

## **Adult Education in Crisis**

### **Europaweite Debatte in der EAEA**

Im Jahr 2012 forderte die EAEA ihre Mitglieder auf, unter dem Schlagwort „Adult Education in Crisis?“ in englischer Sprache kurze Thesenpapiere zur Situation der Erwachsenenbildung in Europa zu verfassen. Aus jedem Land wurde eine Mitgliedsorganisation angesprochen. Als Reaktion kamen sehr unterschiedliche Papiere. Der deutsche Beitrag versuchte, der geforderten Kürze gerecht zu werden. Viele andere verfassten jedoch grundsätzlichere und zumeist längere Texte. Allen gemeinsam ist die Sorge um die Zukunft der Erwachsenenbildung in Europa. Die EAEA plant, die Beiträge in einem Sammelband zu veröffentlichen. Dabei wird auch eine Harmonisierung der momentan sehr unterschiedlichen äußeren Form angestrebt.

Die Hessischen Blätter drucken vorab den deutschen, den finnischen, den portugiesischen und den ungarischen Beitrag. Weitere Diskussionsbeiträge finden sich im nachfolgenden Link: [www.eaea.org/adult-education-in-times-of-crisis](http://www.eaea.org/adult-education-in-times-of-crisis).

### **German Adult Education in Times of Crisis**

*Ingrid Schöll, Leiterin VHS-Bonn*

At the moment Germany is not experiencing an economic crisis. However, it is very important to mention a whole range of crisis phenomena: the social crisis with a widening gap between poor and rich, the crisis concerning the debt crisis, which are hardly able to shoulder the essential expenditure at local level and the education crisis. The implications for the adult education are best illustrated below.

For some time now Germany is debating about the consequences of the far too late adopted (2005) immigration Act, albeit with regional differences (which tend to increase rather than decrease).

This clearly demonstrates that further education is increasingly confronted with severe repair works due to migration and globalization in school and adult education. Some education institutions run the risks of losing sight of the set legal profiles.

Exemplary for the discussion about reparation and worth highlighting are the PISA-, the PIAAC debate and the impact of the national LEO One Study about literacy.

The Pisa debate has shown that many young people are leaving school with major deficits in basic education. Often this causes problems finding vocational training positions and they can't use qualified further education.

Results of the PIAAC studies („Pisa for adults”) are expected in autumn. It is becoming apparent that deficits in basic education in school for young adults cause major problems which continue throughout adulthood.

The study on literacy LEO One has shown that more than seven million Germans of working age are functional illiterates. Further education institutions, most of all Adult Education Centers just reach a small number of people concerned. Initiatives to improve the reading and writing skills are urgently needed. This requires additional funds which have not been provided over the last years.

Above all education should help us bringing people in Europe together, dismantle political prejudices, enhance civil society exchange and communicate empathically (which requires the knowledge of the local language). In order to bring Europe closer together it is important that further education should not be restricted to paying the costs of repairs for basic education and employability – meaning the usability of knowledge for professional purposes.

Such a restriction of financial support is not going to help the mutual understanding of people in Europe.

At worst it will reinforce prejudices and stereotypes and the economic success in fight for global markets proves to become the sole criterion of political action.

One of the many consequences is the political crisis which the European monetary area is experiencing at the moment. Further education needs to be preserved, developed further and financed to the full extent of the task of civil society. Otherwise we will pay for it politically and socially. It endangers democracy which served as an essential and stable link throughout the European Continent over the past years.

## **Finnish Adult Education in Times of Crisis**

*Aaro Harju, Ph. D., Chairperson of the Finnish Adult Education Association (FAEA)*

The economic crisis of the Europe has not hit Finland as strongly as for example Southern Europe. The economic situation, debt equity ratio and unemployment rate were fairly good in the first decade of the new millennium. Therefore Finland has had more economic tolerance than many other countries. In past few years, however, the government has been forced to make numerous saving decisions. These savings have influenced every sector of the society, including adult education.

In Finland, non-formal adult education consists of five different institutional forms: community colleges, folk high schools, study centers, summer universities and sports institutes. There are over 300 institutions in total, attracting about a million students every year (the population of Finland is 5.4 million). The government supports institutes with government shares and assistance with around 164 million euros per year.

*Non-formal adult education in crisis*

The government assigns a certain amount of lessons or student weeks from its annual budget for non-formal adult education institutions. For these lessons and student weeks the institutions get government shares. Due to the crisis, the lesson and student week amounts have been cut between 2007 and 2012: community colleges 9.8%, folk high schools 5.5% and study centers 2.7%. The lesson amounts of summer universities have increased 6.8%. The totals of sports institutes have remained in the same level throughout the period. The difficult economic situation spurs the non-formal adult education field to closer cooperation and structural changes.

Secondly, the government support of non-formal adult education institutions is bound to index; increased costs are compensated. The index increases of 2013 and 2014 are cancelled. The losses have been compensated by special support directed to specific tasks. The latest example of special support of non-formal adult education institutions is funds that are assigned for implementing youth guarantee.

The government has cut also from apprenticeships but during the last year it increased the funds assigned for them. This way the Government seeks to support employability of the currently unemployed. Cuts on other sectors of adult education have not been made. Thus the focus is strongly on vocational education and training.

*Equality in danger*

In addition to the cuts mentioned, the strongest concern of the Finnish non-formal adult education institutions is that many institutions provide 20% to 76% more education and training than they get government support for. The reason for this is the high demand for non-formal studies. Institutions fund the education and training with course fees collected from learners.

At first glance this might not sound worrying, but for decades the backbone of Finnish policy concerning non-formal adult education has been the principle of offering affordable studies and trainings for everyone living in Finland. Finland is geographically a large country of a low population density. Therefore providing education in sparsely populated areas is not cost-effective. As the institutions have been forced to increase the course fees, the poorest people have no chance to participate non-formal adult education. This is alarming from the viewpoint of lifelong learning and equality. The people most in need of education and training are left out. The government has however recently introduced a study voucher which has eased the situation especially when it comes to youth, immigrants and the elderly. With personal study vouchers learners can fund their education and training in non-formal institutions.

*Youth in focus*

The Finnish government has strongly focused on youth; preventing their unemployment and social exclusion. The economic crisis has had serious consequences for the young; 16% of the under-25-year-olds are unemployed. Social Guarantee scheme is the newest opening and youth guarantee as a part of it is in a central role in it. Young persons under 25 are guaranteed a job or a traineeship. The government has assigned

the non-formal sector an appropriation in implementation of Youth Guarantee: Community colleges and folk high schools are implementers of the Guarantee. The government has also assigned the non-formal institutions a strong role in organizing integration courses for immigrants.

### *Conclusion*

Finnish adult education community makes every effort to prevent government's cuts because we believe that non-formal adult education has an important role in enhancing people's skill-levels, updating their know-how and advocating for inclusion, social capital and active citizenship. Non-formal adult education's value is not lying in the amount of study transcripts – it has a higher purpose. Non-formal adult education enables a truly civilized society, learning through life, democracy and active citizenship. These values have been Nordic adult education's strengths in past decades and they should not be lost in the future – not even in the times of crisis.

### **Reflection for the Adult Education in Times of Crisis – Hungary**

*Zsóka Viktória Pásztor, Budapest University*

Even at the time of this worldwide crisis, I don't think Adult Education should reposition itself. What is more, it is time for Adult Education to show and impregnate itself into everyone's mind from the governments to the populations and every single person.

Adult Education should be the answer for people across Europe who has lost their jobs as a consequence of the crisis. As those companies that did not reduce the expenses of the promotions even when the crisis was on the top, still became successful, higher investment for Adult Education could be the end of the road of the current economic, ethnic and personal crisis as well.

In my opinion, the solution would be investing the most possible fund into the Education sector, (including the younger classes) first of all the Adult Education.

The fact is that there are many people seeking for job, high per cent of the adult persons are spending their days without doing necessary things for the society, and for themselves. Until the time of the job seeking, the unemployed persons have many free hours and energy for learning new skills, grow their know-how in their trades or even to acquire a new one.

These times there should be as many potential courses as possible. It brings a lots of new employment options for the education specialists, and a lot new opportunities for the unemployed persons. After all it is a way for realising the knowledge-based population.

### *Targeting vs. universalism?*

Universalism is a very nice benefit of the Adult Education, everyone who feels like he has opportunity for constituting itself should have the right and the way to realise it. But in this special situation relating to the crisis there should be special target groups.

The most people possible should be caught who has no job, who is under qualified. So nowadays the first target group should be the group of any kind of disabled people.

My questions are:

- How the governments could be convicted about financing the Adult Education?
- What are the ways or connections that find the politicians, decision-makers?

## Adult Education in Times of Crisis – the Portuguese Situation

*António Jorge Oliveira, President of Direction Board, Kerigma*

The current adverse environment in economic and financial terms, characterized by falling markets, reduced production, bankrupt of countless businesses and increase of unemployment, particularly among young people, associated with the lack of an entrepreneurial culture, as well as a certain risk aversion and lack of cooperation and innovation, accentuated in Portugal a strong economic and social crisis, affecting not only the production, but also socialization habitudes, the „life culture of people“ as well as thinking instruments used previously to explain reality and planning ahead the future.

The study „Equity and quality of education“, published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) shows that education is the main engine of economic development, and the biggest problem is school dropout. In this sense, education and training grows in importance to the extent that the training of citizens is considered a necessary condition for the recovery of sustained growth and to achieve higher levels of economic, social and territorial cohesion, despite the access to a degree does not guarantee employment.

Since the qualification of the labor force is seen as one of the main vulnerabilities of the Portuguese economy & society, it became one of the most serious impediments to the country's development and one of the reasons for a low and not convergent productivity level and for the divergent path that Portugal shows when compared to European standards, Portugal has implemented a succession of significant measures to support employment (internships, occupational measures, supporting the hiring, supporting entrepreneurship and support for self-employment) and training measures (learning courses, education courses and training for young people, long term education courses and adult education, training and modular courses).

The relative weight of each type of measure within the measures of employment and training is very irregular: occupational measures are responsible for 58% and the internships are 36% of public spending on employment measures. As measures of training, CVET represents 29% and modular learning courses and 42% of total resources allocated to these measures. The results of such measures, according to the findings of the „Assessment Study of Active Employment Policies – Final Report“, 2012, shows that the most effective measures are those that establish a more direct and immediate link between labor and employers, pointing to the eventual removal of programs and educational curricula to the needs of the labor market as a factor in

higher unemployment than younger workers. In line with these results, it is recommended the strengthening of measures to reduce the period of absence from the labor market, since the programs with long durations besides having higher costs, show a lower effectiveness of employability.

The lifelong learning falls thus in a strategy that aims to provide tools and develop skills that can facilitate the transition between moments and situations of life, based on the criteria of effectiveness and efficiency, coupled with effective results within a framework of flexibility and diversification of qualification procedures, tailored to the needs required by the job market. From these priorities, it is being created an information system of personal and professional guidance, replacing the previous system of recognition, validation and certification of competencies, with the mission of vocational guidance addressed to youth and adults and for monitoring their transition processes between the worlds of education, training and employment.

The indispensability of predisposition to lifelong learning and to develop the skills demanded by the labor market started to be more radical in the current crisis situation, as an inherent condition our society lifestyle, characterized by rapid change, by knowledge and technological evolution. Such a requirement is further reinforced by the recognized deficits in scholar and vocational qualifications and the limited nature of a more innovative character of entrepreneurship evidenced in Portugal, structural constraints to our economic and social development, once the low standard of development is not only influenced by these constraints, but it also influences its development by the fact that it maintains conditions and structures based on unskilled models and low innovation levels.

From the above, we highlight a political-ideological orientation that tends to reinforce the link between economy, work and education, whose goals are almost exclusively the development of production systems for which individuals must be trained and qualified, relegating to a second plan the socializing side of education. Training and education here assume a role of „competitive advantage“, whose success depends essentially on the ability of each individual to adapt himself continuously and turn companies into „learning organizations“ or „smart organizations“.

Although there are undeniable benefits of an education developed in the context of „market learning opportunities“ and guided by the criterion of „performativity“ booster while empowering the shift towards greater modernization and competitiveness; however, on behalf of these principles, such strategy does not take into account values of citizenship and citizens' rights and it strengthens, by the other hand, mechanisms of exclusion, through practices that tend to value the most qualified and skilled, accentuating thus the hierarchical structure of organizations, transforming this „knowledge society „in a“ risk society „in which economic development is synonymous of increasing inequality and polarization among the most skilled and the unskilled, between the richest and the poorest, and on a global scale, between the richest countries and the poorest, not taking into account that opportunities for learning and living are not equal for everyone.

Likewise, the use of standardized practices, based on profiles more easily assessable and governable, developed on the basis of existing hierarchical powers, send to

a second plan other perspectives of lifelong learning, and progressive socio-critical perspectives, based on values such as fairness , freedom, solidarity, pluralism and diversity and, additionally, this standardization put on second plan practices that appeal to a system of multiple causalities and the construction and development of an educational process regulated by participation and negotiation with quality criteria, inter-subjectively constructed and opened to indicators and effects not foreseen initially.

Lifelong learning cannot therefore fail to integrate and take the pillars considered essential as learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, learning to be and, in the words of Paulo Freire, get people to deeply realizing the socio-cultural reality that shapes their lives as well as the ability to transform this reality, by acting on it.