

SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE
EPALE and Erasmus+ Adult Education 2024

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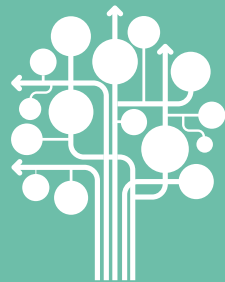


PARTICIPATION IN FOCUS

Pathways to active participation
through adult education

EPALE

Austria | E-Platform for
Adult Learning in Europe



EPALE

Austria

PARTICIPATION IN FOCUS

Pathways to active participation through adult education

SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE
EPALE and Erasmus+ Adult Education 2024

Programm Nachmittag
13:30 - 15:00

Veranstaltung: 1000 Sommergespräche

Erasmus Projekt „Wie Europa geht“ - Orientierung über aktive Europaverbindungen
Kleine Arbeitsgruppen, Mitarbeiter-Entwicklungsworkshop, gemeinsame Online-Produktion

Orte der Partizipation: Mit Bibliotheken Projekte umsetzen
Versteht Lehrende, Professoren Bibliothek

Konkrete Schritte zu Zielen und Zielgruppen der politischen Verantwortlichen
Begrüßung der neuen Erasmus, Chancen und Herausforderungen für die Zukunft

Demokratie-Förderung: Ein Erasmus-Kollegen (aus Italien) im Gespräch
Aber: Diskussion über die 1000 Sommergespräche für die Zukunft der Bibliothek

15:30 - 16:30



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Speakers and the organizing team of the conference

The 2024 EPALE and Erasmus+ Conference entitled “Participation in focus: Pathways to active participation through adult education” was held at the Urania in Vienna on 22 May 2024.

The conference centred around the role of adult education in promoting participation in society. Through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competences, adults can be empowered to actively take part in political, social, and economic processes.

Two interactive presentations offered insights into the system of adult civic education in Austria and Switzerland as well as networking activities in German-speaking Europe. Innovative approaches and methods for the promotion of social participation, some of which were developed as part of Erasmus+, were presented in the idea and networking pools.

Visitors to the conference also had the opportunity to learn about projects during a project exhibition and get information at the Erasmus+ Corner.

In this interactive setting, over 80 participants from Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein networked with one another.

This conference publication provides insights into successful approaches in adult education for the promotion of active participation. It also furnishes information about the opportunities that the Erasmus+ Programme offers for individuals’ learning mobility and cooperation amongst organisations and institutions in adult education and about how EPALE can support project work.

As the National Agency for Erasmus+, OeAD coordinates EPALE in Austria. OeAD would like to thank everyone who contributed to this publication as presenters and authors.

The entire team at OeAD hopes you enjoy reading this publication!

Carin Dániel Ramírez-Schiller
Eva Baloch-Kaloianov
Andrea Nakarada
Anna Schneider

I am delighted to welcome you on behalf of the Federal Ministry's Department of Adult Education. Today's topic, "Focusing on Participation or Participation through Adult Education", ties in very well with the main subject tackled at the most recent EPALE themed conference. This revolved around critical media literacy in the face of fake news and technologies that make it harder to tell how true a piece of information is. Teaching the necessary competences in this area too is vital for adult education.

A few weeks ago, we received the results of the Adult Education Survey, which show that Austria has a very good level of participation in education. This now stands at 58 per cent according to the latest findings from the survey – well above the EU average of 47 per cent. Although we weathered the coronavirus pandemic well in terms of numbers in the adult education sector, we need to keep our eyes firmly on the challenges and on how adult education can continue to make a difference where it is required: in responding to people's needs, specifically the

target group of socially disadvantaged people and those with lower levels of qualifications. And it is precisely these groups of people that have a particularly sceptical attitude towards democracy and science, which is also leading them to become increasingly withdrawn from democratic co-existence.

In conjunction with this year's topic, we still have a great deal to do to get these groups of people involved in programmes of education. The Department of Adult Education is endeavouring to aid efforts to tackle these challenges with suitable measures. These include promoting corresponding development projects and educational activities in adult education, doing more to incorporate academic and scientific perspectives into day-to-day work, and creating space for debate but also raising public awareness of adult education and the institutions delivering it. One of our forthcoming projects will be to use scientific findings to provide appropriate democracy education and science education activities in order to reach

precisely these ultra-sceptical people who are susceptible to fake news or “alternative facts”. Needless to say, we are reliant on the expertise of people from science and industry for this work. With that in mind, I am very much looking forward to the papers and discussions coming up at this conference!

I would like to finish by extending my most heartfelt thanks to everyone involved in organizing the EPALE and Erasmus+ Conference 2024, but especially – of course – the EPALE national support service and its staff who, as always, have shown a great deal of professionalism in organising the event. The crucial and fascinating input and the no-less-fascinating workshops that are lined up for this publication will show us just how diverse this topic is. I hope that everyone taking part finds the reading enjoyable and exciting and learns something that they can take home with them and apply to their own area of work. Thank you very much!



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Encouraging participation through **EPALE and ERASMUS+ Adult Education**

With the European elections in June, the National Council election in autumn, and various rounds of local elections at district and municipality level, 2024 is a bumper election year in Austria. This is making active participation in democratic life in Austria and Europe all the more important. Getting all citizens actively involved, facilitating participation, and helping to build the necessary competences will be key to determining what happens next in Europe. Participation is crucial to peaceful co-existence. Without it, I firmly believe that no Green Deal will be possible in the future and sustainable development will remain off the table.

The importance of adult education

Successful participation depends squarely on education and on the right knowledge and skills being in place. And adult education has a major role to play, not least as it has the biggest target group of all due to the demographic trend currently under way in Europe. It is also the sector with the highest level of diversity. This makes adult education especially challenging but also especially important. In this segment perhaps more than any other, we need to make sure that we are encouraging participation in this very large and highly diverse target group. This is a vital duty of adult education, as the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) explicitly recognises in its [10 Recommendations for the European Elections 2024](#): *“the strengthening of democracy cannot become a reality without adult learning and education”*. Without adult education, therefore, this challenging aim of supporting civic participation and active citizenship cannot be achieved.

Active participation a priority for ERASMUS+

The issue of participation is also accorded due importance in the EU's ERASMUS+ Programme with its *“Participation in democratic life, common values, and civic engagement”* priority. It is one of the four horizontal priorities for ERASMUS+ alongside “Inclusion and diversity”, “Digital transformation”, and “Environment and fight against



climate change”, with all these priorities being interrelated and, in some cases, closely interlinked. Take inclusion and participation, for instance: Without participation, there can be no inclusion. A “horizontal priority” also means that it applies to the whole ERASMUS+ Programme and is intended to be reflected in all its projects. ERASMUS+ makes corresponding financial resources available to support participation in democracy and social and civic engagement through formal and informal learning activities. Thus, for instance, ERASMUS+ funds projects building social and intercultural competences, critical media literacy, or critical thinking. It provides a way to put existing strategies into practice, try them out under real-life conditions, and devise new methods and instruments. We are delighted to see that there is also correspondingly

high demand for ERASMUS+ funding in adult education, particularly for Small-scale Partnerships and large-scale collaborative projects. By our first application deadline in spring 2024, we had received nearly 80 submissions. What is particularly pleasing is the fact that many projects address participation-related themes such as “empowerment” and “media literacy”. In Austria, this important topic clearly appears to have already become part of adult education, particularly ERASMUS+ Adult Education.

The role and purpose of EPALE

EPALE – the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe – is assisting and supporting this development. OeAD coordinates EPALE in Austria as the National Agency for Erasmus+., meaning that there are already close links between this network and the EU’s funding programmes. For example, EPALE runs a marketplace for project partners, where interested parties can find partners for their projects in Europe. In addition, the online platform offers a wide range of stimulating resources, events, and information on various adult education topics including “participation and active citizenship”. Many project organisers also use EPALE to spread the word about their projects. Anyone who has not yet signed up to it might be interested to learn that an event announcement or project report posted on the EPALE online platform will now reach some 145,000 adult educators throughout Europe, including about 1,700 people in Austria – an impressive level of coverage for presenting and sharing project results. EPALE is focusing on three main topics in 2024: training and reskilling for the digital transformation; adult education for sustainable development; and adult education as a route out of poverty. In so doing, it is picking up on a number of key priorities of the ERASMUS+ Programme and helping to put them into



practice.

Taking stock of ERASMUS+

The ERASMUS+ Programme (2021–2027) has already reached its halfway stage, and the first set of results are now available for an interim appraisal. Overall, there would appear to be widespread agreement with the structure of the programme and the priorities chosen for it. By setting inclusion, digitalisation, participation in democracy, and protecting the environment and fighting climate change as its priorities, a number of key challenges were identified that will bring Europe forward if they are met. The programme has also been particularly successful in reaching

out to newcomers, especially as part of ERASMUS+ Adult Education. This is important to ensure that, rather than ERASMUS+ remaining the preserve of insiders, the net of participants is cast ever wider and the added value that projects and activities of this kind bring is recognised across Europe. Adult education must remain a firm fixture on the EU's future agenda, as indeed it looks highly likely to. The importance of adult education within the context of the programme's four horizontal priorities, including in terms of its large and highly diverse target group, is beyond dispute. Now let us hope that this is also reflected in a larger slice of the budget in the future. The demographic change currently under way in Europe is lending this segment of the education sector added importance. Adult education plays

a particularly key role in basic education and in involving those with lower levels of qualifications.

The future of Erasmus+

As Austria's National Agency, we are committed to ensuring that participation in ERASMUS+ becomes a natural step that goes on everyone's CV. There are so many important issues and challenges in Europe right now, and education – and thus the EU's education programmes – will be crucial to implementing and tackling all these key issues and concerns. Through international dialogue and cooperation, they promote European solidarity, mutual understanding, and a sense of togetherness. All of these are important foundations whose absence will make it very hard to achieve all the other objectives set at European level. ERASMUS+ is not merely something that is “nice to have”. Rather, it is vital for cohesion within Europe.

The impact of European programmes

Needless to say, education policy is determined at national level – it is clearly a power held by individual countries. Nevertheless, European initiatives have had and continue to have a significant impact, particularly as regards continued development and quality assurance in this area. Europe is exerting a positive influence on national education systems, not least via opportunities for funding such as ERASMUS+. By participating actively in the June 2024 European elections, we will be helping to shape the future of the European Union and thus also the future of mobility and education programmes like ERASMUS+.



Dr. Carin Dániel Ramírez-Schiller

has been Head of the Erasmus+ Adult Education & Cross-sectoral Topics Area and Deputy Head of the Department for Europe, Education, Youth at OeAD since 2014. After earning a doctorate in political science and history at the University of Vienna, she started her career as a training assistant and later a marketing assistant at a software company before joining OeAD-GmbH in 1994.

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Everything you need to know about the funding opportunities under ERASMUS+, upcoming events, and what advice is available can be found on our website at www.erasmusplus.at

Adult civic education and participation

Adult civic education is geared towards increasing participation amongst adults, specifically in the political sphere. The Austrian Society for Civic Education (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Politische Bildung, ÖGPB) has adopted this definition of civic education:

“We understand civic education as a guided, institutionalised opportunity to reflect on political ideas in order to promote critical awareness, the ability to make judgments independently, and active participation in politics. Processes of reflection on politics and society that are instigated in a targeted way have the potential to enhance individual and structural potential for change, open up opportunities for action, and unlock tangible interventions.”

The key terms in this definition are “active participation in politics”, “potential for change”, “opportunities for action”, and “interventions”. Whether the corresponding objectives can be achieved depends on a number of specific environmental factors, which themselves can be found within the political sphere. As things stand, it would appear that a number of obstacles lie along the “New Paths to Active Participation”, to borrow from the conference title.

Three obstacles on the path to participation

Three trends would seem to me to be particularly relevant: 1.) the shift towards authoritarianism; 2.) conspiracy theories and disinformation; and 3.) exclusive democracy. I will now outline them briefly before offering some potential solutions from an adult civic education perspective.

The shift towards authoritarianism

The “shift towards authoritarianism” is a catch-all term encompassing trends that are making politics and society more authoritarian in nature. One of its key characteristics is the increasing transfer of powers from the legislative to the executive. As the world grappled with the 2008 financial and economic crisis, observers watched as the “troika” – a grouping newly established at the time consisting of the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Commission – imposed stringent belt-tightening measures on Greece, an EU member state. This austerity policy was ordered by an unelected body and had a devastating impact on the Greek people. Another



Discussion at the EPALE themed conference

example of power being transferred from the legislative to the executive can be seen in France, where the political executive decreed a state of emergency following the 2015 Islamist terror attacks that President François Hollande extended several times in the two years that followed. His successor Emmanuel Macron then transposed the main provisions of this state of emergency into national law in the form of tougher security legislation. “Illiberal democracy”, i.e. an authoritarian variant of its representative cousin, is another key component of a shift towards authoritarianism. Countries like Hungary, Türkiye, and Russia may possess the institutional prerequisites of a democracy, but their citizens face restrictions – some of them severe – on exercising their fundamental rights. There is a noticeable lack of civil rights and liberties (e.g. restriction on political opposition) as well as government controls on the media and bans on NGOs. States with authoritarian elements target inactive citizens and thus prevent their participation.

Conspiracy theories and disinformation

The COVID-19 pandemic saw the emergence of brand-new conspiracy theories as well as the growth of existing ones

– what the two strands have in common is the anti-Semitic sentiment underlying them. Disinformation, i.e. deliberately spreading incorrect information, has also gained in importance in recent years. Both phenomena instill in their followers the semblance of being informed (“We’re the only ones who know the truth!”) and of getting something done (“We’re unmasking the great conspiracy!”), thus making citizen participation harder to achieve.

Exclusive democracy

There are two facets to the concept of exclusive democracy: linking the right to vote to the holding of citizenship and the correlation between voter turnout and social inequality. Non-Austrian nationals cannot vote in Austria (apart from EU citizens, who are permitted to vote in local elections). This means that more and more people living in Austria are disenfranchised. Although the federal government could use legislative means – in this case naturalisation – to strengthen political inclusion, Austria has a restrictive naturalisation policy with high hurdles to overcome for anyone wanting to gain citizenship. As a result, the country has one of the lowest naturalisation rates in the EU. If we are talking about the obstacles to adult participation, we also need to mention social inequality. As long ago as 2015, the political scientist Armin Schäfer demonstrated in his book *Der Verlust Politischer Gleichheit* (“The Loss of Political Equality”) that the decline in participation is happening extremely unevenly, because it is primarily poor sections of the population and blue-collar workers who are increasingly opting not to vote. And this loss of political equality is not being compensated for by other forms of participation, as voluntary and political engagement increases with one’s level of education and income. A tendency for certain sections of the population to be structurally excluded from processes of participation can be observed in an “exclusive democracy”.



Key note

These three trends – the shift towards authoritarianism, conspiracy theories and disinformation, and exclusive democracy – make for an ambivalent relationship between civic education and the political sphere. This is because political educators are confronted by the obstacles on the path to participation while also being expected to strengthen that participation. Although they cannot overcome these obstacles on their own, it is possible to identify a number of starting points for promoting participation.

Proposals for adult civic education

To tackle the three obstacles on the path to participation, I would like to put forward three proposals for promoting it. They are intended as initial suggestions and will need to be explored in greater depth and trialled under real-life conditions.

Tackling the juxtaposition between democracy and dictatorship

Although representing political systems by contrasting “democracy” with “dictatorship” is common both in the public debate and in political education, it fails to get to the heart of today’s problems. Taking account of current trends in society, we need to promote an understanding of intermediate forms such as “illiberal democracies” in political education. Political educators often stress that democracy is not just a system of government but a way of life. Many learners probably wonder – and rightly so – exactly where democracy exists in their lives if they are excluded from it or if important areas such as their school, their place of work, or even their adult education institution are not organised in a particularly democratic way. Although it is undeniably important to highlight the possibilities afforded by democracies, any attempt to overexaggerate them merits critical scrutiny, not least to prevent learners from becoming frustrated.

Increasing real-world relevance

“Adults cannot be told what to do” was the firm belief of Horst Siebert, an educationalist and professor of adult education for many years, who died in 2022. If this is indeed the case, then there is a need to make real-life issues, methods, and access criteria a greater part of adult education too, starting with what learners experience and are affected by day to day. One of the major challenges in civic education is the fact that events are mainly attended by those people who are *already interested in and knowledgeable about* the topics being addressed as it is – to an extent, therefore, even civic education is not immune from echo chambers and filter bubbles. Real-life circumstances must thus also be taken into consideration when designing and advertising events as well as when picking a time and venue for them. Another important duty is to provide

services for structurally excluded sections of the population while stressing that the reason people are (educationally) disadvantaged has nothing to do with a failure or lack of effort on their part – rather, it is their environment that is hindering their participation. Rather than primarily being a question of offering something *for* the target group, however, educational offerings must be planned and designed *with* them.

Increasing the funding for adult civic education and embedding it more firmly in the mainstream

I would like to finish with a suggestion for improving participation that, although it might seem obvious, is nonetheless crucial: increasing the funding for adult civic education and embedding it more firmly in the mainstream. Austria is clearly home to a large number of organisations and associations that are highly dedicated to civic education. They should be strengthened further by securing greater public funding, fostering acceptance by society, and ensuring that civic education is institutionalised to an adequate extent in order to encourage political participation too in the medium to long term.

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Adult civic education in Switzerland and collaboration within German-speaking Europe, including workshop „Democracy Fitness“

The current state of civic education in Switzerland

In comparison to countries like Germany, civic education in Switzerland is still in a stage of infancy. While framework conditions and concepts such as the Beutelsbach Consensus, which aims to prevent learners from being overwhelmed and indoctrinated, have been firmly anchored in Germany for a long time now, they are often not even known in Switzerland. Here, there is often an unwarranted fear that civic education could lead to indoctrination, which has in turn resulted in civic education being taught mainly in the form of political science for many years.

So it is not surprising that, in Switzerland, non-formal education in particular plays a big role in civic education. This is provided by many different stakeholders, including youth parliaments, associations, political parties, trade unions, and non-profit organisations. One well-known example is the Easyvote programme of the Swiss youth parliaments umbrella organisation, DSJ, that aims to promote the civic participation of young adults by means of easy-to-understand election and voting information.

The current state of adult civic education in Switzerland

The offers for adults are largely organised privately and left to one's own responsibility. Opinions are therefore shaped by the media, adult education centres, museums, and informal education. There is a need for action here, as dangerous trends are also evident in Switzerland. For instance, faith in political institutions is declining and interest in politics is dwindling while social capital is also decreasing. To counteract this, there are numerous offers for adult civic education supplied by various institutions and organisations. These range from workshops, seminars, and information portals to specialised educational programmes. These projects often face similar challenges. For instance, they often do not reach marginalised groups and peripheral regions, have problems with long-term financing, and focus primarily on disseminating knowledge. Yet, despite these challenges, there are many projects that have been doing outstanding work for many years. A (non-exhaustive) list of projects can be found at campusdemokratie.ch/projekte.



interactive exercise

We can gladly advise you and also make direct arrangements; please write to us at info@campusdemokratie.ch. Thanks to Movetia, the Swiss counterpart to Erasmus+, collaboration with Swiss stakeholders is definitely possible!

National and international networks

With **Campus für Demokratie**, we promote civic education and participation throughout Switzerland. We achieve this by pointing out synergies, by providing advice and accompanying projects, and by developing an active network. In doing so, we strive to show as many stakeholders as possible that we are all stakeholders in democracy, regardless of which sector we are from. In addition, we initiate projects ourselves, for example by coordinating the International Day of Democracy on 15 September as well as GoVote and

Democracy Fitness. All projects centre around systematic action for a lively democracy. And because synergies do not end at national borders, we have jointly created the Offene Gesellschaft initiative and Demokratie21 throughout German-speaking Europe via **Faktor D**, a network aimed at strengthening democracy. Faktor D strives to achieve strategic networking, the dissemination of knowledge, and collective impact. The theme of our mission is to connect stakeholders across national and sectoral borders so that they can all learn from one another and become active. In addition to personal consultations, we also organise innovative processes, the “Im Diskurs” online format, and the annual “Mitmach”-festival – the first trinational democracy festival! You can register here: <https://faktor-d.org/mitmacht-2024>

Democracy Fitness: a Danish concept comes to Switzerland

„We look after our teeth without really thinking about it. Let's look after our democracy too!“

Democracy Fitness is a programme designed to encourage active participation in society in a fun way by training citizens' "democracy muscles". Invented in Denmark in 2017, the concept has now taken off in many other European countries. It comprises a number of 30-minute workshops teaching a range of skills and values that are important for democratic co-existence. The organisation Campus für Demokratie ("Campus for Democracy") is now bringing this concept to Switzerland, because we too are in need of stronger democratic processes of negotiation.

Workshop in Vienna – a first-hand report

Delegates at the [EPALE and ERASMUS+ Conference held in Vienna on 22 May](#) were invited to attend a 90-minute workshop led by Noa Dibbasey and myself, Marc Steinemann, from Campus für Demokratie. We wanted to train two key "democracy muscles" that participants possessed – their courage muscle and their disagreement muscle.

Training the courage muscle

We began the workshop by training our courage muscles, starting with a brief introduction in which we explained how courage is important in a democratic society. People need courage in order to express their opinion and stand up for their values, both in their daily lives and in political processes. Participants learnt for themselves how differ-



Democracy Fitness workshop

ent feelings are linked to certain body positions before being asked to pick a cause that they wanted to advocate for while demonstrating courage in the process. They then got into pairs to discuss the previous activity and encourage each other. This exercise showed that courage can be strengthened collectively as well as individually.

Discussion about rolling out the concept to Austria

After the first part of the workshop, we discussed how the Democracy Fitness concept could be introduced in Austria and adapted accordingly. We shared our experiences from Switzerland and gathered ideas and suggestions from participants. It was impressive to see how committed and creative the proposals were, and it was clear that there is widespread interest in getting the programme off the ground.

Training the disagreement muscle

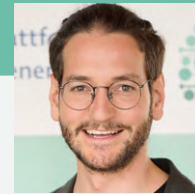
The third part of our workshop focused on the disagreement muscle. The aim was to show those taking part how important it is to be accepting of different views, to stand

up for what you yourself think, and to deal constructively with differences of opinion. We kicked things off with an exercise in which participants had to take a stance on a range of controversial topics. This was because the subsequent discussions required us to have issues that divided people roughly into two camps, something that proved harder than we had expected! Finally, we identified diet and nutrition as a topic that split the field evenly. The next exercise consisted in debating a controversial issue in pairs, listening actively to what was being said, and rebutting it respectfully. The exercise highlighted how, besides being completely normal, differences of opinion are also highly valuable for a functioning democracy.

Concluding remarks and outlook

The workshop concluded with a final motivational round in which we stressed the importance in our day-to-day lives of the two muscles that we had been training. I told participants that these skills are useful in many areas of our lives, not only in political debates. We gave everyone a pin badge to thank them for taking part and encouraged them to keep on using and practising the skills that they had acquired.

The workshop in Vienna was a success and a good example of how Democracy Fitness can bring people together and motivate them to participate actively in society. The positive feedback that we received and the sustained interest that we are seeing indicate that the concept has significant potential in Austria too. Democracy Fitness can help to make people more democracy-minded and encourage civic participation – a major step towards a vibrant and resilient democracy.



Born and raised in Bern, **Marc Steinemann** is committed to civic education and participation both privately and professionally. For more than a year now, he has participated in developing the tri-national “Faktor D” platform and is responsible for its implementation in Switzerland. Marc is motivated by the fact that transnational learning provides a unique opportunity to get to know different societies and their approaches to common challenges, and to benefit from a deeper understanding and more effective collaboration within German-speaking Europe.

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Erasmus+ project „We Europeans – Countering populism through active European citizenship!“

The 2024 bumper election year promises significant political course-setting in Europe. With the European elections, parliamentary elections in Austria and Belgium, and provincial and municipal elections, citizens have the opportunity to actively participate in shaping the future of their countries and the entire continent. Increasing political disenchantment and a swing to the right in many European countries give cause for concern, and for good reason. The effects on social cohesion are clear to see. According to the IPSOS Global Advisor survey [Populism in 2024](#), 60 per cent of Europeans agree with the statement that their society is broken.

Populists use the idea of a broken society to promote an “us against them” narrative. They present themselves as the true representatives of the “people” against a supposedly corrupt elite or against certain minorities. If populists successfully paint the picture of a broken society, it also lowers the trust in democratic institutions and processes. People doubt the ability of democracy to solve their problems, with the consequence that many people withdraw from public life, which in turn weakens democratic participation. But precisely democratic participation and active citizenship are effective means for combating populism. A functioning democracy lives on the engagement of its citizens.

The challenge lies in countering these narratives by promoting a positive, integrative, and fact-based political debate that strengthens social cohesion and restores trust in democratic institutions. When citizens act on an informed, engaged, and responsible basis, they can effectively oppose populist tendencies and preserve a strong, resilient democracy.

But how exactly do you combat populism and how do you deal with statements you encounter in your professional and/or private life that actually leave you speechless? During the We-Europeans workshop at the Austrian EPALE con-



ference “Focusing on Participation: New Paths to Active Involvement through Adult Education” on 22 May 2024, we looked at strategies for counteracting populism.

According to a definition by the Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde, populism is “a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”¹.

“We”, the good, upstanding citizens, are deceived by an “elite” that is only concerned with its own interests. Along with “those at the top”, the “others” are another component of the populist threat scenario. People who endanger or exploit the pure people – people with a migration background, a different religion, a different culture, a different family model, and so forth. Populist parties and their leaders

are the only ones who represent the people against these threats by the elite and/or outsiders.

This highly negative view of populism is especially prevalent in Europe. However, it must be borne in mind that populism builds on one of the most important aspects of democracy: the sovereignty of the people. Populism is an indicator for social problems and rises whenever there are issues that the population feels are not being addressed sufficiently, bringing topics onto the political agenda that are considered to be important.

In any case, however, the divisive rhetoric of right-wing populism poses a significant threat to social cohesion and democratic values. Countering this rhetoric and marginalising, right-wing populist movements is a crucial social challenge of our time. Increased political education and the promotion of an active civil society are key for successfully facing this challenge. The Erasmus+ project We-Europeans contributes to this and provides free content for disseminating knowledge and getting active at www.we-europeans.eu.

However, populism is also a challenge in our everyday lives, be it professionally or in our free time. It is often difficult to know how to react when populist ideas are expressed by colleagues, clients, or students or populist slogans are heard among friends and family, neighbours, or at the sports club. Should you really always confront these people? What arguments can you counter with, and how can you be convincing?

It is important to stay calm and remain friendly, even though this can be difficult. Lecturing, taking an arrogant tone, or even mocking achieves the opposite of the intended effect.



Populist spokespeople are difficult to impossible to convince, and handle themselves very skilfully. But populist spokespeople are not the only ones that can be reached. It can be worthwhile to talk to people who may be undecided or seem to be indifferent or neutral. By offering alternative perspectives, you can prevent others from blindly accepting populist opinions. And at the same time, this bolsters people who are the target of divisive messages.

At populist events, on the other hand, a situation where you are most likely very much in the minority, it is not worth getting into a discussion because the group is generally caught up in a self-reinforcing dynamic in this case.

When it comes to the argumentation itself, it helps to ask follow-up questions: How exactly does the speaker mean that statement, can he/she provide evidence, where did he/she find that again, who said or did that, and how do those points go together? By asking targeted follow-up questions, you may reveal inconsistencies and force the other person to back their statements up. Do not allow yourself to be distracted, and insist on answers. If possible, list facts yourself and provide sources.

It is also important to agree when you see something in a similar way or something is correct. Not every argument should be rejected out of hand simply because it is expressed by someone with a populist stance. Sugarcoating things simply to avoid providing arguments for people who believe in populist theories is not a good solution because this can be refuted easily and weakens your own position in the long run. This point came up during the workshop at the “Focusing on Participation” conference when discussing students with a migration background. One teacher gladly described such students as being particularly hard-working and attentive so as not to leave him/herself open to criticism. Student behaviour has little to do with nationality, and there are attentive and less attentive students everywhere. Admitting this shows that you have a realistic perception and may help provide a mutual basis for the rest of the conversation.

However, whenever the tone of a discussion becomes insulting or hurtful, or discriminative or racist comments are made, it is time to set clear boundaries. Express your disapproval and do not allow any further discussion. There were also specific examples of such situations at the workshop. One instructor ended a discussion with students so as not to provide a platform for further comments of this nature.

Discussions with close friends and family represent a particular challenge. Lots of people avoid sensitive subjects in order to not jeopardise their relationships with these people. Differences of opinion about factual topics should not carry over to the interpersonal relationship. However, tuning out certain subjects can present its own set of problems because this can also lead to an escalation if a topic eventually does make its way into the conversation. You should try to lead a constructive discussion and express your own point of view, but still be respectful to the other person. Listen, give the other person the chance to present his/her arguments, and try not to get emotional. Emphasise aspects you have in common and use humour. People can have different opinions and points of view without the entire relationship being called into question.

Confronting the divisive rhetoric of populism is a challenge, but it is one we have to face. With preparation, constructive communication, a calm, objective demeanour, and support, you can make a confident and convincing impression. You are not alone – lots of people share your democratic values and are on your side.

Together, we can build a strong and resilient society.



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¹ According to Mudde & Kaltwasser (2019): Populism: A Very Short Introduction. Federal Agency for Civic Education.

Places of participation: Implementing projects with libraries

For over a decade now, the common conception of the library as a place to borrow media has gradually been countered by a new idea of the library as a place of encounter and participation.

This paradigm shift – “from collection to connection” – also means that public libraries are serving many more functions than merely stocking their shelves with the latest bestsellers. Although the dissemination of media, reading, and information skills is still an important core task for public libraries, in a certain respect the visitors themselves are now part of the media collection in the 21st century, as they can act as “living books” as active participants.

This new form of actively involving people in the design of libraries’ programmes and offerings is changing and expanding the duties of librarians by requiring them to work together – participatively – with (future) visitors.

Self-fulfilment, development, and experimentation via new formats

Today, libraries not only offer various media for a wide range of topics and areas of interest in addition to literary education, but also make their spaces available for “Book-start” events, seed banks, makerspaces, STEM stations, smart cafés, science afternoons, libraries of things, citizen science, various workshops, dialogue and discussion events, lectures, vernissages, and much more for people of all ages. This includes not only indoor spaces, but also outdoor spaces and, of course, digital spaces. More detailed information about these new formats in library work can be found at the website www.treffpunkt-bibliothek.at.



Some of the offerings and projects of the libraries in the federal province of Lower Austria listed above, which facilitate participation by the public as well as organisations, associations, and the like and thus contribute to the mutual shaping of community life, were presented during the workshop at the [2024 EPALE and Erasmus+ Conference entitled “Focusing on Participation: New Paths to Active Participation through Adult Education”](#). The participative aspects of the projects and the work of Lower Austrian libraries were explained in detail, and the differences between cooperation and participation were illustrated. While cooperation generally centres around a mutual goal of the partners that is defined fairly precisely in advance, and the various contributions to the cooperation in the form of financing, work, promotion, and so on are agreed upon so that everyone involved benefits from the cooperation, participation involves coming up with a goal together in the first place.

The process definitely requires flexibility on the part of all the partners, as the goal can sometimes change or new approaches for achieving the goal can emerge.

Using a stage model of participation (source: Unger, Block, Wright 2010), it was illustrated how, on the basis of the level of involvement, participation can go from other-directed token participation through the so-called preliminary stages of participation (hearing, inclusion) and ultimately to true participation in the form of active contribution and even decision-making power.

*“If you want to walk fast, walk alone.
If you want to walk far, walk together.”*

(African proverb)

The “risks” one is exposed to when participation is applied, but also the opportunities and ultimately the benefits that can be generated through participation, were examined in a guided discussion.

One disadvantage (“risk”) of participation – if one wants to call it a disadvantage – is the equal right of all partners to contribute. The fact that there is a wide range of needs and attitudes may result in a longer process when it comes to decision-making, implementation, and ultimately the achievement of the goal. However, because all of the participants feel like they are involved, they support the mutual decisions and the outcomes.

The indisputable advantage of participative work is not only the diversity of experiences and knowledge of the participants, but also the fact that resources are multiplied: This pertains to workers, multipliers, financial and other resources in some cases, and – not least – the broadening of the participants’ horizons.

Active democracy is characterised by participation. As public places, libraries can serve as a platform for the residents of a community or city to obtain information about a wide range of topics, to discuss these topics, including topics that are controversial or contentious in the given community/city, and to develop solutions by way of joint initiatives, projects, events, and so forth – or at least to foster understanding for other opinions or attitudes.



Ursula Liebmann, MA, was managing director of the Lower Austrian Association of Community Libraries (Niederösterreichischer Fachverband Kommunale Bibliotheken) starting in 2014, managing director of Forum Erwachsenenbildung NÖ (FEN) starting in 2018, and has been managing director of Treffpunkt Bibliothek since 2019. In 2015, she received the Lower Austrian Culture Award for Intercultural Library Work (Niederösterreichischer Kulturpreis für Interkulturelle Bibliotheksarbeit). Ursula Liebmann is the deputy chairwoman of the Austrian Library Association (Büchereiverband Österreich), a member of the management board of Forum Erwachsenenbildung NÖ, and a member of the Lower Austrian Cultural Senate (Niederösterreichischer Kultursenat).



Erasmus+ BEEP – Basic Education and Empowerment for Political Participation

As part of the Erasmus+ project BEEP, the project consortium worked intensively on issues of participation and adult education. Together with the partner organisations **DAFNI KEK** in Greece, **Associazione Arcipelago** in Italy, **EPATV** in Portugal, **AONTAS** in Ireland and **lernraum.wien | Wiener Volkshochschulen** in Austria, a comprehensive inventory of citizen participation processes was carried out. Interviews were conducted to find out who is excluded from democratic processes, who is involved and what goals and interests are associated with the term “participation”. Workshops with learners helped to find concrete ways to participate.

Democracy without participation is dangerous (BEEP). But “participation” without democracy is a false solution. (Hall 1988)

In order to understand who is excluded and who sees themselves as excluded, the basic **research report** first focussed on the definition of the terms “policy” and “participation”. In order to gain an insight into the understanding of participation at individual, institutional and teacher level, focus group interviews and individual interviews were conducted with learners and teachers of basic education, as well as a focus group discussion with stakeholders.

In the final section, the report looks at existing participatory processes in the partner countries and in other countries of the European Union.

Aspects such as **belonging** and a **sense of belonging to a group** were particularly emphasised by the learners. Personal characteristics such as **shyness** can also stand in the way of formulating concrete ideas for improving the neighbourhood or participating in school assemblies from the perspective of a learner from Italy.



BEEP Kick-off meeting

From a teacher's perspective, participation must lead to real results: *"If participation is conditional, it is not real participation."* (Adult educator in Portugal)

Participation requires *"freedom of expression and responsibility"*. Participation can be exercised at various levels, from the micro to the macro level. Participation in democratic processes is often reduced to the idea of "exercising the right to vote". This is a truncated view. (Adult educator in Portugal)

The topic was also discussed controversially at stakeholder level. For example, there are calls for more **funding** and **multilingual information**, and the safety aspect was also raised.

The **basic research** laid the foundation for understanding the challenges and opportunities in the area of political participation and basic education. It provided important

findings that were incorporated into the development of the project products and ensured that they met the needs and requirements of the target group. This resulted in the [guidelines](#) for stakeholders on promoting political participation and the [recommendations](#) for political decision-makers. The [handbook](#) for trainers with activities and ideas for political participation in adult education lessons is a product that emerged from the workshops with the learners. Further links, resources and ideas can be found in the BEEP [Padlet Resource Hub](#).

"We have the right to participate" (BEEP)

The Stakeholder Guide to Promoting Political Participation summarises twelve obstacles and provides six guidelines for promoting political participation.

Obstacles/challenges include people's **socio-economic status** and possible **lack of education**, which reduces the



likelihood of active participation. **Age** can be a factor in why people feel disconnected from the political system. *“There are generations that have not been instilled with a sense of participation, but if we start working with children, we will have a more participatory society.”* (EPATV focus group report). **Gender roles** and stereotypes can also still influence political engagement. **Minority groups** can be discriminated against and marginalised, leading to lower political participation. **Language barriers** can also play an important role. People living in **rural areas** may have less access to political information and fewer opportunities to participate in political campaigns or events. This barrier was emphasised in various groups (EPATV and VHS focus groups).

Disenchantment with politics or **cynicism** may prevent people from participating in the political process. **Dis-trust** of political institutions and leaders can also prevent people from participating because they believe that their efforts will not lead to meaningful change.

Legal hurdles, the **influence of the media** and **social networks** are further challenges. Finally, the lack of **political education** and **mobilisation efforts** are listed.

Six points are emphasised for the promotion of political participation:

- Information - disclosure of the topic/activity in advance
- Thematic proximity
- Empowerment for participation
- Selection of the location based on the Erasmus+ project SAFE ([Safe spAces For LEarning](#))
- Feedback and
- Involving people right from the start

“Participation is necessary – for democracy and for all areas of life” (BEEP)

The third and final project product is dedicated to [recommendations](#) for political decision-makers.

Seven recommendations were made from all the data collected:

- **Opening up educational** institutions to all people in society, taking into account the social reality of all citizens.
- **Democratisation of digital education** and participatory processes to ensure accessibility and inclusion.

- **Involving citizens in the processes of institutions and organisations** to ensure and promote better alignment between the decisions of organisations and the reality of citizens.
- **Policymakers and decision-makers should use multimodal and accessible means to communicate** with the public while providing clear and understandable information.
- **Political decision-makers must represent all** residents, both citizens and non-citizens, in their decision-making. And they must do so comprehensively and without exception.
- **Adult education institutions and policy makers should introduce civic education for learners in non-formal education**, regardless of their socio-economic background and educational level.

To summarise, the following can be said

Participatory processes generate tensions and conflicts that at best encourage people to work for change. The local environment (family, neighbourhood and region) appears to be more accessible for participation in participatory processes and must therefore be particularly encouraged.

(Political) participation also requires promotion and mediation in the form of formal and informal educational structures (lessons, leisure activities, etc.). And, last but not least, political participation can only succeed through the systematic inclusion of all residents and through the right to participate in larger democratic processes.

Further information on the project products can be found on the projekt website: projectbeep.eu



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Erasmus+ #GetInvolved – Supporting Democracy and Active Citizenship in VET

Over the past decade, Europe has grappled with a surge in populism and EU scepticism among both political leaders and citizens. The initial social divide emerged during the economic crisis of 2008, providing fertile ground for populist parties to exploit tensions between various factions of society. Criticisms of EU institutions, coupled with calls for increased national sovereignty, grew louder, exacerbated by the refugee crisis and the EU's failure to find a unified solution.

Across Member States, populist parties, particularly those on the right, have gained traction in local, regional, and national elections. Examples include the near-victory of France's Front National in presidential elections, the entrance of a right-nationalist party into Germany's parliament for the first time since WWII, and the formation of a right-populist government in Italy. Even in Austria, the Freedom Party, a right-populist party, became part of the government, highlighting a trend where established parties embrace right-wing agendas to secure electoral success.

Public discourse has shifted towards the right, with studies indicating the solidification of right-populist sentiments within society, despite declarations of support for democracy and diversity. The aftermath of Brexit revealed widespread distrust in political systems and representatives, further exacerbated by the European Elections, where right and nationalist parties secured significant seats, challenging the influence of established parties and calling for a rekindling of trust in democratic institutions.



Moreover, nationalist sentiments, racist attacks, and hostility towards asylum seekers underscore threats to European values and human rights, prompting the European Commission to initiate Article 7 procedures against member states violating common EU values.

The #GetInvolved project addresses these pressing issues by promoting democracy and active citizenship in vocational education and training (VET). By fostering democratic thinking, participation, and awareness of discrimination in VET, the project aims to strengthen societal values. It targets young VET learners, empowering them to become the future builders of society, while also engaging VET teachers, trainers, institutions, and companies to combat discrimination and enhance inclusivity.

The project seeks collaboration with chambers, professional associations, and trade unions to address discrimination issues faced by migrant and Muslim VET learners, as well as challenges encountered by female learners in technical professions. It aims to tackle biases within the dual VET system, where applicants with migration backgrounds encounter obstacles in securing positions. Ultimately, the project aims to address discrimination across various facets of VET, ensuring equal opportunities for all learners as they enter the labour market.

The #GetInvolved Project develops the following Outputs:

1. Train the Trainer Workshop

The #GetInvolved project developed a two-day training for teachers and trainers in VET. In diverse methods they learn how to raise awareness for discrimination and exclusion mechanisms such as how to empower themselves & their students in order to making change happen. You can download the workshop in EN, DE, IT and PL.

2. Learner Competitions Guide

The Guide for teachers and trainers helps them to conduct students' competitions. VET-students shall be empowered and motivated to "GetInvolved", to take actively part in civic society and engage in social projects. One possibility is to create internal competitions in school/companies or taking part in already existing competitions or even motivate students to apply in the Solidarity Corps by the European Union.

3. Selfmonitoring Tool

The project developed a Self-Monitoring Tool, which can be used by companies, schools and other institutions within the VET sector, to examine their structure and raise awareness of potential discrimination, participation possibilities or similar.

4. #GetInvolved Label

Building up on the other Outputs the project developed a concept for a certification process that shall lead to the "#GetInvolved" label, which certifies VET-institutions, schools and companies democratic competences and structures. As mentioned, it is important to create role models within the VET-Institutions to cause a real change also in peoples' mind. The label assures a real change within the named institutions, gives them a better visibility, and supports them in the competition for the best young talents.

5. State of the Art Report

The project started in 2020 with a desk research on the situation in the partner countries. We researched about the actual state regarding democracy and discrimination in VET, policy initiatives, funding programmes by the national governments on the topic of democracy, the actual status of the VET programmes where there is room for civic education and collected already existing competitions dealing with democracy.



About the project

All project materials can be found here: [#GetInvolved – Supporting Democracy and Citizenship in VET \(getinvolved-project.eu\)](#)

The project was coordinated by the QBS workshop (Germany). Other partners besides 3s were Leibniz Universität Hannover (Germany), ISFORCOOP (Italy) and Voca Train (Poland).

In 2023, #GetInvolved was recognised with the good practice label by the German National Agency (NABIBB).



Mag.a Julia Fellingner completed her studies in socioeconomics at Vienna University of Economics and Business and KU Leuven and has been involved in national and international research projects at 3s Research & Consulting since 2013, specifically in the comparative analysis of labour market instruments and vocational education and training systems.



Monika Auzinger has been working for more than ten years on research and consulting projects on topics related to education and the labour market, through which she has developed a profound understanding of the diversity and uniqueness of national (vocational) education systems.

Promoting engagement: Digitalisation in volunteering – the role of adult education

In the age of globalisation, the work of non-governmental organisations in the area of volunteering has advanced significantly. There is an increasing level of international integration that makes it possible to exchange experiences and knowledge. Particularly in recent years, the volunteer sector has recognised a growing need with regard to both the exchange of proven practices and the development of volunteers.

One thing that is certain is that people are still very willing to volunteer, as is evidenced by the number of organisations and initiatives. However, the requirements of volunteers are also increasing – they tend to get involved with specific projects and are less willing to attain memberships.

Added to this is pressure for greater professionalism that is also being felt by volunteer organisations. This applies to both administrative organisation and operational implementation. In this context, these organisations are also faced with the challenge of increasingly having to introduce more highly digitised processes and offerings. However, opportunities are also being seen to get more young people involved, who can participate not only “on the ground” but also digitally.

The increasing digitalisation is thus having a profound impact on people’s participation in various areas of society. Overall, the merger of volunteer work and digitalisation illustrates the need to take advantage of the opportunities offered by these new technologies while at the same time ensuring that they are accessible and transparent for everyone.



Areas covered by the ProVol educational offerings

The transition to digital technologies has not only fundamentally changed how volunteer organisations work but also the way in which people participate in these organisations. This is opening up new possibilities for the participation of people who want to get involved in volunteer work.

Paths to active participation through adult education

Adult education can and should play a central role in this transformation process. Digital literacy is further developed through training, while working hands-on increases self-efficacy and strengthens the innovative capacity of volun-

teer organisations. Thus, these activities also contribute to promoting social participation. Adults are empowered and motivated to get actively involved in social processes.

How might such educational offerings look?

The key action areas of non-profit organisations should be covered in the educational offerings in a manner suitable for the target group. This applies not only to the volunteer work itself but also its organisation and administration. Participants gain competences and knowledge in order to organise their volunteer work more effectively and efficiently.

This can be achieved by providing insights into the possibilities for digitalisation in volunteer work, the use of suitable methods and tools for digital work, and with the help of instructions for the practice-oriented implementation of online offerings.

ProVol Digital as a tool in volunteering work

The ERAMUS+ project ProVol Digital – Professional Digital Volunteering took on this challenge. The goal was to provide non-profit organisations and volunteer coordinators with specialised knowledge about possibilities, methods, and tools from the digital world and to bring their knowledge and skills for working with digital solutions up to the latest standards.

Along with physical and digital learning materials including a learning platform, continuing education seminars and webinars were developed.

The following continuing education modules and learning materials were developed and tested and are being offered in the form of continuing education formats:

- **Fit for digitalisation – basic digital skills**
Basic skills are built up for those who are not yet entirely prepared for digitalisation so that they can participate in the course activities.
- **Overview of volunteer work and the current trends**
A look at volunteering from both an external and internal perspective. Basic principles such as values and the motivation for getting involved in volunteer work are also examined and discussed with a focus on one's own organisation.
- **Setting goals and defining roles – a compass for the organisation**
Analysis of the topic of organisational goals and team roles, which are linked to specific tasks.
- **Project and time management**
The ability to plan and realise projects as well as effective time management are decisive for the success of project activities.
- **Communication – more than holding discussions**
Working with different target groups requires fundamental knowledge about the effect of communication and how professional communication is structured as well as how to present oneself in public and moderate discussions.
- **Management – effectively organising work with volunteers**
Generally speaking, the focus is the same as in human resource management – guiding and leading people. Key topics include recruiting volunteers and new members, the competence-oriented deployment of volunteers, and supervising, motivating, and bringing together a dynamic team on an ongoing basis.
- **Public relations**
Values-based public relations are particularly important in volunteer work. How do I organise this, what tools should I use, and to what end?
- **Event management – the calling card of the organisation**
Events are often key when it comes to the image of volunteer organisations in particular. Professional planning and suitable implementation are very important for ensuring a successful event.

Fields of activity in the toolbox

- PROJECT MANAGEMENT
- COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT
- VIDEO CONFERENCING
- COLLABORATION
- SELF-MANAGEMENT/TIME MANAGEMENT
- MARKETING
- PERSONNEL AND MEMBER MANAGEMENT
- FURTHER EDUCATION/E-LEARNING
- FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
- KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT
- LEARNING MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT
- FEEDBACK
- SURVEYS AND EVALUATIONS

Over 100 learning resources:

- Tool descriptions
- Step-by-step tutorials



Available at:

<https://handbook.professional-volunteering.eu/de/digitization-in-volunteer-work/tools/>



Areas covered by the ProVol Digital Toolbox, own illustration

- **Networks – turning 1+1 into 11**
Networking and cooperation are prerequisites. But how can these tasks be performed so that they create added value and are not seen as a burden?
- **Financing – where does the money come from?**
How can an organisation's activities be financed? Development of financing strategies with public and private funding.
- **Law and framework conditions**
Structural overview of the legal forms when it comes to non-profit work as well as an examination of association law in Austria, tax law, insurance law, the GDPR, and much more.
- **Working with digital volunteers**
One trend that has only barely started in Austria is digital volunteering – how can I reach volunteers who work for me digitally; what tasks can they perform and how can I retain them in my organisation for as long as possible?
- **Digital offerings in volunteer work and working with digital volunteers**
Relevant digital tools and methods geared towards volunteer work in a toolbox.
<https://handbook.professional-volunteering.eu/de/digitization-in-volunteer-work/tools/>

These offerings help to strengthen the volunteer sector. They enable volunteers to further develop their skills and knowledge and at the same time have a positive impact on society. Working in the volunteer segment is therefore extremely important and contributes to addressing global challenges and effecting positive change.

At the individual level, personal development is also strengthened and digital literacy promoted. As one participant reported, "I not only conquered my fear of using new digital tools, but was also able to digitise many areas of my volunteer organisation during the course!"



Mag. Silke Jamer-Flagel has been working in adult education for many years. Following a long stint as a member of the learn forever expert network, she has been actively working in the ProVol Digital project as a trainer and developer since 2021. As an e-learning expert, she is passionate about developing and implementing new and innovative concepts in education.

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Democracy in Austrian Adult Education Centres in 2024

The history of Adult Education Centres (Volkshochschulen) cannot be understood without the context of the democratic movements for greater democracy starting in the 19th century – and especially the developments towards freedom of assembly and the Law on Associations after 1848, in other words the ability for people to also organise themselves in educational associations. Democracy did not come into being through the generosity of the state, divine intervention, or the rational realisation of rulers; it was not given to anyone – it was won with bravery, civic courage, patience, and sometimes also rage as well as with education, through the exchange of knowledge and experiences, and with public, civic discussion.

Without the multifaceted amalgamation that is civil society, adult education centres cannot be understood and would not have come into being and remained successful to this day. And, conversely, democracy cannot be understood without the still thriving places of civic organisation according to interests. This was already stressed by one of the trailblazers for adult education centres, Ludo Moritz Hartmann: “Democracy and folk education are terms that complement one another because democracy will never be able to have its full impact if not built upon the foundation of general folk education, nor will true folk education be able to be implemented apart from on the soil of democracy” (Hartmann 1919, 18). Nothing has changed in this regard – it makes adult education centres possible and attractive. This is also emphasised by participants when asked about their motivation for taking courses and attending adult education centres (cf. Vater 2022). Along with places for the acquisition of knowledge, they seek places of exchange, discussion, and camaraderie.

What are the tasks of adult education? A plea

Adult education, as it is understood and offered by adult education centres, promotes and requires a place of coming together, of discussion, a political place of possibility, a place that sees the world as something that can be shaped and makes it understandable – and sees education as part of this shaping process.



Presentation of the diversity of democratic education at adult education centres

The principles of democratic, open, non-profit, knowledge-oriented adult education are actually nothing other than the principles of (enlightened) civic competence and critical thinking, which simultaneously counteract populism and democracy fatigue and are prerequisites for democracy. This kind of adult education cultivates the skill of forming one's own opinion and mistrusting abridgments and snap judgments. What is needed to combat populism and the erosion of democracy is to challenge the familiar, to challenge the proposed usefulness of specific knowledge in favour of empowering reflection and solution-oriented thinking, in favour of an orientation towards the participants.

And this promotes and requires participation that is more than just non-binding guidance for political decisionmakers, more than participatory busywork that has no impact. Self-determined participation that goes beyond calling for people to "participate here!" Adult education facilitates democracy in the practising of debate and also in confrontation, it facilitates consensus building in raising awareness for the basic principles of democracy such as the separation of powers, freedom of opinion, freedom of assembly, and freedom of expression.

A lively, diverse landscape of political education at adult education centres

The offerings of adult education centres in the area of democratic education are diverse, even labyrinthine. At adult education centres, democratic education not only means talking about democracy and teaching “Democracy”, but also making it palpable and putting it into practice in day-to-day life. Adult education centres have been demanding and realising this for over 130 years. Putting democracy into practice takes more than an understanding of how institutions function. It is also about actively exercising democratic rights and the ability to get involved, and if necessary to put up resistance and change society. As such, education for democracy primarily means recognising and putting democracy into practice in everyday life, having access, not being excluded, being able to get involved and being respected as well as learning to respect others.

This encompasses a wide range of topics, including youth parliaments and projects, visibility and publicity in Vienna, courses on political topics and topics related to democracy throughout Austria, courses for women as politicians in Vorarlberg, themed walks covering the era of the Nazi dictatorship, discussions on the role of experts in democracy in Lower Austria, lectures on the Austrian constitution, reflections about a democratic future at adult education centres in Upper Austria, and exhibitions throughout Austria about Ruth Maier, a young Jewish woman who wrote about her experiences in her diaries. In Burgenland, talks about contemporary and past antisemitism are held at adult education centres. In Carinthia, a wide range of lectures are offered – including about 1848 – as well as group visits to the memorial at Loibl concentration camp.

In Styria, discussions are held about climate justice as well as what it means to think critically. In Tyrol, attendees of adult education centres can follow the tracks of democracy and in Salzburg, discussions are held about the loss of the democratic public. This selection is random and only serves as a small example of how broad and diverse the offerings are.

Adult education centres make it possible to experience, test, and implement democracy as a kind of “democracy lab”. They are places of inclusion, places where everyone’s knowledge is discussed and analysed and an open society is cultivated. Democratic education makes it possible to forge connections with others, with one’s self, and with the world. Life, with global challenges such as migration, economic crises, and environmental crises, forces us to progress so that we can think, feel, and make decisions from a global perspective. As such, education is necessary as part of the search for solutions that are not a foregone conclusion and that simultaneously often originate in opposing opinions.

Adult education centres shine the spotlight on democracy

Austrian adult education centres have selected the focal point of “democracy” for the year 2024. This means making the network of 256 adult education centres with as many as 700,00 participants a year visible and useful in line with this focal point.



Demokratie erleben und lernen an Volkshochschulen. Eine Auswahl

Die vorgestellten Angebote und Aktivitäten sollen die Vielfalt der Demokratiebildung an Volkshochschulen zeigen, sie stellen eine Auswahl dar und zeigen auch Vergangenes.

Mehr Informationen zu „Frauenrechten“, „Aufgaben des Staates“, „Neoliberalismus“, „Pressefreiheit“ und „Sensibilisierung für Basisbildung“ an Volkshochschulen unter: <https://www.vhs.or.at/themen/demokratie-und-wissenschaftsbildung>

„Mikroebene“ Bildungsangebote

VHS Vorarlberg: Politiklehrgang für Frauen: 6 spannende Module zur professionellen Mitgestaltung politischer Prozesse. <https://www.vhs-goetzis.at/kursdetail/kurs/23W14000>

Demokratie MOOC: Weil Demokratie nichts Selbstverständliches ist. Online-Kurs. <https://demooc.at/module>

AK Bildungszentrum. VHS Graz: DenkMal Demokratie! Veranstaltungen. Der tiefe Graben. Der Klimarat zu Besuch an der VHS. Wie demokratisch ist das Internet? Frühjahr 2024. <https://www.vhsstmk.at>

Urania Steiermark: Kritisch denken lernen – eine europäische Herausforderung. April 2024. <https://www.urania.at>

VHS Burgenland: Antisemitismus diskutieren. <https://www.vhs-burgenland.at>

VHS Kärnten: Mahnung für die Gegenwart: Führung durch das KZ Loibl Nord. <https://www.ak-akademie.at/kurs/mahnung-fuer-die-gegenwart-fuehrung-durch-das-kz-loibl-nord>

VHS Oberösterreich: Vorträge: 100 Jahre Bundesverfassung. Schauplatz Demokratie und Parlamentarismus. Natur und Wir. Zukunftsimpulse. 70 Jahre Menschenrechte. <https://www.vhsooe.at>

„Mesoebene“ Gemeinde und Gemeinschaft

Verband Österreichischer Volkshochschulen (VÖV): „Im Gedächtnis herrscht immer Platzmangel“. 18.1.2024. <https://veranstaltungen.vhs.or.at/programm/angebote-nachfachbereichen/demokratiebildung>

VHS Niederösterreich: Themenspaziergänge: Unsere Gemeinde in der NS-Zeit. <https://waidhofenbbs.vhs-noe.at>

VHS Tirol: Tirol (neu) entdecken – Wandel auf demokratischen Spuren. <https://www.vhs-tirol.at>

VHS-Ausstellung: „Das kurze Leben der Ruth Maier“. <https://erwachsenenbildung.at/aktuell/nachrichten/18858-ausstellung-das-kurze-leben-der-ruth-maier.php>

VHS Wien: Europäisches Jugendparlament Simmering. https://www.vhs.or.at/sites/default/files/news/jugendpartizipation_FolderA5.pdf

VHS Oberösterreich: „Guten Morgen, Zukunft!“ Schwerpunkt rund um das Thema Nachhaltigkeit und die 17 Nachhaltigkeitsziele der Vereinten Nationen. <https://www.vhsooe.at>

„Makroebene“ Politik und Zivilgesellschaft

VHS Salzburg: Abschied von der Öffentlichkeit. Livestream – vhs.wissen live. <https://www.volkshochschule.at/kursdetail/kurs/23-2-01072>

Europäisches Projekt Bildung: Demokratie und Bildung. <https://adulthoodeducation.at/de/news/themen/projekt-bildung-demokratie-und-bildung>

Knowledgebase Erwachsenenbildung: Aktuelle Entwicklung und Geschichte der österreichischen Erwachsenenbildung. Fokus Demokratie. <https://adulthoodeducation.at>

VHS Kärnten: 1848 – Erfolgsgeschichte einer gescheiterten Revolution. <https://www.vhsktn.at/home>

VHS Burgenland: „#mitreden – Demokratie erleben“. VHS-Reihe: Digitale Medien und Demokratie im Rahmen der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Politische Bildung. <https://www.vhs-burgenland.at>

VHS Wien: Erklär mir Demokratie. Videos zu Demokratie in einfacher Sprache. <https://www.vhs.at/de/e/jungebildung/b/2023/05/07/erklarmirdemokratie>

- Democratic rights such as the right to vote were hard won. As non-partisan and also consistently democratic institutions, adult education centres are promoting high participation in the numerous elections in 2024 in their facilities and with their structures.
- Adult education centres stand for democratic education and open debates on the basis of human rights and the principles of justice and equality – especially in 2024. They are places of social and democratic learning and of inclusion. As such, they see themselves as part of the solution to global challenges, including economic, social, humanitarian, and environmental crises. By strengthening adult education centres, we therefore strengthen democracy and support the exercise of the human right to education.
- Adult education centres provide a broad spectrum of offerings and services, including in relation to the awareness of institutions and their procedures, the exchange between citizens, civic organisations, and/or members of parliament, and the dissemination of knowledge on current social challenges. Conversely, we are calling on all groups participating in elections to secure the financing for the work of adult education centres on a long-term basis.

The entire, diverse range of services is united under the basic principle that adult education centres are places in which the exercise of democratic rights is learned, practised, and put into practice. With this in mind, the adult education centres kindly invite you to get involved in and support our work!



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Erasmus+ Adult Education: Learning and networking across Europe!

Learning in and cooperating within Europe is an ideal way to strengthen your educational institution and further its development, and ERASMUS+ offers many opportunities for doing just that. Find out in this blog post what highlights the 2021–2027 ERASMUS+ Programme has in store for adult education institutions.

ERASMUS+ features **mobility and cooperation possibilities** in the areas of education, young people, and sport, for which it sets four horizontal priorities:

- Inclusion and diversity
- Digital transformation
- Environment and fight against climate change
- Participation in democratic life, common values, and civic engagement

Mobility and cooperation possibilities for adult education

ERASMUS+ Adult Education supports cross-border collaboration between adult education institutions. The aim is to improve the quality of adult education in Europe.

In order to achieve this objective, there is **Learning mobility of individuals** (Key Action 1) and **Cooperation among organisations and institutions** (Key Action 2). Adult education institutions can apply for ERASMUS+ funding through each of these two Key Actions. It depends on the needs of your institution which Key Action is the correct one for you.



Information about Erasmus+ Adult Education

Key Action 1 – Learning mobility of individuals

If your adult education institution would like to facilitate education and training in Europe for staff and learners, then Key Action 1 is right for you. It allows your staff to attend courses in Europe, shadow colleagues to gain insights into how other organisations work, or lead their own training sessions.

You can also arrange an opportunity for learning mobility for your organisation's target groups, i.e. the learners at your institution in Austria. One particular priority is encouraging the participation of adult learners with fewer opportunities, who can do their mobility placement either individually or in a group.

However, the ERASMUS+ Programme not only assists people travelling from Austria to other European countries, but also those wishing to travel to Austria from Europe.

So, you could invite experts to come to Austria, for instance! This would allow training to take place at your own institution, thus benefiting many employees. It is also possible to include adult educators who are currently in training and wish to complete an internship in Austria. Sending institutions receive a grant for every mobility participant. The amount of funding depends on the type of visit, the host country, and the length of stay. Additional funds can be applied for in the case of participants with fewer opportunities.

The mentioned mobility opportunities can either be applied for via a **Kshort-term project**¹ or via an **Erasmus accreditation**².

Short-term projects are an entry-level model for organisations that want to gain initial experience with ERASMUS+ or only intend to carry out mobility activities occasionally. These projects are limited with regard to the duration and number of mobilities, and can only be conducted three times within a period of five consecutive years.

By contrast, **Erasmus accreditation** is ideal for organisations seeking regular participation. They are given simplified access to the annual budget after successfully applying for accreditation (as an individual organisation or coordinator of an Austrian mobility consortium), which gives them financial planning security and long-term prospects. The accreditation is flexible and grows along with the plans of the institution, allowing every organisation to determine its own pace for European collaboration.



Erasmus+ Corner

Key Action 2 – Cooperation among organisations and institutions

Interested in raising your institution's profile across Europe, increasing the quality and relevance of your activities, and building networks? Looking to bring your organisation's work up to an international level and apply some innovative techniques? Keen to collaborate with institutions from several countries on an issue that is especially important to you? In that case, cooperation among organisations and institutions will be right up your street!

Every project must deal with at least one of the four horizontal ERASMUS+ priorities or one specific priority of adult education (see Programme Guide Part B, Key Action 2). ERASMUS+ differentiates between **Cooperation Partnerships**³ and **Small-scale Partnerships**⁴, although both project types are funded via lump sums. The applicant organisation and

its partners determine their activities and objectives themselves, estimate the total costs of the project being applied for, and then choose the lump sum which best suits the needs of the partnership. The requirements can increase according to the requested level of funding.

Cooperation Partnerships are particularly suitable for experienced organisations and for large-scale projects. The main aspects in this context are the development of new methods, the expansion of networks, and the internationalisation of activities. The projects are expected to deliver results and provide learning experiences which are reusable and transferable, and which can be put to use beyond the boundaries of the organisations involved.

The project partnerships comprise at least three institutions from at least three EU Member States or third countries associated with the programme and last 12 to 36 months. Activities are funded by means of three different possible lump sums (EUR 120,000, EUR 250,000, or EUR 400,000 per project).

Small-scale Partnerships are aimed primarily at less experienced institutions and newcomers to the ERASMUS+ Programme. They are mainly designed to make it easier for smaller stakeholders and hard-to-reach target groups to access the ERASMUS+ Programme and facilitate initial collaboration at transnational level.

Small-scale Partnerships are collaborations between at least two institutions from at least two different EU Member States or third countries associated with the programme. The funding for this category is lower than for Cooperation Partnerships (EUR 30,000 or EUR 60,000 per project), while the project duration is shorter (6–24 months), and the administrative effort is less.

Application deadlines, advice, and information

The application deadlines for Key Action 1 and Key Action 2 have been published on our website:

<https://erasmusplus.at/de/erwachsenenbildung>



The adult education team at OeAD |

National Agency for ERASMUS+ also provides information events, webinars, and advisory services. Please feel free to contact us at erwachsenenbildung@oead.at

If you would like to be informed automatically about new application deadlines and events concerning the EU programme ERASMUS+ as well as the European Solidarity Corps, then simply register for the *OeAD Erasmus+ Europa bewegt* newsletter here: <https://oead.at/de/newsletter>



Links

- 1 <https://erasmusplus.at/de/erwachsenenbildung/mobilitaet-kurzfristige-projekte/antragstellung>
- 2 <https://erasmusplus.at/de/erwachsenenbildung/mobilitaet-akkreditierung/antragstellung>
- 3 Siehe auch <https://erasmusplus.at/de/erwachsenenbildung/kooperationspartnerschaften>
- 4 Siehe auch <https://erasmusplus.at/de/erwachsenenbildung/kleinere-partnerschaften>



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News from EPALE

Join the EPALE community by registering on EPALE!

EPALE, the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, is a multi-language, virtual meeting point for everyone who participates in adult education. This year, it celebrates its ninth anniversary.

EPALE focuses on a variety of topics related to general, civic, and cultural adult education as well as vocational and in-company training, and it invites all interested parties to make an (inter)active contribution. Since the European Commission created the online platform financed by the Erasmus+ programme to promote the quality of adult education, membership in the European adult education community has grown to just under 150,000.

EPALE makes it possible to network with a multitude of stakeholders in European adult education and to benefit from the mutual exchange.

Join the adult education community now! As a member of EPALE, you will be able to engage in discussions on current topics, write articles, share events, and stay informed on current developments in the area of adult education in Europe. EPALE is highly suitable for finding project partners and for sharing experiences and ideas about your adult education project. By registering, you can gain access to highly valuable resources (in English and German) in connection with the topic of adult education, and can participate in discussions online.



Use the following link to register:

<https://epale.ec.europa.eu/de/contribute>



Thematic focuses

EPALE defines new thematic focuses every year so as to address current social developments which are relevant to adult education.

EPALE's thematic focuses for 2024 are aimed at addressing three present challenges in connection with the **European Year of Skills**: upskilling and reskilling for the digital transition, adult learning for sustainable development, and adult learning as a way out of poverty.

While the thematic focus on the topic of digital transformation emphasises the promotion of digital competences in adult education and aims to strengthen the role of women in the area of technology, the second thematic focus centres around developing green skills and promoting environmental awareness among citizens.

The third thematic focus addresses the need to alleviate poverty through education and concentrates on how education can contribute towards decreasing social inequalities.

Focusing on these topics is intended to contribute towards the development of new practices in adult education and to accumulate existing knowledge on EPALE.



You can read more about EPALE's thematic focuses for 2024 here:

<https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/epale-2024-thematic-focuses>



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in-europa



Was ist EPALE?

EPALE ist ein mehrsprachiger, virtueller Treffpunkt für alle, die in der Erwachsenenbildung tätig sind. Die Plattform widmet sich unterschiedlichen Themenfeldern der allgemeinen, politischen und kulturellen Erwachsenenbildung sowie der beruflichen und betrieblichen Weiterbildung und lädt alle Interessierten zur (inter-)aktiven Beteiligung ein.

Was bietet Ihnen EPALE?

- Sie erhalten kostenlosen Zugang zur größten Erwachsenenbildungs-Community Europas
- Sie profitieren von aktuellem Wissen & Know-How
- Sie können in Ihrer Sprache international kommunizieren
- Sie vernetzen sich mit einer Vielzahl an Akteurinnen und Akteuren, welche in der Erwachsenenbildung Europas tätig sind
- Sie machen sich und Ihre Arbeit europaweit sichtbar
- Sie gestalten aktiv die Erwachsenenbildung Europas mit

EPALE in Europa

Initiativen, Funktionen, Veranstaltungen

- **Blogbeiträge:** Einblicke und Ideen von EPALE Mitgliedern
- **Nachrichten:** Aktuelle Entwicklungen in der Erwachsenenbildung
- **Veranstaltungen:** Events und Aktivitäten in Europa finden und eigene Veranstaltungen teilen
- **Community Stories:** Inspirierende Geschichten aus der EPALE-Community
- **Jährliche EPALE Community Conference mit inspirierenden Beiträgen** und interaktiven Workshops
- **Jährliche Themenschwerpunkte** mit spannenden Beiträgen auf EPALE
- **4x jährlich EPALE-Diskussionen:** Teilen Sie Ihre Ideen und tauschen Sie sich aus
- **Projektpartnersuche:** Finden Sie Partner für nationale Projekte und EU-Projekte
- **Praxisbezogene Communities:** Treten Sie Gruppenbereichen bei, um sich zu bestimmten Themen auszutauschen
- **Newscasts:** Schalten Sie ein und erfahren Sie mehr über die neuesten Entwicklungen in der Erwachsenenbildung
- Lernen Sie auf der **Plattform mit Podcasts, Ressourcen, OERS** oder stöbern Sie durch den **Kurskatalog**

Recently published leaflet from EPALE Austria

The leaflet from EPALE Austria provides a comprehensive overview of the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe and of the services offered by EPALE. It contains information on the various functions, initiatives, and events at the European and national level. Read more about the annual events of EPALE Austria in the leaflet, subscribe to the national EPALE newsletter to stay informed, and join the EPALE community!



Click on the following link to access the EPALE Austria leaflet:

<https://epale.ec.europa.eu/de/content/epale-oesterreich-neues-infoblatt-veroeffentlicht>



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