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The opinions of participants' about Grundtvig workshops on history and culture

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Grundtvig programme are activities aimed at providing adults with ways to improve their knowledge and skills. This study examined the opinions of adults who participated in four workshops on history and culture organized throughout Europe between 2009 and 2014 under the Grundtvig Adult Education Programme and Lifelong Learning Programme of the EU. The aim of the study was to analyze the opinions of adults from different age groups, professions, and ethnicities about these informal workshops. In order to determine the study group, an easily accessible sampling method was used. The study group there was 43 workshop participants from different countries. In order to learn their opinions, they were asked to fill a form with 4 open-ended questions. Data were collected and analyzed from workshops organized in different years and in various countries. The content analysis method was used. Most of the participants stated that they learned about new cultures, and histories and developed their communication skills. They also stated that they learned most from the active learning, audiovisual and IT methods. Participants confessed that they had trouble in communicating with foreigners, managing time, and overcoming prejudices. They also stated that personal experience, motivation, audiovisual elements, study program, and themes facilitated learning. It was concluded that informal history education is possible for adults as shown by the answers of the workshop participants on subjects such as history education, national identity, historical prejudices, and intercultural learning.

Key words: Adult education, Gruntvig workshops, culture, history education, intercultural learning.

INTRODUCTION

Grundtvig Adult Education Programme is a program developed with the aim of meeting the everchanging information needs, increasing the employment chance of adults by developing their skills and adapting to social changes. Gruntvig Programme organizes workshops on various topics in order to provide informal education to adults from EU member and candidate countries. Adult education has been a popular study topic for several years. It aims to educate adults and improve their life and employment chances. Thus, it aims not only to educate adults but also contribute to society (ua.gov.tr).

It is only possible for a society to develop when people can access and use information, and this is only possible with continuous education. This has become a necessity both for individuals and nations and is called lifelong education (Miser, 2002). This term is coined by Nikolai

Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) (Maliszewski, 2002). The motto of "School for Life" emphasizes the fact that education never ends and is not only needed by youngsters but also by adults (European Commission, 2010). Lifelong learning is a concept based not only on the education and learning theories but also on the employment and career theories. It only focuses on the certification of the learned skills and abilities and disregards questions regarding who, where, why and how (Aksoy, 2013, p. 42). With the penetration of technology to our pockets, everyone, young and old alike is aware of the developments. In such a global context, individuals feel the pressure to learn even though they completed their formal education. Adult education meets this demand.

Gruntvig adult education program aims to bring adults from different countries together for information, experience and skill exchange in accordance with the priorities determined by the EU Education and Culture Programs (European Commission, 2019). Workshops organized in various fields create an important learning opportunity. Workshops used structured, non-formal and informal education approaches. They use different learning environments outside class and school, such as outdoors, museums, libraries, nature, and city centers. There are different and various learning tools. Cinema, music, theatre, literature, comics, technological tools, internet, artworks, books, and games are the ones that come to mind in an instant. Grundtvig Workshops mostly use drama, visualization, empathy, personal-internal, one-on-one, and group learning techniques. Workshop participants learn by practicing, living, and observing in place. Schools, informal education institutions, non-governmental organizations, local and national education and administration authorities, and other sociocultural institutions are pursuing joint enterprises with the other institutions such as libraries, museums, media centers, universities, and religious institutions (Turkish National Agency, 2019).

In this study, we focused on history and culture workshops. These are organized by institutions and educators from various fields and structured learning environments aim to teach regional history and culture. They have important goals, such as pursuing the dream of European peace, bridging the gap between East and West, and promoting the participation of minorities and disadvantaged groups. These goals are all based on the aim of creating an intercultural community (Martinalli and Taylor, 2000, p. 11). These values are being taught to the young generation in lectures such as history and social sciences. But these values should be taught to older generations as well. For example, a common misconception on the history education is that it is given by teachers, in schools, and through big books. But Gruntvig workshops teach history to adults using informal, unconventional methods. History education is relevant not only to students but also to the whole

community and develops the ability to think from various perspectives, especially by using museums and historical places (Barton and Levstik, 2004). These ideas inspired many projects and researches aiming to move history education from school to outdoors both in Turkey and in the world. These studies, besides providing information on history, employed different methods and models such as visits to museums and historical places, historical drama, and cultural interaction workshops.

In this study, four Grundtvig Workshops conducted in 33 countries including Turkey were examined. These are:

a) "Baroque in Bavaria" Freising, Munich-Germany, 2010.
b) "Local Cultures-European Identity", Edremit, Balıkesir-Turkey; 2012.
c) Man and Woman in the 20th Century, Castel del Piano-Italy, 2010.
d) Viaggio in Europa. Cultural literacy through arts and philosophy, 2014.

Synopses of all these workshops are given in the following sections:

a) "Baroque in Bavaria" Freising, Munich-Germany (March 2010):

This workshop is organized in Friesing, Germany; Friesing is home to the Cathedral of Bavarian Catholicism and is only a short train trip away from Munich, the capital of Bavaria. Many experts participated in the workshop, such as experts on the Catholic culture from Vienna and Munich and experts on the Protestant culture. The workshop explored the historical roots and historical, architectural and social impacts of the Bavarian Catholicism. There were Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant as well as Muslim participants. This created a multicultural learning environment both for students and teachers. Six educators and experts from Austria and Germany, and 15 participants from eight countries found the opportunity to observe, practice and experience the historical roots of Baroque style, and impacts on the life, architecture, art, music, and handicrafts.

b) Local cultures-European identity, Edremit, Balikesir-Turkey (2012):

This workshop was organized in the second year of EU LLP Grundtvig Workshops Programme. It was organized in Edremit, Balıkesir, Turkey and 3 educator and 13 persons from 9 countries participated. Since its focus was on the local culture, participants were selected from the rural and lesser-known regions of Europe. Therefore, the participants not only learned about the local culture of Edremit but also became representatives of their cultures. So, the students became teachers during the workshop. They visited places selected from the Intangible Cultural Heritage list of UNESCO.

c) Man and woman in the 20th Century

The workshop was organized in Castel Del Piano, Toscana, Italy. In this workshop, participants coming from the EU member or candidate countries, working in various professions and aged between 20 and 58 came together in a historical place with an art director, two theater actors, a history teacher, and a music teacher. They performed various activities for five days on culture, theater, and history. They especially employed drama, role-playing, and teamwork techniques. They discussed gender roles in different nations throughout time, mythological elements, historical symbols, national heroes, prejudices, symbols, and stereotypes.

d) Viaggio in Europa: Cultural literacy through arts and philosophy

The last Grundtvig Workshop on history was organized in Milano, Italy in April 2014. Three Italian educators and 16 persons from nine countries participated. As the name suggests, participants are taken to a trip in the art ship and sailed from 19th to 21st century. Meanwhile, they discussed the birth of modern art trends, their impact on politics, economy, society, culture, and technology and the relation between history, art, and philosophy. Workshop put especially the historical development of the 20th-century modern art at the forefront with the aim of improving cultural literacy. Participants discussed the effects of various events such as political unifications during 19th and 21st centuries, the emergence of central national states, industrialization, alienation, and de-industrialization on the modern cities and people starting with the example of Italy.

All the selected workshops lasted 5 days. Workshops usually employed informal learning methods. Since unconventional methods are employed in order to teach about history and culture, we wanted to learn the opinions of participants. Thus, the following questions were asked:

1. What is your opinion on things you learned in the workshop?
2. What is your opinion about the efficiency of the methods employed in the workshop?
3. What were the disrupting factors for your learning experience?
4. What were the facilitating factors for your learning experience?

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study aiming to observe and understand the event in its natural environment. The opinions of workshop participants from different countries, age groups, and professions were analyzed. Therefore, a qualitative research method, namely the phenomenological method was used. The phenomenological method focuses on exploring the actual experience. This method aims to measure the "experience" at various levels and contemplate on the meaning, content, and essence of the experience (Sart, 2015; Onat-Kocabıyık, 2016). Since this study was based on the participants' workshop experiences, we preferred to use a phenomenology design.

A semi-structured interview form by reviewing the literature on the field was developed. Semi-structured interview forms are the most popular method for collecting data in the phenomenological approach (Sart, 2015, p. 75). The participants were asked to fill the form. Data were analyzed using the content analysis method. By asking open-ended questions we wanted to grasp the experiences of the participants in depth.

Study group

In order to determine the study group, convenience sample method was used. This method is where the sample is taken from a group of people easy to contact or to reach. We preferred this method for speed and practicality (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). Direct access of the researchers to the workshop participants also played in favor of the selection of this method. The participants were from different countries and different professions. The participants of workshops were from the EU member or candidate countries, working in various professions. For example, the participants of "Man and Woman in the 20th Century: Love and Violence Workshop" were from Turkey, Italy, Latvia, Romania, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Portugal, Poland. In the group there were teachers, academicians, theatre actors, NGO workers, and a photographer.

The other workshops' "Baroque in Bavaria" participants were from Romania, England, Bulgaria, Latvia, Estonia, Austria, Turkey and Germany. The workshop "Local Cultures-European Identity" was organized in Turkey and the participants were from Romania, England, İtaly, Latvia, Lithuania, Turkey, Germany, Poland, Scotland. The participants of "Viaggio in Europa. Cultural Literacy through Arts and Philosophy" were from İtaly, England, Turkey, France and Spain. The participants were not asked about their age, gender and occupation since it was not planned to be used in the research analysis.

The summarized information is presented in Table 1.

Process

All workshops lasted 5 days. Participants were taught in English and using informal methods. In the last day of workshops, a form with open-ended questions was handed to the participants and they were free to answer. Some of the participants were reluctant to answer the interview forms; data were collected from 43 of them. First data was collected from the 2010 workshops and follow-up data was collected from 2012 and 2014 workshops.

Table 1. Basic information on the study groups.

Name of Workshop	Place and Time	Number of participating countries	Number of participants who answers the questions
Baroque in Bavaria	Munich, Bavaria, Germany- March 2010	8	15
Man and Woman in the 20th Century: Love and Violence	Castel del Piano, Toscana, Italy- June 2010	8	9
Local Cultures-European Identity	Edremit, Balıkesir, Turkey-October 2012	9	13
Viaggio in Europa. Cultural Literacy through Arts and Philosophy	Milan, Italy-February 2014	5	6

Table 2. Answers to the question What did you learn?

Categories	f
Different cultures	25
Histories of different countries	21
Communication skills (socialization-immersion)	20
Prejudices	9
New perspectives	8
Behavior improvement	7
Historical empathy	3

Tools of data collection

For data collection, an interview form with 4 open-ended questions was used. The questions were (1) "What did you learn?"; (2) "How did you learn?"; (3) "What were the disrupting factors for your learning experience?" and (4) "What were the facilitating factors for your learning experience?". The opinions of three field experts on these open-ended questions was received. In this research, to ensure participants express themselves comfortably and to learn their workshop experience, more detail this kind of data collection method was preferred.

Data analysis

The content analysis method for this study was used. The analysis was performed in four phases: 1. Coding the data, 2. determining the themes in the coded data, 3. organizing the themes and codes, and 4. determining and interpreting the results (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011, p. 228). Frequencies are different since some participants gave answers that can be categorized under multiple themes (n= 43). Furthermore, the investigator triangulation method was used. Since all data was recorded in English, we asked the help of an expert from the department of foreign languages and two field

experts. Investigator triangulation is a method where two or more investigators analyze the same qualitative data and their results are compared. This decreases the bias problem when only one investigator is used and his/her prejudices affect the analysis and increase the consistency of results (Patton, 2014).

RESULTS

Opinions of the Participants regarding What they learned from the Workshops

The participants were asked what they learned from the workshop. The result is presented in Table 2.

We gave a code to all participants starting with the letter K and a number. Some of the responses are given below:

K13: "*I learned many new things about different cultures, the culture night was especially interesting.*"
K21: *Foods, lifestyle, business life, dance, music, clothes in different countries and much more that I can't count here*..."
  Workshops included special activities like culture nights. Such activities included presentations on cultural elements, traditional clothes, and tasting of traditional

Table 3. Opinions of participants on the teaching methods employed in workshops.

Categories	f
Active learning methods	29
Audiovisual methods	19
Information technologies	13
Intercultural learning	12
Projection method	11

foods and beverages. As most of the participants emphasized, various learning methods are employed in these workshops such as music, presentation, and social interactions.

K19: "*We must admit that cultural and historical learning can be gained in time and there may be some limitations arising either from the individuals or the process itself. You should be modest and open to multiculturality and learning. Workshops open new worlds before us; on the other hand, you realize how "small" the world is and how similar some traditions are. Therefore, you realize the richness of different cultural heritages.*"

K3: *"I learned to express myself in front of a community with confidence. Communicating with friends from different nations was fun, we established long term contacts."*

K43: *"I believe that I obtained intercultural communication skills".*

As these examples show, the participants believe that they obtained many new skills. In this respect, one can think that the teaching methods employed in workshops were effective because the participants volunteered. Besides it can be seen in statement K3 that workshop inspired long term connections and similar projects. These statements may imply a continuation of such projects.

K4: *"I tried to learn the parts of European history and global cultural heritage that previously I didn't know, such as regional cultural differences, minorities, the geography of the country, our commonalities…"*

K5: *"I learned a lot about the regional and almost extinct cultures and historical places of Europe."*

K12: "*…I realized that I have many prejudices I didn't realize, for example on religions and identities... And I learned to overcome these prejudices via different perspectives".*

K11: "*I saw the great impact of historical events on our national identities, and the established prejudices of other participants on my country and nation*"

Prejudice was a frequently repeated term. In the interview forms, many participants said thing like "I saw their prejudices; religious and national prejudices and learning to overcome prejudices". It is not surprising to have conversations on religious, political and national topics where people from different nationalities meet.

K34: "*We are learning our differences and cultures. We're*

also learning the common cultural heritage of humanity."

K36: "*…I believe that I and others have changed after all those activities, personal contributions, and participation. We learned tolerance, altruism, democracy, international brotherhood, peace etc…*"

K42: "*I realized that visits to museums and historical places and historical role-playing may help someone to empathize with the historical figures and events".*

Participants stated that they had developed values and behaviors thanks to the workshops. Most commonly stated themes were obtaining different perspectives, developing behaviors, and establishing empathy.

Opinions of participants on the affectivity of teaching methods employed in workshops

Under this research question, we asked the participants how they learned in workshops. Results are presented in Table 3.

Selected opinions of participants are as follows:

K11: "Starting with the first day of the workshop, active presentations are given. *It was fun. Methods like drama, discussion, creative drama, cooperative learning-teamwork, and conceptual map were also useful".*

K27: "*…my favorite activities were museum visits all along. I had observed many details regarding the history and architecture of the region during these visits.*

K18: *"It was fun for me to talk about our prejudices through drama method. When playing a role, I realized the surfacing prejudices that I have. This method affected me".*

K19: *"… a short film we saw about the theme of the day was especially affective for me and its effect is lasting".*

K21: "*Documentaries, short films, and relevant music were used frequently in lessons. I find this interesting*".

K33: "*In a presentation given by one of the educators on the social media and forum sites, I learned about some free and educatory programs that I've heard before but never used. I believe they will be useful*".

K36: *"…I learned new things on blog sites, forums, practical computer programs, virtual museums, and virtual tours, and I think I will improve myself".*

K20: *"…I can say that I learned a lot from short conversations we had with our educators during coffee*

Table 4. Opinions of the participants on the factors disrupting learning.

Categories	f
Foreign language	37
Time management	14
Prejudices	9
Education program	8

breaks".

K14: "…*self-evaluations at the end of the day, and teamwork really helped us. I can say that my personal gains will be useful both in my future business life and social life".*

K17: "… *during the education, we visited a village. That was a wonderful experience for me. I saw many things that I will tell to my close friends when I return to home,".*

K30: "*I learned some established features of different cultures through close observation. For example, I asked many questions on the lifestyle of a Muslim to my participant friends without reserve".*

K28: "*…sometimes our daily lives and trivial experiences may turn to be a great learning experience for others. It was for me. For example, I've decided to propose a change in the activity when I return from here..."*

When we look at the examples from the comments of participants and from the table, we can see many can be evaluated in multiple categories. This means that participants commented on multiple methods used in the workshops. There are many comments regarding the affectivity of these methods. But participants mostly praised the affectivity of active learning and audiovisual methods and information technology. This finding is similar in some studies like Rogers (2001), Ursic and Caf (2009), Kalaitzidis et al. (2015). These studies also state that adults could improve their learning in many methods especially active and technologic methods.

Workshops analyzed in this study were prepared by people experienced in their relative fields and were selected among many candidate projects by international agencies. It is logical to expect the methods used in these carefully prepared and selected projects to be successful. Feedback from participants supports this expectation.

Opinions of the participants on the factors disrupting learning

Under this research question, we asked the participants about the factors that disrupted their learning during their education. The results are presented in Table 4.

K19: "*Like many other participants, my greatest problem was also lack of proficiency in English, the formal language of the education. Many times, I failed to*

express myself exactly".

K34: "*Many times I was misunderstood, sometimes I got excited and used wrong words, educators supported us but I couldn't help myself but feel bad*".

K40: "*I strained myself because of my lack of practice in speaking. I felt the need to improve myself".*

K6: "*In presentations, educators used complex terms and sentences. I would like simpler and more easily understandable presentations".*

Most of the participants stated they had difficulties in language. This problem is obvious in their answers. Some of the participants even failed to write complete sentences in their forms and tried to express themselves with one or two words. Some even left the questions unanswered. We believe this to be due to the lack of English proficiency.

K18: "*…I believe time management is another problem. Planned time was insufficient for some activities and too much for others…"*

K40: "*…in the last days of the education, programs lasted more than they should. It was tiring".*

K21: "*…there were problems of long and short presentations as well as a long program".*

K18: "*Sometimes I could not receive detailed information regarding the presented subject or places we visited. My questions went unanswered".*

Some of the participants expressed that the problems regarding the program and time management disrupted their learning experience. Expressions like "long presentations", "short presentations", "density of the program", "lack of time", "misinformation", and "personal study time" are classified under the time management and education program themes.

K11: "*Small discussions with the other participants and their criticism sometimes disheartened me".*

K27: "*Even though we are adults, some showed too much prejudice. I heard many unnecessary comments on my country and religion. I did not like that. You cannot easily overcome prejudices on national identity and history, no matter how much you discuss".*

K9: "*Although trivial, I experienced personal problems and these made learning difficult for me".*

In these workshops, it was observed that the same problems that can be observed in any group consists of people from different nations and meet others for the first time. To prevent these problems, they organized meeting activities on the first day of workshops. Educators intervened to conflicts with restraint. Despite these

Table 5. Opinions of the participants on the factors facilitating learning.

Categories	f
Experience/ personal interest and motivation	29
Audiovisual elements	27
Study theme-program	23
Active learning methods	22
Group dynamics	20

measures, some of the participants experienced personal problems.

Opinions of the participants on the factors facilitating learning

Under this research question, we asked the participants about the factors that facilitated their learning during their education. Results are presented in Table 5.

K32: "*Previously I attended a similar event. In the school that I am working, we are writing various projects. Being experienced made things easier for me*".
K40: *"I have an interest in other cultures. Times that I spent here were very useful for me"*.
K16: *"…it is very exciting for me to spend a couple of days in a different country with people I don't know"*.
K18: *"…especially the well-preparedness, fullness and denseness of the program"*.
K40: *"My answer to this question is an effective program, a good team, and professional educators."*
K21: *"…I believe the well-planned activities used in presentations worked well. They convey tons of information sometimes through a picture sometimes with a game. Educators were successful"*.
K12: *"Education techniques and motivation of study groups"*.
K15: *"…and motivation and sincerity of group members"*.

The most commonly repeated theme in the answers of the participants was the personal experience. Some participants had previous project experiences; some had prepared national and international projects in schools or associations. These participants expressed that their experiences facilitated their learning. Furthermore, teaching methods used in workshops, successful educators and programs, visuals, songs, and selected places were among the facilitating factors. Some of the participants also emphasized the sincerity of educators and participants and group dynamics. These were motivating factors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the opinions of the participants of Gruntvig

workshops organized between 2010 and 2014 under the themes of history and culture was examined. At the fifth day of the workshops, all 43 participants were asked what they learned. Nobody left the question unanswered or told he/she learned anything. This shows that although superficial, all workshops gave something to their participants. The most common themes that can be found in answers were "meeting with different cultures and histories", "improving communication skills" (socialization – communicating in a foreign language), "prejudices", "gaining new perspectives", "improving behaviors" and "historical empathy". When the answers are analyzed, it was found that the outcomes targeted by the EU programs are mostly achieved, such as intercultural learning, personal development, tolerance, and productivity. These themes, intercultural learning proficiencies, and skills can be found in the book edited by Titley (2002). Besides comments of the participants than can be categorized under "openness to different perspectives" and "prejudices" themes made us think that people that participated to these programmes might be more sensitive, responsible and peace loving. Some of the participants were working in NGO's and some were themselves educators. These results (Keugh, 2004) comply with the result that people participating in adult educations are effective in the policy choices and practices of their countries.

The second research question was "how did you learn?". Majority of the participants (n= 29) stated that they learned from the active learning methods and audiovisual elements. The other effective themes were projection, information technologies, and intercultural learning. These results comply with the studies that found that active learning methods are very successful in various lessons in primary and secondary education. Adults, like children, stated that they can learn more easily with different methods and technologies. Results show that many adults liked learning by drama, storytelling, and games.

The third research question was "What are the factors disrupted your learning?". Answers included themes like a foreign language, time management, and education program. In the studied workshops, some problems arise because of the official language of the educations, English. Although all participants declared their proficiency, some really did not. One of the aims of such

programs is to develop the communication skills of participants in English (ua.gov.tr). But not much can be achieved in this respect only in five days, so workshops mainly focused on their main themes. This result shows that any person that will participate in the Erasmus+ program or any other international education program should previously take a language preparation course else they should be asked to certify their proficiency. Under the time management theme, the participants expressed problems such as the length of the program, shortness of some activities, and shortness of the times given to complete tasks. These problems can be deemed natural in an education where people from different nationalities and age groups attended. As a solution, Titley (2002) recommends planning an education program which is more flexible, appropriate for multicultural groups, and including contingency plans. Another recommendation that we can deduct from our results is to have the participants meet in an online platform before the workshop.

The most common answer to the fourth research question was personal experience. Besides, participants listed the other factors facilitating learning as methods used in the workshops, successful educators and program, visuals, songs, and visits to historical places. Some of the participants listed the sincerity of educators and participants and groups dynamics. They stated that these factors improved their motivation.

As a general result, we can say that the self-evaluations of the participants were satisfactory. Results show that adults participating in workshops attain many and various skills. This proves that informal history education is possible even though it is simple. Furthermore, workshops on history and culture can contribute to overcoming national prejudices and attain world peace. The results of this study are limited to the opinions of the participants in the study group. It is recommended that it is beneficial for future researchers to work with larger groups. In addition, data were collected through open-ended interview questions in this research; mixed method for conducting studies will also contribute to the field.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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