

## *Information on Adult Education in Europe:* InfoLetter<sup>1</sup>

Michael Voss, InfoLetter, No 2, 2010

### CELEBRATE THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROMOTE THE BENEFITS

*„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.*

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

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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. Celebrate the achievements and promote the benefits. After 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.

**Michael Sommer, InfoLetter, No 2, 2010**  
**„YOUTH ON THE MOVE“: WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO  
ADULT EDUCATION?**

*“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.*

“Youth on the Move” is part of the “Europe 2020” strategy presented by Barroso on 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 to 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 education, 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.”

**Michael Sommer, InfoLetter, No 2, 2010**

### **PIAAC: AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF COMPETENCIES**

*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.*

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.