

Stakeholder Meeting: More Bildung for Adult Education?

Towards a holistic understanding of ALE (adult learning and education) in the 21st century. Expert meeting 10.12.2020 - 11.12.2020

This event was a collaboration between the Europäische Agenda für Erwachsenenbildung (EAAL), Volkshochschule Bonn, DVV international and the European Association for the Education of Adults. We thank all the partners for this fruitful cooperation and a special thanks goes to Unity Effect for the technical assistance during the online conference.

Welcoming remarks by the organisers

The stakeholder meeting starts with a warm welcome by Uwe Gartenschlaeger, the deputy director of DVV International and the president of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), who sets the stage for Bildung, framing it as a crucial topic in these challenging times.

The director of DVV International Christoph Jost follows with his welcoming remarks and calls for a holistic understanding of adult learning in the 21st century. He eloquently highlights the role of Bildung across the non-formal, informal and formal education sphere and depicts adult learning and education (ALE) as a driver for change on a global level. Acknowledging that ALE is often the weakest link in Lifelong Learning, Jost emphasises the need for adult learning to strengthen social cohesion, integration and inspire people to take action in their local contexts. In the upcoming years, transformative citizenship education will rise to the agenda of ALE, also framed by the forthcoming [CONFINTEA](#) and the [UNESCO initiative on the Future of Education](#).

Aligning with the mission of the Agenda 2030, the [Sustainable Development Goals](#), Jost argues that Bildung can be a driving force to combat the challenges of this time: the climate crisis, digitalisation, demographic change, migration and the threats to European democracy. In times of a global pandemic, ALE is more important than ever to strengthen participation, collaboration and solidarity across generations.

Uwe Gartenschlaeger resonates with Jost's words and shares his concerns that many citizens have lost their optimism during the pandemic. Transformative, change-oriented ALE as presented in [EAEA's Manifesto for Adult Learning](#) is not only at the core of Bildung, but also crucial to reinstitute social cohesion and contest the fears that have arisen in society over the past year.

Contextualising the conference, Hans Georg Rosenstein from the European Adult Education Agenda highlights the potential of this online stakeholder meeting and invites for participation. Looking into the future, Rosenstein points towards the likelihood of a new

Agenda or policy paper for adult learning for the autumn next year (following on to the un-continued 2020 Agenda for adult learning).

Lene Rachel Andersen: Nordic Bildung and ALE in the 21st century

The Nordic Secret

Lene Rachel Andersen presents a thought-provoking key-note, building on her expertise as the head of the thinktank Nordic Bildung and the author of the book [“The Nordic Secret.”](#) Contemplating why Nordic countries are often perceived as the successful ones, Andersen proposes that the secret lies in a holistic understanding of education across all domains of society, deeply rooted in the concept of Bildung. This understanding includes moral (how to behave in familiar situations) and ethical (how to behave in unfamiliar situations) foundations.

In Andersen’s definition of Bildung, she distinguishes between transferable and emotional knowledge. Transferable knowledge is shared regularly and hence, becomes increasingly complex. Emotional knowledge, on the other hand, is based on unique human relationships with emotional depth, tied into cultural heritage and moral aspirations. Bildung is essentially at the “meaning-making intersection” between transferable and emotional knowledge. This intersection is where an individual makes sense of their context, their culture, their epistemology and of who they are.

The Bildung Rose

Lene Rachel Andersen goes on to present her concept of the [Bildung Rose](#), which lays out seven demands to thrive in society: technology, production, aesthetics, power, narrative, science and ethics. Combining developmental psychology and pedagogy, Andersen presents [Robert Kegan’s model - the Stages of Adult Development](#). Kegan’s model (the path from a self-consolidating to self-transforming adult) serves as the theoretical ground for her argument, describing how adults develop and expand their mental and emotional complexity.

In the second part of Andersen’s presentation, she takes the audience on a historical journey to the origins of the term Bildung. She argues that Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's 1770 contemplations about the spirit (German “geist”) and its relation to human culture, tradition and folklore were revolutionary. While society around them was fundamentally underdeveloped, they already engaged in meaning-making on a self-authoring or even self-transforming level. Therewith, Herder and Goethe were an embodiment of Bildung, transcending the moral and cultural parameters of their time.

Historical Foundations of Bildung

Inspired by Herder and Goethe, Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (also known for the Grundtvig award) read all the German authors and developed his own notion of Bildung, in

which peasants and other lower classes of society should also have a right to learn. Seeing the emergent need for education towards a national sentiment (Danishness) during and after the Schleswig war, Grundtvig established the first Folkhighschool in 1844. Over time the vision of Folkhighschools spread and Christian Kolb opened a second school in 1848, allowing peasants to ask questions and participate, which was a revolutionary approach at the time. Andersen explains how the need for education was closely interlinked with the concept of national identity, which thrived under the wars and revolutions of the era.

Knowing what it means to be a nation, a people was a new concept and a turning point in history, showcasing the need for Bildung. The Danish believed that if people do not receive enough information, they will create a revolution. In Germany, Bismarck proclaimed that if people know too much, they will start a revolution. This contradictory perceptions of Bildung, led to new Folkhighschools in Denmark teaching about narratives ethics and political systems, and to the closure of adult evening schools in Germany. Andersen's historical analysis of the emergence of Bildung shows that education was a fundamentally political endeavour that started on an interdisciplinary foundation.

Bildung in the 21st century

While the early approaches to Bildung at Folkhighschools integrated all aspects of the Bildung Rose, today the seven demands are perceived as separate entities (e.g. science is taught separately from ethics). While money is spent on the layer of what is physically possible, such as technology, production, ethics and narrative, the meaning-making areas of societies are undervalued and hence, underfunded. Andersen calls upon philosophers and artists to speak up about the core of Bildung, embodied in an interdisciplinary vision that combines ethics and aesthetics with science and technology.

Lene Rachel Andersen's presentation receives cross-cutting appreciation and positive feedback in the stakeholder meeting. Questions address the connection of Bildung and nationalism today and the role of identity in education. Andersen explains how identity is at the core of the Bildung idea. This identity, however, does not have to be exclusivist but it can also refer to a transnational identity or an imagined community. Asked about the necessary skills for Bildung at a European level, she highlights the importance of bilingualism and the urgency of education for ethical human decision making, instead of relying on the market for accountability.

Professor Rudolf Tippelt, Scientific feedback and reflection (LMU Munich)

Eight theses on Bildung

Professor Rudolf Tippelt, emeritus professor for educational science and pedagogy at the Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich, proposes eight theses to reflect on the insights of Lene Rachel Andersen. In his first thesis, Professor Tippelt draws the connection to Wilhelm von Humboldt, an icon of the Bildung idea. In Humboldt's perspective, Bildung was meant for people to freely develop their personality, in a sphere where neither state nor religion has a monopoly over science. Humboldt ascribed the same value to vocational and academic training, while simultaneously acknowledging their difference. Prof Tippelt argues that these Humboldtian insights are crucial to understanding the concept of Bildung from a holistic perspective today.

In his second thesis, Prof Tippelt grounds the Bildung idea in three processes: Firstly, the individual regulation of action, ability and judgement inspired by Immanuel Kant. Secondly, social participation and equal opportunities and thirdly human resources measured as qualifications and competences. With his conceptualisation, Prof Tippelt adds another layer to Kegan's psychological-pedagogical approach that Andersen proposes.

The third thesis explains how Bildung needs to be embedded and developed in reference to social megatrends. Social megatrends, such as digitalisation and globalisation do not reach everyone and hence, should not impose a universal ethic in the name of Bildung. Prof Tippelt acknowledges that Bildung is not a reality for all and calls for the urgency of basic education in his fourth thesis.

The embeddedness of Bildung is also portrayed in his fifth thesis, in which Prof Tippelt connects Bildung to societal challenges, such as demographic change, migration, climate change and the growing trend of individualisation. In his sixth thesis, he posits that Bildung and competencies are no contradictions. In today's world, individuals construct their own selves, at times far away from their family tradition. This requires self-organised action and social competencies, alongside Bildung.

A Bildung approach suggests that input and processes are as important as outcomes, according to Prof Tippelt's seventh thesis. While education is often focused on outcomes, Bildung needs to transcend the production centred mode. Instead of measuring the output, the quality of inputs and teaching should be critically assessed. Bildung, as also shared in the words of Lene Andersen has the task to create narratives and foster cohesive social communities, that are based on empathy. Communication is the tool that conveys values and culture and therewith essential for Bildung.

In his final thesis, Prof Tippelt posits that Bildung is more than occupational knowledge but includes the personal, social, emotional skills of a person: people's courage, their drive, stamina, sense of justice and responsibility. Going beyond the nation centred focus of Bildung, today's approaches should be focused on openness and intercultural skills. In the world of today, Bildung could be a tool that allows one to reconnect the knowledge for wisdom with the knowledge for life.

A call for more Bildung

Concluding, Prof. Tippelt states that, "Yes, we need more Bildung in adult learning and education." Opening the floor for questions, participants raise the question of recognition in Bildung (especially among more vulnerable groups of society/ e.g. migrants). Prof Tippelt responds that multilingualism and digital skills are at the core of a healthy democracy and that Bildung should address access and recognition barriers for those that are marginalised. On the path towards making Bildung a reality for all, more empirical studies are needed, especially concerning the importance of informal learning. According to Prof Tippelt, Bildung, in its essence should be understood as a pillar of a healthy democracy.

ALE & Bildung - Good Practises Across Europe

In the second part of the first day, three stakeholders share their good practices of Bildung on the ground in Germany, Spain and Denmark.

Meike Woller (DVV), Germany

[Appreciative Learning Spaces]

Meike Woller from DVV international shares how educators can create safer, more appreciative learning spaces for refugees, presenting a case study from Germany. Woller presents "[Curriculum InterculturALE](#)" and "[Building Educational Bridges](#)", two projects that aim at strengthening the intercultural, didactical and psychosocial competencies of adult educators. Rooted in research, the project was a close collaboration with professionals, academics, and educators from Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Germany. Today the toolkit serves to provide educational approaches to integration in adult classrooms in Jordan, Germany and beyond.

Meike Woller presents the origin of the project and sheds light on the challenges of migration in Germany. She describes how many adult educators face intercultural challenges when interacting with migrants and refugees who have undergone psycho-social trauma. Reflecting on the make-up of societies today, Woller calls for learning spaces that foster empowerment and agency, provide security and strengthen the self-esteem of refugees. She explains that adult educators can support refugees to build confidence and the skills for the labour market.

The intercultural toolkit responds to the needs of the refugees and educators and includes tools about cultural commonalities, social trauma and conflict. Woller emphasises how important language is in the process of integration and showed how storytelling can help refugees in deconstructing harmful narratives.

One example she mentions is the theory of multi-collectivity, in which plurality is seen as an advantage. The theory explains how every person belongs to numerous collectives, of which nationality is only one. Overall, the goal of the project was to create a trauma-sensitive classroom, in which refugees can unfold their potential, instead of feeling powerless. The resources of the toolbox are available for free online and can be viewed on the [educational resource page](#) of DVV international.

Jaume Vidal (Gentis Foundation), Catalonia

Another inspirational good practice was shared by Jaume Vidal from the Gentis Foundation in Catalonia, Spain. He introduces the audience to the “No Som Curts” project, an initiative for younger adults (16-24 years) from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who suffer from social exclusion. The initiative animates young adults to gain confidence, strengthen their social involvement and in some cases reintegrate them into society.

The production of video content is at the heart of the project, in which young adults bring visibility to societal issues. “No Som Curts” promotes teamwork, creativity, participation and communication among young adults. Going from idea to the final video publication, the project promotes experiential learning and strengthens relationships.

In reference to Bildung, Vidal explains how access and participation are key to build a sustainable learning process. “No Som Curts” empowers young adults and shows them that everyone can influence the world in their own way. Drawing the circle back to Andersen’s keynote, the Catalan project reveals not only how art is a tool for empowerment but also how art/aesthetics needs to be an integral part of Bildung; as presented in the Bildung Rose.

Carolina Magdalena Meier: Danish Storytelling project (DAAE)

Carolina Magdalena Meier, from the Danish National Association of Adult Education, presents *Danmark fortæller* (Danish storytelling project) as a good practice from Denmark. During the lockdown due to the Coronavirus pandemic, many adults started missing physical meeting spaces for socialising, discussing and learning, a tradition deeply ingrained in Danish culture. The Danish National Association for Adult Education (DAAE) set out on its storytelling project to prevent loneliness by creating a space of belonging. Meier explains how they formed small community groups, which met online for one and a half hours for five consecutive weeks, discussing topics such as love, hope, courage and childhood memories.

Inspired by the native American indigenous tradition of storytelling, the project arranged online listening spaces, facilitated by adult educators. Instead of giving one's opinion, the

project invited people to just listen and share how the story affected them. Another inspiration for the project was Hannah Arendt's approach to Collective Storytelling. Meier explains how Arendt's vision resonates in the Bildung concept by using storytelling to make people democratic and ethical human beings. Narrative Theory also influenced the project and encouraged participants to understand themselves in light of history. Meier reminds the audience how this theoretical model resonates with Grundtvig's idea that one cannot make moves for a perfect life but has to wait how it develops.

The responses to the storytelling project were very positive and can be related to Andersen's concept of emotional knowledge. Meier explains that learning from one another was a powerful experience for the community. DAAE seeks to continue the project and Meier shares how the conversations invoked fruitful discussions among the community and beyond. A theatre company even offered to transform a story into a theatre play. This development highlights the importance of emotional knowledge in Bildung, as it creates intergenerational learning, collective resonance and community empowerment. Meier believes that the Bildung concept is necessary for adult learning as a philosophy and actionable methods for more cohesive and resilient societies.

Second Day

Introduction by Dr Ingrid Schoell

Opening the second day of the stakeholder meeting, Dr. Ingrid Schoell, director of VHS Bonn, shares a few impressions of the Haus der Bildung in Bonn and reflects on the previous day. Dr Ingrid Schoell, the director of VHS Bonn highlights how Bildung cannot only support every person to become a better author of their life but also shapes the collective foundations of social cohesion. She points out the opportunities of the digital world and warmly welcomes the stakeholders.

Bildung on the European Policy Level, Gina Ebner (EAEA)

A new strategy for ALE

Gina Ebner, the Secretary-General of the European Association for the Education of Adults gives an inspiring presentation on the state of the art of European education policy, referring to the Bildung idea. Ebner reveals that the past years have seen a trend towards more holistic approaches to education. This includes a new focus on life-wide learning and participation.

While the Lisbon Strategy (2000-2010), pushed for a learning economy, the European Commission has recently shifted its objective. The new transition narrative is "green and digital" and incorporates life skill approaches. The [2020 Agenda for Adult Learning](#) set a standard that needs to be continued and expanded to meet the needs of education for

citizenship and Sustainable Development. Upskilling Pathways has given people the chance to adapt their job circumstances but left out those with insufficient basic skills (such as numeracy and digital competences).

Guerilla gardeners

While the European Union operates on written policy statements, adult educators continue to use grassroots approaches, Ebner argues. "Adult educators are guerilla gardeners." Ebner draws on a powerful metaphor here, in which adult educators are planting the seeds of Bildung. Reconnecting to the very traditions of adult education, she explains how adult education derived from self-organised workers who wanted to learn more. Striving towards education for self-fulfilment, educators should become guerilla gardeners on the European level, seed bombing holistic education whereby revisiting the roots of adult learning.

Policy for Bildung?

On the policy level, the most recent publication of the European Education, however, does not mention adult learning. Instead, a strong focus remains on vocational education and training. The [Digital Competence Framework](#), alongside the [Life Competence Framework](#), were important developments, yet, a neo-liberal view on education continues to dominate in the European Union. Bildung is a cornerstone of democracy and should be treated as such, by e.g. investing in more research and funding.

Ebner concludes the past years more room for Bildung opened in the European policy arena, while the ALE sector remains a small world. From a realist perspective, it will take a couple more years to make Bildung and a holistic approach to education a priority on the European education agenda.

Responding to Gina Ebner's presentation the stakeholder raised a range of comments. The struggle of recognition was addressed, alongside the importance of the upcoming CONFINTEA process. Gina Ebner responds and shares that what was once literacy, numeracy and basic skills, is slowly becoming citizenship education and life skills. There is hope for transformative education approaches that incorporate the Bildung vision.

Reflections on Bildung by Dr. Ingrid Schoell , Director of VHS Bonn

Responding to Gina Ebner's reflection Dr Ingrid Schoell, the director of VHS Bonn, shares that the Sustainable Development Goals are a good step into the right direction, showing the interconnectedness of global problems. Dr Schoell sees digitalisation as closely connected to Bildung, especially in tackling the inequalities that have been widened by the global COVID-19 pandemic. According to her, fostering language abilities should be another cornerstone of a Bildung agenda.

In the second part of her presentation, Dr Schoell shows a range of good practises from Bonn. She explains how museums are educational models that show a cultural approach to learning, where teaching goes beyond skills and instead centres around life. Dr Schoell argues that glocalisation goes hand in hand with Bildung, reflecting on the trans-disciplinary approaches that Andersen and Tippelt proposed. Finally, Dr Schoell calls for practising Bildung face to face, while using digital tools for communication.

Group Conversations:

How can we use the concept of Bildung in various fields of ALE?

In the final participatory section of the conference, stakeholders had the chance to discuss the concept of Bildung from four different perspectives in small groups: concerning democracy, sustainability, basic education and digitalisation.

Democracy

On the topic of Bildung and democracy, the stakeholders highlighted the need for strong citizenship education, especially with the rise of populism in Europe. Basic skills are a necessary pillar of adult education to strengthen democracy. In Germany, a project supports education for democracy for migrants, despite them not being able to partake in the elections. In Ireland education for democracy is closely connected to community education that raises awareness on social issues on the ground. Many stakeholders agreed that more financial and ideological support towards collective adult citizenship education is needed in Europe.

Sustainability

The group focusing on sustainability highlights that climate change awareness and sustainability have still not made it on the agenda of adult learning. The challenges of the climate crisis will, however, affect learners across generations. The group calls on organisations to implement green aspects in their courses, link with local environmental organisations and advocate for more dialogue between politicians and citizens (e.g citizens assemblies). Informal learning is key in Bildung and sustainability education. Instead of focusing on the skills for the labour market, Bildung could promote a holistic understanding of sustainability that stresses life-skills and the importance of intergenerational learning.

Basic skills

From the perspective of basic skills, the stakeholders argue that basic skills are at the foundation of Bildung. Trends show that basic skill frameworks have shifted to become more technical in some countries (Austria), while other countries furthered the intersection between basic education and democracy (Finland). In Germany, basic skill research

contributed to policy making and hence more investment in basic skill education. In Portugal basic skill programs are focused on the elderly. Overall, the conversation depicts a diversity of approaches to basic education across Europe.

Digitalisation

The stakeholder discussion on digitalisation presented the impacts of the digital divide (exclusion) and highlighted that digitalisation is not a reality for all. For Bildung, digitalisation offers great chances but can restrict inter-personal communication at the same time. Critically investigating today's digital democracy based on the power of the internet raises the question of ethics and narrative, as posed by Lene Rachel Andersen. Finally, the group calls for guerilla digitalisation and a need for equitable access to technology, broadband and digital education.

The way forward, Uwe Gartenschlaeger, DVV international

Closing the fruitful discussions, Uwe Gartenschlaeger ends on a forward-looking note. He invites the participants to share their thoughts on the EPALE platform and get involved in the Erasmus + Bildung Project. It would be possible to establish a Community of Practise on the EPALE platform. Please get in touch with Uwe Gartenschlaeger if you are interested: gartenschlaeger@dvv-international.de

Organisers

DVV International (Institute for International Cooperation of the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband)

EAEA (European Association for the Education of Adults)

VHS Bonn (Adult Education Center, Bonn)

EAAL Germany (European Agenda for Adult Learning / National Agency)