

Topic: **Participants and promotion**

Without doubt, adult education has a great social significance, but above all, a significance that is individual and personal: whoever learns, comes further, expands his skills and possibilities, has more employment prospects and becomes more involved in society. However, the motivation to learn often has to be awoken first, for example, through learning festivals, which regularly advertise adult education throughout Europe. This InfoLetter provides ideas on how to recognise and awaken the participants' needs, and also shows examples of the positive effects of education on individuals.



## Celebrate the achievements and promote the benefits

**Europe.** "To promote the importance and role of learning and education in all stages of life and for all the roles that one takes." This is the mission statement of Lifelong Learning Week in Slovenia. But it might as well have originated from all other such promotional weeks taking place in a number of European countries.

(Michael Voss) In the United Kingdom it is called Adult Learners Week (ALW). In Norway the title is Learning Days. AONTAS in Ireland are organizing Adult Learners Festival, and the Russians call it Move. Independent of name they all aim to promote adult education and lifelong learning.

The Irish organizers have detailed their aims into five points:

- Celebrate the achievements of learners and adult learning organizations
- Promote the benefits and value of adult learning
- Raise the benefits and value of the adult education sector
- Encourage collaboration at local level
- Keep adult education on the political agenda

### International Week

Some of these ALW's have taken place for almost 20 years. In 1997 they got a global boost when the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) decided to promote the development of a United Nations Adult Learners' Week. The international week was launched in September 2000 trying to bridge the learning festivals already taking place and deepen the cross-national exchange and cooperation.

A handbook was produced and a website under the auspices of UNESCO was established. In that way the international week also helped spread the idea to other countries both in Europe and globally. Af-

ter some years, experience showed that the national associations and institutions preferred to organize the promotional weeks at a time of year that suited their national calendar instead of the same week all over the world.

Generally many national organizers have been inspired by other countries. At a seminar in Estonia, November 2009, Nina Litvinova, national coordinator of the Russian ALW, told that they got the idea in 1992 from the UK. They have organized the week in collaboration with colleagues in Ukraine, Kazakhstan and China, and experts from a number of European countries have assisted them.

The status today is that ALW's are taken place in at least 12 European countries primarily in Northern, Eastern and Central Europe. A festival took place in Spain a couple of years ago but apart from that the idea seems not to have caught on in Southern Europe.

### From street festivals to prison programs

A huge variety of activities takes place in each country. Usually a national association is coordinating the initiatives of local schools and associations. One example is Hungary. In this country some of the activities are:

- A grand opening ceremony
- Street festivals
- Folk art events
- Activities for elderly people
- Prison programs
- Museum education for adults
- Pop-science in libraries

The dry numbers of 2008 were: 158 towns and villages; 370 activities, 50.000 participants, 266.000 € spent on activities.

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**EUROPEAN  
AFFAIRS**

**Implementation of life-long learning strategies**

The European Commission has published a call for proposals on actions that support the implementation of lifelong learning strategies and policies and raise the awareness of European co-operation in education and training. ▶

**The EAEA Breakfast**

EAEA (European Association for Education of Adults, Brussels) organised the first in a series of policy breakfasts at the European Parliament. ▶

**NATIONAL  
AFFAIRS**

**The gain is within you!**

**Portugal.** External evaluation of new opportunities initiative reveals high degree of adult satisfaction following participation in adult education programmes. Problem: poor employability. ▶

**Finland needs a strategy for lifelong learning**

**Finland.** Finland's knowledge society is a success from an educational perspective but only if the learning route taken is a blinkered march from pre-school through to the retirement home. This sums up the message that the Council for Lifelong Learning, operating in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, is sending to politicians dealing with education. ▶

**Education for the autonomy of migrant adults**

**France.** The 300 community centres work towards the integration of migrant adults via an acquisition of French linked with practical cases. These sociolinguistic workshops are most valuable for the autonomisation of these adults in French society. ▶

# „Youth on the Move“: What will happen to adult education?

**Europe.** „Youth on the Move“ is the name of the new flagship initiative, which was officially presented by EU President Barroso on 3rd March. What might sound lively conceals some controversy, because this is how the new comprehensive initiative should sound, which previously promoted educational work in Europe. The Lifelong-Learning programme, including Grundtvig, will not disappear, said Dennis Abbott, Spokesperson for the Directorate-General for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth of the EU Commission.

(Michael Sommer) „Youth on the Move“ is part of the „Europe 2020“ strategy presented by Barroso on 3rd March, which aims to supersede the former Lisbon Strategy. Seven „guide initiatives“ are envisaged in this, one of them being „Youth on the Move - promoting the quality and attractiveness of the European higher education institutions through supporting the mobility of students and young skilled personnel“. The objective of the initiative is concrete and aims „to enhance the performance and international attractiveness of Europe's higher education institutions and raise the overall quality of all levels of education and training in the EU, combining both excellence and equity, by promoting student mobility and trainees' mobility, and improve the employment situation of young people“. Thus, there should be an expansion and linking of mobility programmes such as Erasmus, Tempus or Marie Curie, an extension of the previous modernisation programme of the higher education institutions, the promotion of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, as well as the introduction of a programme, which aims to provide young unemployed persons with better employment opportunities through work experience abroad (e.g. traineeships).

Already with the programme title, the references to adult education are no longer recognisable, and also with the proposals for implementation, this sector, just like the concept „Lifelong Learning“, cannot be found. Does this mean the impending end of the European promotion of adult education?

**Umbrella strategy**

„We do not want to kill any of the existing initiatives,“ reassures Dennis Abbott, Spokesperson for the Directorate-General for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth of the EU Commission. In addition, the very successful Lifelong Learning Programme, including Grundtvig, should not be replaced by „Youth on the Move“. The new concept is to be understood as much more than an umbrella strategy, which is said to take on even more additional measures. The Directorate-General has announced an accompanying concrete draft for June.

For Doris Pack, Chairwoman of the Committee on Culture and Education in the European Parliament, the European promotion of adult education must not only remain in its previous form, but also be financially and substantially better equipped. She stipulated this at the end of January at an EU conference on the Grundtvig programme.

The umbrella organisation of European adult edu-



cation, EAEA, also views „Youth on the Move“ with some scepticism and, at the same time, stresses the significance of the existing programmes. „The action plan for lifelong learning and the Grundtvig programme have shown that the EU attaches importance to adult education. Both initiatives had a positive influence on the policies and strategies of many member states,“ said EAEA President Sue Waddington. „The EAEA will urge the European Parliament and the Commission to carry this programme through to the next decade.“

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## PIAAC: An international comparison of competencies

**Europe.** The aim of the PIAAC, a global study by the OECD, is to assess the level of competencies in various countries and determine people's level of education. The test phase has just begun for the questionnaire, which is similar in design to the well-known PISA study for schoolchildren. The first results are to be available in 2013, providing important data for adult education.

(Michael Sommer) Since its launch in 2008, 27 countries altogether worldwide (a large number of European countries and others including Russia, Chile, Canada, the USA and Japan) have put together teams of researchers to tackle this task. The abbreviation PIAAC stands for „Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies“. The OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) created the study with the following aims:

- To give policy-makers in each participating country a profile of their country's adult population in terms of their knowledge, abilities and competencies.
- To assess how these competencies relate to the different results, as well as to the social and economic situation.
- To gauge how successful systems of education and training are in achieving these results.

According to the project leader of the German study, Dr Beatrice Rammstedt of GESIS (Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences), the main difficulty is to gain comparable data in the face of major cultural differences. For this reason, instead of a single questionnaire being used for all countries, each country is developing its own questions based on jointly developed foundations. A manual of about 300 pages has also been developed, setting out how the survey is to be carried out, right down to details such as what computer should be used.

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# Who takes part in study circles?

**Sweden.** *What sort of people choose to attend study circles. Why do they do it? What do they get out of the circles? Well, the majority are women. Many of them are active in non-profit associations. And most of them are very satisfied with their study circles. These are some of the results of a big new survey of study circle participants in Sweden.*

(Hetty Rooth) "You can give free rein to your imagination when it comes to choosing a theme for a study circle. As the person starting the circle, it's up to you to decide what to focus on", writes the ABF (Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund = Workers' Educational Association) study association in a fact sheet about getting a study circle started.

Freedom of structure, freedom to choose and the participants' own interests form the basis for the adult education activities conducted in the Swedish study associations. Using the study circle method, the learning takes place in a group environment where everyone is involved on equal terms.

This has been the case since the end of the 1800's when the first study circles were started in Sweden. At that time it was a way for people to get an education on their own terms. The question is whether the traditional ideology still has the same relevance today.

Yes, to a large extent it has, according to the "Circle participants 2008" study presented by the Swedish National Council of Adult Education (Folkbildningsrådet) in December 2009. The report is based on the results of a survey of 10,800 people who took part in study circles in 2008. The surveys were supplemented by interviews to obtain a better awareness of the participants' reasons for taking part and the effects the activities had had on them personally and on society.

## Participants

What sort of people then, join study circles in Sweden? Women have long played a significant role in adult education and currently around 60% of study circle participants are women.

But the age range is wide. The youngest participant in the survey was 13 and the oldest was 95. The average age of all participants was slightly over 50.

Generally speaking, participants are not getting any younger. In spite of the fact that all the debates on adult education stress the importance of reaching out to young people. The proportion of younger people has, if anything, fallen somewhat over the past twenty years, while the number of participants over 65 has risen.

## Working structures

Adult education in Sweden is largely governed by the rules on the state subsidies which influence the structure of the circles. In order to obtain a grant, a study circle must, for example, have at least three participants, but the size of the group is not just governed by money. The size of the groups is also important for the adult education teaching methods to work effectively.

"The ability to hold a conversation in which every-

one can have their say, sets the limit for the number of participants in the circle. The number of participants must be reasonable in terms of the participants' requirements and capabilities. From a learning point of view a maximum group size of twelve is preferable", wrote the National Council of Adult Education in 2007. And this is how the circles are actually structured today. The study circles normally have fewer than twelve participants. This works well, as demonstrated by the report. Almost 80% of those who took part in the survey thought the working structures were well suited to the aim and content.

A large majority thought that there had been good cooperation within the groups and that everyone contributed to the work.

Developing as a person and enhancing and extending your skills and knowledge is something that many circle participants consider to be important. In the surveys the vast majority responded that the circles had improved their knowledge and that they had been able to use their skills in their private lives and leisure activities.

Many people also thought that they had developed personally through the contact with other circle participants. One participant of a reading circle described it like this: "The reading circle obviously hasn't changed my life or opinions, but perhaps it has made me take a greater interest in what other people think".

A good 60% agreed totally or to a considerable extent that the study circles had enhanced their quality of life and well-being, e.g.: "It puts you in a good mood and you feel better and you feel like a new person. You're totally relaxed ... and you feel things are going well".

## Increases the desire to learn

What unites the study circles is the desire to seek knowledge together. The report shows that the study circles have also provided inspiration to continue with studies. More than half the participants said that they would continue to study in study circles or other forms of study.

The inspiration to learn more when you get the opportunity to develop an interest can be illustrated by the response from a participant in a rock music circle: "Now I do nothing but music. I am following a music syllabus at upper secondary school and I have joined a music society through this rock circle. We rehearse four – five times a week, so it's nothing but music every day. Before this I didn't really do anything". "I am going to do something with music in the future. Even if I don't become a rock star".

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## Migrant milieus and learning

**Germany.** In "milieu studies", social groups are sorted into clusters according to shared characteristics in their behaviour and lifestyle. A current Sinus milieu study® investigates educational behaviour among migrants in Europe.

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## Comprehensive role

**Belgium.** Changes in society led to a new decree on socio-cultural work with adults in Flanders. This resulted in the foundation of a new type of organisations in non-formal education: locally oriented 'folkhigh-schools' or rather adult education centres. The research gathers information about how socio-cultural adult educators stay current in this fundamentally changing profession. ►

## Contact with a human being

**Lithuania.** Among the most important personnel chains in the context of lifelong learning are adult teachers, who are currently being trained in several universities. ►

## Success formula for life

**Malta.** Success Formula for Life is one of a number of popular short courses appealing mostly to those in search of professional and personal growth. ►

**Malta:** Adult Education with Hands-on-Training ►

## PROJECTS

### Creative methods in adult education

**Germany.** The use of creative methods should also help to get such target groups interested in political issues, who were not reached or only reached with difficulty by the traditional methods. A cultural project on the topic "Experience Europe" has taken up this approach. ►

Hattrick project launched: Football – Learning – Integration ►

YES, an European project to promote transparency in tourism qualifications. ►

ILMAE: Innovative Learning Methods in Adult Education ►

**PRACTICE**

**Motivation and active participation**

**Italy.** Can training represent a path towards personal development in a continually changing society? ▶

**Teacher and adult educator training: convergences and divergences**

**Switzerland.** Continuing education contributes to the realisation of the „knowledge-based economy“ of a society in rapid transformation. ▶

**Sweden.** Anna Lena Hellman is an adult education professional who believes everything is possible. ▶

**Ireland:** The fourth AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival ▶

**Europe.** Adult learning under the ash cloud ▶

**Teaching Adults: profession or vocation**

**Ireland.** A strong belief in the right of adults to learn has sustained the adult and community education sector in Ireland through many years of sparse funding as well as lack of recognition and support. ▶

**SCIENCE**

**What does adult education provide according to the participants themselves?**

**Netherlands.** It provides people with a better place in society by teaching them. ▶

**Switzerland:** Recent studies have examined the relationship between continuing education and the economy ▶

**Denmark:** Nordic seminar “Competence development among adult educators/ Professionalization of adult educators”. ▶

## Two men and a new career

**Finland.** A cellist resigns his position in an orchestra and studies to become an entrepreneur in the wellness industry. A professional boxer goes back to school and now helps former prison inmates. Adult education can lead you to a new career – two Finnish men from very different backgrounds are evidence of this.



Erkki Hirvikangas

(Terhi Kouvo, Anne Nisula) Living in Joensuu in Eastern Finland, 51-year-old Erkki Hirvikangas' working week these days is filled with flotation therapy, massage baths and other wellness services – including music. “Creative, unpredictable combinations can result in new skills and specialisations,” he affirms.

Hirvikangas' own story is a good example of this. With a university degree in cello performance from the Sibelius Academy and three decades of experience behind him as a professional cellist, ideas about a creative break started to simmer at the back of his mind.

Hirvikangas resigned from his main job in the Joensuu City Orchestra and embarked on studies in Entrepreneurship and Business Administration at the North Karelia Adult Education Centre based in his hometown. Erkki's education in entrepreneurship also came in handy for his wife Anitta, who was concurrently working on developing a model for expanding her own business.

It had been three decades since his last stint at school but Erkki easily picked up the rhythm of studying again. Within half a year he had a vocational qualification as an entrepreneur under his belt and a year later a specialist vocational degree in Business Management. These qualifications enabled him to take up a managerial role in the growing family business, Animation. “Education helped me to understand finance in a completely different way from how I understood it before,” Hirvikangas remarks.

Erkki is happy that his employer granted him temporary leave for work and study. He encourages others to also try new fields: “Adult education certainly does not mean you have to pursue a new profession. It is personally enriching to improve your skills and develop yourself as an individual,” he says.

Erkki Hirvikangas continues to work as a cellist, as there is room in the same person to be both a business director and a musician. Rather than a hindrance, his musical background is a real benefit to the business: customers appreciate and thank the staff for the excellent choices in music used in the spa.

**Boxer lends a helping hand**

Having made his living for 25 years as a boxer, Jukka Järvinen, 44, from Helsinki, has taken some rough

punches in his time. When his professional career came to an end, he found himself staring into a black hole: “Again and again, I asked myself, ‘can an old guy like me go back to school?’”



Jukka Järvinen

Järvinen relates, as he describes how he felt a few years ago. His first day at Helsinki Diakonia College showed him that he could. He was not even the oldest in his group and realised that it is never too late to make a new start.

Having always done most of his learning as a pupil in the school of Life, as it were, Jukka Järvinen's formal education up to that point had consisted only of primary school. In boxing circles he had been known as the “Käpylä Executioner”.

Järvinen brought his own experience and practical thinking to the study group. He noticed that he learnt best by doing. “I've been faced with many obstacles in my life, but I have overcome them. I started to figure things out my own way,” he says.

His friends also needed some convincing: “Once things got going for me, others started to think, ‘hey, maybe I can do that too’. Now others have gone and done the same thing.”

Jukka Järvinen gained his qualifications as a substance abuse counsellor and went on to study substance abuse social work at a University of Applied Sciences. His work now involves offering support to homeless people and former prison inmates.

“I have seen people I know simply go off the rails: friends of mine have ended up in jail or six feet under. When I was young, no-one was bothered about me, now I want to help others,” Jukka explains.

Full story in database ▶

## Unemployed participants in adult education

**Poland.** An analysis relating to adult participants in education and, in consequence, to those who do not participate, cannot be limited to the institutions undertaking this activity, but must also give consideration to the expectations and motivations of the people to whom the educational offer is addressed.

(Anna Walulik, Wit Pasierbek) The Małopolskie Education, Cooperation and Counselling Centre is among the providers who have made an attempt to adopt this way of thinking about their educational offer. Established on the basis of experience gained during 15 years of working in conjunction with the Netherlands Management Cooperation Programme, the Centre has put together an offer which responds to the most crucial needs of the target users. The main area of activity is the organisation of training courses which will take into account not only the requirements of institutions, but also those of specific social groups.

Full story in database ▶