

PRESS RELEASE

For three days Innsbruck is the centre of European adult education

70 experts from 11 countries: adult education plays a key role during and after the financial crisis

Adult education plays a key role in dealing with the consequences of the financial crisis. Both in terms of achieving short-term labour market objectives as well as pursuing long-term educational measures aimed at sustainably raising the educational and skill level of the people of Europe, those countries with a well-developed adult education system had/have had major advantages. This is the conclusion reached by the 70 experts at the 5th International Future Forum, which took place this year in Innsbruck from 3 to 5 July on the initiative of the Austrian Association of Adult Education Centres and which turned the capital of Tyrol into the centre of European adult education for the duration of the event.

In her keynote address on the first day of the conference, the head of the Icelandic “Education and Training Service Centre”, Ingibjörg Gudmundsdóttir, highlighted that her country responded to the financial crisis, which struck Iceland particularly hard, by enhancing the quality and increasing the public funding of adult education. In this way, the government could offer those affected effective opportunities for vocational continuing education and personal and social further development.

Not every country has followed Iceland’s example. A study presented by the European Association of Adult Education has clearly shown that the widening gap between rich and poor in Europe is also impacting educational behaviour. The well-to-do remain relatively unaffected by the crisis, whereas the poor suffer. Adult education institutions in those countries with very little funding for adult education or even cut-backs have been forced to raise course fees. Those people lacking the means, who are usually the ones who need further education and training the most, thus run the risk of being excluded from it – with far-reaching consequences for the economic region, social stability, and the people’s social and especially personal opportunities for development. Moreover, the major role that adult education plays in social cohesion and the development of democracy is often disregarded. This is also demonstrated by the fact that it is important to look for alternatives and new approaches together with the local inhabitants.

In his keynote address, Professor Clemens Sedmak emphasised that education also includes the “skill to use one’s skills”. The ability to handle one’s skills and to use them properly is especially important in a crisis, because when first-order resources are scarce, which is the case in a crisis, second-order resources, like the skill to use one’s skills, become increasingly important.

In working groups, the experts from the UK, Norway, Belgium, Iceland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Ireland, Slovenia, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Germany, Austria and the European Association of Adult Education came to the same conclusion: strengthening short-term educational measures geared to the labour market is important, but not enough on its own. It also involves guaranteeing everyone access to educational opportunities that provide them with the eight key competences for lifelong learning as defined by the European Union.

Adequate public funding is therefore absolutely imperative in order to achieve this. For the funding to be adequate, it would have to be 1% or more of the country's entire education budget.

The 5th Future Forum came to an end today, 5 July, at 12:30 pm. Next year's Future Forum will take place in South Tyrol.

INNSBRUCK, 5 July 2013

For any further queries, please contact
Mr Matthias Bauer
Volkshochschule Tirol
+ 43 (0)512 58 88 82 - 13