

## **A CASE-STUDY IN CO-OPERATION – THE EUROPEAN BUREAU OF ADULT EDUCATION**

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UNESCO has convened three international conferences on adult education since the war-at Elsenore, in 1949; at Montreal, in 1960 and at Tokyo, in 1972. At all of them the need was asserted for national and regional co-operation between the public and private agencies that actually provide adult education, country by country. Formal co-operation through councils, associations, institutes and so on has now been established in a fair number of countries; but even nationally it is easier to admit the needs than to do anything practical about them. Ethnic, social, political or religious divisions painfully stultify good intentions.

When they are emphasized by barriers of language, custom and unhappy memories of things past, it is easy to understand how difficult any progress becomes. Inter-governmental bodies, from the United Nations Organization and its satellites downwards, are enmeshed in protocol. They show no particular enthusiasm for attempts to create less formal links between non-governmental bodies and the individuals who support and serve them, although their declared purposes are less likely to be fulfilled without such reinforcement. Of course there are happy examples to the contrary, but as a generalization it will stand.

Against this background, the European Bureau of Adult education can look with some satisfaction at a record of development and achievement now extending over twenty years. Its experience may have some relevance in areas where the difficulties are even more formidable.

Although it still rests too much on the faith and works of a few people, particularly its original Dutch sponsors headed by its secretary, Mr G.H.L. Schouten, the Bureau now counts over one hundred associates in a dozen countries. The Dutch government has given disproportionate support with no strings attached, perhaps because it sees more directly the quality of the Bureau's work. Mr L.B. van Ommen's address to the twentieth anniversary meeting in September last year(...), is typical of the practical and candid attitude of the Dutch people to the whole business of international contact.

What, then, from a narrow base in a small country, has the Bureau achieved? First and foremost, by persisting in the promotion of conferences, seminars and study visits, it has brought people together often enough to give a human and personal dimension to the idea of co-operation. Freed from the exigencies of protocol, it has been able to draw into some measure of dialogue

those who do the daily work, rather than those who legislate, enforce and administer general policies.

Secondly, accepting that Euclid is still valid for our time and space and that parallel lines meet only in infinity, it has tried to promote convergence between the two levels of co-operation, governmental and non-governmental, particularly in relation to the Council of Europe and its Council for Cultural Co-operation.

It produced under contract with the council, a first comparative study of emerging policies for recruitment, training and status of adult educators in six countries.

It has recently prepared a preliminary study of legislative developments that will be the working document for a specialist meeting to be convened by the Council this year.

Thirdly, all international meetings within my memory have asked for multi-national directories, glossaries and abstracts as essential aids to communication and understanding. The Bureau is currently working on all three. A first draft Directory covering eleven countries was circulated for scrutiny and comment in 1972 and is now being revised and enlarged. A two-year experiment in the production of three-language abstracts of current writing is being evaluated. The new task is to obtain the support needed for the continuance and expansion of this hard-won experience on the lines indicated in the report of the UNESCO-IBE documentation meeting reported in the last issue of this journal. A comparative glossary of terms in English, French and German is also in preparation with reasonable hope of publication within the next year.

The Bureau is accommodated in the headquarters of the Dutch National Association for Adult education on concessionary terms. It also has access to the excellent Documentation Centre maintained by the Association in the same building. Served by a full-time deputy-secretary- Mr Schouten's serviced are entirely honorary- and part-time clerical help (which must be able to work in three languages), the present scale of the Bureau's work would clearly be impossible if it did not foster goodwill and effort from its associates: the same will undoubtedly be true of the International Council. Two recent examples may be illustrative.

In November 1972, a seminar in which the preliminary work was done for the projection legislation mentioned earlier was arranged in Oslo by the initiative of the Norwegian national body, Samnemnda

for Studiearbeid, with financial support from the Norwegian Ministry of Church and Education. In March 1973, two groups in the United Kingdom, concerned with provision for residential adult education, sponsored a conference on that theme with the help of the National Institute of Adult Education. Financial assistance was obtained from the Calouste Gulbankian Foundation. These are only the most recent of a long succession of similar joint enterprises: others are in prospect between 1974 and 1976 in Germany, Switzerland and Ireland.

Registered as a foundation under Dutch law, the Bureau is directed by a steering committee which is as representative of areas and types of adult education as possible. The provisional constitution, under which it has worked for the last decade, is under scrutiny in an attempt to strengthen the responsibility of its associates for its future maintenance. In this as in other spheres people are, perhaps understandably, more willing to pay for the milk by way of grants and other assistance for particular projects than they are to keep the cow alive by contributing adequately to the maintenance of the body itself.

The term "European" creates its own problems. It is associated with the post-war history of division between East and West. The Bureau's present body of associates are in the Western group of countries and come mainly from the North and centre than from the South. This is simply a response to the facts, and interest and involvement from the East would be more than welcome. Individuals from most of the socialist countries have attended seminars and other meetings over the years, but the institutionalizing of these contacts remains difficult. If we have sense enough in the world to maintain the present climate of *détente*, more may become possible.