

## 4<sup>th</sup> Future Forum of the Association of Austrian Adult Education Centres in cooperation with the Association of Bavarian Adult Education Centres

### Society without a middle class? Adult education out of bounds?



From 9 to 11 July 2012, 100 adult educators from 11 nations discussed future challenges for adult education and adult education centres at the 4<sup>th</sup> international Future Forum at Seon Monastery in Bavaria.

The topic of and backdrop to the Future Forum 2012 were analyses and research results that suggest the destruction and subsequent loss of society's middle class.

Members of the middle class have numbered among the losers over the last few years. For a long time, they provided the support for the social welfare state and at the same time benefited from its services. Today they are caught in the tension between the borderless pursuit of profit in the globalised economy and the restructuring and dismantling of the social welfare state. This development can be seen clearly in the area of education.

The majority of participants in adult education come from the middle class, whose financial capacity to invest in education is increasingly disappearing. At the same time, an adequate amount of public funding is no longer being provided. As a result, adult education can no longer fulfil its teaching mission.

Is a society without a middle class consequently leading adult education out of bounds? Sergio Bologna, an Italian expert in new forms of work, Ralf Holtzwardt from the Federal Employment Agency, Walter Huber from Siemens AG, and Ulrike Herrmann from the daily newspaper taz provided the stimulus for plenary and working group discussions. It quickly became clear that the question of the destruction of the middle class is controversial, yet it seems undisputed that the middle class increasingly fears losing its social status and no longer believes in advancement through education. Adult education and adult education centres react to these trends by providing new course offerings, target group-specific marketing as well as high-quality programmes for all groups in society.

The Future Forum is an annual forum for adult educators and its objective is to put questions concerning the future of adult education up for discussion. In July 2013, the Future Forum on Adult Education will take place at the Salzburg Adult Education Centre and will deal with the topic "Answers to the crisis! Adult Education and its tasks in difficult times".

