

Topic: European Year of Volunteering 2011

The European Union has declared 2011 as the Year of Volunteering. As the reports and statistics in our InfoLetter show, this is not a side issue but rather a very widely spread phenomenon: many people in Europe are dedicated volunteers in a variety of activities, working for free for social, political or cultural purposes. Adult education plays an important role in this, for example with the preparation and support or as a field in which people can volunteer.

Cartoon: Mester



From the periphery to the centre?

Europe. *In Budapest around 250 experts met in the middle of March to discuss the future of the European adult education strategy. The result: initial training has, for a long time, not been enough to meet the requirements of a modern society. The financial crisis, the demographic shift and the new EU Strategy 2020 are bringing continuing education increasingly to the fore.*

(Michael Sommer) Within the EU Commission, there are two departments that explicitly deal with adult education: one is responsible for the "Grundtvig" support programme, the other for strategic questions. The latter has developed the "Action Plan on Adult Learning 2007-2010". The "It's always a good time to learn" plan lists five priorities in particular that should be implemented by the member states and through EU policies. An expert group with participants from all member states accompanied this process. Within the structure of the action plan, studies are prepared, workshops run, priorities at a European and national level were discussed and some smaller countries such as Slovenia took on the suggestions for their national strategy, confirmed Hélène Clark, Director for Lifelong Learning / Policies and Programmes in the European Commission: "People have become much more aware of adult education".

And now, following the end of the action plan? The challenges are massive. 50 million people in Europe do not take part in adult education. There are 76 mil-

lion under-qualified people, and the demographic development demands that qualifications continually need to be gained, including among the older generation. Sue Waddington, President of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), thus demands that "adult education must move from the periphery to the centre!"

Innovative financing measures

Innovative financing measures must be found, says Hélène Clark. More and better information and scientific data, better access to education and improved quality are required. This, however, cannot be achieved using a Christmas tree approach, where everyone can receive nice presents. Instead, a selection is necessary. She also emphasised the necessity of increasing the ties between the future action plan, which will be developed this summer, and the 2020 Strategy of the European Union. In connection with this, it was suggested from various parties that something is done to combat the fragmentation of adult education that has existed so far or at least to achieved better coordination within the various commissions (work, education, communication) and within EU agencies. **Full story in database ►**

Comment

EU feed for stubborn member mules

Europe (Michael Sommer). The action plan has caused willing experts to come together to have a better understanding of the joint goals of European adult learning. But the road to a quick strategy is difficult and is only possible with an increased and sustainable financial involvement from the EU. **Full comment in database ►**



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EUROPEAN
AFFAIRS

Food for the growth and development of the Italian community

Grundtvig: Senior Volunteering Programme

The programme enables older volunteers to share their experiences in other European countries. ▶

EAEA Grundtvig Award

In 2011, European Association for the Education of Adults EAEA is looking for projects that tackle Learning Experiences through Volunteering. ▶

“A highly successful programme”

For those familiar with adult education politics at the European level, Alan Smith is ‘Mr Grundtvig’. We met Alan Smith to discuss Grundtvig’s past and present, and most crucial, the future. ▶

NATIONAL
AFFAIRS**Description, field of activity, issues and questions**

Switzerland. The Swiss Federal Statistical Office provides data on non-paid work, such as work at home, organised voluntary work as well as informal voluntary work. ▶

Volunteers are society’s powerful reserve force

Finland. A recent study published by the OK Study Centre shows that volunteers are one of the pillars of the welfare state. Their labour input produces a six-fold result compared to the amount of money invested in it. ▶

Two-legged support for hearing dogs

Finland. Miniature poodle Pinja is a hearing dog with equal access to the coffee shop or the hairdresser’s salon. More volunteers are needed as independent assistance persons for the owners of hearing and aid dogs. ▶

Italy. “A point of reference and an active protagonist of civil society”: that’s how volunteer work was defined by the President of the Italian Republic during International Volunteer Day (December 2010). That notwithstanding, the government is reducing the funds that are earmarked for voluntary associations. Yet what roles does volunteer work play in Italy? We heard the opinions of Italian experts and volunteers.

(Teresa la Marca) “From my experience, training is the motivations that push towards volunteer work would be essential for helping to understand the meaning of this commitment,” stated Linda, aged 37, from Padua, a social worker with volunteering experience under her belt. “Volunteer work should never be a substitute for professionalism, above all in the social sector.”

“I believe that in Italy, especially in the South, there is some confusion between volunteer work and working in the social sector,” proclaimed Manuele, aged 40, a volunteer and educator from Naples. “Perhaps because the social welfare sector is not sufficiently valued and protected and is very underpaid,” Manuele continued. “It is also true however that volunteer work is often equivalent to gaining real experience in the field, allowing people to receive training and find opportunities to introduce themselves in the working world,” Manuele further asserted.

The research indeed demonstrates that, above all in Southern Italy, many unemployed young people are using this avenue to create employment opportunities for themselves and to acquire professional skills. For example, a 2008 study demonstrated that the Civil Service is considered by some participants as an experience that is geared towards deepening their own university education, while for others it is a way of directing educational and professional choices.

Volunteer work and Adult Education

“There is little preparation and a lot of improvisation,” stated Stefano, aged 36, from Vicenza, who works in a community for former drug addicts and handicapped people.

“In reality in Italy, if you exclude adult education teachers, there is no tradition of training volunteer workers for adult education, since many initiatives, while valid, risk becoming defunct due to a lack of resources and energy. Sometimes workers in the field gain experience for themselves that they didn’t have and learn skills that have nothing to do with the rich Italian tradition of adult education,” affirmed Bruno Schettini, an Italian adult education expert.

“Volunteer work could of course be a resource for the dissemination of adult education; however it should also be able to get support from institutional systems or be formally recognised in order to be able to develop initiatives that are able to meet the demand for adult training and engagement,” continued Bruno Schettini.

Volunteer work and active citizenship

Volunteer work in Italy is increasingly the expression of active citizenship: according to the latest national

research (Eurispes, 2010), volunteer work geared towards protecting the common good represents in total 28.6% of the activities performed, working in sectors of civic participation (environment, culture, continuing education and instruction, civil protection, international solidarity).

“Today, volunteer work – especially non-profit – contributes to the gaining of experience from grassroots involvement, legal and civic training, acceptance and guidance for people coming from the East and from the Afro-Mediterranean basin,” Professor Bruno Schettini further explained to us.

Full story in database ▶

Interview with Gina Ebner, EAEA

Lifelong Learning Programme: We need further efforts, funding and ideas



Europe (Christina Gerlach). During the last months the European Commission has launched several public consultation processes in the context of the preparations

for the next programme generation after 2013. EAEA as European umbrella organisation for adult education took part in the consultation. We met Gina Ebner, EAEA Secretary General to talk about the new education programme.

Interview in database ▶

Science / Research**Adults in formal education**

The report (Eurydice) reflects on five key issues faced by European countries and concludes that the completion of a formal qualification should now be seen as a step on the lifelong learning ladder rather than an end in itself. Summary in database ▶

Call to increase participation

The Dutch Research Institute Research voor Beleid published the final report of the assessment of the „Impact of ongoing reforms in education and training in the adult learning sector“. The report makes clear that both the European Commission and the Member States need to take action to improve their adult learning systems. Summary in database ▶

Volunteers demand experience, training and support

An EU report indicates that, as volunteering is getting more popular, volunteers’ demands are increasing in terms of experience, training and support. Summary in database ▶

Volunteering and learning in the United Kingdom – a personal view

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

UK. In the UK volunteering does not necessarily mean engagement in education. They are treated as two distinct activities although there are connections but also disconnections. Much arts based learning is closely linked to voluntary led organisations. The University of the Third Age in the UK is a voluntary learning organisation. However many adults wishing to return to formal education often discount any voluntary experience they have had as evidence on previous learning.

(Jim Soulsby) What we have not done in the UK is really make a distinction between a voluntary act – to engage in learning or any other activity; and voluntary work – working as a volunteer without remuneration. In the main the latter is the accepted definition.

This area of voluntary work is sometimes known as the Third Sector. The previous Labour administration as part of its exploration of the informal learning sector worked with the sector to explore what it could bring to informal learning. (A very malleable definition about everything that was not within the formal system and not funded from Government (local and national) education budgets). The Third Sector Forum supported by the Department for Business Innovation & Skills considered that the third sector:

- has 'reach' into local communities and the trust of vulnerable people
- is known to work in creative, innovative and flexible ways
- 'joins things up'
- promotes new cross sector partnerships

Most of our towns in the UK have volunteer bureaux where anyone can look for voluntary 'work' such as:

- aiding other people (delivering meals to household people),
- working with animals (donkey sanctuaries),
- getting involved in environmental or heritage projects (National Trust).

It is suggested that volunteering is the backbone of UK society with the financial benefits to the state being hard to estimate. Most recently the Big Society initiative promoted by the UK Prime Minister David Cameron as part of his coalition Government's activities is intended to reactivate local communities. By Big Society I think he means small government with much decision making and actions devolved right down to local level. However at the same time many of the existing voluntary organisations doing excellent work and funded by local or national government are having their finances drastically cut so becoming unable to function.

With respect to older people, in the very early days of the University of the Third Age movement at one of their national conferences there was a discussion about volunteering and whether this should be an aspect of its development. The debate was quite heated with some delegates feeling that the expertise available within any U3A group could be utilised in other parts of the community where they were based. One lady was adamant that this should not happen; for her education in U3A was different. "I do my volunteering in the morning!" she said. This view reflected a



University of the Third Age (U3A)

long held, but fortunately eroding, Victorian tradition in the UK of volunteering as a class issue undertaken as an act of benevolence by those who could afford the time. This perception has been quite in the past a barrier in trying to change perception and broaden the base of volunteers.

After the 1993 European Year of Older People and Solidarity between Generations I was involved in several discussions with colleagues from across Europe about definitions of volunteering as we explored the possibilities of European Exchanges involving older people. These discussions led to awareness that some of the activities considered as volunteering in the UK were just natural acts within many other countries and communities and certainly not differentiated as 'volunteering'. An examination within the UK may reveal something similar – certainly it was strongly implied in the Informal Learning 'Revolution' of the previous government.

In 1999 I advised a Government initiative to explore the health and social benefits of the engagement of older people in education. (Dench S, and Regan R, Learning in Later Life: Motivation and Impact Research Report RR183, Department for Education and Employment, February 2000). The process adopted was to re-interview people over age 48 previously interviewed by the education department as part of its regular education participation survey.

Holistic guidance service

I wished the interviewers to explore the relationship between education and learning. I believed (and still do) that engagement in learning and accessing education leads to greater involvement in society and the local community. The testimonies by adult learners of their learning journey – why they started and what it led to - during the national Adult Learners' Week supported this view. There was nothing in the subsequent research to support this (or refute it) but the researchers did suggest that involvement in volunteering is likely to lead to engagement in learning.

For me I wish to see a holistic guidance service for people in mid life which provides advice, information and guidance to assist them in the transition from (hopefully) full time paid employment through to other forms of engagement or fulfilment in later life. The process for reflection, assessing skills and making things happen is by accessing learning. ■

Jim Soulsby: Development Coordinator, Association for Education and Ageing, UK, Co editor The International Journal for Education and Ageing

First ever academic training for adult educators

Austria. The Master's degree "Adult Education / Continuing Education" will start now. ►

Petition demands more state money

Austria. Austria allocated 16.6 million euros to general adult education this year. If we are to believe the initiators of the current petition for an educational referendum, then this is not enough. In fact, they are demanding that these funds be increased. ►

Voluntary work in Poland

Poland. The concept of charity and philanthropy has had a long and turbulent history in Poland. ►

Impact on economy and education

Portugal. Generally equated with selflessness and an attitude of generosity on the part of the individuals who offer it, voluntary service can play an important role in stimulating alternative economic models and providing a collective platform for local development. ►

Coimbra debates new perspectives

Portugal. The third Conference on Adult Education and Training held at the University of Coimbra has reopened the debate on public policy for the sector. ►

What have you done for the community today?

Denmark. Voluntary work needs to be included in a specific goal-oriented way into a large number of key welfare services. ►

Virtual voluntary workforce and cyber-activism

Spain. The tertiary sector is booming and composed of a large number of flexible new organisations with new ideas. Virtual voluntary workforce and cyber-activism demonstrates evidence of this. ►

NATIONAL
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Dog training for people with disabilities

Voluntary participation in third-age education

Netherlands. An educational project for seniors, which has proven to be a success around the world. ▶

Volunteering as an opportunity

Hungary. The first half of the European Year of Volunteering coincides with the Hungarian presidency of the European Union. ▶

Volunteers save Irish state €10,000,000

Ireland. Community education courses could return the Government's €10 million investment almost threefold in the benefits from increasing volunteering alone. ▶

Helping with the loneliness...

Czech Republic. An example: Marie Málková, 48-years-old, married, 3 children, Catholic, working voluntarily as a companion for seniors. ▶

Voluntary teaching

Germany. Volunteering has a particular significance in adult education in Germany. The total number of volunteers among the educators lies at around a tenth of the workforce. ▶

Paradigm shift in cultural politics

Sweden. In 2011, a new decentralised structure will be piloted for the state contribution to cultural activities. ▶

Educating around the system

Romania. When the financial means are few and the bureaucracy is mean, the meaning of resourceful adult educators becomes obvious. ▶

New country overviews:

Iceland ▶
Finland ▶
Netherlands ▶
Sweden ▶

Sweden. *With courage and commitment great things can be achieved in a short time. Something unexpected can appear in the very moment when you are noticed and listened to. Such magical moments are not unusual in the Swedish Dogs for All project. Here, dog owners and their dogs have been devoting their free time to training people with disabilities for many years. This has sometimes involved finding new ways of communicating because spoken language is not always enough.*

(Hetty Rooth) The Dogs for All project has been running in Sweden since 2005 with the aim of offering people with disabilities the opportunity to get out into the open air with dogs in a positive and organised way.

The project has been set up as a study circle with the emphasis on personal development, social inclusion and increased involvement in society and community activities.

In most cases, Dogs for All is run as a joint scheme between the local Working Dogs Clubs and the local authorities' social services and their sheltered housing schemes.

Apart from the participants, who all have some form of disability, personal assistants also take part if necessary, together with one or two circle leaders, a dog on loan for every participant, and their owners.

Dog training has been the circle's main focus, but just as in all adult education activities, interaction between people is most important. And in this case between people and dogs as well. Providing warmth and contact.

Feeling is important

Gunilla, one of the course organisers, has had a lot of experience with dogs and horses but says that she knew very little about disabilities when she started to get involved in this voluntary scheme for people with disabilities.

"I have a friend who was born with a slight mental disability, who has helped me with my horses," she says. "I saw how the contact with animals helped him make progress and how well the horses responded to him. I kept this knowledge in the back of my mind when I started organising these dog training courses."

"I was certainly worried to begin with that we would not manage. You have to be able to find suitable dog owners as well as suitable dogs to make the activity work."

In Gunilla's opinion it is not so important for a dog owner to have received training. The main thing is for them to have a genuine commitment and to be able to respond to signals from both animals and people. It may well happen that some of the course participants have difficulty in working in a group. Perhaps they are not even accustomed to or don't like being outside a lot. The dog owners have to be able to handle this effectively.

"At the same time their dogs must be good-tempered and well-trained. They mustn't bark or jump or run off. And they have to like being patted and stroked."

"It's not difficult to see the value of this type of activ-

ity," says Gunilla.

"It was so obvious that being with dogs had a positive effect on the participants. It's as if something was released inside them when they

talked to the dogs, picked them up, caressed them and laughed together."

"We were able to follow their progress step by step. I particularly remember David, who had my dog, Zoya. He couldn't talk and had great difficulty in walking and moving his arms and hands."

Open the door to greater involvement

"To begin with I stood behind him and made signs to my dog so that she could understand him. At the same time I tried to encourage him to try for himself. Then one day he came to the course and it was obvious that he had practised at home because he could now raise and lower his hands to give signals to the dog. And it worked. His joy from his success was really fantastic."

This project does not just give people with disabilities all over Sweden the opportunity to train outdoors with dogs and their owners. The aim has been to open the door to greater involvement in community activities. It is basically a way of reinforcing democracy and improving the opportunities for disadvantaged groups to progress and influence their own situation. This is also one of the goals which the Swedish Parliament has set for Swedish adult education. ■



Volunteering in later life: results from the Belgian Ageing Studies

Science (Koen Lombaerts). Research on volunteering in later life has been limited. The question of whether and why older people are involved in voluntary work deserves further research. Moreover, there has been relatively little analysis on the relation to context. Information on obstacles like the influence of different sources of vulnerability and environmental factors or thresholds remains under-researched and poorly understood. Understanding the barriers that people face in deciding to volunteer could help reverse this trend. The main purpose is to investigate what key factors determine voluntary work among older people. In particular, the research looks at the relationship with the subjective neighbourhood integration of older adults and whether they volunteer or not.

We shall use data from the Belgian Ageing Studies, a sample of 59,977 Belgian senior citizens (aged sixty and above), living in 127 municipalities and cities in Belgium. A multinomial logistic regression is applied to analyse the key factors that determine whether one is a volunteer or not.

Full story in database ▶