales et régionales ainsi que les écoles et les autres partenaires tiers concernés dans la communauté
2. Il faudrait améliorer les synergies entre les résultats Erasmus+ et les différentes initiatives et instruments dans le domaine de la politique scolaire au niveau européen et national, afin de mieux documenter l'élaboration de politiques éducatives basées sur les résultats de la coopération transnationale dans le domaine de l'enseignement scolaire.
3. Étant donné la complexité inévitable des partenariats transnationaux dans le domaine de l'enseignement scolaire et le temps nécessaire à la mise en œuvre des projets et à la diffusion des résultats, il faudrait réfléchir à des façons de prolonger les coopérations créées au sein des partenariats de valeur avérée, pour assurer une continuité de temps et de développement qui permettra de réaliser des changements durables dans les pratiques éducatives.

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4. Il faudrait encourager le développement de partenariats équilibrés impliquant réellement les trois types de partenaires pendant la phase de la candidature, en montrant aux partenaires tiers la valeur de leur implication et en évaluant les partenariats proposés en termes d'équilibre.
  5. Lors de la conception de projets de coopération dans l'enseignement scolaire sur une base participative, il faudrait s'intéresser aux questions importantes dans le domaine de l'enseignement scolaire correspondant aux priorités européennes, nationales et régionales en matière de politiques éducatives.
  6. Plus d'attention devrait être portée à la planification de la durabilité et de la diffusion lors de la conception du projet et de la candidature. Il faut créer un plan de diffusion clair et cohérent, qui présente la manière dont les autorités locales et/ou régionales seront impliquées.
  7. Les autorités locales/régionales doivent conserver la responsabilité principale des projets, mais leur rôle effectif en tant que coordinateurs de projets devrait être bien défini et actualisé.
  8. Dans le cadre du financement du projet, des moyens suffisants devraient être accordés pour accroître les capacités des organisations participantes, renforcer le développement des partenariats et la réalisation conjointe des activités (ex. rencontre préparatoire en face à face entre les partenaires), comme c'est déjà le cas dans le programme Comenius actuel.
  9. Les autorités locales/régionales et les agences nationales devraient renforcer leurs activités de diffusion et d'exploitation des résultats pendant et après la mise en œuvre du projet, dans le cadre de l'action clé 2 d'Erasmus+ « partenariats stratégiques ».
  10. La cartographie et l'intégration des pratiques innovantes en matière d'enseignement scolaire, élaborées dans le cadre des partenariats Comenius Regio, pourraient être promues grâce à la création d'un réseau Erasmus+.

## Kurzfassung

Zweck der Studie	Diese Studie analysiert die Auswirkungen von Comenius Regio, einem Bereich des wichtigsten Finanzierungsprogramms der EU im Bereich der schulischen und beruflichen Bildung, des Programms für lebenslanges Lernen (2007-13).
Comenius Regio	Comenius Regio wurde 2008 ins Leben gerufen und hat seitdem grenzüberschreitende Projekte unterstützt, in welchen Organisationen zweier verschiedener europäischer Regionen schulische Bildung in einem gemeinsamen Interessenbereich durchführen. Die EU-Finanzierung läuft über zwei Jahre. Comenius Regio wurde so konzipiert, dass es in interregionalen Partnerschaften den lokalen/regionalen Schulbehörden eine leitende Funktion zuweist und zugleich andere Organisationen als Projektpartner einbezieht, die nicht notwendigerweise mit schulischer Bildung zu tun haben, z.B. Arbeitgeber, Universitäten oder Jugendorganisationen (im Folgenden „Drittpartner“). Jede Partnerschaft integriert mindestens eine lokale/regionale Behörde, eine Schule und einen Drittpartner aus jeder der beiden Regionen. Seit 2009 hat die EU 698 Projekte unterstützt, in welcher Organisationen aus 33 europäischen Ländern involviert waren.
Fokus der Studie	Die Studie konzentriert sich auf den Beitrag von Comenius zu Veränderungen der Bildung auf verschiedenen Ebenen. Bewertet wurden vor allem unter die im Rahmen der Ausschreibungen („Call“) 2009 und 2010 abgeschlossene Projekte (insgesamt 245) und, soweit möglich, auch Projekte nachfolgender Ausschreibungen, um Erkenntnisse über einen längeren Zeitraum zu vergleichen. Ausgeführt wurde die Studie vom <i>Public Policy and Management Institute</i> (PPMI, Litauen) zwischen November 2012 und August 2014.
Analyseebenen	Die Studie untersucht die Auswirkungen der Aktion auf verschiedenen Ebenen: Teilnehmer, Partnerorganisationen (lokale/regionale Behörden, Schulen und Drittpartner), lokale Gemeinden und Ausbildungssysteme. Zusätzlich gewährt sie Einblick in die Schwierigkeiten und verweist auf Möglichkeiten zur Entwicklung ähnlicher Partnerschaften in der Zukunft.
Methodik	Die Studie beruft sich auf Indizien, die durch die Anwendung qualitativer und quantitativer Methoden erhalten wurden: 1) Sekundärforschung und Analyse von Verwaltungsdaten; 2) Interviews mit Teilnehmern von 12 ausgewählten Projekten; 3) Interviews mit maßgeblichen Anspruchsgruppen auf EU-Ebene; 4) einer Umfrage unter den Projektteilnehmern und einer Umfrage unter den Koordinatoren von Comenius Regio, durchgeführt von den Nationalagenturen <sup>3</sup> und nationalen Entscheidungsträgern, die in den Ausschuss für lebenslanges Lernen 2007-2013 involviert waren; und 5) soziale Netzwerkanalyse.

<sup>3</sup> Die Nationalagenturen sind für die Förderung und Umsetzung des EU-Programms auf nationaler Ebene zuständig und fungieren als Bindeglied zwischen der Europäischen Kommission und den teilnehmenden Organisationen auf lokaler, regionaler und nationaler Ebene.

## WICHTIGSTE ERGEBNISSE

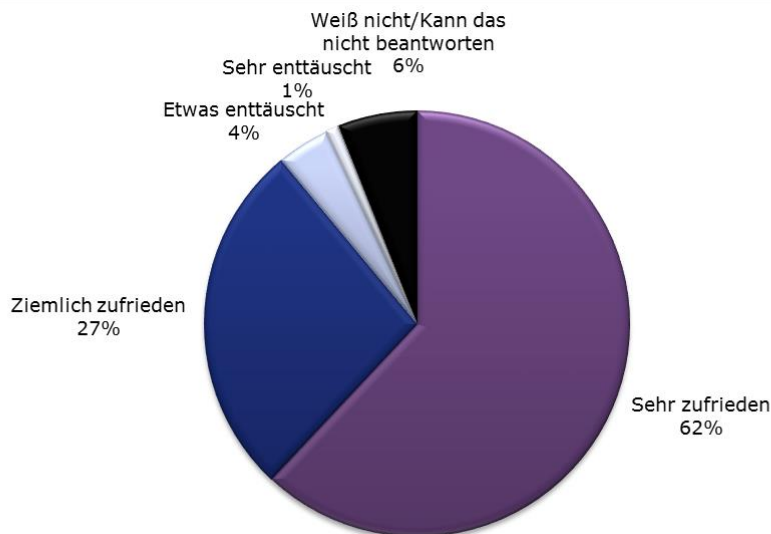
### Stellenwert und Gestaltung der Partnerschaften

Links zu jüngsten Entwicklungen in der Schulbildung	Die Themenfelder der Comenius-Regio-Projekte finden ihre Entsprechungen in den auf nationaler und europäischer Ebene etablierten Schlüsselprioritäten der Schulbildung. Auch die Gestaltungs- und Durchführungsmodalitäten der Aktion konnten Synergien und Ergänzungen zwischen den Partnerschaften und schulpolitischen Entwicklungen fördern.
Innovative Rolle der Aktion	Die Comenius-Regio-Aktion nahm eine innovative Rolle bei der Zusammenführung verschiedener Organisationen - Bildungspolitik, Administratoren, Inspektoren und Berater auf lokaler/regionaler Ebene, lokale Gemeinden und Schulen – zweier europäischer Regionen ein. Die Entwicklung interregionaler Partnerschaften dieser Art entsprach der zeitgleich stattfindenden Dezentralisierung vieler Schulsysteme, Ausweitung der Schulautonomie und zunehmender Gewichtung des Engagements lokaler Gemeinden in der Schulbildung.
Große Projektvielfalt	Die Projektvielfalt variierte in Abhängigkeit von der Anzahl der beteiligten Partner (kleine Partnerschaften mit sechs Partnern oder größere mit über 20 Partnern, bei einem Durchschnitt von neun Partnern) und ihres Typs, d.h. Vorschulen oder weiterführende Schule, Wirtschaftsakteure wie die Handelskammer), der akademische Sektor sprich Universitäten, Sozialpartner oder NGOs u.a. häufigste Teilnehmer waren lokale Behörden, weiterbildende Schulen und Grundschulen, doch auch regionale Behörden, bildungsfördernde Organisationen, Berufsschulen und Ausbildungszentren waren oft involviert.
Hauptzielsetzungen der Projekte	Durch das Initiieren oder die Teilnahme an einem Comenius-Regio-Projekt wollten die Partner vor allem den Bildungsprozess verbessern, mit Partnern anderer europäischer Länder Best-Practice-Beispiele austauschen, die Ausbildung von Lehrern/lokalen Behördenmitarbeitern verbessern und die Zusammenarbeit zwischen den maßgeblichen Anspruchsgruppen auf lokaler und europäischer Ebene stärken.

### Gesamtbewertung der Partnerschaftenpartnerships

Erfolgreich umgesetzte Zielvorgaben	Die Daten aus der Umfrage über die Projektteilnehmer und einer Umfrage über die Koordinatoren von Comenius Regio bei den Nationalagenturen und nationalen Entscheidungsträgern indizierten, dass Comenius Regio hinsichtlich des Umsetzens der Gesamtzielvorgaben erfolgreich war. Darunter fallen die Europäische Dimension in der Schulbildung und das Entwickeln von Tools für nachhaltige grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit. Die große Mehrheit der teilnehmenden Organisationen konnte ihre Projektziele erreichen.
Zufriedenheitsgrad	Die Projektteilnehmer beurteilten die Erfahrung als insgesamt sehr zufriedenstellend (s. Abb. 1) und den größeren Teil hatte auch die Projektumsetzung überzeugt.

**Abb 1. Zu friedenheit der Teilnehmer mit Comenius Regio**



Quelle: Umfrage unter den Teilnehmern der Comenius-Regio-Partnerschaften, PPMI.  
 Anmerkung: Die Umfrage wurde ergänzt durch 460 Antworten (31.34%) aus 207 Comenius-Regio-Projekten (d.h. 84% der Projekte wurden im Rahmen der Ausschreibungen 2009 und 2010 initiiert).

#### Rolle lokaler und regionaler Behörden

Die Studie zeigte des Weiteren erhebliche Unterschiede bezüglich der Rolle der lokalen/regionalen Behörden innerhalb ihrer Partnerschaften auf. Der sozialen Netzwerkanalyse lässt sich entnehmen, dass sie hinsichtlich der Teilnahme an verschiedenen Projekten und Ausbau der Zusammenarbeit mit mehreren Partnern besonders aktiv waren. Obwohl formell die lokalen und regionalen Behörden die Rolle als Koordinatoren hatten, zeigten die Umfragedaten und Ergebnisse der Fallstudien, dass bei Projekten im Rahmen der Ausschreibungen 2009 und 2010 in einigen Fällen auch Schulen eine führende Rolle übernahmen.

#### Auswirkungen auf individueller Ebene

##### Berufliche und persönliche Entwicklung

Die Teilnahme an Comenius Regio wirkte sich positiv auf die berufliche und persönliche Entwicklung aller unmittelbar in die Projekte eingebundenen Personen aus. Sie erfuhren etwas über Bildungssysteme in anderen Ländern, konnten ihr Bewusstsein für die kulturelle Vielfalt Europas stärken und wurden stärker in professionelle internationale Netzwerke integriert.

##### Unterschiede bei den Partnern

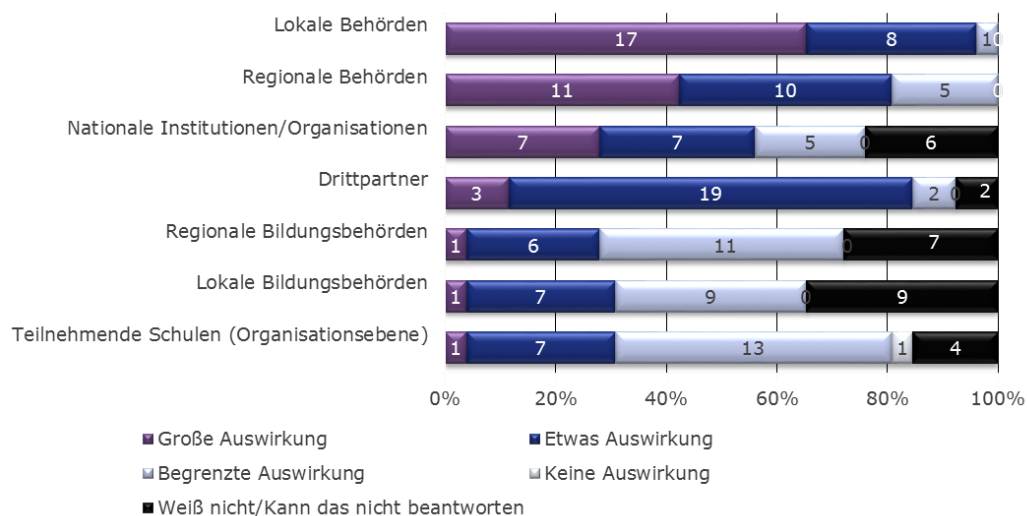
Mitarbeiter lokaler und regionaler Behörden erkannten häufiger als Teilnehmer aus Schulen oder Drittpartnern an, dass ihre administrativen Fähigkeiten sich durch die Projektteilnahme verbesserten. Die Teilnehmer von Schulen nahmen eine starke Auswirkung auf ihre beruflichen und persönlichen Kompetenzen wahr. Drittpartner fühlten sich ermutigt, in der Zukunft auch an internationalen Projekten teilzunehmen.

#### Impact at institutional level

##### Alle Arten von Partnern wurden von der Aktion beeinflusst

Die Nationalagenturen stellten fest, dass die Teilnahme an der Comenius-Regio-Aktion wesentliche Auswirkung auf alle Arten von Partnerorganisationen hatte. Dabei standen an erster Stelle teilnehmende Schulen, dicht gefolgt von lokalen Bildungsbehörden, regionalen Bildungsbehörden und Drittpartnern (s. Abb. 2).

**Abb. 2. Auswirkung auf die Partnerorganisationen**



Quelle: Umfrage der Nationalagenturen und nationalen Behörden, PPMI.

Anmerkung: 26 von 33 Nationalagenturen antworteten auf die Umfrage, entsprechend 79% der Gesamtbeteiligungsquote.

Alle Arten von Partnern wurden von der Aktion beeinflusst

Ein Ergebnis der Comenius-Regio-Projekte war, dass die lokalen und regionalen Behörden ihre Zusammenarbeit mit anderen lokalen und internationalen Partnern in der Schulbildung intensivierten. Die Projekte brachten verbesserte berufliche Kompetenzen und Fremdsprachenkenntnisse des Personals, Förderung ihrer administrativen Fähigkeiten im Hinblick auf interregionale Projekte mit sich und halfen bei einer effektiveren Zuweisung von Bildungsaufgaben in ihrer Region.

Auswirkung auf lokale und regionale Behörden

Die Schulen bauten ihre Beziehungen mit anderen Partnern aus, entwickelten nachhaltige grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit, lernten innovative Wege für die Adaption von Bildungspraktiken gemäß dem Bedarf in ihrer Gemeinde und das Entwickeln effizienterer pädagogischer Praktiken kennen. In vielen Fällen konnten die Projekte außerdem zur Veränderung der Unterrichts- und Lernsituation in der Klasse beitragen.

Auswirkung auf Drittpartner

Drittpartner profitierten vor allem von intensivierter Zusammenarbeit mit Schulen und lokalen Behörden in ihrer eigenen Region und im Ausland. Die Repräsentanten der Drittpartner merkten außerdem an, dass sie ihre Kompetenz erweitern und wertvolle Erkenntnisse zu verschiedenen Fragen der Schulbildung gewinnen konnten und diese daher in ihrem unmittelbaren lokalen Umfeld nun besser angehen können.

### Auswirkungen auf Partnerschaften und lokale Gemeinden

Wahrnehmbarkeit und Anerkennung

In den meisten Fällen erkannten die Teilnehmer an, dass dank ihrer Projektbeteiligung die Wahrnehmbarkeit der Comenius-Regio-Aktion und des Comenius-Programms im Allgemeinen auf lokaler Gemeindeebene anstieg und die Teilnahme an internationaler Zusammenarbeit mehr Anerkennung durch Bildungsbehörden fand.

Zusammenarbeit zwischen den Partnern

In ungefähr der Hälfte aller Fälle zogen die Projekte die Etablierung offizieller Schulpartnerschaften und Kooperationsvereinbarungen zwischen den mit Schulbildung befassten Behörden beider Partnerregionen nach sich und führten des Weiteren zu stärkerer Einbindung anderer lokaler Anspruchsgruppen in die Schulbildung. Bemerkenswert viele Organisationen setzten die Zusammenarbeit aktiv fort, indem sie sich auch an Projekten nachfolgender Comenius-Ausschreibungen beteiligten.

## Auswirkungen auf Regional- und Systemebene

Mehrwert  
der Partner-  
schaften

Die Comenius-Regio-Partnerschaften waren als Bottom-Up-Initiativen konzipiert. Sie konzentrierten sich im Wesentlichen auf ihre Arbeit und waren vor allem auf lokaler Ebene erfolgreich. Sie ermöglichten für jene, die sich mit der Bildung auf allen Ebenen befassten, Feldbesuche, damit sie gemeinsam mit anderen lernen, ihren Erfahrungshorizont erweitern und diese Erfahrungen in den beruflichen Kontext einbringen. Einige Projekte hatten signifikante Auswirkungen auf regionaler Ebene und in ganz wenigen Fällen haben sie sich möglicherweise sogar auf die nationale Politik- und Schulbildungspraxis ausgewirkt.

## LEHREN

Allgemeine  
Schluss-  
folgerungen

Die Planung der Aktionen zur Unterstützung interregionaler Partnerschaften, die es den Schulen und Drittpartnern gestattet gemeinsam mit den lokalen/regionalen Behörden in vollem Umfang an der Planung des Projekteinhalts mitzuwirken, wurde als vorteilhaft angesehen.

Das Implementieren erfolgreicher dauerhafter Veränderungen oder Initiieren eines internationalen integrierten Netzwerks von Berufstätigen aus dem Bildungsbereich in allen Ländern Europas beansprucht viel Zeit und erfordert einen ganzheitlichen und voll entwickelten Ansatz. Comenius Regio und die Nachfolgeprogramme können in diesem Prozess eine wichtige Rolle spielen.

Aus-  
gestaltung  
der Partner-  
schaften  
während der  
Durch-  
führung

Die Einbindung lokaler/regionaler Behörden als Projektkoordinatoren kann als entscheidend für den Projekterfolg angesehen werden. Zugleich wurde festgestellt, dass die lokalen/regionalen Behörden in den Comenius-Regio-Partnerschaften durchaus unterschiedliche Rollen einnahmen. Auch die Drittpartner und ihr jeweiliger Beitrag waren nicht einheitlich, jedoch bestand gerade in der Möglichkeit, möglichst unterschiedene Drittpartner zu integrieren eine der Stärken von Comenius Regio. Insgesamt kann man die Entwicklung gleichberechtigter Partnerschaften als wichtigen Faktor für den positiven Output betrachten.

Die im Rahmen der Aktion Comenius Regio initiierten Programme decken eine breite Themenpalette ab. Sie richten sich an Bildungsfragen im Zusammenhang mit Prioritäten und Initiativen schulischer Bildung, die von den maßgeblichen nationalen Behörden ebenso wie von lokalen und regionalen Behörden mit Bildungsauftrag verfolgt werden. Dies birgt das Potential, Ergebnisse der Comenius-Regio-Projekte für bildungspolitische Entwicklungen zu verwenden.

Aktives Einbeziehen der lokalen und/oder regionalen Behörden und effektives Planen von Verbreitungsaktivitäten ist für eine erfolgreiche Verbreitung der Projektergebnisse und deren erfolgreiche Anwendung in anderem Kontext bereits im Stadium der Projektgestaltung erforderlich. Die Drittpartner können bei der Verbreitung der Projektergebnisse ebenfalls eine maßgebliche Rolle spielen.



#### Durchführung der Partnerschaften

Unterstützungsgrad und Engagement der leitenden Organisationen (lokale/regionale Behörden) hatten wesentlichen Einfluss auf den Grad des Engagements nicht schulischer Partner. Die Studie hat aufgezeigt, dass die Rolle der lokalen/regionalen Behörden als Projektkoordinatoren von Comenius-Regio-Partnerschaften variiert. Lokale und regionale Behörden sind nicht immer bereit in der Form zusammenzuarbeiten, die man sich von ihnen wünscht, während oft Schulen eine signifikante Rolle manchmal sogar die Rolle der de facto leitenden Organisation übernehmen.

Prozessbezogene Faktoren wie wirksamer Informationsaustausch zwischen den Projektpartnern, effektives Projektmanagement, effektive Planung der Projektaktivitäten und deren Überwachung während der Projektdurchführung, sowie effektive Problemlösung und Entscheidungsfindung trugen zum Projekterfolg bei.

Das persönliche Engagement der Projektkoordinatoren kann als einer der Hauptfaktoren sowohl für den Gesamterfolg als auch seine Auswirkung auf die Teilnehmer betrachtet werden. Die erfolgreiche Koordination des Comenius-Regio-Projekts erforderte einen beträchtlichen Aufwand an Zeit, Hingabe und Begeisterung.

#### Verbreitung der Projektergebnisse

Comenius-Regio-Projekte sind in der Regel auch auf lokaler Ebene erfolgreich. Die Partnerschaften bringen zwar vor allem Ergebnisse auf lokaler Ebene hervor, doch könnten sich auch im regionalen Kontext Multiplikatoreffekte erweisen, desgleichen könnten die regionalen Behörden durch ihre Unterstützung zur breiteren Auswirkungen der Projektergebnisse beitragen.

Die Auswirkung der Comenius-Regio-Partnerschaften auf lokaler, regionaler oder Systemebene stand im Zusammenhang mit der Qualität ihrer Ergebnisse, Verbreitungsaktivitäten und dem Ausmaß, in dem die Projektergebnisse die maßgeblichen Zielgruppen erreichten. Neben den lokalen und regionalen Behörden sowie Drittpartnern kommt auch den Nationalagenturen eine wichtige Rolle bei der Verbreitung der Projektergebnisse für eine breitere Öffentlichkeit zu.

Es ist wichtig, die innovativen Praktiken in der Schulbildung, die von Comenius-Regio-Partnerschaften über verschiedene europäische, nationale und regionale Netzwerke, Veröffentlichungsplattformen sowie Werbeaktivitäten und -veranstaltungen (wie z.B. Comenius-Regio-Konferenzen) entwickelt wurden ebenso wie Mainstreaming- und Folgeprojekte zu kartieren und einzubinden.

## EMPFEHLUNGEN

1. Das Programm Erasmus+ sollte die Vorteile von Comenius Regio beibehalten, indem es weiterhin die regionale Zusammenarbeit mit Partnerschaften unter Einbeziehung von lokalen und regionalen Behörden zusammen mit Schulen und anderen maßgeblichen Drittpartnern der Gemeinde unterstützt.
2. Verbesserung der Synergien zwischen den Erasmus+ Ergebnissen und verschiedenen schulpolitischen Initiativen auf EU-Ebene und nationaler Ebene, um auf den Ergebnissen transnationaler Zusammenarbeit in der Schuldbildung basierende bildungspolitische Entwicklungen anzuregen.
3. Angesichts der unvermeidlichen Komplexität der transnationalen Partnerschaften in der Schuldbildung sowie der für die Projektdurchführung und Verbreitung der Ergebnisse erforderlichen Zeit sollte geprüft werden, ob



- 
- sich bewährte Partnerschaften ausbauen lassen um Entwicklungskontinuität zu wahren und dauerhafte Veränderungen in der Bildungspraxis zu bewirken.
4. Förderung der Entwicklung ausgewogener Partnerschaften, bei denen alle drei Arten von Partnern in der Bewerbungsphase einbezogen werden, indem Drittpartnern der Wert ihrer Beteiligung aufgezeigt wird und die vorgeschlagenen Partnerschaften hinsichtlich ihrer Ausgewogenheit beurteilt werden.
  5. Bei der Planung von Kooperationsprojekten in der Schulbildung, von der Basis ausgehend, sollte ein besonderes Augenmerk auf Themen der Schulbildung gelenkt werden, die mit EU-Gewichtungen sowie nationalen und regionalen Schwerpunkten korrespondieren.
  6. Der Planung von Nachhaltigkeit und Ausbreitung in der Planungs- und Bewerbungsphase sollte bereits mehr Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet werden. Es sollte ein kohärenter, klar verständlicher Ausbreitungsplan erarbeitet werden, der auch darauf eingeht, wie lokale und/oder regionale Behörden einzubeziehen sind.
  7. Die lokalen/regionalen Behörden sollten die Hauptverantwortung für die Projekte tragen, doch ihre tatsächliche Rolle als Projektkoordinatoren müsste klar definiert und eingehalten werden.
  8. Im Rahmen der Projektförderung sollten ausreichende Ressourcen bereitgestellt werden, um die Kapazitäten der beteiligten Organisationen, die Entwicklung der Partnerschaften und die Durchführung von gemeinsamen Aktivitäten (d.h. „Face-to-face“ Vorbereitungstreffen zwischen den Partnern) wie im aktuellen Comenius-Programm zu verbessern.
  9. Die lokalen/regionalen Behörden und die Nationalagenturen sollten ihre Bemühungen in Verbreitungs- und Anwendungsaktivitäten während und nach der Projektumsetzung durch Strategische Partnerschaften (Erasmus +/Key Action 2) intensivieren.
  10. Kartierung und Verankerung der von Comenius-Regio-Partnerschaften entwickelten innovativen Praktiken in der Schulbildung könnten durch Entwicklung eines Erasmus+ Netzwerks gefördert werden.

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## INTRODUCTION

This Report is submitted for the implementation of specific contract No. EAC/2012/0518 "Study of the impact of Comenius Regio", implementing Framework Contract No. EAC/50/2009.

This study analysed the impact of the Comenius Regio action in the field of school education which was launched by the European Commission in 2008 under the Lifelong Learning Programme. The **partnerships lasted for two years** and supported **project-based cross-border cooperation** between local and regional authorities with a role in school education. Between 2009 and 2013, the action led to cooperation between partner organisations from 33 European countries and financed 698 projects.

Comenius Regio Partnerships played an innovative role in terms of **bringing together different organisations** – educational policymakers, administrators, inspectors and advisors at the local/regional level, local community partners and schools – **from two European regions**. The action was designed in such a way as to give the leading role in the inter-regional partnerships to local and regional authorities. Another innovative aspect of the action was the involvement of third partner organisations which were not necessarily directly involved in the provision of school education (e.g. employers, universities, youth organisations).

The study focused on the contribution of the Comenius Regio action to education changes at different levels: impact on project participants, partner organisations (local/regional authorities, schools, and third partners), local communities and education systems. It primarily assessed the **finalised projects** funded under Call 2009 and 2010 (245 projects) and, when possible, referred to the projects funded under subsequent calls in order to compare findings across time. The study also offers insights on obstacles and opportunities to improve and develop similar partnerships in the future. It study was carried out by Public Policy and Management Institute **between November 2012 and August 2014**.

The study relied on the evidence gathered using **qualitative and quantitative methods**, including: 1) desk research and analysis of administrative data; 2) interviews with the participants from 12 projects selected for the case studies; 3) interviews with relevant stakeholders at the EU level; 4) a survey of the participants and a survey of the Comenius Regio coordinators at the National Agencies as well as national policymakers involved in the Lifelong Learning Programme Committee 2007-2013; 5) social network analysis.

In the subsequent parts of this Report the Contractor presents the context of the Comenius Regio Partnerships (see Chapter 1), lays out the framework for the analysis and methods applied in the study (see Chapter 2), presents information on the full results of the study, including results of the survey analysis and desk research, the case studies, interviews with relevant stakeholders (see Chapter 3), presents the findings regarding obstacles and success factors and formulates conclusions and recommendations for the future development of the inter-regional partnerships (see Chapter 4).

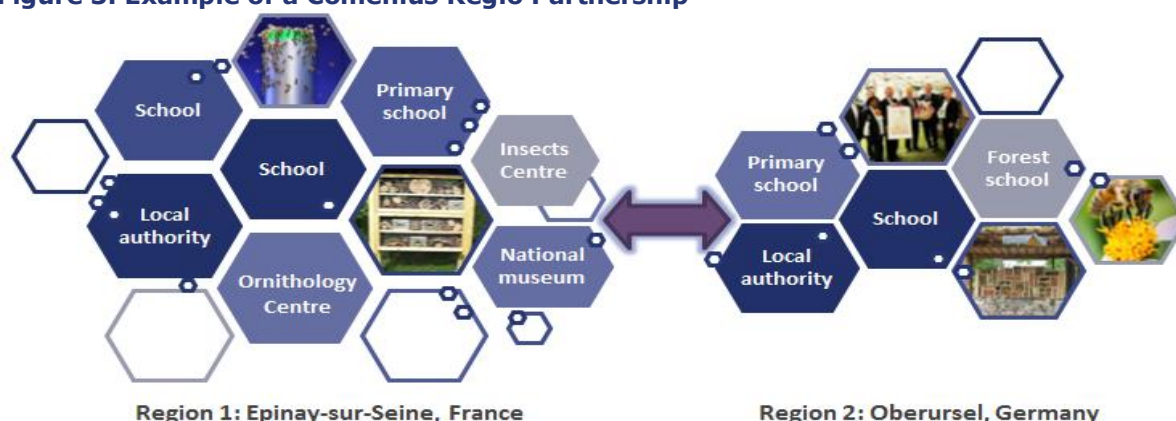
# 1. CONTEXT OF COMENIUS REGIO AND THE DESIGN OF THE ACTION

## 1.1. Comenius Regio Partnerships

Comenius Regio Partnerships was part of the Comenius programme under the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007–2013 with 33 participating countries<sup>4</sup>. This action was launched in 2008 to promote and support project-based cross-border cooperation between local and regional authorities with a role in school education.

According to the requirements, a Comenius Regio partnership had to be composed of two partner regions. Each of them had to involve: the local or regional authority with a role in school education; at least one school; and at least one other relevant local partner (e.g. youth or sport club, parents association, local teacher training institute, vocational education and training institution, local employer, museum and consulting services/advisory board), which will be referred to in this study as third partner. Figure 3 provides an example of a Comenius Regio Partnership, involving more than ten partner organisations from two twinned cities in France and Germany.

**Figure 3. Example of a Comenius Regio Partnership**



Source: PPMI.

Note: Comenius Regio Partnership "Active learning about the development of biodiversity in cities" 2010-1-FR1-COM13-14580, selected for case study analysis (see Table 2 and Case study 7).

Partners were required to be from two different countries participating in the Lifelong Learning Programme, one of which must be from an EU Member State. In addition, only local or regional authorities with a role in school education, which were eligible to apply for funding, were able to act as coordinators of the project within their region.

### 1.1.1. Comenius Regio objectives

The general objective of Comenius Regio Partnerships was to enhance the European dimension of education by promoting cooperation activities between local and regional authorities with a role in school education in Europe. The main mechanism to achieve this objective operated through structured cooperation between the two partner regions.

Comenius Regio Partnerships aimed at achieving the following specific objectives:

<sup>4</sup> Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Croatia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

- helping the participating regions to develop and exchange best practice in school education;
- developing tools for sustainable cooperation across borders;
- strengthening the European dimension in school education.

The objectives of the Comenius Regio Partnerships were an integral part of the overall Comenius programme, which aimed at:

- improving and increasing the mobility of pupils and educational staff across the EU;
- enhancing and increasing partnerships between schools in different EU Member States;
- encouraging language learning, innovative ICT-based content, services and better teaching techniques and practices;
- enhancing the quality and European dimension of teacher training;
- improving pedagogical approaches and school management.

In order to achieve their goals, Comenius Regio Partnerships focused their work on clearly defined themes (e.g. cooperation between schools and local partners, raising pupils' motivation and achievement). The projects produced concrete outputs, including publications, conferences, seminars etc.

#### 1.1.2. Partnerships developed between 2009 and 2013

In the five-year period, 33 European countries participated in the Comenius Regio action. In total, 698 partnerships were created between 2009 and 2013<sup>5</sup>. Projects from Calls 2009-2011 are finalised and the ones from Call 2012 will be finished by end of 2014 and Call 2013 by end of 2015.

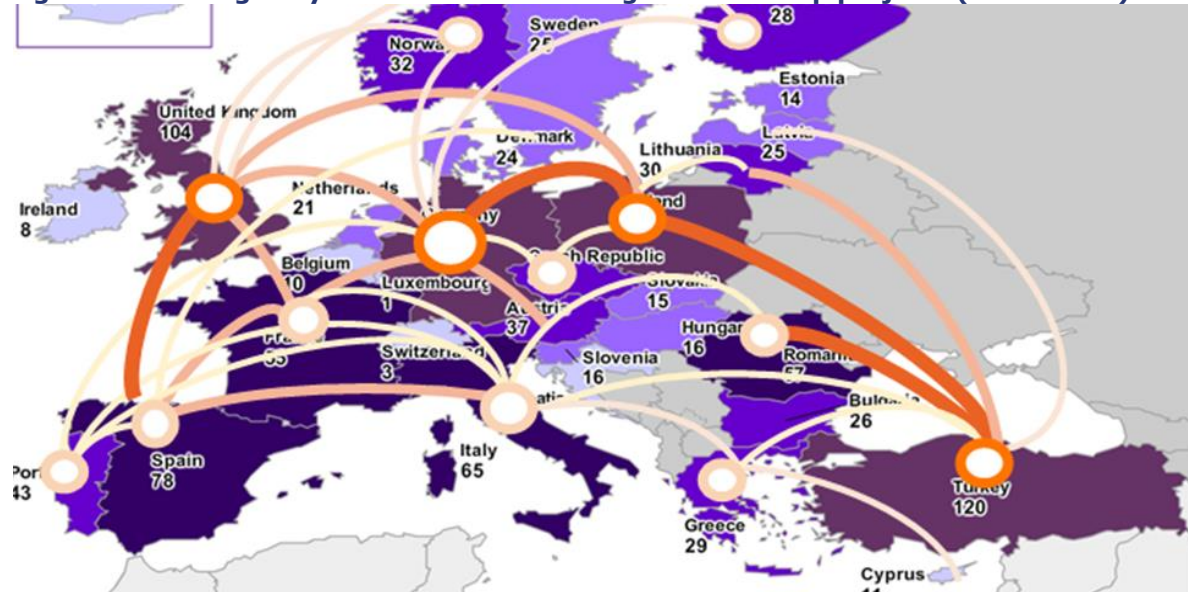
There was significant variation in the participation numbers across countries. Figure 4 shows the frequency of the collaboration ties between the regions from particular countries. The exact number of partnerships between particular countries is presented in Table 1.

In total, during the 2010-2011 call, 16.284 mobilities took place. Overall, between 2009 and 2013 Comenius Regio partnerships involved 2882 schools and 3018 third partners. Thus, high numbers of third partner participants show that Comenius Regio Action was successful in terms of strengthening collaboration and ties between schools and local/regional authorities on the one hand, and those partners that are not directly involved in education. It is planned that the projects of 2013 call will be finished in 2015.

"In total, 698 partnerships were created between 2009 and 2013"

<sup>5</sup> According to the administrative data on Calls 2009-2013 obtained from the EC, there were 698 partnerships established under the Calls 2009-2013.

**Figure 4. The “highways” of the Comenius Regio Partnership projects (2009-2013)**



Source: PPMI based on the administrative data from Calls 2009-2013.

Note: the brightness of the colour indicates the frequency of country's participation/partnership between countries: the darker the colour, the higher the frequency.

**Table 1. Number of partnerships between the regions (2009-2013)**

	AT	BE	BG	CH	CY	CZ	DE	DK	EE	ES	FI	FR	GB	GR	HR	HU	IE	IS	IT	LT	LU	LV	MT	NL	NO	PL	PT	RO	SE	SI	SK	TR	
AT		1	0	0	0	0	17	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	4	1	0	1	0	1	0	6	0	0	0	1	0	0	
BE			0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	4	3	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	
BG				0	0	1	1	0	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	2	0	0	0	4	2	4	0	0	0	6	
CH					0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
CY						0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
CZ							7	0	1	0	2	4	3	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	1	0	0	6	1	
DE								4	1	5	4	12	15	1	0	2	0	0	6	2	3	0	0	8	4	30	2	0	5	1	1	7	
DK									0	2	0	0	6	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	
EE										0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	3	
ES											2	12	29	4	0	0	1	1	14	0	0	0	0	1	2	9	8	1	2	2	0	2	
FI												1	3	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	
FR													12	0	1	0	0	0	13	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	3	1	2	0	0	2	
GB														1	1	1	4	1	4	2	1	0	0	2	5	16	3	2	17	0	0	6	
GR															0	0	0	0	3	1	0	2	0	0	2	1	0	5	0	1	0	4	
HR																1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	
HU																	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	0	0	2	2	0	
IE																		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	
IS																			1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	
IT																				2	0	0	1	2	0	2	3	9	2	3	0	7	
LT																					0	1	0	1	0	4	1	4	0	0	0	7	
LU																						0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
LV																							0	0	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	4	
MT																								0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	
NL																									1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	
NO																										2	2	0	2	1	0	0	
PL																											4	2	1	2	4	23	
PT																												5	0	0	0	3	
RO																													0	0	0	27	
SE																														1	0	1	
SI																															0	1	
SK																																0	
TR																																	0

Source: PPMI based on the administrative data from Calls 2009-2013.

Note: the number of partnerships is counted without making any distinction between Region 1 and Region 2 (N=672).

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## 1.2. Recent developments in school policies and their links to Comenius Regio

In the following sections of the Report we discuss the synergies and complementarities of Comenius Regio Partnerships with current European school education priorities and recent developments in European school education systems<sup>6</sup>.

*First*, the following sections show that the prevalent **thematic areas and topics** of Comenius Regio projects corresponded well to the key school education priorities established at both national and European levels (see Section 1.2.1). *Second*, the study results demonstrate that the **design and implementation modalities** of the Comenius Regio action were conducive to producing synergies and complementarities between the partnerships and school policy developments (see Section 1.2.2). This confirms that the development of a specific type of transnational partnership involving a broad range of actors and coordinated by the local/regional authorities was timely in the context of recent changes in school education structures, decentralisation of school education systems, widening school autonomy, growing emphasis on local community, etc. *Finally*, it reveals **synergies between the project results** on the one hand **and key school education policy developments** in the countries involved on the other (see Section 1.2.3).

### 1.2.1. Key priorities of school education and the thematic areas of Comenius Regio

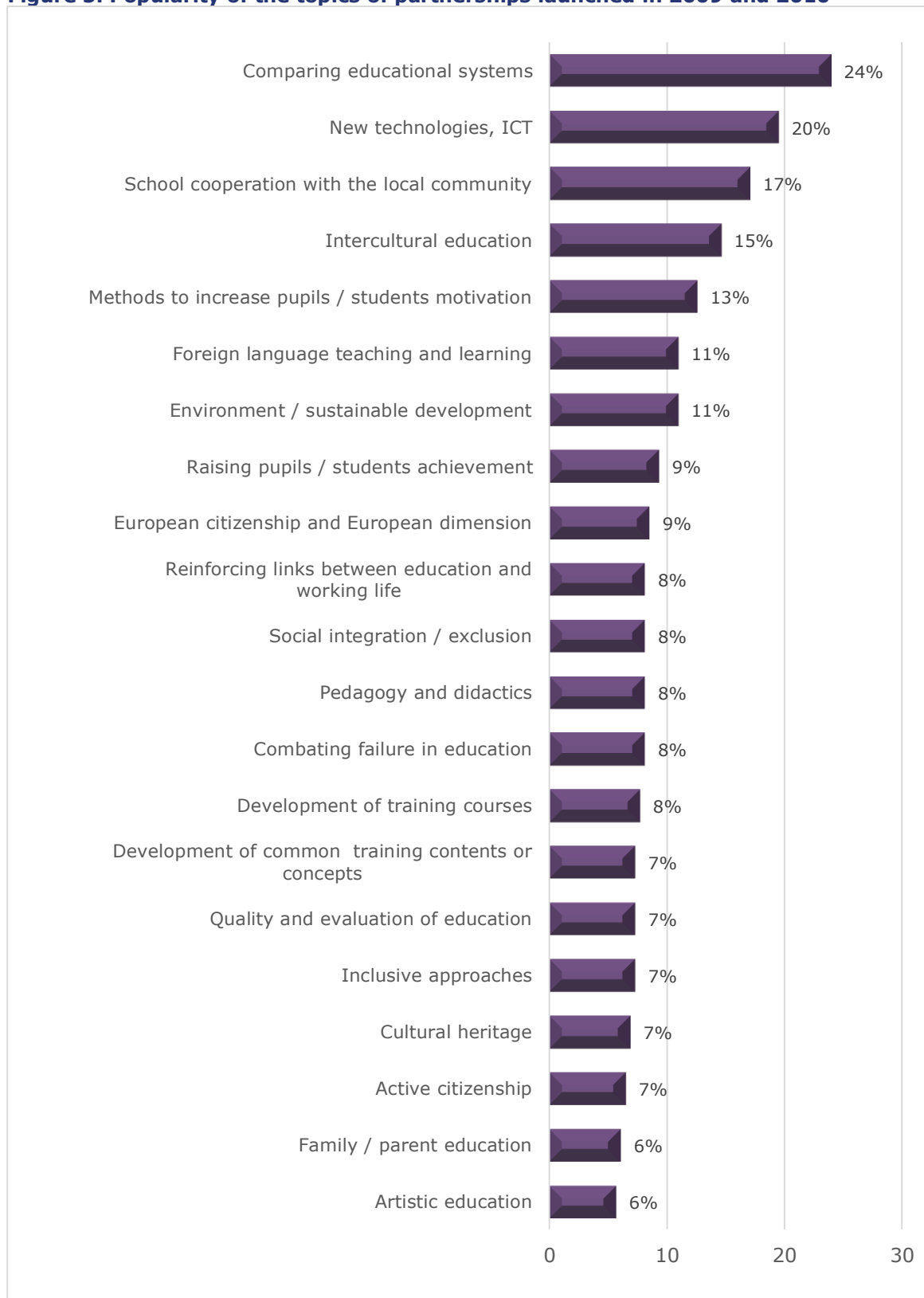
The analysis of the key thematic areas covered in the Comenius Regio projects showed that a number of projects launched in 2009 and 2010 aimed at comparing education systems, focused on school cooperation with local community or new technologies and ICT (see Figure 5). Intercultural education, European citizenship, European dimension, increasing student motivation and achievement, employability, teacher professional development, inclusive education were also popular topics.

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<sup>6</sup> This section is based on the evidence gathered during desk research, the survey of the representatives of National Agencies and National Authorities and survey of Comenius Regio participants (see Annex 1 and 3).



**Figure 5. Popularity of the topics of partnerships launched in 2009 and 2010**

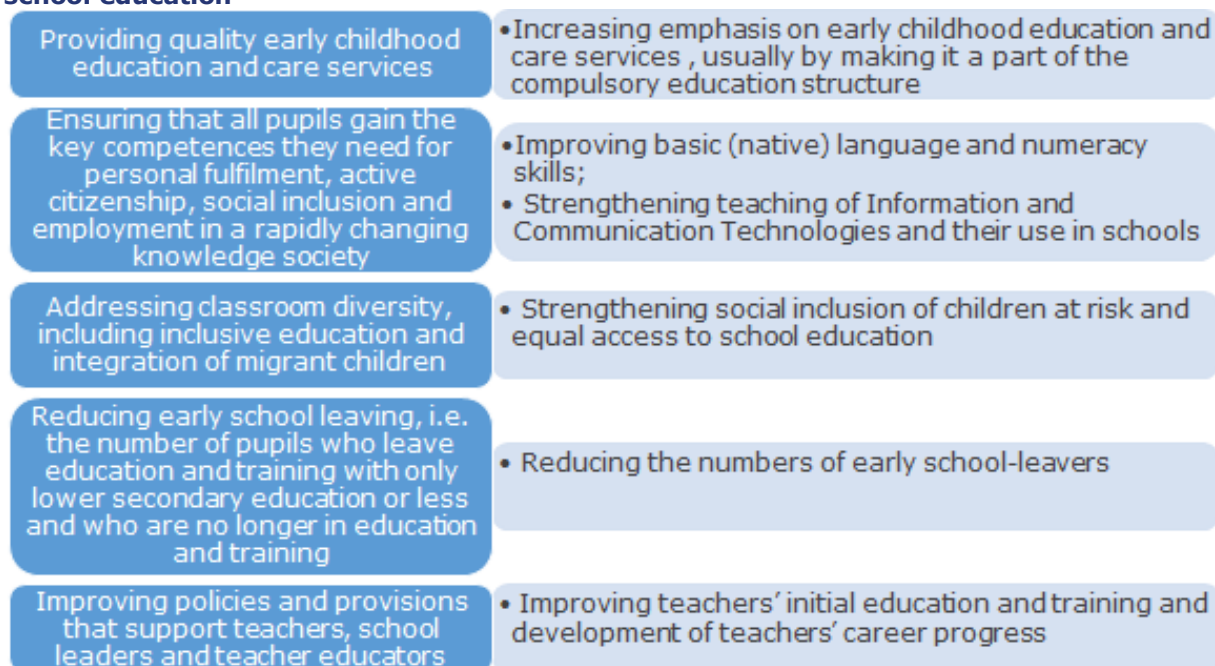


Source: analysis of administrative data, PPMI.

Note: the figure presents topics that were selected in at least 5% of all projects (31 more specific topics were not included in the figure). Percentages are counted based on overall number of projects launched in 2009 and 2010.

These issues were **relevant** to both the school education priorities at the **EU level and national level** priorities in school education (see Figure 6 below).

**Figure 6. Relationship between the EU (left side) and national (right side) priorities in school education**



Sources: Commission Communication on the Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems, COM (2006) 481 final, Brussels; Commission Staff Working Paper Schools for the 21st Century, Brussels, 11.07.07 SEC (2007)1009; European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture, "European Report on the Quality of School Education: Sixteen Quality Indicators", 2001; Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for ET 2020, Official Journal C 119, survey of the National Agencies and National Authorities, PPMI.

Note: for more details see Annex 1 and 3.

Furthermore, the evidence gathered during this study demonstrated that the Comenius Regio projects were relevant and complementary in terms of helping to identify and address the prevalent educational issues and challenges at local level and regional level, as well as widening the knowledge of the staff from the local/regional authorities on educational issues. The data gathered while carrying out the social network analysis, the participants' survey and the case studies showed that the partnerships resulted in increasing the knowledge and awareness of different educational issues among the participating local/regional authorities, influencing the educational policies in accordance to these relevant issues and improving the administrative and project management capacities of local authorities. Moreover, it also confirmed that the Comenius Regio action had significant influence on the participating local and regional authorities in terms of strengthening the links with other actors involved in school education at local, national and international levels.

#### 1.2.2. Development of the Comenius Regio action in the context of recent school policy developments

The **design and implementation modalities** of the Comenius Regio action were conducive to producing synergies and complementarities between Comenius Regio Partnerships and school policy developments. **Local or regional authorities** with a role in school education, which are aware of school education needs in their regions and concerned with offering support to schools and teachers, acted as coordinators of the partnerships and frequently initiated them (see Section 3.1.4).

Also, the Comenius Regio action supported **transnational cooperation** among the partner regions facilitating the development and exchange of good practices in school education across different regions (see Section 3.1.6). Moreover, Comenius Regio



Partnerships **involved different school education stakeholders** (educational authorities, schools and various third partners) engaged in school education developments (more information on Comenius Regio Partnerships is provided in Section 1.1.). There is evidence that the implementation of Comenius Regio Partnerships helped local/regional authorities and third partners to better address relevant educational issues at local and regional level, as well as facilitating transnational cooperation and networking among the partner organisations (see Section 3.5.2.). The active involvement of local and regional authorities, schools, teachers and other relevant partners is crucial in order to promote actual and sustainable changes at school level.

The literature review indicated that the development of the Comenius Regio action was particularly timely in the context of the **gradual decentralisation of school education systems** (see Box 1) and the **widening scope of school autonomy** in Europe (see Box 2). Almost half of the respondents of the survey of the National Agencies and National Authorities indicated that over the past four years there were important or at least some significant changes in their countries in terms of increased scope of school autonomy. Furthermore, one in four respondents reported important or at least some significant changes in terms of decentralisation of decision-making powers in school education from central/regional to local authorities (see Annex 1 for more details on survey results).

#### **Box 1. Gradual decentralisation of school education systems**

Following a gradual transformation during the last three decades, decision-making power in school education tended to be devolved in many countries: for instance to geographical regions (as in Spain), or to language communities (as in Belgium). In other countries, it was delegated to elected regional governments or to regional arms of the central ministries (de-concentration) or to both, as in the case of France. In the Nordic countries (Finland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden) decision-making power was devolved to the local and municipality level, thus reducing the administrative functions of both the central government and regional authorities.

Source: prepared by PPMI on the basis of Eurydice, *School Autonomy in Europe. Policies and Measures*, 2007.  
Note: for more details see Annex 3.

#### **Box 2. Widening scope of school autonomy**

In terms of decentralisation at institutional (school) level, country-level analysis of the recent developments in Europe showed that the scope of school autonomy in Europe has been continuing to widen recently. In some countries school autonomy is growing mainly in terms of the management of financial and human resources. In other countries, however, schools also recently increased their pedagogic autonomy, as, for example, in the case of Romania, where, following the adoption of the new Law on National Education of 2011, part of the school curriculum was decentralised.

Source: Government of Romania, *National Reform Programme (2011–2013)*, Bucharest, April 2011.  
Note: for more details on recent trends in school autonomy in Europe see Annex 3.

The results of Comenius Regio projects were relevant and complemented the trends of decentralisation and the consequent growing importance of local actors in European school education. The partnerships **strengthened the links between the local actors** involved in education and encouraged schools to open up to their environment (see section 3.4.1. of this report). Moreover, the available evidence also showed that the Comenius Regio projects were relevant in terms of **encouraging school education policymaking at local level**: the surveys carried out for this study confirmed that in about one third of the cases the results and experiences from the projects were used in assessing new school policy proposals and/or in consulting relevant policy stakeholders at the local level (see Annex 1).

However, the fact that Comenius Regio action was launched and implemented in the context of changing and shifting priorities, rather than in a relatively stable and predictable educational environment created **additional challenges for the partner organisations** and in some cases it prevented the full exploitation of the project results. Nearly one half

of the respondents of the survey of National Agencies and National Authorities indicated that over the past four years their country experienced important or at least some changes to the school education system (see Annex 1). About half of respondents who took part in the survey of participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships identified important constraints that affected the transferability of project results. For example, the further development of practices developed within the project was prevented by implementation of other reforms and initiatives or it did not fit with the prevailing principles and regulations (see Section 3.5.4). One in ten project participants reported that changes in national educational policy had a negative influence on the development of their project (see also Section 3.2.2 and Section 3.6).

### 1.2.3. Contribution of Comenius Region Partnerships to ongoing school education changes

Comenius Regio projects primarily focused on the development of inter-regional partnerships on topics relevant to the local and regional environments of school education in European countries. **The action was not created as a tool to implement school education changes at national level.** However, the evidence gathered for this study shows that the local/regional authorities responsible for coordinating the projects (or sometimes schools or other educational bodies acting on their behalf) in many cases initiated partnerships which ensured the **dissemination of good practices** between partner organisations and relevant stakeholders. The projects can contribute to important changes in the schools and their environment and may also have wider impacts on local and regional levels (see Section 3.4.1 and Section 3.5). By doing so, partnerships can inspire the development of particular initiatives that are relevant to the educational systems and create synergies with other actions and policy initiatives implemented at national, regional or local level (see Sections 3.5 and 3.6).

The evidence gathered showed that **the results of Comenius Regio Partnerships complemented recent policy developments** in European national school education systems in terms of several important aspects, including: strengthening school evaluation and quality assurance in schools, developing innovative teaching and learning practices at international level, improving the development of key competences and teaching practices, as well as providing opportunities to better know and learn from different educational systems.

The analysis revealed high synergies between the Comenius Regio action and the recent developments in **quality assurance of school education**. Since the 1990s, more and more European countries have adopted standardised central-authority based criteria for school evaluation<sup>7</sup>. The survey results and literature review indicated that external and internal school evaluation in Europe was recently strengthened by emphasising its importance and expanding its scope (for more details see Annex 1 and Annex 3). A growing emphasis on school evaluation and quality assurance was also reflected in the Comenius Regio projects. Partnerships provided new opportunities for sharing good practices in school evaluation and quality assurance: topics focusing on the quality and evaluation of education institutions were among the most popular between 2009 and 2010 (see Section 3.1.5 below). More than a quarter of the surveyed representatives of National Agencies and National Authorities indicated that results and experiences of partnerships were used in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of school education policies (see Annex 1).

In terms of specific developments, the country-level analysis of recent trends in the development of school education curricula in Europe indicates a shift of **emphasis towards the development of eight key competences** for lifelong learning of the European Reference Framework of 2006. The country-level analysis showed that a number

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<sup>7</sup> In 2010/11 there were 14 such countries. See: *Key Data on Education in Europe 2012*, Eurydice, 2012.

of countries were re-designing their student examination and assessment systems so as to better assess the ability of pupils to use key competences, such as mother tongue, competence in mathematics and basic competences in science and technology (see Annex 3). A further important development is the **earlier age at which many European pupils start learning foreign languages**. The results of the surveys carried out for this study also confirmed the above-described trends in European school education systems (see Annex 1).

Overall, **Comenius Regio Partnerships were relevant to** the above-mentioned **developments in European school education**. They provided additional opportunities for the countries involved in this action to share good practices on important school education issues addressed in the partnerships. For example, between 2009 and 2010, the second most popular Comenius Regio thematic area was the development of key competences; while one in five projects launched between 2009 and 2010 focused on motivation and achievements of pupils. These projects frequently resulted in more effective pedagogical practices (e.g. more active assessment, feedback-based teaching techniques) and consequently strengthened the teaching of key competences in the curricula of participating schools.

The study also showed that the **synergies** between the Comenius Regio projects and school education priorities and initiatives pursued by responsible national authorities, as well as local and regional authorities with a responsibility for education **could be exploited further**. Projects funded under the Comenius Regio action cover a wide range of different themes. They address a number of educational topics corresponding to school education priorities and initiatives pursued by national authorities, as well as by local and regional authorities. This indicated a good potential for using the results of Comenius Regio projects to inform educational policy developments. Since the Comenius Regio projects primarily address the issues of school education at local level (or in some cases regional level) the project results were not however widely disseminated at national level and national-level stakeholders were not actively engaged in the dissemination activities (see Conclusions and Recommendations).

There was **a rather high degree of synergies and complementarities** between the Comenius Regio projects and recent developments in school education because many Comenius Regio topics corresponded closely to the national and EU level priorities and produced results relevant to the implementation of these priorities in the participating European countries. Although these countries did not treat Comenius Regio Partnerships as an instrument for the implementation of their priorities at national or sub-national levels, these synergies and complementarities were achieved as a result of the specific design of the Comenius Regio action and its implementation modalities (transnational partnerships involving a broad range of actors and coordinated by local/regional authorities). Comenius Regio Partnerships added value to the emergence or development of intra-regional educational networks and collaborations on school policy issues related to both national and EU-level policy priorities.

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter we present an overall framework for analysis (see Section 2.1) and all methods used in the preparation of this study (see Section 2.2).

### 2.1. Framework for analysis

This study focused on the contribution of the Comenius Regio Partnerships to education changes at different levels. In order to assess the link between the action as a cause and its impact, we formulated a theory of change linking the intervention logic of this action with the main contextual and process factors affecting the achievement of its outputs and outcomes.

Any theory of change should include vertical and horizontal logics. In terms of the **vertical logic**, Comenius Regio seeks to contribute to the objectives of the Comenius programme and the Lifelong Learning Programme. Together with other Comenius actions, Comenius Regio Partnerships are expected to bring positive changes to: improving the quality of learning/teaching, better understanding of schools and their social/economic environment, improving future employability of students, the creation of an open learning environment, more attractive learning, improvement of foreign language learning, as well as an increase of mobility and exchange.

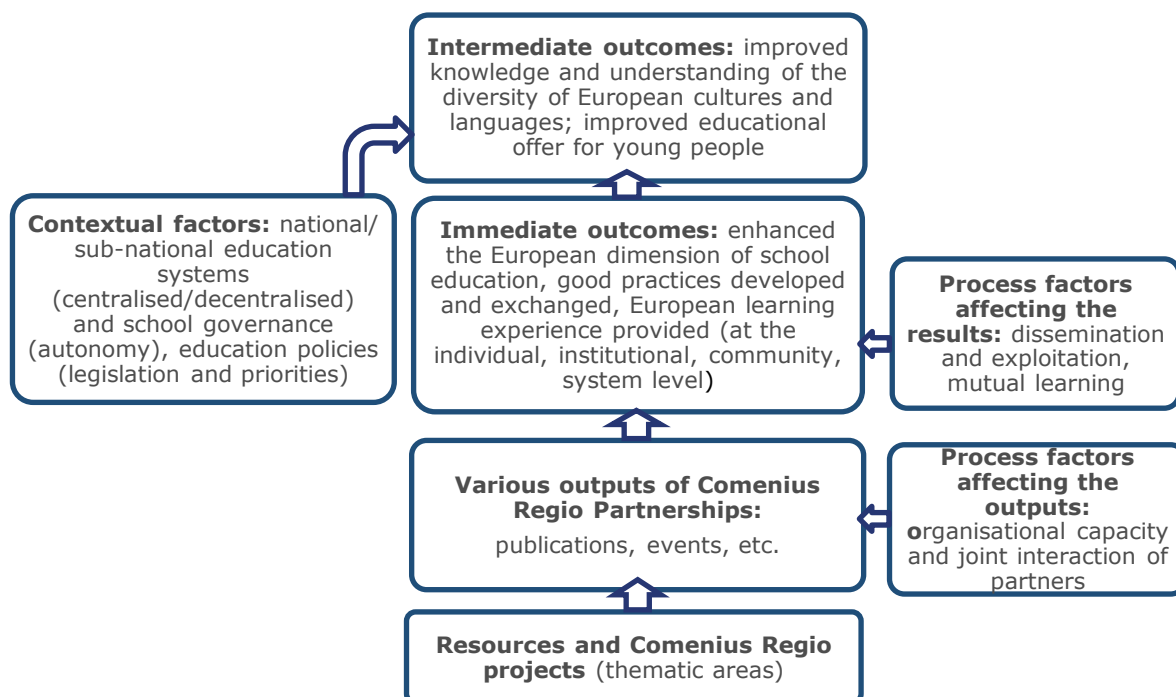
The **main specific objective** of a Comenius Regio action is to enhance the European dimension of education by promoting cooperation activities between local and regional authorities with a role in school education. By supporting bilateral school education partnerships it can contribute to enhancing knowledge and understanding of the diversity of European cultures and languages, as well as improving the educational offer for young people. Through transnational cooperation among the partner regions it can add value to interventions of the participating states and other organisations (complementary to them, coherent with them and exploiting synergies of different interventions).

In addition to the vertical logic, a theory of change includes the **horizontal logic** (pre-conditions and other conditions linked to products and outcomes of the action). Our desk research found that the following three interrelated factors that are external to the programme should be considered in this study: (1) **national/sub-national education systems** (centralised/ decentralised), (2) **school governance** (including autonomy) and (3) **national/sub-national education policies** (legislation and priorities). For instance, more decentralised education systems with higher school autonomy can provide a more favourable setting for not only the participation of responsible local/regional authorities and schools in the action but also for inducing certain changes at the institutional level as a result of the on-going or completed Comenius Regio projects. Also, we identified such important process factors as **dissemination and exploitation**, as well as mutual learning (affecting the programme outcomes) or **organisational capacity** of the project coordinators/partners (in particular their previous cooperation experience and/or partnership development) and the joint interaction of partners (affecting the programme outputs). For instance, the study analysed the dissemination and exploitation of project results, as well as the cooperation of various project partners in order to promote certain school management or policy changes.

The theory of change is summarised in Figure 7. By definition, any logical model is a simplification and aims to reflect only the most important factors and mechanisms. Although various components of the theory of change are presented in a linear way, in

practice these components are usually interdependent and there are some feedback loops among them.

**Figure 7. Theory of change for the impact assessment of Comenius Regio**



Source: PPMI.

Measuring how much an intervention contributed to certain school education changes is quite challenging. *First*, it is important to recognise that successful and lasting education change takes a lot of time and should be school-focused by deeply involving both teachers and learners in understanding and implementing the process of change, as well as to provide an environment that supports and values creative and innovative approaches. For instance, it was argued that improving system performance ultimately comes down to improving the learning experience of students in their classrooms<sup>8</sup>.

*Second*, it should be noted that at the time the Study of the Impact of Comenius Regio was launched the Comenius Regio Partnerships was a relatively new action: there were only four calls made (Call 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012) and only two of them were finalised (Call 2009 and 2010). Therefore, the time frame of the programme was not sufficiently long in order to expect significant system-wide impacts.

*Third*, if determining impacts is usually easier at the project level, it is more difficult to demonstrate clear impacts at the programme level due to multiple other factors and influences. Therefore, inferences about the contribution of certain interventions to these changes at the programme level should be established based on more rigorous approaches and methods. In this study, we employed inferential statistics and the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data from various sources (desk research, surveys, case studies and social network analysis) in order to establish the extent to which the programme contributed to school education changes (see Section 2.2).

<sup>8</sup> Mona Mourshed, Chinezi Chijioke, and Michael Barber, "How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better", The McKinsey Report, November 2010.

## Levels of analysis

The impact of Comenius Regio Partnerships is analysed at several levels (individual, institutional, community/partnership and national/system level), taking into account the interconnectedness of these levels in relation to the educational process (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8. Levels of the impact of the Comenius Regio Partnerships**



Source: PPMI.

The **individual-level impacts** refer to impacts on the professional and personal development of individuals directly involved in the project (see Section 3.3). It would not normally include pupils; although in some partnerships the impact on the primary school children who participated in the projects proved to be highly significant (see Section 3.4).

The **impact at the institutional level** is discussed in three sections. **Local/regional authority level impacts** refer to effects on the work of the authorities in supporting the management of teaching and learning in schools, including curriculum development and professional development of staff (see Section 3.4.2)<sup>9</sup>.

**School level impacts** refer principally to effects on the management of schools directly involved in the project and the implementation of the teaching and learning process within them (see Section 3.4.1). This should be broadly defined, to include not only effects on the attitudes, motivation and achievement of pupils, but also the effects on the relationship of the school with parents and the community it serves. There may well be impacts on other schools not directly involved in the project, which will be referred to in Section 3.5.

**Impacts on third partners** refer to effects on third partner organisations, but it should be remembered that some of them are actually closely allied to the local authorities (see Section 3.4.4)<sup>10</sup>.

**Community level impacts** refer to developments involving the relationships between schools and their immediate community – in which case they are also school-level impacts. They also refer to developments in community education in a broader sense – for instance in youth work, libraries, sports facilities for the community, facilities for older people (see Section 3.5).

## 2.2. Methods

A number of recognised research methods were employed to assess the Comenius Regio action: desk research, case studies, interviews, surveys and social network analysis.

### 2.2.1. Desk research

The Contractor analysed EU and national policy documents on school education relevant to Comenius Regio action, reviewed relevant evaluations, empirical studies, reports and

<sup>9</sup> Sometimes there is a need to distinguish between local authorities with a broader remit, including education, and local authorities with community responsibilities not including education.

<sup>10</sup> In some cases, a 'third partner' actually runs the project for the local authority. For example, Southside Partnership in Case study 4; Centre for Undervisningsmidler in Case study 10.



academic articles (see List of References). In addition, all administrative data from LLPLink on Comenius Regio projects were integrated into a set of databases and these were later used for analysing general statistics on the partnership patterns.

### 2.2.2. Case studies

When selecting 12 good-practice examples for the case studies (see Table 2), the Contractor took into account the recommendations of the National Agencies, paid attention to relevance of the topic, geographical balance of the sample, profile of the partnership, centralisation of the education system and school autonomy. The case study reports were based on the literature review and interviews with project participants. The case study reports can be found at the end of the report<sup>11</sup>.

**Table 2. List of projects selected for the case studies**

Title and project number	Year	R1-R2*	Focus of the project
1. Sand in Taufers Elsendorp Partnership into the Future (2010-1-NL1-COM13-03018)	2010	NL-IT	The importance of school education in creating a tight network between education providers, local entrepreneurs and the community
2. School Horizons for Counseling and Career Guidance (2010-1-GR1-COM13-04000)	2010	EL-CY	Useful advice and training based support – guiding students to choose their future wisely and find the right path to develop professionally
3. Classroom Leadership in Real Life (2010-1-SE1-COM13-04704)	2010	SE-GB	Learning through leading – how entrepreneurial education enables higher engagement, responsibility taking and interactivity in the learning process
4. The Rainbow Project: Restorative Practices in Ireland and Norfolk – Bettering our Work (2010-1-GB1-COM13-06091)	2010	GB-IE	Implementation of Restorative Practices, based on mutual respect and negotiated solutions to problems, across the range of local authority services to the community
5. Libraries without borders (2010-1-ES1-COM13-20646)	2010	ES-PT	Using school libraries as active information hubs to facilitate more efficient learning and teaching
6. Improving Engagement and Learning Capacity for Disaffected Pupils (2009-1-GB1-COM13-03670)	2009	UK-DK	Getting back to nature – creative ways to enhance the potential of pupils and help them to solve learning difficulties
7. Active learning about the Development of Biodiversity in Cities (2010-1-FR1-COM13-14580)	2010	FR-DE	Tackling common education problems through lenses of biodiversity – how taking pupils outside the classroom helps to keep them in school
8. EU-EMSET Excellence in Maths and Natural sciences (2009-1-SE1-COM13-01497)	2009	SE-GB	Mathematics in the forest – proving how innovative approaches to teaching scientific disciplines can boost their attractiveness and help students to achieve higher results
9. Pathway to Success (2009-1-CZ1-COM13-01936)	2009	CZ-SK	Unlocking the potential of gifted children: openness and integration in the classroom, meeting high commitment of education authorities
10. Implementation of Interactive Whiteboards in Schools (2010-1-DK1-COM13-01895)	2010	DK-SE	New interactive technologies in the classroom – a way to increase engagement of children, competences of teachers and overall interactivity of the learning process

<sup>11</sup> In order to ensure the confidentiality of the interviewees and avoid pointing out to the specific partner organisations for shortcomings on the request of the European Commission the specific negative examples were not included in the case study reports and were not used as illustrations in the main report. The findings about the shortcomings and areas of improvement are presented in the main report in a synthesized way.

Title and project number	Year	R1-R2*	Focus of the project
11. Educational Systems in Poland and Austria in the Professional Aspect and the Labour Market (2009-1-PL1-COM13-05422)	2009	PL-AT	New perspectives to vocational education – hands-on training to increase the attractiveness of working life
12. Support from Schools for Heavily Handicapped Young People in the Phase of Preparation for Adult Life (2009-1-DE3-COM13-05763)	2009	DE-CZ	Providing assistance for heavily handicapped pupils: the importance of ongoing conversation, commitment and spreading of inspiring ideas

Source: PPMI.

Note: R1 stands for Region 1, R2 stands for Region 2.

### 2.2.3. Interviews

The Contractor carried out 85 interviews with the project participants September–November 2013<sup>12</sup>. The interviews were semi-structured and adapted to a specific target group (see questionnaires in Annex 2).

In addition, the Contractor carried out 6 interviews with relevant stakeholders at the EU level, working in various associations of local and regional authorities such as Committee of Regions, Assembly of European Regions, Council of European Regions and Municipalities, Eurocities, European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning and Nordic Council. The interviews were semi-structured, adapted to a specific target group, and were carried out in April and May 2014<sup>13</sup>.

### 2.2.4. Surveys

The Contractor carried out two surveys: a survey of the participants and a survey of the relevant stakeholders. The questionnaires of both surveys are available in Annex 1.

**The survey of the participants of the Comenius Regio action** targeted local and regional authorities, schools and third partners. The survey was completed by 460 respondents (31.34%) from 207 Comenius Regio projects (i.e. 84% of the projects funded under Call 2009 and 2010). Over 44% of all local/regional authorities involved in the projects took part in the survey.

**The survey of the relevant stakeholders** targeted two distinct groups of respondents: the Comenius Regio coordinators at the National Agencies responsible for management of the action, and national policymakers which took part in the Lifelong Learning Programme Committee 2007-2013. The survey was completed by 31 individuals.

The statistical analysis of the survey results and administrative data was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The Contractor used methods of descriptive statistics (frequencies, contingency tables, etc.) and inferential statistics<sup>14</sup>. Data processing required recoding certain variables in order to better understand and present the underlying trends in the distribution of values and to create more comparable groups for overall analysis.

<sup>12</sup> Generally, the interviews were carried out face-to-face (Region 1), via Skype or phone (Region 2).

<sup>13</sup> The interviews with the stakeholders were carried out via Skype or phone.

<sup>14</sup> All results of inferential statistics are used with the boundaries of statistical significance, where  $p \leq .05$  is chosen as a typical lowest alpha level used by researchers to assess that the null hypothesis is less than 5% probable and, therefore, can be rejected.



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### 2.2.5. Social network analysis

The Contractor carried out social network analysis of the organisations which participated in the Comenius Regio Partnerships under the first four Calls (2009-2012), in order to disclose partnership patterns. The data containing the full list of projects and participant organisations was processed by the software of social network analysis (UCINET and GraphInsight). As a result, a single Comenius Regio Partnerships network was produced, reflecting the ties of each of the participant organisations with the remaining participants. The appropriate measures and analytic instruments were used for the analysis and a number of different hypotheses about the patterns of network interaction were tested (see Annex 4 for more details about the method and results of social network analysis).

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## 3. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

### 3.1. Design and execution of Comenius Regio Partnerships

Comenius Regio Partnerships played **an innovative role in terms of bringing together different organisations** – educational policymakers, administrators, inspectors and advisors at the local/regional level, local community partners and schools – from two European regions. In order to better understand the overall interaction between the different partners and their contribution to the partnership, it is important to analyse the main motivation factors, previous experience of partner organisations, their linguistic and cultural proximity, establishment and stability of the partnerships, main activities and dissemination measures (see Sections 3.1.1-3.1.5 respectively).

#### 3.1.1. Motivating factors

The project participants interviewed for this study and the participants of the survey programme indicated several distinct reasons that encouraged them to take part in the Comenius Regio Partnerships. Most often they mentioned their intention to:

- **improve the educational process** in innovative ways and in particular through new approaches to teaching and learning;
- **exchange examples of good practice** with partners from other European countries and develop international collaboration between different educational cultures;
- increase and/or further **develop cooperation between different actors** in the education field;
- **enhance the training of teachers/local authority staff** and their assessment policies.

Every partnership also had **specific objectives** relating to its goals. Some of these were subject or discipline related such as to raise the motivation of students in science, maths and environmental education. Other objectives addressed broader issues, for instance tackling student disaffection and educational failure, or supporting schools in better preparing students to enter the world of work and participate more fully in the local community.

#### 3.1.2. Previous experience of local and international collaboration

The existence of previous cooperation experience between local or international partners proved to be an additional factor facilitating the establishment of the Comenius Regio Partnerships. The survey results revealed that:

- Almost 80% of all respondents of the participants' survey had extensive previous collaboration experience with **schools**, 69% with **local or regional authorities** and 53% with **third partners** in the education field **in their own region**.
- However, the level of experience of working with international partners varied considerably and for a large number of participant organisations (especially for local/regional authorities and third partners) Comenius Regio was their first experience of **international cooperation** in the school education field: 46% of respondents of the participants' survey indicated having such collaboration experience with schools, 34% with local authorities and 25% with third partners<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> The schools were the exception to this rule, since a number of other Comenius actions and Comenius School Partnerships in particular were available platforms for transnational cooperation for schools.

- Regarding the experience of participation in the **specific European programmes and actions**, the survey respondents stated that they had been involved in other sub-programmes of the Lifelong Learning Programme in the past or were involved at the time the survey was carried out. More than one third (35%) of them had experience of Comenius School Multilateral or Bilateral Partnerships. One in five representatives of the partner organisations reported previous or current involvement in eTwinning (23%) or Comenius in-service training of staff grants (22%).
- A significant share of the respondents indicated that they were involved in **other school education initiatives** involving foreign partner organisations (28%) or national/regional initiatives (19%).
- Only 7% said that they **have never been involved** in any other actions or programmes either at European or national level.

### 3.1.3. Linguistic proximity of partner regions and proficiency in common language

The social network analysis showed that the linguistic/cultural proximity of partner regions was an important factor influencing the choice of partner organisations. Strong *homophily*<sup>16</sup> patterns were found in the **German-speaking, Greek-speaking and Romanic**-country groups, whereas somewhat moderate *homophily* patterns were found in the **Nordic** and **Visegrad**-country groups. For instance, the probability of cooperation within the German-speaking group was 5.6 times higher than the probability of cooperation between a German-speaking and a non-German-speaking organisation (for full results of social network analysis see Annex 4). This general tendency indicates that the specific country groups from more diverse partnerships in terms of linguistic proximity than others.

The case studies also showed that the proficiency in language used as common language in the partnership is an important factor which can facilitate the establishment of the partnership. For example, in Case study 11 German language teacher from Poland was the main contact person and played a very important role: her linguistic competences were particularly helpful while establishing the partnership with Austrian partners and preparing the application in German.

### 3.1.4. Establishment and stability of the partnership

In order to apply for the Comenius Regio action, the leading partner organisation had to build a network of partners in two regions. Further analysis of the survey results and administrative data showed that partnerships varied widely in **number** and **type of partner organisations**, as well as in terms of **initiative**:

- More than one third of all **partnerships** funded under Call 2009 and 2010 **were created** by local or regional authorities, while 23% of the projects were initiated by schools and 21% by other educational actors respectively<sup>17</sup>.
- Overall, the action managed to gather sufficient number of different partners and create partnerships involving local/regional authorities, schools and third partners. The partnership size varied from 6 partners (officially required minimum) to 27 partners<sup>18</sup>. Table 3 shows that number of partners involved in the partnership was often bigger than the requested minimum and it was over the double in the last few years. It also shows that the **average size** of partnerships did not alter significantly from 2009 to 2013 (see Table 3 below).

<sup>16</sup> In the social network analysis theory network homophily is defined as the tendency of network actors to associate and cooperate with similar others, i.e. with network actors that have similar characteristics.

<sup>17</sup> The respondents were able to identify whether their organisation had already participated in activities related to the project topic(s) with international partners (selected by 8% of all participants), local community (4%); or whether they wanted to participate in Comenius Regio and approached the National Agency (5%).

<sup>18</sup> There were two projects which involved 27 partners: one was funded under Call 2009 (2009-1-DK1-COM13-00763) and one under Call 2011 (2011-1-IT2-COM13-25816).

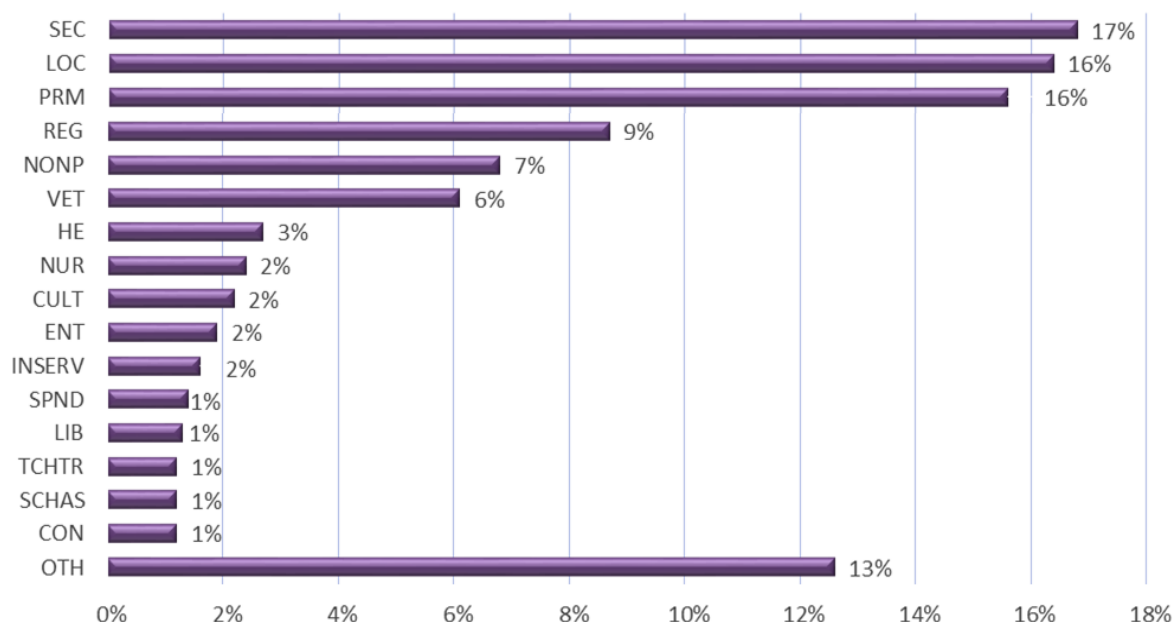
**Table 3. Number of partners by years and by type of partner organisation**

	Average number of partners per project	Average number of partner organisation by type		
		Local/regional authorities	Schools	Third partners
Call 2009	10.48	2.76	4.05	3.66
Call 2010	10.35	2.23	4	5
Call 2011	11.4	2.35	3.1	4.54
Call 2012	12.4	4.02	4.57	4.24
Call 2013	12.48	3.01	4.57	4.32

Source: data provided by the European Commission.

- Local authorities, secondary and primary schools were the **most frequent participants**<sup>19</sup>. Regional authorities, educational support organisations and non-profit organisations as well as vocational schools and training centres were also often involved in the projects (see Figure 9).
- In terms of **coordinating partners**, local authorities were involved twice as frequently as regional authorities (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9. Frequency of participation by types of organisations/institutions (%)**



SEC	General secondary school
LOC	Public authority (local)
PRM	Primary school
REG	Public authority (regional)
NONP	NGOs, non-profit associations
VET	Vocational or technical secondary school
HE	Higher education institutions
NUR	Pre-primary school
CULT	Museums or other cultural organisations
ENT	Private companies
INSERV	Institutions for in-service teacher training, trainees associations
SPND	Establishment for learners/pupils with special needs
LIB	Libraries
TCHAS	Teacher associations
SCHAS	School associations
CON	Counselling, consultancy or body providing guidance and information on Lifelong Learning
OTH	Other

Source: created by PPMI on the basis of the LLPLink data.

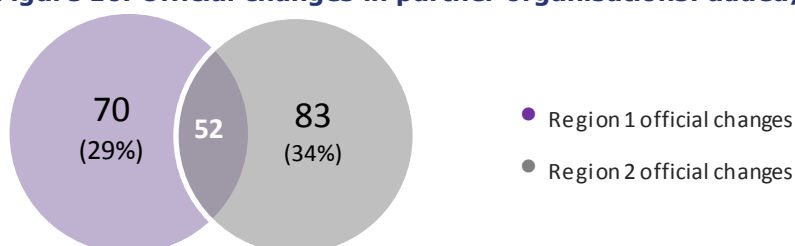
<sup>19</sup> Includes data on projects launched between 2009 and 2013.

Note: Individual participation rates of the types of organisations and institutions included in the category of "Other" were less than 1%. Category "Other" include the following types of participants: public authority (national), local community associations, parents' associations, pupils' associations, students' associations, national youth councils, research centres, foundations, hospitals, public companies or other type of public organisation, professional associations, trade unions, adult education providers, institution for secondary art education and for initial teacher training, etc.

The analysis also showed that there were **changes in terms of the composition of participating organisations** during the implementation of projects funded under Call 2009 and 2010 (see Figure 10 below). Overall, 153 coordinating organisations reported official changes (additions and withdrawals, including changes of legal representative or changes of partners) in their partnership structure. In addition, 356 coordinating institutions from both regions stated in the final reports that their project included non-official partners in the region. It can be regarded as a positive finding in the sense that there were more participants than the official ones and a number of other organisations were involved on a voluntary basis (not being paid by the project budget).

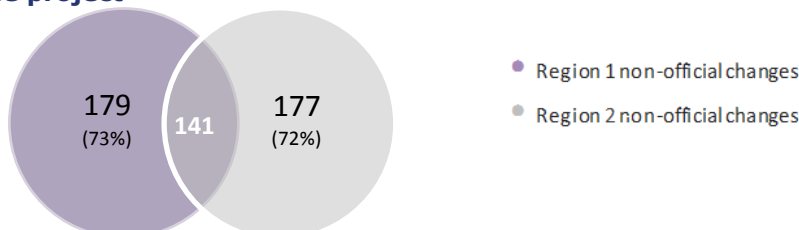
In total, 38 projects underwent both types of changes in both participating regions. Analysis of the project final reports showed that these changes were often related to enlargement of the partnerships (including both official and non-official partners). It also indicated that among the other reasons for changes in the partnership structure, the project coordinators also mentioned withdrawals caused by change of staff in partner organisations, reorganisation and dissolution of the partner organisations/institutions, etc.

**Figure 10. Official changes in partner organisations: added/withdrawn organisations**



Source: analysis of the administrative data, PPMI.

**Figure 11. Non-official changes in partner organisations: unofficial partners taking part in the project**



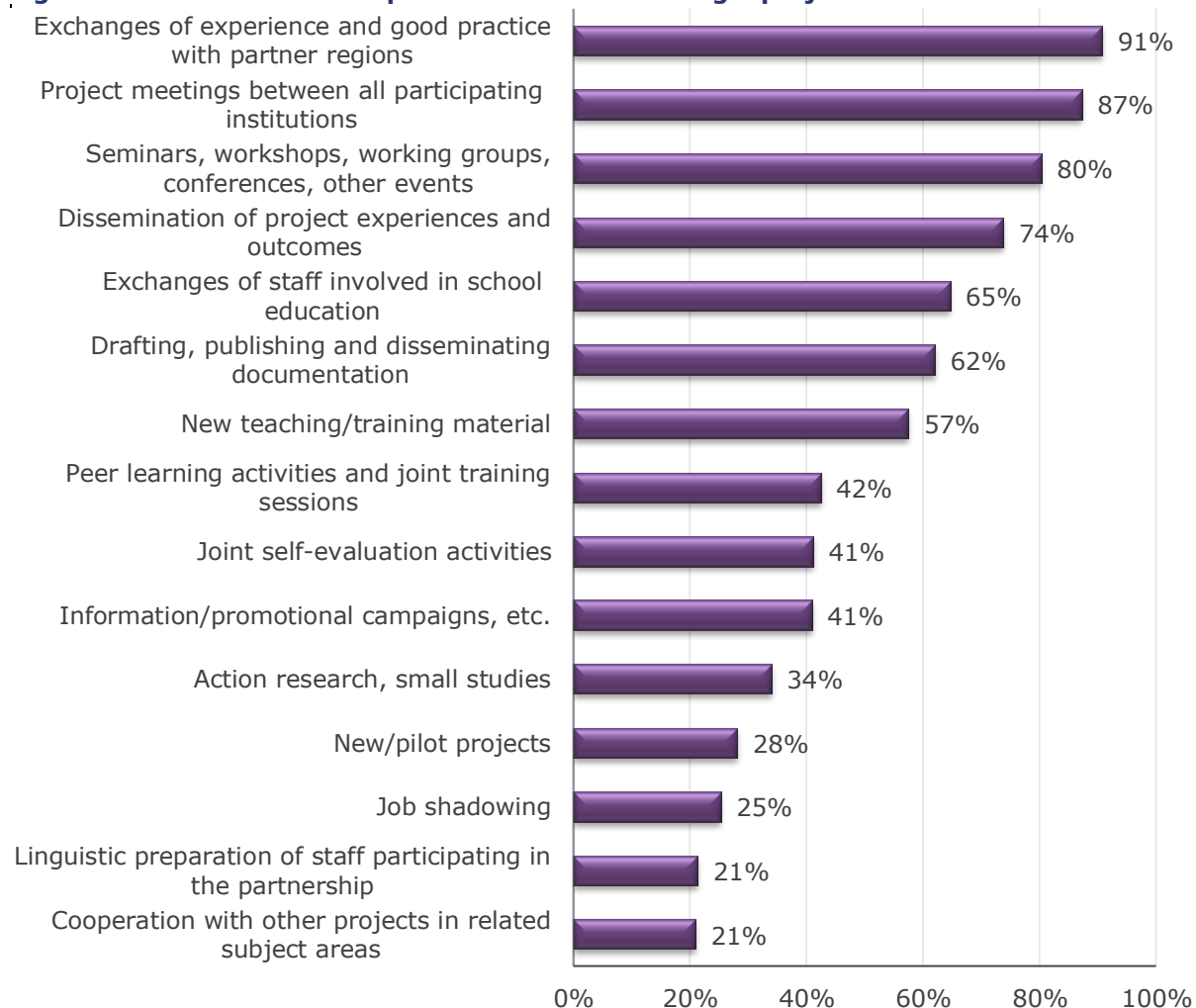
Source: analysis of the administrative data, PPMI.

Note: in both figures above the overlapping parts of the circles show the number of partnerships where changes in the partner organisations happened simultaneously in Region 1 and Region 2. Percentages are counted based on the overall number of projects funded under Calls 2009 and 2010 (N=245). Missing values: 27 projects from Region 1 (11,02%) and 26 projects from Region 2 (10,61%).

### 3.1.5. Main activities and dissemination measures

The diversity of project designs can be further analysed by looking at the activities carried out by partner organisations to achieve their goals. Exchange of good practices between partner regions (selected by 91% of survey participants) and project meetings involving all participating institutions (87%) were the most popular activities. A similar share of respondents (80%) indicated that their projects also used some form of training: seminars, workshops, working groups, etc. (see Figure 12).

**Figure 12. Activities and outputs of the Comenius Regio projects**

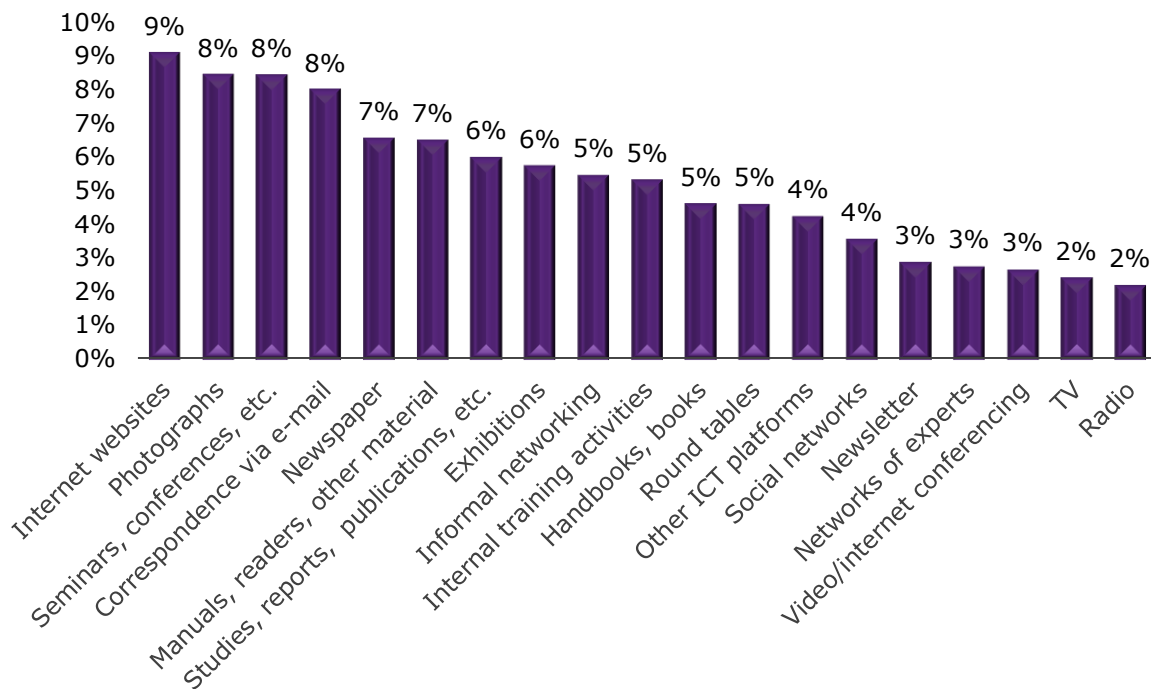


Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

Note: values in the graph indicate the actual number of respondents who selected a certain activity.

Most of the partner organisations also paid attention to the **dissemination activities**: they shared the project results using internet websites, photographs, correspondence via e-mail, seminars, conferences, workshops and other events (see Figure 13). Moreover, half of the project coordinators interviewed for the case studies stated that they also published results in studies, reports or books, detailing their experience (Case study 9, 1, 2, 3, 12, 5) and released a CD for teachers (Case study 9).

**Figure 13. Dissemination tools used in the Comenius Regio projects**

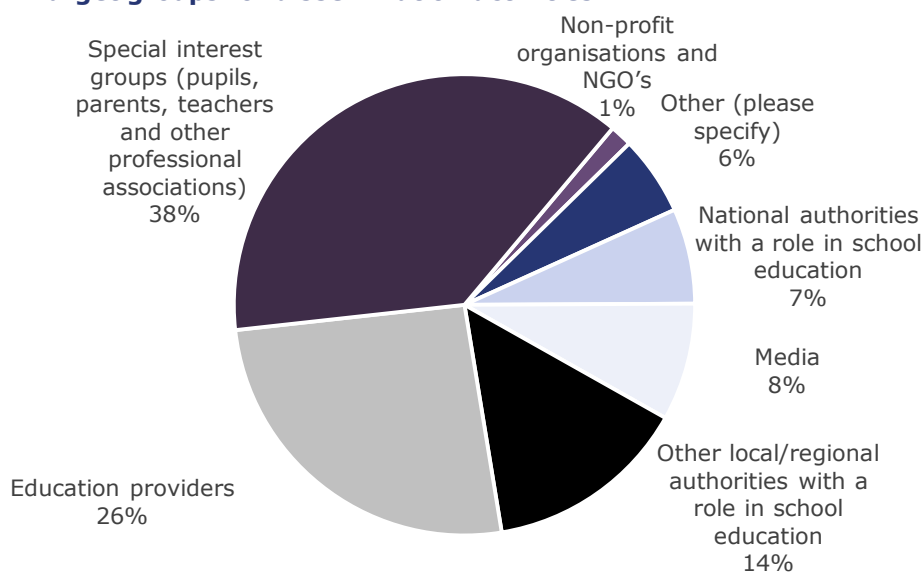


Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

Note: values in the figure indicate the actual number of respondents who selected a certain dissemination tool.

The project results were mainly **disseminated at the local/regional level**: more than one third of the partnerships (38%) focused on spreading the information for a particular interest group, possibly associated with the specific topic of their project; a large share of respondents perceived education providers (26%) and local/regional authorities (14%) as main target groups when it comes to dissemination activities (see Figure 14). Although the nature of the action is local/regional (with a transnational dimension), 8% of partnerships aimed at informing media and 7% targeted national authorities. This indicates that in these specific cases the project results potentially became known to the wider contexts (see Figure 14 below).

**Figure 14. Target groups for dissemination activities**



Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.



### Box 3. Dissemination of the project results: example from Case study 9

**Case study 3:** Local authorities from other municipalities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as policymakers and educators at national level were informed about the project at the final conference, which was considered as very successful in disseminating the project's results. Main dissemination tools, such as a publication on "Exceptionally intellectually gifted child", final conference proceedings and a CD for teachers are still available for interested teachers, child specialists and professional staff both in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. An information leaflet for parents has been distributed to kindergartens in both participating towns. The leaflet is displayed in a public space in the kindergartens to allow easy access for all parents.

Source: case study reports accompanying the Study of the impact of Comenius Regio, PPMI.

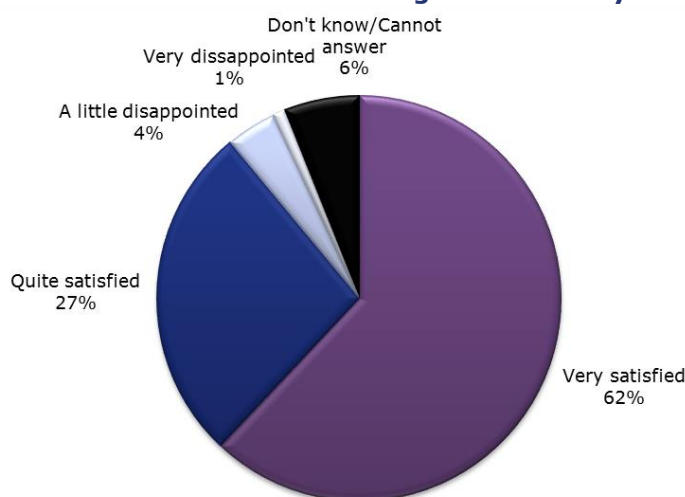
Note: for more information see Table 2 and Case study 9.

Concerning **dissemination of the project results to the wider public, the National Agencies played an important role.** The majority of the representatives of the National Agencies who took part in the survey, indicated that project results were presented in seminars, conferences, workshops and other events (20 out of 26)<sup>20</sup>, internet websites (19), correspondence via e-mail (18) and informal networking (16). Moreover, several respondents suggested organising more local conferences or information seminars in order to effectively promote the action and attract local/regional authorities to inter-regional partnerships.

### 3.2. Overall assessment of the partnerships by project participants and relevant stakeholders

The respondents of the participants' survey considered the overall experience of the partnership as very satisfactory (see Figure 15). More than a half of them were very satisfied with Comenius Regio and only 5% indicated some level of disappointment with the action. No significant differences were detected between the different types of partner organisations.

**Figure 15. Satisfaction with Comenius Regio indicated by the participants**



Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

The survey results also showed how project participants assessed the involvement of each type of partner organisation: 64% of local authorities and third partners were particularly satisfied with the involvement of partner schools; while 53% and 50% of respondents highly evaluated the involvement of the local/regional authorities and third partners respectively. Moreover, the project participants appreciated the assistance from the National Agency during the project implementation: 83% of the respondents were satisfied

<sup>20</sup> There are 33 National Agencies in total, 26 out of them answered the survey questionnaire.

with the support and guidance they received. This evidence proves that support provided by National Agencies was very important for the successful implementation of Comenius Regio projects.

### 3.2.1. Assessment of the development of the project

Overall the participants were satisfied with the way their project was developed. More than half of participants considered that during the project the exchange of information between the partners was effective, the activities were well planned (see Figure 16). Survey respondents also positively evaluated problem solving and decision-making in the partnership. All these elements were seen as essential for a successful project implementation.

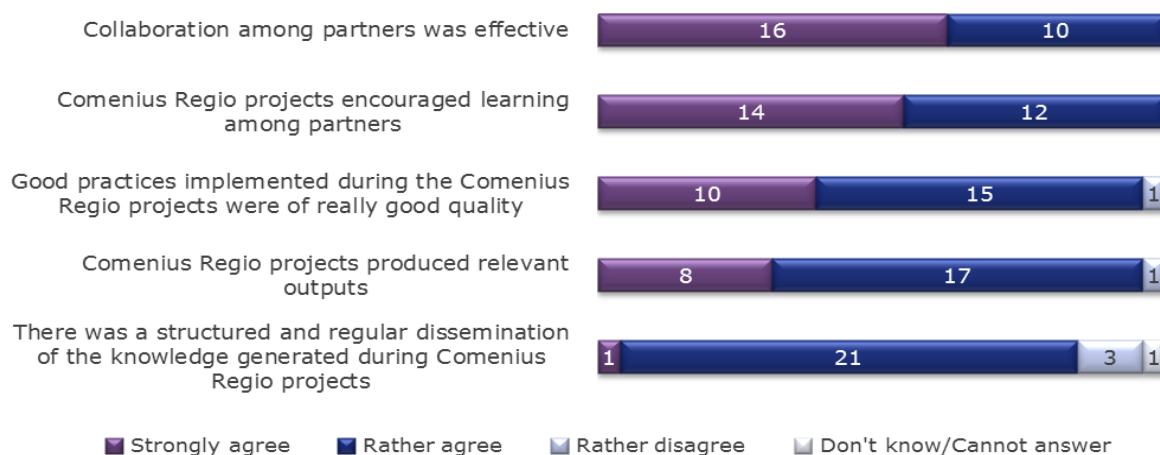
**Figure 16. Assessment of the communication and coordination activities in the partnership (according to project participants)**



Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

These results can be supported and complemented by the findings from the survey of the National Agencies and National Authorities. Collaboration and incentives for learning brought about by the Comenius Regio project and the quality of the practices implemented and outputs produced were evaluated positively (see Figure 17).

**Figure 17. Assessment of the activities and outputs of the partnerships (according to the representatives of the National Agencies) (N=26)**



Source: survey of the National Agencies and National Authorities, PPMI.

Note: responses to the survey were submitted from 26 out of 33 National Agencies, corresponding to a 79% total participation rate.

The survey respondents also suggested that the information about the good practices developed by partner organisations mainly reached the stakeholders at the local/regional level (see Section 3.1.6).

### 3.2.2. Assessment of the involvement of different partners

The results of the social network analysis (including the Calls 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012) demonstrated that the **local/regional authorities** were the **most active** in terms of participating in multiple projects and developing links with multiple partners. The analysis of basic Comenius Regio network characteristics revealed that among the 239 organisations that participated in Comenius Regio partnerships more than once (i.e. took part in projects funded under two, three or all four calls), local/regional authorities accounted for almost half of them (46%). Moreover, the local/regional authorities outnumbered by far other types of organisations among the top central organisations in the Comenius Regio network 2009-2012 in terms of the overall number of cooperation links developed (see Annex 4 for more details).

The **active involvement of the local and regional authorities** was further confirmed by the data gathered during the participants' survey: a majority of the survey respondents (89%) agreed that a local/regional authority was at the core of their partnership, liaising with all project partner organisations. Overall, 20 out of 26 representatives of the National Agencies that participated in the survey agreed with this statement: 5 of 26 representatives strongly agreed with this statement and 15 of 26 choose the answer option "rather agree" (see Figure 18). Some of the National Agencies commented on their responses and noted that local and regional authorities did not always cooperate as they were expected to and that the role of local, regional authorities needed to be specified better<sup>21</sup>. Moreover, the evidence gathered during the case study interviews also showed that schools often – of necessity – played a very significant role, sometimes even the role of a *de facto* leading organisation: the local authority in some cases delegated responsibility for day-to-day management of the project to staff in schools, or other educational support organisations. This might suggest that in the case of many projects, individual schools actually played a leading role, even if the local authority provided overall coordination. In other cases, head teachers or teachers (who were after all normally the employees of the local authority) managed the project on behalf the local authority.

"According to the findings of social network analysis the local and regional authorities were the most active participants in terms of participating in multiple projects and developing links with multiple partners"

17 out of 26 respondents agreed with this statement.

The study shows that **a core-role attributed to the local and regional authorities while designing Comenius Regio action does not mean that schools or third partners were marginalised and detached from the project activities**. The results point to a significant involvement of all three types of partners: around 48% of respondents strongly supported the statement that all partners were equally involved in the partnership and additional 37% agreed with this statement. The data from the survey of National Agencies and National Authorities complements these findings: the majority of the representatives of the National Agencies considered that **all partners were equally involved** in the projects:

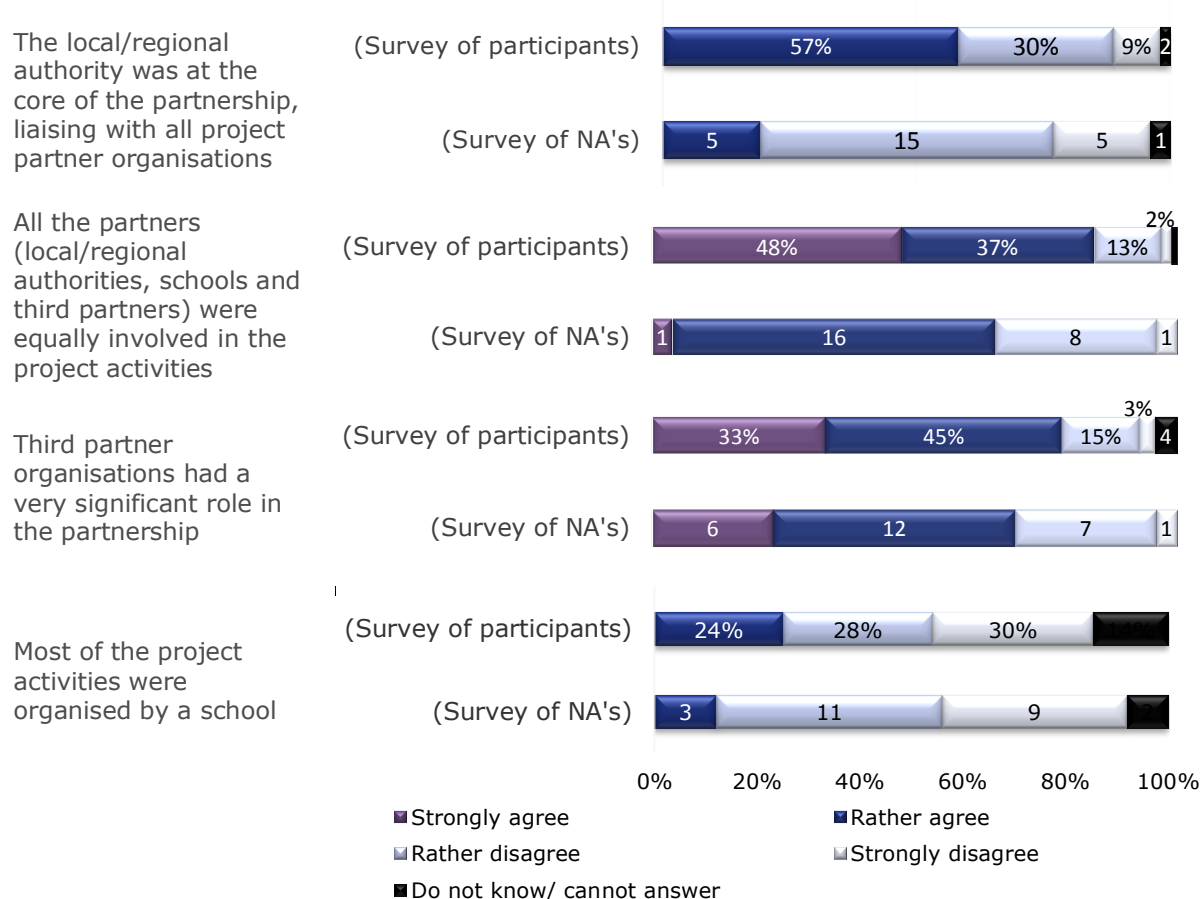
<sup>21</sup> In the words of the respondents: "they could act as leaders in this area especially by helping schools to begin the process"; "their role needs to be specified at the application stage. Financial and procedural burdens can be decreased to make more room to focus on quality of projects".

Furthermore, in many cases schools and other partners were particularly active. According to the evidence from the participants' survey, 53% of respondents agreed that most of the project activities were organised by a school, but the perception of the level of the involvement of schools varied: the statement about the dominating role of schools was supported and rejected by a similar number of participants (respectively 52% and 44%), showing that there is clearly considerable variation in the role of schools in Comenius Regio Partnerships.

"The majority of the representatives of the National Agencies considered that all partners were equally involved in the projects"

The level of the involvement of the third partners in the project activities was also assessed by both project participants and National Agencies: 34% of project participants that took part in the survey strongly agreed and 45% rather agreed with the statement that third partner organisations had a very important role; and 18 out of 26 representatives of the National Agencies "strongly" or "rather" agreed with this statement (see Figure 18 below).

**Figure 18. Assessment of partners' involvement in the partnership activities (according to participants and the representatives of the National Agencies)**



Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships and survey of the National Agencies and National Authorities, PPMI.

Note: responses to the survey were submitted from 26 out of 33 National Agencies, corresponding to a 79% total participation rate. Abbreviations: NA – National Agency.

### 3.2.3. Obstacles and success factors of the partnerships

The involvement of local and regional authorities in the partnerships as project coordinators was considered an important factor by project participants, representatives of

the National Agencies and the relevant European stakeholders. A significant number of them regarded local/regional authority's involvement as project coordinators as one of the key features contributing to project success together with involvement of third partners (see Figure 19). The bilateral nature of the partnerships also received generally positive reviews.

**Figure 19. Features of Comenius Regio projects which contribute to the success of projects (according to the representatives of the National Agencies)**



Source: survey of the National Agencies and National Authorities, PPMI.

Note: responses to the survey were submitted from 26 out of 33 National Agencies, corresponding to 79% total participation rate.

Project participants expressed their satisfaction with the suitable design of the partnerships, which – at least in some cases – allowed the schools and third partners to focus on the project content while leaving administrative work for the local authorities (see Box 4).

#### Box 4. Appreciation of the project design by partner organisations

**Case study 5:** In the project “Libraries without borders” the importance of support and involvement of the local/regional authorities in the project was clearly understood and it has contributed to closer cooperation between different schools, in Extremadura and Alentejo.

**Case study 7:** The leadership of Epinay-sur-Seine Local authority was regarded as a key element for the success of the whole project: *They put great energy, determination and human means to achieve the project goals and to create a wide network of partners and a sustainable partnership. Their dynamic involvement generated enthusiasm among all the official partners and led other local or regional organisations to integrate the project into their work.*

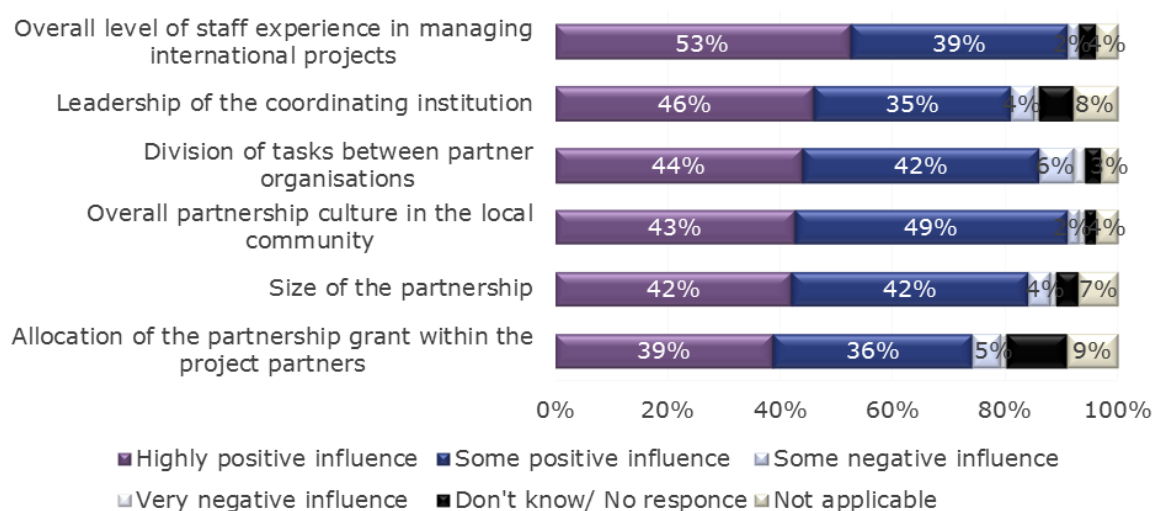
Source: case study reports accompanying the Study of the impact of Comenius Regio, PPMI.

Note: for more information see Table 2, Case study 7 and Case study 5.

However, it is by no means the only important factor for the success of the inter-regional partnerships. The study revealed a **number of other factors** which had a **positive or negative influence** on the development of Comenius Regio Partnerships.

According to the results of the participants’ survey, such factors as the level of **experience in managing international projects** (assessed as highly positive by 53% of respondents), **good leadership** of the coordinating institution (46%), **division of tasks** between partner organisations (44%) and overall **partnership culture** in the community (43%) had a positive influence on the development of the Comenius Regio projects (see Figure 20).

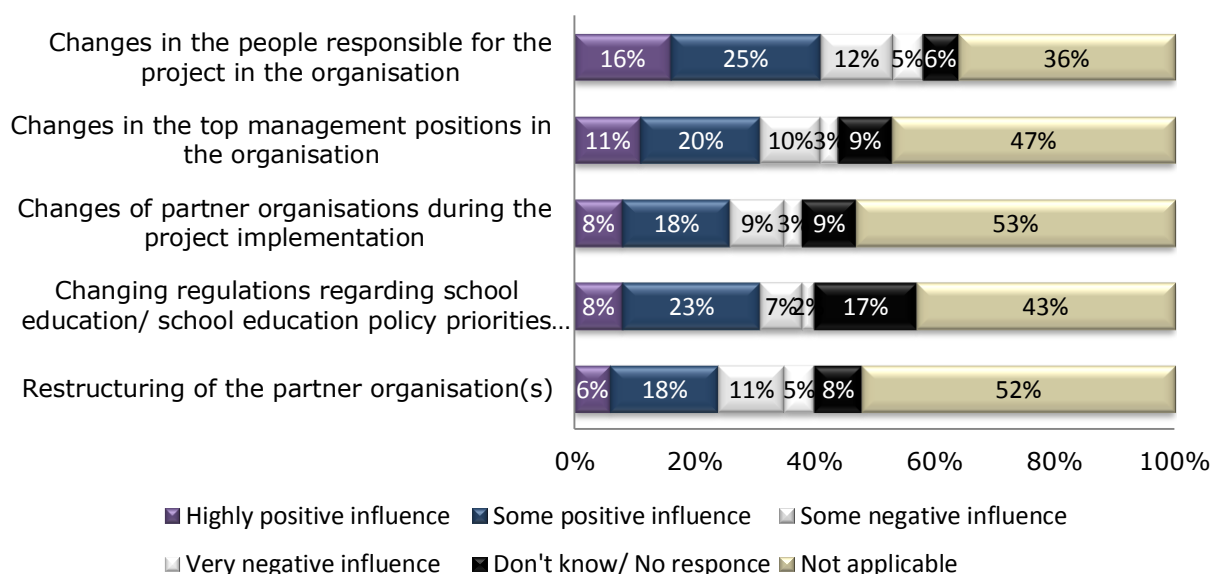
**Figure 20. Factors that had mainly positive influence on the partnership experience (according to the project participants)**



Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

Various changes in both participating organisations and the partnership structure in general, and in national education policy were evaluated as **having both positive and negative influence on project implementation**. For example, 26% of respondents reported that projects were positively influenced by **changes of partner organisations** and 12% of them considered that it had a negative influence. Similarly, 24% respondents reported that projects were positively influenced by **restructuring of the partner organisations** and 16% considered that it had a negative influence (see Figure 20)<sup>22</sup>. It should be noted, however, that a large share of respondents did not respond to the question or considered that these factors were not relevant in their partnerships.

**Figure 21. Factors that had both positive and negative influence on the partnership experience (according to the project participants)**



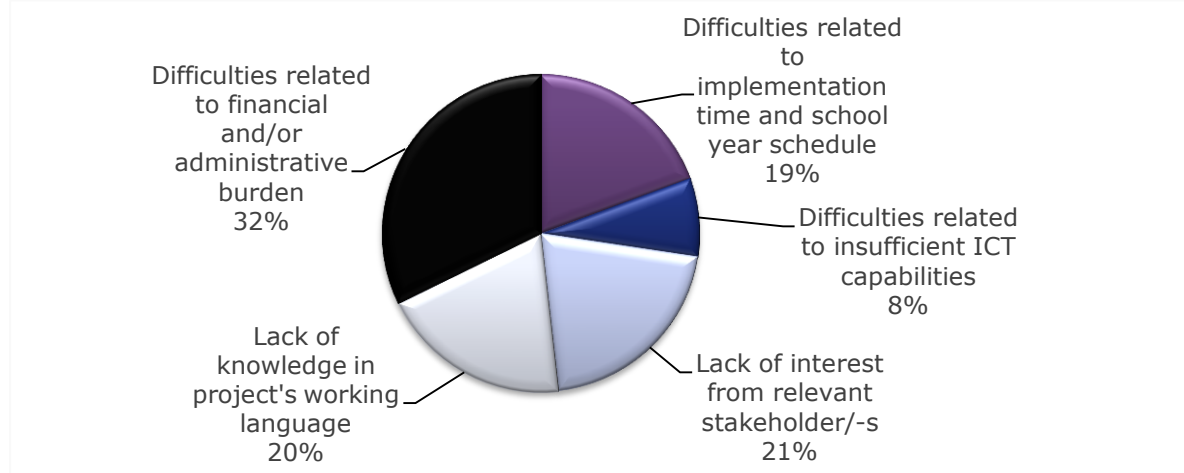
Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

<sup>22</sup> See also Section 3.1 on the changes, reported in the project final reports.



The project participants acknowledged that they also experienced some difficulties related to the project implementation. The majority of these obstacles proved to be associated with financial and/or administrative burden (32%), around 20% of them were caused by a lack of interest from relevant stakeholders, language barrier or timing issues (see Figure 22 below). A small number of organisations also had to deal with insufficient ICT capabilities (8%). A more in-depth analysis of the positive and negative factors of the Comenius Regio projects is presented in Sections 3.3-3.6 of this Report.

**Figure 22. Difficulties that influenced the implementation of the Comenius Regio projects**



Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

Note: the categories in the graph are created based on respondents' answers to the question on the difficulties, which influenced the implementation of the Comenius Regio projects; the thematically similar categories are aggregated (e.g. lack of experience working with ICT and insufficient ICT equipment counted under difficulties related to insufficient ICT capabilities).

### 3.3. Impact at individual level

This section focuses on the impact and benefits of Comenius Regio on the different types of individual participants, e.g. staff members of local/regional authorities, teachers and/or other members of school administrative staff and members of third partner organisations, who were directly involved in the partnerships.

Analysis of the results of the participants' survey showed that more than half of the individual participants assessed Comenius Regio as highly influential in affecting the following changes:

- encouraging involvement in international collaboration in the future (65%);
- improving experiences of other cultures (57%);
- establishing long-lasting personal contacts (54%);
- widening experience and knowledge about educational issues at international level (53%);
- improving professional competences (53%).

Changes in the perceptions of individuals towards **cultural diversity** and **new incentives** to collaborate with educational partners were repeatedly mentioned by the participants of the survey and should be indicated as the areas of strongest influence. In addition, the benefits at individual level were also strongly associated with increased individual motivation for **further professional development and improvement of competences** through the process of learning from colleagues. In the words of one participant interviewed during the case studies: *"working with European partners was like an injection of motivation"*. Moreover, the survey data strongly indicated that Comenius Regio also created benefits in the area of **personal growth of individuals**: more than 76% of the respondents felt influence in terms of improvement of social skills.



### Box 5. Appreciation of the relationships developed by project participants

It could also be seen from the case studies that some of these partnerships managed to establish “close relationships between project participants” (even referred to as “new friendships” by one of the interviewees) that allowed them to become much more open in communication between different educational partners.

Other individual examples from case studies also indicate that the “main strength of the project has been people meeting people” and “the opportunity for participants to come closer to people from another culture and opening their eyes to the benefits of cooperation and development on a transnational and European level”. Such influences of the Comenius Regio projects in some cases extended beyond the level of individuals directly involved in projects and attracted other participants to join in during the course of the project because it “stimulated [their] curiosity and interest” in new kinds of approaches.

Source: case study reports accompanying the Study of the impact of Comenius Regio, PPMI.

These personal experiences can be divided into two separate groups of changes: **changes occurring at “purely individual level”**<sup>23</sup> (e.g. language, ICT competences, etc.) and **changes “outreaching individual level”**<sup>24</sup> and therefore having the potential to affect organisations (i.e. to change working practices at the participating organisations through individually improved managerial skills, extended collaboration networks, etc.). Although the content and the exact potential of the outreaching individual competences might still be a debatable issue, the collected data indicates that the Comenius Regio action affects not only the participating individuals directly, but also can be oriented towards changes at the partner institutions and their broader environment<sup>25</sup>.

#### 3.3.1. Differences between types of participants

Analysis of the survey data also allowed drawing comparisons between individuals from different types of partner organisations:

- The individuals from **local and regional authorities** more often than other groups reported that participation in the Comenius Regio project improved their **administrative and management skills** (high influence was felt by 51% of respondents from this group as opposed to 38% and 36% of respondents from schools and third partners). These results of the descriptive statistics were supported from the inferences of statistical tests (Cramer’s V 0.131,  $p < 0.05$ ).
- The project participants from **schools** who took part in the survey more often than other groups stated that they improved **professional and personal competences** such as foreign language proficiency (44% of respondents felt high influence), ICT competences (23%), experience of other cultures (65%) and improvement in social skills (49%). The higher improvement of foreign language skills (Cramer’s V 0.181,  $p < 0.05$ ) and social skills (Cramer’s V 0.137,  $p < 0.05$ ) was also confirmed by the inferences of statistical tests.
- Participants from **third partners** were most **encouraged to join international projects** in the future (70%), although very few of them acknowledged that their

<sup>23</sup> The following changes were included in the “purely individual level”: improved language proficiency in a foreign language other than English; improved ICT competences; improved language proficiency in English; improved know-how and experiences of other cultures; improved professional competences; increased motivation for continued professional development.

<sup>24</sup> The following changes were included in the “outreaching individual level”: establishment of lasting personal contacts partner organisations from the other country; encouraged to become involved in international collaboration in the future; increased participation in professional networks; introduced new work practices (innovative); improved social skills; improved administrative and project management skills.

<sup>25</sup> The analysis revealed that the average value of the outreaching category of individual changes (equal to 3.3) was higher than the average of purely individual level changes (equal to 3.0) and even higher than the total average of all observed changes (equal to 3.1).

participation in professional networks increased as a result of taking part in the Comenius Regio Partnerships (13%).

The explanation of the observed results should be formulated simultaneously in assessing the overall logic of the Comenius Regio Partnerships, where most of the administrative work may be carried out by leading partners from the local and regional authorities, while teachers and staff can be more active in participating in various training events and seminars.

It also shows the importance of social skills, especially bearing in mind the impact of Comenius Regio Partnerships in lowering barriers between the direct providers of education and the authorities, with both groups getting to know each other *on a personal, informal basis* in the course of a Comenius Regio partnership, as indicated by interviewees during the case studies. This also applies to improved personal and professional relationships between participants from local authorities and schools on the one hand and those from community, higher education, business or third partners on the other.

### 3.3.2. Factors contributing to changes at individual level

The evidence gathered during the surveys carried out for this study show that there are several factors which affected the observed changes at individual level.

- Some differences were noticed between the projects in terms **of the choice of topics**. Projects focusing on such topics as improvement in individual skills (e.g. working with ICT, teaching and learning foreign languages, applying benchmarks and standards for quality and evaluation of education, as well as improving basic skills) contribute most to the observed changes at individual level. In contrast, topics that are more relevant at higher educational levels, such as comparison of education systems and cultural differences, combating school failure, raising pupils' achievements, social integration, as well as promoting environmental development, contributed least to these changes.
- **Previous collaboration experience** at both local and international level was also found to be one of the most influential factors in this respect. In 9 out of the 14 areas of changes at individual level, previous working experience with local/regional authorities at local level or schools in the international level can be statistically associated with a higher level of Comenius Regio influence<sup>26</sup>. Previous collaboration with local/regional authorities mostly affected areas of increased participation in international networks, establishment of lasting professional contacts, improvement of competences (including managerial skills) and enhancement of European cultural diversity. Experience of working with schools helped to bring changes in the areas of all the basic and specialised professional competences (including language competences, knowledge of ICT, innovative work practices and administrative skills) and also added value to the areas of future international collaboration and motivation for career development.
- **Successful project implementation** constituted another factor explaining the overall impact of Comenius Regio at individual level. While almost all the factors indicating the successful implementation of a partnership showed statistically significant ties with changes influenced by Comenius Regio at individual level, the greatest impact (indicated by medium strong ties<sup>27</sup>) was achieved in the partnerships where all partner

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<sup>26</sup> All mentioned variables create statistically significant (lowest level of statistical significance is  $p < 0.05$ ) weak association ties applying Cramer's V test; the values of the test can be distributed between 0.138 and 0.214 in the case of local collaboration and between 0.136 and 0.168 in the case of international collaboration.

<sup>27</sup> Medium statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) association ties were found between the indicated factors and the following impact areas: improved professional competences (Cramer's V 0.300), involvement in international collaboration in the future (0.306), establishment of lasting personal contacts (0.303), increased motivation for further development (0.333), improved administrative skills (0.326), broadened view on educational issues (0.318).

organisations jointly interacted during the project implementation. In addition, the majority of the survey respondents (60%) who strongly agreed with the statement that all partners jointly interacted during the project, other influential factors such as effective exchange of information in the partnership (70%), good activity planning (63%) and equal involvement of all partners (49%) proved the importance of relevant contributions as well. These results of the analysis emphasise the importance of close collaboration between different types of educational organisations included in the Comenius Regio action.

- **Personal commitment of project coordinators** also seemed to be a very important factor in both the overall success of a project and its influence on participants. The evidence gathered from project case studies and interviews with the European stakeholders suggested that effective coordination of a Comenius Regio project required a considerable amount of time, devotion and enthusiasm. Several case studies confirmed that such a commitment was a primary condition for the successful implementation of a project and also for important educational changes at local level.<sup>28</sup>

All in all, the impacts on individual participants, rather than systemic impacts at any level, may be the most difficult to quantify, but they may well also be highly valuable, if we are to believe the survey results and also the evidence from the case studies. These impacts are of course closely linked to the impacts on the organisations concerned – local authorities, schools, third partners – and also to any potential impacts at community, regional or national levels. As can be illustrated by the project “STEP into the Future” (see Case study 1), *“the most inspiring results were not the concrete changes in daily practice but changes in the way of thinking and considering attitudes and practices beyond the accepted everyday routine. Contrasts and differences proved to be very inspiring and created a cohesion that can last after the project has finished”*.

The evidence provided by the surveys and case studies confirmed that the Comenius Regio projects had a significant influence on the perceptions, competences and working practices of the individual participants. The overall partnership experience was the most influential at the individual level in terms of enhancement of knowledge of European cultural diversity and education systems, greater involvement in professional international networks and improvement of personal and professional skills. In addition, certain aspects of partnership design such as the choice of more person-oriented project topics (e.g. improvement of ICT) were linked to a higher overall individual impact. In line with the framework for analysis of this study, certain process factors also proved to be more effective in creating greater opportunities for implementing changes. Such factors primarily include previous collaboration experience, especially with educational authorities, and a smooth interaction and collaboration between all partner organisations in the project.

### 3.4. Impact at institutional level

This study particularly investigated the extent to which the Comenius Regio Partnerships can have an impact on the participating organisations, through transfer of the experiences and the development of new practices at the institutional level. Given the variety of partner organisations involved in the projects, Comenius Regio’s influence at institutional level was analysed according to the three types of organisations that participated in the action: schools, local/regional authorities and third partners.

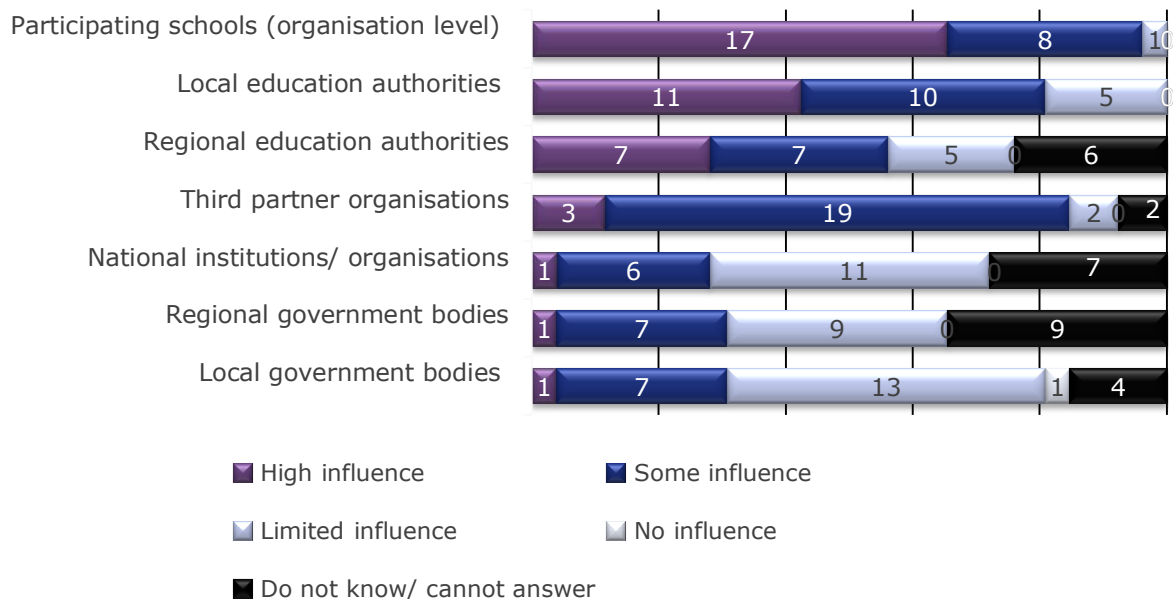
The survey of the National Agencies and National Authorities confirmed that, in their view, Comenius Regio Partnerships had highest influence on participating schools, followed by

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<sup>28</sup> The case study of a Czech-Slovak partnership demonstrated that a strong local initiative with a committed local authority helped bring significant changes in educational services in kindergartens at local and regional levels (see Case study 9). Similarly, the personal commitment of the project coordinator was identified as the main success factor of a Polish-Austrian partnership (see Case study 11).

that on local education authorities and regional education authorities – rather than on third partners, or other national, regional and local bodies (see Figure 23).

**Figure 23. Influence that Comenius Regio Partnerships have had on particular institutions in respondent's country**



Source: survey of the National Agencies and National Authorities, PPMI.

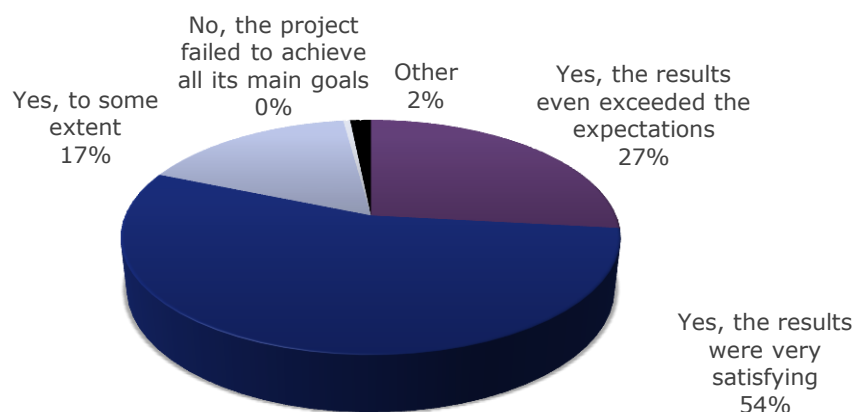
Note: responses to the survey were submitted from 26 out of 33 National Agencies, corresponding to 79% total participation rate.

The following three sections address each of these types of organisations and provide analysis of the influence Comenius Regio had on them.

### 3.4.1. Impact of Comenius Regio at the school level

It was expected that Comenius Regio Partnerships should contribute to strengthening of the international ties of the participating schools, as well as to sharing and adoption in the daily life of schools of the good practices in teaching and learning. In addition, strengthening of the collaboration between the schools and local authorities responsible for school education was also considered as one of the main potential areas of influence.

**Figure 24. Achievement of the primary goals of the Comenius Regio project among the participant schools**



Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

The evidence provided by the participants' survey showed that the participating schools **achieved their project objectives**. According to the survey results, out of a total 187 responses from schools, 27% indicated that their project results even exceeded their expectations, whereas another 55% suggested that the results were very satisfying (see Figure 24 above). The level of participant schools' overall satisfaction with the action is comparable to that reported by the participants of the Comenius School Partnerships<sup>29</sup> and other Comenius actions<sup>30</sup>.

The survey respondents (including local/regional authorities, schools and third partners) most often identified the following main changes in the participating schools as a result of the Comenius Regio projects (as having occurred to a large extent or to some extent):

- ability to **compare activities and educational practices** in their region with international partners and opportunity to learn from good practices (86% of the respondents from all types of organisations);
- strengthened **collaborative relationship** between local/regional authorities, schools and third partners (78% of the respondents);
- development of sustainable cooperation across borders (71% of the respondents);
- learning about **innovative ways** to adapt educational practices to the needs of the community and more effective pedagogical practices (e.g. more active, assessment-feedback based teaching techniques), (67% of the respondents);
- **changing teaching and learning styles** in the classroom (64% of the respondents).

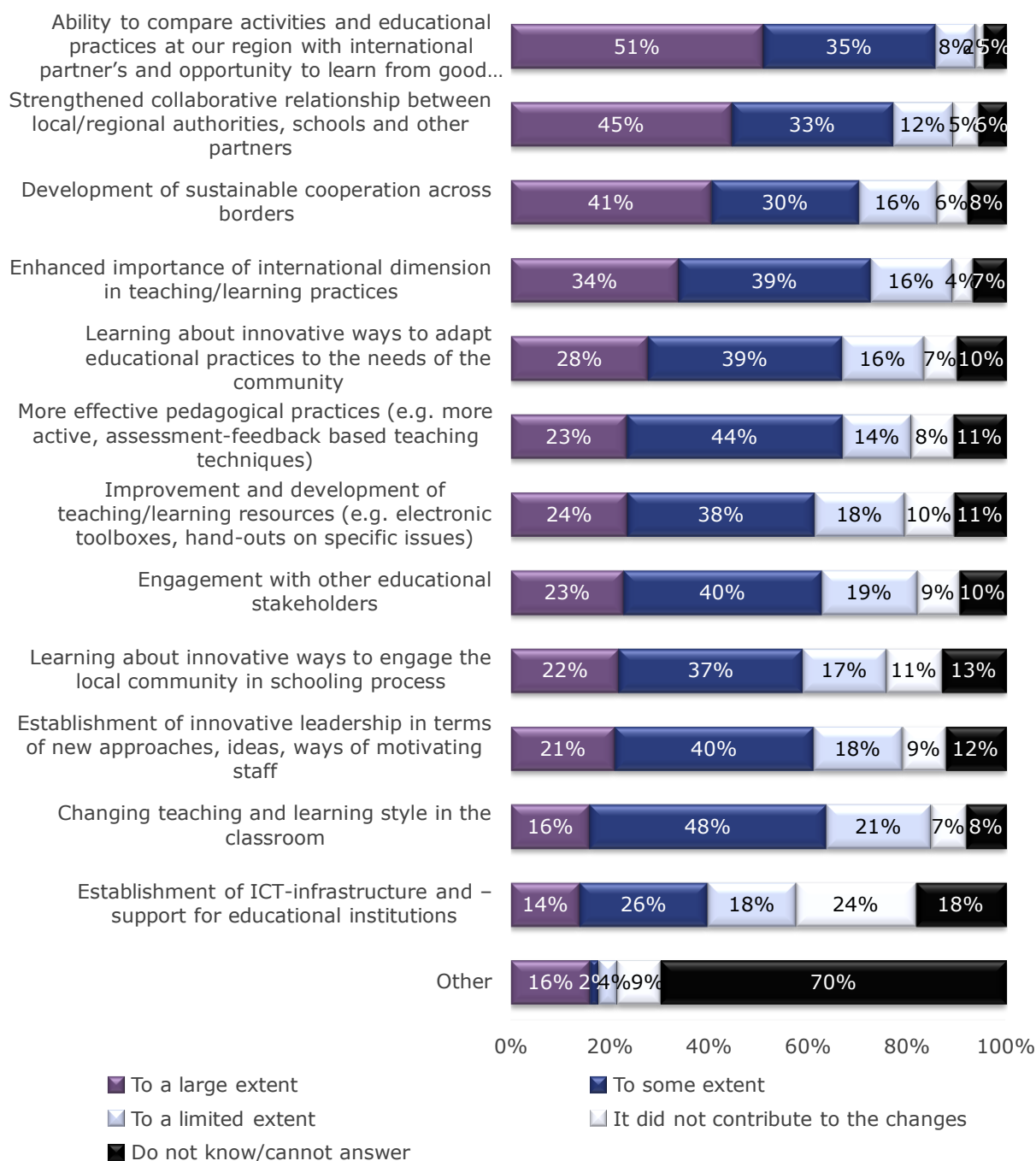
The survey respondents also confirmed that Comenius Regio Partnerships influenced changes in other areas of school life, including the development of ICT infrastructures in schools, engagement with other educational stakeholders, and enhancing the importance of the international dimension in teaching/learning practices, etc. (see Figure 25 below).

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<sup>29</sup> For example, 89% of the participants of the Comenius School Partnerships were satisfied or very satisfied with the outcomes and impact. See: Association for Empirical Studies and Centre for research into schools and education at the Martin Luther University, *Impact of the Comenius School Partnerships on the participant schools*, 2007, p.62.

<sup>30</sup> See: Maiworm, F., H. Kastner, and H. Wenzel, *Study of the impact of Comenius In-Service Training activities*, 2010, p.71; Maiworm Friedhelm, Heiko Kastner, and Hartmut Wenzel, *Study of the Impact of Comenius Assistantships*, 2010; Public Policy and Management Institute, *Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme*, p.80.

**Figure 25. The main changes at participating schools as a result of the Comenius Regio projects**



Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

The evidence provided by the case studies also strongly supports the survey results on the influence of Comenius Regio on schools. Several case studies indicated that the Comenius Regio projects helped the participating schools to **strengthen foreign language teaching** in their curricula. For instance, as a consequence of the cooperation between French and German schools under the project "Active learning about the Development of Biodiversity in Cities", three additional French language groups were created in a German primary school and a second German class was opened in a French primary school (see Case study 7).

The case study evidence also, like the survey results, indicated that the Comenius Regio Partnerships **strengthened the cooperation** between the participating schools and that



between the schools and third partners in their regions and helped to improve the communication between the participating schools and parents (see Box 6 below).

#### **Box 6. Strengthened cooperation between schools, third partners and improved communication: case study examples**

**Case study 8:** The case study of the Comenius Regio partnership between the Swedish and British local authorities “EUR-EMSET: Excellence in Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Environmental Education and Technology” showed, for instance, that ties between some Swedish schools and their respective local authorities became closer, and the collaboration between the schools in the Västerås region intensified.

**Case study 7:** Similarly, the project “Active Learning about the Development of Biodiversity in Cities” also resulted in strengthening the links between the local primary and secondary schools participating in this project, both from Germany and France.

**Case study 9:** The Czech-Slovak partnership on pre-school education for gifted children contributed to improving the communication and collaboration between local kindergarten and primary schools, thereby facilitating the transition from pre-school to primary school education stages in a local area. The outcomes of the partnership between the Czech and Slovak regions increased the local schools’ capacities to provide parents with information on individual learning needs of their children.

Source: case study reports accompanying the Study of the impact of Comenius Regio, PPMI.

Note: for more information see Table 2, Case study 3, Case study 8 and Case study 9.

The available case study evidence also revealed the positive impact of Comenius Regio Partnerships on the quality of educational offer in the participating schools. In some cases, the **exchange of good practices** supported by the Comenius Regio Partnerships facilitated a better alignment of educational offer to the needs of different pupils’ groups (see Case study 9 and Case study 12). In other cases, the partnerships facilitated the **adoption of new and effective teaching methods, tools and techniques**, which contributed to the quality of education in schools in general (see Case study 6). In addition to the improvement of education quality through the sharing and adoption of good practices, the Comenius Regio projects also helped some participating schools to **improve managerial skills among their staff** (see Case study 11) and improve **teaching and learning infrastructure** in the participating schools, especially by sharing good practices on the use of ICTs in the teaching and learning process (see Case study 10 and Case study 5).

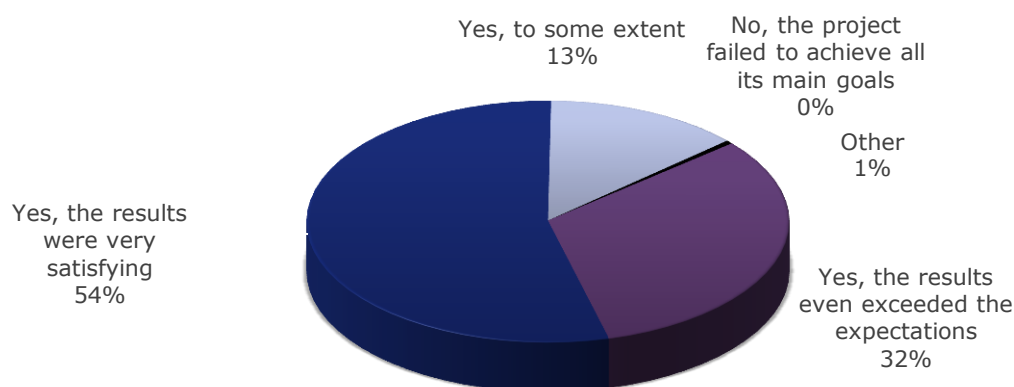
Overall, the empirical evidence confirmed that the Comenius Regio partnerships had a significant influence on the participating schools in various areas. This included strengthening foreign language teaching and learning in schools, developing and adopting new teaching and learning methods and techniques through the exchange of good practices between the participating schools, better adjusting educational offer to the needs of pupils and the local community, developing and increasing the use of ICT in teaching and learning processes. The partnerships also strengthened the cooperation and links between the schools, local authorities and local communities at both local and international levels.

#### **3.4.2. Influence of Comenius Regio on the local/regional authorities**

Generally, the local/regional authorities involved in Comenius Regio, like other types of organisations, **were highly satisfied with the results of their projects**. According to the survey results, 86% of the local/regional authorities considered that the project results either exceeded their expectations or were very satisfying (see Figure 26).



**Figure 26. Achievement of the primary goals of the Comenius Regio project among local/regional authorities**

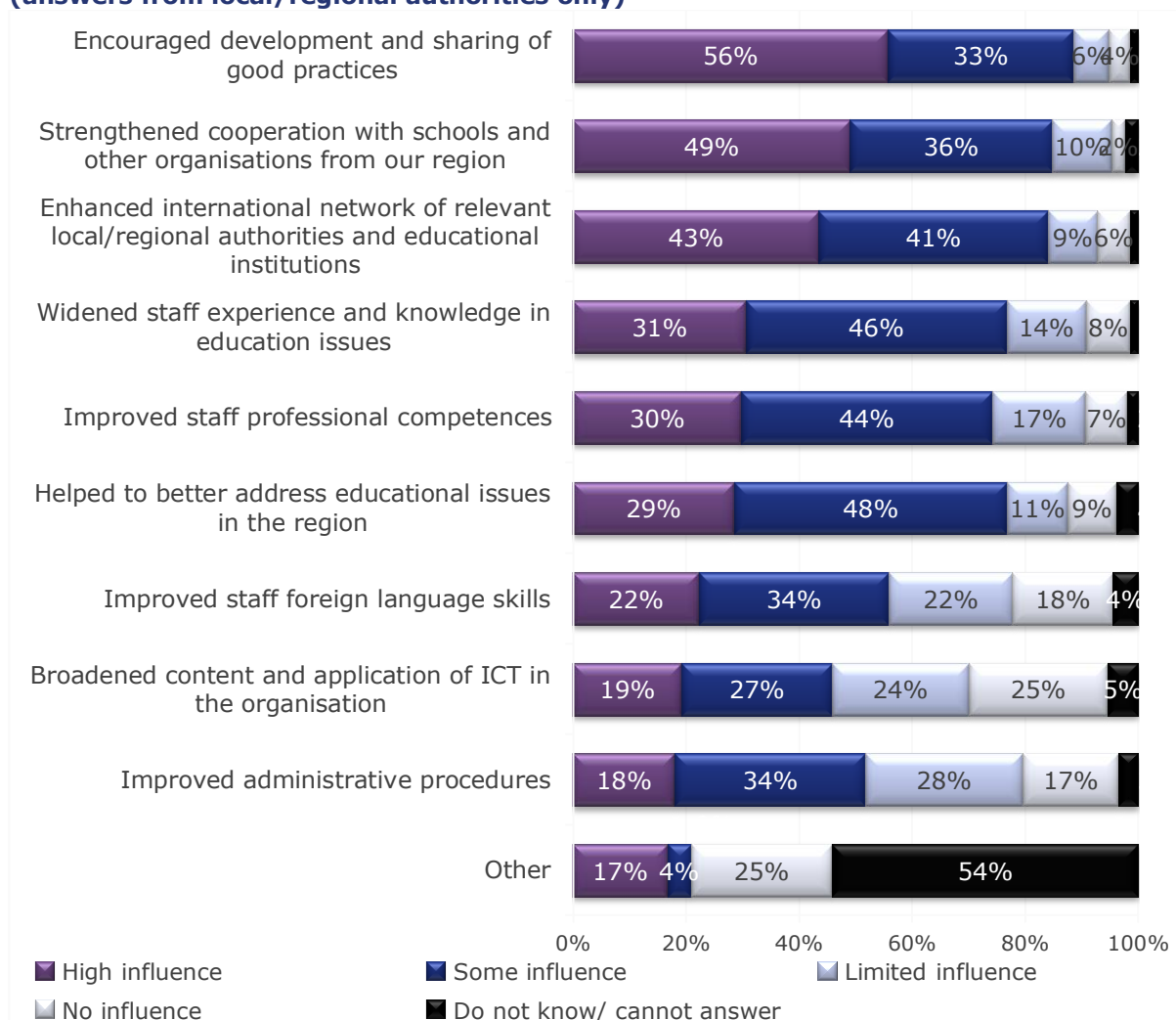


Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

According to the survey results, the local and regional authorities involved in Comenius Regio mostly emphasised the benefits to their institutions in terms of **strengthening the cooperation links** with schools and other organisations from their region (85% of local regional authorities agreed that the partnerships had either high or some influence in this area), enhancement of **cooperation with international actors** involved in school education (84% of respondents), as well as opportunities to develop and share **good practices** (89%) provided by this cooperation. When asked to assess the influence that participation in the Comenius Regio Partnership had on their institution, the respondents indicated that projects helped them to **address educational issues** in their region (77%) and **widen staff experience and knowledge** in education issues (77%) (see Figure 27).

The evidence provided by the case studies supports the above-mentioned information on the influence of Comenius Regio projects on the participating local and regional authorities. **Strengthening the existing links and building of new cooperation links** between the local/regional authorities and links with other relevant stakeholders involved in school education at local/regional, national and international levels was considered the most important influence of Comenius Regio on the participating local/regional authorities (e.g. see Case study 7, 8 and 9). Stronger international ties were particularly beneficial in terms of familiarising colleagues with and learning from different school education policy-making procedures in other regions. Polish and Austrian local authorities, for instance, acknowledged the opportunity to learn more about each other's structure of vocational education, the use of public funds, and the systems of education funding (see Case study 11) as particularly beneficial.

**Figure 27. Influence of the Comenius Regio participation on local and regional authorities (answers from local/regional authorities only)**



Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

In some instances, the project experience encouraged the participating local and regional authorities to redirect their policies in terms of **increasing support for collaboration between other actors involved in school education in their region** (see Box 7). In other cases it helped to **increase the knowledge and experience of various educational issues** among the participating local/regional authorities and thereby influence their school education policy agenda (see Box 8). The evidence provided by project case studies also indicates that the partnerships had contributed towards the **development of administrative and project management skills** among the participating local/regional authorities, thereby increasing their capacities to become involved in similar international projects (e.g. Case study 7 and Case study 11).

#### **Box 7. Increasing support for collaboration between other actors involved in school education in their region: case study examples**

**Case study 9:** The case study of the partnership between the Czech and Slovak regions showed that, as a consequence of project activities, the Czech local authority increased its awareness of the educational needs of gifted children and, thereby, became able to support a more systemic communication and collaboration among local pre-schools and primary schools as well as pedagogical and psychological centres.

Source: case study reports accompanying the Study of the impact of Comenius Regio, PPMI.

Note: for more information see Table 2 and Case study 9.

## Box 8. Increasing knowledge and experience of various educational issues: case study examples

**Case study 4:** The evidence provided by the case study of the partnership between two German and French regions shows that the focus of the project on biodiversity in the cities reinforced and re-aligned the policies of both local authorities in accordance with the local implementation of the Agenda 21 action plan (see Case study 7). Moreover, the same project re-shaped the attitude and policies of local authorities towards young people in general: the local authorities became more disposed to including local children in larger public events organised at local level. Similarly, a project involving the British and Irish local authorities encouraged both authorities to re-orient their policies towards being a Restorative Authority model.

**Case study 2:** The increase in the awareness and understanding of various educational issues led the local/regional authorities to establish new institutional bodies to tackle these issues. An example here is the partnership between Greece and Cyprus. As a result of the project, a specific office was created in the local authority of the participating local authority of Cyprus: it provides career guidance services for local pupils for several hours each day.

Source: case study reports accompanying the Study of the impact of Comenius Regio, PPMI.

**Overall, the evidence provided by the social network analysis, the participants' survey and the case studies indicate that the Comenius Regio action had significant influence on the participating local and regional authorities.** More specifically, this influence was mostly concentrated in the area of strengthening the links with other actors involved in school education at local, national and international levels. In addition, the partnerships also resulted in increasing the knowledge and awareness of different educational issues among the participating local/regional authorities, influencing the educational policies in accordance to these relevant issues and improving the administrative and project management capacities of local authorities.

### 3.4.3. Contribution of process factors to the local/regional authority and school level changes

Based on statistical analysis of the survey results, this section focuses on factors that contributed to the Comenius Regio related changes in participating organisations (schools and local/regional authorities) analysed in the previous sections.

The experience of **participation in Comenius Regio as well as in other European and national programmes and initiatives** in school education was first important factor of the school and local/regional authority-level changes related to participation in the Comenius Regio Partnerships:

- schools participating in the subsequent Comenius Regio Partnerships tended to report enhanced accessibility of education/training services for different target groups, improved teaching of foreign languages, improved foreign language competences of teachers and improved competences of teachers in using electronic platforms;
- local/regional authorities with participation experience in national/regional programmes/actions of the EU Member States in the field of school education reported higher influence of Comenius Regio partnerships in terms of encouraged development and sharing of good practices, enhanced international network of relevant local/regional authorities and educational institutions, as well as strengthened cooperation with schools and other organisations from their region.

Another important factor that explains the extent of Comenius Regio influence on schools and local/regional authorities was the **experience of these organisations in collaborating with other local and international actors** (including local/regional authorities, schools and other organisations) involved in school education. According to the survey data:

- Previous extensive collaboration experience with local/regional authorities from their regions contributed moderately to higher influence of Comenius Regio partnerships on participant schools in terms of broadened content and application of ICT in the school (Cramer's V 0.319,  $p < 0.05$ ).
- Similarly, schools with extensive collaboration experience with European local/regional authorities tended to report higher influence of Comenius Regio on them in terms of improved teaching methods, introduction and implementation of new learning approaches, encouraged development and sharing of good practices, improved cooperation between teachers from the same school, improved cooperation between teachers and school management, raised participation of staff in professional networks, raised quality of training for teachers, encouraged implementation of international activities in other schools and introduction of the European dimension in school curricula.
- There is also evidence of the contribution of previous local/regional level collaboration to the higher influence of Comenius Regio on participating local/regional authorities. According to the results of statistical analysis, local/regional authorities with previous extensive collaboration experience with other local/regional authorities from their region also reported higher influence of their partnership in terms of strengthened cooperation with schools and other organisations from their region.

In addition to the above-mentioned factors, the statistical analysis of participants' survey results has also revealed a number of other process factors that contributed to the overall influence of Comenius Regio on schools and local/regional authorities. It showed that the **effective exchange of information between the project partners** contributed to positive changes in participating schools and local/regional authorities:

- the surveyed schools that indicated the presence of such an exchange of information within their partnership, also tended to report higher influence of Comenius Regio in terms of encouraged development and sharing of good practices, improved foreign language competences of teachers and enhanced professional competences of teachers (though the relationship was weak);
- a much stronger relationship was found between the effective exchange of information between the project partners reported by participant local/regional authorities and the influence of Comenius Regio on these authorities in terms of enhanced international network of relevant local/regional authorities and educational institutions, strengthened cooperation with schools and other organisations from their region, encouraged development and sharing of good practices, improved administrative procedures and improved professional competences of staff<sup>31</sup>.

**Effective project-management by leading local/regional authorities** as well as **effective activity planning and monitoring** during the project implementation also contributed to higher influence of Comenius Regio on schools and local/regional authorities:

- The schools which indicated that the local/regional authority was at the core of their partnership, liaising with all project partner organisations, tended to report higher project influence on them in terms of improved teaching of foreign languages, raised participation of staff in professional networks and improved school management practices.
- The local/regional authorities which indicated that the local/regional authority was at the core of their partnership also reported considerably higher influence of Comenius Regio on them in terms of enhanced international network of relevant local/regional authorities and educational institutions, strengthened cooperation with schools and other organisations from their region, encouraged development and sharing of good

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<sup>31</sup> Cramer's V between 0.4 and 0.6,  $p < 0.05$ .

practices, better addressing educational issues in the region, improved administrative procedures, widened staff experience and knowledge in education issues, improved professional competences of staff.<sup>32</sup> The effective activity planning and monitoring during the project implementation had a stronger effect on the local/regional authorities in the same areas<sup>33</sup>.

- Schools that indicated there was such activity planning and monitoring in their partnership also tended to report a higher influence of Comenius Regio on them in terms of encouraged development and sharing of good practices, broadened content and application of ICT in the school, improved school management practices and encouraged implementation of international activities in other schools (Cramer's V between 0.2 and 0.4,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Finally, one of the main process factors that contributed to the Comenius Regio related changes in local/regional authorities was the **equal involvement of all project partners and joint interaction between the partner organisations**:

- a moderate-to strong relationship was found between the indication by participant local/regional authorities that "all the partners were equally involved in the project activities" on the one hand, and higher influence of Comenius Regio on these local/regional authorities in terms of all the potential areas of influence identified in the survey questionnaire, with the exception of broadened content and application of ICT in their organisation;
- the surveyed local/regional authorities that agreed with the statement "the partner organisations jointly interacted during the project implementation" also reported a higher influence on them in terms of almost all the aspects, except broadened content and application of ICT in their organisation<sup>34</sup>.

#### 3.4.4. Influence of Comenius Regio on the third partner changes

This section analyses the influence of Comenius Regio partnerships on the participant third partners. As in the case of schools and local/regional authorities, the main source of evidence was the results of the participant survey and case study evidence. It should be remembered, however, that in comparison to other types of organisations, the overall number of survey respondents was substantially lower (57 respondents). Moreover, the variety of third partner organisations and the consequent variety in their interests and capacities, means that any generalisations in relation to project influence on them and factors of this influence should be treated with some caution.

Overall, the participants' survey results indicate that, like schools and local/regional authorities, the third partners involved **were highly satisfied with the results achieved** during the cooperation: 79% of survey respondents from the third partners category indicated that the results of their partnership either exceeded their expectations or were very satisfying (see Figure 28).

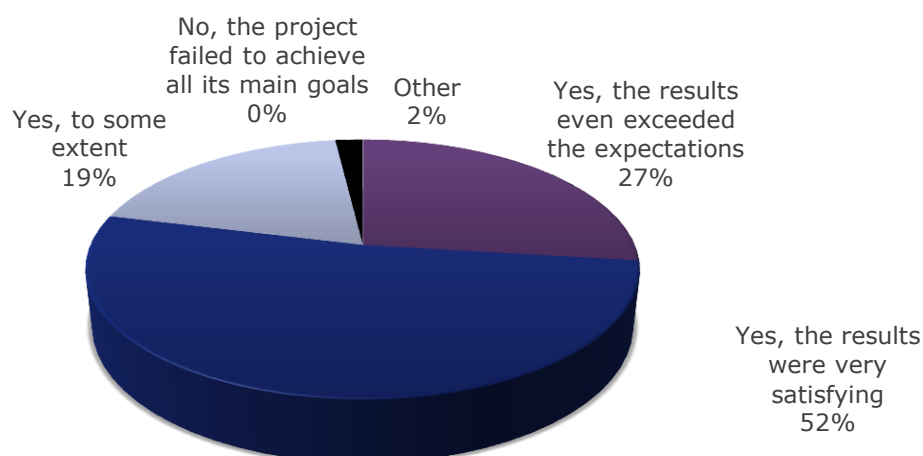
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<sup>32</sup> Cramer's V between 0.3 and 0.6,  $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>33</sup> Cramer's V between 0.4 and 0.6,  $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>34</sup> In the case of both above mentioned process factors, Cramer's V ranged between 0.3 and 0.6,  $p < 0.05$ .

**Figure 28. Achievement of the primary goals of the Comenius Regio project among third partners**



Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

The survey results of the influence of Comenius Regio projects on third partners reveal that they mostly benefited from the strengthening **of local and international links** with other actors involved in school education, as well as **increasing their awareness and understanding of relevant education issues**. In terms of specific impacts indicated by the survey respondents from other organisations involved in Comenius Regio, the following were the most prevalent:

- **strengthened international dimension** (84% of third partners respondents agreed that participation in their project had high or at least some influence on their organisation in this area);
- **broadened staff view on education issues** (80% of respondents);
- **widened staff experience and knowledge** in education at international level and established lasting cooperation with schools (72% of respondents);
- **strengthened cooperation with local authorities** (71% of respondents).

The evidence gathered from the case studies implemented during this study confirms the above findings on the influence of Comenius Regio on the third partner organisations involved. It demonstrates that Comenius Regio Partnerships helped the third partners to build and strengthen their **collaboration links with other organisations involved in school education, at both local and international level** (see Box 9). The representatives from other organisations particularly emphasised the benefits of the partnerships in terms of **building expertise and knowledge on various school education issues** and thereby better addressing these issues in their local environment (see Box 10).

#### **Box 9. Development of international dimension within third partner organisations**

**Case study 2:** Representatives of the Chamber of Magnesia (a third partner organisation from Greece) indicated, for instance, that the partnership between two regions of Greece and Cyprus helped them to create sustainable cooperation links with the organisations from the partner region. As a result, an agreement of imports and exports was signed between the Chambers of both regions (organisations uniting representatives of the employers and entrepreneurs in both regions).

**Case study 11:** Similarly, as a result of the Polish-Austrian partnership, a Polish third partner organisation, the local association of entrepreneurs reported significant achievements in terms of building international ties: relationships between the association of entrepreneurs and the Chamber of Agriculture from the Austrian region were established. In some instances, even large third-partner organisations, such as universities, reported significant changes in terms of



developing international links.

**Case study 6:** As a result of a Danish-British partnership, for example, a Danish teacher-training university indicated strengthening and expansion of its international activities as the most important benefits achieved through participation in the project. The role of international education is much more central and much more visible in the life of this university following implementation of the project.

Source: case study reports accompanying the Study of the impact of Comenius Regio, PPMI.

Note: for more information see Table 2, Case study 2, Case study 11 and Case study 6.

#### Box 10. Increased expertise and knowledge on various school education issues

**Case study 9:** As a consequence of the partnership between Czech and Slovak regions, for example, a Czech third organisation improved the professional competences of the staff in identifying gifted children and in using more objective diagnostic methods for this purpose.

**Case study 3:** Similarly, a project involving British and Swedish partner organisations helped the Swedish third organisation, a university, to concentrate more efforts on researching the topic of teaching and learning entrepreneurship in schools. Consequently, two new PhD students were enrolled in this university, working in the area of entrepreneurial learning.

Source: case study reports accompanying the Study of the impact of Comenius Regio, PPMI.

Note: for more information see Table 2, Case study 9 and Case study 3.

The interviews with the European stakeholders also confirmed that the Comenius Regio action contributed to the creation of **closer links between different actors at local and regional level**. The employers were considered by some of the stakeholders as key partners when it comes to youth education, training and employment: according to the interviewees, the action has helped to improve interaction between schools, local authorities and businesses<sup>35</sup>, and their active involvement contributes to the success of the project<sup>36</sup>. However, some challenges, which are partially related to the different working cultures of private and public sectors, were noticed in relation to the involvement of local business<sup>37</sup>.

Overall, the evidence provided by case studies and the participants' survey indicates that the Comenius Regio Partnerships had significant influence on third partners. The influence was the most significant in terms of building the international ties of these organisations and developing their international dimension. In addition, the projects also contributed to the increasing knowledge and expertise of these organisations on the relevant educational issues, thereby facilitating their cooperation with the local schools and other actors, in order to improve the quality of educational offer in the region.

#### 3.4.5. Contribution of the process factors to third partner level changes

Because of the limited number of survey respondents from third partner organisations<sup>38</sup>, it was decided not to implement a systemic and survey result based testing of the hypothesis that was applied at the level of school and local/regional participants. Instead, it was decided to assess the factors that contributed to the changes in third partners using the qualitative evidence provided by the case studies.

<sup>35</sup> Telephone interview with the European level stakeholder no. 1, 8 April 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Telephone interview with the European level stakeholder no. 4, 23 April 2014.

<sup>37</sup> According to interviewee, public being more focused on long term changes, private being more focused on immediate concerns. Telephone interview with the European level stakeholder no. 4, 23 April 2014.

<sup>38</sup> One of the reasons explaining the relatively smaller number of responses from third partner organisations can be related to the fact that this target group was harder to reach due to changed contact details (potentially related to staff changes and/or structure of the organisation): despite various attempts to update the original mailing list, this sub-group of respondents recorded the highest rate of bounced survey invitations or/and invalid initial contacts in comparison with the other sub-groups.



According to the case study evidence, one of the main factors influencing the impacts on third partners of Comenius Regio Partnerships, were the **capacities of these organisations to actively participate in the project activities**. The case study evidence also revealed that the **level of support and involvement of the leading organisations** was also an important process factor of the overall influence of Comenius Regio on third partner organisations (see Box 11).

#### Box 11. Active involvement of third partners, support and active involvement of the learning organisations

**Case study 10:** In the case of Danish-Swedish project “Implementation of Interactive Whiteboards in Schools”, both third partner organisations were very active in the partnership. The Danish institution CFU even undertook the role of coordinator and managed the main flow of the day-to-day communication between the partners. They were responsible for the coordination of the project, establishment of the VLE and the website, creation of the sharing platform among other things. The representatives of the CFU were very experienced in the field of ICT as well as in carrying out international projects and were particularly committed to making the project successful. The other partner from the Swedish side – LKDATA – also took a very active role.

**Case study 11.** In the case of Polish-Austrian partnership “Educational systems in Poland and Austria in the professional aspect and the labour market”, after several mobilities and creation of connections with their counterparts in Austria, the Association of Entrepreneurs from Żywiec became very actively involved and enthusiastic about the project. The interviewees from other organisations mentioned that the Polish association helped a lot when it came to the establishment of the simulation company in the vocational school in Żywiec (e.g. helped with materials, furniture etc.).

Source: case study reports accompanying the Study of the impact of Comenius Regio, PPMI.

Note: for more information see Table 2, Case study 8, Case study 9 and Case study 4.

Finally, another factor which contributed to higher influence of Comenius Regio on third partner organisations was the **existence of previous links** between these organisations and schools and/or local/regional authorities. As was shown in the case study of another Swedish-British partnership, one of the main sources of motivation for the British third-partner organisations (a Communications and Training Consultancy) were the links with the Swedish upper-secondary school that were established before the launching of the Comenius Regio project (see Case study 3).

### 3.5. Impact at partnership and local community level

This section focuses on the synergies created between the schools and their environment through the partnership and the continuous cooperation between partner organisations. It also provides more details on the new initiatives and new projects.

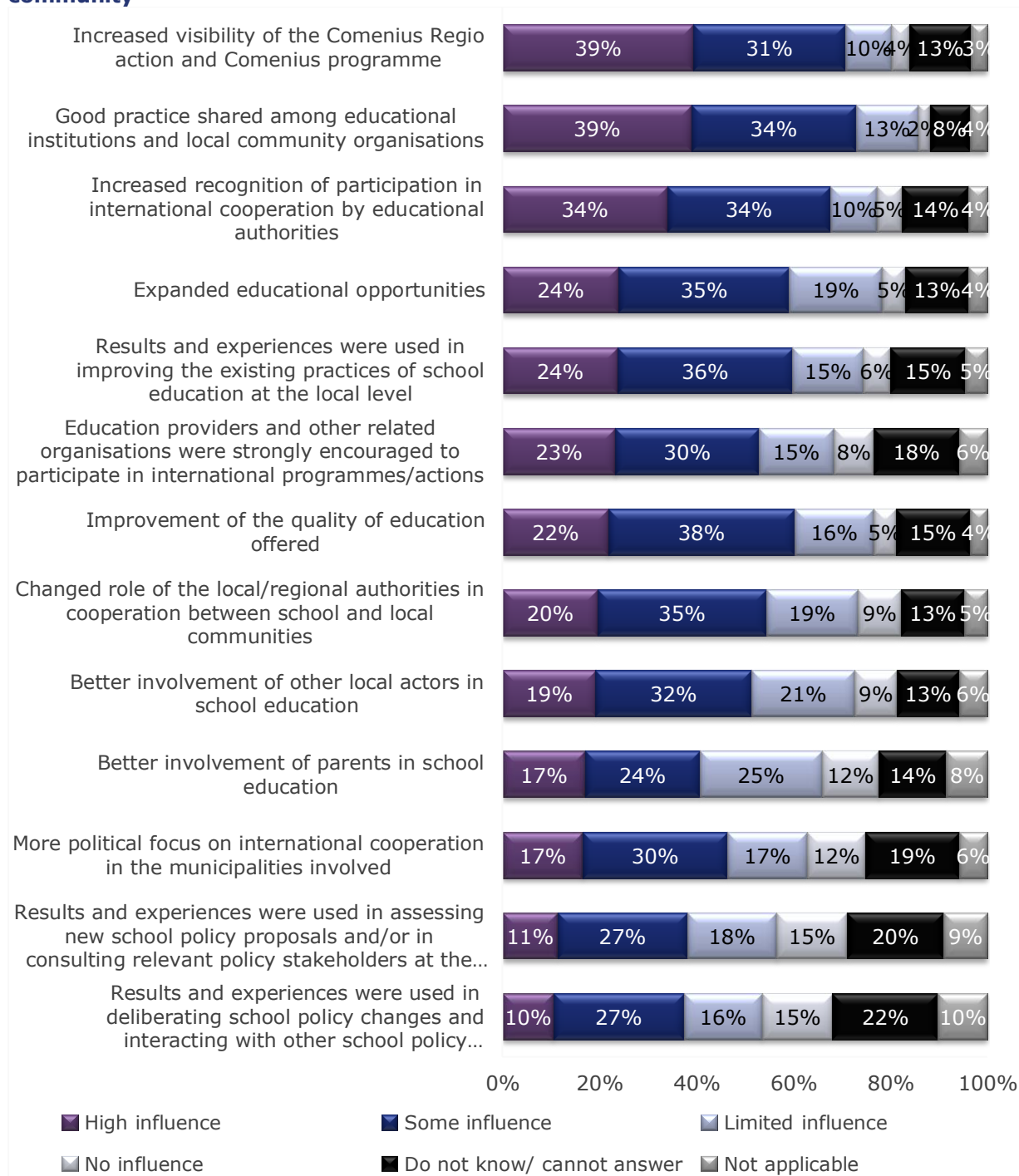
#### 3.5.1. Relations between the participating schools and their environment

The evidence gathered by this study shows that the participants considered that their partnership contributed to the **changed role of local/regional authorities in cooperation between schools and local communities** (55%) (see Figure 29 below). The influence on the **opening up of schools to the possibilities offered by their local social and economic environment** through the partnership was assessed by the respondents similarly: according to 51% of the respondents, the Comenius Regio Partnerships had an influence on the better involvement of other local actors in school education and according to 41% of them it had an influence on the better

“Comenius Regio Partnerships contributed to the creation of closer links between different actors at local and regional level”

involvement of parents in school education (see Figure 29). In comparison, 70% of them considered that their participation in Comenius Regio partnership increased visibility of the Comenius Regio action and Comenius programme and 68% of them noticed an increased recognition of participation in international cooperation by educational authorities.

**Figure 29. Influence of the participation in Comenius Regio Partnership on the local community**



Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

The interviews with the European stakeholders carried out for this study and case study evidence also confirmed that Comenius Regio Partnerships **contributed to the creation of closer links between different actors at local and regional level**. The interviewed

stakeholders were aware of cases where local and regional authorities started to focus much more on educational developments within the new local strategic plans<sup>39</sup>. Comenius Regio Partnerships have in many cases helped to create the habit of dialogue between different educational actors, both within local areas and internationally<sup>40</sup> and encouraged the perception of educational developments as closely linked to economic and social progress<sup>41</sup>. Several case studies revealed that the Comenius Regio projects helped to develop closer relationships and a better understanding between the participating schools and local business/industry (e.g. Case study 8, 3, 11), between schools and primary schools (e.g. Case study 9), and also contributed to the establishment of links between schools and universities (e.g. Case study 9, and 10), research institutions (e.g. Case study 9) and other local community organisations (e.g. Case study 5) in at least one of the partner regions.

Interestingly, some **differences between the country groups** were observed while analysing the Comenius Regio influence on the local community. The Member States that joined the EU in 2004 or later<sup>42</sup> more often indicated that their participation in the Comenius Regio Partnerships had an influence on the local community than other Member States. For example, 60.1% of the respondents from the former group thought that their participation had a high influence on the sharing of good practices among educational providers, while only about 29.1% of the latter group shared the same opinion. Similarly, 80% of the respondents from the Member States that joined the EU in 2004 or later thought that their participation had a high influence on expanded educational opportunities or an improvement in the quality of education; while 10% of the respondents from the EU-15 Member States reported a high influence on these areas.

The analysis of the survey data showed that **most of the process-related factors had a weak but statistically significant relation** with the respondents' perceptions about the influence of the action on the local community. For example, the effective exchange of information, good activity planning and monitoring as well as good problem solving and decision-making during the project implementation made it more likely for the above-mentioned changes on the local community level to occur<sup>43</sup>. In addition, the respondents reported a higher influence on the local community more often in the case of those projects where a local/regional authority was at the core of the partnership<sup>44</sup> and where partner organisations played a very significant role in the partnerships<sup>45</sup>. Although the statistical tests showed that the relation was rather weak, it was statistically significant. These statistical results confirm the importance of process factors for school education changes<sup>46</sup>.

### 3.5.2. Increased interest in cooperation, development of new initiatives and new projects

When the Comenius Regio Partnerships were launched in 2009, it was envisaged that the new action would help the participating regions to develop tools for sustainable cooperation across borders. The majority of the coordinators of the Comenius Regio action at the National Agencies, who participated in the survey (N=26) agreed that the main benefits of Comenius Regio Partnerships were **strengthened collaborative relationship** among local/regional authorities, schools and third partners within the region (24 out of

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<sup>39</sup> Telephone interview with European level stakeholder no. 1, 8 April 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Telephone interview with European level stakeholder no. 2, 8 April 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Telephone interview with European level stakeholder no. 1, 8 April 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Although Croatia joined the EU in 2013 and currently takes part in Comenius Regio projects, no projects funded under Call 2009 and 2010 involved Croatian partners.

<sup>43</sup> Cramer's V varies from 0.17 to 0.282,  $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>44</sup> Cramer's V varies from 0.152 to 0.234,  $p < 0.05$ .

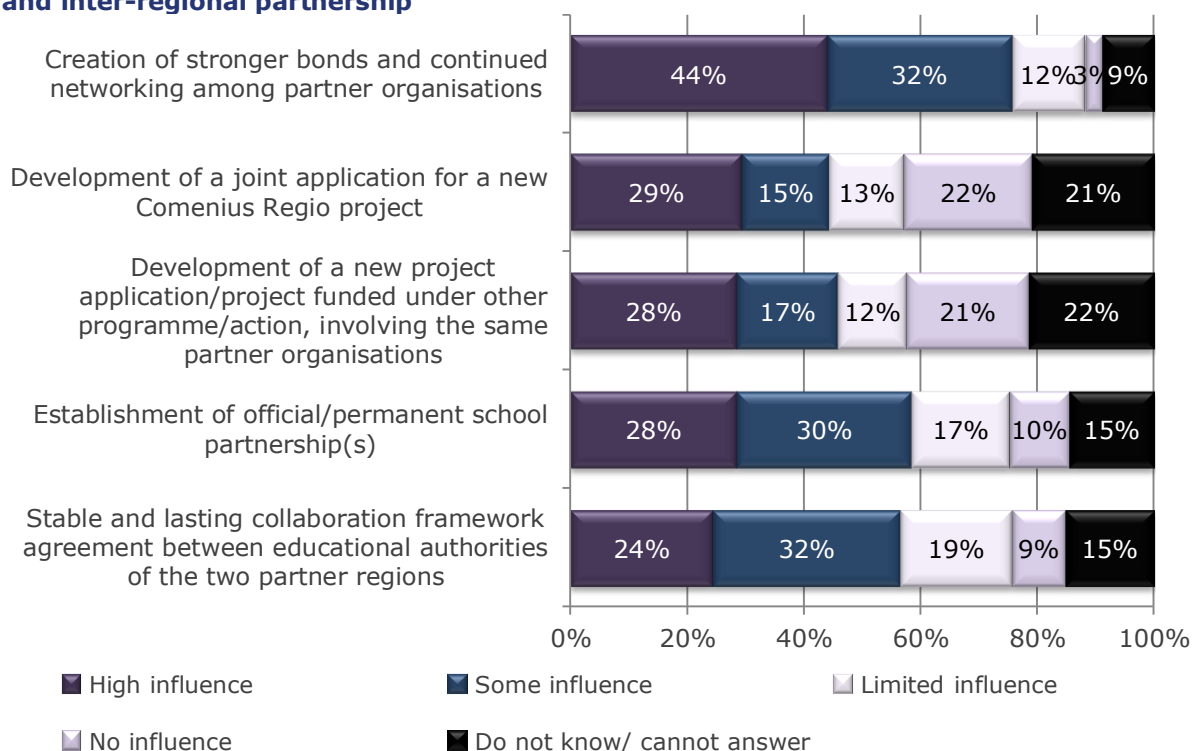
<sup>45</sup> Cramer's V varies from 0.151 to 0.206,  $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>46</sup> Some other factors affecting the influence of the Comenius Regio Partnerships on the above-mentioned aspects are also discussed in Section 3.4 above.

26) and **development and exchange of good practice** in school education between participating regions (23 of 26).

Furthermore, these findings were confirmed by the results of the participants' survey of Comenius Regio Partnerships. A considerable number of the Comenius Regio projects launched in 2009 and 2010 had an influence on the **establishment of official/permanent school partnerships** (58%) and the **collaboration agreements between the authorities** with a role in school education from both partner regions (54%). The Comenius Regio projects influenced the development of a **joint application for a new Comenius Regio project** (44%) or an application/project funded under another programme or action (43%) involving the same partner organisations (see Figure 30 below)<sup>47</sup>.

**Figure 30. Influence of the participation in Comenius Regio Partnerships on the regional and inter-regional partnership**



Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

Although not all the applications submitted were successful and secured funding for a new project under Comenius Regio or other programme/action, the survey results indicated that **a significant number of the partner organisations continued participating in the Comenius Regio Partnerships funded under the subsequent calls**. For example, more than 50% of the survey respondents (including the local/regional authorities, schools and third partners) stated that they were involved in the Comenius Regio projects funded under Call 2011, Call 2012 or Call 2013. The local/regional authorities reported that they continue to participate in the subsequent Comenius Regio Partnerships (69%) more often than schools (61%) or third partners (51%). Furthermore, the majority of respondents from local/regional authorities plan to continue cooperation in the future: 58% of the representatives from local/regional authorities plan to continue cooperating with their local/regional partners and 48% of them plan to continue cooperating at the European

<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, the representatives of the local and regional authorities considered that the Comenius Regio project had a higher influence on these developments more often than other types of respondents. A large number of the participants representing schools and third partners were often not aware of new applications/projects emerging from their Comenius Regio Partnership.

level.

The results of the social network analysis support the survey results and indicate the number of **repeating cooperation ties between the individual organisations**. The existing inter-connections between the organisations already indicated that a number of organisations continue to take part in subsequent calls – and that in the later years they often tend to connect a larger number of organisations in the sub-networks. The social network analysis showed that the 442 cooperation links between the organisations that took part in the Comenius Regio Partnerships (Call 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 included) involved pairs of organisations that cooperated in more than one project (see Annex 4 for more details). These repeating cooperation links between the same partner organisations compose only 1% of the overall number of unique links, but it still confirms that at least a small share of the organisations involved in Comenius Regio developed repeat cooperation ties between individual organisations, which were involved in the same project, and managed to gain funding for their common projects in subsequent Comenius Regio calls.

“A significant number of the partner organisations continued participating in the Comenius Regio Partnerships funded under the subsequent calls”

The case study findings also demonstrated that some partner organisations continued to actively **collaborate through existing networks** (e.g. Case study 12), **working groups** (e.g. Case study 1); they established **new partnerships** involving the same partner organisations from one of the partner regions (e.g. Case study 2, Case study 11) or from both partner regions (e.g. Case study 4). Some Comenius Regio projects had an influence on the **development of a wider partnership** involving a larger number of local/regional authorities from the same countries to give more territorial coherence to the follow-up of a successful project (e.g. Case study 7) or wider partnerships involving partner organisations from other countries (e.g. Case study 10). More details on some of these developments are provided in Box 12 below.

#### **Box 12. Example of continuing collaboration between partner organisations and the involvement of the new regions**

**Case study 7:** The project “Biodiversity in Cities”, involving organisations from Epinay and Oberursel, had a significant impact on both territories, thanks to the dissemination of the project results to different levels (local, national, European). Consequently other authorities such as Hessen regional authority in Germany (not involved in the project), the Hochtaunuskreis (Regional Education Office) and the Council for the Department of Seine Saint-Denis and other local organisations wish to cooperate and develop a partnership with Epinay and with Oberursel so as to give more territorial coherence to the follow-up of the project on “Biodiversity in Cities”.

**Case study 10:** The partner organisations realised the potential of interactive whiteboards in public and school libraries. The Linköping municipality developed a new project involving a large number of partners from several European countries on ICT use in libraries with the aim of exploring what the libraries of the future could look like. Similarly, the Danish partners applied the knowledge gained during the Comenius Regio partnership in a number of other projects involving school libraries. Furthermore, the interactive whiteboards were used in the Linköping municipality as a support for elderly people in order to increase their digital competences.

**Case study 1:** The project has had far-reaching effects on education and community development in both participating regions. The operation of six working groups during the project and their continuation, albeit less formally, after the end of the project is a considerable achievement.

**Case study 4:** A further project has just begun (Call 2013). It involves a number of partner organisations which took part in the project “Restorative Approaches in Ireland and Norfolk –



Bettering Our Work” (see Case study 4)<sup>48</sup> together with two more secondary schools from Devon. An additional partner is the neighbouring local authority to Hudiksvall. This project seeks to develop further the cooperation established in the project “Restorative Approaches in Ireland and Norfolk – Bettering Our Work”. Thus this example not only shows the particularly active involvement of the local authority, but also demonstrates the influence of the results of a particular Comenius Regio Partnership on the future initiatives in the partner regions.

Source: case study reports accompanying the Study of the impact of Comenius Regio, PPMI.

Note: for more information see Table 2, Case study 7, Case study 10, Case study 5 and Case study 4.

Interestingly, the case studies also revealed that **some local/regional authorities were particularly actively involved in this specific action**. For example, the local authority from Devon (the United Kingdom), which coordinated the project “Restorative Approaches in Ireland and Norfolk – Bettering Our Work” in cooperation with Hudiksvall (Sweden) (see Case study 4), has been involved in no fewer than nine Comenius Regio projects since the action began in 2009<sup>49</sup>. Furthermore, the social network analysis confirmed that the local authority from Devon was not a unique example in the context of the Comenius Regio Partnerships. While ranking the network actors according to the number of their direct links with other network participants (i.e. degree centrality), it was revealed that there were five other central organisations from the UK (6), whereas Italy had the most central organisations (8). In addition, the time-series analysis at country level also revealed that over time the Comenius Regio network has become increasingly open and internationalised in terms of the variety of countries involved (see Annex 4 for more details).

Overall, the information gathered using various research methods confirmed the potential for further development of the network involving former participants of the Comenius Regio Partnerships. Comenius Regio (or any subsequent action supporting inter-regional partnerships) can provide a framework for the establishment of such sub-networks, if organisations continue their participation in subsequent Comenius Regio projects (and receive funding) or retain their connections with partner organisations. However, such a development would also seem to be dependent on a range of external factors, not least the availability of sources of funding to support further cooperation.

### 3.5.3. Exploitation of results and dissemination of good practices

The development and exchange of best practices in school education participating regions was regarded as a very important aim of the Comenius Regio action. Therefore dissemination and exploitation of the project results is particularly important.

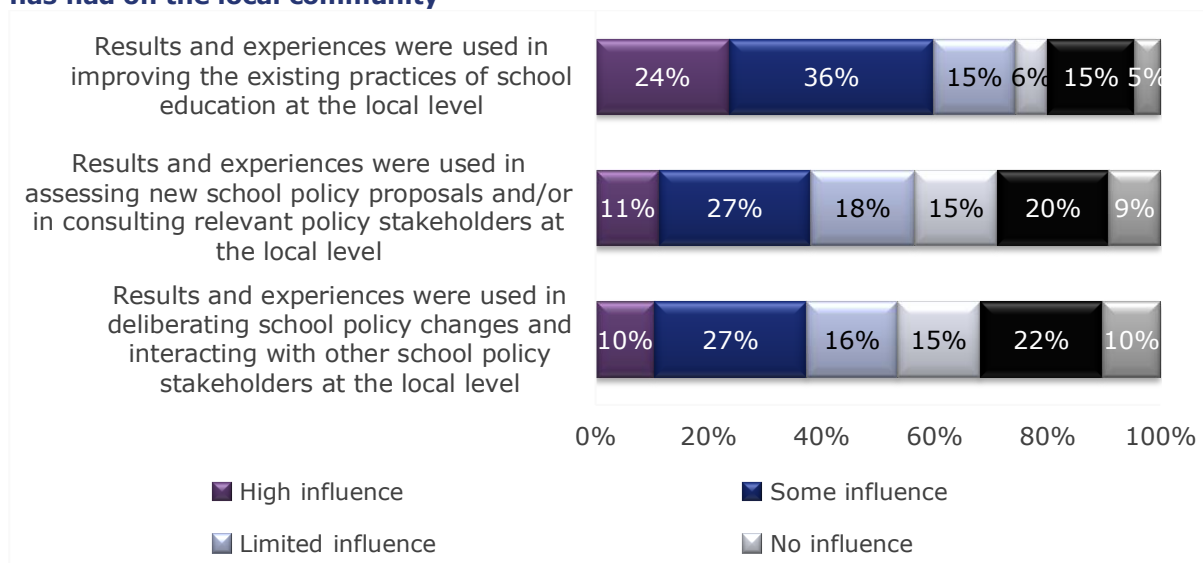
The data gathered during the survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships showed that the project results contributed **to improving the existing practices of school education at local level, assessing new policy proposals or deliberating school policy changes** (see Figure 31 below).

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<sup>48</sup> The organisations involved include: Devon local authority, Hudiksvall local authority, Newton Abbot College and Bromangymnasiet.

<sup>49</sup> 1 project was funded under Call 2009, 1 project under Call 2010, 3 projects under Call 2011 and 4 projects under Call 2012.

**Figure 31. Assessment of the influence the participation in Comenius Regio Partnership has had on the local community**



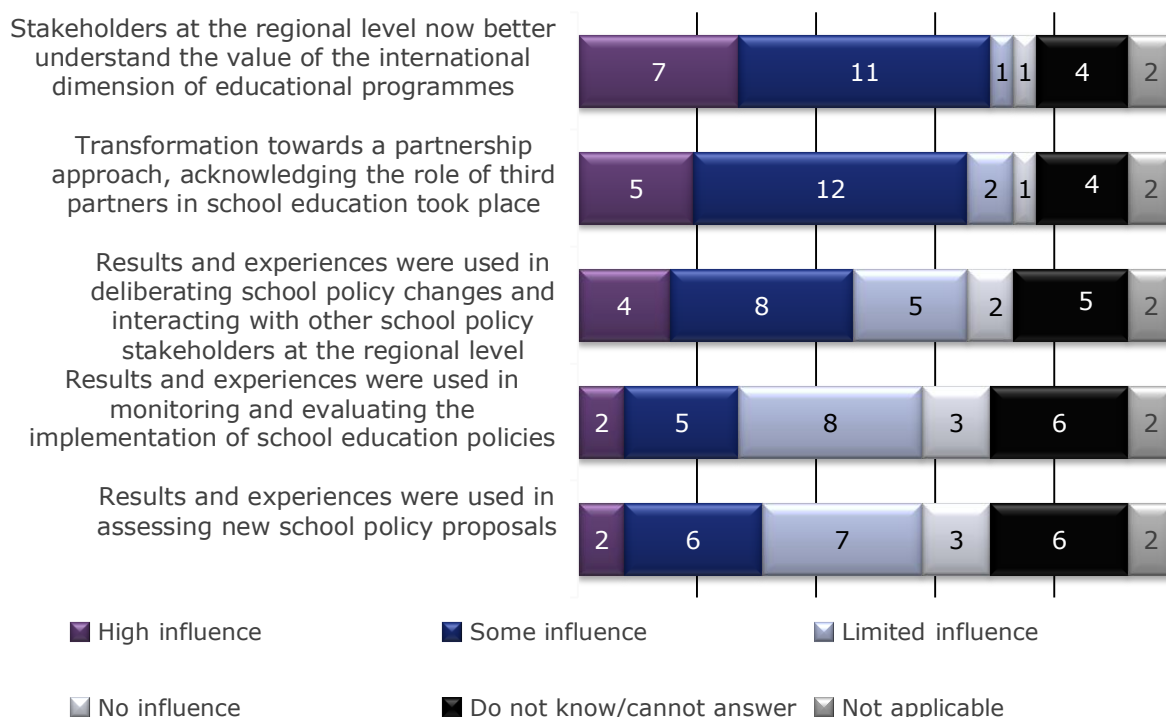
Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships (N=460), PPMI.

Similarly, the results of the survey of the National Agencies and National Authorities also indicated that Comenius Regio has had an influence at the regional level in the sense that stakeholders at the regional level now **understand better the value of the international dimension** of educational programmes (18 out of 26) and the importance of a transformation towards a partnership approach, **acknowledging the role of third partners in school education** (17 out of 26). However, very few of them agreed that the project results had a high influence on **deliberation of school policy changes**, were **used in monitoring and evaluation** the school education policies or in **assessing new school policy proposals** (see Figure 32).

When analysing the exploitation of results and dissemination of good practices to the wider community, one must bear in mind that the chain of change is long and complex. A number of factors can affect the project outputs or outcomes and **only in some cases can the development and exchange of good practices** bring changes not only in the participating institutions, but also **influence school education at local level**.



**Figure 32. Influence Comenius Regio Partnerships have had on the regional level in general**



Source: survey of the National Agencies and National Authorities, PPMI.

Note: responses to the survey were submitted from 26 out of 33 National Agencies, corresponding to a 79% total participation rate.

Overall, the Comenius Regio projects seem to produce mainly local results<sup>50</sup> and tend to be effective at a local level<sup>51</sup>. Multiplier effects, however, may take place in the regional contexts – and regional authorities can sometimes be supportive in enabling a wider impact for project results. Furthermore, the projects can be developed in the context of a coherent regional strategy and the region can provide a broader policy context. The cooperation between the local and regional authorities seemed to be fruitful and productive, however, only if they can learn from each other's experience and practices on some of their common concerns and needs<sup>52</sup>. In this respect the active involvement of regional authorities in the development of projects and the dissemination of the results of successful projects can be particularly important. More attention could be paid on planning for sustainability and dissemination at the application stage. A very clear plan should be elaborated during the application stage, showing how local and/or regional authorities will be involved. It would be possible to make the local authority responsible for sustainability within their area of responsibility, while the regional authority might take the lead in wider dissemination and ensuring multiplier effects – at least where both local and regional authorities can be involved.

#### 3.5.4. Process factors affecting the influence of participation in the Comenius Regio Partnerships on the local level

The results of the participants' survey of the Comenius Regio Partnerships and evidence gathered during the case studies showed that a number of different factors (see Section

<sup>50</sup> Telephone interview with European level stakeholder no. 1, 8 April 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Telephone interview with European level stakeholder no. 2, 8 April 2014.

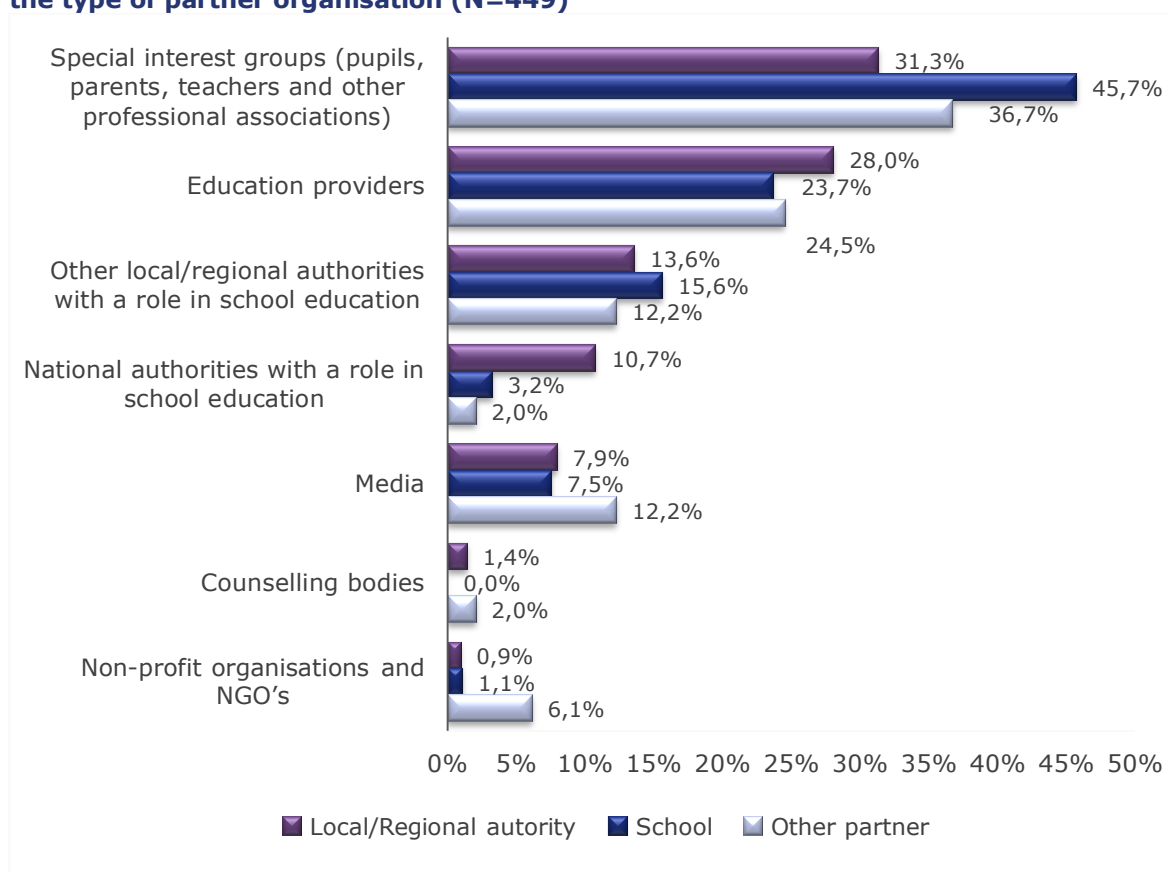
<sup>52</sup> Skype interview with European level stakeholder no. 6, 7 May 2014.

2.1) can potentially affect the influence of the Comenius Regio Partnerships on the local and regional levels.

First, the analysis of the survey results confirmed that the usage of the project results was related to the **quality of the results**: there is a weak but statistically significant relation between the respondents' opinion about the achievement of the primary goals of Comenius Regio projects and the use of the results and experiences<sup>53</sup>. The projects which achieved better results were perceived as more successful and, consequently, the results were more widely spread and more used by the relevant stakeholders.

Second, the usage of the results and experiences of the projects on the local and regional level was also related to the **dissemination activities and the extent to which the project results reached the necessary target groups**. The data gathered during the participants' survey showed that information about the projects was mainly shared with special interest groups, i.e. pupils, parents, teachers and other professional associations (see Figure 33 below).

**Figure 33. Target groups for the dissemination of the project results and experiences by the type of partner organisation (N=449)**



Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

One out of four respondents mentioned that they considered educational providers as one of the target groups of their dissemination activities and 14% of the respondents shared the results of their projects with the local/regional governing authorities. The local/regional education authorities more often informed educational providers (28%) and national

<sup>53</sup> Influence on the usage of the results and experiences in deliberating school policy changes (Cramer's V 0.225,  $p < 0.05$ ), in improving the existing practices of school education (Cramer's V 0.226,  $p < 0.05$ ) and in assessing new policy proposals (Cramer's V 0.215,  $p < 0.05$ ).

authorities with a role in school education (10.7%) than other partner organisations. The case study data confirm the survey findings<sup>54</sup>.

*Third*, the survey data and the case-study evidence showed that the exploitation of results and the dissemination of good practices to a wider community also depended **on a number of other internal and external factors**:

- About one half of the survey respondents identified a number of other constraints that affected the transferability of project results. According to 14% of the respondents, the further development of practices developed within the project was prevented by **implementation of other reforms and initiatives**. According to 12% of the respondents practices implemented during the project **did not fit with the prevailing attitudes or beliefs of certain stakeholders**, 5% of respondents thought that they did not fit with the **prevailing principles and regulations** and 8% of them considered that the practices developed during the project **were not perceived as better than other practices disseminated at the same time**. In addition, about 10% of respondents thought that practices were not perceived as better than the **current situation or products**<sup>55</sup>.
- In addition, the case studies showed that one of the issues most often mentioned among constraints was **time** (e.g. Case study 7, 9, 1, 2, 4, and 5). A number of partner organisations realised that the project was more time consuming than was originally expected and some of them indicated that more time (and resources) could be allocated for dissemination of the project results. **Political changes** (e.g. Case study 9 and 11), **budget restrictions or financial constraints** (e.g. Case study 9, 2, and 4), **restructuring** (e.g. Case study 8, and 2), **reduction of staff** (e.g. Case study 9, 2, and 4) or **changes of personnel in partner organisations** halfway through the project period created some challenges and problems (e.g. Case study 7, 8, and 9) and emerged as constraining factors in several case studies. In some cases a **different organisational culture** (e.g. Case study 9) or **different education systems and curriculum framework** (e.g. Case study 7) were recognised as factors limiting the exploitation of results and the dissemination of good practices to a wider community. **Lack of ability and capacity of the project staff** to link more closely the project results to the national reform efforts (e.g. Case study 9) and **resistance to change** (e.g. Case study 3) were also mentioned in the case study reports.

Overall, usage of the results and experiences of the Comenius Regio Partnerships at the local level were primarily related to the quality of the results, dissemination activities and the extent to which the project results reached the necessary target groups. However, a number of other internal and external factors were involved also. These included implementation of other reforms and initiatives, prevailing attitudes or beliefs of certain stakeholders or the prevailing principles and regulations, which did not allow considering the wider use of the practices developed during the project. In addition, in some cases the exploitation of results and the dissemination of good practices to a wider community was constrained by limited financial resources, limited time to disseminate project results, lack of will and readiness for changes, restructuring, reduction of staff or changes of personnel in partner organisations.

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<sup>54</sup> The information about the development of projects was usually disseminated to special interest groups and education providers. The final results were also presented or discussed with local/regional authorities, policymakers and stakeholders. In some cases partners organised meetings with local communities where the main information about the Comenius Regio projects was provided (e.g. Case study 1, Case study 11) and shared information about the projects during meetings with local partners (e.g. Case study 11)

<sup>55</sup> Limited financial resources (7), limited time (4), lack of will and readiness for changes<sup>55</sup> (4), conflicting expectations between the two regions (3), lack of follow-up programmes or opportunities for further funding (2), administrative burden (2), structural reasons (without providing more detail) (2), limited number of students involved (1), lack of support from colleagues (2), lack of experience in disseminating the project results (1), difficulties to apply the material developed during the project in another context (1) were also considered as important constraints.

### 3.6. Impact at system level

The projects mainly aimed at bringing changes at local level. However, some of them potentially could have an impact on the wider contexts. The study further investigated whether any impact could be traced beyond the immediate environment of the projects and whether they had any influence on the system/national policy level. It was expected that the partnerships funded under this action could contribute to and/or create synergies with school policies in the different participating countries, particularly where reforms have been carried out.

Academic literature on cross-national policy learning indicates that there can be various degrees of influence by a programme on substantive policy change<sup>56</sup>. Concepts and practices learned during the partnerships may influence the thinking of main stakeholders (**cognitive shifts**) so that they refer to these concepts and practices when designing their positions or criticising local/regional (or national) authorities and their policies. In turn, this can lead to changes of policy agendas (**political shifts**) when ideas with roots in an action or programme enter the policy mainstream and are addressed in public discussions. New ideas emerging from the projects may be reflected in policy documents, can feed into the policy agenda or be discussed at advisory bodies (i.e. working groups or forums) and eventually they may be reflected in government activities, which could later lead to **programmatic shifts**.

The direct impacts (programmatic shifts) would be the most obvious example, but such a direct line of influence is also the most difficult to prove as any policy change occurs due to multiple factors. From the participants' survey and the data gathered during the case studies there was **no considerable evidence that the Comenius Regio action influenced programmatic shifts**. Taking into account that this action follows the decentralised implementation mode, it is hard to expect direct impacts at the system or national policy level. **In most of the cases it is possible to talk about cognitive shifts and in some cases about changes of policy agenda (political shifts)** when some ideas from the Comenius Regio Partnerships are addressed in public discussions and, at least to some extent, are used by political actors in shaping the school education policy. Some examples illustrating political shifts are provided in Box 13.

#### Box 13. Influence of the partnerships on the system/national policy level

**Case study 1:** The research by Umeå University into entrepreneurial learning was encouraged by the Swedish government and funding had been made available. At national level in Sweden a lot of funding has been devoted to Continuous Professional Development aimed at head teachers and teachers where entrepreneurial learning and more cooperation with private enterprises is desired. Umeå University is collaborating with Skolverket (the Swedish National Agency for Education) on a 5-day course where at the end it should be possible to: 1) explain and understand terminology within the area, entrepreneurial learning; 2) have knowledge on how entrepreneurial learning influences children's motivation to learn; 3) be able to link entrepreneurial pedagogy to the curriculum; 4) have ideas on how entrepreneurial learning can be implemented in the classroom; 5) be able to discuss formative assessment in relation to the review questions; 6) be aware of the importance of leadership in how to inspire and influence collaboration.

**Case study 4:** The Restorative Justice Council, which provides quality assurance and a national voice for restorative practice, has become involved in developments within Norfolk, and Restorative Approaches are being developed throughout all aspects of local government. The Development Manager for Restorative Practices, acting as the replacement project coordinator, has been able to achieve a lot of progress at the strategic level, within Norfolk local authority – and this success has been very much mirrored by similar strategic developments in Dublin: 1) the Irish Restorative

<sup>56</sup> The analysis framework developed by Zeitlin, J., "Conclusion: The Open Method of Coordination in Action. Theoretical Promise, Empirical Realities, Reform Strategy" (In J. Zeitlin, P. Pochet and L. Magnusson (eds.) *The Open Method of Co-ordination in Action: The European Employment and Social Inclusion Strategies*, Brussels: PIE Peter Lang., 2005) can be applied to the education policy.

Practice Network has found its work greatly strengthened by the project. An *All Ireland Strategic Forum* has also been set up – and the project has been a major positive influence in this development; 2) as a direct result of the project, a Restorative Practices Strategic Management Group has been established in Dublin. The project management group found that many local agencies both in Norfolk and in Dublin were becoming involved in Restorative Practices development, inspired by what they had seen in the project.

**Case study 5:** The project results have been used in elaborating the Frame of Reference for the School Libraries, developed jointly by the Spanish Ministry of Education and the representatives of the Autonomous Communities (see Case study 5 for more details).

Source: case study reports accompanying the Study of the impact of Comenius Regio, PPMI.

Note: for more information see Table 2, Case study 1, Case study 4 and Case study 5.

Similarly, the survey data provides very few examples of the possible influence of the Comenius Regio projects on the national level. There were a few cases where **results and recommendations** of the Comenius Regio projects were possibly **adopted to improve school education policies** (see Box 14).

#### **Box 14. Examples of the influence of the Comenius Regio Partnerships on the system/national policy level from the survey results**

“The definition of professional competences of different fashion jobs were taken into consideration in shaping new fashion-related courses”; “We shared our experiences with the policymakers on the national level and believe that some of our input was used in making new and/or improving policy on educational issues”; “The results and the recommendations of the project were adopted and supported by the Ministry of Education and they are currently being applied to a great extent. Some of the recommendations are being viewed and will be implemented in the near future”.

Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

On the one hand, the transferability of the project results at the national level can be constrained by one of the similar reasons as those discussed in the previous section: practices were prevented by implementation of other reforms and initiatives, it did not fit with the prevailing attitudes or beliefs of certain stakeholders or prevailing principles and regulations, were not perceived as better than other practices disseminated at the same time or were not perceived as better than the current situation or products (see Section 3.4). On the other hand, many project promoters have indicated that despite the mentioned limitations when it comes to transferability, the Comenius Regio action can be considered as an opportunity to test and discuss further ideas or models: it allows the participants to rethink its own ideas when it has to present it to others and it can serve to validate, revise and improve an initial idea. The data gathered during the case studies indicated that in some cases the projects further **enhanced the status of a particular community or a particular approach** as a good-practice example in the regional and national contexts (e.g. Elsendorp, Netherlands in Case study 1; Larnaca, Cyprus in Case study 2; both Shropshire, the UK and Hvidovre, Denmark in Case study 6). Even though a number of projects were clearly very well thought of by the National Agencies or national authorities and recognised as good-practice examples, it would be very difficult to claim any national level impact in these cases.

The stakeholders at the European level interviewed for this study indicated that they saw a strong value in the work of Comenius Regio in providing **opportunities for those involved in education at all levels** to undertake field visits, in order to learn together, broaden their experience and bring that experience to bear in their professional context<sup>57</sup>.

The majority of the small number of survey respondents who stated that they have disseminated the project results to the stakeholders at the system level, either mentioned

<sup>57</sup> Telephone interview with European level stakeholder, 22 April 2014.

that project results were disseminated as a good-practice example in a wider context or confirmed that their project was appreciated by national authorities or other organisations referring to various awards they received (see Box 15).

**Box 15. Dissemination of the project results at national level from the answers to the open question of the survey of the participants of the Comenius Regio Partnerships**

“It has been identified as a particularly innovative project and the contact person and the writer was invited by the Ministry and the National Agency LLP in Florence”; “Our good practice experience was presented at national level and some municipalities were consulted by telephone about implementation of a Comenius Regio project”; “The project was selected to be promoted at the Youth on the Move campaign. The project was selected as an example of good practice at both national and EU”; “Yes, our project was seen as very good and spread by our national board as a “best-practice” project”; “The project has been showcased at national level by the British Council as an example of good practice as well as receiving an EST Star Award”; “Been asked to share best practice to other national organisations as an example of good working practices and enterprise network”.

Source: survey of the participants of Comenius Regio Partnerships, PPMI.

**One of the key conditions** to emerge for policy learning and synergies with school policies in different participating countries is **awareness of the individuals in charge of education policy at national level**. In the case of Comenius Regio Partnerships, the results of the projects funded under this action would need to be adequately disseminated and exploited. The case studies and the results of the participants’ survey revealed that in most cases the project partners do not **regard national authorities as one of the main target groups** of their dissemination activities (Figure 33)<sup>58</sup>. Since in practice most partners do not and cannot aim to reach national authorities as their target group given the decentralised nature of the action, it is important to breach that gap. The role of National Agencies and other EU level organisations that are aware of successful projects can be important in this respect (see chapter “Conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations”).

“One of the key conditions to emerge for policy learning and synergies with school policies in different participating countries is awareness of the individuals in charge of education policy at national level”

<sup>58</sup> The tendency to perceive the school community and other interest groups at the local level as the main target group is not surprising given the similar findings of previous evaluations of other Comenius actions. For example, the study on impact of the Comenius School Partnerships, carried out in 2007, indicated that the main target groups of the dissemination activities were school community and other actors at the local level; while the study, carried out in 2012, indicated that dissemination was essentially made through project results being made available on a website and their transmission to neighbouring schools. It indicated that schools found it difficult to disseminate the results which they had developed and to influence the development of systems and institutions. See: Association for Empirical Studies and Centre for research into schools and education, *Impact of the Comenius School Partnerships on the participant schools*, p. 31–32; Centre international d’études pédagogiques (CIEP), *Study of the impact of Comenius school partnerships on participating schools: Institutional changes and the European dimension. Executive summary*, p. 9–10.



## 4. CONCLUSIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This part of the report presents the overall conclusions of the study and the lessons learned about the main obstacles and success factors in the implementation of Comenius Regio, as well as outlines general and specific recommendations as to how the design of school partnerships and their execution could be improved in the future.

### Overall conclusions of the study

The study of the impact of Comenius Regio indicates that **the Comenius Regio action was successful in achieving its general objectives**, which include strengthening the European dimension in school education and developing tools for sustainable cooperation across borders. The design of the action supporting interregional partnerships, which allows the schools and third partners to participate fully in project content development with the local/regional authorities, was regarded as beneficial.

The study confirmed that **the vast majority of participating organisations succeeded in achieving their project objectives**, and sometimes the project results exceeded their expectations. The Comenius Regio Partnerships had **either a high degree of influence or some influence** on such areas as development and sharing of good practices, improved cooperation between teachers from the same school, introduction and implementation of new learning approaches, improvement of cooperation between teachers and school management, encouragement of implementation of international activities in schools.

#### Recommendation 1:

**The Erasmus+ programme should retain the advantages of Comenius Regio** by continuing to support regional cooperation with partnerships involving local and regional authorities together with schools and other relevant community third partners in school education partnerships in order to improve school education practices.

The results of transnational cooperation between local/regional authorities, schools and other educational actors are frequently related to a number of educational topics corresponding to school education priorities and initiatives pursued by responsible national authorities, as well as local and regional authorities with responsibility for education. Therefore, the results of many Comenius Regio projects are highly relevant to European, national and sub-national decision-makers engaged in the formulation of school education policy. This indicates a good potential for using the results of the Comenius Regio projects in order to **inform educational policy developments**.

#### Recommendation 2:

In order to improve the use of transnational cooperation results in educational decision-making at national or regional level, **improve synergies between Erasmus+ results and various school policy initiatives at EU and national level**. Furthermore, synergies between **Erasmus+ and other funding instruments** (in particular with the European Structural and Investment Funds) could be improved in order to reinforce their joint contribution to achieving relevant educational policy aims.

The study evidence suggests that implementing successful and lasting change in schools or creating an internationally integrated network of education professionals across different European countries **takes a lot of time and requires a very thorough and fully developed approach**. The Erasmus+ programme can play an effective part in this



process, but a longer timeframe could be allowed for project implementation, if substantial development is to be achieved despite the rapid changes in the context of the European educational landscape.

### Recommendation 3:

Given the inevitable complexity of transnational school education partnerships and the time required for project implementation and the dissemination of results, **consider ways of extending cooperation undertaken in partnerships of proven worth in order to provide continuity of development and time to effect lasting change in educational practice.** Partnerships identified by both National Agencies as potentially good practices during the second year could be invited to re-apply for funding for follow-on projects, on the basis of demonstrating successful achievements and a credible strategy for further development. A longer period of cooperation would allow more time for relationships to develop with other partners – and for those partners to feel a positive impact. Moreover, that would give participants time to conduct dissemination activities that could extend from information spreading for specific target groups associated with project themes – to the inclusion of higher education levels and the wider public. This would encourage opening up schools to the community and help local authorities and schools to use the community as a learning resource. It would also contribute to project quality and innovation, as well as development of competences.

### Design of the partnerships during the application stage

The results of the overall analysis demonstrated a great variety of project designs in terms of partner selection, partnership size covered topics and chosen activities. The study revealed that **the involvement of local/regional authorities as project coordinators** is regarded as one of the key features contributing to project success. However, there was considerable variation in the role of local/regional authorities in Comenius Regio Partnerships. The nature and roles of third partners also varied widely. Some organisations with a strong commitment to and wide experience of school education in effect replaced the local or regional authority as *de facto* coordinating body. Others had a much more peripheral role.

The **opportunity to involve a broad range of third partners**, however, constituted one of the strengths of Comenius Regio. It allowed the project participants to develop **broad strategic partnerships** in the field of school education and contributed to the **development of closer relationships** between schools and their local environment. Furthermore, the key role of local/regional authorities in the partnership, the equal involvement of all project partners and an active role of third partner organisations also had an important effect at institutional and local community levels.

A core role assigned to the local and regional authorities while designing the Comenius Regio action does not mean that schools or third partners were marginalised and detached from the project activities. In many cases schools and other partner organisations were particularly active in the partnerships and this contributed to the overall project success.

### Recommendation 4:

**Promote the development of balanced partnerships** significantly involving all three types of partners during the application phase. It is important to demonstrate to the third partners that their participation is recognised and visible. When selecting the submitted applications for funding attention should be paid to the extent to which the partnerships are balanced and involve third partner organisations.

The results of the study confirmed the **importance of previous collaboration experience** to managing the partnership activities. According to the data gathered, previous involvement in Comenius Regio as well as in other European and national programmes/initiatives in school education was an important factor that contributed to the influence of the project on the participant schools and local/regional authorities. Consequently, schools with experience of previous extensive collaboration with local/regional authorities from their region tended to report a higher influence of their Comenius Regio Partnerships in terms of the development and sharing of good practices,

improved foreign language competences of teachers and the encouragement of the implementation of international activities in other schools. A similar relationship was also found between the previous collaboration experiences of schools with European-level partners involved in school education.

Regarding **the topics addressed in the partnerships**, the projects most frequently focused on improvement of the key competences of participants (such as ICT, foreign languages), enhancing the European dimension in school education and increasing school cooperation with the local community. Issues relating to the management of the education process remained the least popular. In addition, **the activities conducted in the projects** most frequently included exchanges of good practice between partner regions, project meetings and various forms of training (seminars, workshops, working groups, etc.) as well as the group of dissemination practices that focused on drafting, publishing and spreading information on project results.

#### Recommendation 5:

**In designing cooperation projects in school education on the bottom-up basis the focus should be placed on important issues of school education that correspond to EU, national or regional priorities for education policies.** The European Commission, the Executive Agency, the National Authorities and National Agencies should better communicate these priorities to potential applicants in order to better link them with school education issues faced at institutional or local level. Depending on project objectives, appropriate individual and organisation-level activities (such as working with ICT, improving teaching and learning foreign languages, encouraging the use of open educational resources, etc.) that are more likely to bring immediate changes to school education at local or regional level could be selected. Project activities should be planned so that they are likely to engage project partners and contribute to joint results.

On the other hand, it should also be noted that system-wide activities (such as a comparison of educational systems and cultural differences) require a more holistic approach and relate to wider and deeper changes in educational practice than could be feasible under quite small Comenius Regio projects. Therefore, support for policy reform, which is foreseen in the new integrated programme of Erasmus+, could be provided for enabling joint working on these macro issues, involving responsible national, regional and local authorities with a role in school education.

The **active involvement of local and/or regional authorities and the effective planning of dissemination activities** are important already in the project design stage for the successful dissemination of project results and their possible application in other contexts. Project partners can share their responsibility for the execution of dissemination activities. In addition to local and regional authorities, third partners can play a significant role in disseminating project results. Furthermore, they can help to spread the information about the benefits of partnerships to the similar organisations working in the field and encourage them to take more active part in the local communities.

#### Recommendation 6:

**More attention should be paid to planning for sustainability and dissemination at the project design and application stage.** It is important to promote the importance of dissemination during this stage and provide clear guidance on dissemination to project promoters and project evaluators. Also, a coherent and clear dissemination plan should be elaborated, indicating how local and/or regional authorities will be involved and which dissemination tools will be used. It could be possible to make the local authority responsible for project sustainability within their area of responsibility, while the regional authority might take the lead in wider dissemination and ensuring multiplier effects – at least where both local and regional authorities can be involved.

#### Execution of the partnerships

The study revealed considerable variation in the role of local/regional authorities as **project coordinators** in Comenius Regio Partnerships. Local, regional authorities do not always cooperate as they are expected and **schools often** – of necessity – **play a very significant role**, sometimes the role of a *de facto* leading organisation. Some local authorities delegate control to schools, to other bodies, set up special offices to manage the project – or employ consultants. In other cases, head teachers or teachers (who are

after all normally the employees of the local/regional authorities) manage the project on behalf of the local authorities.

#### **Recommendation 7:**

**The local/regional authorities should retain the main responsibility for the projects, but their actual role as project coordinators should be well defined and maintained.** Guidance and information could be provided on the role of these authorities during the whole project cycle. Also, project partners should adequately share and balance their responsibilities while designing a project. Moreover, local and regional authorities should demonstrate their commitment and leadership in school education partnerships during the project execution.

Additionally, **the organisational capacities** allowing participants to become actively involved in project activities were the main factors affecting the programme impacts on third partners of Comenius Regio Partnerships. The level of support and involvement of the leading organisations (local/regional authorities) was revealed to be a significant feature for the engagement of non-school partners as well. Process-related factors such as the effective exchange of information between the project partners, effective project management, effective activity planning and monitoring during the project implementation, effective problem-solving and decision-making also contributed to positive changes in participating schools and local/regional authorities.

The study evidence suggested that one of the principal factors of both the overall success of a project and its influence on participants was **the personal commitment of project coordinators**. The effective coordination of a Comenius Regio project required a considerable amount of time, devotion and enthusiasm. The future inter-regional partnerships could institutionalise the project coordinator's role by officially allocating part of the working hours of the relevant member of staff to the project and offering additional support to minimise the administrative burden.

#### **Recommendation 8:**

Taking into consideration the importance of process factors to the achievement of Comenius Regio impacts at all levels, **the joint interaction of partners and their cooperation in designing and executing transnational school education projects should be facilitated**. This would be achieved by allocating sufficient resources within project funding to enhance the capacities of participating organisations, partnership development and joint activity execution (e.g. opportunity should be provided for a face-to-face preparatory meeting between partners), as in the current Comenius Programme. The National Agencies can continue providing appropriate guidance for potential applicants and project beneficiaries on good project development and management practices.

The Comenius Regio projects tend to be **effective at a local level**. At the institutional level, the local/regional authorities, schools and third partners acknowledged the contribution of the action to changing teaching and learning styles in the classrooms, adapting educational practices to the needs of the community and development of more effective pedagogical practices. The Comenius Regio Partnerships also helped local/regional authorities and third partners to better address educational issues in the region and broadened staff experience and knowledge in school education. The partnerships frequently influenced the creation of stronger and continuing networking among partner organisations. Increased visibility of the Comenius Regio action and the Comenius programme, as well as the increased recognition of participation in international cooperation by educational authorities were also regarded as the main benefits of the action at the local community level.

#### **Dissemination and exploitation of the project results**

The involvement of the local/regional authorities seemed – in some cases – to contribute to raising awareness of the relevant stakeholders at the national level, because they were much more active in spreading the information about the Comenius Regio projects to a wider context than schools and third partners.

Although the partnerships seem to produce mainly **local results, multiplier effects**, however, may take place in the regional contexts – and regional authorities can be supportive in enabling a wider impact for project results. The Comenius Regio Partnerships had an influence at the regional level in the sense that stakeholders at the regional level may now understand **better the value of the international dimension of educational programmes and the importance of a transformation towards a partnership approach, acknowledging the role of third partners in school education**.

The analysis revealed that the impact of the Comenius Regio Partnerships at local, regional or system level was primarily related to the **quality of their results, effective dissemination activities** and the extent to which the project results **reached relevant target groups**. The study results also showed that a relatively small number of partner organisations considered educational providers, other local/regional authorities or national authorities to be one of the target groups for their dissemination activities. In addition to local and regional authorities, third partners, the National Agencies also play an important role while disseminating the project results to the wider public: the results were presented in seminars, conferences, workshops and other events.

#### **Recommendation 9:**

There should be an increased awareness of relevant school policy stakeholders about Comenius Regio results and an improvement in their use at system and regional/national levels. In relation to developing longer term multiplier effects, **the local/regional authorities and the National Agencies should be further supported to reinforce their efforts in dissemination and exploitation activities during and after the project implementation**, within Erasmus + Key Action 2 “Strategic Partnerships”. This would help to retain the strengths of Comenius Regio in supporting both community education developments and the close involvement of the local/regional authority (or association of schools in whatever form is relevant in the particular context) in disseminating good practice from projects more broadly (in cooperation with the National Agencies). This could include the adoption of wider dissemination strategies, selection of more appropriate dissemination mechanisms adjusted according to particular target groups and the current situation in education development in that region/area and targeting regional/national level policymakers and stakeholders more directly.

The data collected during the study indicates that it is important to **map and mainstream the innovative practices in school education** that were developed by the Comenius Regio Partnerships through various European, national and regional networks, dissemination platforms and websites, promotional activities and events (such as the Comenius Regio conferences), as well as special mainstreaming or follow-up projects.

#### **Recommendation 10:**

**Mapping and mainstreaming the innovative practices in school education**, which were developed by the Comenius Regio Partnerships, **could be promoted by developing an Erasmus+ Network**. Such network would link together successful projects, and participants could form new alliances and carry out further research. This tool should be well designed, managed and supported, and the project beneficiaries and potential applicants should be aware of its existence and encouraged to use it. Such a network could play a crucial role in relation to the sustainability of developments made within projects. The development of such a network could be possible under the Erasmus+ programme, which sets cooperation, networking and peer learning as key objectives of the strategic partnerships.

## CASE STUDIES

### SAND IN TAUFERS ELSENDORP PARTNERSHIP INTO THE FUTURE

#### Case Study 1



Project website  
[www.schooljournals.net/step](http://www.schooljournals.net/step)

#### Participating regions

Netherlands, Italy

#### Participating organisations

##### Netherlands:

- Novem Foundation for Catholic and Protestant Christian Primary Education (third partner, non-profit association)
- Endersdorp Foundation for Broad School (third partner, local community association)
- Elsendorp Community Council (local/regional authority)
- Meester Ivenschool - Primary School, Elsendorp (primary school)

##### Italy:

- German-speaking school board, Bozen/Bolzano Schulsprengel Sand in Taufers (secondary school)
- Cooperative for Regional Development and Training Campo Tures Tauferer Ahrntal (third partner, adult education provider)
- Sand in Taufers Local Council (local/regional authority)

Number of mobilities	Topics covered
100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community education</li> <li>• Environment</li> <li>• Broad School concept</li> </ul>

#### IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT TOPIC AND THE MAIN PROJECT IDEA

The project's main aim was to **strengthen the links between the schools, the local community and the local entrepreneurs**. Elsendorp Community Council wanted to engage with the ideas and skills of its 1000 villagers to create a vision of the village's future. In the Netherlands the concept of the Broad School<sup>59</sup> had been introduced. It fitted perfectly into the Elsendorp vision of cooperation and shared responsibilities. Participation in the Comenius Regio project came about because Elsendorp had won the Dutch stage of the European Village Partnership competition. They then proceeded to the final stage at European level, which was won by Sand in Taufers from South Tyrol. As a consequence, informal links were developed between these villages. Another local Dutch village then recommended the preparation of a Comenius Regio application. The project was based on the idea to develop further cohesion between education, enterprise, citizenship and healthcare within the two communities. Both communities

**The importance of school education in creating a tight network between education providers, local entrepreneurs and the community**

<sup>59</sup> A "broad school" is defined as a community-based in school, which involves pupils in the life of the community and the whole community in the learning process.



were equally committed to these concepts and keen to learn from each other's experiences.

Both partners agreed on the following common objectives:

- involve inhabitants in the development of the local community by cooperating, sharing and taking responsibilities;
- let children learn that they can have a role in the community too as they are the village's future;
- promote reading skills and childrens' motivation to read to open up their world and activate their imagination;
- convince every generation in the village that the involvement of volunteers is necessary in order to achieve all educational and other activities to realise the infrastructure necessary for the village's future.

The project carried out meetings at a transnational level, with work packages taking place in between the meetings, each of which was the responsibility of a special work group, established within the partnership, led by a work group coach. The individual working groups of the partnership have met several times in joint sessions since the partnership's formation. Within these, institutions and associations in the regions were invited to share experiences and to learn from each other. During the discussions partner organisations focused on:

- the two different school systems (what is good and what needs improvement);
- the two different cultural systems (especially for pupils);
- integration of children with special needs into local and regional schools;
- childcare (nursery schools, day nursery);
- the possibility of integrating the library either into the school or local society;
- the development of a broad school local community;
- the promotion of educational initiatives by the municipality;
- a range of topics about social learning;
- agricultural development and the relationship between large scale agriculture and nature;
- opportunities and threats for the future of small villages in their regions;
- the Agenda 21 project "Healthy Community".

### 3. MAIN IMPACTS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

Some of the positive impacts of the project on participating teaching staff included professional recognition, new insights into pedagogical methods, experiences shared in an open learning environment, discussion of alternatives methods in an open minded atmosphere, enhancing the participants' understanding of their own professional responsibilities and capacities. It gave them energy to look at their own teaching practices from a new perspective and make constructive changes accordingly.

Some impacts on other participating institutions were also evident. As the participants of the work groups came from all local organisations, they reported their own personal experiences. This started discussions about methods and their effects, resulting in some practical changes within organisations.

In addition, impacts on the local community were drawn from special meetings between school leaders, parents and teachers, which were organised to share the experiences of the project participants and to view exhibitions of pictures from the project meetings. For example, two conferences were organised for school committee members (60 parents were present each time) to provide them with information about the project and its objectives.

As a consequence, participants' families and colleagues– both adults and children – learned even more about foreign practices and daily life.

Finally, the project has been able to establish an on-going partnership that can be sustained over a number of years.

The Chair of the Elsendorp Partnership felt that, *"We did more than we first thought that we could do. We changed what we had to change – and it was vital to be able to be flexible. For the Italians, this was much more difficult – they had to stick to the rules".*



Overall, as was indicated by the project's Final Report, the most inspiring results were not the concrete changes in daily practice but **changes in the way of thinking** about the role of the local community in school education processes, and considering attitudes and practices beyond the accepted everyday routine. Contrasts and differences proved to be very inspiring and created a cohesion that will last after the project has finished. Above all, the strength of the project has been 'people meeting people' and coming close to people from another culture. According to project coordinator, *"Overall, the most inspiring results were not the concrete changes in daily practice but changes in the way of thinking and considering attitudes and practices beyond the accepted everyday routine".*

#### SUCCESS FACTORS (AND OBSTACLES)

The co-ordination on the Italian side was shared between the Municipality and the partner school, so that provided the link required between school education and the broader community services. The involvement of the Gemeende Gebert-Bakel was a distinct and valuable one, although the project was led by one of its constituent village communities. There was a considerable difference in the nature of the school buildings and in the level of facilities available – notably in ICT. What was possible within the project was therefore in many respects quite different from what had been originally planned.

This project, although it had only seven official partners, managed to involve many aspects of community services (including childcare, health, social care) and local businesses. Thus, it proved a good example that even the smallest projects can bring positive outcomes in local communities. The increasing **involvement of the wider community** was an essential part of the learning process.

The project team had a very clear and easily accessible website which has plenty of details on all the project developments. They have also published a **high-quality booklet "STEP into the Future"** on the project's implementation and results, in German and Dutch. The project published details of developments in regional newspapers and received coverage on local television. Meetings for the inhabitants of both communities gave details of the projects. More importantly, the many professionals involved spread and discussed their new insights through both personal and professional networks.

When it comes to the **sustainability** of the project, very positive results have been achieved. Most of the work groups initially proposed did in fact operate – and some of those are still actively cooperating, sharing new ideas and developments together and seeking each other's help with new issues as they arise. The Dutch partner has drawn great strength and encouragement from the project, to continue with and expand the 'Broad School' concept.



## LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR TRASFERABILITY

As the project began, community education (the “Broad School” concept or “a healthy community and school” concept) was perhaps more effectively established and better developed in Elsendorp than in Sand in Taufers. The project served to advance both the idea and the practice of community education in Sand in Taufers, as they sought to apply its principles in their own context. The project was, however, equally valuable to participants from Elsendorp, as they shared their own good practice – and also learned from the expertise of various groups and individuals from their partner region.

Whilst formally there were only three partners involved on the Dutch side and four on the Italian, in reality the **project involved a wide range of participants**, for example from health and social care, agriculture and tourism, rather than just those directly involved in education. The official lead organisations, the local education authorities of Gemert-Bakel and Bozen actually facilitated the co-operation of two quite small local communities, Endersdorp (approximately 1 000 inhabitants) and Sand in Taufers (approximately 5 200 inhabitants). The initiative for the project had in any case come from these communities.

This small-scale project enabled excellent personal and professional relationships to be established between a wide range of social and educational actors – and also proved **very resilient** in responding to the many challenges faced – for example, the very different systems and ways of thinking about both learning and community issues and the language problem. The small scale allowed for **flexibility** when activities had to be changed and more achievable objectives had to be established in light of the reality of the project. The **holistic and cooperative model** of the project (both within and across the two partner communities) was in itself a challenge to traditional ways of thinking and also to the normal ways of supporting transnational cooperation through European projects.

Project coordinator: *“I am sure you felt that the enthusiasm is still fully alive. And we really regret that we had only two years to accomplish as much as possible because we could easily have gone on for another two years at least”.*

## CONTACTS

For more information about the project please contact the project coordinator Ietje Zeguers at [ietjezeguers@gmail.com](mailto:ietjezeguers@gmail.com) or Piet Willems at [pietwillems@ivenschool.nl](mailto:pietwillems@ivenschool.nl).

## SCHOOL HORIZONS FOR COUNSELLING AND CAREERS GUIDANCE

### Case Study 2



#### Participating regions

Greece, Cyprus

#### Participating organisations

##### Greece (Magnesia):

- Directorate of Secondary Education of Magnesia (regional authority)
- 1st Lyceum of Volos (secondary school)
- 3rd High School of Nea Ionia Magnesia (secondary school)
- 1st Vocational Lyceum Volos (vocational-technical secondary school)
- Chamber of Magnesia (*third partner, chambers of commerce*)
- Development Company of Magnesia Chamber (*third partner, public company*)

##### Cyprus (Larnaca):

- District Education Office of Larnaca and Famagusta (regional authority)
- Gymnasium of Larnakas (secondary school)
- Regional High School Xylofagou (secondary school)
- Association of Parents Gymnasium Larnaca (*third partner, parent's association*)

Number of mobilities	Topics covered
37	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career guidance &amp; counselling</li> <li>• Reinforcing links between education and working life</li> <li>• Development of training courses</li> <li>• School cooperation with local community</li> <li>• Interdisciplinary approaches</li> <li>• Parents' involvement</li> <li>• Professional competences</li> </ul>

#### IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT TOPIC AND THE MAIN PROJECT IDEA

The aim of the project "School Horizons for Counselling and Career Guidance" was to increase the quality of career guidance, to explore the teaching practices used and share the experiences in counselling and **career guidance in schools** in Greece and Cyprus. The partner organisations also aimed at strengthening the links between **education and the labour market** and encouraging the schools to open up their environment by establishing closer links with the business sector.

The subject of career guidance is gaining more importance across Europe and the great importance of high-quality educational and vocational guidance as well as career guidance is acknowledged by the other Member States. Both authorities involved in the project stressed the importance of the improvement of the quality of guidance services and the training of counsellors.

**Useful advice and training based support – guiding students to choose their future wisely and find the right path to develop professionally**

The partners from Larnaca and Magnesia did not perceive career guidance as the sole work of career guidance teachers and believed in an **interdisciplinary approach**: from

their perspective, everyone who comes in contact with students should be able to help them to choose their career path. Therefore from the very beginning the project involved not only a number of different schools, but also representatives of employers' organisations as well as **parents' associations**. A number of other schools and organisations not directly involved as partners also contributed to the partnership during the project's implementation.

#### MAIN IMPACTS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The project helped to establish closer links between the schools and their local partners and contributed to the dissemination of **good practice** in the career guidance and counselling of Magnesia and Larnaca. This was achieved under the guidance of two local authorities with a role in school education and with the active involvement of career counsellors and other partners from these two regions.

The activities involved seminars for the counsellors, principals and teachers and the **active involvement of business representatives** in career guidance classes in the schools, as well as two large conferences organised in Volos and Larnaca. The project participants stressed that the seminars were particularly useful to the counsellors and helped them to improve their **professional competences**. Counsellors gained theoretical and practical knowledge, shared their experiences with their counterparts and came into contact with researchers, government managers and representatives of other organisations working in the field of career guidance during the project activities.



To gain more information important for career guidance and counselling, the partner organisations carried out a **research project** on the impact of social background on the career choices of students using qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The research results disclosed the importance of social background in the choices of the students and were used in discussions with the relevant stakeholders. The partner organisations were able to **disseminate the research** results to other teachers and head teachers who did not take part in the project, because a number of project activities targeted teachers and head teachers from the other schools from the regions of Magnesia and Larnaca and the coordinating institutions made their participation mandatory.

Based on the project results the partner organisations prepared an extensive **publication** reflecting on the use of professional counselling to overcome the difficulties of integration in the labour market in the current economic environment, stressing the value and importance of counselling and career guidance in the context of the economic crisis.

Some of the project activities also directly targeted the students from a number of schools involved in the partnership. The entrepreneurs from various fields shared their success stories and provided advice to the pupils. The project coordinators organised an informal survey in the schools to learn about their preferences and invited entrepreneurs from the fields in which students were most interested. The project helped students to broaden their understanding of possible career opportunities and introduced them to success stories shared by people of various ages and backgrounds. In response to the economic crisis and consequent increase of unemployment, it was an important contribution to helping students choose realistic **career orientations**.

The project also had an impact on partner organisations. A **specific office** was created in the District Office of Larnaca to handle the project and provide assistance on career guidance. According to the project coordinator from Cyprus, the office continues to operate even after the project has officially ended. In addition, some important links between the association of entrepreneurs from Magnesia and their counterparts from Larnaca were established, fostering economic exchanges between the regions.

The project's merit has been recognised at the national level, with representatives of the Ministry of Education and the National Agency of Cyprus praising the achievements of the project. The Ministries of Education of Greece and Cyprus expressed their interest in the publication of the final results of the partnership.

### SUCCESS FACTORS (AND OBSTACLES)

The Centre for Counselling and Guidance in Magnesia, which was coordinating the project from the Greek side, had considerable **experience and expertise** in the field. In addition, they found **committed partners** on the Cypriot side. Although the coordinating institutions did not have previous cooperation experience, the enthusiasm and determination of the project coordinators allowed them to ensure smooth communication and reach the project goals.

Project **coordination by the regional authorities** with a role in school education policy was an important factor contributing to the success of the project. Having supervisory control over the secondary and vocational schools, both coordinating institutions had the necessary authority to involve the target group in the project activities. This ensured the involvement of the other schools in some project activities and the dissemination of the project results to all counsellors and head teachers in the regions.

The success factors also included the active engagement of the project participants. The partnership involved passionate **teachers and counsellors**, devoted to their job and willing to help their pupils. The support of the **head teachers** and personal involvement by some of them in the project activities was also perceived as a very important factor facilitating possible changes in schools.

The necessary knowledge and expertise possessed by some of the project participants allowed them to carry out research on the specific topics related to the impact of social background on career choices, using qualitative and quantitative research techniques.



The project also had to face some difficulties related to the ongoing reforms in the partner's educational system and the economic crises that lead to cuts in staff. Due to these external factors, some adjustments to the planned activities had to be made.

### LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR TRANSFERABILITY

Even in the context of significant changes related to career guidance and counselling in schools in Magnesia, the partner organisations managed to carry out the planned project activities and gathered valuable knowledge, which was shared with a number of interested parties. The personal determination and commitment of the project coordinators were particularly important in the context of the emerging challenges.

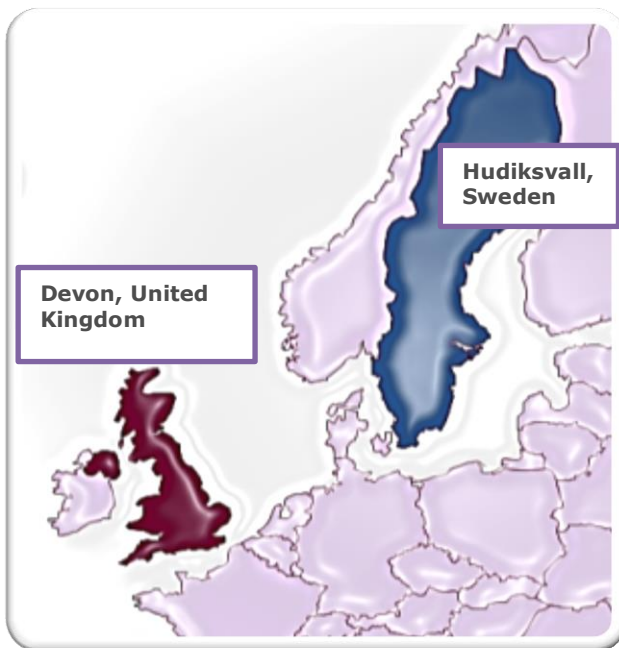
Another important lesson from the project was the importance of the extended **professional experience** possessed by the project coordinator in the field of career guidance. In this particular case, a project aimed at increasing career councillors' qualifications can achieve better results if it is coordinated by a person with direct counselling experience.

#### CONTACTS

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## CLASSROOM LEADERSHIP IN REAL LIFE

### Case Study 3



Project website  
[www.fortbildningab.se/pdfkatalog/7207.pdf](http://www.fortbildningab.se/pdfkatalog/7207.pdf)

#### Participating regions

Sweden, UK

#### Participating organisations

##### Sweden:

- Hudiksvalls kommun, Förvaltningen för Lärande och Kultur – Hudiksvall Local Council – Department for Education and Culture (local/regional authority)
- Bromangymnasiet – Upper Secondary School (school)
- Umeå University (third partner, university)

##### UK:

- Devon County Council (local/regional authority)
- Newton Abbot College – Secondary School (school)
- Keywords – Communications and Training Consultancy (third partner, consultancy)

Number of mobilities	Topics covered
52	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of teaching and learning</li> <li>• Learning to Learn</li> <li>• Formative assessment</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial education</li> <li>• Personalized Learning</li> <li>• Professional development</li> </ul>

#### IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT TOPIC AND THE MAIN PROJECT IDEA

The project was initiated by the Swedish partner school, as a result of a longstanding working relationship with Newton Abbott College. The two schools had worked together on enterprise education for some five or six years. The College had been involved in innovative work in the establishment of a Core Skills curriculum for Year 7 (11/12 years old). This was of interest to Bromangymnasiet, even though their own students were between 16 and 19 years old, and linked closely to their own work on entrepreneurial approaches to education. The partnership centered on the joint development of more **effective teaching and learning strategies** by the two partner schools, with support from the two local authorities, and expert advice from the third partners, Umeå University and communications and training consultancy “Keywords”. The model was very much based on **development and validation of best practice in the schools**, which can then be disseminated more widely within the two local authorities.

The partnerships’ objectives were to maintain and improve standards of education in schools, acquire transferable learning skills, increase motivation and engagement through entrepreneurial education and improve academic attainment through innovative teaching and learning approaches, including access to further and higher education. Other objectives of the project included: raising awareness of the purpose and value of personal learning and

**Learning through leading – how entrepreneurial education enables higher engagement, responsibility taking and interactivity in the learning process**



thinking skills; developing the teaching of personal learning and thinking skills in a relevant social context; exploring assessment techniques and approaches evaluating personal learning and thinking skills; sharing the outcomes of good practice locally, regionally, nationally and internationally; offering developmental opportunities for students and staff; and encouraging experimental learning among project participants.

In terms of the development of EC Key Competences, this project focuses directly on the transversal Key Competences: Learning to Learn, Using ICT, Entrepreneurial Skills and Social and Civic Competences.

#### MAIN IMPACTS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

In Sweden, there has been a significant impact on the local authority, in that the Director gave the project strong personal support from its inception. The project has been used as a **model of good practice** by all of Hudiksvall local authority, with all schools sending a representative to the Final Dissemination Conference. The level of impact on both partner schools was very high, with **senior management** on both sides showing a high level of commitment to the project. Specific developments in schools resulting from the project include: establishment of teaching enterprise through subjects, i.e. a shift from simply focusing on teaching the subject syllabus, to understanding what students need to learn by creating a student-focused learning syllabus; students are given freedom of approach towards a described and relevant goal; teachers planning outside their usual subject-based experiences has resulted in creative and diverse ideas that have increased student engagement and attendance on enrichment days.

In Devon there was a Dissemination Conference, with attendance from other Devon schools and representatives from other schools in the South West. Since local authorities in the UK no longer have a central role in providing professional development for staff, many local authority services tend to be provided by a sub-contracted private companies, and others by individual consultants. The project actively **involved the project consultant**, who represented the local authority and had close links with the local authority due to his earlier work.



The primary initiatives within the project came mainly from the relationship between the two partner schools with the local authorities' support. A number of different project activities took place between the two partner schools, contributing to a shared vision of enhancing **personal learning and thinking skills** (PLTS). First, a jointly conducted self-evaluation through exploration of schemes, systems and shared resources was organised, along with an exchange of staff through very focused mobilities linked to lesson observation and follow up coaching/mentoring and discussions. Project partners also organised evaluation and embedding of skills through post-mobility meetings held with a senior teacher and the project consultant to share findings and learning. Dissemination of techniques through post-mobility discussions involving senior leaders allowed the trialing and sharing of new methodologies. Partners also developed a training programme to cater for emerging needs of staff at both partner schools. These were used at both final conferences as an integral

part of training days for both schools and regions. Finally, a Key Skills Catalogue (a set of cards defining, describing and assessing each skill)<sup>60</sup> was developed during the project.

On a personal level, the representative from Umeå University found that the project expanded her knowledge about different modes of classroom leadership having experienced practices in a different country. The results and experiences of this Regio project have been built **into professional development courses** run by the University of Umeå.

### SUCCESS FACTORS (AND OBSTACLES)

Bromangymnasiet received very **strong support from their local authority** – even to the extent of the local authority insisting that all its schools be represented at the final dissemination conference. Newton Abbott College also received the support of Devon County Council, in a different way. In the case of Devon, an independent educational consultant and former head teacher in the county was the contact person and his role included a range of contracts in curriculum development and continuous professional development for the Authority. As a consequence of his involvement in the project, it was possible to use his expertise and also to maintain contact with the Authority and its schools.

### LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR TRANSFERABILITY

The following lessons were learnt during the project:

- There was an issue at both schools in relation to **resistance to change** – and doubt as to whether the developments were actually initiated by the leadership team. The process of changing practice took some time, partly due to the large number of staff and the need to reassure that the intentions in the project were the same as the changes brought by the new Swedish national curriculum.
- When considering possible improvements to a future Comenius Regio (or similar) project, the Newton Abbott teachers identified the need to improve communication tools so they would be easier for teachers to use (e.g. video conferencing links, interactive blogs and websites). They also would like to include student-focused activities within the project, as this can perhaps encourage more active communication. Also more interaction between students could be contributed to more effectiveness of the project.
- Strong leadership was shown by the UK teachers, enabling the project to help its participants learn more about different educational systems and the implications of this on entrepreneurial learning.
- Given an opportunity to compare different teaching and learning methods in two regions, the project helped teachers to introduce changes and make their lessons more flexible.
- Continuity was secured by insuring that key personnel were involved for the duration of the project.
- Some project participants recommended that Regio projects last for three years instead of two. Often it takes the first year to get a project running and it was felt at



<sup>60</sup> The cards have been handed out to all teaching staff and also distributed on the school web platforms. A training programme was also developed including lectures, audits, seminars, workshops, interviews and lesson observations.

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the end that there is still work that could be developed further.

## CONTACTS

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## RESTORATIVE APPROACHES IN IRELAND AND NORFOLK – BETTERING OUR WORK

### Case Study 4



Project websites  
[www.rain-norfolkschools.org.uk](http://www.rain-norfolkschools.org.uk)  
[www.restorativeapproaches.ie](http://www.restorativeapproaches.ie)

#### Participating regions

United Kingdom, Ireland

#### Participating organisations

##### United Kingdom:

- Restorative Approaches Group, Norfolk County Council (local authority)
- Norfolk Children's Services – Local Education Authority (local authority)
- Norfolk Constabulary – Police Authority (third partner, public authority)
- Broadland District Council – District Authority (regional authority)
- Cliff Park High School, Gorleston-on-Sea, Great Yarmouth - Secondary School (school)
- St Michael's Junior School, Bowthorpe, Norwich - Primary School (school)

##### Ireland:

- Dun Laoghaire Vocational Educational Committee (DLVEC) – Vocational Education Authority (local authority)
- Southside Local Authority Area Based Partnership – Education, Community, Social Inclusion (third partner, non-profit non-governmental organisation)
- Blackrock Education Centre – Local Authority Centre for Continuing Professional Development for Teachers (third partner, non-profit non-governmental organisation)
- Archbishop McQuaid National School - Primary School (school)
- Holy Family National School – Primary School (school)

Number of mobilities	Topics covered
54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family/Parent Education</li> <li>• Disadvantaged groups</li> <li>• Conflict management</li> <li>• Development of Training Courses</li> <li>• Inclusive Approaches</li> <li>• Learning to learn</li> <li>• Social and civic competences</li> <li>• Early school leaving</li> <li>• Support for teachers, school leaders and teacher educators</li> </ul>

#### IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT TOPIC AND THE MAIN PROJECT IDEA

Norfolk County Council has been very much committed to Restorative Approaches to developing **positive relationships and managing conflict**, both for children and staff in schools and also in many areas of local government. The Local Authority decided to further develop this work in the context of a European project. The Healthy Schools Coordinator made the initial link with the local authority in Dublin via a contact in Northern Ireland.

The Southside Partnership in Dublin was very much involved in working with **disadvantaged young** people within the Youth at Risk Network – and in particular they were concerned with how to deal with the issue of the high incidence of **suspension of pupils from schools**. They wished to encourage schools to adopt a different, more

constructive approach, based on Restorative Practices. They had already had contact with an expert in this field working in Newry, Northern Ireland – and were very keen to become involved in the proposed Comenius Regio project with Norfolk, when they were approached by Norfolk asking them to consider doing so. One attraction was that work on Restorative Practices had limited funding available in Dublin – and this represented an opportunity to acquire funding to engage in a cooperative development with another local authority, which was equally committed to the concept and already had substantial experience in the field. This was a timely opportunity.

Within the EC's Key Competences Agenda, this project is clearly highly relevant to both **'learning to learn'** and to **social and civic competences**. Within other important EU priorities, the following aspects are central to the project: reducing **early school leaving**; **improving policies and provisions that support teachers, school leaders and teacher educators**.

### MAIN IMPACTS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

In Norfolk, the Restorative Practices initiative has been successfully extended in order to offer specialist, inclusive training to all special schools in the county. **Every school in the county** will now receive an offer to become involved in Restorative Practices. Much of that development arises from the Comenius Regio project. One of the most significant developments from the project has led to a review of the different models of behavior and safety that Norfolk local authority supports schools to use. These include Social, Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL), Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), Peer Mediation, Norfolk STEPS (de-escalation training), and Restorative Approaches. All of these are based on restorative principles, and the local authority aims to improve the method of promoting these to give schools the information to make a better-informed decision and to increase efficiency and effectiveness. Specific impacts at both partner schools have been very positive and these schools have taken the lead in implementing Restorative Practices within the Partnership of East Norfolk Schools.



In Dublin, a crucial factor in the success of the project has been the development of an **accredited module on Restorative Practices**, and which is run through the Blackrock Education Centre. This was originally designed **for parents**, but is also now very much in use and in demand by **teachers**. The Centre is committed to the concept of Restorative Practices and has played a very active role in the project. They are engaged with **in-service teacher training at a national level** – and are working to establish Restorative Practices within national level programmes. Had there been more time available within the project, it would have been possible to make much more significant progress in this respect. Partner organisations involved on the Dublin side have been much encouraged in their work and have very much welcomed the opportunity to involve a wide range of community groups in Restorative Practices.

**Implementation of Restorative Practices, based on mutual respect and negotiated solutions to problems, across the range of local authority services to the community**

In both regions participating in the project a



range of training programmes and resources has been developed to act as a **toolkit**, including: a Restorative Practices lesson plan framework for primary school class teachers to use with Junior Infants to 6th Class student year groups; piloting of a lesson plan framework for teachers of 1st to 3rd year post-primary year groups; the development of an accredited module in Restorative Practices that was piloted in September 2012; development of a DVD training resource for (and by) parents. A five-day course in Peer Mediation was delivered to 20 teachers in July 2011 and July 2012 in Blackrock Education Centre; Experts from Dublin were invited to Norfolk to lead a county-wide conference on Restorative Approaches.



For the **parents** the project organised 3 introductory RP workshops and 3 four-week training courses for 100 parents in Dublin school communities. Other resources created included the DVD and the design of a course for parents.

**Progress with schools** has also been impressive, though it is recognised that implementing fundamental changes in schools takes time. Specific impact on partner schools has however been wholly positive. Schools involved in Restorative Approaches consistently reported a range of positive outcomes, including **increased attainment, better attendance and less exclusion from schools**. There has been very positive feedback. As for teachers, a total of 16 introductory Restorative Practices in-service school training sessions were delivered to 400 teachers in 15 schools. Classroom resources have been developed for primary and post-primary students.

There have also been significant impacts at national level. In the UK, the Restorative Justice Council, which provides quality assurance and a national voice for restorative practice, has become involved in developments with Norfolk. The Irish Restorative Practice Network has found its work greatly strengthened by the project so this constitutes an impact at national level. An All-Ireland Strategic Forum has also been set up – and the project has been a major positive influence on this development.

### SUCCESS FACTORS (AND OBSTACLES)

This project seemed able to secure the deep **involvement of partner schools**, alongside the provision of a **clear direction** and also substantial developmental activity **from local authority partners**. The wholehearted commitment of two 'other partners', Broadland District Council and the Blackrock Education Centre, was also crucial. There were inevitably some difficulties and setbacks. The role played by **Norfolk Police** was important and they committed the time that was possible for them.

The results have been disseminated through the development of a website hosted by Cliff Park High School, the holding of an end of project conference, the development of training courses in Restorative Practices and Peer Mediation; the development of Restorative Practice lesson plans; and the establishment of the All-Ireland Restorative Practice Strategy forum. The project is also disseminated via the website [www.restorativeapproaches.ie](http://www.restorativeapproaches.ie). The project has generated a high degree of interest, as evidenced by the high number of hits on the project websites both in the UK and in Ireland, with a considerable number of visitors from other schools, local authorities and other organisations that have seen the project in action, both in Norfolk and in Dublin. Also significant was the support of the Restorative Justice Council in the UK and the involvement in the project not only of the Centre for Peace and Reconciliation at Corrymeela in Northern Ireland, but also of a sister centre in the Republic of Ireland.

Without the project staff in Norfolk would not have experienced the work facilitated by the **expert from the University** of Ulster concerning the creation of a restorative



environment. Norfolk Children's Services are considering in more depth what it means to be a restorative authority. The learning from both experts from Northern Ireland has also been incorporated into local training and awareness-raising sessions. A wider group of professionals was also able to experience the same learning at a specific workshop held in March 2012. Cliff Park High School also increased their Parent Support Advisor support as a result of seeing the effectiveness of the Home School Liaison Officer working in Dublin. The RAINBOW Project has had a great impact on the wider development of restorative approaches in Norfolk. The Restorative Approaches page of the Norfolk Schools website has provided an excellent reference point and has recorded over 300 'hits' per month which has led to visits to the County from other local authorities. Notably, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk have developed a close partnership in this area.

In Dublin the opportunity arose in the course of the project to go beyond earlier intentions and to add yet further value. Further impact will be made by people accessing the resources on the website including a video introducing Restorative Practice concepts and showing examples of conflict scenarios. The Norfolk website will similarly contribute by using the Restorative Practices lesson plans, and the Peer Mediation training packs developed. Agreed actions include bringing together a wider group of Dublin partners to look at a follow-on Restorative Practices project; exploring the possibility of a Dublin/Norfolk mobility for the group of Dublin parents who spoke at the conference to deliver a seminar to parents in Norfolk; continuing to communicate through emails.

#### LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR TRANSFERABILITY

The undoubted success of the project can be ascribed to a number of key factors. First, there was a clear vision on the part of the originator and initially designated project coordinator for a cooperative project that would enable the further development of the concept of Restorative Practices to be undertaken in a transnational environment. Second, an important factor was high relevance – indeed urgency – of the need for effective ways of resolving conflict and finding mutual respect and understanding, within school and broader community contexts. Another factor of success was that the project involved two local authorities working (in their different ways) within both education and community development, each with a clear commitment to developing Restorative Practices across their entire remit.

A major contribution also came from the thoroughness and competence of the project team, ably led by the Restorative Approaches Development Manager, as coordinator, and her Irish colleagues from both Dun Laoghaire Vocational Educational Committee and the Southside Partnership. Other important factors included the use of a number of key experts – notably the originator of the project herself, but also the two experts from Northern Ireland, as well as very strong commitment of the partner schools and their willingness to work together with their local authorities and local educational authorities, and with each other. Finally, the project's success was also influenced by a commendable openness on the part of the project team to embrace new developments and new participants in the broader process.

Overall, the project succeeded in achieving close inter-regional cooperation that Comenius Regio seeks to promote. Both local authorities could be said to have acted in an entrepreneurial way, Norfolk in further developing an existing county-wide initiative and Dublin in moving from some initial exploration of the issues prior to the project to a full commitment to Restorative Practices as the project progressed. Though Norfolk was initially more experienced, Dublin contributed just as much to the project development – and the bringing in of outside expertise from Northern Ireland was also very important.

Project coordinator: *"In terms of impact, the project was ambitious in its scope, but in reality the initial objectives were easily surpassed. Teachers and other professional participants have benefited enormously from time away from their job and the chance to*

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*reflect in a different environment. The amount of joint working and joint training that has resulted was much greater than was originally thought would be the case.”*

#### **CONTACTS**

For more information about the project please contact the project coordinator Kirsten Cooper [Kirsten.cooper@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:Kirsten.cooper@hotmail.co.uk) or the project consultant Rosemary Games at [Rosemary@brundall.net](mailto:Rosemary@brundall.net).

## LIBRARIES WITHOUT BORDERS

### Case Study 5



Project website

<http://biblioregiosf.educarex.es/?a=prd>

Number of mobilities	Topics covered
51	Literacy, ICT, Foreign languages Transversal competences Teaching practices Pupil motivation

#### Participating regions

Spain, Portugal

#### Participating organisations

##### Spain:

- Extremadura-Alentejo Cultural Association (third partner, cultural organisation)
- "Juan Pablo Forner" Municipal Library (third partner, library)
- Center for Language and Resources of Cáceres (third partner, Institution or organisations providing learning opportunities)
- Center for Language and Resources of Badajoz (third partner, Institutions or organisations providing learning opportunities)
- Grouped Rural Center "Master Victoriano D. Mateos (primary school)
- Public College of "José M<sup>a</sup> Calatrava" (primary school)
- "Manuel Pacheco" Public College (primary school)
- Ministry of Education of the Government of Extremadura (local/regional authority)
- Institution for Secondary Education "El Brocense" (secondary school)
- Institution for Secondary Education "Jálama" (secondary school)

##### Portugal:

- Group School Elvas N1 (primary school)
- Public library of Evora (third partner, library)
- Center for Teacher Training In Northeast Alentejo Portalegre (third partner, Institutions or organisations providing learning opportunities)
- Socio Educational Center Local / Regional (secondary school)
- Regional Directorate of Educação Alentejo (local/regional authority)
- Basic School 2, 3 Count Vilalva (primary school)
- Nabeiro-Delta Cafes Group (third partner, private company)

## IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT TOPIC AND THE MAIN PROJECT IDEA

The aim of this project was to break down barriers and coordinate educational activities between the two regions. There were three key project objectives:

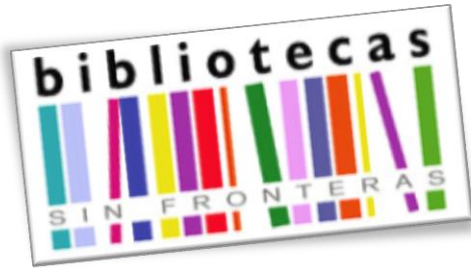
- to exchange educational experiences of using the school library as a key instrument to support the educational process;
- to raise cultural awareness throughout the regions of Alentejo and Extremadura;
- to use Information and Communication Technologies to develop products that encourage reading.

Thus, the key idea that defined the project was to promote cultural knowledge, as well as learning Spanish and Portuguese languages through the use of school libraries. The use of

the **school library as a comprehensive resource** for different areas and subjects has been one of the most relevant educational topics in both regions. In both countries it was increasingly emphasized as a key tool to improve the reading and writing skills in the mother tongue and foreign languages, while also aiding **transversal key competencies** such as teaching entrepreneurship, electronic literacy, media literacy and innovative learning environments.

## MAIN IMPACTS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The main result of the project was the improvement in understanding of the potential of the school library, as a central tool that provides support for all school programmes. The project has led to an exchange of information and stressed the importance of the school library's daily life as well as the impact it has on students and the rest of the educational community. As a consequence, the project has contributed to deepening and internalising the notion of the library as a central focus of school life. This concept has been also transferred to other non-participant schools, and regional authorities have proposed to extend this model to other schools in the community.



The case study has identified a number of the partnership's impacts. First, the project participants have learnt new strategies for organising their work and using sources of information offered by the school libraries. They have exchanged methods on the use of school libraries in teaching and learning, in order to promote reading in the school environment. The partner schools also incorporated different products developed during this partnership in their daily teaching practices, including documentary projects, use of blogs as an education resource for the dissemination of information, as well as the use of e-books and e-readers. There was also an impact on horizontal skills of project participants. Project participants learned to work in an international team and improved their project management skills. Their abilities to reach common agreement, to develop common objectives and activities have been increased as a consequence of project activities.

A number of impacts resulted from cross-border nature of the partnership: the sharing of cultures between the participant member regions has increased, sustainable ties for collaboration and knowledge-exchange in the future have been established, while the students have actively participated in different activities, thereby internationalising and developing their basic competences.

In addition, in all the partner schools there was an increase in the students' motivation in the area of the Spanish and Portuguese languages, culture and literature. The participants from the Education and Culture Council of Extremadura learnt about the functioning of school library networks in Portugal and within the Portuguese education system in general. The cultural associations from both regions have increased their funding, thereby acquiring more resources and capacities to reach a wider population. Finally, the project has also influenced national school education policies: the project results have been used in elaborating the Frame of Reference for School Libraries, developed by the Spanish Ministry of Education and the representatives of the Autonomous Communities.

Overall, the expectations of teachers and the participating institutions have been fully met. Moreover, the majority of project participants indicated that they had managed to **achieve much more than expected**.

**Using school libraries as active information hubs to facilitate more efficient learning and teaching**

## SUCCESS FACTORS (AND OBSTACLES)

There were several success factors identified in the project case study. First, active support and **involvement of the local and regional authorities**, in Extremadura and Portugal, has been essential for the project's success. For instance, the Education Council of Extremadura promoted and supported the project with human and financial resources, thereby contributing to closer cooperation between different schools in the two regions. The support given by **national agencies** was also an important factor in the project's success. All the interviewed project participants referred to a high level of satisfaction regarding the level of involvement of other collaborating centres and agencies. In general, the willingness of the representatives of both authorities, the schools and other participating institutions to cooperate has been very high. Finally, the **involvement of different schools** in the project also contributed to the project's success, since it allowed schools to take part in various meetings, collaborate on developing common materials and resources, and apply new programmes and methods in their local environments.

## LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR TRANSFERABILITY

All the project results have been beneficial for the participants interviewed; however, strengthening the use of the library as a dynamic hub of school life was of particular importance. As a result, students became more familiar with using the library as well as searching for and using information in different formats, including digital formats. In addition, the schools involved in the project incorporated different strategies developed during this project into their daily teaching practices.

Moreover, in a time of ICT, when libraries might seem like an institutions of the past, project demonstrated that libraries still have a role in teaching and learning. However, they need to be redesigned and adopted to today's technologies and needs of the users.

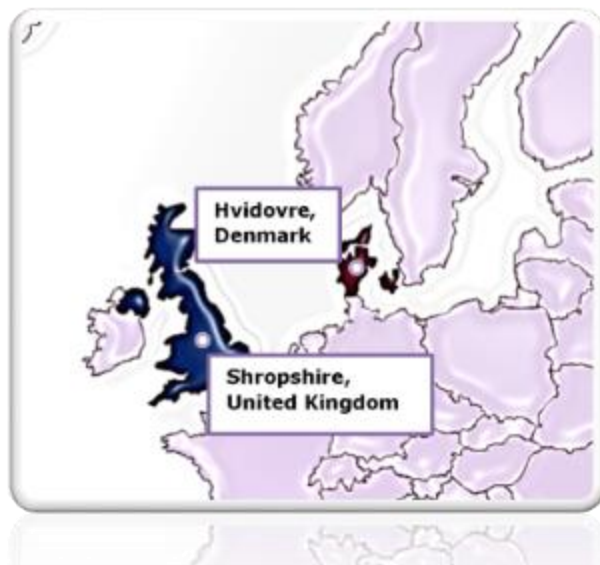
Overall the project has made it possible for two regions to exchange, learn, develop and cooperate in the area of using libraries in school education. This project could easily be carried out in other European countries and regions that are geographically close to each other and share similar cultures. It would likewise help to improve understanding of other cultures and would lead to the discovery of different approaches and work methods.

## CONTACTS

For more information about the project please contact the project coordinator Eulalia Morales Morales at [atd17@edu.juntaex.es](mailto:atd17@edu.juntaex.es) or Maria Mario Murteira at [maria.murteira@dreale.min-edu](mailto:maria.murteira@dreale.min-edu).

## IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING CAPACITY FOR DISAFFECTED PUPILS

### Case Study 6



#### Participating regions

United Kingdom, Denmark

#### Participating organisations

##### UK:

- Shropshire County Council (local authority)
- St Lawrence COE Primary School, Ludlow (school)
- Edge Hill University (third partner, university)

##### Denmark:

- Hvidovre Kommune, Hvidovre Community (local authority)
- Engstrand Skule Engstrand school (primary school)
- Laereruddannelsen Zahle – Teacher Training University (third partner, university)

Number of mobilities	Topics covered
45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combating pupil disaffection</li> <li>• Environmental education</li> <li>• Outdoor teaching</li> <li>• Teaching sciences</li> <li>• Learning difficulties</li> </ul>

### IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT TOPIC AND THE MAIN PROJECT IDEA

The project's focus was on "Disaffected pupils". The intention was to support pupils seen as being in danger of disaffection, by providing opportunities for local authorities, partner organisations and school staff to work together to reflect upon the impact of their practice. Particular emphasis was placed on looking at how the **outdoor environment** is used as a context for learning, in order to enhance pupils' confidence, self-esteem, independence and employability – and to raise standards of education in science. The project's principal objectives were to improve the inclusive nature of education within the two authorities, reduce pupil disaffection and increase pupil independence through increased use of the outdoor environment as a context for learning, and raise standards of education in science. In addition, the project aimed at enabling dialogue between practitioners within the two local authorities and their project partners.

For Shropshire local authority, one of the central concepts of this Comenius Regio project was to learn from the Danish model to explore ways of creating more freedom in the learning environment for children. The topic was very high on the agenda of Hvidovre local authority as well. The Hvidovre local authority contact person commented, *"Anything concerning how children learn is very much the focused of local politicians and stakeholders. During the project, its aims were always on the agenda at management meetings in Hvidovre. The topic is also a priority for school managers (head teachers) in Hvidovre, since they are very keen to learn and try new pedagogical ideas."*

### MAIN IMPACTS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

There has been significant impact in Shropshire, including a shift in thought-process within the local authority, while the project has also informed the professional practice of a number of key staff in the area. *"It is of particular importance that a number of senior*



personnel from Shropshire have the personal experience of seeing Forest School education in practice in Denmark" (Project Coordinator). The implementation of **Forest Schools** in the county was seen as more creative and focused on specific positive learning outcomes than the implementation observed in Denmark, where the concept was first developed. This has resulted in increased confidence amongst Local Authority and school staff to continue to develop the Forest Schools programme.

One of the main benefits of the project has undoubtedly been the high quality of professional experience enjoyed by all the project participants and particularly those in project mobilities. Many of those involved on both the UK and Danish sides have moved on to new positions of higher responsibility and have taken the positive experience of joint development and idea-sharing in an international context into their new roles.



At school level, the project has addressed pupils' self-esteem and engagement and the use of outdoor education as a medium for curriculum delivery and social development. Some evidence, gathered in a relatively short timescale from a very small sample indicated that there was an improvement in standards of basic skills in literacy, numeracy and science. Pupils involved in the project have shown high levels of interest in participation and this is likely to lead to improved levels of qualification and consequently employability when they leave school. As a consequence of the project's activities, **the role of teachers as effective facilitators** of pupils' learning and independence has been clearly recognised by participants. Danish teachers have generally detected a need to be more specific in setting aims and objectives for learners, setting targets relating to both academic development and behaviour, whilst English teachers have recognised the need to give pupils greater responsibility for their own learning, trust them to take ownership of this learning and be prepared to take more risks in order to provide more interactive learning opportunities.

A teacher from the UK primary school commented, "*Travelling abroad to see other schools in operation made us feel highly valued as teachers and had a very positive effect on staff morale. It was also very valuable to get to know both colleagues from Denmark and also local authority staff from Shropshire on a personal, informal basis.*"

### SUCCESS FACTORS (AND OBSTACLES)

In Hvidovre, the direct involvement of a senior manager as the partnership coordinator provided a clear link between effective school practice observed on mobilities and decisions on strategic development within the municipality. This was particularly noticeable with regard to policy on the development of ICT across all the authority's schools. After observing the practice in Shropshire, the way in which the authority funded training in the use of ICT in schools was changed significantly, with increased emphasis being put on offering ICT training to help teachers to devise effective teaching and learning strategies for the curriculum, using ICT. In addition, there was a clear focus on embedding ICT use within the learning process, rather than simply developing ICT-related skills.

In Shropshire, which has 10 times more schools than Hvidovre, impact at a strategic level has been determined by the level of school autonomy. The autonomy of schools in England to determine how they deliver the curriculum places much greater authority and responsibility on the head teachers of individual educational establishments. The involvement of a range of local authority advisory staff has had an impact; however, on the emphasis they place on the use of the outdoor environment as a context for learning.

Moreover, the role of the advisory staff responsible for the delivery of training and leadership of the Forest School Initiative has been strengthened by their engagement with the project.

The results of the project have been widely disseminated. The British Council chose the project as an **example of good practice** and the Project Coordinator spoke at a City-M Evaluation Project conference in Belfast. He then also addressed an international conference organised by the Romanian National Agency in Bucharest on the subject of the



development and impact of the project. He believes that the effect on the professional development and thinking of individuals has been substantial. The dissemination of the results, via Shropshire's International Forest School Conference, enabled the partnership to share its findings with a wide range of practitioners beyond the two local authorities.

As regards sustainability, links between a number of professionals involved in the project have continued on an informal basis. A similar project might be possible in the future – and the local authority would be likely to support the idea at least in principle, as the benefits

have been very much appreciated at senior officer level.

#### LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR TRANSFERABILITY

This project involved very close collaboration between the two local authorities – and also between the two partner schools. The schools were used as a testing ground for new practices and developments and school staff were very much involved in developing Forest School and Outdoor Education practice alongside Local Authority advisory and administrative staff. The whole process received vital academic support from the Danish Teacher Training University. It was important that the desire of Shropshire local authority to validate and also further develop their ideas on Forest Schools/Outdoor Education coincided with a similarly strong impetus on the part of Hvidovre to tackle pupil disaffection, as well as to develop techniques in focusing independent learning by pupils and the constructive use of ICT in education. The two LAs were thus able to help each other in fulfilling important objectives – and to learn much from each other even in the short time available within the project.

In addition, a number of other lessons have been learned from the project. First, the small scale of the project meant that logistics were manageable and that the team was able to concentrate fully on developing a very full and intense collaboration. However, the small number of partners made the partnership very reliant on the full participation of all partners – for both project development and (in particular) future cooperation beyond the funded period.

The project also showed that the involvement of only two partner schools was not an unduly restrictive factor, given that both LAs were able to involve other colleagues, such as those working in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in Shropshire and staff from the Youth School in Hvidovre.

There was a strong case for extending the duration of a Comenius Regio project to three or four years – to allow developments to occur within a reasonable timescale, to permit the team to overcome difficulties such as the virtual withdrawal of a key partner – and to allow for organic growth in project development and embedding of new concepts and practices, both within schools and more broadly within the LAs.

Overall, schools' collaboration worked really well, though it was just a pity that the Comenius School Partnership came to an end. **It would be very constructive to see the development of bilateral cooperation between** partner schools as a result of the Comenius Regio project.

#### CONTACTS

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## ACTIVE LEARNING ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF BIODIVERSITY IN CITIES

### Case Study 7



Project website  
<http://bioepinayoberursel.eu/pages/german/biodiversitaet.html>

#### Participating regions

France, Germany

#### Participating organisations

##### France:

- Marie d'Epinay-sur-Seine (local authority)
- Evariste Galois College (secondary school)
- Jean Vigo College (secondary school)
- Pasteur 2 Primary School (primary school)
- National Museum of Natural History, Paris (third partner, public authority)
- Centre of Ornithology Ile-de-France, Vaujours (third partner, non-profit association)
- Office for the Insects and their Environnement, Guyancourt (third partner, non-profit association)

##### Germany:

- Oberursel City Council (local authority)
- Gymnasium of Oberursel (secondary school)
- Stierstadt Primary School (primary school)
- FördervereinSchulwald e.V. (third partner, non-profit non-governmental organisation)

Number of mobilities	Topics covered
55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental awareness</li> <li>• Methods to increase pupils' motivation</li> <li>• Learning foreign languages</li> <li>• Use of ICT</li> <li>• Regional and transnational cooperation</li> <li>• Teacher and pupil motivation;</li> <li>• School failure;</li> <li>• Absenteeism;</li> <li>• Interdisciplinary activities;</li> <li>• Innovative approaches;</li> <li>• Transversal competences;</li> <li>• Cultural diversity;</li> <li>• Teachers' professional development.</li> </ul>

### IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT TOPIC AND THE MAIN PROJECT IDEA

The project addressed common educational concerns regarding school failure, lack of motivation for learning, the necessity to develop children's awareness regarding environmental issues, the learning of the partner's language and ICT competences.

The twinned cities of Epinay-sur-Seine and Oberursel in Hessen wanted to involve schoolchildren in a range of environmental activities and encourage schools and regional associations, active in developing environmental education, to engage in sustainable cooperation at regional and transnational levels<sup>61</sup>. The partnership focused on boosting cooperation within different education systems and sharing innovative pedagogical

<sup>61</sup> The twinned cities of Epinay-sur-Seine and Oberursel in Hessen wished to expand and strengthen their long and fruitful cooperation through a transnational project. Both Oberursel and Epinay-sur-Seine had already worked with schools on environmental and educational matters with "Fantasy and garden" in Epinay-sur-Seine, a project with an artistic approach and the Schulwald project, in Oberursel, which had a more scientific approach.

approaches between partners from the educational, scientific and cultural fields in both cities.

The **interdisciplinary activities** were carried out in partnership with **specialists** (scientists, artists, botanists, beekeepers, gardeners) from institutions acting outside the education system and active in developing environmental education. The teaching approaches mainly consisted of active and hands-on activities in and out of school and gave priority to action and to the use of the senses: for example, constructing a hotel for insects, setting up of a beehive and a "pollinisateur" in the city park, experiencing bees' activities from inside and organising workshops about the world of urban bees, experiencing a sound trail and games related to birds, etc.

This active and **innovative pedagogical approach** induced a revival of **motivation for learning and for teaching among pupils and teachers**.

#### MAIN IMPACTS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

All partners acknowledged the successful educational approach used to address biodiversity issues and the effective positive impact it had on the participants. The project activities **raised children's motivation for learning**, gave meaning to the learning process, developed children's **transversal competences**, their capacity for group work, strengthened teacher/pupil relations, renewed interest in **learning languages** (German and French in particular), opened the eyes of participants to the differences and similarities of **cultural approaches** and education systems.



The urban "pollinisateur"

Credits: <http://global-et-local.eu/?Epinay-sur-Seine-95-Autour-de-la>

The partnership strengthened existing ties between the twinned cities and also extended their network of professionals, thus **creating new regional and transnational synergies** between different educational institutions. **New partnerships** between other participating organisations are well on the way with

new projects on other themes emerging from the networking between educational partners, extra-curricular organisations and various associations. By fostering closer links with local authorities, cultural institutions and regional associations, the project also helped **open up schools to their local communities**. In order to extend the impact of the Comenius Regio project locally, other schools, leisure centres, local community groups (city council employees, citizens, parents and families) were also given the opportunity to discover biodiversity in the city and experience some of the educational activities implemented within the Comenius Regio project. As a consequence of the dissemination of the partnership's results at different levels (local, national, European), the project had a significant impact on both regions. It raised the interest of other institutions to collaborate with French and German local authorities.

**Tackling common education problems through lenses of biodiversity – how taking pupils outside the classroom helps to keep them in school**

The European dimension of the partnership had a strong impact on the primary school community: the participant schools' openness to the world strengthened their positive image in the eyes of parents. Furthermore, pupils' motivation to learn their partners' language was increased by the meetings with their counterparts, resulting in an increase in the number of elementary school pupils wishing to learn the partner's language and,



consequently, in the opening of new language classes and groups and registration of bilingual classes in secondary schools. The Comenius Regio grant also helped the local authority to equip its primary school with more computers<sup>62</sup>.



Hotel for insects in Epinay-sur-Seine  
Credits: Master's dissertation of Lucie Niel

The project activities contributed considerably to **teachers' professional development**. One of the German teachers commented: *"Working with European partners was like an injection of motivation. We had a lot of fun and we would like to do it more often"*. Teachers acquired knowledge and competences in scientific fields, in languages (English, German and French) and in new teaching practices. Participants also gained a better knowledge of other partner organisations, including local authorities. This encouraged them to consider other forms of cooperation with them more willingly. Transnational meetings and working together created interpersonal ties between participants from different institutions, which continue after project completion and facilitate the development of new projects or informal networking. These intercultural

situations revealed common "professional cultures" which has contributed towards a better mutual understanding. As the French project coordinator explains, *"Exchanging practices imply meeting people and meeting people implies human interactions, thus developing cross-cultural competences and a sense of belonging to a greater geographical territory, Europe"*.

**Active learning based on innovative activities** had a significant impact on the pupils' attitudes towards their learning process and educational activities – and rates of **absenteeism** fell. They acquired greater self-confidence and greater capacities for working in groups or individually. Development of creative or practical skills encouraged those pupils who experience problems in more academic subjects. Teachers reported an increase in interest and respect among pupils for their natural environment and small creatures. Learning about the world of living creatures and their environment contributed to developing new skills such as curiosity, sense of observation, greater autonomy and a sense of responsibility for living creatures. Meeting professionals with non-educational profiles was an eye opener for pupils in terms of new job prospects: some pupils discovered potential career paths.

#### SUCCESS FACTORS (AND OBSTACLES)

Six success factors were identified in the final report:

- interdisciplinary pedagogical approach;
- creating a local and regional network through a mixed partnership with professionals in diverse areas of expertise;
- good infrastructure and financial resources;
- the allocation of time to meet project objectives by all participants and actors;
- leadership and the entrepreneurial role of local authorities;
- creativity and transversal approach in the pedagogical activities.

<sup>62</sup> In order to give teachers the means to continue their transnational cooperation, Epinay-sur-Seine local authority will accelerate the implementation of a "Digital School Plan" to provide schools with digital equipment while the Local Education Authority will organise digital training for teachers whose schools are involved in transnational partnerships.



All participants agreed that the **leadership and the entrepreneurial role of local authorities** was a key element to the success of the whole project. The participating local authorities brought great energy, determination and human resources to achieving the project goals, creating synergies within a wide network of partners and establishing a sustainable partnership. Their dynamic commitment generated enthusiasm among all the involved partners and gradually led other local or regional organisations to integrate the project into their work. Epinay Local Authority had built a strong relationship with teachers and other local partners through previous collaborations and had gained their trust, support and respect. The involvement of other local authority services, offices and administrative staff, including councillors (one in charge of International relations, the other of Environment), was enriching for all beneficiaries. The support from councillors and politicians was equally crucial. The project itself was viewed as very successful by both local authorities and both mayors regularly refer publicly to the beneficial outcomes of the project. Epinay-sur-Seine city council allocated extra financial support to the Comenius Regio project, which helped all activities to be completed.



Final project seminar: Officials from Epinay-sur-Seine and the German delegation from Oberursel  
Credits: Proceedings of the Final project seminar in Epinay-sur-Seine

### LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR TRANSFERABILITY

It is clear that the commitment of all partners contributed to the success of the Comenius Regio partnership. However, the role played by the project coordinator in ensuring the partners' involvement was of crucial importance. The success of a project relies on the **coordinating local authority's capacity to lead, to create synergies, to choose reliable and adequate partners, to aim at realistic goals addressing the partners' identified needs and to support partners throughout the project.** Some initial obstacles can hinder the progress and outcomes of the project. Poor ICT competences and foreign language skills might interfere with communication between European partners and may discourage some participants. However, the project helped to overcome them by improving participants' ICT competences and infrastructure as well as the language skills. The support and involvement of school heads and educational authorities is essential for the involvement of teachers, the sustainability of the European partnership and the transferability of new practices and project results.

To conclude, the comment of a natural sciences teacher in Collège Jean Vigo can be quoted: *"This project is a great opportunity to involve children who feel themselves to be on the fringe of society and the school system. By working on biodiversity matters, by building an insect hotel, by meeting professionals other than their own teachers, they are encouraged to develop their creativity, their participant observation, their curiosity and their responsibility in a global and group project. Such a project is also a great opportunity for teachers to exchange, inside the school, with other classes in Epinay-sur-Seine (colleges and primary schools) and with counterparts in Oberursel. This project is a key to opening minds, knowledge and cultures".*

### CONTACTS

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## EXCELLENCE IN MATHEMATICS AND NATURAL SCIENCES, ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY: A EUROPEAN APPROACH TO ENQUIRY-BASED LEARNING

### Case Study 8



Project website  
<http://eur-emset.wikispaces.com>

#### Participating regions

Sweden, United Kingdom

#### Participating organisations

##### Sweden:

- City of Västerås (local/regional authority)
- ABB – Asea Boven Brown (third partner, large enterprise)
- Asköviken Nature School (third partner, Foundation)
- Mälardalen University (third partner, university)
- Västmanlands Association of Local Authorities and Regions (third partner, public authority)
- Vafab Miljö AB (third partner, SME)
- Mediecenter Mälardalen AB (third partner, SME)
- Rönnbyskolan (primary school)
- St Ilians school (secondary school)
- Lindboskolan (secondary school)

##### United Kingdom:

- Wydean School and Sixth form Centre (secondary school)
- University of Gloucestershire (third partner, university)
- Forest Education Business Partnership (third partner, local community association)
- Gloucestershire First Economic Partnership (third partner, local business community association)
- Real Ideas Organisation (third partner, social partner)
- Cirencester Deer Park School (secondary school)
- International Education Office, Gloucestershire County Council (local/regional authority)

Number of mobilities	Topics covered
53	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mathematics, Science and technology</li> <li>• Basic skills</li> <li>• Learning context and processes</li> <li>• Motivation</li> <li>• Collaboration with enterprises and universities</li> <li>• Teacher competences</li> <li>• Curriculum development</li> <li>• Innovative teaching and learning</li> <li>• Foreign language</li> <li>• Cross curricular and experimental learning</li> </ul>

### IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT TOPIC AND THE MAIN PROJECT IDEA

The main focus of the project was to increase the motivation of students in Mathematics, Science and Technology (MST) to raise their basic skills by making these subjects more attractive and enjoyable and then to achieve an increase in the number of students who wish to study these subjects, both in upper secondary education and then going on to higher education. The intention

**Mathematics in the forest – proving how innovative approaches to teaching scientific disciplines can boost their attractiveness and help students to achieve higher results**

was to find ways of achieving a greater degree of **student involvement in the learning process** – and to work in a **cross-curricular** way. It was also of great importance that the students could study these subjects in **learning contexts** other than the classroom, i.e. Outdoor School, Nature School, First Lego League as well as **collaborating with employers**.

The lack of competence and skills among students in MST is common all across Europe and combating this issue is a high priority in all European countries. The two local authorities realized that the decline in MST must be combated, not only at primary and secondary level, but also in preparation for higher education. Both authorities had collaborated in other EU-funded projects over many years and had, through informal discussions, seen the need to improve the quality of teaching MST. This brought about the idea to apply for Comenius Regio and it fitted the idea for the project very well to involve other **partners from both higher education and private enterprises**. Local authority advisors and those working in environmental education and education-business links as well as community groups outside formal education were also centrally involved in the project.

### MAIN IMPACTS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The project has established clear priorities for future development as well as achieving much in terms of **inter-school cooperation and interdisciplinary development**. This was achieved under the guidance of the two local authorities and with the active participation of a number of 'third partners', which were in fact mainly educational, support organisations. Both local authorities acted as facilitators for these organisations and for the partner schools, which also played a central role. The role of subject **teacher advisors** in Västerås was certainly strengthened.

The main impacts on the partner schools involved included: **learning experience for teachers and other staff involved in curriculum development** activities; direct contact with staff from abroad; learning experience for pupils involved in **innovative learning** activities related to the project; direct contact with staff from abroad; and contact with fellow students via ICT. As a consequence, 3-4 teachers in Västerås have been inspired by the project to take post-graduate degrees in Maths. A UK participant commented with respect to their experience in a Swedish school: *"There is better structure of the school day than in the UK. Teachers are less stressed by having lots of targets aimed at the pupils."*



Through this project contact between some schools in Sweden and the local authority has become closer and more collaboration has also been developed between the schools in Västerås involved in the project. Schools benefited from visiting each other and the schools in the UK have worked more with Västerås than would have been the case otherwise. **Pupils** involved seemed to **collaborate more in their learning** with each other than prior to the project. There has been a rise of **competence in English** among the Swedish pupils; the teachers also feel more confident in English than before.

### SUCCESS FACTORS AND OBSTACLES

In Västerås the project was organised by the Local Authority. In Gloucestershire the project was coordinated by the International Education Officer with support from an external advisor. These two local authorities had long experience of collaborating. To

ensure that the project followed the planned timeline it was vital that these two local authorities played central roles as they had staff with time available to follow up the different project stages and keep the project flowing. On the Swedish side, the greatest level of involvement came from Asköviken Nature School. On the UK side the greatest involvement came from STEM works and the Forest EBP. Gloucestershire First Economic Partnership became more involved during the second year, because they were already working with Västerås on a Leonardo project proposal.

In terms of sustainability, various innovative **cross-curricular and experiential learning** activities were developed, providing a sound basis for further joint curriculum development between the two local authorities. The project website has a wealth of information, experience, curriculum materials and classroom practice, in textual form, still image and video formats.

Because of the pressure of time, there were some difficulties in terms of fully involving all partners on each side. It was certainly true that most of Year 1 was actually spent in learning about each other's systems and perspectives, prior to the project being able to make any substantive contribution to joint curriculum development in Year 2. This is related to the nature of joint development work, especially on an international level.

### LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR TRANSFERABILITY

There was bound to be a high degree of complexity in the organization of the project. The perspectives in Sweden and Gloucestershire were rather different and compromises had to be made in order to secure full support from all partners. Because it was a quite ambitious project, involving many participants, timing proved too short to achieve a better level of cooperation in a complex relationship involving local authorities, schools, and external partners.

The project showed that it is important to have access to stakeholders and policymakers in order to be able to inform them on such projects: this would lead to politicians changing some of their educational policies and priorities.

The interviews with the project coordinator and other colleagues on both sides indicate that the wider dissemination of project results can contribute to a more lasting impact. The EU should continue arranging conferences/workshops to gather partners who can share good practice examples – this refers also to other programmes besides Regio. The project participants also suggested that more teaching materials should be translated into both languages – more funding for this, in addition to mobilities, should be made available.

### CONTACTS

For more information about the project please contact the project coordinator Conny Strom at [conny.strom@salbohedsskolan.se](mailto:conny.strom@salbohedsskolan.se) or Alex Fleming at [Alexandra.fleming@gloucestershire.gov.uk](mailto:Alexandra.fleming@gloucestershire.gov.uk).

## PATHWAY TO SUCCESS

### Case Study 9



#### Participating regions

Czech Republic, Slovakia

#### Participating organisations

##### Czech Republic:

- Kindergarten of Šumperk, (pre-primary school)
- City of Šumperk (local/regional authority)
- Educational and psychological counseling Olomocukého Region (third partner, counselling)

##### Slovakia:

- Centre of pedagogical-psychological counseling and prevention (third partner, counselling)
- City of Prievidza (local/regional authority)
- Kindergarten of Ul. V. Clementisa 251/12 Prievidza (pre-primary school)

#### Number of mobilities

111

#### Topics covered

- Early childhood education and care
- Teacher training
- Inclusive education
- Gifted pupils
- Teachers professional development
- Parental involvement
- Educational tools
- Teaching practices
- Diagnostic tools

### IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT TOPIC AND THE MAIN PROJECT IDEA

**Integration and inclusion** have become more prominent in national educational policies in the Czech Republic and Slovakia over the past few years. However, national efforts are focused primarily at disadvantaged children and children with special education needs. Although **gifted children** have been recognized as having special education needs, this group has received little attention in national policies and measures.

As a response to identified gaps in national policies, the municipalities of Šumperk (Czech Republic) and Prievidza (Slovakia) decided to improve education opportunities for exceptionally intellectually gifted children at pre-school age. Their project aimed at establishing systematic support for the **professional development of pedagogical staff** in pre-school institutions. The partner organisations in Šumperk and Prievidza wished to improve the identification of these children at an early age through enhanced quality of diagnostic tools and to offer practical and methodological support for kindergarten **teachers and parents**.

**Unlocking the potential of gifted children: openness and integration in the classroom, meeting high commitment of education authorities**

To achieve these goals, the project's activities included analysis of early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems, a literature review, on-going consultation with key experts in the field, visits to educational institutions with good practice, exchange of experiences among the project teams, seminars and interactive workshops for



kindergarten teachers and other professional staff, and development of new diagnostic tools and methodological materials for teachers.

The project was equally relevant to European-level policies on ECEC,<sup>63</sup> particularly in promoting high **quality ECEC** systems that respect and honour diversity, equity, inclusion and individual learning needs of all children, including gifted children.

#### MAIN IMPACTS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The project has had a long and lasting impact at the local authority level, particularly in Sumperk. With the **improved knowledge** and understanding of the key staff, the town of Sumperk was in a better position to understand the learning needs of gifted children and to support more systemic communication and collaboration among pre-schools, primary schools, pedagogical and psychological counselling centres, and parents.

The project's institutional impact remained most visible at the level of **support services**, namely at the Pedagogical and Psychological Counselling and Prevention Centre (PPCPC). The Centre continues to provide support and care for gifted children and their parents within the administrative district. On request, methodological support is also offered to colleagues from PPCPC in other regions.

The project's greatest impact is on **improved and expanded educational tools** in the pre-school education of exceptionally intellectually gifted children by creating conditions for their harmonious personal, physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. The project promoted their integration and inclusion in regular kindergarten classes, while respecting their individual learning needs.

The Happy Kindergarten in Sumperk has become a **methodological centre** for pre-school and primary school teachers. Significant impact has been reported in terms of improved **teaching practices** of teachers involved in the project's training activities. Teachers have become more confident and professionally better prepared to use individualised approaches and alternative teaching methods.

Another significant impact of the project was the improved **diagnostic tools** that are now used to identify exceptionally intellectually gifted children at pre-school age (4.5–5 years old). The concept has shifted from "problem" to "potential" diagnosis and focused on identifying the specific learning needs of gifted children. This new methodology has potential for further scaling up, with PPCCs from other regions taking up the methodology.

The project also had an impact on **improved communication and collaboration** between kindergartens, pedagogical and psychological counselling centres (PPCCs) and parents. PPCCs in Sumperk and Prievidza now offer systemic counselling, consulting and support for teachers and parents of exceptionally gifted children. The project's outcomes as well as its **visibility in public media** encouraged more parents of gifted children to actively seek help from the PPCC. Parents started to seek advice and support in order to improve their own parenting skills and to better address the learning, social and emotional needs of their children.

The project's merit had been recognised by the Czech National Agency and the town of Sumperk received the **Quality Seal Comenius 2011**. This recognition also contributed to the project's visibility at national level. In Slovakia, regional TV broadcasted a discussion about gifted children and the project. Numerous articles about the project were published in regional and national newspapers as well as in printed media for teachers.

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<sup>63</sup> Council conclusions on early childhood education and care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow, 2011/C 175/03.



Local authorities from other municipalities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as policymakers and educators at national level were informed about the project at the final conference, which was considered as very successful in disseminating the project's results. Main dissemination tools, such as a publication on "Exceptionally intellectually gifted child", final conference proceedings and a CD for teachers are still available for interested teachers, child specialists and professional staff both in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. An information leaflet for parents has been distributed to kindergartens in both participating towns. The leaflet is displayed in a public space in the kindergartens to allow easy access for all parents.

### SUCCESS FACTORS (AND OBSTACLES)

In both regions, the local authorities played a key role in the project's success. For instance, the commitment of Sumperk has been the key factor in the project's impact and sustainability. Since the inception of the project, the local authority has continued to provide financial support to educational and counselling services for exceptionally gifted children and has continuously supported the project's dissemination efforts.

High impact at (pre-school) institutional level was a result of **active participation by kindergarten teachers and professional staff**. This worked particularly well in the Czech Republic, as highly motivated and interested teachers from Sumperk and the Olomouc region volunteered to take part in the project's activities.

Another important factor for the project's success was the active involvement and **commitment of school leadership**. The head teacher of Happy Kindergarten in Sumperk, in collaboration with the local authority, identified a gap in the market of pre-school offer and focused on developing expertise and experiences in working with gifted children in a systematic way. As a result, the Happy Kindergarten became the centre of excellence in educational provision for gifted children in the Olomouc region.

### LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR TRANSFERABILITY

One of the key messages of the project is that education services in kindergartens need to be more open and sensitive to specific learning needs of all children, including exceptionally gifted ones.

The project showed that the most suitable learning setting for exceptionally gifted children is in integrated classrooms, with appropriate additional support, e.g. individual learning plans, small size classes and teacher assistants. This requires improved teacher education and training, legislative changes and revisions in national curricula.

However, the project demonstrated that a strong local initiative with a committed local authority could bring significant changes in educational services in kindergartens at local and regional levels. Established communication links and close collaboration among all relevant partners at the local level, under the leadership of the education department of the local authority, enabled the project's continuous impact.

### CONTACTS

For more information about the project please contact the project coordinator Hana Kolaříková at [kolarikova.hana@seznam.cz](mailto:kolarikova.hana@seznam.cz).

## IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERACTIVE WHITEBOARDS IN SCHOOLS

### Case Study 10



Project website  
<http://www.iwb nordic.eu/>

#### Participating regions

Denmark, Sweden

#### Participating organisations

##### Denmark (Aabenraa):

- Aabenraa local government (local authority)
- Rugkobbøl school (primary/lower secondary school)
- Center for Educational Materials (third partner, institution for initial teacher training)

##### Sweden (Linköping):

- Department of Education, Linköping local government (local authority)
- International school Atlas (ISATLAS) (primary school)
- Tornhags school (secondary school)
- LKDATA, Linköping (third partner, public authority)

#### Number of mobilities

39

#### Topics covered

- New Information and Communication Technologies, ICT
- Development of training courses
- Pedagogy and didactics
- Basic skills
- School performance
- Local community
- ICT procurement
- Staff training
- Mentoring

### IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT TOPIC AND THE MAIN PROJECT IDEA

The education sectors in many countries are facing the need to better understand the **challenges and opportunities involved in the use of new technology** and its contribution to the **achievement of better results in schools**. In order to help implement innovative tools in classrooms, the municipality of Aabenraa (Denmark) and the municipality of Linköping (Sweden) decided to establish a **model** for procuring and implementing interactive whiteboards in the schools.

The choice of this topic was related to significant **ICT investments** foreseen in the schools of the Linköping municipality and was based on the previous experience of the partner organisations working on ICT-related subjects. The partners relied on the practical experience of the Rugkobbøl School in Aabenraa, where interactive whiteboards had been used for more than a decade.

**New interactive technologies in the classroom – a way to increase engagement of children, competences of teachers and overall interactivity of learning process**

In addition to two local authorities (Aabenraa and Linköping) and the above-mentioned primary and lower secondary school from Denmark, the project also involved two secondary schools from Linköping municipality, which were preparing to acquire the interactive white boards, a service organisation for schools and education institutions in Denmark and an institution, which provides IT support to the Linköping municipality.

The partners aimed at providing guidance in the acquisition of the whiteboards, their implementation in the classrooms, initial **staff training**, pedagogical use of interactive whiteboards and the creation of a library containing examples of best practices. The project was based on the idea that the use of ICT tools in the classrooms could help to achieve better results and to provide pupils with the competences they need.

#### MAIN IMPACTS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The Comenius Regio project not only facilitated the implementation of learning methodologies involving interactive whiteboards in the classrooms, but also had a direct impact on the teachers, schools and third partner organisations.

The participating teachers gained important practical knowledge by discussing and experiencing examples of using the interactive whiteboards. It was acknowledged that the whiteboards support different teaching styles, improve teachers' planning and preparations as well as teaching practice. Following the distribution of the interactive whiteboards in the classrooms, **specific training was organised for the teachers** and practical examples on how to use the interactive whiteboards were disseminated. Since some of the teachers involved in the project were the frontrunners in their schools, the results have been spread to their respective institutions relatively fast. The teachers were prepared to be **mentors** to their colleagues and some of them continue to provide training in other schools when requested.

The interactive whiteboards have become a natural tool for teaching and learning in the schools, including those that did not take part in the project, although the level of actual usage of the whiteboards by the other teachers differs depending on their personal willingness, enthusiasm, and preparedness to use the ICT tools. According to partner organisations, *"they are in the middle of the process of transforming the school from an analogue mind-set to a digital mind-set which will change the school radically. The project has been an important step in this direction"*.

The project also had some **impact on the wider community**. The partner organisations realized the potential of the interactive whiteboards in public and school libraries. The Linköping municipality developed a new project involving a large number of partners from several European countries on ICT use in libraries. Similarly, the Danish partners applied the knowledge gained during the Comenius Regio partnership in a number of other projects involving school libraries. Furthermore, the interactive whiteboards were used in the Linköping municipality as a support for **elderly people** in order to increase their digital competences.

The project also had some impact on the institutions that did not take part in the partnership. For example, teachers and students of Linköping University, in which future teachers are educated, were informed about the project and considered interactivity as a potential tool for their teaching. This encouraged some of them to carry out research projects on interactive whiteboards and interactive didactics.

The other Danish and Swedish municipalities were informed about the project through municipality boards as well as during the Comenius Regio meetings organized by the National Agencies. The project coordinators indicated that they were occasionally approached by representatives of other schools and institutions about the practical application of the model in other municipalities.

#### SUCCESS FACTORS

There were several factors that contributed to the success of the project. First and foremost, the **project corresponded to the needs of the partner organisations**,

because a large investment in developing the use of interactive whiteboards was planned in one of the partner regions.

Second, the **municipalities' involvement** was an important success factor as well. According to project participants, it meant that the project was considered in a broader dimension. The schools were able to focus on the practical use of the interactive whiteboards, without large involvement in the administration of the project. As underlined by one of the teachers involved in the project, *"having an outside agent to coordinate the project makes the implementation process easier"*.

Third, the previous experience in carrying out **international projects** on ICT-related issues and an in-depth knowledge of the subject largely contributed to the success of this Comenius Regio project. The Danish partner was perceived as a leader in ICT matters by the partners from Sweden and they were very willing to cooperate.

Fourth, the previous cooperation between the partner organisations ensured a **trust-based relationship** and smooth communication between the partner organisations. According to one of the project coordinators, this allowed them to develop very warm relationships between the participants and *"to become a real family"*.

Fifth, amongst the other success factors, the project participants underlined the importance of the **active involvement of a wide range of actors** (teachers, head teachers, representatives of local authorities, other partners) in the partnership. This ensured a better coordination of actions at all levels, as well as improving the understanding of the potential of the use of interactive whiteboards.

Finally, the institutions involved in the project had a **wide network** of partner organisations. This helped them to disseminate the project results to the wider public and allowed them to use the experience gained during the Comenius Regio partnership in other projects.

## LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR TRASFERABILITY

The lessons learned from implementing the interactive whiteboards in the Aabenraa and Linköping municipalities were directly used by the partner organisations while developing detailed instructions for others interested in acquiring and implementing interactive whiteboards in the classrooms. The **guidelines** were based on the practical experience gained while implementing and using the interactive whiteboards. They are easily accessible to other municipalities interested in purchasing, implementing, maintaining or using interactive whiteboards in classrooms.

The project showed that previous experience, extensive knowledge of the subject, commitment of the partner organisations, correspondence of the project objectives to the needs of the partner organisations and the active involvement of local authorities can be regarded as factors contributing to the success of the project. Compared to the experiences from other projects in which the partner organisations were involved, Comenius Regio was perceived as a very positive action.

The project results were **widely disseminated and easily accessible** to any interested party, therefore further exploitation of the results is possible. New projects could be developed on the basis of successful Comenius Regio projects in order to increase the possibility of replicating similar models in the other European countries.

## CONTACTS

For more information about the project please contact the project coordinator Jan Brauer at [jbra@ucsyd.dk](mailto:jbra@ucsyd.dk) or Björn Bertilsson at [Bjorn.Bertilsson@linkoping.se](mailto:Bjorn.Bertilsson@linkoping.se).

## EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS IN POLAND AND AUSTRIA IN THE PROFESSIONAL ASPECT AND THE LABOUR MARKET

### Case Study 11



#### Participating regions

Poland, Austria

#### Participating organisations

##### Poland (Żywiec):

- Powiat Żywiecki District Żywiecki (local authority)
- Zespół Szkół Agrotechnicznych i Ogólnokształcących Centrum Kształcenia Praktycznego im. Józefa Piłsudskiego Jozef Pilsudski School of agronomic and General Practical Training (vocational and technical secondary school)
- Stowarzyszenie Przedsiębiorców Ziemi Żywieckiej Association of Entrepreneurs of Żywiecka (third partner, non-profit association)

##### Austria (Gemeinde Opponitz):

- Gemeinde Opponitz Community of Opponitz (local authority)
- Landwirtschaftliche Fachschule Hohenlehen Agricultural College Hohenlehen (vocation and technical secondary school)
- Landwirtschaftliche Fachschule Unterleiten Agricultural College Unterleiten (vocational and technical secondary school)
- Amt der Niederösterreichischen Landesregierung, Abteilung Landwirtschaftliche Bildung Office of the Lower Austrian Provincial Government, Department of Agricultural Education (third partner, school association)

Number of mobilities	Topics covered
59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforcing links between education and working life</li> <li>• Comparing educational systems</li> <li>• Foreign language teaching and learning</li> <li>• Teacher competences</li> </ul>

### IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT TOPIC AND THE MAIN PROJECT IDEA

**Strengthening the link between education and working life** and making the teaching at vocational schools more practice-oriented was at the heart of the partnership established between Żywiec (Poland) and Gemeinde Opponitz (Austria). Local and regional authorities together with three vocational schools and an association of entrepreneurs combined their efforts to offer new professional perspectives to young people in the respective regions in Poland and Austria.

The partners aimed at increasing the attractiveness of vocational education and training as well as helping the young people to acquire a set of skills necessary for their professional life through practice-oriented teaching. They also wished to strengthen the link between the schools and their environment. For this purpose the coordinators invited the representatives of the association of e-entrepreneurs of Żywiec to join the partnership and organised meetings

**New perspectives to vocational education – hands-on training to increase the attractiveness of working life**



with various companies providing apprenticeships for students from vocational schools in Austria.

The quality and attractiveness of vocational education were considered to be of crucial importance in the partner regions. Due to the regional context, people graduating from vocational education institutions need to acquire the skills to carry out more than one professional activity and be flexible in the labour market. The limited attractiveness of vocational schools and the mismatch between the qualifications young people acquired and the demands of the labour market were considered as important topics by both partner regions. The vocational schools involved in the project felt the need to prepare young people for working life and provide them with additional professional skills so that they could earn an adequate income in the region.



Logotype of the hotel "Oak"

The above-mentioned issues are also important in other European regions and correspond to priorities at the European level. Better vocational education is considered to be of vital importance in responding adequately to the challenges of global competition that European countries are facing, such as the high numbers of low-skilled workers, high levels of youth unemployment and ageing populations.

## MAIN IMPACTS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The project provided theoretical and practical knowledge to the teaching staff in the areas of establishing and developing training-simulation at schools, which were used to provide first-hand experience to students on how to run a small company.

Polish partners created a small hotel, "Oak", in their premises during the project. With the help of the simulated company, students were able to develop the necessary **competences** for their future work life, for example, mathematical competences, ICT and foreign language skills, entrepreneurship, creativity, practical professional abilities, etc. The project contributed to the improvement of students' **foreign language skills**. In addition, interactive teaching helped to raise their motivation to study.



Final event in Żywiec – "Partnership Fair"

The organisations created important connections with the institutions from the partner region and gained additional experience in project management. They learned about vocational education in the other country and were able to compare the education systems.

The project participants understood the importance of opening up the schools to the local environment and creating lasting contacts with various local actors. The

positive experience from this project encouraged the partners from Żywiec to participate in other Comenius Regio projects involving other partner regions.

The entrepreneurs involved in the Comenius Regio partnership established connections with their counterparts from Austria and some of the companies continue to cooperate after the project.

## SUCCESS FACTORS (AND OBSTACLES)



The establishment of the partnership was based on the **professional networks and the personal determination of the participants**. The enthusiasm of the coordinators from both sides was an important factor contributing to the success of the project.

Involvement of the local authorities in both countries and the support of the regional authority on the Austrian side were very important for the development of the project. The latter helped significantly with the legal aspects of the mobilities involving school pupils and enabled greater flexibility for schools in allowing the teachers to take part in these mobilities.



Students of the vocational school working at the reception of the hotel "Oak" in Żywiec

### LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR TRANSFERABILITY

One of the project's key messages is that interactive teaching methods in vocational schools can help in increasing **teaching quality and student motivation**.

This particular Comenius Regio partnership also showed that previous experience in carrying out international projects can facilitate the cooperation and communication between the partners. In addition, the project between Opponitz and Żywiec demonstrated the importance of the role of foreign language teachers' in international projects.

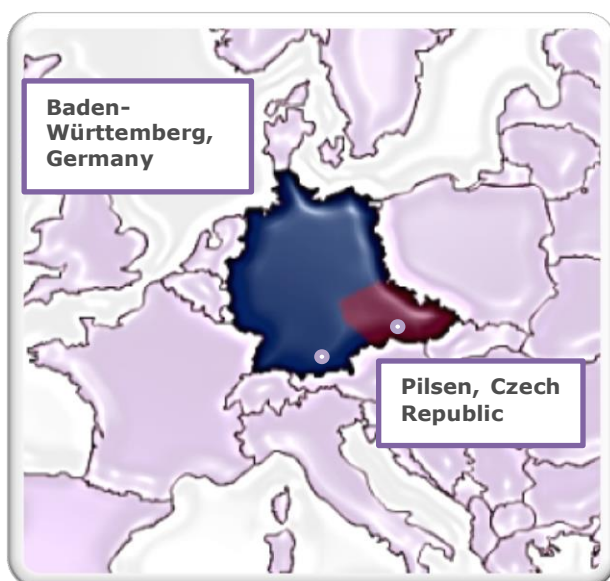
Finally, the project confirmed that the support of the regional authorities can significantly facilitate exchanges at the school level. What is more, valuable experience gained by the local authorities while participating in one project can greatly contribute to the quality of subsequent Comenius Regio projects.

### CONTACTS

For more information about the project please contact the project coordinator Danuta Kiser at [danuta\\_kiser@op.pl](mailto:danuta_kiser@op.pl) or Tatjana Stangl at [stangl@opponitz.gv.at](mailto:stangl@opponitz.gv.at).

## SUPPORT FROM SCHOOLS FOR HEAVILY HANDICAPPED YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PHASE OF PREPARATION FOR ADULT LIFE

### Case Study 12



#### Participating regions

Germany, Czech Republic

#### Participating organisations

##### Germany:

- Ministry for Culture, Youth and Sport (local/regional authority)
- Centre for physically handicapped Weingarten (school, establishment for learners / pupils with special needs)
- Martinsschule Ladenburg (school, establishment for learners / pupils with special needs)
- Specialized Pedagogical Seminary, department for special needs pedagogics (third partner, Institution for initial teacher training )
- Paul Meyle School for mentally and physically handicapped (school, establishment for learners / pupils with special needs)
- Schule Lichtenstern Lichtenstern school (school establishment for learners / pupils with special needs)

##### Czech Republic:

- Region of Pilsen (local/regional authority)
- Primary and vocational school, Zbûch (school establishment for learners / pupils with special needs)
- Primary and vocational school, Horšovky Tyn (school establishment for learners / pupils with special needs)
- Support centre for schools, Pilsen (third partner Non-governmental organisation (NGO))

#### Number of mobilities Topics covered

69	Comparison of education systems inclusive education Special needs education Teaching methodologies
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### IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT TOPIC AND THE MAIN PROJECT IDEA

European societies are facing the challenge of integrating heavily mentally and physically **handicapped pupils** in their education systems. The demand for **inclusive education** poses multifaceted challenges for schools regarding facilities, medical equipment, qualification of teachers and other staff members, as well as to teaching methods and approaches.

Therefore, the project initiated by the Baden-Württemberg (Germany) and Pilsen (Czech Republic) focused not only on the **exchange of experiences** and the design and implementation of **new approaches**, but it also aimed at the development of standardised criteria for quality education of heavily handicapped pupils preparing them for life after school.

The partnership involved schools, regional governments, a pedagogical seminary (DE), and a school support centre (CZ). Both regions encounter growing numbers of heavily mentally and physically handicapped with diverse needs.

**Providing assistance for heavily handicapped pupils: the importance of ongoing conversation, commitment and spreading of inspiring ideas**

The partners' objectives corresponded to several **priorities at national level** in both countries. In Baden-Württemberg and many other German *Länder* reforms of the school systems led to gradual closure or reform of traditional schools for handicapped pupils and made way for an inclusive approach.

The project was equally relevant to the European and international policy context, including the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007), which strengthened the rights of handicapped people, in order to enable their equal participation in society.

The main objective of the project partners was to design and implement approaches to prepare handicapped pupils for life after school. They sought to learn from different experiences, structures and ways of handling the interests of heavily handicapped pupils in both countries.

In order to provide better schooling for handicapped pupils, the project partners started out with presenting, comparing and evaluating already existing pedagogical methods and teaching approaches, as well as collecting examples of "**good practices**". In a second step, several approaches were tested in all partner organisations in order to establish a diverse **methodological approach** for the specific project target group and to foster the professional competencies of teachers.

#### MAIN IMPACTS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The project certainly had a definite and lasting impact on regional authorities and schools in both regions. All partners took particular advantage of the project's **practice-oriented approach**, which allowed them to adopt ideas for their daily work. By sharing experiences, approaches and convictions, the participating schools were able to implement a diverse methods' approach for the target group right away and to foster the professional competencies of the teachers.

Moreover, many schools had plans to develop new approaches on their own at the beginning of the partnership. With the project they seized the opportunity to present their teaching practices and receive feedback, which strengthened the self-confidence of teachers and school communities. It assured them of "being on the right track".

Through a systematic comparison of the two education systems, the project partners highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches and teaching methods in depth, which contributed to further development of existing practices and provided them with suggestions and ideas for improvement, as well as teaching materials. The German pedagogical seminary was able, for example, to expand its collection of audio-visual material as well as its field-specific competence considerably. This will be used for the benefit of teacher training in Baden-Württemberg.

Since the issue of this project is very complex and strongly influenced by traditional points of view, one objective was information, sensitisation and activation of the general public. This goal was achieved: the project helped to re-think positions and attitudes towards severely handicapped people not only among representatives of the partner organisations, but also, for example, among government officials in the Czech Republic and in companies located in Baden-Württemberg that were asked to offer internships for handicapped pupils.

Finally, the project visibility was enhanced by the preparation of project documentation in German and Czech. These **publications boosted the dissemination** of the project results and were sent to other practitioners, similar projects, interest groups, university researchers, as well as to regional and national policymakers and stakeholders. In addition to several workshops and meetings of experts in both regions, two final conferences were

held in Pilsen (CZ) with 200 participants and Friedrichshafen at Lake Bodensee (DE) with more than 300 participants. The conferences were considered to be the most successful dissemination activity of the project.

### **SUCCESS FACTORS (AND OBSTACLES)**

The success of this partnership was mainly grounded in the factors situation, relationship, and experience.

The debate on inclusion of handicapped people has assumed a far greater importance in recent years. It seems that the issue has become more relevant to professionals, politicians and even in public debate. The project contributed to these developments by providing an opportunity for exchange of ideas, participation in this "movement" relating to inclusion and developing innovative and interesting approaches to educational practice.

It has certainly been an asset to this Comenius Regio partnership that most partners had known each other since 1997 due to previous cooperation in international working groups. Project partners pointed out that "friendships had developed", which furthered the dialogue right from the start. All partners' existing relationships and the stability of contact persons in each partner organisation were seen as key factors to the project's success.

The German partners in particular brought a lot of experience in international cooperation with their colleagues in other countries. These contacts were used in the course of the partnership for dissemination purposes and contributed to the extraordinary success.

At the beginning of the project, language differences, especially different subject-specific terms, however, were an obstacle to smooth and efficient communication between the partners. In order to overcome this challenge, a translator with the relevant background was engaged in order to ensure the professional preparation and implementation of project events.

### **LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR TRANSFERABILITY**

The project showed that partners with very different perspectives on a subject can nonetheless cooperate successfully. The participants deemed it important to identify any differences, especially concerning mutual expectations.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EU	European Union
EU-15	European Union of 15 Member States: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom
EUR-EMSET	Comenius Regio project "EUR-EMSET: Excellence in Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Environmental Education and Technology"
ICT	Information and communications technology
LLP	Lifelong Learning Programme

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