



ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN EUROPE

CONFERENCE 29-30 SEPTEMBER 2009
MUSEUM OF WORLD CULTURE GÖTEBORG SWEDEN



Folkbildnings-
studieförbundens
intresseorganisation **förbundet**



EAEA
EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION OF ADULTS

Appeal from the Active Citizenship in Europe Conference

Active Citizenship in Europe is a unique European conference for non-formal adult education institutions, other civil society organisations and decision-makers at all levels, to be held in Gothenburg on 29-30 September 2009. The conference is organised by the Swedish Adult Education Association – the umbrella organisation for the nine Swedish study associations – and EAEA, European Association for the Education of Adults.

Summary:

The conference highlights the fact that non-formal adult education and informal learning promote active citizenship in Europe. Non-formal learning emphasizes empowerment, grass roots participation and is a driving force in civil society.

Challenge 1: Only four out of ten Europeans voted in the European election

Politicians have long talked about the need to increase the involvement of citizens in EU issues. However, only just over four out of ten Europeans put a polling slip in the ballot box, despite the fact that EU policy has a huge impact on their daily lives.

Option 1: Put more emphasis on non-formal adult learning

The EU's draft Lisbon Treaty sets out the intention of maintaining an open, transparent and regular dialogue with civil society. Active adult education organisations constitute, together with other civil society organisations, a foundation for a strong civil society. They form a structure of crucial importance for a sustainable democracy. Non-formal learning is an important tool for discussing and promoting the European idea itself. If civil society is to be capable of successfully generating involvement in Europe, decision-makers at EU, national and local levels must embody and pay attention to the democratic activities carried out by civil society organisations. Non-formal adult education and informal learning can play a crucial role in promoting active citizenship, but there is very little political and financial support available. We therefore suggest an extension of the EU Citizenship Programme to include a strong emphasis on non-formal adult learning. The parts of the European lifelong learning programme targeted at non-formal adult education should also be extended. The European leadership must move from words to deeds.

Challenge 2: Ignorance breeds extremism

Extremism in Europe is on the rise. Xenophobic and anti-democratic fractions are established.

Option 2: Support a citizens' Europe

We understand that the growing support among Europeans in favour of extremist parties is rooted in ignorance and a sense of powerlessness. To be able to combat extremist ideas, a functioning democracy needs well educated citizens with respect for human rights and a global awareness. The EU's current education initiatives and programmes emphasize formal learning. It is high time to provide equal support for non-formal adult education and informal learning. For many people, non-formal learning is a stepping stone to, for instance, formal education or the jobs market; it also fosters personal development and provides meeting places for people from different social backgrounds and with different views.

Challenge 3: The financial crisis

The financial situation in Europe is tough. Public finances are increasingly under pressure and unemployment is rising, especially among young people.

Option 3: Time for an adult education initiative

Encourage the EU community to launch an adult education initiative, an initiative that invests in the education and learning of citizens. The initiative will promote the acquisition of the EU's key competences, such as learning to learn, social and civic competences, cultural expression, digital competence and entrepreneurship. This will promote social cohesion and more people will be able to join the labour market. It will also prepare Europe for future challenges such as demographic and environmental change. Non-formal learning is crucial for promoting learning for sustainable development. An investment in adult education now – despite and because of the crisis – will bring long-term benefits. Non-formal adult education and informal learning can reach out to people and foster a sense of community and citizenship. It is an asset and a necessity for Europe, its member states and its regions.