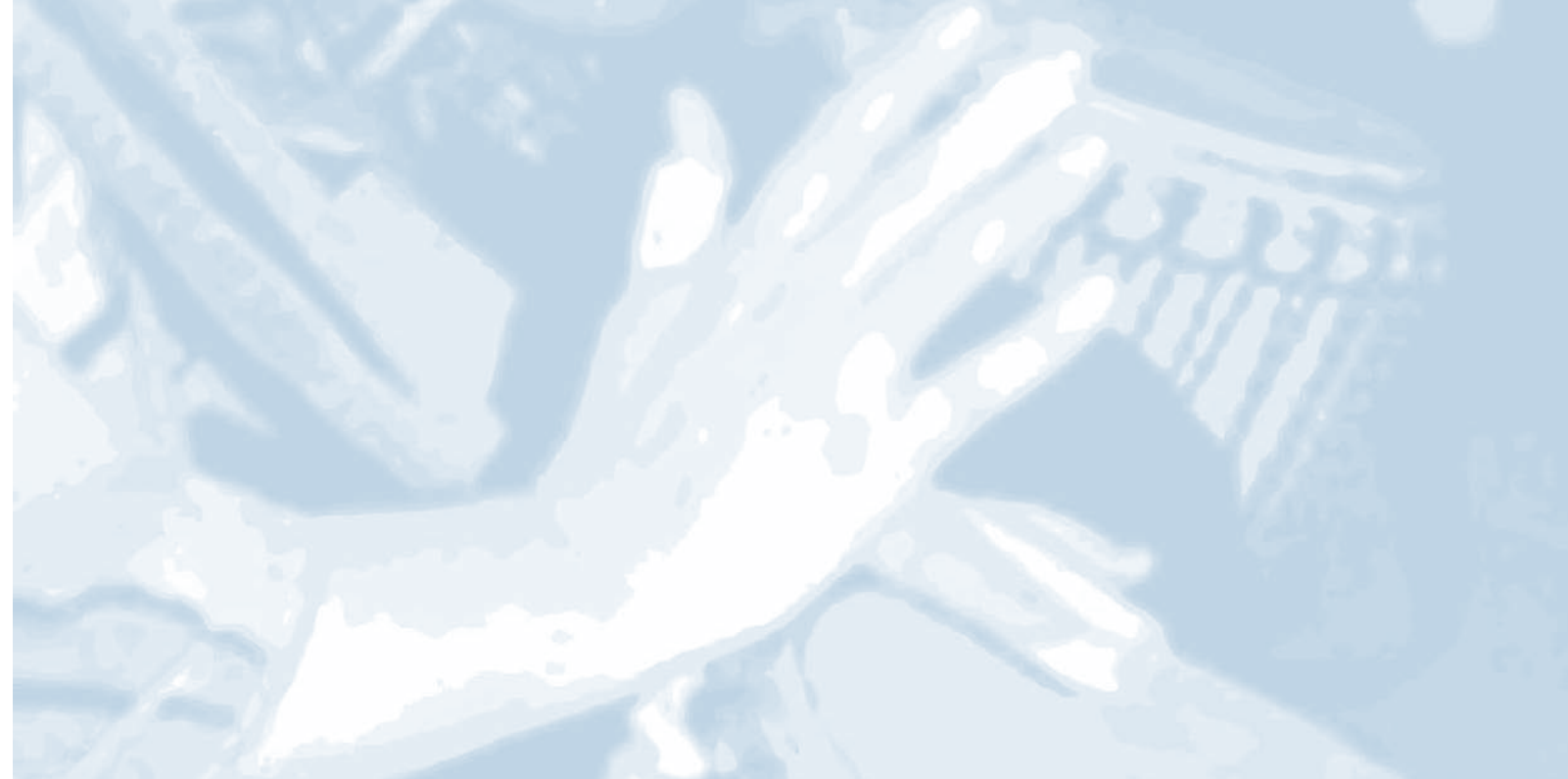




BEATING THE DRUMS BEVING FOR DREAD BEN & ON

*Proceedings and
Outcomes of the
Socrates/Grundtvig
Network
“International Adult
Learners Week in
Europe”
(IntALWinE)*





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Directorate General
for Education and Culture



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Foreword

“**B**eating the Drums for Attention” is the metaphorical title chosen to reflect the continuous effort carried out by adult educators to promote learning, to encourage a joyful approach to it and to motivate learners to be part of and actively influence the overall reflexive process they are involved in. What carries the whole movement is the united commitment of its members to spread learning in creative ways and to share their innovative, authentic and unique learning paths. Out of the national adult learners weeks and learning festivals, an international event has developed. The European chapter is the strongest and most active, supported by the Socrates/Grundtvig Programme of the European Union, and a dynamic network of talented coordinators.

It was a pleasure and a challenge for UIL to lend its expertise and support in coordinating this network and supporting the learning festivals movement both in Europe and worldwide. A major part of the task consisted in identifying

and maximizing the potential and effectiveness of learning festivals and in developing a more consolidated European framework of cooperation. Another objective was to enhance the role of adult learners and to empower them by giving greater weight to their voices and points of view in shaping the learning processes. The ultimate goal was to use this powerful resource to mobilize efforts in the promotion of lifelong learning and the strengthening of democracy, human rights and good governance.

The movement has grown remarkably fast, with the drums becoming louder and the steps of the dance changing along with the accelerating rhythm of the beat.

As stressed by CONFINTEA V, adult learners weeks have proven to be outstanding mobilization agents in promoting adult learning and demonstrating its noble capacity to empower all learners, increase participation in basic education, contribute to building democracy and help lay the foundations for

lifelong learning. Learning festivals, adult learners’ forums, adult learners’ study tours, and individual learning journeys are among the various modi operandi used to celebrate learners, acknowledge their achievements, and value their merits. The admirable work of IntAL-WinE is to spearhead this process in a systematic, creative and participatory way, to demonstrate ways of building solidarity, sharing experiences and responsibility, creating robust partnerships, building solid alliances and tirelessly promoting the joy of learning. My colleague Bettina Bochynek was at the heart of this movement and did not spare any time and efforts to animate it with devotion, talent and competence. UIL wishes to extend to her and to the whole network our deep gratitude. Let the drums play, continuing to reach the most difficult to reach and to spread the joy of learning.

Dr Adama Ouane
Director
UNESCO Institute
for Lifelong Learning (UIL)

Introduction and Overview of IntALWinE

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When we started our work for IntALWinE towards the end of 2003, three years of transnational networking of national mobilization campaigns and advocacy for lifelong learning in Europe lay ahead of us. While in the beginning that sounded like a long time span with lots of space for exchange and productive work, we were amazed to see how fast time was actually flying and how challenging and time-consuming it was for a group of full-time professionals to communicate, interact and arrive at collectively agreed results across different countries and cultures.

Initially thirteen coordinators of adult learners weeks or learning festivals from thirteen European countries had joined the network under the coordination of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) – formerly the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE) in Hamburg, Germany. Over the years, we lost two of our partners due to internal work shifts in their respective organizations, but gained three

other partners instead. At the time of concluding the activities towards the end of 2006 in conformity with our Socrates/Grundtvig work plan, learning festival coordinators from fifteen European countries made up the network: from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. They mainly represent national non-governmental associations of adult learning, but also a few national government-related institutes for adult education.

First and foremost, the aim of IntALWinE has been to draw on and further enhance the strategic potential of learning festivals and to develop a more consolidated European framework of cooperation. The network was meant to lend support to national learning festivals by increasing the technical skills of coordinators and facilitating the involvement of adult learners. It was going to produce and circulate materials, and to raise the visibility and status

of learning festivals in support of advocacy work for lifelong learning.

Three interrelated areas of work were tackled by the network. Their objectives were to:

1. bring to the forefront the voices and perspectives of adult learners and to make them actively participate in the network activities,
2. improve the effectiveness of learning festivals both in the network partner countries and beyond, and to
3. manifest and maximize the value of learning festivals as mobilization campaigns for lifelong learning and democracy building.

Working meetings, study visits, communication by e-mail and group work formed the body of the network's activities. They were complemented by the active participation of adult learners from the IntALWinE partner countries in three activities as well as by the learners' input to the evaluation of the network and the formulation of policy recommendations.

All proceedings and outcomes of IntALWinE have been documented on the network's website (www.ALWinEurope.net). This website, beyond containing the records of the project, is meant to provide an ongoing gateway to the learning festivals landscape in Europe. The website will also remain as an interactive and dynamic repository of technical support tools, relevant links, useful materials, contacts and learners' stories. Provision is made on the website for everybody interested to contribute experiences, knowledge or stories and to keep this communication tool alive.

The present publication is the final product of the collective work of IntALWinE, giving an account of the activities carried out and the results achieved in the framework of the Socrates/Grundtvig network. Following this introduction and overview, the publication includes a series of suggestions and examples of good practice collected by the IntALWinE partners for the improvement of learning festivals. They are structured in five categories around events and activities, promotional material, awards, cooperation and evaluation. Two sets of policy recommendations will be presented in the next chapters: one produced by the network partners and the other one drafted by the adult learners involved in the network activities. In the centre page, you will find the IntALWinE Country Windows, and on the final page the contacts of IntALWinE partners.

We hope that a wide range of interested readers will have access to this publication and will get something out of it – and that they will enjoy it! We would like to win policy makers, adult learning providers and practitioners over to the possibilities of adult learners weeks and learning festivals as powerful mobilization tools for lifelong learning. We would also like to encourage current and future organizers of learning festivals to benefit from the advice and recommendations



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we have collected. And finally, we would like to invite adult learners to glance at our work and to give us feedback, and in particular to find inspiration in the policy recommendations drafted by the adult learners involved in this network.

Voices and Perspectives of Adult Learners

The first area of work of IntALWinE, which concentrated on the experiences, aspirations and participation of adult learners, was at the heart of our work. It constituted the most innovative and ambitious component and the one with a clear forward-looking perspective. For this reason, a more thorough report on the related activities will be presented here.

Three activities were carried out in the framework of this area of work. The first activity was the International Adult Learners' Forum which took place on 4 - 6 October 2004 in a residential adult learning center ("Knuston Hall") in Northamptonshire in England. While the forum was organized and hosted by the UK IntALWinE partner, the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), all network partners were requested to nominate an adult learner from their respective country to take part in the forum. Being an international meeting, the nominated adult learners needed to provide of certain skills and experiences: they had to be able to communicate in English, to have the confidence to travel and work with an international group, and to have gained some leadership skills in their home countries.

It turned out that this required profile was not easily fulfilled. However, in the end eleven international adult learners from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, Switzerland and the Netherlands participated in the Forum. They were joined by four adult learners from the UK (from England, Scotland and Wales), who had all had previous experiences of involvement in a learners' forum at national or local level.

The aims of the International Adult Learners' Forum were for the learners to:

- share their experiences of being consulted as adult learners for the design of learning provision in their respective countries,
- improve a number of skills when working as the member of a team or group, such as confidence building, presentation and listening skills,

Lithuanian calendar specifically developed as promotional material for ALW



- come up with recommendations for professionals and policy makers for involving adult learners in consultation,
- explore possibilities for future cooperation among adult learners locally, nationally and internationally, and
- act - later on - as a multiplier and initiate the first steps to set up a local or national Adult Learners' Forum in their respective countries.

It needs to be highlighted that the forum was the first ever international forum for adult learners from different countries! As such, it had several limitations and suffered from simple lack of experience. While the forum was professionally prepared and implemented by two experienced facilitators (Sue Duffen and Val Saunders), the international and intercultural format was more challenging than expected. More time should have been reserved for the meeting so that participants could have familiarized themselves better with the working environment in a foreign country and the related travel inconveniences, as well as with their fellow participants from other cultural backgrounds. Likewise, more time should have been taken to find adult learners in the different countries with the above-mentioned profile. Those finally nominated should have been more thoroughly prepared for the objectives of the encounter and for the follow-up involvement expected from them. They should have also been sensitized for the benefits for themselves and their own contexts.

Despite these lessons learnt, the forum was a successful activity and highly appreciated by everybody involved. Some of the objectives of the forum were immediately achieved, such as the sharing of experiences of adult learners across diverse cultural and socio-political backgrounds, but also the capacity building and the production of recommendations for adult learner involvement. Seeds for future possibilities of cooperation among learners from different European countries were planted. Other objectives remain to be completed in the future, in particular the multiplication of learners' forums in the IntALWinE partner countries, which, however, has begun to bear fruit.

In order to ensure sustainability and a follow-up, the same group of adult learners had the chance to meet again and to review the outcomes of their first working meeting on the occasion of the UK Adult Learners' Week in the spring of the follow-

ing year. This International Adult Learners' Study Tour, carried out on 22 - 26 May 2005 in London (Cardiff & Manchester), UK, constituted the second IntALWinE activity for and with adult learners.

Concretely, the study tour had the following objectives:

- to assess what the participating adult learners had done and experienced as a follow-up to the forum (in terms of feedback, publicity and impact in their own countries),
- to explore possibilities and concrete steps for a continuation of the regional and national adult learners' forums movement,
- to discuss future strategies for an improved involvement of learner representatives at national and European levels in policy development and in the design of learning provision, and
- to visit activities organized by, with or for adult learners, both in London as well as in two local regions (Cardiff and Manchester), including the central launching event and Award ceremony of the UK Adult Learners' Week in London.

In the beginning of the study tour, the learners reported about how their participation in the previous forum had been followed up in their home countries. In cooperation with the respective IntALWinE partner, they had spread the information about the international learners forum in different meetings and even at press conferences or on the websites of the IntALWinE partner organization. Some initial steps had been undertaken to advocate for the establishment of an adult learners' forum or to raise money for this purpose. In some countries, a forum at local level was beginning to take shape (e.g. Hungary, Slovenia).

After attending the central launch event and Award ceremony of the UK Adult Learners' Week in London, opened by the UK Secretary of State for Education and Skills,



Slovenian Lifelong Learning Week poster

the learners split into two smaller groups and traveled separately to two distinct local regions in the UK (to Manchester in the centre of the England and to Cardiff, the capital of Wales) in order to get to know local initiatives that cater to learners and/or learner-led community-building initiatives. The first group's visit in Manchester concentrated on the Moss Side Residents' Group, who had won an Adult Learners' Week award for community activism in a socially marginalized neighbourhood. In parallel, the second group traveled to Wales. Their programme led them to the valleys north of Cardiff, an area heavily affected by the large-scale closure of the former mining industry and subsequent massive unemployment, where they visited the headquarters of the RISE Innovation Centre, an umbrella/partnership organization for adult learning, as well as several adult learning centres of the local region. In both locations, the international adult learners had a chance to meet local adult learners and Award winners.

Getting back to London for a final discussion, there was a sentiment that the involvement in these IntALWinE activities was the beginning of an important process. The participants formed a "core group" in charge of keeping up the future communication among them via email. The learners from England, Iceland, Norway, Romania, and Wales volunteered for this task.

Meanwhile, the group has carried on their networking beyond the Socrates/Grundtvig framework: different core group members have been invited to and spoken during major expert and policy conferences on adult learning in different European countries. One of them was the Conference on Adult Learning, Competence and Active Citizenship in Helsinki, Finland, in October

2006, on the occasion of the Finnish presidency of the European Union, where the European Commission's Memorandum on Adult Learning – It's Never Too Late to Learn was launched.

Finally, the third IntALWinE activity involving adult learners was the collection and publication of learning biographies from the network partner countries, including the stories of the participants in the forum and study tour. The collection has been entitled: I did it my way. Journeys of Learning in Europe and is available in English, French and German. Greek, Bulgarian and Hungarian versions have been produced by the respective IntALWinE partner.

The stories about the learning journeys adults have undertaken provide an impressive volume of evidence about the positive impact of learning on our lives. While stories

of learners had already been documented within several countries, the network's publication is the first international documentation including voices of learners from as many as fourteen different European countries. As such it is unique. The demand for copies has been immense, and the English version has already been reprinted.

Print copies of the publication (in English, French and German) can be ordered for free from UIL. For copies in Greek, Bulgarian and Hungarian, the respective IntALWinE partner should be approached (see contact details on the last page).

All versions are also available on the IntALWinE website: www.ALWinEurope.net



The Effectiveness and Value of Learning Festivals

Beside these activities for and with adult learners, the activities of IntALWinE concentrated on adult learners weeks and learning festivals themselves, and were based on the direct expertise of network partners. The second area of work focused on the operational improvement of learning festivals. In order to help improve their effectiveness, the network partners identified and discussed examples of good practice from their own backgrounds, suggested and compared models for cooperation. They also developed a matrix for data collection and the evaluation of a campaign – including many debates around the challenges of evaluation. A series of examples and guiding principles emanated from this collective work, of which the five most important categories will be presented in the following chapter of this publication.

While the second area was dedicated to the pragmatic aspects of learning festivals, the third area finally employed a strategic perspective: it focused on demonstrating the mobilization and advocacy potential of learning festivals for lifelong learning and democracy building. On the basis of their own experiences as organizers of learning festivals and as adult educators, and against the background of the two most recent policy documents from the European Commission on adult and lifelong learning, the IntALWinE partners discussed and developed common policy recommendations. These recommendations are addressed to policy makers on the one hand, and to adult learning providers, cultural institutions and media on the other hand. In parallel, the adult learners involved in the IntALWinE activities produced recommendations and proposals from their own perspectives, with a focus on how to involve learner representatives in the development of adult learning policies



and provision. Both documents are presented in the following chapters.

Between December 2003 and September 2006, six face-to-face working meetings were carried out where IntALWinE partners gradually learned to know and to work with each other, and where the important discussions took place in order to arrive at the above results. Some of these network meetings were combined with a study visit to observe the learning festival in the host country and to lend support to the respective coordinator.

The first working meeting of IntALWinE took place on 4 – 6 December 2003 at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in Hamburg, Germany. It brought together the network partners as a group for the first time and established the working relations, reviewed the planned activities of the network, and clarified the tasks. The meeting also

Above:
Bulgarian Lifelong Learning Days poster
Below:
Finnish ALW Poster



helped to structure the assignments around concrete tasks in smaller working groups.

For the second time, IntALWinE met in Helsinki (and local Regions), Finland, on 21 - 25 April 2004. This meeting, which also included a study visit to observe the Finnish ALW events, was hosted by the Finnish network partner, the Finnish Adult Education Association (FAEA). It consisted of three days of working sessions, followed by parallel over-night excursions to ALW events in five different locations away from the Capital. Network partners used the meeting to finalize the IntALWinE information leaflet and to advance the work of the working groups, in particular regarding the International Adult Learners' Forum.

Hosted by the Dutch network partner, CINOP, the third working and advocacy meeting in Maastricht, Netherlands, on 15 - 18 December 2004, provided the IntALWinE with the opportunity to disseminate its work during the Leonardo da Vinci Open Space and Information Day (in the framework of the traditional Conferences of European Ministers in the respective president country of the European Union). An information stand had been reserved for the network in the exhibition

area, where partners displayed the learning festivals posters and materials from their countries and gave out information. IntALWinE could also present its activities in a public workshop and make a case for lifelong and life-wide learning in general and for learning festivals in particular. Apart from this advocacy work, the network partners reviewed the progress of the different working groups. The meeting also served to integrate the additional network partners from Hungary and Spain, the Hungarian Folk High School Society (HFHSS) and the Spanish Federation of Popular Universities (FEUP).

On 15 - 19 June 2005, the IntALWinE partners came together for the fourth time in a working meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland, hosted by Educate Iceland, the Icelandic network partner. The meeting concentrated on taking stock, advancing the assignments related to the working groups and further planning. Based on the report from the UK network partner (NIACE), all partners could assess the recently implemented Adult Learners Study Tour in the UK in May 2005. The publication of the voices of learners "I did it my way. Journeys of Learning in Europe" was reviewed and a respective distribution strategy discussed. The meeting was also used for reflecting on the final network publication and the evaluation of the network. Eventually, the third additional network partner from Italy, the Popular University of Rome (UPTER), was integrated and familiarized with the network.

The fifth working meeting of IntALWinE was carried out in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 26 - 29 April 2006, hosted by the Lithuanian network partner, the Lithuanian Association for Adult Learning (LAAE). It had been conceived with a focus on productivity, as the results of the respective working groups had to be completed, in particular on good practices, cooperation models, and evaluation methods. One full morn-

ing session during the meeting in Vilnius was reserved for a meeting with local Lithuanian festival organizers and provided the opportunity to present and disseminate the activities of IntALWinE. The session took place on the premises of the Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO, where the General-Secretary of the Commission confirmed her support for ALW in Lithuania.

Finally, IntALWinE joined each other for the last time as project partners in Rome, Italy, on 14-17 September 2006. Hosted by the Italian network partner, the Popular University of Rome (UPTER), the meeting was organized in conjunction with UPTER's learning festival. A public forum at the National Italian Commission for UNESCO opened the meeting. The network partners presented their work to an audience of adult educators and managers of adult education from Rome and the surrounding region and to the Provincial Counselor for Adult Education, who expressed her appreciation for the mobilization campaigns for lifelong learning. Being the concluding network meeting, it served to wrap up the activities and tasks of IntALWinE with a focus on the policy proposals. It was also an opportunity for the network partners to observe the learning festival practices in a partner country, in particular in the South of Europe.

Outlook

This is how three years went by. In retrospect, the time span looks extremely short, and the activities undertaken and the results achieved within this time frame seem impressive. And no word has been mentioned about the administrative and logistic burden shouldered in addition by the network partners and the coordinator. I think we can be proud of ourselves!

However, while the Socrates/Grundtvig work plan and budget has come to an end, IntALWinE partners

are eager to and confident that they will keep in touch in the future. We will meet in other occasions as part of the European "family" of adult educators, and we will continue to share information. Thanks to our website which has been designed as an ongoing communication tool, we will update our public windows and follow up on the initiatives begun, such as using our own policy proposals for advocacy work. Whenever possible, we will support each other through advice and visits and we will encourage more countries to set up a learning festival. We will also use various channels, including the European Association for the Education of Adult (EAEA) and UNESCO, to make a case for the international movement of learning festivals.

Within their own national contexts, IntALWinE will re-formulate their materials and discourses in a language that is more geared towards public relations and marketing. There are reflections to suggest one of the IntALWinE policy proposals

as a unifying theme for learning festivals in all participating countries, or as the focus of a new project to be submitted to the European Commission.

Of course, IntALWinE partners will continue and support each other to follow up on one of the core components of the network: the multiplication of local and national adult learners' forums and networks within and across more countries. Regarding the sustainability of this initiative, one concrete initiative is the project proposal to be submitted to the European Commission in 2007 by the Scottish Adult Learning Partnership (SALP) for the creation of a European Adult Learners Network. All IntALWinE partners have been invited to take part in this project. The overall aim of the project will be to establish a Euro-

pean Adult Learners' Network, as well as to create and/or strengthen local and national learner forums in the partner countries. An advocacy event at the European Parliament is envisioned, and possibilities to bring learner representatives to the next CONFITEA (International Conference on Adult Education) in 2009. The analytical and policy-oriented aspects of the network/project will focus on active citizenship, democracy, and culture.

For more information on the project to create a European Adult Learners Network contact: Ms Fiona Boucher, Director of the Scottish Adult Learning Partnership (SALP): fiona.boucher@salp.org.uk

The end of IntALWinE is not the end of the international movement of mobilization campaigns, but rather a stepping stone in getting stronger and more visible. Or — the space and skills enlarged to go on "beating the drums for attention".



International adult learners' group during the study tour in London



Lithuanian ALW image

Good Practices to Mobilize: Events and Activities of a Learning Festival

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Adult learners weeks and learning festivals are important means for showcasing the ways in which individuals expand their competences, skills and self-appreciation whilst at the same time contributing to building learning communities in which people can explore shared enthusiasms and work together as active citizens. To get closer to these goals, mobilization remains the key element of a learning festival, and a variety of events and activities to this avail have been invented and progressively refined over the years.

The most important and effective category of these events and activities are public activities organized in non-traditional places, addressing potential new learners and the general public. They include public classes on trains or buses, opening ceremonies in railway stations, cultural programmes and fairs in markets, shopping malls, prisons, open spaces, or information campaigns in discos.

Another type of activities comprises all sorts of activities for professionals, such as seminars or conferences on different policy or content-related topics of learning. They can involve policy makers or international experts, and can take place at local, regional and national level. Finally, company days dedicated to employees and employers of cooperating enterprises have proven to be useful in order to promote the professional and individual development and fulfilment of the work force.

On the basis of long-lasting experiences to make their learning festivals successful over the years, the IntALWinE partners selected “good practice” examples from their own context to help others improve or enrich their campaigns. Each event or activity can be adapted to any national, regional or local situation.

* More examples and further information can be found under the section “Tools and Products” at the network’s website: <http://www.ALWinEurope.net>



Educational Fair during the Lifelong Learning Days in Bulgaria
Left page: ALW opening ceremony in the UK



Estonian ALW poster

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Bulgaria – sharing the responsibility

In 2005, the opening conference of the Lifelong Learning Days targeted policy makers, but also helped build the capacities of learners and led to the acquisition of new skills of everybody involved. The responsibility for the planning, organization, implementation and evaluation of the conference was shared between the main co-ordinator, the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association, Office Bulgaria, and the main partner organisation, Association Znanie. Shared programmes, press releases and promotional materials of the two institutions were used to promote the event.

Cyprus – partnerships for rural learning

During adult learners week, members of local and regional so-called adult education committees organized open activities with traditional dancing, music, exhibitions etc. in rural communities in cooperation with local community councils.

Estonia – learning train and tram

Throughout the learning festival week, train and tram travellers in Tallinn could take advantage of short lectures delivered onboard by university students and professors. Topics included memory training and accelerated reading. The activity was supported by leaflets, posters, sweets and other giveaways distributed right before and during the lecture.



ALW open-air activities in Hungary



Iceland – Company day

Companies' human resources departments were contacted by the national organizer of adult learners week and encouraged to organize learning events and provide information sessions to their employees on a particular day. The events or the session took place at lunch breaks, coffee breaks etc. This activity turned out to be a good method to reach people - during working times - who are difficult to reach by other routes.



Library exhibition during Lithuania's ALW

Italy – conferences at local, regional, national and European level

Conferences were organised during adult learners week to promote lifelong learning opportunities at different levels with the participation of politicians, local authorities, experts, professionals, teachers, and practitioners. The purpose of the conferences was to take stock of the situation of the adult learning field while all stakeholders are present.



Video Conference during Lithuania's ALW

Lithuania – video conferencing

Video conferences were used as opening or closing events of adult learners week, broadcast from the central distance learning centre to regional distance learning classes. Participants in the distance learning classes could participate in the discussions. The welcoming speeches included those of the President of the Republic and of the Minister of Education and Science. Although being located in different parts of Lithuania, the participants felt that they were part of the common event. They could see each other, talk to each other, participate in discussions, and share their experiences.



ALW poster from the Netherlands

Netherlands – ALW dictation

A special "Adult Learners Week Dictation" was carried out, inspired by the traditional national dictation, which is a well-known activity in the Netherlands. The ALW dictation took place in the town hall, following a speech of the Mayor on the subject of adult learning. Anybody could join the dictation, which focused on a theme of local interest and awards were given to the winners. Policy makers and representatives of councils, employment agencies and companies joined the audience. This event is a good example of how a popular national activity can be adapted to attract interest for and during adult learners week.

Finland – main railway station

The opening ceremony in Helsinki was organized for two days in the centre of the main railway station. Also during the other days of the learning festival week, three different events took place at three different railway stations in the city's Metropolitan area. To organize activities where people come and go regularly was a good thing to raise public interest. An orchestra captured the attention of by-passers for the display of information and created an atmosphere of learning being fun. The National Railroad Company supported the activity by providing technical facilities.

Hungary – open-air cultural and educational activities

A one-day programme of cultural activities was offered in public gardens in different villages. Activities included traditional local music and dancing and a food market with products from the local producers. Informal discussions with adult learners from the villages were hosted by a local celebrity, with the learners themselves enjoying the opportunity of talking and being together. Local TV and press offered free advertisement for the event.



Welcoming the international adult learners' group: a community college in Wales



Informal meeting of teachers, parents and pupils in Slovenia



The international adult learners' group and adult learners in the UK



Norway – open-door days

The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning opened its doors to other training organizations and provided the premises and opportunity for debate around organizing courses or training activities on cultural and intercultural issues as well as for disabled people. The activity was advertised in the press.

Romania – learning in prison

A series of cultural programmes including concerts and poetry reading were organized in prisons, offering a learning opportunity to offenders from ethnic minority and disadvantaged backgrounds, and providing a significant platform for social inclusion. The events were promoted on posters sent to the offenders' institutes beforehand.

Slovenia – informal meeting of teachers, parents and pupils from primary and secondary schools

These meetings offered a chance to discuss burning issues that concern teachers, pupils/students and other stakeholders. Issues included the struggle against drugs, violence in schools, effective approaches to learning, how to fill up leisure time, environmental issues, and active citizenship etc. Teachers who organized and coordinated such activities received certificates / recognition for advancing their career.

Spain – producing a book on “The pleasure of learning”

Learning testimonies were collected and presented at the regional adult learners week festival. The learners had been previously asked in some workshops to use ten minutes to write about their experiences of learning in the Popular University. Two of the stories were read by the respective author/learner during the festival. It became clear that the objective of the majority of the authors/learners was to communicate “the pleasure of learning” rather than to refer to specific themes learned. Reading their own stories encouraged the respective authors/learners to continue learning, and encouraged others to begin. In addition, the Popular University obtained a fantastic promotional material based on learner participation!

UK (England) – “Quick Reads”

Quick Reads are short, fast-paced, punchy books, written by bestselling authors for Britain's emergent readers. In the run-up to Adult Learners' Week, special discount book tokens were distributed throughout Britain, which could be redeemed against the Quick Read titles. The tokens entitled the buyer to a discount on the retail price. Twelve titles, by well-known British authors and the BBC, were released to coincide with ALW. NIACE, which delivers ALW in England and Wales, asked groups of literacy learners to choose their Quick Reads favourite and an award was presented during ALW at the newsroom of The Guardian, a national British newspaper. The publishers, Random House, presented the award to crime-novelist, Minette Walters, for her book, Chickenfeed.

Promotional Materials
for learning festivals -
a communications tool



Promotional Materials for a Learning Festival

Left page, above:
ALW calendar motif
from Lithuania
Background:
information flyers



Adult learners weeks and learning festivals have several different target groups. These are, first of all, policy makers and politicians, education and training providers (both national and local) and cultural institutions. Secondly, of course, there is the general public and the learners themselves. But the target groups also include other local and national non-governmental bodies such as unions. All these different groups may not respond to the same type of promotional material.

For that reason, festival organisers will generally produce different items of promotional material to raise awareness and provide information on the campaign and the related issues. Among the questions to be asked when beginning to produce materials are:

- What are the materials for?
- Who are they for?
- How will they be marketed?
- How will they be distributed?

After deciding on the nature of the promotional material and the target group, festival organisers will need to decide how best to raise awareness of the existence of the materials (which may itself be via a newsletter, or a website) and, if the materials are to be produced centrally and used at a local or regional level, plan routes of distribution. Other national partners may be encouraged to take part in this process by distributing information about the materials to their own stakeholders.

Successful promotion will depend on making sure that any items produced fit their purpose. For example:

- Display materials such as posters and exhibition boards are intended to catch people's attention but offer limited detail. They announce that the campaign exists and "sign-post" readers either to specific events, or to more comprehensive sources of information.

They are the first thing to be seen and are used to add life and interest to ceremonies, conferences and other events. In particular posters can also be placed on the notice boards of institutions or community centres, on public transport such as buses or at train stations, or even on road-side billboards.

Typically they will carry

- title and logo of the campaign,
- key dates,
- themes,
- photographs or images,
- sponsors' logos,
- the contact or helpline number, and
- the website address.

- Mail-outs like newsletters, flyers, leaflets or their electronic equivalent provide more details and can include response forms to encourage readers to actively participate. Whatever format is chosen, it should be kept in mind that emailed communication should be more concise than their printed equivalent.

- Giveaways such as postcards, key-rings, beer mats, t-shirts, mugs, or sweets have only limited space and as such should be reserved for conveying specific details such as key telephone numbers and website addresses.

A few selected examples below show how IntALWinE partners have addressed this issue, taking into consideration the needs of their respective target groups as well as their respective cultural contexts.

* More examples and details can be explored under the section "Tools and Products" at the network's website:
<http://www.ALWinEurope.net>



ALW poster from Iceland





ALW poster from Hungary

Finland

A poster is produced to reach out to existing and potential learners. The posters are distributed to adult learning providers, libraries and other institutions and are displayed during adult learners week in venues where events are taking place, or in other venues to signpost visitors to events. A helpline number and website are displayed.

Hungary

Big information tents serve as a tool of promotion on sites and in projects that address passers-by and gives space to describe adult learners week projects. Tents can be set up at busy points in the city, offering leaflets, project books, posters and promotional materials. An Internet connection in the tent is available to give more information, as well as preparing volunteers and employees working in the tent on all there is to know about ALW.

Iceland

Water bottles with the adult learners week logo and the sponsors' logos are distributed in non-conventional places, e.g. in the shopping mall where one of the events of the festival takes place.



ALW cake in the UK

Bulgaria

In Bulgaria a poster is produced before the Lifelong Learning Days. The posters are distributed among partners' organizations, co-organisers and in public places. Following the festival, a publication with the materials from the events in the whole country is produced and is used as a main promotional material. In addition, a different format of the programme/calendar of events has been developed so far each year.

Estonia

Three hundred kg of special adult learners week sweets are distributed throughout the country to regional and local coordinators. The sweets are given out during ALW events and help to "draw in" visitors – more information about learning possibilities is available in leaflets and flyers alongside the sweets.

Italy

A daily electronic newsletter is sent out to providers and other stakeholders to keep them continually informed of the development of the festival. The list of email contacts is maintained and updated and new colleagues are encouraged to join.

Lithuania

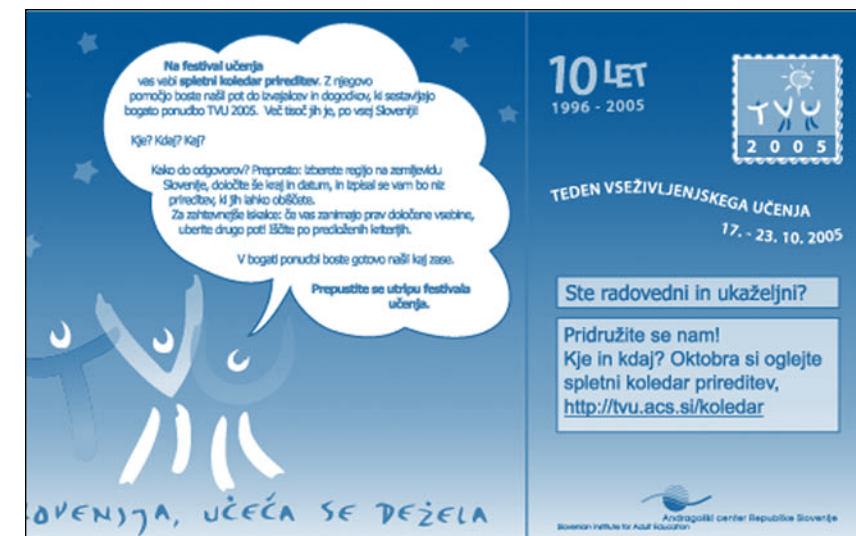
A calendar for the next year illustrated with photos, quotations, thoughts, paintings and drawings of events of adult learners week is distributed throughout the country to regional and local coordinators.

Romania

In cooperation with local authorities, free display space is offered to the organisers of the lifelong learning week. Posters are displayed in bus stations and public places in the capital and other major cities, as well as in the subways in Bucharest.

Slovenia

On the learning festival website, practitioners can create and send their own e-card using elements of the national logo. This has proven to be a highly interactive form of promotion.



Above: Swiss chocolate, symbolizing a brain cell, used as the logo of the learning festival
Left: E-card from Slovenia



Netherlands

In 2006 the organizers of adult learners week developed a film on DVD with five learners' portraits to be used for local and regional television. The portraits illustrated the learners' experiences and difficulties, and their experiences with accreditation of prior learning. Two were former winners of learners' awards.

Spain

The book "The pleasure of learning" is distributed to local adult education centres and other providers as a means of showcasing the benefits of learning and of promoting the learning festival.

Switzerland

Small boxes of chocolates displaying the learning festival logo are distributed to visitors during the festival week in public events in trams, market places and colleges.

UK

A leaflet and CD on "What is Adult Learners' Week?" containing case studies, useful hints and tips about ALW and why people should be involved is produced each year for existing and potential stakeholders, and advertised in the national newsletter and on the website.



Awarding Adult Learners and Learning Achievements

24

The awards granted during adult learners weeks and learning festivals seek to recognize and celebrate the thousands of adults who struggle to improve their lives through learning. Adult learners show that there is a lot to be gained by learning something new: improved skills, knowledge and employability, but there are wider benefits too – increased self-confidence, a better social life and an increased willingness to engage with their community.

Showing how ALW award winners overcome their difficulties to learn and progress is just as important as showing how their achievements contribute to their communities. Harnessing people's natural enthusiasm for learning is one of the key strategies to generate a sustained culture of lifelong learning.

Awards recognize a great diversity of learning styles and learning routes and, for many, an enormous distance travelled in respect of personal development. The winners include people who have gained basic skills in areas like literacy, numeracy, language or information technology, or those who lost out in education first time round, so as to build the vital platform of skills that they need for continuing learning. There are also those who have learned for its own intrinsic value, for cultural enrichment and intellectual or creative stimulation, for personal health and wellbeing, and for enjoyment.

When awards are given to individuals or groups of learners – usually during the public opening ceremony of the learning festival – they can powerfully draw the attention of politicians, but also of the public. Award winners are living proof that learning can be enjoyable, enriching and life-changing, and their inspirational stories encourage more people to follow their lead.

Awards are also a good means to attract and attach sponsors, and they catch the attention of media. They help put learners in the centre of attention and let them and their achievements speak for themselves. In addition, awards can be given to institutions and facilitators: these help to highlight the message of what is good quality in adult learning provision.

In many IntALWinE countries, awards are given to individual learners or groups of learners honouring their exceptional learning successes, or for improving their own knowledge/skills, or for having set up a neighbourhood project that is helping other adults. These awards can be given at national or local level, or at both.

* Further information can be looked at under the section “Tools and Products” at the network's website: <http://www.ALWinEurope.net>

Cyprus

Awards are given to special groups such as tutors, senior citizens etc.

Estonia

Targeting local authorities, awards are given to municipalities that are supportive to learning communities and individuals.

Iceland – Awards for Best Practices in Vocational Education and Training

The award is given to companies, educational providers, associations or specific projects that have been nominated because of their excellent work in the field of vocational education and training. The objective of the award is to support innovation and development in vocational education and training in Iceland, to motivate further development, and to set an example for others in the field of vocational education and training.

Lithuania - Citizenship in Practice and Education for Culture, Culture for Education

For adult learners week 2005, the organizers, the Lithuanian Adult Education Association (LAAE), invented an award for projects and actions initiated by citizens (i.e. not organization-led). The aim of the competition was to increase publicity for adult education and to present good practice in local, regional and national events. The top three most original projects were awarded an LAAE Diploma and a set of LAAE publications. In 2006, under the ALW theme of “Education for Culture, Culture for Education,” LAAE granted an award for adult education projects, initiatives and actions which illustrate different forms of cultural education.

Norway - Norwegian Adult Learning Award

The Norwegian Adult Learning Award acknowledges the acquisition of knowledge, participation, use of one's own experiences and reflection. The award is offered for efforts over an extended period of time to individuals and/or groups which have developed possibilities for liberation, working together in the name of solidarity and development.

Slovenia

At the grand award ceremony, a 3-minute video presentation is used to present each award winner. These films are also posted on the website.

Switzerland - Award for the Modern Woman

During the learning festival in 2005, which was carried out under the main theme “Let Your Brain Cells Dance”, a special award was given to a successful woman who participated in adult education and made her way into the “world of working men”. In addition, a special day for women was organized with seminars on management, social work, self-acceptance, and retraining for re-entering the workplace. The results turned out very positively; women role models delivered speeches on their background and on integrating family and work.

UK – Learning Works Awards

In some parts of the UK awards are made to individuals whose efforts to learn have improved their prospects either in their current job or in finding a new job. They may have gained the skills and qualifications required for a specific career, an increase in job satisfaction, confidence in abilities, understanding a job's needs or giving back something to the workplace, colleagues and/or the local community. These awards are sponsored by companies and organisations with a strong interest in employability and are made at a national ceremony hosted by celebrities during ALW.



Award-winning adult learners in Norway (left) and the UK

The Importance of Cooperation

Adult and lifelong learning takes place in many different contexts of life, during different periods in life, using different learning approaches. The range of providers of formal, non-formal and informal adult learning and of agencies and organizations with a special interest in adult learning will be just as diverse. Among them will be the classical public and private education providers, but also museums, libraries, trade unions and media, as well as local, regional and national governments and a diversity of smaller or larger special interest groups. In a learning society, all these actors are considered to be partners.

When planning for and establishing an adult learners week or learning festival, key consideration needs to be given to obtaining cooperation of as many of the above partners. At the same time, the sustainability of

partnerships needs to be ensured. Special care should be applied to encouraging greater collaboration between non-formal and informal learning providers on the one hand and the formal sector of education and training on the other hand – so as to foster an understanding of lifelong learning and learning societies where formal and non-formal learning possibilities are bridged.

A Culture of Cooperation

Partnerships and networks allow learners easy access to information on learning and to learning opportunities in a whole range of areas: current and potential learners will get a chance to be stimulated much beyond their original interest. Providers working together from different sectors will create support structures, synergize resources and generate innovations – and partnerships also afford a sustainable environment when resources are scarce. Sustainable local or regional partnerships can also gain more influence to formulate adult and lifelong learning policies. Eventually, getting used to cooperating and ensuing sustainability could lead to developing a genuine culture of cooperation.

Some of the tangible and practical benefits of cooperation and partnerships initiated for the implementation of an adult learners week or learning festival include a common information product such as a web-site or common advocacy activities such as an education fair. These might also serve any other joint projects, beyond the learning festival. At the same time, the involvement and commitment of employers, for example, can lead them to encourage their employees to take part in further education and lifelong learning, and increased media involvement will lead to a better profile of and more awareness on adult and lifelong learning.

Finally, of course, cooperation will produce a longer-term sustainability of the adult learners week or learning festival itself.

Features of Different Cooperation Partners

Cooperation partners of an adult learners week or learning festival usually differ in their main function. In order to illustrate how cooperating with these different partners might look like concretely on the ground, IntALWinE partners have sorted them out in five categories.

* Much more guidance on cooperation is included in the section “Tools and Products” at the network’s web-site: <http://www.ALWinEurope.net>

Potential Organisers of Events during an Adult Learners Week or Learning Festival

The wider the range of organizers of events during a learning festival, the greater the diversity of target groups reached. It is advisable to involve as many institutions as possible at all levels: in the strategy development (such as the policy or steering group), overall management and grass-roots delivery.



ALW exhibition in Iceland

Approaches to potential partners should be made early in the planning stages of an adult learners week or learning festival and through a variety of routes, such as advertising in the press and/or web-site and sending information sheets to existing email lists or personal contacts. Creativity in finding partners who are not primarily involved in learning but could be interested

(flower shops, biological farms, pubs, restaurants etc.) will add to the breadth and depth of the festival and reach out to new groups of learners. At the same time, providers should be encouraged to think of unconventional spaces for their activities (metros, discos, prisons, shopping malls etc) as a way to create a new image of the learning as a process taking place everywhere and throughout life.

While the overall coordination of a learning festival can be the permanent responsibility of one institution only, all partners should be involved in the collective planning, management and evaluation. However, it can also be worthwhile to have an arrangement where national leadership of the festival rotates around the group.

Changing the themes of a learning festival on an annual basis can help to increase the range of partners and, by offering a fresh perspective each year, help to motivate partners who have been onboard for a longer time.

Examples

Slovenia

The regional coordinators of the Lifelong Learning Week are largely educational and other institutions which manage a network of providers at a local level. They act either in their town, municipality or region (so-called regional coordinators) or in their thematic field (thematic coordinators, such as the Tourist Association of Slovenia, the Scout Association of Slovenia, or the Public Foundation for Cultural Activities). In 2001 the network of Lifelong Learning Week coordinators was formalized and established by the national coordinator, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE); since then the collaboration has been steered by a set of written recommendations.

The degree of coordination varies – in some cases, regional Lifelong Learning Week coordinators

animate other institutions to take part in the festival and send them necessary information, while all further activities are taken care of by the providers themselves. In other cases coordinators manage the content and the timing of events. Coordinators very often also take care of joint media and visual promotion of events.

As a result of this approach to Lifelong Learning Week, the number and diversity of providers has increased and the quality and variety of events has grown, as has the reaction of media and the wider public. Long-lasting partnerships have been established and the cooperation of “small” providers has been made possible.

Coordinators exchange information and experiences by means of a closed e-forum. Annually, two meetings are organised by SIAE for providers and regional coordinators – one in springtime to launch the first guidelines and discuss the Lifelong Learning Week plan for the year, and the second in October, just before the festival – to exchange the latest information and disseminate the joint promotional material. Discussions at these meetings are important contributions to the conceptualisation of Lifelong Learning Week in the current and next year.

And: the network of Lifelong Learning Week coordinators receives financial support from by the Ministry of Education and Sport!

Hungary

The funding scheme of adult learners week in Hungary is at the same time an instrument to ensure sustained cooperation. It works at two levels: at first the Hungarian Folk High School Society (HFHSS), as the main coordinator of the festival, is required to apply at the Ministry of Labour one year ahead in order to obtain financial support for the festival. Following this procedure, HFHSS transfers the money to the organizers of events and activities.

However, HFHSS reserves 10% of the amount to be allocated to partner organizations and only transfers them after the end of the activity. The withheld 10% serves as a security for HFHSS to guarantee that the organizations prepare accurate financial reports and stay on board until the evaluation process. The remaining 10% are transferred once the organizations have met all the requirements set in the contract. HFHSS subsequently submits a report to the Ministry of Labour under similar conditions.

Authorities/Governing Bodies

This category of cooperation partners include local, regional and national governments, in particular various ministries and research institutes, municipalities and district councils, inspectorates of education and local employment agencies.

Priority should be given to maintaining a constant information flow with these partners not only before and after the festival, but as part of a constant working relationship beyond the festival. Reinforcing these relationships should facilitate another key goal, namely to include the learning festival in strategic gov-

ernment thinking in order to ensure the recognition and larger impact of the festival.

Examples

Iceland

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture of Iceland appoints a special committee which determines the policy for lifelong learning for a given period, including adult learners week. In Iceland, the festival has traditionally been based on a productive cooperation and active involvement of social partners, including the trade unions, which have a very strong position in the country.

The former committee was in function from 1999-2004, covering the period of the first five adult learners weeks in Iceland. In 2005 a new committee was appointed with representatives of the Ministry (chair and manager of the committee), the Teachers' Association of Iceland, the nine Regional Lifelong Learning Centres, the Federation of Trade Unions, private education providers, the Confederation of Icelandic Employers and the Vocational Council of the Directorate of Labour. The new committee has been appointed for three years.



Norway's ALW goes public

Bulgaria

The preparation of the Lifelong Learning Days in Bulgaria is steered by a national "committee of experts", which selects the focus and themes for the festival. This committee is also in charge of liaising with national and local authorities to raise awareness of the campaign on the ground and to ensure a certain amount of political commitment. The committee also trains local and regional coordinators.

Sponsors and Supporters

National ministries and regional or local municipalities can also support an adult learners week or learning week through sponsoring. Other sponsors include trans-national governing bodies, international associations or international development agencies, but also private enterprises and media at local level.

Some organizations or institutions will find it easier to provide support in-kind instead of "hard cash". In any case, the IntALWinE partners suggest that organizers of adult learners weeks and learning festivals seek as many and as varied sources of funding and support as possible. As in other aspects of cooperation, diversity will help sustain the festival in the long term.



Examples

Estonia

Taxation levied on the lottery and casino industries in Estonia is made available through the government-authorised Council of Gambling Tax to fund projects that contribute to social benefits. The delivery of adult learners week is included in the allocation; all 15 Estonian counties apply for support according to their plans of activities. The money thus raised is an additional support to national coordinators for local adult learners week activities; the main financial support for the festival is received from the Ministry of Education and Research and the European Social Fund.

Slovenia

Each year an annual adult education action plan is confirmed by the government and put out for public tender by the Ministry of Education and Sport. The Slovenian Lifelong

Learning Week is one of the programmes financed by this public resource. Funding is allocated both to Lifelong Learning Week providers, i.e. institutions and groups which deliver events, and to regional and thematic coordinators who carry out activities of joint interest to providers within their domain. For both, action plans and corresponding budgets have to be submitted by providers and/or coordinators to the Ministry of Education. A special committee evaluates and selects successful applications.

For private and public (educational) institutions the involvement in Lifelong Learning Week has proven to be an efficient way of promoting their primary activities. It is an investment which brings a return (e.g. larger participation in their courses etc.). For smaller providers, such as associations and clubs in areas such as culture, health, social care etc., NGOs, individuals and interest groups who do not earn their money



ALW in Rome, opened by the mayor of Rome on the famous Piazza Navonna

on the market or get it through the public budget the above way of getting financial support for Lifelong Learning Week activities is very welcome.

Media

Media coverage by TV channels, radios and newspapers at all levels (national, regional and local) cre-

ates awareness of the campaign and of the importance and diversity of adult learning. It also raises the profile of organizations involved in the adult learners week or learning festival, providing them at the same time with a "return" on their participation. Media should therefore be considered as a key partner in the delivery of a festival.

IntALWinE partners recommend that festival organisers should develop a media strategy early on, selecting key media or individual journalists or editors for publicising particular activities. Establishing a database of contacts to national and regional/local media can be useful; entries can be grouped according to the type and frequency of information that will be sent to them. If the main theme of the learning festival corresponds to the interests of society or journalists, organizers will have a better chance of involving them. If possible, a meeting with TV stations should be arranged where they can be convinced to build in themes of the learning festival into their regular programme.

Journalists require information presented clearly and concisely (basic questions answered such as what, where, when, and why) and written in accessible language without unusual or complex terms. Press releases, an information sheet about the background and the aims of the festival, and a draft programme of meetings and activities will all be appreciated by the busy journalist – as will up-to-date information and statistics on a website. Human interest stories will attract attention as they appeal to viewers or readers: look out for good personal stories and photographs.

Press conferences can be organised in advance of or during the event and addressed by celebrities and ministers, if they are available and willing.



Adult learner from Cyprus presenting results of the discussion to the international group of adult learners during the study tour in London

came together in the studio answering the questions in a life broadcast. One person represented the labour office, one the Board of Education (vocational sector), one was a principal of a folk high school and one the chairperson of the Finnish Adult Education Association, representing the sector of non-formal adult education. The questions varied from enquires about study allowances to specific needs of further education, from expressing opinions on the quality of educational programmes to criticizing the obligation to take part in educational courses if one is unemployed. Several questions were asked about how adults could get a certificate without going “back to school”, the so-called competence-based test for adults. Two hours were filled nicely with questions and comments, and several people expressed their gratitude for the thematic programme having been broadcast on the radio.

UK

The partnership of adult learners week with broadcasters on TV and radio has played a prominent role in raising awareness of the benefits of adult learning and stimulating demand across the UK. In England, a national channel's series of short programmes, entitled “Natural Born Learners”, was broadcast during ALW and featured five adults who wanted to develop their career or gain basic skills to improve their lifestyle. Each year independent television across the UK focuses on local events and the achievements of adult learners - very often the ALW award winners - through news, documentaries, social action programmes and community service announcements, with on-screen promotion given to the national helpline. Independent local radio and BBC radio feature live discussions and interviews with learners

broadcast every day in the morning. One year later, “Radio News” was a cooperation partner of ALW, so the jingle was broadcast for free; only the production of the jingle had to be paid for.

Thirdly, special radio programmes are produced where experts in adult education are invited to talk about different issues, and the public can ask questions and inter-act with them. These programmes, however, are not meant to promote ALW but rather to increase the understanding of lifelong learning both for participation and democracy as well as for the improvement of professional skills.

Finland

The cooperation with the Finnish Broadcasting company on behalf of adult learners week in Finland has had different forms over the years. In 2004, for example, a radio programme was produced where anyone could call and ask questions about adult learning. Four experts

and experts on the current learning issues of the day. In one year, radio features on the BBC's “Count Me In” campaign that coincided with ALW generated over 1,000 requests for information packs.

Adult Learners

One very important group of cooperation partners for an adult learners week or learning festival are – adult learners themselves! They are at the heart of IntALWinE partners, not only as a target group. Current learners are already motivated and often willing to be engaged as role models (to have their stories published in the press, for example) or spokespeople at events to encourage others. Local learners' groups can contribute enormously to community research and consultation methods in which the views of learners can be heard and by which they can be involved in helping to shape local policy decisions.

It is useful to maintain a database of current and past adult learners who are willing to help in the preparation of the learning festival or to act as “ambassadors of learning”. New or potential learners can be motivated and encouraged by the availability of learning hotlines or help lines, whilst achievement recognition systems like the awards delivered by many countries during a learning festival provide a pool of people whose successes can be publicised and used to motivate others.

Examples

Bulgaria

Adult learners are actively involved during the educational fairs and conferences organized for policy makers and experts as part of the Lifelong Learning Days in Bulgaria, while the wider public is kept informed but not directly incorporated. Adult learners participate as

visitors and as presenters of good practice and successful projects. They also act as facilitators during workshops and participate in round-table discussions and in social and cultural events.

UK

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) has developed and manages a national network for adult learners, which grew out of the UK's National Adult Learners' Forum. The network's aim is to keep in contact with learners, and to put them in contact with each other in ways that respond to their interests and concerns about learning. Its approach is informal, inclusive and flexible. A database of learners has been set up, recruited from existing ALW award winners, mail groups, special interest groups and regional forums. As members of the network they receive quarterly newsletters with much of the content derived from learners themselves, together with details of learners' events being organised by NIACE around the country. This database of interests and offers of involvement has significantly expanded the pool of learners from whom NIACE can seek advice and information about their experiences of learning.

Examples

Romania

The media strategy to promote the Romanian adult learners week is threefold: First of all, a press conference is organized by the Ministry of Education and Research. Journalists from different magazines and newspapers are invited and subsequently announce the ALW activities of the week. The involvement of the Ministry is crucial, because media representatives in Romania are very sensitive towards all information coming from officials.

Secondly, video and audio clips of 15 seconds are produced and offered to national TV stations or as radio jingles. In 2005 a jingle was produced for “Radio News”, the national channel for news, and it was



ALW poster from the UK

As described in the previous chapters, adult learners weeks and learning festivals are broad campaigns that encompass a wide range of activities and stakeholders at national, regional and local levels, which can vary from year to year. Given its amorphous nature, measuring or quantifying the outcomes or evaluating the effect or value of a learning festival can be quite challenging.

On the other hand, conducting an evaluation of the campaign can demonstrate its benefits to all those involved and can provide stakeholders with an opportunity to contribute feedback and share experiences of success and difficulties. Such information will also lend useful information on the lessons learnt and provide the impetus to move the campaign forward.

IntALWinE partners have had different experiences of evaluation. Evaluating every year in the same way (like in the UK or in the Netherlands) allows the organizers to distil and follow-up trends, such as growth in activities, increase in participants, development in media attention and visits to the website pages. This is also an opportunity to get more insight into what kind of activities are carried out in the different regional/local areas of the country. Furthermore, good practice can be selected and published as an idea box for other organizers. This kind of continuous evaluation is useful in order to demonstrate the success and growth of a learning festival.

Yet, with a view to the larger social and political contexts, IntALWinE partners are aware that it is, indeed, difficult to prove that adult learners weeks or learning festivals alone are able to influence large populations, or whether they have succeeded in sensitizing the overall environment for lifelong learning. It is hardly possible to isolate the effects of the campaign from other factors. One solution for this dilemma is to use the testimonies of adult learners in advocating for lifelong learning, but also as evidence for the inspiration and strength received from a learning festival.

Of course, IntALWinE partners believe in the effectiveness of learning festivals, and they believe in the gains of evaluation. The following suggestions and tips have been collected to guide all those who would like to evaluate their campaign.

* More recommendations as well as an evaluation matrix and samples questionnaires are available in the section "Tools and Products" at the network's website:
<http://www.ALWinEurope.net>

How to Carry out an Evaluation

General recommendations:

- As much as possible, every activity included in the evaluation of the learning festival should be related to the respective national policy context of adult education and/or lifelong learning.
- Every year, the vision and objectives of the learning festival should be clearly formulated and the corresponding evaluation criteria should be set up.
- On that basis, achievements and outcomes should be measured in relation to the pre-defined objectives.
- Both the success and failure factors should be analyzed.
- Where possible, the trends/development of the learning festival (from year to year) should be followed in order to monitor progress.
- If available, the respective evaluations should be compared from year to year.
- And finally: it should be kept in mind that the evaluation needs to address all involved stakeholders: providers/organizers of events, partners, supporters and learners and participants.

Suggestions for general evaluation criteria:

- Number of participants attracted (to the various events and activities at all levels).
- Media attention received (press, radio and TV, through number of articles/features published/shown, but also qualitatively through collaboration in producing clips etc).
- Number of regions/local areas covered by/involved in the festival.
- A network of regional coordinators developed, and its respective nature.
- Strategic political involvement of decision-makers ensured.
- Range of plans/strategies implemented.

Additional tips:

- Adult learners who have supported the festival could also take part in the Evaluation (questionnaires).
- Both, internal and external evaluation could be carried out. External evaluation is useful because it is objective and strengthens your position vis-à-vis supporters and funding agencies, e.g. local or national governments.
- A self-evaluation is an appropriate tool to evaluate the outcomes of an element of a campaign consisting of volunteer work.

Evaluating a Learning Festival



The Lifelong Learning Week goes open-air in Slovenia



Conducting an evaluation of a campaign can demonstrate its benefits to all those involved and can provide stakeholders with an opportunity to contribute feedback and share experiences of success and difficulties.

**ICELAND**

Week of Lifelong Learning –
Vika símenntunar
Since 1995, annually
Coordinated by EDUCATE Iceland
Features: Company day and
events in public places.
www.mennt.is/simenntun

UNITED KINGDOM

Adult Learners' Week
Since 1992, annually
Coordinated by the National
Institute for Adult Continuing
Education (NIACE)
Features: awards, themes,
national and regional events,
media partnerships,
Learning at Work Day
www.niace.org.uk/alw

SWITZERLAND

Adult Learners Week –
Lernfestival
Since 1996, every third year
Coordinated by the Swiss
Association for Adult Learning
(SVEB)
Features: events and awards
at national level
www.lernfestival.ch

**SLOVENIA**

Lifelong Learning Week – Teden
vsezivljenjskega ucenja/TVU
Since 1996, annually
Coordinated by the Slovenian Insti-
tute for Adult Education (SIAE)
Features: events on national and
local levels
www.llw.acs.si (English)
www.tvu.acs.si (Slovenian)

**SPAIN**

Festival of Lifelong Learning and
Adult Education – Festival del ap-
rendizaje a lo largo de la vida y
la educación de personas adultas
Since 2003, annually
Coordinated by the Spanish
Federation of Popular Universities
(FEUP)
Features: publishing books

BULGARIA

Lifelong Learning Days –
Dni na ucheneto prez zeliija zhivot
Since 2002, annually
Coordinated by the Institute for
International Cooperation of the
German Adult Education Association
(IIZ/DVV Sofia)
Features: Educational Fairs,
workshops in libraries and a
classroom with glass walls
www.lifelonglearning-bulgaria.org

**CYPRUS**

Adult Learners Week
Since 2002
Coordinated by the
Ministry of Education
Features: Learning festivals
in adult education centres

ESTONIA

Adult Learners Week –
Täiskasvanud õppija nädal
Since 1998, annually
Coordinated by Association of
Estonian Adult Education,
Andras
Features: Learning train,
e-learning day and
adult education forum
www.andras.ee

**FINLAND**

Adult Learners Week –
Aikuisopiskelijan viikko
Since 1997, annually
Coordinated by the Finnish Adult
Education Association (FAEA),
AIKE and Finder
Features: the theme and the
coordinating body is selected anew
for each year by the three partners
and approved by the Ministry of
Education
www.aoviikko.org

ITALY

Festival of Adult Education –
Upter Navona
Since 2004, annually
Coordinated by the Popular
University of Rome (UPTER)
Features: conferences, opening
event and learning by visiting
www.upternavonafestival.it

**HUNGARY**

Adult Learners Week – A műve-
lődés hete – a tanulás ünnepe
Since 2002
Coordinated by the Hungarian
Folk High School Society (HFHSS)
Features: conferences and open
air activities around the country
www.nepfoiskola.hu/muvhete

**THE NETHERLANDS**

Adult Learners Week –
De Week van het leren
Since 2000, annually
Coordinated by CINOP
Features: photo exhibition, chain
letter and dictation
www.weekvanhetleren.nl

NORWAY

Learning Days for Adults –
Læringsdagene for voksne
Since 1998, annually
Coordinated by the Norwegian As-
sociation for Adult Learning (NAAL)
Features: the use of non-con-
ventional places, panel debates and
open door days
www.vofo.no/uka/

**ROMANIA**

Adult Learners Week –
Festivalul Sanselor Tale
Since 2000, annually
Coordinated by the Popular
University Bucharest and
IIZ-DVV-Bucharest
Features: educational ad cultural
activities in the whole country,
outreach activities and questions
on the street
www.updalles.ro



IntALWinE Country Windows

Capitalizing on the Mobilization and Advocacy Potential

of Adult Learners Weeks and Learning Festivals: Conclusions and Policy Recommendations from the IntALWinE Network

“Lifelong learning is, however, about much more than economics. It also promotes the goals and ambitions of European countries to become more inclusive, tolerant and democratic. And it promises a Europe in which citizens have the opportunity and ability to realize their ambitions and to participate in building a better society.”

- “Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality”, Communication from the European Commission, November 2001

“The challenge for the Member States is two-fold: to increase the overall volume of participation in adult learning, and to address the imbalances in participation in order to achieve a more equitable picture, by motivating, encouraging, enabling and supporting the adults least likely to participate in learning in all its modes, formal, non-formal and informal. This requires targeted public investment to reach those who have been least well-served by education and training systems in the past.”

- “Adult learning: It is never too late to learn” Communication from the European Commission, October 2006

Across Europe, there is a determination to embed national and trans-national education and training strategies into an overarching lifelong learning paradigm. Whatever present or future challenges are discussed at policy level, lifelong learning has become a major focus for governments, civil society organizations, the private sector and social movements. While children and youth are catered for through their formal education and training pathways, it is adults and the diversity of their ongoing lifelong learning activities which are mainly addressed through this discourse.

In their 2001 Communication on lifelong learning, the European Commission clearly defined lifelong learning as encompassing the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning, and identified active citizenship, personal fulfillment, social inclusion and employability as the objectives. The Commission called upon their Member States to develop coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning structures which are based on the centrality of learners and guarantee that relevant quality learning opportunities are accessible to all. Creating partnerships, providing adequate resources and building a culture of learning were suggested as strategies for social cohesion within environments that are increasingly marked by social disparities and cultural diversity.

Yet, five years later, the Commission's 2006 Communication on adult learning had to admit that *“Adult learning has not always gained the recognition it deserves in terms of visibility, policy prioritization and resources, notwithstanding the political emphasis placed on lifelong learning in recent years.”* Participation rates of adults in learning remain very low in all European countries. In particular marginalized parts of the population, including

the low-qualified, unemployed and migrants, continue to be excluded from learning opportunities.

How then to include the excluded into the lifelong learning societies? How to *“lift the barriers to participation”*, as the 2006 Communication demands?

Adult educators and policy makers in every country have been faced with this central challenge, which has to be tackled from both the supply and the demand side. Ensuring quality and relevance of adult learning provision, synergizing and maximizing conditions through cooperation and, last but not least, providing adequate resources is imperative in order to increase participation in adult learning, and it is one side of the coin. On the other side, adults themselves need to be targeted: they need to be sensitized and mobilized in order to develop the desire to take up learning again. They need to know what is on offer, they need to know why learning would make sense to them and, in many cases, they first of all need to be reached.

Precisely to address this two-fold challenge, adult learners' weeks (ALWs) and learning festivals came into being. ALWs and learning festivals are special advocacy and mobilization campaigns for lifelong learning. They work on the supply side, building alliances and partnerships between policy makers, adult learning providers, cultural institutions and media, thereby helping to build lifelong learning cultures. Yet, ALWs and learning festivals equally work on the demand side, raising the awareness on the value of lifelong learning and motivating, encouraging and supporting potential new learners.

The value and effectiveness of ALWs and learning festivals has been recognized internationally by the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) in 1997 and by UNESCO in 2000. Ever since, a growing number of coun-

tries worldwide have developed their own learning festival to rally for lifelong learning.

Against this background, we, the coordinators of ALWs and learning festivals from fifteen European countries who have participated in this Grundtvig network supported by the European Commission, appeal to all stakeholders to continue and renew their support and commitment to ALWs and learning festivals according to their possibilities of intervention. On the basis of the advocacy and mobilization work we have carried out in our respective countries as well as through our trans-national cooperation, and with a view to the Action Plan which the European Commission is planning to develop in 2007 in order to ensure the effective follow-up of their 2006 Communication, we are highlighting the benefits of ALWs and learning festivals for policy makers and adult learning providers and are offering the following recommendations:

To Policy Makers (National Governments, Local and Regional Governing Bodies, International Agencies)

A. Benefits of ALWs and Learning Festivals

ALWs and learning festivals create broad public visibility for the diversity of learning opportunities and the excitement created by learning. They communicate the value of lifelong learning, and motivate more adults to take up or return to learning. Awarding learners for their achievements does not only celebrate and honour individual adults, but encourages other adults to follow the successful examples.

ALWs and learning festivals help create and develop partnerships between governments and civil society organizations and social partners at local, regional and national levels,

namely between policy makers, classical and non-traditional learning providers, sponsors, media, employers' associations and trade unions. This process improves efficiency at all fronts, and helps build capacities in planning, management and programme design of all actors involved.

ALWs and learning festivals put learners and their voices at the centre and give a public arena to their learning needs, interests and concerns. They often are the springboard for establishing adult learners' forums and networks where adult learners can articulate their perspectives and speak - even to policy makers - on their own behalf, which helps develop needs-based education policies, strategies and provision.

ALWs and learning festivals address particular groups, such as immigrants, cultural minorities, people with disabilities or those with basic skills needs, who are least likely to participate in learning, thus contributing to social inclusion.

ALWs and learning festivals are national campaigns based on regional and local activities, which include further promotion of learning and a huge programme of guidance to learning activities. The central coordinating function of the organizer supports the development of regional and local community-based partnerships, which implement activities to address local needs.

ALWs and learning festivals are inclusive of all learning approaches and modes, formats and places. They help to overcome the boundaries between formal, non-formal and informal learning modes, thereby contributing to a holistic understanding of lifelong learning and the development of lifelong learning cultures.

ALWs and learning festivals provide a public arena for debate and dialogue. They offer opportunities to propose, discuss and sift the ground for education policies. And – if desired – they provide the floor for politicians to issue statements or make appearances in the media.

And finally, through all of the above, ALWs and learning festivals contribute to active citizenship and social cohesion.

B. Key Recommendations

1. In light of the multiple benefits, governments (at local, regional, national level) should acknowledge the uniqueness and value of ALWs and learning festivals and provide financial resources as core funding for the campaigns in every country to guarantee the professional management and coordination.
2. Aside from direct financial support, organizers of ALWs and learning festivals are greatly helped by a variety of indirect material support from governmental bodies, such as access to governmental buildings, locations and facilities, or the possibility of using printing venues or means of transport. Governments (at local, regional, national level) should welcome coordinators of ALWS and learning festivals and offer all sorts of indirect support.
3. Governments (at local, regional, national level) should also consider backing up ALWs and learning festivals through being open to a concerted thematic approach in a given year. The propagation of education, cultural and employment policies can be helped by being advocated for through the ALWs and learning festivals, while the festivals can raise funds through aligning themselves to major governmental initiatives.

4. Representatives of governments (at local, regional, national level) should consider taking part in events and activities of ALWs and learning festivals. This will help raise the profile of the learning festival, and will enable the representatives to gain a public forum. Governments might also be ready to organize certain events in the framework of an ALWs and learning festivals, such as professional meetings or international encounters.

5. The implementation of international, national, regional and local strategies and development plans in lifelong learning highly depends on the involvement of all stakeholders – from practitioners to researchers, from learners to education/learning providers and politicians, media representatives etc. ALWs and learning festivals should be recognized and tapped as tools for sensitizing, informing and motivating stakeholders thereby building a platform for joint action.

6. As there is a lack of research about the impact of the participation into learning processes, governments should support further research focused on the overall added value which lifelong learning generates for individuals and societies. There is equally a demand for participation surveys to inform policy-makers about who is not learning and which are major obstacles to their participation.

7. International governmental agencies (EU, UNESCO) should continue to lend technical, financial and moral support to ALWs and learning festivals. Transnational cooperation frameworks should be maintained and improved. However, ALWs and learning festivals are embedded in national and local contexts, and need to be in line with national

and local needs, themes and rhythms. Frameworks for international ALWs and learning festivals should be based on the principle of diversity. While there is no need to standardize everything (name, target groups, timing or individual thematic foci), creative means should be explored to ensure continued transnational coherence.

8. The Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission will greatly help many European trans-national cooperation projects in adult learning in the coming seven years. While the present Grundtvig network is coming to a close, the Commission should continue to fund cooperation projects and partnerships which will follow-up on the work accomplished by the present network. Yet, it will be of imperative importance to reformulate the budget structures in order to compensate more justly to the actual work invested by project partners, aside from direct costs.

To Adult Learning Providers, Cultural Institutions and Media (Organizers of and Contributors to ALWs and Learning Festivals)

A. Benefits of ALWs and Learning Festivals

Being part of or even coordinating an ALW or learning festival means to engage in mobilization on all fronts, initiating new or refreshing old links with cooperation partners, lobbying for lifelong learning and investing time and resources in publicity work.

This process raises the profile of involved adult learning providers or cultural institutions, both within the

field of education as well as towards the general public. It will make any organization better equipped to promote its own courses to learners, and thus to raise its income through course fees. In addition, the organization will enhance its capacities, both of individual staff members as well as institutionally.

The advocacy potential of ALWs and learning festivals can also be used to influence the current policy framework in which adult learning providers and cultural institutions are forced to operate. Through the alliances and contacts created as well as through the publicity, it is easier to raise a collective voice and to create political pressure for the implementation of lifelong learning policies and goals in adult education. At the same time, smaller local organizations receive the opportunity to learn about these policies and goals.

Adult learners are at the heart of adult learning providers. The improved cooperation generated through ALWs and learning festivals enables involved organizations to harness themes which will mobilize and activate learners, not only during the festival but throughout the year and in diverse settings. It will also be conducive to creating more opportunities for learners to meet and to express themselves, possibly leading to learners' forums and networks as established mechanism of consultation.

B. Key Recommendations

9. ALWs and learning festivals can build a "bridge from sofa to classroom". Adult learning providers and cultural institutions should work in collaboration, including media, representatives of governing bodies and employers. Time should be invested to create a systematic network which is continually provided with information and reminders and helps to extend the reach-out potential. The created net-

work should become part of the community or region and should be regarded as an added value to the prospering and developing a lively powerful region.

10. Publicity and public relations should be embraced as necessary and positive key components of any campaign. Providers should be bold enough to think out of their own box and use their creativity, for instance approaching famous people (CEOs, actors, artists, athletes etc) and politicians to offer statements about their views on and experiences of adult learning.

11. While there is a continuous need for making changes and adapting to current debates and policy priorities (e.g. new themes, new approaches, new partners and new initiatives), organizers should ensure sustainability by keeping the basic structures and cooperation partners on board. There should be a reasonable balance between continuity, flexibility and innovative approaches to keep the concept fresh and attractive for the public.

12. Adult learners should be recognized as partners and should be involved in all contexts where policy initiatives for adult learning are discussed and planned. There is a need for Adult Learners Forums and Adult Learners Networks as mechanisms for consultation on the design of learning provision and policies in all countries, at local, national and international levels. Providers should actively support the development and sustained operation of Adult Learners Forums and Adult Learners Networks by all means possible to them.

How to involve Learner Representatives in the Development of Policies and Provision

Recommendations and Proposals from the Perspective of Adult Learners

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The present recommendations and proposals have been prepared by two of the adult learners involved in the IntALWinE activities (the “International Adult Learners Forum” in October 2004, the “International Study Tour” in May 2005 and the publication “I did it my way – Journeys of Learning in Europe”), John Gates from Wales and Winifred Hignell from Ireland/England, in consultation with members of the international group.

Context

The comments made by the adult learners who took part in the IntALWinE project suggest that it was a success. There were outcomes apart from the original ones that grew spontaneously out of bringing learners from different countries together. It was shown that meeting and being able to talk with adult learners from other countries was the greatest benefit that came out of the project. Participants could see how they had benefited from this interaction and could see how it would also benefit other learners from their country.

Having had the opportunity to see how adult learners were able to take part in discussions and to have an influence in the formation and delivery of learning in other countries, they came to the conclusion that it must be a fundamental principle that: “Adult learners have the right to be involved in any discussions that affect their learning lives”.

Benefits:

The participants in the IntALWinE activities could see how greater involvement would benefit not only the individual learner but, more importantly, would also benefit the learning provision in their individual country. Greater involvement would give successful adult learners the opportunity to give something back to the learning system, to receive training and gain qualifications for working in the community.

Recommendations:

Adult learners need to be able to learn new skills and to practice those new skills in a non-threatening environment. Thus, adult learners should be given opportunities to attend seminars/conferences at a local, national and international level.

Involving Individual Adult Learners

Individual adult learners can take part in activities at different levels and with different objectives, depending on their own circumstances and the respective national/local context. The possibilities include adult learners functioning as:

- **Enthusiasts:** Adult learners willing to talk to groups of future adult learners about what learning has been like for them. They can make a contribution at open days and events where you are encouraging people to become learners.
- **Mentors:** The dictionary definition is “an experienced and trusted advisor”. Adult learners as mentors can support new recruits giving advice and increasing their motivation to continue.
- **Champions:** Adult learners who can speak on the radio or in the press to tell their story and to motivate others by their example. Ideally these would be learners who have already won awards during an Adult Learners’ Week or a learning festival.
- **Activists:** Adult learners are members of communities who can be supported and trained to go out and research what kind of provision the community members would like to have available in their area.
- **Advocates:** Adult learners who can promote the advantages of learning to a number of different groups and can highlight important issues to professionals.
- **Members of Governance:** Adult learners who act as learner representatives on committees or boards and can feed information in both directions: about what current and new adult learners demand and need and what issues are discussed and what decisions are taken in the board room.

Benefits:

It is important to remember that the various skills acquired, practised and improved by the respective learner representative in one or many of the above roles will be of benefit to the wider community, local charities etc.

Using a successful learner as a role model can:

- Change attitudes – both of policy-makers and of adults “turned off” by learning,
- Show that barriers can be overcome,
- Highlight the ways of reaching new audiences,
- Motivate other people to take part or seek more information,
- Attract the attention of the media.

Recommendations:

In order to be able to fulfil these roles and to carry out the various responsibilities, adult learners need to be trained. There will be a need for training in communication skills, team working skills, committee skills and an understanding of the education system in their country. Adult learners should be given the training and a chance to make a difference by being consulted on a wide range of subjects. In addition, adult learners will also have to have an understanding of democratic principles.

Learning Champions have already been identified through Adult Learners’ Week or the learning festival in some of the participation countries of IntALWinE. Most are found to be enthusiastic and are willing to give something back to the learning system.

Benefits:

Learning Champions are a great asset and they have great potential. By using the adult learners’ already acquired knowledge and experience, they can actively promote learning in a community. They can advocate for learning

towards those who are not yet engaged in learning by:

- Speaking to potential adult learners,
- Leading adult learners in local initiatives to promote learning,
- Speaking to local providers,
- Speaking to local media,
- Speaking to local organizations.

Recommendations:

Adult learners are the experts of using the current education system. They are the ones who have experienced the problems, and might know how to overcome them. Only adult learners can say if what is provided does what it says it should do. Successful adult learners identified during the learning festivals should function as Learning Champions in a longer-term perspective (e.g. for a whole year) - it would be a waste if they were champions only for a night.

While benefiting from the experiences already gained by Learning Champions, their knowledge and experience should also be extended so that they can make a more effective and positive contribution, by:

- Inviting them to attend national and international conferences, seminars and events,
- Enabling them to speak on behalf of other adult learners nationally and internationally,
- Encouraging them to be available for national media interviews,
- Including them in policy-making committee meetings.

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Adult Learners' Forums

An Adult Learners' Forum is a meeting of adult learners who are currently involved in any form of learning. The forum members meet to identify issues and concerns about their learning, talk about their experiences, give each other mutual support, identify causes for celebration or for concern, support and celebrate good developments and work on strategies for bringing about necessary change.

Getting together helps adult learners to generate a collective and authentic voice on their own behalf. It is a means by which adult learners can join in the discussion with professionals, providers and decisionmakers.

Learning providers will only know if the courses they are providing are meeting the needs of adult learners by asking them or by listening to the "voice of the learners", and when adult learners can articulate their problems and concerns. The only way that those who fund adult learning can find out if the money is being spent effectively, is to ask adult learners if and what they have gained from the course.

Benefits:

By consulting adult learners through adult learners' forums, money can be better targeted at provision identified by the learners as needed by themselves or their communities. Because adult learners live and work in their communities, they are better placed to identify what the community requires and can be an important force for developing a learning culture within that community.

Learner feedback is an invaluable tool in bringing about change. It is a worthwhile experience and motivating force for adult learners to feel empowered as agents of change in their own learning environment. Learner feedback can also be regarded as a key component of accountability. Adult Learners' Forums can underpin a new way of planning education and training. Adult Learners' Forums can contribute strongly to the development of a learning society and of learning communities.

Recommendations:

Learning Champions who are already identified and trained can be used as the basis for forming an Adult Learners' Forum. The establishment and maintenance of adult learners' forums need to be supported, both financially as well as through professional and moral support. At the same time, adult learners' forums should gradually become more directly owned and managed by adult learners.

Adult Learners' Networks

An Adult Learners' Network is a network made up of adult learner forums and of individual adult learners. The learners can be involved in any form of learning, both formal and non-formal, accredited or non-accredited. An Adult Learners' Network can take place anywhere, through E-mail communication, in the community or in a formal learning establishment. The advantage of an Adult Learners' Network is that it can reach out to learners who are geographically distant, and thus create a broader linkage of interests, concerns and voices.

Benefits:

Adult Learners' Networks can help to identify a learner representative who can sit in all committees that hold discussions and make decisions on adult learning, including the policy, planning, management and monitoring of provision. Based on the possibilities to reach out and have an ongoing communication mechanism, an Adult Learners' Network can also: establish a working dialogue with the Government (nationally and locally) and all providers of adult learning, and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the provision of adult learning and bring these issues to the attention of the Government, learning providers, funding bodies and other decision-makers.

Recommendations:

For an Adult Learners' Network to succeed it must have the support of the policy makers and professionals. At the same time, networks need to gain that support in showing that there are worthy of being supported. One support mechanism from professionals could be the development of a data base containing information on those adult learners, who have already shown that they are a willing to take part in the policy making and promotion of learning. The data base can also help learning providers to identify individuals for specific duties and tasks – which would help build capacities of adult learners that can feed back into the network.

A European Adult Learners' Network

One of the outcomes of IntALWinE which had not been foreseen was when some learners and providers from the original project were invited to a global ALW conference in Oslo, Norway, in October 2005. After several discussions it was decided to join forces to apply for a grant from the European Commission under the leadership of the Scottish Adult Learning Partnership, SALP, in order to set up a "European Adult Learners' Network" which would carry on the work that had grown out of IntALWinE.

The main purpose of the European Network would be to build an enthusiastic alliance of adult learners throughout Europe, who could exchange experiences, give each other advice and support, and find out more information in order to develop learning forums and networks in the participating countries. The European network could also be used to spread good practice in learning provision between countries as seen from the viewpoint of the learner. Common barriers across borders to learning could be identified and innovative solutions to overcome them could be suggested.

It is hoped that each participating country will arrange local, regional, national and international events, where adult learners can have the opportunity to meet up with other adult learners to extend their knowledge and experience by mixing with other learners, learning providers, policy makers and politicians from different countries.

Benefits:

The many directives coming from the European Commission on learning and education highlight the need to give adult learners an international voice and to empower learners throughout Europe to take an active part in their learning journey. The European Adult Learners' Network could help:

- To support national/local adult learners' forums and networks for the sharing of good practice,
- To help more countries develop national/local adult learners' forums and networks,
- To promote the mobility of individual adult learners from European countries and to help them take part in international campaigns,
- To offer research opportunities to adult learners,
- To act as an information service for the European Commission and Parliament.

Recommendations:

The development of the European Adult Learners' Network will largely depend on the support from the European Commission, but also on other trans-national organizations and the national participating organizations. The Commission should grant its support to the proposal which will be submitted in order to provide the framework. Support should also be given from the side of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and from UNESCO. The national participating organizations should include the provision to have costs budgeted for one professional and for one adult learner each in the related activities.

Overall Challenges and General Recommendations for Learner Involvement

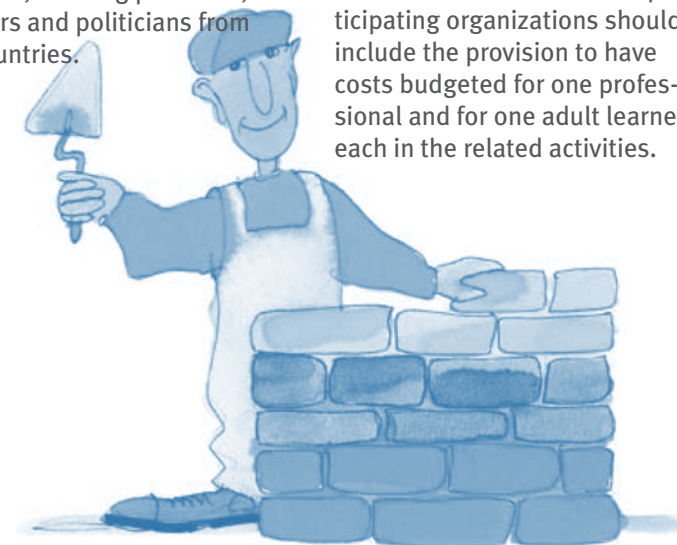
Despite the benefits which the involvement of adult learners in the development of policy and provision of learning will bring, two major challenges to adult learner involvement have been identified: the attitude and situation of the learners on the one hand, and the attitude of professionals and policy makers on the other hand.

The first problem to be tackled is inertia of adult learners. Adult learners need to be motivated. Those who need to get involved in learning have little experience of being asked their opinion about what they want in general, and so they have no expectation of being asked their opinion on matters about their education. They are usually the ones who believe that no one will listen or take notice of what they have to say.

In the beginning adult learners will also be suspicious about whether their role as agents of change would be respected. Another concern will be that, once they are invited to meetings, these meetings will be perceived as just another "talking shop", meaning that there will be lots of talk and very little action.

Recommendations:

Adult Learners are usually fully immersed in their own lives. They have a family, a job, and are attending their learning courses. In contrast to professionals, attending meetings is not part of their work time. In order to attend meetings, adult learners have to give up some of their course, leisure or family time. So the timing of meetings is critical, and meetings need to be made at a time appropriate to the needs of adult learners, if their involvement is seriously desired.



Ten Tips for involving Adult Learners:

1. *It is better to invite two learners to attend rather than one. This allows for flexibility in attendance and also for mutual support.*
2. *It is essential to ensure that travel or related expenses are met before meetings, unless arranged otherwise. Adult learners cannot be expected to find money for travel or subsistence.*
3. *Costs to cover dependent care need to be offered and met and an understanding about this needs to be made clear at the beginning.*
4. *An individual learner may be available in the early days but, with growing confidence and new opportunities, that availability may decrease with time. A process whereby new adult learners are involved should be put in place.*
5. *If a learner will lose a day's pay by attending the meeting, compensation for that pay should be covered. When professionals attend a meeting they usually do so as part of their paid job.*
6. *A provider representative from the relevant meeting should be allocated to 'look after' the adult learners so they have a point of contact and can take the time to fill in any background and or jargon that may arise.*
7. *Consideration needs to be given to the timing of meetings. Meetings need to be easy to get to, and the timing needs to be appropriate for people with children who have to travel long distance. Adult learners cannot attend meetings during their working hours.*
8. *It should be clarified beforehand what the purpose of the learner's presence at the meetings will be. They should play an equal role to the professionals, or else their presence might become tokenistic. As little jargon as possible should be used in meetings, and patronising should be avoided.*
9. *Adult learners will come with passion and commitment to do a 'job' – if they see that their enthusiasm is not being utilised they will be disappointed and stop attending. Commitment must be there on both sides to make it work.*
10. *Adult learners will benefit from training in 'Meetings Skills' or 'Presentation Skills'.*

Other barriers that could deter adult learners from taking part in meeting and activities for policy discussion should be taken into consideration when organizing them, such as the loss of wages, the costs for transport (which is often a problem for adult learners on low income), and child-care facilities for younger adults and dependant-care for older learners.

Up to now, it is understood that there is a risk in consulting adult learners about what they want and in collecting their views. Managers and providers are often uneasy about sharing power but they will need to develop a culture where open and honest feedback is welcomed and where views can be expressed safely. There has to be a cultural shift amongst policy makers and providers.

Extra work and funding will be required in order to ensure that feedback is given to adult learners and relevant actions are taken. Transparency about the purpose of the consultation and what can be put into action realistically is important.

If adult learners are meant to be empowered, if the activities are meant to be "learner-centred or learner-led", then the following should be considered:

- Treat adult learners as equals and the adults that they are,
- Give power to adult learners so that they can take an effective part in the governance of learning provision,
- Ensure that adult learners have the means to make comments and influence learning provision,
- Ensure that the project leaders not only listen, but act upon what has been collectively agreed.

Concluding Remarks to the IntALWinE Network

Although the Grundtvig project of IntALWinE has come to an end, it would be a backward step if the network were to disband without any follow-up and the close relationships, contacts and experience of working together were lost. The network partners should continue working together but change its focus. They should now look at how working with and using Learning Champions could enhance and improve the effectiveness of the respective ALWs and learning festivals. To do this successfully the network partners would have to embrace the principles and practices described above.

Recommendations:

- Members of the IntALWinE network should:
- promote the use of the Learning Champions (to a greater extent),
 - look at ways of involving adult learners in their work,
 - look at ways to fund the learner involvement,
 - look for ways of funding the Adult Learners' Network,
 - support the European Adult Learners' Network.

Possible areas of research that could be best carried out by adult learners might include:

- *Learner satisfaction, how are adult learners consulted, are they happy with the way they are consulted, are they happy with the outcomes of that consultation?*
- *In the promotion of learning, are adult learners used as promoters of learning, how are they used and how effective are they?*
- *How can adult learners be motivated to become active participants in the governance of learning?*
- *How can adult learners best influence policy and funding decisions?*
- *How can adult learners act as advocates on behalf of other learners?*
- *Can an adult learners' forum be used to encourage the democratic process?*
- *Would participating in an adult learners' forum encourage good citizenship?*
- *What are adult learners' needs and do they differ from country to country?*
- *Do the needs of the individual and the needs of the country differ and if they do, how can they be reconciled?*
- *How can the resistance, of some policy makers and providers, to adult learners being seen as true partners in education be overcome?*
- *Write an Adult Learners' Charter that could be used across Europe and the World!*

Energized after a successful study visit in Wales: members of the international adult learners group





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