

LEARNERS' FORUM – A NEW CHALLENGE IN ADULT EDUCATION

In some democratic environments, learners' forums have emerged as relatively formalised meeting places of learners and/or potential learners with the aim to: (1) identify and discuss experience-based issues and concerns related to (adult) learning, (2) provide recommendations to education professionals, providers as well as policy makers, and (3) play an active role in promoting and fostering a learner-centred approach¹ to the development of the education and training system as well as the society as a whole. Ideally, learners' forums have a representative, evaluative and formative potential thus establishing the link between adult learning and democratic citizenship. A movement for establishing an international learners' forum and sowing seeds for setting up forums at national, regional and/or local level has been launched within the framework of a Grundtvig 4 project². The networking of project partners, i.e. coordinators of learning festivals in partner countries, as well as other international and domestic experience has led to the implementation of the first learners' forum in Slovenia.

The article presents historical and contextual grounds for setting up learners' forums world-wide and specifically in Slovenia by describing the potential for and objectives of introducing this specific form of modern active citizenship. Examples of learners' forums or other forms of involving learners from certain parts of Europe are given. For Slovenia, the Lifelong Learning Week with its ten-year tradition of promoting the culture of lifelong learning is defined as the springboard and vehicle for the development of learners' forums. Consequently, characteristics of the inclusion and empowerment of learners and possible benefits to (adult) education practice and policy are indicated. Furthermore, psychological and social dimensions of practising democracy through learners' forums are illuminated. The multifarious role of learners as enthusiasts, activists, advocates, ambassadors, champions, mentors and tutors is emphasized. In addition, wider aspects of making the voice of learners (active citizens) be heard and have impact are reflected upon by stressing the importance of lifelong learning in democracy renewal and practice. Finally, overall findings stemming from the implementation of the first Slovenian learners' forum are presented and directions of its further development are outlined.

¹ As introduced by the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2001) and proclaimed in subsequent strategic documents in the field of (adult) education and lifelong learning

² International Adult Learners' Week in Europe (IntALWinE) – 109775-CP-1-2003-1-DE-Grundtvig-G4