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Benefits of Lifelong Learning in Europe: Main Results of the BeLL- Project

Research Report

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Main Results of the BeLL- Project

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1. The BeLL Project and Study

The Benefits of Lifelong Learning (BeLL) study investigated the benefits of participation to learners in organized non-formal, non-vocational, voluntary adult education (hereafter 'liberal adult education') in Europe. Funded by the European Commission within the Lifelong Learning Programme ('Studies and Comparative Research, KA1'), the BeLL study was carried out by a consortium of partner organizations from nine Member States (Czech Republic, Germany, Finland, England and Wales, Italy, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland) plus Serbia as a tenth associated partner.

The project ran from 1 November 2011 to 31 January 2014. In the project, European public and private research institutes, universities, NGOs and umbrella organizations have shared a working

model to conduct research on the topic of 'wider benefits' of liberal adult education. The project operationalized and expanded on categories of this approach used in studies in England and Finland since the early 2000s.

This report aims to introduce the theoretical framework, the research design, and the main results of the BeLL study, as well as the ten national country reports on key findings and the respective national liberal adult education landscape. Comprehensive reports for each sub-section of the study (Manninen & Mariläinen, 2014; Sgier, 2014) are available on the project website (www.bell-project.eu). Furthermore, a series of articles has been and will be published, and further data analyses will be carried out.

The report opens with an introduction to the aims of the study. Liberal adult education in Europe is defined in Chapter 2, followed by information on the sample, on research questions, and the design of the study, as well as the results of the statistical analysis (Chapter 3), the analysis of open questions in the questionnaire (Chapter 4), and the qualitative analyses of the interview data (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 provides a summary of key findings, and Chapter 7 contains the country reports of the study. The report concludes with a research outlook (Chapter 8) and policy recommendations (Chapter 9). For appendices and further details, particularly on research results, see the comprehensive reports of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the study (Manninen & Mariläinen, 2014; Sgier, 2014).[1]

1.1 Research Interest and Aims of the BeLL Study

The main purpose of the BeLL study was to investigate the individual and social benefits perceived by adult learners who participated in liberal adult education courses. Benefits of lifelong learning were defined, refined, and explored in ten European countries. The BeLL study aimed to expand the knowledge base on liberal adult education in general and on the respective liberal adult education landscapes in the ten participating European countries. The findings on the perceived benefits of learning were to be interpreted against this background.

In order to achieve these aims, the BeLL study used a mixed-methods design consisting of two interrelated phases of research. In the first phase, quantitative data was collected via a questionnaire that was developed, piloted, and refined by the BeLL consortium. In the second phase, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted. In total, 8646 valid completed questionnaires and 82 interviews from the ten participating countries were carried out in adult education centres sponsored publicly (public provision) or by various organizations of the civil society. The unique data set of the study provides insights into liberal adult education and its benefits across ten European countries and aims at increasing the understanding of the wider benefits of adult participation in liberal adult education.

While earlier studies on the wider benefits of lifelong learning have focused on the impacts of vocational education and training (VET), and mainly on its monetary benefits at the individual level (e.g. higher earnings) and societal level (e.g. higher tax revenues), the focus of the BeLL study was the area of liberal adult education—that is, learning activities which are non-formal, non-vocational, and voluntary. In this, the BeLL study operationalizes and expands on the 'wider-benefits-of-learning' approach to cover the whole range of lifelong learning activities, including liberal adult education.

[1] We thank Maren Henkes, Julia Rust, Miriam Schmidt, Jonas Ludwig, Jennifer Schons, Sabrina Thom, and Andrea Franzen, DIE, for their support in the BeLL project.

The following research objectives were partly predefined at the beginning of the project and partly developed in the course of the research process. The BeLL study aims

- to understand, refine and develop the definitions and the categorisation of "benefits" in adult education research.
- to document and interpret the benefits learners perceive from participation in liberal adult education in 10 European countries.
- to differentiate these finding for different groups of participants with respect to gender, age, employment status, type and subject of the course.
- to describe the relationships between the reported benefits of liberal adult education and the characteristics of the learning course, such as the topic, teaching methods, learner groups, teaching styles, learning cultures and the teachers' personalities, and to develop from this hypotheses on the institutional conditions associated with the individual and societal benefits.
- to expand the knowledge base on liberal adult education in general and on the respective liberal adult education landscapes in the 10 European countries participating in the project, and to interpret findings on the perceived benefits of learning against this background.

To document participants' experiences and perceptions of benefits, several research questions were developed in the course of the study:

- What kinds of changes do participants experience in connection with liberal adult education?
- Do they describe these changes as benefits, and do they attribute them to their learning experience? How do they describe them?
- According to participants' reports, how does participation in liberal adult education affect and change their attitudes, self-concepts, learning biographies, and learning behaviour, as well as their everyday lives, and how do participants assess this?
- Can we see differences between different groups of participants in this?
- Can we see differences with respect to different course topics?
- What kinds of changes and benefits were experienced with respect to family life, social networks, and local communities in particular?
- According to participants, which elements of course-related settings generate benefits?

Through these objectives and research questions, the BeLL study aims at raising awareness among adult education providers, practitioners, stakeholders, and policy makers about the benefits of liberal adult education and the factors that influence their development. Against this background, the consortium discussed preliminary results with practitioners in adult education institutions during one or two survey feedback sessions in the ten partner countries. Through this, a shared understanding of liberal adult education emerged in the partner organizations as well as in the participating adult education institutions. The country reports on their respective liberal adult education landscapes are meant to sustain such a shared understanding. They complete country reports published on adult education by the DIE and other partners in the consortium.[2]

[2] Such as the *DIE country portrait* series (http://www.die-bonn.de/Weiterbildung/Literaturrecherche/details.aspx?ID=518#) and the *Country Reports on Adult education* compiled

When operationalizing and investigating participants' experiences and perceptions of benefits, the BeLL study can make references to both PIAAC and AES data, which at some point refer to the category of self-reported perceptions of benefits, as well as to quantitative and qualitative research on participation, learning needs, and interests, as well as learning biographies and learning projects or personal development (see Chapters 7, 9 and 10). In doing so, the BeLL researchers were particularly interested in matters of participation and benefits for non-traditional, less educated groups in liberal adult education across Europe.

It is beyond the scope of the BeLL study to compare national education systems. But awareness of national characteristics is needed to assure an adequate interpretation of the results. Moreover, the study addresses the complex matter of benefits of lifelong learning on the basis of a multi-perspective, multi-method approach (for references on mixed methods, see Hammond, 2005; Mason, 2006; Kelle, 2006, p. 8; for a description of its advantages in benefits research, see Desjardins, 2008b). Using qualitative and quantitative data and analysis in the BeLL study serves the purposes of complementarity, as suggested by Hammond (2005, pp. 247-250). Complementarity means that different types of data provide possibilities for elaborating, enhancing, illustrating, and clarifying results (see also Gieseke, 1992). Survey data (n=8646) are combined with semi-structured interviews (n=82). The survey data are predominantly numerical, but the survey questionnaire also included open questions (two about outcomes and benefits and one about learning situations), which are analysed using qualitative content analysis.

The earlier Finnish study on the wider benefits of adult education (Manninen & Luukannel, 2008; Manninen, 2010) showed that the benefits found in the interviews, in the open questions, and in the survey statements were almost identical. This project aims to use a mixed methods approach to provide a 'close-up illustration' (and explanation) of the 'bigger picture' provided by the quantitative analysis. The aim of the qualitative interview analysis is to illustrate and complement the results of the statistical analyses with respect to the benefits and their individual dimension (i.e. change of attitudes, self-concept, learning biography, behaviour) and their social dimension (i.e. family life, social networks), as well as with respect to the factors driving their development.

1.2 The 'Wider-Benefits-of-Learning' Approach in the BeLL Study

The 'wider-benefits-of-learning' approach is used to analyze how education contributes to the 'well-being' of individuals and societies (cf. Motschilnig, 2012; Desjardins, 2008; Schuller, Bynner, Green, Blackwell, Hammond, Preston, & Gough, 2001).

> The aim of wider-benefits research is to record the complexity of benefits and other effects on both the personal and the societal level deriving from the individual's educational efforts. The central issue is: 'What changes are affected by learning interventions?' (Schuller/Desjardins, 2010, p. 229)

The BeLL study focuses not only on economic returns but also on (1) *non-economic benefits*, that is, benefits that are not directly linked to additional income or increased productivity, and also tries to find evidence indicating (2) benefits that develop on a societal level, *above the level of the individual* (cf. Schuller et al. 2001, p. 1; OECD/CERI, 2007a, p. 9). Thus, wider benefits in the BeLL study encompass

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by the European Association for Adult Education (EAEA) (http://www.eaea.org/en/resources/adult-education-in-europe.html.

- social (public) non-monetary benefits which benefit society, such as trust, social cohesion, political stability, and democracy;
- personal (private) non-monetary benefits, such as value of learning, health status, life satisfaction, and improved family life (Schuller & Desjardin, 2010:, p. 229).

Generally the wider benefits approach is based on two assumptions:

- Learning has mostly positive effects for the individual as well as for society. Nevertheless, the investigation of wider benefits must occur in an open and unbiased way. Both positive and negative patterns of outcomes have to be taken into account (Schuller, Preston, Hammond, Brasset-Gundy, & Bynner, 2004, p. 5; Feinstein, Budge, Vorhaus, & Druckworth, 2008, p. 20).
- Lifelong learning—especially during adulthood—can have an impact on society as a whole. Adult learners can in turn initiate changes in the wider sense by affecting the home/family, work, and community contexts they engage in (Schuller & Desjardins, 2010, p. 229).

Benefits can occur on a cognitive as well as on an emotional level; on a psychological as well as on a behavioural level. They can be direct or indirect, expected or unexpected, and furthermore, job as well as leisure related (ibid.; OECD/CERI, 2007a, p. 35).

In order to systematize the returns gained from learning, the concept of *capital* is used (Schuller et al., 2004; Côté, 2005; Schuller, 2007; Manninen, 2010).[3] Schuller et al. (2004) distinguish three forms of capital:

- *Human capital* is based on know-how and qualifications that enable an individual to participate in the economy and in society.
- *Social capital* results from networks in which people actively participate. Learning can provide access to individuals and groups, and thus can promote social integration, civic engagement, and social cohesion (Feinstein et al., 2008). Social capital refers to norms, trust, and cooperation and therefore is not an individual characteristic but a social one.
- *Identity capital* refers to personal resources such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, resilience, and internal locus of control. It is also assumed, however, that there is a social influence on this form of capital (Schuller et al*.,* 2004, p. 20; Bynner, Schuller, & Feinstein, 2003, p. 346).

Schuller et al. (2004) attempt to make this concept of capital applicable to educational concepts by creating a connection to the term *capabilities*, as used by Amartaya Sen (1992). In this sense, the ability to shape one's own life is (or can be) built and rebuilt throughout the life course. The less people build this ability the more they are at risk of exclusion (Schuller et al., 2004, p. 12). The more they build this ability the higher is their potential to achieve personal and collective goals (see Bynner et al., 2003, p. 346f.) This is why learning and education are given key importance, and why they can be linked to the social and economic system as a 'bridge of growing relevance' (Alheit, 2001, p. 100). The BeLL study makes reference to this concept of different capitals (cf. Manninen & Meriläinen, 2014, pp. 26ff.) in the quantitative data analysis (factor and SEM, see Chapter 3).

[3] For definitions of different capitals see Bourdieu, 1986, and Putnam, 1995.

However, assessments of the impact of learning processes on the societal level can only be made from the perspective of the actor (Alheit, 2001, p. 116f.). In this sense, 'wider benefits of learning' can only be identified 'where they have been recognized as "social benefits" by social actors themselves in their concrete fields of social experience' (ibid., p. 117).

Besides the effects and outcomes of learning, wider benefits researchers also focus on investigating the pedagogical processes in relation to benefits. 'One aim, with obvious policy relevance, is precisely to open up the debate on how education might be more effective, by changing its form, content, pedagogy, or timing.' (OECD/CERI 2007a, p. 24) Organized learning situations can contribute to the development of wider benefits on a social and personal level through two mechanisms.

- *Personal skills and knowledge as well as personal attitudes*: Education and learning can strengthen the development of key skills, abilities, and personal resources, as well as reinforce the individual's belief in their ability to deal with disadvantageous situations. Education also helps individuals to make well-reflected decisions on how to act with regard to their health and happiness.
- *Social interaction*: Education enables access to individuals and groups with a similar and heterogeneous socio-economic background, encourages social cohesion, and provides the possibility of social involvement.

(see Feinstein, Budge, Vorhaus, & Duckworth, 2008, p. 21).

Nevertheless, empirical research on the questions of why and how participation in organized learning contributes to the development of benefits is concentrated mainly on schooling and tertiary education (ibid.). The relation between the development (emergence) of benefits and people's participation in organized learning has not yet been systematically investigated for the area of adult education.

Previous studies and research gaps

The BeLL study takes into account all possible benefits found in earlier studies (except lower crime levels). Therefore a short overview of these results will help illuminate the starting point of the BeLL study (for an overview see also Motschilnig, 2012) and the dimensions this study refers to.

Generally the research field is characterized by various theoretical strands and a range of methodological approaches (Schuller et al., 2001, p. 1). In Europe, the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (WBL), the Institute of Education at the University of London (IOE), NIACE (Schuller & Watson, 2009), and the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI; affiliated with the OECD) have rendered outstanding services to the research on wider benefits. Based on a variety of data sources—longitudinal survey datasets, cross-sectional survey datasets, case studies of institutions and communities, individual case stories, social biographical (case) studies, experiments (randomized control trials), and quasi experiments—the IOE investigated the wider benefits of lifelong learning in a broad sense (see Schuller et al., 2001, p. 5; Bynner et al., 2003).[4]

[4] However, detailed information, such as the level of significance, descriptions of the sample tests, and an explanation of the variances, is largely missing from the available files. A meta-analysis taking primary data into account thus still needs to be carried out and would initially require extensive research from the individual authors of the benefit investigations. In addition, the findings mostly come from English and Finnish studies and for that reason possible cultural variations and

Although the wider-benefits research attempts to illustrate the benefits of learning at all stages of life (see WBL, 2008; CERI, 2007; Schuller et al., 2004), only a very small number of empirical studies focus exclusively on adult education. Jyri Manninen, from the University of Eastern Finland, carried out a representative survey on the wider benefits of adult learning in Finland (Manninen et al., 2010). Furthermore, the Bertelsmann Foundation (Schleiter, 2008) conducted a representative survey among adults in Germany asking for their subjective opinion concerning the role of lifelong learning in fostering happiness and well-being. Below, we present a rough overview of the benefits found in these empirical studies following participation in adult education.

Health behaviour and mental well-being: Positive effects of education on health—regardless of economic position—are quite well investigated, and in some cases the evidence is considered so robust as to even suggest causality (Schuller & Desjardin, 2010, pp. 230ff.). Participating in at least one course between the age of 33 and 42 increases people's level of exercise, correlates with the probability to give up smoking, and enhances life satisfaction (Feinstein & Hammond, 2003, p. 22). Even if effect sizes are small in absolute terms, adult learning plays an important role in contributing to those small shifts in behaviours and attitudes during mid-adulthood (ibid.). Empirical findings based on a representative study among adults in Germany showed that 86 % of the interviewees reported a positive correlation while 40 % feel 'very happy' when having the possibility to learn something new (Schleiter, 2008, p. 5). Nevertheless, the findings in relation to adult learning and well-being are complex, and besides the positive effects, some negative effects were found as well, depending on course types and the characteristics of the participant (Feinstein & Hammond, 2003; for more information on the relations between participation in adult learning and well-being, see also Tuijnman, 1990; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Bynner et al., 2003; Simone & Sculli, 2006; Field, 2009; Manninen, 2010).

Social outcomes: Civic and social engagement, including active citizenship

Learning as a shared activity can enhance tolerance and stimulate social and political participation by shaping what people know, by developing competencies that help people apply, contribute, and develop their knowledge in CSE, and by cultivating values, attitudes, beliefs, and motivations to encourage civic and social engagement (OECD/CERI, 2007). There is evidence to suggest that participants in continuing education are less at risk of adopting extremist attitudes and develop a more tolerant behaviour (Preston & Feinstein, 2004). Older people improve their learning experiences by adopting fewer age stereotypes (Simone & Scuilli, 2006). Preston (2003) and Feinstein and Hammond (2004) show that people involved in adult education activities become politically active, vote in elections, and are on the whole politically motivated. Furthermore, participation in adult education is linked to higher levels of civic and social participation and voter participation (Bynner & Hammond, 2004; Field, 2005), as well as to pervasive changes in social and political attitudes (Feinstein et al., 2003).

Adult education and intergenerational effects, including family learning

Quantitative as well as qualitative results show a relation between parental learning and children's attainment (Brasset-Grundy, 2004, p. 97; see also Wolfe & Haveman, 2002). Furthermore, the

differences or designations of the recorded benefits are still unclear, being in no way conceptually defined or separately validated (see Kil, Motschilnig, & Thöne-Geyer, 2013, p. 4).

results underline a positive relation between learning and increased parenting abilities and better relationships among family members through the acquisition of improved communication skills (Brasset-Grundy, 2004, p. 97). Studies exploring the influence of adult education on relationships among parents and children agree that learners become better parents in that they are more patient and understanding and better at listening to and supporting their children (The Centre for Literacy, 2010).

Adult learning and employability (work-related benefits)

Positive effects of adult education and training on employability and economic outcomes have been focal points of investigation since the 1960s (cf. Ferrer & Ridell, 2010, p. 299). By contrast, only very little is known about the effects of participation in non-vocational adult education on work-related benefits, although some evidence does exist (Manninen, 2010).

Adult education and further learning motivation

In regard to educational progression, there is clear evidence that (successful) engagement in learning provides an incentive for further learning (cf. Sabates, 2007). Manninen (2010) found that adult education increased people's motivation, as 93 % of the participants (the equivalent of 992,247 Finns) said their participation motivated them to learn more. Schuller (2002) and Feinstein and Hammond (2004) show that self-efficacy and self-confidence as an adult develop positively, become clearer, and grow through the process of learning itself. Dench and Regan (2000) show that adults between the age of 50 and 71 felt they had a higher level of self-confidence following participation.

Research gaps

While there are well-founded studies of the benefits of formal education (schooling, further and higher education), relatively little attention has been paid to the benefits of adult learning in non-vocational education settings. Accordingly, empirical evidence on the potential of liberal adult education to create personal, economic, and social value is scarce (Motschilnig, 2012; see also Schuller & Desjardins, 2010, p. 230). Moreover, a deeper understanding of individual and social benefits of adult education is still missing. The BeLL study attempts to close these research gaps and to do so with a cross-European approach. For this purpose, benefit concepts were defined and research tools were developed during the quantitative phase of the study and refined during the qualitative phase of the study.

2. Liberal Adult Education in Europe and in the BeLL study

The BeLL study targeted at adults who participated in liberal adult education courses during the past 12 months. Liberal adult education is that part of the non-formal adult education system that is non-vocational, voluntary and based on topics and courses that are not work- or career-oriented.

The challenge for the BeLL study, and also for European lifelong learning policies, is that non-formal, non-vocational adult education is often not recognized as an important and special activity within the field of non-formal adult education, which is mostly work-related and organized or paid for by employers. The 2007 Adult Education Survey revealed that over 80 % of non-formal adult

education in Europe is work-related, and that over half of the courses are organized (and sponsored) by employers or non-formal training organizations (Boateng, 2009). This can be seen in participation statistics, legislation, and organizational structures, which in many countries cover non-formal, non-vocational adult education less effectively.

Another challenge is the lack of a common terminology covering the range of 'non-formal, non-vocational adult learning'. In earlier studies, this kind of adult learning is defined as 'learning activities taken for personal interest-related reasons' (Desjardins, 2003, p. 11) or 'general curricula' (Feinstein & Budge, 2007, p. 20). This kind of adult education is sometimes called 'liberal' adult education (Jarvis & Criffin, 2003; Manninen, 2010) and sometimes 'popular' adult education, especially in the Swedish context (cf. Rubenson, 2006, p. 337; Rubenson, 2013). Further terminology exists in the German-speaking countries ("Allgemeine Erwachsenenbildung") and so on. The problem is that these terms also have slightly different meanings, especially in different languages and cultural contexts.

The following table describes how liberal adult education is related to other types of adult education.

Table 1 Types of adult education

	Vocational education	**Non-vocational education**
Formal education	Vocational basic, secondary, and tertiary education, providing formal degrees	General basic and secondary education, providing formal degrees
Non-formal education	Work-related courses organized by employers or training organizations; no formal degrees are awarded but certification is common	**Liberal adult education: courses based on participants' own learning interest, voluntary participation, no formal degrees nor certificates; organized by associations, adult training organizations, or third-sector organizations**

In the typology of adult education programmes (Rogers, 1996, p. 21; and various other authors across Europe), these are programmes aimed at personal growth (including a wide range of subjects, such as handicraft, arts, sports), and programmes aimed at social growth (targeted at specific population groups with the aim of enhancing their social role, e.g. parental counselling, women counselling, counselling of trade union members, etc.).

3. Statistical Analysis

3.1 Research Questions, Design ans Sample

3.1.1 Research questions

The specific research questions for the BeLL survey were:

1. What are the benefits of participation in liberal adult education according to the respondents? Are there any differences in the experienced benefits
    a. between different groups of participants?
    b. between the types of study topics in different kinds of courses?
    c. between the countries involved in the study?

2. What are the course-related aspects in the learning process that support the development of benefits?

In addition to defining benefits at the individual level, the data are used to analyse whether there are indicators of wider benefits for the family and local community, for the wider social networks and communities, and for society in general.

3.1.2 Questionnaire construction and benefit concepts

One of the aims was to get a comprehensive picture of all potential benefits of adult learning in liberal adult education. Therefore the survey questions were defined using the list of all potential benefits (except lower crime levels) found in the previous studies, and by defining these as theoretical concepts (see below). These were operationalized into corresponding statements. In addition to the theory-driven analysis of survey data, qualitative data were also collected in the questionnaire by including two open questions, the answers to which were analysed using qualitative content analysis.

The BeLL questionnaire development and data collection process included the following stages:

1. Construction of the pilot version of the questionnaire (Spring 2012);
2. Translation of the pilot version into national languages;
3. Piloting of the questionnaire (May 2012);
4. Project meeting on piloting results (June 2012);
5. Modifications in the questionnaire (July–September 2012);
6. Production of the final BeLL^{Q} questionnaire (paper and web versions in national languages);
7. Data collection (from September 2012 to June 2013).

The construction of a questionnaire was in itself a demanding task, and in a trans-European study like BeLL extra caution was needed when different language versions were developed. Cultural differences were taken into account, as well as different meanings of the terms and words in other languages. The pilot version was tested in three different ways:

1. Each partner asked 3-4 experts to review and comment on the questionnaire. The experts were university professors and researchers, administrators, and practitioners.
2. Each partner collected piloting data from 6-7 adult learners who met the target group criteria. Web versions for the pilot questionnaire were created in English and Finnish; the other countries used paper versions. Piloting data was analysed, and the results used to modify the questionnaire.
3. In addition, all partners organized individual or group interviews for 3-4 respondents who had tested the questionnaire to collect qualitative feedback about the questions and the questionnaire.

All feedback and piloting results were taken into account and discussed at a project meeting in Ostrava (Czech Republic) in June 2012. As a result, some changes were made in the

questionnaire. In particular, the number of statements was reduced, and some overlapping or unnecessary questions were removed. The final BeLL questionnaire contained 35 benefit statements, each of them representing one of the following 14 concepts:

- Psychological benefits based on the concepts *Locus of Control* (Rotter, 1966) and *Self-efficacy* (Schwartzer & Jerusalem, 1995);
- *Tolerance, Trust, Social Networks, Sense of Purpose in Life, Civic and Social Engagement, Civic Competence, Mental Well-being, Work-related Benefits, Physical Health, Health Behaviour, Family,* and *Changes in Educational Experience.*

Locus of Control refers to the extent to which individuals believe they can control events that affect them (Rotter, 1966; Zimbardo, 1985, p. 275). It is a psychological state of mind that changes in different life situations (Frost & Clayson, 1991). Bandura's (1994) concept of perceived **Self-efficacy** is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to influence events that affect their lives. It represents the extent to which we believe that we are the authors of what we do and what happens to us (Cervone, Artisitco, & Berry, 2006; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995; Scholz, Gutierrez Dona, Sud, & Schwarzer, 2002). **Tolerance** is used to cover the changes in the permissive attitude towards behaviour, opinions, practices and beliefs which are different from one's own. Changes in participants' attitudes to an understanding of cultural differences have been identified as benefits in the previous studies (Field, 2009; Manninen, 2010), as well as **Trust,** an attitude or a mindset that unknown people (Newton, 1999; Kouvo, 2011) or institutions (political trust) can generally be trusted (Newton & Zmerli, 2011). Trust is linked to social capital and social cohesion, and generally used as one indicator of the benefits of learning (OECD, 2007a, p. 80; Manninen, 2010; Merriam & Kee, 2014). Earlier studies show that changes in trust are linked to the creation and development of **Social networks** (Schuller et al., 2002), which were defined here as a social structure based on individuals or groups. Social interaction with other learners, making new friends, and creating new networks are among the core benefits found in the earlier studies (Field, 2009; Manninen, 2010). **Sense of Purpose in Life** is defined by Ryff (1989) as 'having goals in life and a sense of directedness, a feeling that there is meaning to present and past life, harbouring a belief that gives purpose, and having aims and objectives for living'. Sense of purpose in life predicts psychological and physical well-being (Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Makola & van den Berg, 2008).

Civic and Social Engagement is often linked to educational level and hence defined as a wider benefit in earlier studies (e.g. Dench & Regan, 2000; Merriam & Kee, 2014). It can include activities such as joining associations, volunteering, or otherwise taking on a more active role in the community (OECDa, 2007). **Civic Competence** describes the skills and competencies that enable individuals to fully participate in civic life, including knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation (EU, 2006; Hoskins & Crick, 2010, p. 8). Dench and Regan (2000, p. 1) reported participants' increased 'ability to stand up and be heard' in group situations as another benefit of learning.

Mental well-being denotes a mental state combining factors such as mental health, happiness, life satisfaction, and quality of life. Mental well-being is a dynamic state in which individuals are able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong relationships with others, and contribute to their community (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, 2008, p. 45). In previous studies, well-being is linked to other benefits, such as health, social participation, and civic engagement (Field, 2009; Manninen, 2010).

Physical Health is a relative state in which people are able to function well physically. Self-rated health is widely used in research as a valid indicator of both physical and mental health (Chen & Yang, 2013, p. 65; Nummela, Sulander, Karisto & Uutela, 2009). The same applies to **Health behaviour**. Feinstein and Hammond (2004) found that learning has positive effects on a wide range of health behaviours, such as giving up smoking, increasing exercise, positive changes in behaviour and attitudes, and more healthy living.

Work-related benefits are outcomes that help the individual to find or keep a job, advance their career, earn a better income, or any other benefits related to employment (Manninen, 2010). The benefit concept of **Family** was used to measure whether parents' educational attainment has positive effects on their family life and kids, as previous studies suggest (Wolfe & Haveman, 2002; The Centre for Literacy, 2010). In the BeLL project, the concept is limited to parent/child relationships.

Potential **Changes in educational experiences** were measured as changes in learning motivation, in learner self-confidence, and in the perceived value of learning. This concept is based on participation studies (Rubenson, 1979; Manninen, 2003; Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009; Hippel & Tippelt, 2010), and on motivation theories (Pintrich, 1988; Ruohotie, 2000).

In addition, **Skills and Competencies** were used as a benefit concept in the qualitative analysis of the open-ended interview questions. For practical reasons, however, it was not included in the structured survey questions, because listing all potential skills in the questionnaire would have been impossible.

Benefit studies are often prone to selection bias, due to the fact that more active adult learners are usually healthier, more socially active, and so on than non-participants. Likewise, it is difficult to create research settings involving longitudinal follow-up data collection, and especially control groups, the way it is done in the natural sciences. As a consequence, it is also quite difficult to prove any causal effects in benefit studies (Desjardins, 2008b). In the BeLL study, we tried to minimize this problem by asking respondents to report in the questionnaire the *changes* caused by their participation in liberal adult education courses. These changes are based on personal experiences, and therefore can and should be measured using self-reports. The wording of the question was formulated as described below, and followed by a list of 35 statements measuring different benefit concepts:

2.3.1 *Now, please assess whether these liberal adult education courses have caused the following changes in your life. Use the following scale*:
Much less (- - -) Less (- -) Slightly less (-) No change (0) Slightly more (+) More (++) Much more (+++)

It should be noted that the wording of the question and the scale also take into account the possibility that the changes might be negative. Since this approach is rarely used in benefit studies, it brings an additional perspective to this field of research. In practice, wider benefits are defined in the BeLL study as 'positive changes' in respondents' lives. Note that in some questions 'less than before' can be a positive change (e.g. concerning smoking and alcohol use). The questionnaire is available in Manninen and Meriläinen (2014).[5]

[5] Because the BeLL data collection is based on self-reported changes reported retrospectively, there is the danger of subjective 'bias' (social desirability). Benefits are assessed from the perspective of current and former participants of liberal adult education courses, and they are asked whether they recognize any changes caused by their participation. Such answers can become subject to the effects of adult education's positive general image, and an individual might answer questions in the highly charged field of lifelong learning in a 'socially desired' manner (see Paulhus, 1991; 1998).

Background questions and open questions

In addition to the benefit questions defined above, the questionnaire included the following questions about respondents' learning history during the past 12 months:

- Number of liberal adult education courses attended (1.1);
- Name, topic, and length of these courses (1.2);
- Course provider (1.3).

After that, there were two open-ended questions about outcomes and changes. The aim was to get a spontaneous answer about potential benefits before the respondent was introduced to the list of potential benefits. A similar method and similar questions were used in the previous Finnish study (Manninen & Luukannel, 2008; Manninen, 2010). The two open-ended questions were:

> *2.1 What immediate outcomes, if any, have you noticed from your participation in learning?*
>
> *2.2 What other outcomes, long-term effects, or changes have you noticed?*

After the benefit statements and the statements measuring social desirability, respondents were introduced to a list of potential elements in learning situations that might have been important for the development of benefits (Question 2.4). The elements were selected with the help of results of previous studies and adult education literature. For example, the importance of the group is well described in adult education handbooks (Knowles, 1985) and various theories of learning, including communicative learning (Mezirow, 2009) and social constructivism (Bonk & Cunningham, 1998). It is also found in previous studies (Manninen, 2010). In addition, respondents were asked about the role of these elements in the development of benefits using an open question:

> *2.5 If possible, please give one or two examples which illustrate why and how these elements were important for the outcomes you listed above.*

The last page included some background questions about respondents with respect to

- gender
- age
- educational level
- employment status
- profession
- citizenship
- mother tongue (whether it is same as in the questionnaire).

Social desirability is defined as a 'tendency to give socially desirable responses in self-description' (Edwards, 1957, p. 35; Paulhus 1991). The risk of asking about subjectively experienced benefits was taken into consideration by adding the following four control statements measuring social desirability to the questionnaire. Statements were selected from Paulhus' Social Desirability Scale (Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding BIDR): *36. It would be hard for me to break any of my bad habits*; *37. I never regret my decisions*; *38. I am very confident of my judgments*; *39. Once I have made up my mind, other people can seldom change my opinion*.

3.1.3 Sampling and data collection

The BeLL study is based on the experiences of adult learners who participated in at least one liberal adult education course during the past 12 months.

In order to map the liberal adult education provision available in the various Member States, the partners made a sample plan reflecting the national situation of liberal adult education in their country. The sample plans were based on available sources (statistics, descriptions of national adult education systems, etc.), which were used to identify and describe the liberal AE providers and their situation in each country. The national AE situation was described in the sample plan, and based on that, each partner presented and explained their sampling decisions. Taking into account that the situation and structure of liberal adult education varies between partner countries, it was acceptable for the sample plans to be somewhat different for each partner country.

In order to capture the wide range of potential liberal adult education course topics, a list of these was created and used as a guideline when targeting respondents. Each partner had to make sure that their BeLL sample contained the following course topics:

- Languages / humanities;
- ICT;
- Creative arts;
- Social skills, active citizenship;
- Health and sports,
- Basic skills and competences.

These topics should each make up about 10 % of the BeLL sample. It was also agreed that the respondent profiles should be diverse in terms of gender, age, level of education, and employment status.

The data collection was conducted using both paper and online questionnaires. Paper versions in all ten languages (plus an Italian version for the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland) were edited by DIE to follow the same BeLL layout. Identical web questionnaires for all languages were created by UEF, using the 'e-lomake' programme. Both versions have advantages and disadvantages, and the idea was to provide two options for training organizations and respondents to choose from. The web version was the main data collection method (70-80% of responses were to be collected that way), and the paper questionnaire was the additional method (20–30% of responses).

The BeLL study aimed at analysing what kinds of benefits are generated by participating in liberal adult education. Data collection thus had to be targeted at individuals who recently experienced that kind of adult learning (cf. Dolan & Fujiwara, 2012). For that reason, the sampling method (the way respondents were selected) in the BeLL survey was convenience sampling (Hedt & Pagano, 2010) targeting active adult learners in liberal adult education organizations.[6]

For the same reason, it is impossible to estimate the response rate or the representativeness of the sample, because the total number of adult learners in all countries is not known. In Finland, for

[6] Similar challenges are faced by, for example, medical studies where the target group consists of individuals taking part in a special treatment, or rare, elusive, or otherwise hard to reach populations (Sudman, Sirken, & Cowan, 1988; Hedt & Pagano, 2010; Brick, 2011). It was not possible to use random sampling of all adults (because the majority of them have no experience with liberal adult education courses). It was also impossible to use a random sample of registered course participants, because there are no such registers or easily accessible administrative records (Brick, 2011, p. 878) of liberal adult education participants in ten European countries. Due to these constraints, it was not possible to use a random sample of 'active adult learners'. Reaching, for example, every tenth adult learner at random would have required up-to-date statistics and course registers, and a lot of extra work on the part of training providers.

example, the estimated number of liberal adult education participants is 520,000, which makes it difficult to get a 'representative sample' of these adults. In addition, because of the explorative nature of the BeLL study and the convenience sampling method, the results cannot be generalized to a wider adult population. This is self-evident, but has to be kept in mind when using the results in policy discussions. However, given the size of the data corpus, the study provides a good overview of participation and benefits, especially positive benefits.

National sampling and data collection in the BeLL countries

It was evident that the only way to collect BeLL data was (1) to contact liberal adult education providers and ask them to deliver questionnaires to their students, or (2) to contact adult learners directly. In practice, the BeLL survey data consist of adult learners who (1) participated in at least one liberal adult education course during the past 12 months, and who (2) somehow received the paper questionnaire or the link to the web questionnaire, and (3) who were willing to fill in the questionnaire.

The target was to collect 1,000 questionnaires per country, resulting in a total of 10,000 respondents. The distribution of paper questionnaires was based on the following methods:

- Taking questionnaires into a learning group, introducing the study and questionnaire face-to-face, and collecting the completed questionnaires;
- Asking trainers or administrative staff to do the same;
- Asking organizations to distribute questionnaires to individual adults and to organize the collection of questionnaires;
- Using research assistants (students) to contact individual adult learners.

The distribution of web questionnaire links was conducted in the following ways:

- Sending a motivational letter (traditional paper letter or e-mail) featuring the web link directly to learners via organizations' mailing lists;
- Putting up 'posters' advertising the BeLL survey (paper version on notice boards, web versions on organizations' web sites or on the homepage of a web journal targeted to a liberal adult education audience);
- Asking national liberal adult education umbrella organizations and training organizations for help with the distribution of information.

Because liberal adult education is organized differently in each country, some national modifications of sampling methods had to be developed. Further information on sample plans and sampling in the BeLL countries can be found in the statistical report (Manninen & Meriläinen, 2014).

3.1.4 Survey analysis methods and phases

After describing respondents' profiles and the basic frequencies of benefits, more detailed factor analysis and group comparisons were carried out. The statistical analyses were done in five phases using SPSS-19.0 and MPlus 6.0 statistical software (Muthén & Muthén, 2010):

- **First phase**: The structure of the first and second order latent factors of benefits was tested with the help of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The confirmatory factor analysis was done step by step for each theoretical dimension.
- **Second phase**: The sum scores measuring the benefits were calculated for each respondent, based on the factors found in the confirmatory factor analysis.
- **Third phase**: The benefits were compared between different subgroups with the help of t-test and one-way variance analysis (ANOVA)
- **Fourth phase**: The interaction between background variables in relation to benefits was analysed with the help of covariance analysis (ANCOVA).
- **Fifth phase**: The overall structure and relations between benefit factors were examined using structural equation modelling (SEM).

SEM analysis was used for two purposes: as a starting point for the analysis to define the benefit factors (Phase 1), and to analyse the factor structure and development of benefits (Phase 5).

3.2 Results of the Statistical Analyses

3.2.1 Respondents

The target for data collection was 1000 respondents per country. After the data collection had ended, the non-valid cases were removed from the data (e.g. cases that had not participated in liberal adult education courses, were duplicates, had too much missing data, etc.). There were only a few such cases per country. The remaining number of valid respondents was 8646. Table 2 shows that the target of 1000 respondents was reached in three countries; another four countries came very close.[7]

Table 2 Respondents by country

Country	N	%
England	709	8.2
Finland	1252	14.5
Germany	902	10.4
Italy	543	6.3
Romania	1043	12.1
Switzerland	274	3.2
Serbia	981	11.3
Spain	898	10.4
Czech Republic	989	11.4
Slovenia	1055	12.2
Total	8646	100.0

Out of the 8646 respondents, 62 % had participated in only one liberal adult education course during the past 12 months; the rest had taken two or more courses.

[7] Only Switzerland fell far short of the target due to problems in data collection described earlier.

The profile of respondents[8] follows the general profile of active adult learners familiar from liberal adult education participation statistics: 71 % are female; the majority of them have a rather high educational level; and most are active in work life or retired. Age ranges from 15 to 92 (see Table 4). All country-specific respondent profiles are available in Appendix 1 in Manninen and Meriläinen (2014). There are some differences between the respondent profiles of the ten countries. In Finland and Slovenia, for example, respondents tend to be older than in the other countries, and Romania has more male and young respondents. These differences need to be taken into account in further comparative analysis.

Table 3 Composition of BeLL sample, by educational level

	n	%	Valid %
Primary education, or first stage of basic education, or below (ISCED 1 or below)	324	3.7	3.8
Lower secondary education, or second stage of basic education (ISCED 2)	825	9.5	9.7
Upper secondary education (ISCED 3)	2724	31.5	32.2
Post-secondary education (ISCED 4)	1383	16.0	16.3
First or second stage of tertiary education (ISCED 5 and 6)	3180	36.8	37.6
Other	29	.3	.3
Total	8465	97.9	100.0
Missing	181	2.1	
Total	8646	100.0	

Respondents (like adult education participants in general) have a rather high level of education. 37 % have a tertiary degree; the second largest group has completed upper secondary education. As the country-specific tables in the Appendix show, there are major differences between the countries: Italy and Spain have very few respondents with tertiary degrees, whereas in Germany and Romania, over 50 % have a university-level education. These national differences in respondent profiles in part reflect some differences in sampling procedures, but are also related to differences in national educational structures, as well as to differences in liberal adult education provision.

Respondents were grouped in five age groups (Table 4, for country comparisons see Manninen & Meriläinen, 2014). Countries differ in their age profiles: Finnish, English, Slovenian, and especially Italian respondents more often belong to the oldest age groups, whereas the youngest respondents can be found in Romania, Spain, and Serbia.

[8] The skewed male/female ratio accurately reflects the actual gendered nature of liberal adult education participation and participant profiles. In Finland, for example, 70 % of liberal adult education participants are female (Kumpulainen, 2008, p. 94).

Table 4 Composition of BeLL sample, by age group

		N	%	Valid %
Age groups	15-24	1065	12.3	12.9
	25-36	1938	22.4	23.6
	37-49	1727	20.0	21.0
	50-64	2160	25.0	26.3
	65-92	1338	15.5	16.3
	Total	8228	95.2	100.0
Missing		418	4.8	
Total		8646	100.0	

Table 5 shows the main employment status categories. More detailed categories, as well as employment status information by country, are available in Appendix 1 in Manninen and Meriläinen (2014). In September 2013, the average unemployment rate for the EU-28 was 11 % (Eurostat, 2013), which is almost identical to the share of unemployed respondents in the BeLL data (11.7%). The highest percentage of unemployed respondents was found in Spain (25.9%), Slovenia (19.8%), Serbia (19.6%), and the Czech Republic (14.6%). Only in Spain and Serbia do these numbers match the actual unemployment rate (26.6% in Spain, 20.0% in Serbia, as of September 2013). In the other two countries, actual unemployment rates are much lower (10.2% in Slovenia, 7.0% in the Czech Republic).

Table 5 Composition of the BeLL sample, by employment status

	N	%	Valid %
In working life	4124	47.7	49.0
Student	838	9.7	10.0
Outside labour market	2443	28.3	29.0
Unemployed	1009	11.7	12.0
Total	8414	97.3	100.0
Missing	232	2.7	
	8646	100.0	

Out of the total of 8646 respondents, 8417 were used in the deeper statistical analysis for confirmatory factor analysis; 8228 were used for ANOVA and ANCOVA analyses. These were the respondents who had replied in sufficient detail to the change statements so that it was possible to make sum scores for them. In other words, those respondents who were dropped from the deeper statistical analysis had too many missing answers in change statements or background questions. The number of cases in different analyses and in different sum scores varies according to the type of analysis and the number of people who provided valid answers in different statements.

3.2.2 Course types

Table 6 shows the detailed list of course types found in the analysis, in order of frequency. Table 7 shows a shorter list of the main course categories. The categorization of course types was done using the name and topic of the course(s) respondents had attended (maximum: 3 courses; Question 1.2).

Because respondents were asked to list up to three courses they had attended, the number of courses to analyse was higher than the number of respondents. 38 % of respondents listed more than one course, and the total number of courses to analyse was 13,338. In most cases, the course type was easy to define based on the name of the course (e.g. 'ICT for beginners'). In some cases, the course description was also needed for the analysis. (A course called 'A monstrous regiment', for example, can be defined as a history course based on the term 'Tudors' in the course description.)

Table 6 Course types in order of frequency

Course type	Frequency	Percent	Valid %
Several course types attended *	2099	24.3	24.6
Languages	1290	14.9	15.1
Work-related and vocational topics	958	11.1	11.2
Sports	735	8.5	8.6
Basic ICT skills	544	6.3	6.4
Social education	465	5.4	5.4
Handicrafts	341	3.9	4.0
ICT	316	3.7	3,7
Arts	258	3.0	3.0
Singing	238	2.8	2.8
Culture	217	2.5	2.5
Health-related courses	206	2.4	2.4
Basic competencies	155	1.8	1.8
Political education	147	1.7	1.7
Music	76	.9	.9
Basic literacy skills	69	.8	.8
Baking and food	64	.7	.7
History	61	.7	.7
Special skills	61	.7	.7
Basic language skills	57	.7	.7
Creative writing	55	.6	.6
Nature	55	.6	.6
Animals	48	.6	.6
Science courses	24	.3	.3
Basic numeracy skills	8	.1	.1
Total	8547	98.9	100.0
Missing	99	1,1	
Total	8646	100,0	

* This category includes participants who participated in more than one type of course.

For the purposes of analysis, the course types were also classified into main categories to narrow down the number of types and to combine similar types of courses into the same main category.

Table 7 Main categories of course types

Main category of course type	Frequency	Percent	Valid %
Health & sports	941	10.9	11.0
ICT & skills	1210	14.0	14.2
Languages	1290	14.9	15.1
Creative activities	1135	13.1	13.3
Society & culture	914	10.6	10.7
Work-related and vocational topics	958	11.1	11.2
Several courses attended	2099	24.3	24.6
Total	8547	98.9	100.0
Missing	99	1.1	
Total	8646	100.0	

* This category includes participants who participated in more than one type of course.

Note that the figures in Table 7 indicate the number of course topics (not the number of courses) that respondents mentioned. For example, the number 941 indicates that 941 respondents participated in *one or more* courses, which were all health- and sports-related.

Work-related and vocational course topics exist in the data for various reasons, even though liberal adult education is by definition non-vocational. Some training providers organize both liberal and work-related courses. More importantly, some adults study these work-related topics on a voluntary basis, without having specific goal- or career-oriented reasons for participation, but instead take these courses for the sake of learning something new (Houle, 1961). In Finland, for example, these kinds of courses are open university studies, organized by liberal adult education organizations in cooperation with universities. They are academic university studies.

There are many work-related course participants, especially in Spain, where 40.6 % of respondents studied work-related and vocational topics. In fact, 37.2 % of all vocational course participants came from Spain. The second-biggest shares of work-related course participants were found in Romania (19.3%) and the Czech Republic (10%). The smallest shares were found in Finland (2.5%) and Switzerland (3.3%).

When the Spanish course topics were analyzed in more detail, it was found that the majority of work-related course participants were studying for the 'university access exam for people over 25 years old'. However, many people doing this kind of training are not trying to improve their labour market prospects but do so for personal reasons (e.g. to test their learning skills, to go back to school at an adult age no matter what the level of education, or even to study for pleasure or out of interest, etc.). These kinds of courses are also the few examples of public provision for adults in Spain. Moreover, because of the economic, financial, and social crisis, adults in Spain look at education as a way to simply make use of their extra time because of unemployment. Within the Spanish BeLL sample, many people see unemployment as an opportunity to devote time to learning activities. In the interviews, participants said they were trying to improve their CVs by taking additional courses, although these do not involve any kind of certification.

The cumulative category 'Several courses attended' includes respondents who participated in two or more courses belonging to different course categories, for example one language course and one course related to health and sports. Even though the category differs from others in terms of definition and frequency, it is the only solution for analysis. The category does not show which

courses respondents participated in, but it can be used as a ‘mixed courses’ category in the analysis.

A more detailed analysis of adults who attended ‘several course topics’ shows that course type combinations are very individual, and that it is difficult to point out a ‘typical’ set of combinations. For further information on this, see Manninen and Meriläinen (2014).

3.2.3 Basic frequencies

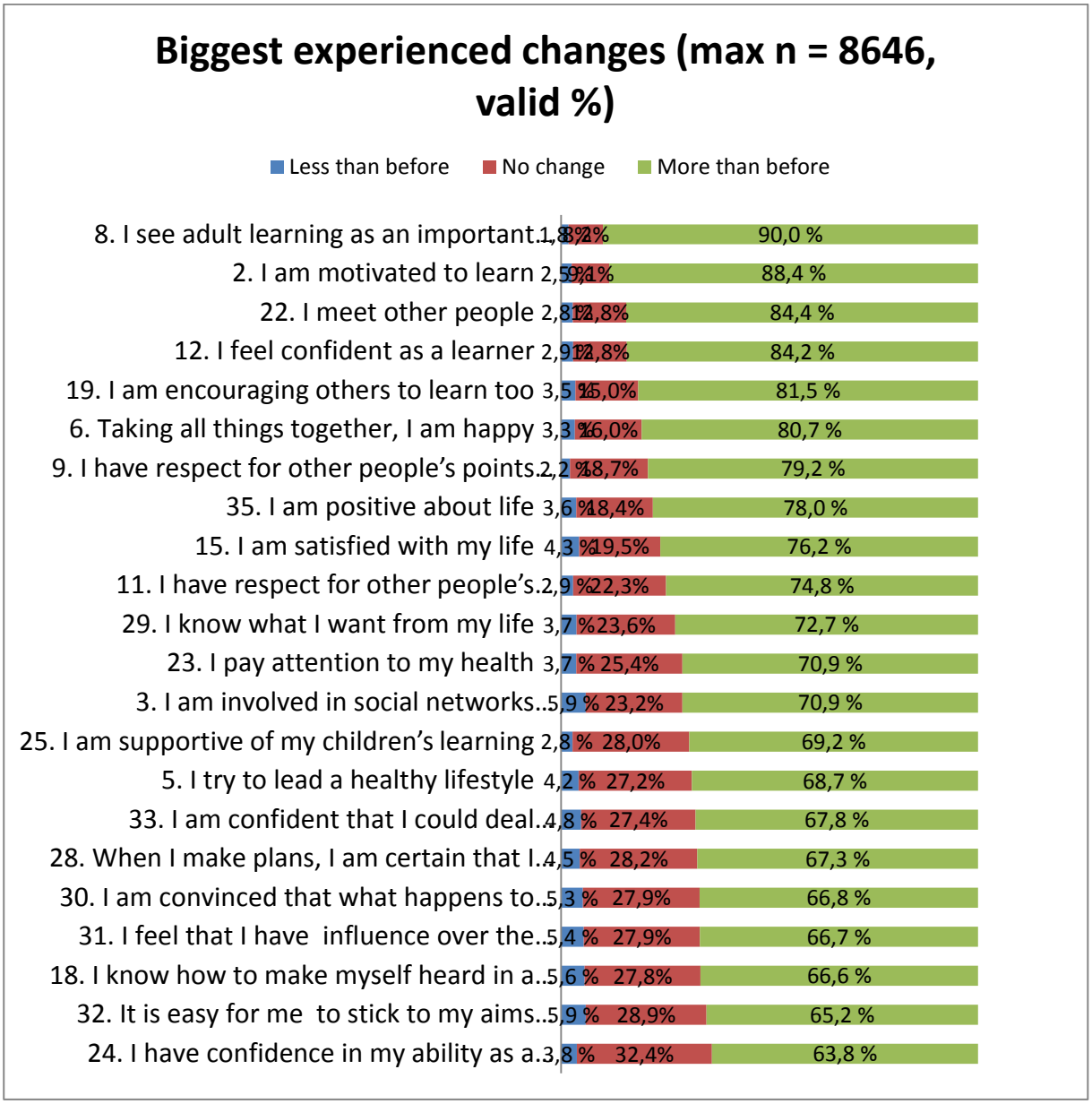
Changes experienced by the respondents

The statistical analysis of the BeLL data will be based on the experienced changes measured with 27 benefit statements (measuring the 12 benefit concepts) and 8 psychological statements (measuring the two psychological concepts), as described in Table 9 later in this report. Respondents were introduced to a list of potential benefits and asked to estimate whether there were changes in these caused by participating in liberal adult education courses during the past 12 months. They were asked to reply on a scale of Much less (- - -) Less (- -) Slightly less (-) No change (0) Slightly more (+) More (+ +) Much more (+ + +).[9]

Figure 1 shows the general results in order of the biggest positive changes. For presentation purposes, the response options ‘much less’, ‘less’, and ‘slightly less’ have been combined into one response, ‘less than before’. Likewise, response options measuring changes in the other direction were merged into one response, ‘more than before’. The ‘no change’ category remains the same.

[9] Scale numbering for the statistical analysis: Much less (1) Less (2) Slightly less (3) No change (4) Slightly more (5) More (6) Much more (7).

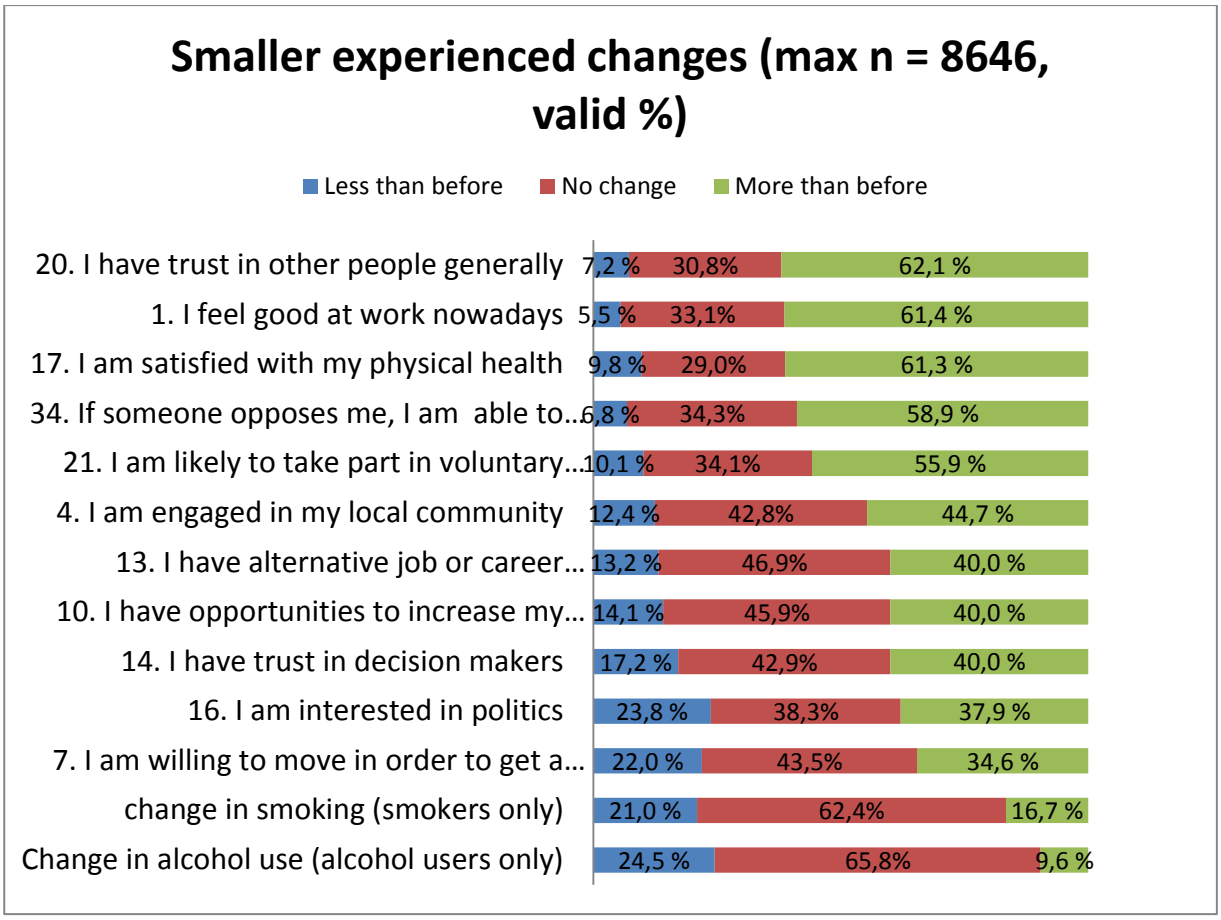
Figure 1 Biggest changes experienced by respondents at statement level



The results show that 90 % of respondents who replied to that question are now more convinced that adult learning is an important opportunity than they were before participating in a course. 88.4 % feel they now have a better learning motivation, and 84.4 % meet more other people than before.

Figure 2 shows the second half of the list, 'smaller changes'.

Figure 2 Smaller changes experienced by respondents at statement level



In Figure 2, the changes reported for smoking and drinking alcohol are based only on the responses of those who smoke or drink alcohol. Those who replied that they don't use alcohol or smoke at all were removed from the analysis. There were 2551 smokers and 4507 alcohol users in the sample. Note that 'less than before' is a positive outcome in this case (at least from the point of view of national health). The results show that 21 % of smokers now smoke less than before their course participation, and 24.5 % of those who use alcohol have reduced that habit. However, there are also respondents who smoke or use alcohol more than before. It seems that the relationship between 'bad habits' and participation in adult education is a complex one, and there are some differences between countries and also between course types. A more detailed analysis, as well as the results for the other changes and negative outcomes, is available in Manninen and Meriläinen (2014).

3.2.4 Factor structure

In the **first phase** of deeper statistical analysis, the overall factor structure was explored with the help of Structural Equation Models (SEM). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was done step by step for each theoretical dimension to define the factors measuring benefits of lifelong learning in this study (cf. Chen & Yang, 2013). In addition to normal first order factors (10), three second order

factors were created. These factors are described in Table 8. A more detailed table with statements loading in factors is available in Table 9.

Table 8 Benefit factors

Benefit Factors (sum scores)	Cr.α (n)	Second order factors:
Locus of Control (3 items)	.85 (8066)	
Self-Efficacy (3)	.85 (8044)	CONTROL OF OWN LIFE (8 items) .93 (7853)
Sense of Purpose in Life (2)	.78 (8170)	
Tolerance (2)	.80 (8147)	
Social Engagement (5)	.78 (7717)	ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL (11) .89 (7444)
Changes in educational Experiences (4)	.80 (7975)	
Health (3)	.84 (8056)	
Mental Well-being (2)	.82 (8134)	HEALTH, FAMILY & WORK (9) .83 (2468)
Work (2)	.77 (7475)	
Family (2)	.89 (2735)	

In the **second phase** of analysis, sum scores measuring changes in benefit factors for each respondent were calculated based on the items loaded on each factor. The internal consistency of the sum variables was satisfactory, Cronbach's α varied between 0.77–0.93 (see Table 10, which also presents the means and variances of sum variables).

The factor structure follows closely the original 14 theoretical concepts described earlier, but not in every detail. In the factor analysis, some statements were moved to another factor (concept), and some were dropped from the factor structure because of low communality (see Table 10). The main change is the merger of 'social networks', 'trust', and 'civic and social engagement' into a new concept: social engagement.

Table 9 Factors and sum scores of benefits of lifelong learning

Items → Factors (sum scores) → Second order factors	Factor loading	N	Cr.α (n)	M	SD	g_1	g_2
FACTOR/SUM SCORE: Locus of Control (3 items)		8320	.85 (8066)	5.11	1.05	-.30	.25
31. I feel that I have influence over the things that happen to me.	.81						
28. When I make plans. I am certain that I can make them work.	.79						
30. I am convinced that what happens to me is my own doing.	.80						
FACTOR/SUM SCORE: Self-Efficacy (3)		8289	.85 (8044)	5.04	1.05	-.22	.23
34. If someone opposes me. I'm able to find the means and ways to get what I want.	.70						
32. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals	.83						
33. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.	.81						
FACTOR/SUM SCORE: Sense of Purpose in Life (2)		8373	.78 (8170)	5.40	1.10	-.49	.33
29. I know what I want from my life	.81						
35. I am positive about life	.73						
→ COMBINED INTO SECOND ORDER FACTOR: CONTROL OF OWN LIFE (8 items)		8412	.93 (7853)	5.16	.99	-.35	.46
FACTOR/SUM SCORE: Tolerance (2)		8378	.80 (8147)	5.6	1.12	-.62	.15
9. I have respect for other people's points of view.	.84						
11. I have respect for other people's cultures.	.80						
FACTOR/SUM SCORE: Social Engagement (5)		8491	.78 (7717)	5.07	.99	-.42	.91
3. I am involved in social networks (friends. Colleagues etc.).	.62						
4. I am engaged in my local community.	.53						
20. I have trust in other people generally.	.68						
21. I am likely to take part in voluntary activity.	.65						
22. I meet other people.	.77						
FACTOR/SUM SCORE: Changes in educational Experiences (4)		8562	.80 (7975)	5.75	.93	-1.08	2.60
2. I am motivated to learn.	.69						
12. I feel confident as a learner.	.74						
8. I see adult learning as an important opportunity.	.73						
19. I am encouraging others to learn too.	.73						
→ COMBINED INTO SECOND ORDER FACTOR: ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL (11)		8577	.89 (7444)	5.42	.88	-.79	2.22
FACTOR/SUM SCORE: Health (3)		8421	.84 (8056)	5.35	1.19	-.41	-.14
5. I try to lead a healthy lifestyle.	.82						
17. I am satisfied with my physical health.	.69						
23. I pay attention to my health.	.89						
FACTOR/SUM SCORE: Mental Well-being (2)		8417	.82 (8134)	5.47	1.11	-.66	.71
6. Taking all things together I am happy.	.83						
15. I am satisfied with my life.	.84						
FACTOR/SUM SCORE: Work (2)		7827	.77 (7475)	4.44	1.33	-.35	.61
10. I have opportunities to increase my income.	.79						
13. I have alternative job or career opportunities.	.80						
FACTOR/SUM SCORE: Family (2)		2861	.89 (2735)	5.43	1.31	-.57	-.05
24. I have confidence in my ability as a parent.	.98						
25. I am supportive of my children's learning.	.82						
→ COMBINED INTO SECOND ORDER FACTOR: HEALTH, FAMILY & WORK (9)		8506	.83 (2468)	5.15	.93	-.36	.95
Scale: Much less (1) Less (2) Slightly less (3) No change (4) Slightly more (5) More (6) Much more (7) Sumvariables include cases with missing information [MEAN(item1.item2.item3.item4)] Cronbach's α is based on cases with no missing information. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test <.05; All sumvariables varied between 1-7 (Min.-Max.) g_1 = Skewness; g_2 = Kurtosis							

Only those who have children under 18 (n=2810) were asked to reply to family benefit questions (24 and 25), which makes the frequencies smaller.

These ten factors and three second order factors were used to calculate sum scores for each respondent. These sum scores were used to make group comparisons for experienced benefits.

Table 10 Single benefit statements not included in the factors

The following single statements (benefits) were analyzed separately, because they do not load into factors:	N	M	SD	g_1	g_2
26. Change in smoking (smokers only, non-smokers removed)	2551	3.84	1.33	-.37	1.02
27. Change in alcohol use (alcohol users only)	4507	3.61	1.15	-.90	1.08
1. I feel good at work nowadays	7638	5.05	1.29	-.401	.335
7. I am willing to move in order to get a new job	7612	4.18	1.67	-.225	-.259
14. I have trust in decision makers	7978	4.37	1.36	-.193	.305
16. I am interested in politics	8146	4.15	1.62	-.334	-.275
18. I know how to make myself heard in a group	8180	5.12	1.23	-.390	.231
Scale: Much less (1) Less (2) Slightly less (3) No change (4) Slightly more (5) More (6) Much more (7) g_1 = Skewness; g_2 = Kurtosis					

3.2.5 Group comparisons of benefits

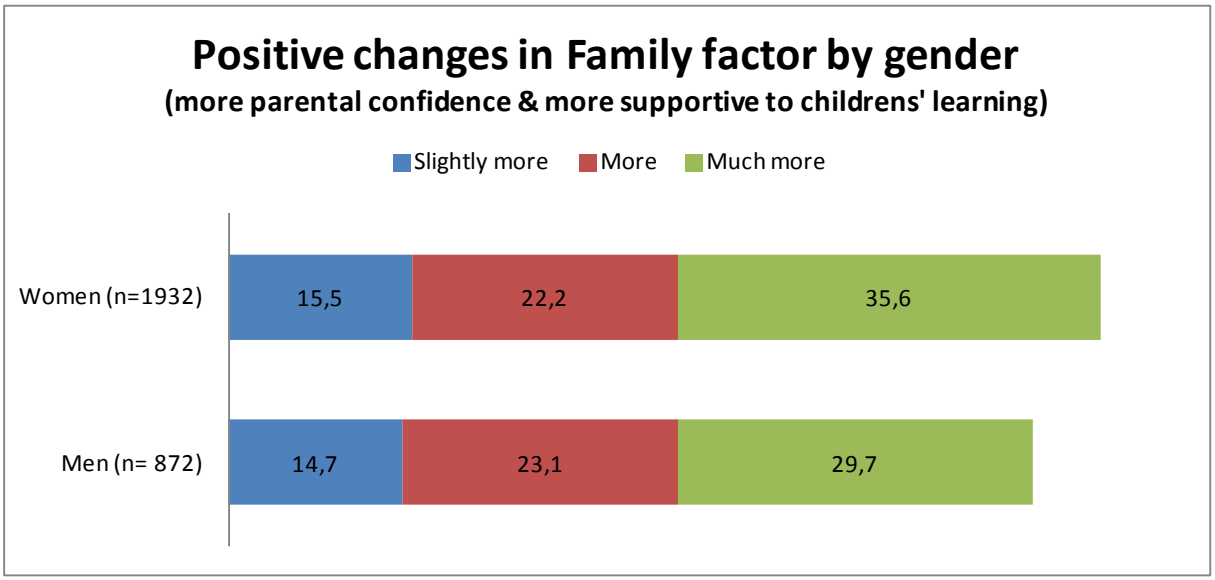
This section describes the basic differences between different respondent groups in relation to experienced changes and benefits. This is the **third phase** of analysis, where the benefits of lifelong learning were compared between different subgroups. The statistical differences were examined with the help of T-test and one-way ANOVA. T-test was used in analysing the means of two groups; ANOVA was used when there were three or more subgroups to compare. The comparisons are made mainly by T-test or ANOVA, later with more detailed Covariance analysis (ANCOVA). More complex statistical tables are available in Manninen and Meriläinen (2014).

When making country comparisons, we have to keep in mind the different respondent profiles and course types. Even though the statistical analysis is made using covariance analysis (ANCOVA), which makes it possible to control for and analyse the influence of intervening variables, the interpretation of some country differences also requires consideration of some national differences. These were already addressed to some extent in the study (see Manninen & Meriläinen, 2014, pp. 78-94) but need further research.

When interpreting the statistical differences, we have to keep in mind the fact that differences between the various groups are small, even if they reach the level of statistical significance. 'Statistical significance' only indicates that the observed difference—even a small one—between group mean values is 'real', and that the mean values and variances are different enough to allow the conclusion that the groups in question indeed have some real differences. Due to the large number of BeLL respondents, even small differences data are statistically significant in BeLL, even though in 'real life' situations these differences are less radical. An example is given in the Figure 3, which shows how the statistically significant difference between male and female respondents in the 'family' sum score (5.30 vs. 5.48, $p < .01$; see next chapter) is reflected in actual response frequencies[10].

[10] The scaling of sum scores (factors and second order factors) into the original response scale of 1 to 7 was made by recoding the sum scores in the following way: 1 = 1 (much less), 1.1 to 2 = 2 (less), 2.1 to 3 = 3 (slightly less), 3.1 to 4 = 4 (no change), 4.1 to 5 = 5 (slightly more), 5.1 to 6 = 6 (more) and 6.1 to 7 = 7 (much more). Note that these recoded sum variables are more abstract than the original statements on the response scale 1 to 7, and are used only for the visual demonstration of differences in sum scores, not in the statistical analysis.

Figure 3 Example of group differences



As Figure 3 shows, 67.5 % of male respondents who answered these questions have experienced some positive change, compared to 73.3 % of female respondents who reported the same. The major difference seems to be that women selected the 'much more' option more often than men.

Benefits of lifelong learning in relation to respondents' gender

Earlier research indicates that there are differences in the way that men and women experience the benefits (Nummela, Sulander, Rahkonen, & Uutela, 2008). A comparison of BeLL data revealed that changes in 'Locus of control' or 'Sense of Purpose in life' did not differ between male and female respondents, but male respondents reported more changes in 'Self-efficacy'. The difference was statistically significant also in the sum variable of CONTROL OF OWN LIFE, which describes the sum score of these three subdimensions.

Female respondents experienced more changes in the area of ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL. The difference was statistically significant in all three subdimensions: 'Tolerance', 'Social Engagement', and 'Changes in educational Experiences'. In the HEALTH, FAMILY, & WORK area, female respondents also experienced more benefits compared to their male counterparts, except with respect to work-related benefits.

Benefits of lifelong learning in relation to respondents' age

A comparison of respondents' age group in relation to benefits (see Appendix 5 in Manninen & Meriläinen, 2014) revealed that the youngest participants had benefitted most in CONTROL OF OWN LIFE. This difference was evident in all subdimensions except for 'Sense of Purpose in life'. It seems that education improved the 'Sense of Purpose in life' among both the youngest and the oldest age group. The reason might be that for younger participants, liberal adult education serves as a 'stepping stone' to society and their own life, whereas older participants use it as a 'cushion' to soften age related-changes like retirement or the loss of family members.

The group of 65- to 92-year-olds experienced most benefits in the area of ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL. The difference to all other age groups was obvious in all subdimensions, and also

statistically significant in the 'Social engagement' dimension. Similar differences emerged regarding 'Health' and 'Mental well-being': the oldest participants benefitted most in these areas. It seems that especially for older adults social interaction and engagement are important sources of well-being.

In the benefits concerning 'Work', the three youngest age groups (15-24, 25-36, and 37-49 years) differed from the older age groups (50-64 and 65-92 years). This difference is natural because most older respondents are retired. On the other hand, it seems that the group of 50- to 64-year-olds did not experience work-related benefits, even though they have not yet reached the formal retirement age. There are at least two explanations for this: older adults do not participate in work-related or vocational courses, or they do not look for work-related benefits because they already have a good income and do not need to look for alternative jobs or career opportunities.

In the area of 'Family' benefits, there was a statistically significant difference between the 15- to 24-year-olds and 37- to 49-year-olds. Again, this result is understandable. The 165 respondents in the youngest group are less likely to have school-aged children, whereas the 1086 respondents in the group of 37- to 49-year-olds are more likely to be parents of school-aged children. Interestingly, the mean of the oldest age group was same as the mean for group of 37- to 49-year-olds. Maybe the benefits experienced by the 204 respondents in the group of those aged 65-92 were related to their adult children and grandchildren. In the interview data, there were some examples of how the participation of older adults encouraged their grown-up children to learn as well. In summary, the youngest and the oldest benefitted most in the area of HEALTH, FAMILY, & WORK, but the differences were small.

Benefits of lifelong learning in relation to participants' educational level

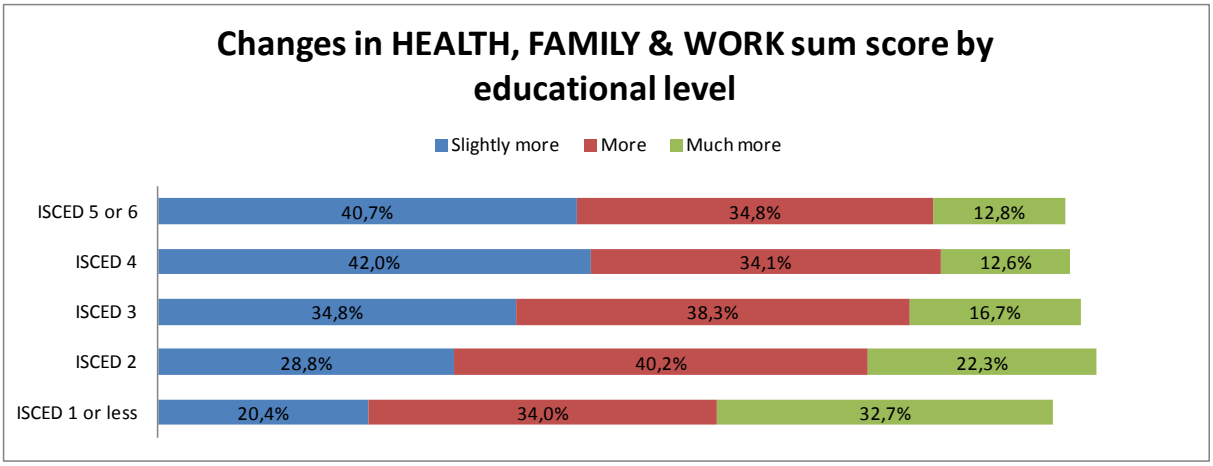
A comparison of respondents' educational level in relation to benefits revealed that respondents with an educational background on ISCED levels 1-3 had benefitted more in CONTROL OF OWN LIFE compared to respondents with ISCED level 4 and ISCED levels 5 or 6 (see Appendix 5 in Manninen & Meriläinen, 2014). The difference was statistically significant in 'Self-efficacy' and 'Sense of Purpose in life'. The difference between educational levels was linear: the lower the educational level, the higher seems to be the benefit of participation in liberal adult education courses. The differences between educational levels were similar in the benefits concerning ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL. This observation is obviously based on the fact that participants with lower educational level are likely to experience more changes than those with a longer learning history, because these higher educated persons have 'already benefitted' from education during their educational career. In plain language, they already have a good sense of self-efficacy, for example, and additional participation in learning does not produce changes as big as those seemingly experienced by the less educated. Similar observations have been made by Chandola et al. (2011), who reported that less educated adults experience more health benefits from adult education.

Likewise, respondents with the lowest levels of education benefitted most with regard to 'Health', 'Family', and 'Work', but there was no statistically significant difference between educational levels in the work-related benefits. The difference between educational levels was linear in the area of 'Mental well-being' as well, except for persons with ISCED level 2, who had benefitted most.

In total, the difference between perceived benefits between different educational levels concerning CONTROL OF OWN LIFE, ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL and HEALTH, FAMILY, & WORK is obvious. The difference is linear and statistically significant. The respondents with lower

educational level benefit more from liberal adult education than those with higher educational level. To be more precise (see Figure 4), all respondents experience changes, regardless of their educational background, but respondents in the lowest ISCED level report bigger changes than others. They selected the 'much more' option almost three times as often as respondents with the highest ISCED level (32.7% versus 12.8%).

Figure 4 Changes in HEALTH, FAMILY, & WORK sum score, by educational level



Benefits of lifelong learning in relation to participants' employment status

Analysing the benefits of lifelong learning in relation to participants' employment status revealed that self-employed persons and freelancers, homemakers, and full-time students experienced slightly more changes in CONTROL OF OWN LIFE, but these differences were not statistically significant. Homemakers also differed from the other groups in ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL. In addition, it seems that retired persons also experienced especially strong benefits in ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL along with the subdimensions of 'Tolerance', 'Social engagement', and 'Changes in educational experiences'. This same difference was found in the age comparison, which is obvious because retired people are often older as well.

These two groups, homemakers and retired persons, experienced more benefits in 'Health' and 'Mental well-being' than liberal adult education participants in general, but these differences were not statistically significant. Homemakers (who are more likely to have children to take care of) also differed from other groups in 'Family'-related benefits, and significantly from part-time workers.

Interesting differences emerged with regard to benefits related to 'Work'. Self-employed persons/freelancers and part-time students experienced more work-related benefits than others, which can be explained by the more 'insecure and searching' labour market status of these groups (learning generates new career options and job opportunities to increase income). Interestingly, unemployed respondents experienced the least work-related benefits (M= 4.51, except for retired respondents, who had the lowest mean, 3.79). The difference was statistically significant for self-employed persons/freelancers. Unemployed participants had participated more often in courses dealing with ICT, skills and competencies, and work-related topics, but it seems that they experience fewer work-related changes. This may be related to the fact that their life situation is more seriously based on the challenge of finding new job opportunities, and that they already went

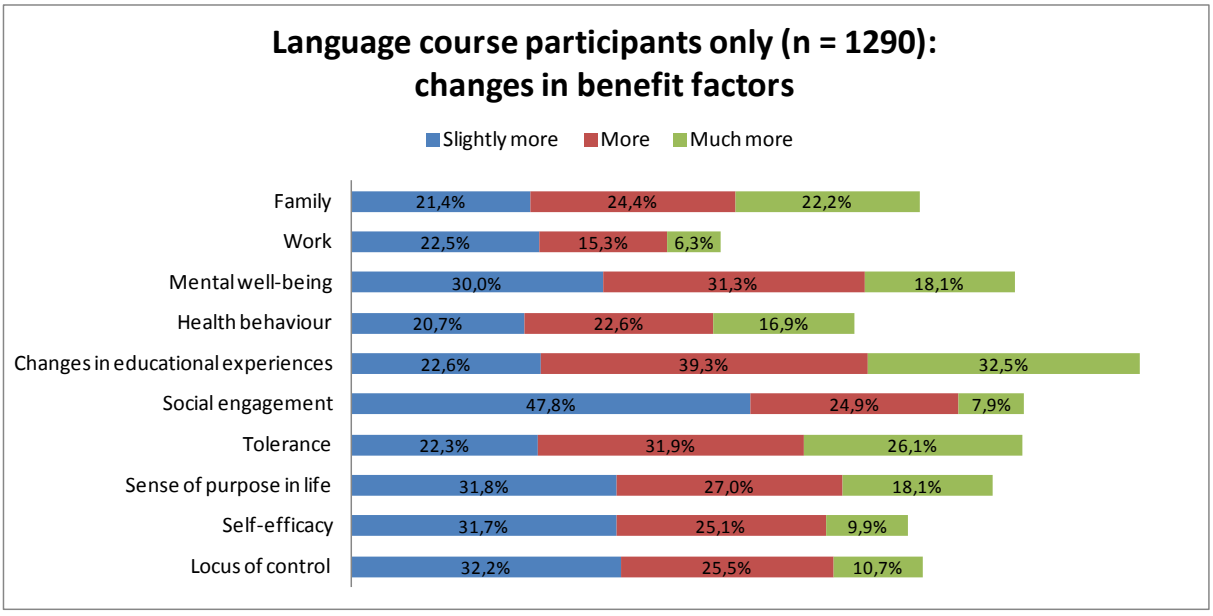
through that thinking process before entering the courses. That said, 45.7 % of unemployed respondents reported they now have better opportunities to increase their income, and 42.5 % thought they had better career or job opportunities. It is obvious, therefore, that learning benefits unemployed participants as well, but the changes are a bit smaller than for some other groups. The respective percentages for self-employed persons and freelancers were 54.4 % and 56.2 %. When interpreting the statistically significant differences we have to keep in mind that actual differences between the groups are small.

3.2.6 Emergence of benefits by course topic

The question of which courses generate what kinds of benefits is quite central to the BeLL study. This section focuses on this question.

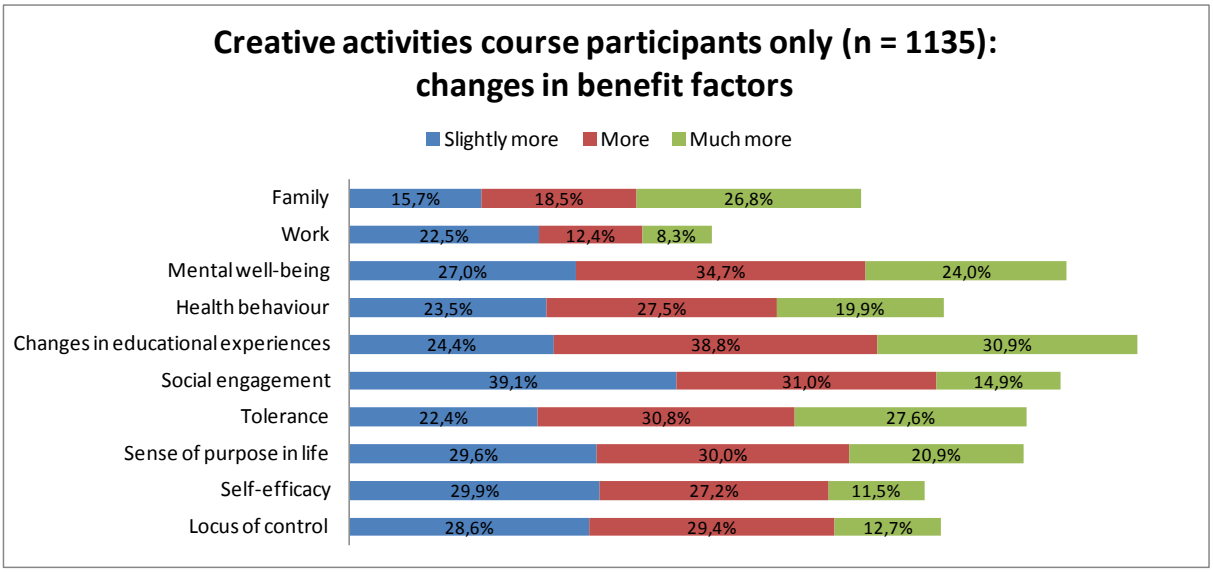
Our analysis showed that at the individual level, adults experience benefits very individually (see Manninen & Meriläinen, 2014, pp. 55ff.). Similar courses (here language courses) may generate benefits for some participants that others don't recognize. When all language course participants (n=1290) are analysed statistically, we see that all benefit factors exist, but there are some differences as to which benefits are experienced more or less. As Figure 5 shows, 'Changes in educational experiences' is the 'top benefit' that emerges from participating in language courses (and in fact, all types of courses).

Figure 5 Changes in benefit factors experienced by language course participants



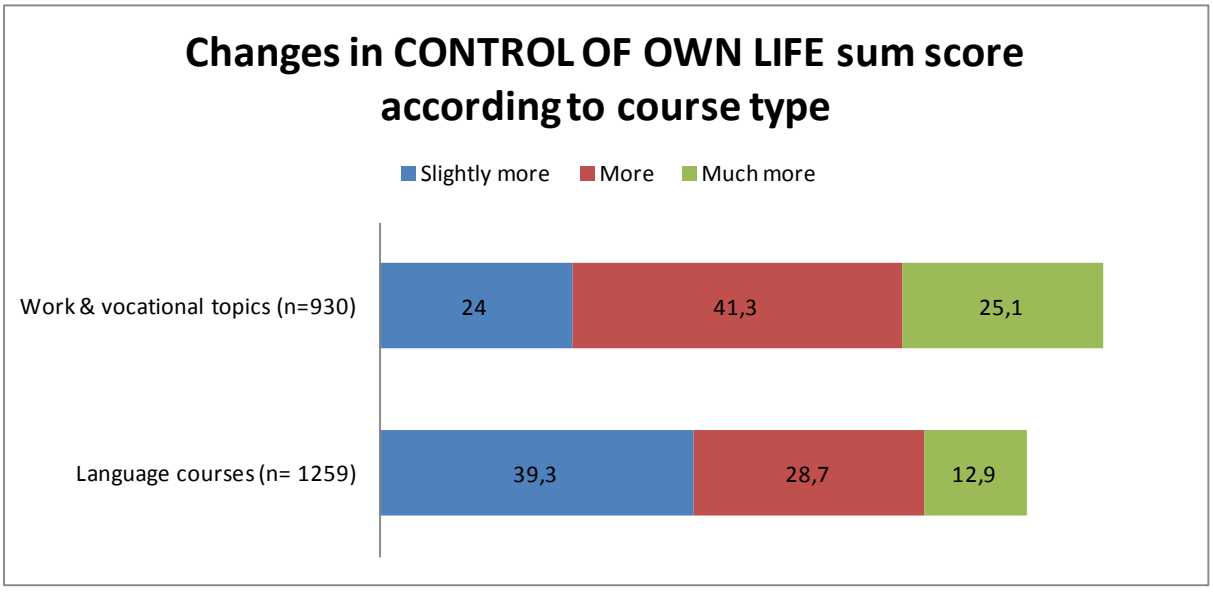
The differences between types of courses in terms of benefits are actually very small in practice, even though there are some statistically significant differences, as described later in this section. The following figure shows that the benefit factor profiles for participants of creative courses are almost identical to those of language course participants, with only minor differences in percentages.

Figure 6: Changes in benefit factors experienced by creative activities course participants



A deeper statistical comparison of course types revealed that work- and vocation-related courses best supported best the emergence of CONTROL OF OWN LIFE. The difference was statistically significant in all subdimensions: in 'Locus of Control', 'Self-efficacy', and 'Sense of Purpose in life" compared to all other course types; except in development of "Sense of Purpose in life' compared to those who had participated in several courses. By contrast, courses dealing with languages and creative activities were shown to support the development of CONTROL OF OWN LIFE to a lesser degree than other course types. However, this does not mean that language courses or courses dealing with creative activities are not effective in producing wider benefits. On the contrary, 80.9 % of language course participants experienced some positive changes in CONTROL OF OWN LIFE, but for work-related and vocational course participants, that percentage was even higher (90.3%). The following figure shows the differences at the response frequency level.

Figure 7: Sum score differences between two course types



The results show that adults participating in certain types of courses seem to experience more changes than participants in some other courses, but none of the course types is 'ineffective' in terms of producing benefits. The differences between course types are small and may be explained at least to some degree by different types of participants.

Those who participated in several courses perceived most changes in the development of ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL. The difference to all other course types was evident, except to work-related courses, which seem to support not only participants' CONTROL OF OWN LIFE but almost to the same extent the development of ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL. ICT-related courses, too, seem to support 'Tolerance', 'Social engagement', and 'Changes in educational experiences'. The courses dealing with languages were least effective in supporting the development of ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL.

It is not surprising that health and sports courses were most effective in supporting the development of 'Health'. This comes out clearly in the interviews:

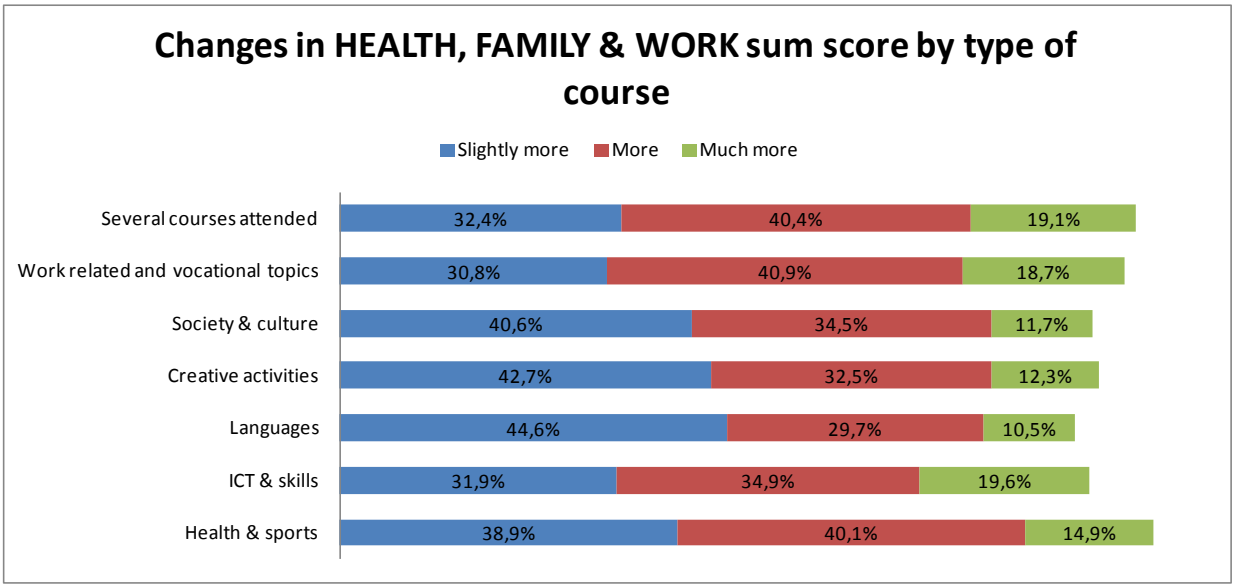
> *Ah yes, the bodywork. Yes, the bodywork has made me much more aware of my body and has allowed me to develop a better relationship with my body. And it's as a result of this I think that I have begun to think a lot about how at the end of the day, we are only alive as a result of our bodies. All of this has led me to become a lot more self-aware. Perhaps it's also a matter of becoming older and thinking more about things. I'm not sure but what I do think is that all of these external stimuli have set me thinking on my own. [...] In any case, I think that the breathing exercises are relaxing and that they and the walking provide me with a bit of endurance training. All in all, I've become a little more composed. (GER_A)*

Participation in multiple courses seems to support 'Mental well-being' even better. It is obvious that 'doing anything' that keeps people active is beneficial for their well-being, as the following example from interviews indicates:

> *I feel great, I feel a complete sense of well-being. I'm not sure if it's because of that or other things. But I don't want to rule it out. Because I now have a reason to go somewhere. You make a commitment to go somewhere and do something different, to be active. And it's for this very reason that it enriches your life. (GER_C)*

Likewise, participating in several courses supported the development of 'Family'-related benefits. Perhaps a bit surprisingly, ICT courses supported 'Family' benefits almost as much. The explanation is that positive learning experiences in ICT courses help parents understand their own learning processes, and therefore also support the learning of their kids.
Again, we have to keep in mind that the actual differences are small, even though they are statistically significant (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Changes in the HEALTH, FAMILY, & WORK sum score by type of course



Analysing benefits in relation to the number of courses attended revealed that participating in three courses brings the biggest changes in CONTROL OF OWN LIFE, ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL, and HEALTH, FAMILY, & WORK. A comparison between subgroups based on the number of courses attended showed that those who participated in three or more courses differed from those who participated in one or two courses.

In general, the difference between subgroups was linear: the more courses respondents had taken, the more changes they had experienced. The only exception concerned work-related benefits, where groups did not differ statistically. Here it is worth noting that participating in one course already produces favourable work-related benefits. One explanation might be that that single course was more often work- or skills-related than other courses.

3.2.7 Background variables and benefits

In the **fourth phase** of analysis, the more complex and detailed interaction between background variables in relation to benefits was analysed with the help of covariance analysis (ANCOVA). The idea was to control for the potential influence that intervening variables may have on the development of benefits, for example to find out whether different course types generate different kinds of benefits in relation to gender and age when respondents' educational background is controlled.

The perceived benefits in relation to participants' educational level were analysed earlier with the help of ANOVA. This group comparison revealed the linear relationship between respondents' educational background and perceived benefits. That' s why it was reasonable to set education as a covariate, whereas the main effects of respondents' gender, age, and chosen course type, as well as the interaction between these variables, were analysed in relation to perceived benefits. Besides a linear relation between the covariate and the dependent variables, the analysis of covariance requires that covariates are not correlative.

The benefits of lifelong learning in relation to country and course type were also analysed with the help of ANCOVA. The idea was to find out whether different course types generate different kinds

of benefits in relation to respondents' country when their educational background, age, and gender were controlled.

A detailed analysis with regard to second order factors is presented in the statistical report (cf. Manninen & Meriläinen, 2014, pp. 59-78).

3.2.8 Structural equation model: How benefits develop

In this section, the overall structure and the relationships between the benefit factors (see Tables 8 and 9) will be explored with the help of structural equation modelling (SEM). SEM models and latent variables are considered to be better methods than traditional regression models to analyse complex interactions between variables. They also make it possible to depict multiple hypotheses in a single model (cf. Chen & Yang, 2013, p. 68; cf. Desjardins, 2008b). In the BeLL study, SEM models enable us to analyse the complex relationships and potential interactions between benefits.

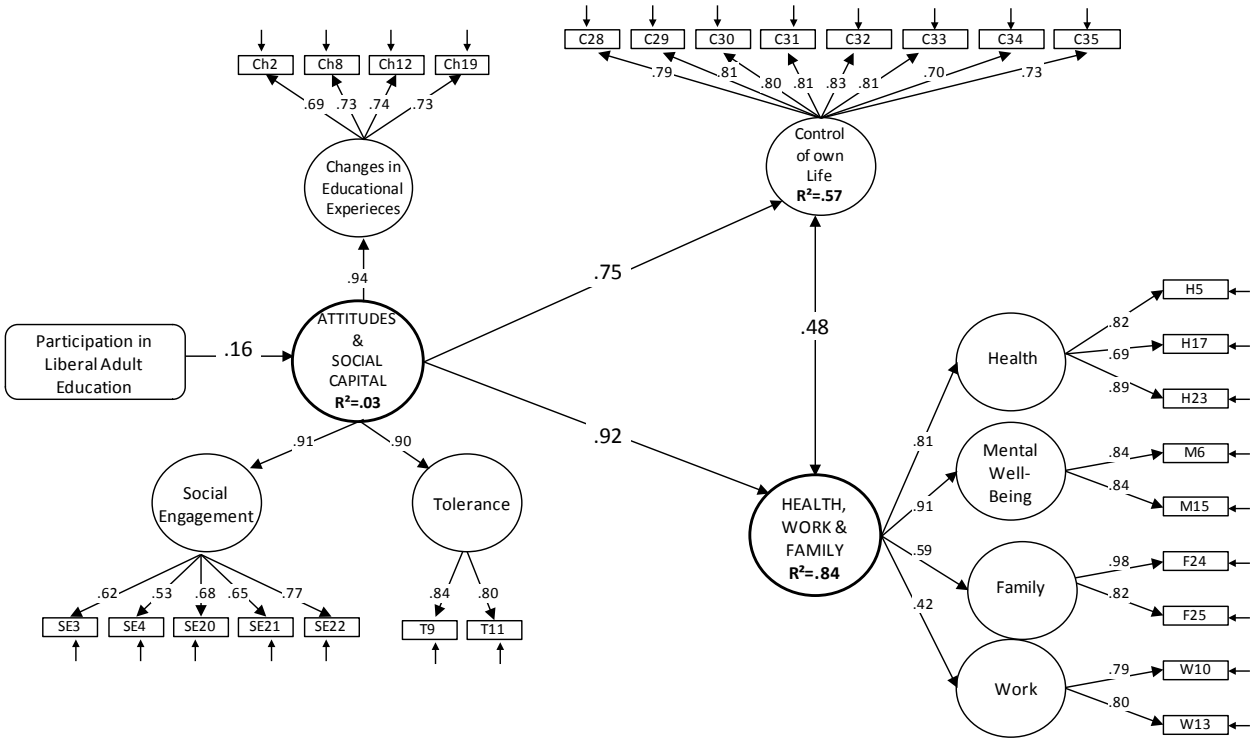
The statistical parameters of the SEM analysis indicated a good fit with the data (for details see Manninen & Meriläinen, 2014).

These parameters—together with good internal consistency of factors, high factor loadings, and good factor determinacies—show that the theoretical framework built for BeLL study works well, and that the measurement of benefits and the SEM model are reliable. The operationalization of the benefits has been successful, and only five statements had to be dropped from the factor analysis (see 10).

The following model (Figure 9) shows the overall structure and relationships between benefit factors. The observed variables (statements in the survey; numbers indicate the number of statement, see Table 9, enclosed in the boxes, circles with capital letters indicate second order latent factors, and circles with normal letters are first order factors. Numbers next to arrows indicate correlation coefficients between benefits.

Note that in the SEM analysis 'Control of own life' is used as first order factor, not as a second order factor like ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL and HEALTH, WORK, & FAMILY. When the dimension of CONTROL OF OWN LIFE was tested separately as a second order factor, it consisted of three first order factors: 'Locus of Control' (3 items), 'Self-efficacy' (3 items), and 'Sense of Purpose in Life" (2 items). But when this structure was included in the overall SEM-model the dimension had to be re-formed as a one first order factor consisting directly of the eight items measuring the benefits 'Locus of Control', 'Self-efficacy', and 'Sense of Purpose in Life'. Therefore, to differentiate one dimension from the other, this factor is a first order factor in the SEM analysis and written in lowercase letters ('Control of own Life'), whereas it was used as a second order factor in the earlier analysis (ANOVA and ANCOVA) and written in uppercase letters (CONTROL OF OWN LIFE). Note that these two factors measure exactly the same phenomena and are based on the same statements; the only difference is in how the factors are formed in statistical terms.

Figure 9: Model of the relations between the benefits of lifelong learning



The arrows between the second order latent factors (ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL and HEALTH, WORK, & FAMILY) and the first order latent factor 'Control of own life' indicate the direction of assumed influence. Statistically speaking, the arrows also show the correlation between the factors. The double-headed arrow between HEALTH, WORK, & FAMILY and 'Control of own life' show that the relationship between these two benefit factors is bidirectional. The coefficients of determination (R^2) values inside the circles indicate how many per cent of variability is explained by the other factor. The variance in changes in ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL is explained by 'Participation in liberal adult education', which is an observed variable with values varying between 1 and 4 (number of liberal adult education courses attended by respondents). In this model, 84 % of the variance in changes concerning HEALTH, WORK, & FAMILY are explained with the help of other factors.

In plain language, the SEM model shows that the benefits of liberal adult education can be summarized into these three main factors, which are connected to each other. It shows that participation in liberal adult education leads to a change in attitudes among participants (concerning the importance of adult education, learner self-confidence, and tolerance) and to more active social engagement. This in turn generates a stronger sense among participants that they have control of their own life (feelings that can influence one's life situation). It also leads directly to benefits related to health, work, and family. Moreover, participants' increased sense of control and the benefits related to health, work, and family interact with each other, meaning that better health and increased career opportunities also enhance learners' self-confidence, for example, and vice versa.

In general, the change in ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL is essential in relation to the benefits gained. It seems to serve as a mediator triggering and enabling the developmental processes of other benefits. This interpretation is validated by the qualitative analysis of the open-ended

questions and also by the BeLL interviews. Social interaction and new networks in particular seem to generate processes that also lead to the emergence of other benefits.

The common challenge in SEM analysis (or any analysis dealing with causal relationships) is the difficulty to determine the direction of influences between variables if follow-up data is not available. Affirmating causality is an ordinary problem in this kind of cross-sectional research. In SEM analysis, researchers have to decide how to build up the SEM model, that is, what kind of causal or reciprocal links they assume to exist between the factors. In practice, there are several alternatives as to what the SEM model can look like in any analysis. This kind of methodological problem is all too familiar in educational research, and a common but unreasonable solution to this kind of dilemma is conducting the analysis in both ways to see which 'works best'. However, in the BeLL analysis, we followed the suggestion by Keith (2006, p. 249) who says that 'theory, previous research and logic are the appropriate tools for making such judgments'. The SEM model was built using the theoretical background of the BeLL study and previous research. In addition, the results of the BeLL interviews (see Sgier, 2014) and the results of our analysis of the open questions (see next chapter) were used to build hypotheses about potential links between benefits. The analysis of the qualitative data shows that there are reciprocal relationships between benefit factors, and that the development of benefits is a rather individual process. There is interaction between benefits, and there are also individual differences as to how benefits emerge. Therefore it is fair to suggest that participation in education generates different kinds of benefits at the same time, and that there is interaction between different developmental dimensions, as the SEM model shows.

4. Qualitative Analysis of Open Questions on Benefits in the BeLL Questionaire

In order to comprehend, refine, and develop the concepts and categories of 'benefits' in adult education research, the survey questionnaire included two open benefit questions and the following instruction:

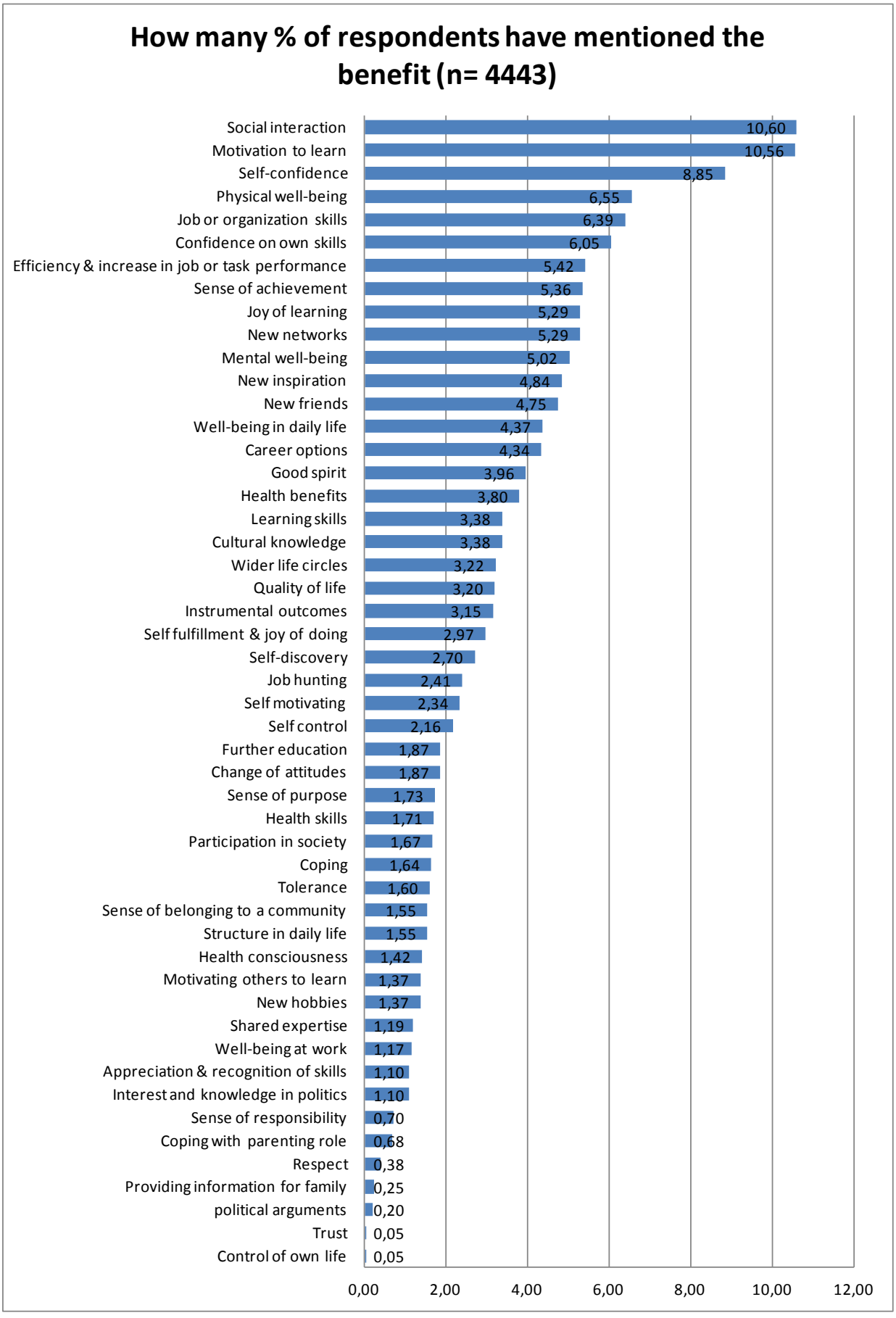
> *Please think back to your learning experiences and participation during the past 12 months in these liberal adult education courses and try to answer the following questions by writing your answer in the empty space provided below the questions.*
>
> *2.1 What immediate outcomes, if any, have you noticed from your participation in learning?*
>
> *2.2 What other outcomes, long term effects or changes have you noticed?*

These questions were asked before the list of potential benefits was introduced to the respondents. The purpose of these open questions was to first collect spontaneous responses about experienced outcomes and changes caused by the liberal adult education courses the respondent had listed at the beginning of the questionnaire. Because answers to these two questions were unprovoked, written in respondents' own words, and based on the outcomes they remembered and experienced best, the qualitative analysis of these answers gives an additional and also a slightly different picture of the benefits than the statistical analysis of structured statements[11]. More results and a detailed analysis of this part are available in Manninen & Meriläinen (2014).

[11] The difference between these two methods of data collection is the same as asking a person to list the movies they have seen on TV during the last 12 months, and then asking them to tick the movies they have seen in a list of all movies shown on TV during the past year. The movies recalled and mentioned spontaneously are likely to be the ones that were most memorable and had a stronger impact on the respondent, and that the spontaneous list of movies is shorter than the number of movies the person has actually seen. On the other hand, when given a complete list of possible movies, the respondent is likely to remember and recognize more and different movies than in the open-ended question.

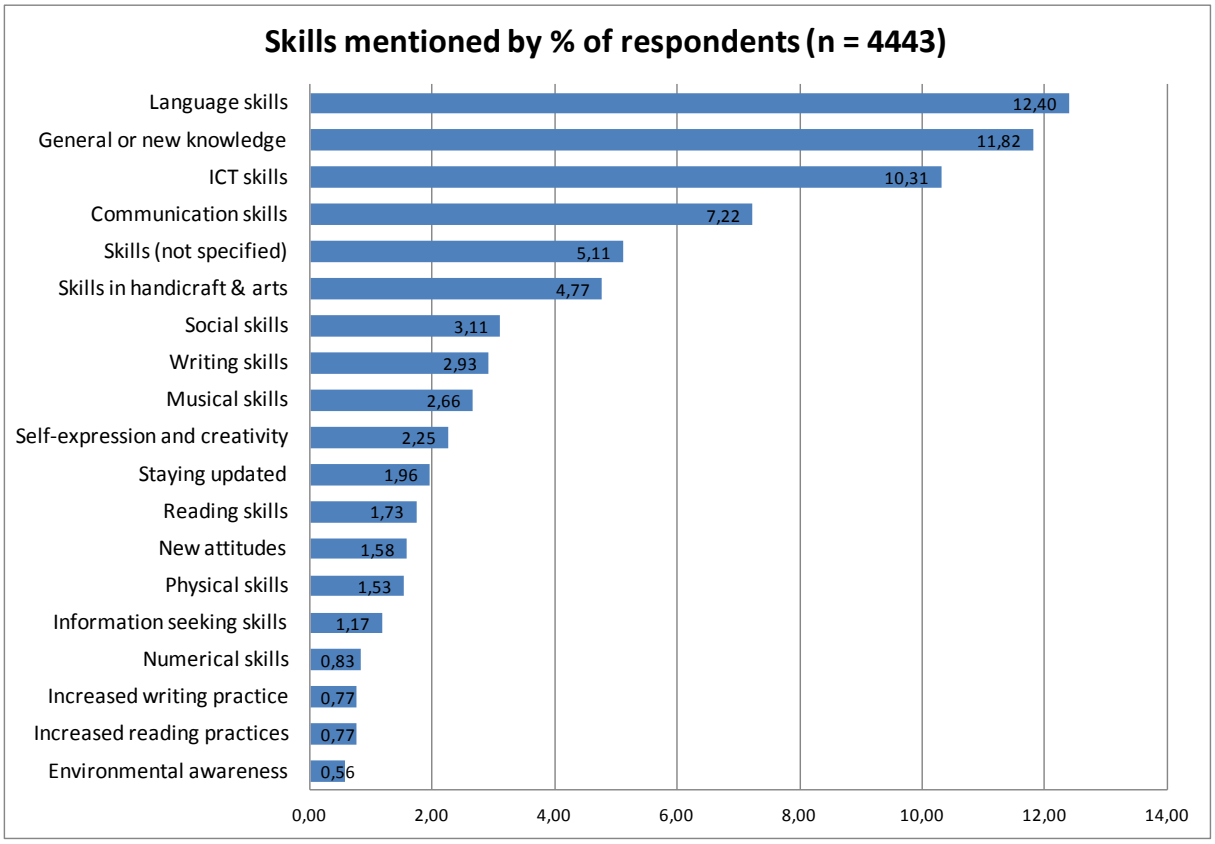
Figure 10 summarizes the benefits found in the qualitative analysis. ‘Social interaction’, ‘Motivation to learn’, and ‘Self-confidence’ are the benefits that respondents mentioned spontaneously most often. At the end of the list are the two benefits that were mentioned only by two respondents, ‘Trust’ and ‘Control of own life’. Note that this does not mean that these benefits are rare or do not exist.

Figure 10: Benefits found in the qualitative analysis



Skills and competencies found in the analysis are listed separately in the next figure. Respondents most often mentioned language, communication, and ICT skills, as well as an increase in general or new knowledge and unspecified skills (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Skills and competencies found in the qualitative analysis



5. Qualitative Analysis of the BeLL Interviews

The qualitative analysis consists of national reports on qualitative data and a compilation of these reports. The interviews were analysed by the national research teams in the ten partner countries. The overall qualitative analysis is available in Sgier (2014).

5.1 Resarch Questions and Interests

The aim of the qualitative interview analysis is to illustrate and complement the results of the statistical analyses. The aim of the qualitative interview analysis is to

- illustrate and complement the results of the statistical analyses with respect to the benefits and their individual dimension (i.e. change of attitudes, self-concept, learning biography, behaviour) and social dimension (i.e. family life, social networks);
- find out whether, and if so how, participants of liberal education courses reflect on their learning experience, whether they are aware of any benefits and able to name them;
- explore possible connections between the benefits and find observable external benefit criteria;

- explore the extent to which the development of benefits depends on course-related aspects such as the teacher (personality, expertise, and teaching approaches), the group, the teaching methods, and so on, as expressed by interviewees based on their experiences;
- identify ways in which benefits of liberal adult education, according to leaners, emerge and develop in real-life and biographical contexts, and ways in which they interrelate with them.

To answer these questions, we analysed participants' reports about their participation and experiences in liberal adult education courses and about the impact that participation has on their lives. In the context of the qualitative research report, as in the whole BeLL study, we operationalize 'benefits' as effects and changes for the better in participants' attitudes, self-concepts, learning biographies, and learning behaviour, as well as their everyday lives, AND, through this, their social environment (real-life contexts). Below these domains, we address the benefit categories that have been developed in the theoretical parts of the study and applied in the quantitative part of the analysis.

We will present our findings on relevant factors for the emergence of benefits through respondents' reports about their experiences in adult education courses, such as their learning relationships with teachers and fellow learners, as well as personal, thematic learning interests. The findings also allow for drawing conclusions about the relationships between individual benefits categories and participants' attitudes to liberal adult education and participation.

The interview guidelines and the code list, as well as the national case schemes, which give more information about the national samples, are available in Sgier (2014). All quotes in this report can be identified by country and case. GER_A, for example, refers to case A from the German sample.

5.2 Research Methods of the Qualitative Study

Data collection

The qualitative part of BeLL was carried out in all ten partner countries *after* the survey. The survey questionnaire included a question asking whether the respondent would be willing to be contacted for a longer interview at some later point. Of the total 8646 respondents to the national surveys, 27% accepted to be contacted. Of these, 82 people were finally interviewed some months after the survey (8 respondents per country, except for Spain, where 10 people were recruited for an interview). The sample of interviewees was overall quite similar in structure to the national survey samples, especially in terms of gender (about two-thirds women) and age. Compared to the survey sample, the qualitative sample had a higher proportion of 'active' learners (i.e. people who had attended more than one adult learning course over the 12 months preceding the survey) and a somewhat lower proportion of respondents with low professional qualifications (see below for details).

The interviews followed the logic of the *semi-structured* interview (Arksey & Knight, 1999). The topic guide for the thematic interviews was developed on the basis of the survey questionnaire and results, taking into consideration the theoretical framework of the BeLL study. The topic guide contained the complete set of benefits from the survey—that is, the benefits mentioned in the survey questionnaire as well as additional benefits found in the analysis of the open questions. All

interviews were carried out and fully transcribed in the national language(s) of each country[12]. Subsequently, selected extracts of the interview materials were translated into English.

Data analysis

The interview data were analysed on the basis of a systematic coding, following the approach suggested by Saldaña (2012). This type of analysis consists of a systematic coding (breaking down) of data according to a *code* list (or code system[13]), in such a way as to identify (practically and theoretically) relevant patterns. The coded segments are then grouped and synthesised 'up' into (more general) *categories*, which in turn get linked to more general *themes* and (theoretical) *concepts*. For a detailed explanation of the methodological approach to the qualitative interview analysis, see the qualitative report (Sgier, 2014).

5.3 Results of the Qualitative Study

In all countries, most of the benefit categories defined in the survey and used in the qualitative code system were also found in the interviews. Some categories were found very frequently—including 'Mental health' or 'Sense of purpose in life'—whereas others, like 'Civic competences', were rarely found in most countries.

Predominant benefits

The following benefit categories are the dominant benefits in the international sample:

- Social network
- Mental well-being
- Self-efficacy
- Sense of Purpose in life
- Changes in educational experiences
- Work-related benefits
- Skills and competences

Social network is clearly a predominant category in all countries and for the majority of interviewees. The analysis shows different aspects of this benefit, including social contact inside and outside the classroom, socialization and social integration, making new friends, and so on.

Mental well-being and **Physical health** are often interconnected and hard to distinguish (for instance when relaxation is mentioned, or work-life balance, coping with illness, etc.). In many cases, these two benefits were analysed together, since the connection proved to be strong.

The same is true of **Sense of purpose in life** and **Self-efficacy**. Although defined as two distinct concepts, these categories appear as closely interconnected benefit categories in several national interview analyses.

[12] In Switzerland, interviews were done in German.
[13] Codes, in Saldaña's (2012) terminology, are short words or phrases ('tags') that are more general than the coded text segment itself but remain *close to the original text*.

Changes in educational experience is a crucial benefit category as well, especially the codes 'joy of learning', 'motivation to learn', and 'sense of achievement'.

In the case of the benefit category **Skills and competences**, the situation is more complex, since the list of potential skills to be acquired in adult education is virtually endless. It was not the aim of BeLL to define a comprehensive, definite list of all the skills that could be acquired through adult learning, but the analysis nevertheless gives insights into the range of skills pointed out by course participants. Some of the skills reported by the interviewees are closely related to the course topic, whereas others do not have such an obvious connection and are mentioned as a result of individual reflection and interpretation of learning experiences.

Categories that play a minor role in the interviews:

- Locus of Control
- Trust
- Physical health / health behaviour
- Tolerance
- Civic and social engagement / civic competence
- Family-related benefits

Locus of control and trust turned out to be the rarest categories. In the case of the other benefit categories playing a minor role, there are some indications that these benefits might be more closely related to the course topics than the benefits that were mentioned more frequently.

5.3.1 Benefit categories

In the following sections, we present selected findings on benefit categories from the qualitative report (Sgier, 2014).

5.3.1.1 Sense of purpose in life

'Sense of purpose in life' is one the central categories found in the interviews. All codes were found, but 'structure in daily life', 'sense of belonging to a community', and 'respect' are mentioned less frequently by interviewees than the other codes in this benefit category.

New inspiration

Participants mention new inspiration quite often and in different contexts, including professional activities or daily life. New inspiration is described either in a concrete, instrumental way or as a general feeling. Participants connect inspiration the idea of opening up their minds, discovering new ideas and possibilities, stimulation and enrichment, depth, quality of life, or mental challenge. Inspiration is linked to cognitive, emotional, social, and practical experiences.

Among other effects, liberal adult learning is reported to be helpful as a source of **inspiration for professional activities** in a general way—described as a sense of increased creativity that has an impact on one's working life—or in a specific way when leading to concrete ideas about how to solve professional problems. In some cases, this is to do with work-life balance. New inspiration

with regard to work overlaps with the work-related benefits category in cases where inspiration is perceived as improving job performance. Examples:

> Also, I found the topic for my paper for the professional exam in a training. (SLO_C)
>
> I just think it's nice if you have somewhere else to go for intellectual input other than work. I use my brain a lot, write a lot of designs, so it's a bit of a break if I can do something else but still use my head. Something to give the brain some fresh air. Sometimes that can help you take a step back. (SWI_C)

Another inspirational context described in the interviews is **daily life**. Inspiration is viewed, for instance, as something that became possible because of specific skills acquired in courses, as for example language skills or ICT skills widen access to the Internet or other information sources. Inspiration here means either new ideas or fresh perspectives on old ones.

> We are very pleased about all the things we can discover, and we can find out so much information on the Internet, and not only from Romanian sites, since we can understand English too. (ROM_NV)
>
> Since I've been photographing, well, been on this course, I look at the newspapers, magazines, images differently. (SWI_B)

Other participants point at new inspiration as a **general enrichment of their lives** or as a **challenge to routine**, without connecting this inspiration with specific skills. This idea is often connected with enrichment and quality of life and based on an attitude of progress and discovery. Examples:

> It's enabling me to delve into other areas of knowledge […] and to gain experiences. And it's helping me to develop and enrich my life. (GER_C)
>
> You think differently, some kinds of directions open up that you want to discover. (SLO_F)

When new inspiration is described as a generalized experience, it seems to be part of the participants' **identity as learners**. This seems less the case where inspiration is explicitly connected with the skills that were acquired in a course. But in all the cases reported above, new inspiration appears to have a connection with **personal development as an on-going process**.

Structure in daily life

Adult learning courses can help learners create or maintain a structure when work or family routine no longer provides a framework for daily life, as several interviewees pointed out. This benefit was found predominantly with learners who are **not on the labour market** due to retirement, unemployment, illness, or parenting.

The function and importance learners attach to this benefit in their lives differ in many ways. Some typical meanings could be distinguished: The structure that course participation provides can help **prevent chaos, emptiness, boredom, or exclusion** in the very pragmatic sense of keeping people busy and part of a social context. And it can go beyond the practical issue of structuring days and weeks towards a more **identity-related** purpose in the sense of assuring the regular availability of learning when 'being a learner' is essential to a participant's identity. A third meaning found in the interviews is the connection of **external and internal structure,** when structuring daily

life enables the person to recognize and handle their own goals and interests by structuring them alongside the courses. Examples:

> On Mondays I go to a painting class which lasts all day. On Tuesday evenings I have Romanian. On Wednesdays I go walking. On Thursdays I attend a breathing exercise and fitness class, and then in the evening I currently go to a painting class at the adult education centre. (GER_A)

> Yoga encouraged me to wake up at a really early hour, to have an organized day, and to set different, measurable goals. I can relate this to this personal coaching, which was also about finding measurable goals and inner inspiration. (SLO_G)

Sense of belonging to a community

The benefit of belonging to a community shows strong overlaps with benefits coded as 'Social network'. Community-related experiences were rarely coded in the category 'Sense of belonging to a community'. The few cases that were coded here point at communities of **people with a specific interest in the course topic**, like writing courses and networks, local communities, clubs or—in a broader sense—**culture and tradition**. Example:

> […] but I never really knew that I always wanted to be in a writing community, which I can belong to and feel to be a part of. (FIN_D)

In single cases, **providers can be viewed as communities,** too, especially by learners who choose the same provider for all their learning activities, seeing this provider as a community of teachers and learners that is essential to one's own learning experiences. Examples (originally coded in the 'Social network' category):

> Through the college I've [...] got more involved in what's happening. It's an agricultural college and they've got a charity event coming up in June which I've been involved with. (ENG_V)

> Plus, being part of Leeds Met is great, having the student card, being able to use the union. That has been nice too. (ENG_R)

Self-fulfilment and joy of doing

This benefit category was rarely found, which might be to do with the fact that self-fulfilment is named by the participants less explicitly than other aspects of personal development. The few examples of explicit notions draw a direct line from a **specific activity** to joy of doing and the perception of development:

> This change in my thinking brings great results. My flat is very beautifully decorated with flowers and with decorations from dry plants and fruits. I can also bring together such colours which fit my flat – it means if it is bright or dark – and the furniture. I can recognize the style of the equipment in a flat and in each room. (CZE_A)

It is worth mentioning, however, that this benefit shares several connotations with other codes under the categories 'Sense of purpose in life' and 'Self-efficacy'. Aspects of self-fulfilment can be found in participants' accounts in statements that point at personal growth and personal development.

Wider life circles

This benefit was not coded often either. But some participants explicitly mentioned wider life circles in the sense of having new things to do or finding alternative ways of spending spare time. Mostly they speak of **activities linked to specific skills**—especially languages—which is seen as widening opportunities in a personal or professional context. Example:

> This way I met other cultures, their history, the way of life of other nations, met various people, but complete cultural shock I experienced in Japan, and it was in the positive sense. This experience enriched my life in a way that I can't describe. I learned a lot about alimentation in those countries, about habits and customs. (SRB_J)

Other experiences were reported which could be understood as wider life circles but were described (and coded) in the other categories, especially 'Social networks', 'Participation in society', and '(New) hobbies'.

(New) hobbies

What was said above about wider life circles is also true of the '(New) hobbies' category. Participants report many new activities they took up in connection with new courses, activities that are mostly related to the course content, but they do not typically call these activities **hobbies**. In some cases, however, they do:

> I will never become a professional dancer, but personally, as a hobby, this will always be an option for me. (ROM_T)

Most participants who talk about new activities do **not specify the status of these new activities** in their personal life contexts. These cases are likely to be found in the 'Skills' or 'Sense of purpose in life' categories, if described mainly under the aspect of new inspiration. An example:

> In Design – I was a journalist by profession and then thought about retirement. Now I write my own stories from my life, or I wanted to write our family history, so the children had something to keep. I wrote them down then thought, what now? Publishers wouldn't be interested in family history. I thought I'd like to make my own book. So I did the course and learnt how to do it. (SWI_F)

Other participants give the impression of seeing activities they took up in connection with a course and kept doing on a regular basis not as hobbies but as something that **might become of vocational use** or develop into a profession altogether, a sideline activity, or **civic engagement**. Example (from a former doctor who quit her profession to become a novelist after taking up writing as a hobby):

> I didn't know before if I could do it, write like this, or if it would be any fun for that length of time, and actually—almost every day I sit at the computer for about 5 or 6 hours and write something. (SWI_A)

Several examples from this benefit category exemplify a substantial aspect of adult learning: a tendency to **use courses for personal development without separating personal, professional, and social goals**. In the BeLL interviews, this can be observed especially with very active learners, that is, participants who engage in more than one course at a time.

Respect

Very few participants describe their being **more respected by others as resulting from participation and new skills**, but in some cases this benefit seems to be implicitly reported in connection with **self-confidence** and **social benefits**. Some participants describe positive reactions of their social network or other course participants, which can be interpreted as respect in the above-mentioned sense.

When respect is reported in connection with the course context, it is mostly to do with improved competences. In other cases, respect is about **being underrated as a learner and being able to prove** one's will and ability to achieve one's learning goals. Example:

> People perceive me now as a person with a wide horizon. (CZE_F)

Several participants speak about respect not in the way this benefit was defined here, but in terms of their **own increased respect for other people**, which is mentioned in connection with language and humanities courses, creative arts, and competencies like communication.

5.3.1.2 Social networks

Social benefits are **one of the most important** and most frequently reported benefits. For several participants, 'Social network' is the primary benefit. However, there are also participants who attach little importance to social benefits.

Participants report social benefits occurring in the courses—mostly related to social interaction—and social benefits going beyond the course context, widening the circle of friends or the range of wider social contacts. The three codes are often closely connected and reported as a bundle of benefits in connection with the social aspects of courses.

New networks

Many participants mention new **contacts they found in adult learning courses**. Some mention networks that include regular meetings, mutual support, or common activities; others speak of people they got to know and stay loosely in contact with for a certain time after the course. In both cases, networks seem to be valued as essential benefits of course participation.

Participants frequently mention the opportunity to meet new people as a benefit in itself, whether or not it may result in them finding new networks or even new friends. Examples:

> At every training you meet new people. Every participation means new acquaintances. (SLO_C)

> It's ok to chat on the street if someone you know from there passes you by. (FIN_C)

In the case of **non-committal networks** developing through course participation, social contact seems to be limited to the course period. Although many participants do not disclose any detailed information on their networks, there is some evidence suggesting that networks are **often temporary**. However, some participants describe the temporary nature of their new networks in a positive light, which can be interpreted in the sense that they enjoy making social contacts without looking for or expecting long-lasting contacts and friendships.

In cases where contact after the course period is limited to saying hello when seeing each other on the street, the courses have clearly not widened the social network permanently, but they may still have widened the circle of 'friendly strangers', which can also have an effect on the way participants feel at home in their surroundings.

In many cases, new social networks are reported as implying a **certain commitment**. Interviewees describe new networks by highlighting **specific activities**, some of them suggesting that temporary networks could lead to **lasting friendships**. Examples:

> Yes it happened to me with courses. In all the courses that I took I always met people and I made friends, new people. In this case, two colleagues with the same age as me, well, more or less, and another one who is a little older than us. We met all together to study so if one of us does not come to class, the rest of us share with him our notes. I also added more people, some young people, well... in general... I added them to my Facebook. (ESP_N)

> I've been able to make new contacts. My circle of friends and acquaintances has grown. Information is transmitted better as a result. I get important information and hear about what's going on in society. (GER_A)

Some participants mention their involvement in **social media networks**. This was not mentioned often, which however does not allow for drawing conclusions regarding the importance of social media, since the interview guidelines did not explicitly include this sort of network.

Although the courses were generally not work-related, a number of participants mention that social networks that came out of liberal adult education courses were occasionally useful in their **professional contexts**.

Another aspect of new social networks is **social or cultural integration**. Apart from migrants who are able to settle with the help of their new networks, a number of interviewees mention social integration in connection with being out of the labour market and using adult education courses to stay connected with society. In some cases, integration takes the meaning of **mutual support and self-help** for people who share a specific problem or a difficult situation. Examples:

> [...] we were all unemployed and we had time to socialize. Also, we were socializing with our teacher, she would sometimes drink coffee with us. I made very nice friendships there. (SRB_Ž).

> We became a good group of people and we have been meeting regularly up until now, even if each of us has their projects […]. [Participating in the course] was very supportive and gave us the chance to share ideas with other people. It's very important, aside from learning things. It's important to become a group, it's important that women support each other. They are in different situations but they can help each other. (ITA_D)

Finally, it is worth mentioning that there is also some **ambiguity** in the interviewees' reports about social networks. Some participants seem to enjoy the new social networks while emphasizing that they do not have great importance.

Social interaction

Social interaction is frequently mentioned as a benefit both with regard to the **interaction occurring in the course** and that occuring **in the new social networks**. Whereas some participants just enjoy contacts, mutual exchange, or the group atmosphere, others mention mutual

support as essential to their learning success. Another aspect is the role of social interaction as a **kind of laboratory** supporting the transfer of new competences to other contexts such as work. Example:

> It was more because of the socializing that I'd regret something, because for me, Tuesday mornings were always course mornings and, well, we know each other well by now, and you know a lot about each other and you have a lot of fun together. (SWI_F)

A number of participants point at the specific benefit of social interaction in the course as a way to relax, switch off, or take a step back from work. In this sense, social interaction can have work-related benefits in the wider sense of influencing **work-life balance**. Example:

> It takes a long time for me to unwind after a stressful day. However, joining in with a group of people practising yoga or jazz dance allows me to switch off completely. (GER-C)

New friends

Not surprisingly, lasting friendships are less often mentioned than social networks and social interaction. The distinction between acquaintances and friends is in some cases difficult to make, but new friendships seem in any case to be an important benefit for many interviewees. Examples:

> I've been able to make new contacts. My circle of friends and acquaintances has grown. Information is transmitted better as a result. I get important information and hear about what's going on in society. (GER_A)

> The long-term benefits are the emotional relationships established with those women [...]. (ROM_SI)

5.3.1.3 Changes in the educational experiences

Interview results for this benefit category show that changes in their educational experience play a crucial role for many participants. 'Joy of learning', 'Motivation to learn', and 'Sense of achievement' often seem to be intertwined so that these benefits are often difficult to distinguish. The way of speaking about changes illustrates the fact that benefits are **typically reported in bundles**.

In some cases, changes in educational experience are reported as the experience of **becoming aware of one's own learning ability**, in other cases participants describe an on-going personal development which consists of **having new experiences through learning**.

A noticeable aspect of this category is the frequent connection between the benefits of 'Changes in the educational experience' and the **voluntary nature** of participation in learning activities.

Joy of learning

Many statements provide explicit or implicit evidence of joy of learning when participants describe the learning process in a positive light. These descriptions **focus partly on the learning process**—emphasizing the diversity of methods or interesting topics—and **partly on the skills and competences** or activities participants acquire or perform in the courses. Example:

> I learnt nice new things because of some repetition and some tricks. An example is the arranging of dry plants using a space – you can do it for example on a piece of a dry wood from a tree or on a piece

> of a log. I actually create ‘my nature’ in my home in this way. I enjoy the shapes and colours of my models. (CZE_A)

In some cases, participants explain their joy as being the **result of voluntary participation** in liberal adult learning as opposed to previous school experiences.

Motivation to learn; Motivating others to learn

‘Motivation to learn’ seems to play a crucial role for almost all participants, although they do not always mention their motivation explicitly. Often, motivation is described when participants emphasize the fact that their course **participation is voluntary** and that they would not take the course if they did not want to learn or if the course did not suit their needs.

Several participants explain how one course led them to the next one because a positive **course experience triggered their motivation to continue** learning. Of course, that learning does not necessarily have to continue in the form of taking another course, it could also be informal learning in cases where participants do not specify their further plans.

Another observation we can make is that some participants speak of their **motivation in a generalized way**, suggesting it has become a personal feature, while others make a **connection with specific competences**.

Examples:

> What is very important at our age is that we want to learn—we’re not forced to do it like a child who doesn’t want to go to school but has to [...]. But you must know that we take it very seriously and really do learn. (RO_V)

> I am experiencing this very intensively, because I have been doing this for two years, and this is the third one ... and I am very motivated ... and I want to learn it ... I like it really ... (ESP_J)

When participants talk about **motivating others to learn**, they typically seem to draw connections between their **own motivation and their willingness to motivate** others to learn. In some cases, motivating others to learn is embedded in social or civic activities.

Several participants mention positive learning experiences in the **voluntary setting** of liberal adult learning as opposed to previous school experiences. They describe these positive learning experiences as the source of their enhanced motivation to learn. In some cases, new learning experiences as an adult seem to cause a fundamental **shift in the way participants approach learning**—which can include a re-definition of their personal biography as learners.

Learning skills

Learning skills are not often mentioned as a benefit, but a number of interviewees describe how important learning skills are in their opinion. Some interview examples suggest a close **connection between motivation and learning skills** that works both ways: motivation helps people develop learning skills, and the experience of being able to learn enhances their motivation. Example:

> It makes you more motivated. You could say. Because you approach something new tentatively, not quite sure if it’s a good idea or not. And when you realise ‘I can learn that, I can learn something new’, then that’s satisfying and you think: ‘So I could do this, too, or even this.’ (SWI_F)

Sense of achievement

Many interviewees mention a sense of achievement, either as a **general feeling** or in the **pragmatic sense** of experiencing learning progress, which can in turn enhance further learning motivation, joy of learning, inspiration, or self-confidence regarding one's own learning skills.

Learners report a sense of achievement in **various contexts**: for example as an aspect of their personal development, as evidence that ageing does not mean losing one's learning skills, or as proof that the person stands out from the crowd. In some other cases, learning something unusual can for instance make a difference in an environment where everybody has similar professional competences. Example:

> Kind of like inspiration when you notice that you succeed in something that you thought was difficult or almost impossible. (laughing) (FIN_D)

5.3.1.4 Mental Well-being

Most interviewees report benefits that belong to the category of 'Mental well-being'. One participant formulated this benefit in a radical way:

> At my age I believe that learning is health. (SLO_F)

Apart from the code 'Sense of purpose', all codes were used in the analyses, but 'Well-being at work' and 'Good spirits' appear very rarely in the analyses. The predominant codings in this benefit category are clearly in 'Well-being in daily life' and 'Coping'.

'Quality of life' and 'Keeping the mind active' also seem rather important, but may not be coded in some cases because of the overlap with 'Well-being in daily life'.

Well-being in daily life

'Well-being in daily life' is often related to a **general feeling of satisfaction** or happiness. Specific characteristics used in the interviews are, for instance, relaxation, concentration on a specific task or topic, stimulation, and activity. Some participants also mention changes in their **daily awareness** and aesthetic perception, which they value as a benefit improving the quality of their life.

'Well-being in daily life' seems to have **three points of focus**: sense of balance or harmony, animation and stimulation, and (aesthetic) enrichment. Examples:

> I find this quite astonishing when I'm painting, for example. Painting simply makes everything else vanish from my mind. I'd say that this is because I feel completely relaxed. Because when I'm painting, all my problems somehow, I don't know, they somehow disappear. I'm concentrating on painting and that's it. (GER_A)

> I just feel very stimulated. And it makes me feel good when I—because otherwise I'm at home too much, just lying around—it makes me feel good and I think there's still something there, or when there's something new, I meet new people, my life is active, you know? And that's good for me. (SWI_B)

> I was always in a rush. Now I take time to look at the beauty that surrounds me and I have the impression that some of the girls noticed these things at a younger age than I did, and I appreciate this and there's a joy in my soul because they see what I saw at 40 sooner and that is because I think they are wiser than I was at their age, they value more the things in life. (RO_SI)

Well-being at work

The code 'Well-being at work' was used very rarely. Work was in fact mentioned by some participants, but they mostly focused on work-life balance, which was assigned either to 'Well-being in daily life', 'Quality of life', or 'Work-related benefits'.

Work-life balance seems to play a role for a number of participants, even if they rarely use this term. More often, they speak of '**switching off**', relaxing, or coping with work-related stress, which could also be coded as 'Well-being in daily life'. One example where the term is mentioned explicitly:

> It was a complete change from what I do in my day job. So it was a form of relaxation and trying to redress the work-live balance in my life. (ENG_L)

Good spirit

This code was hardly used in the analyses, which may partly have to do with its being very similar to 'Well-being in daily life'. One of the few examples:

> The fact that I know that I'll meet nice people there. You leave, you go home in good spirits. And, of course, these good spirits help me in my daily life. (GER_F)

Coping

Liberal adult learning can obviously help people cope **with stress, personal difficulties, illness, isolation,** or other challenging conditions. Participants mention coping benefits in **connection with activities** and competences they trained in courses (like yoga, handling conflicts, or identifying priorities) **and with social contacts** or exchanges they had (e.g. giving mutual support, sharing specific information and knowledge, or comparing yourself with other people, thereby putting your own difficulties into perspective). Examples:

> I can say that I felt calmness, it is like attending yoga, after choir I felt satisfaction, that I am filled with that, happier, and in better mood. After a hard day I enjoy it, I release stress and negative energy. (SRB_J)

> "Yes, I feel happier. Because if I did not come to the literature circle, I would be sitting on the sofa, doing nothing. But now since I have to come, I put on make-up, I take a shower, and I come ... and you feel happier ... You do not have time to be depressed or things like that ... (ESP_S)

Quality of life

Only a few codings were identified in this category. However, there are many examples of codings in the other **aspects of the 'Mental-well-being' benefit** that have a close connection to quality of life. Example:

> I naturally take a more active interest in the subject. Like how I look at a magazine or how I act at a concert or an exhibition, I'm much, much more active, much more aware of the technical side of it all. I feel that before I was, not superficial as such, but it is a depth issue I think, do you know what I mean? (SWI_B)

5.3.1.5 Physical health and health behaviour

Physical health and health behaviour do not belong to the predominant benefits reported by the interviewees. Some of them mention physical health mainly, but not exclusively, in connection with health-related sports or yoga courses. The benefits reported here mostly concern **general physical well-being**, fitness, and coping with pain or tension.

A number of participants emphasize the relationship between **physical and mental well-being**. Examples:

> I lose pain of my back and both my physical and mental form has improved. (CZE_E)
>
> I feel good in my body and, I mean this subjectively of course, I feel good in my mind. So, it's a state of [pause] satisfaction. No pain, feeling healthy and capable of fulfilling my potential. Thanks to the courses. (GER_C)

Health behaviour

This category was rarely assigned. Examples:

> Another course we attend now, and I think it is very important that we are informed about medical issues: how to eat, what medicines we should avoid, how to avoid medical excesses, how to live and eat naturally. (RO_V)
>
> Oh my health, yes. Because I bake my own pastry at home and they are freshly baked, so I don't need to buy a pastry that has been, maybe mixed with, um, donkey pee (laughs). I make them and I know the ingredients. (ENG_T)

5.3.1.6 Work-related benefits

Although very few participants attended liberal adult learning courses explicitly for work-related reasons, many of them identified work-related benefits of their courses, often but not exclusively referring to **transferable competences** such as languages, ICT, communication, or social skills.

Most of the economically active participants do at least **consider possible effects** of liberal adult learning on their working life, even if they do not expect a direct impact. But some, on the contrary, emphasize that the courses they attend in their leisure time have **nothing to do with work**. The not-work-relatedness can even be seen as a precious aspect of liberal adult learning.

The participants that can clearly see relationships between the courses they attended and their working life point especially at job-related skills, career options or job hunting, efficiency, and an increase in job performance.

Further education, instrumental outcomes, and the appreciation and recognition of skills appear to be less important benefits for the interviewees.

Sideline activities are mentioned by both employed and retired people.

Further education

Very few interviewees mentioned that the courses they attended encouraged them to pursue a formal degree, which is not surprising since the course topics were generally non-vocational. But there are examples of participants who used courses for this purpose, typically attending courses

that teach general or **transversal skills,** which can be applied in several contexts, both work-related or personal. Example:

> I found the project management class useful because that was what I was doing at the time and I wanted to know more about how to do my job as well as I could […] The initial idea was to learn as much information as possible and to do my job better. I don't know how relevant it is that I received a diploma at the end. (RO_IM)

Instrumental outcomes

This code was rarely used. However, some participants mention instrumental outcomes such as **certificates** or **new products** they were able to create due to their course participation. But many of these outcomes seem either not to be work-related or to have been coded as 'External criteria'. One of the rare examples coded as instrumental outcomes:

> […] after the evaluation we received a certificate which confirmed the course [...]. So I transferred it a little into doing something which would bring me material benefits. (ROM_SN)

Career options and job hunting

While some participants hope for a better job or take **courses with the aim of improving their options**, others describe the connection with work the other way round: Having acquired competences without any work-related aims—foreign languages, for instance—some participants think about the **possibility of using these in their professional context**. Another important aspect is more general, when participants assume that **training their learning skills** or proving their willingness and motivation to learn might eventually widen their career options. Examples:

> In my case the focus was that I already had the competences and I just wanted to get a certificate to prove them. (ESP_J)

> In any case, I can definitely say that I'm more open and that my future plans include spending some time abroad. (GER_G)

Job-related skills

Most statements describing how participants could apply new skills at work seem to refer to **transferable competences** such as working methods or languages. Some participants also mention more **job-specific skills**, which are mostly related to the course topic. Example:

> The positive side of these trainings was, now I just concentrate on one, that I actually could use the technique we mastered in the courses in my work right away. (SLO_C)

Efficiency and increase in job performance

These benefit codes are described partly in connection with **competencies and experiences** that come out of liberal adult learning. Another aspect proves to be quite important: Participants who are able to establish or keep a good **work-life balance,** or improve their general **mental well-being** through liberal adult education, often report indirect benefits in their working life.

Apart from specific skills, work-life balance, and well-being, **social contacts** are another benefit arising from liberal adult education courses that can have an impact on participants' efficiency and

job performance. This is the case, for instance, when a participant meets people with similar interests or professionals from their own sector in a leisure course. Example:

> I met people with similar interests in a very stimulating context, which supported me in focusing on what I really want from my life and helped me to find solutions also for my professional plans. (ITA_H)

Appreciation and recognition of skills

This code was rarely used in the analyses. One of the few examples where a participant feels that her skills were appreciated:

> For instance, recently I've had a bit, I've achieved a bit of a coup, I've had a double-page spread in a really reputable magazine about my trip to Patagonia last year, complete with pictures I took myself, and I'm not a photographer really, and it's been well received apparently, so that's kind of pleasing. (ENG_D)

Sideline activities

Sideline activities as an **additional income** option or as an **opportunity for retired persons**. In some cases, sideline activities are undertaken for pleasure but without ruling out the possibility that they may eventually evolve into a job option, freelance activity, or independent business. Liberal adult education can in this sense **widen individual long-term professional opportunities** without having an explicit work-related focus. Example:

> I guess longer term, I could quite see myself going off and starting my own business, freelance or whatever. I could see me taking it further certainly. (ENG_L)

Similarly, sideline activities can be seen as options that could lead to **civic voluntary engagement**.

5.3.1.7 Tolerance

The only pre-defined code here is 'Cultural knowledge'. But a series of statements were assigned to the 'Tolerance' category without being coded more in detail. On the basis of national qualitative analyses, these statements can be attributed to the code 'Cultural diversity', which was located in the template under the category 'Development of benefits/other participants'. This code designs tolerance as a benefit that results from tolerant social interaction in a heterogeneous group (i.e. a multicultural, mixed age group of learners with very different backgrounds).

Cultural knowledge

Cultural knowledge is often, but not exclusively, mentioned in connection with **culture-related course topics,** such as languages, humanities, and arts, or political education. Additionally, some participants mention **cultural knowledge that is acquired as a side-product** of other topics.

The benefit of tolerance has a strong connection to notions like **difference and otherness**. While some participants keep their descriptions of this issue general, others describe specific differences that mirror regional or national aspects of culture and multiculturalism.

Examples of **tolerance as a result of cultural knowledge**:

> There is time to talk about culture and what's acceptable and what things will appear rude to someone who isn't Finnish but not to a Finn—it broadens your mind as well. (ENG_R)
>
> Well because it's not just the dancing. Well. At the same time you learn about the culture and Arabic music, it's so very different in comparison to western music. (FIN_C)

Some participants describe tolerance as a sort of **generalized competence** they acquired in connection with liberal adult learning. I some cases, participants relate this benefit to the workplace context, although there is no direct connection between the course topic and work. Example (referring to a course in Japanese):

> We have a lot to do with international companies, and the course helps me there because I am more aware that different cultures work differently. And you're more aware that when you're in an international environment you have to know that what's right for one person isn't necessarily right for the next. (SWI_C)

Apart from the cases mentioned above, 'Cultural knowledge' is also mentioned as a benefit that includes the connotation of tolerance without explicitly mentioning it.

Tolerance

Some participants mention tolerance as related to the experience of **social interaction in a heterogeneous group**. Examples:

> Even though we got along well with the other participants, still they were foreign people to me. I had to work with them intensively so I became more open and tolerant. (CZE_B)
>
> The class was attended by at least 20 per cent non-native Italians, but the confrontation never became a clash, it was very interesting to see. I liked the foreigner's approach to our language. (ITA_B)

This way of speaking about cultural knowledge points at participants' awareness that heterogeneous learning groups can **challenge their sense of tolerance** and that it requires **efforts to understand** each other.

5.3.1.8 Civic and social engagement

This benefit category is among the less frequently mentioned. Moreover, the results suggest that civic benefits might be more closely related either to the **course topics or to specific providers** than most of the other benefit categories. The interviewees that emphasize civic benefits typically refer to courses in political education or to courses offered by trade unions or other socially and politically engaged organizations. This also allows us to assume a connection between civic benefits and individual attitudes to society.

Participation in society

Some participants talk about participation in society in connection with liberal adult education. Those who do so especially point to **voluntary activities**, **moral duties,** or a **sense of responsibility** for their community. Examples:

> Amongst other things, you know that our group of intergenerational members work with the schools, and I go with them. We go and we exchange information; we help them in various activities, and they help us, so it's an amazing thing. What impresses me is the fact that we are active. (ROM_V)

> And other things have come out of them. For instance, out of the writing classes and the Welsh class, some of whose members coincide, I've set up a quiz team and we do charity events. (ENG_D)

Interest and knowledge in politics

One of the rarest benefits reported in the interviews is interest and knowledge in politics. Example:

> You see how active they are at all the debates and how they really try to understand thoroughly what is happening, what our politicians tell us. (ROM_NV)

5.3.1.9 Civic competence

Change of attitudes

This benefit was reported in a few cases, referring to **democracy**, the development of a more **critical attitude to consumer goods,** or to a critical **attitude to consumerism**.

> Daoism and things like that make you think. We in the West are terribly consumerist and so back to nature [...] it gives you another perspective. (ENG_H)

Shared expertise

This code was rare as well. The very few examples from this code refer to either **specific activities** or the experience of being with people who have **something in common**. Example:

> It is a book in which each of us found herself and we underlined paragraphs and said look this is me and it was nice to see that all of us talked about the book and each of us found a piece of herself or a familiar situation here. (RO_SI)

Sense of responsibility

Some interviewees describe their **willingness to engage** in their community, in other social contexts, or in society in general. They seem to show an interest not only in **politics**, but also in the **political meaning of societal issues**. Examples:

> Well, when I see that something needs to be done, I'm happy to help out so my answer would be 'yes'. I'm actually developing my own seminars for the trade union. […]. At the moment, I'm doing something for an organization for the older generation. (GER_B).

> I have never done volunteer work before. But when I came to the Learning Project for Young Adults, when I noticed how everything works, I became an active volunteer in many things. I repaired computers for the project to help all Slovenians that can't afford a computer to get one. I teach others, not only at the Project but also my acquaintances and friends at the village. (SLO_H)

Advocacy for political convictions

Advocacy appears for instance in the context of courses that are aimed at promoting democracy and tolerance. An example:

> Well, first of all, you never stop learning how to give a reasoned argument. The benefits are being able to speak freely, never forgetting how to do that, being able to exert yourself in a group, learning how to take the lead and how to introduce a topic into such a group […]. And in our socio-cultural centre, we have open youth work and an office for the Bündnis für Demokratie und Toleranz (Alliance for Democracy and Tolerance). I have of course been able to give a lot of impetus to the work carried out here. As I've already said, 'It's a topic where I can [incomprehensible] for the first time.' (GER_E)

5.3.1.10 Family-related benefits

Family-related benefits were mentioned only by a few participants in the whole international sample.

Coping with parental role

The interviewees who did report this sort of benefit referred mostly to the coping aspect, albeit often in a wider sense than the term 'coping with parental role' suggests. Some interviewees report a development and improvement of the **mutual relationships within families**, encompassing all **generations**. Examples:

> Yes, I feel more prepared to help my daughter ... and I do not know ... a little like rejuvenation ... not physically, but mentally… (ESP_N)

> Improvement of family life. Yoga really calms a person down and when he or she is calm, it is easier to accept behavioural disorders of others. (SLO_G)

Another sort of family-related benefit stems from **specific competences** enabling parents to support families in different ways. Example:

> Because my children, they love home-baked cake, because since then, it's like, we bake cakes every week now. It's good to have fresh pasty at home. (ENG_T)

Providing information

Very few examples mention the benefit of providing information to the family. In these cases, there is a connection with **health behaviour**. Examples:

> I've already told my daughter: 'Don't give the children salami, hot-dogs or sandwich meat'—because that's what we've been taught. And there are many other things I consider very important. (RO_V)

> And it is not only good for me, my family benefits from it too, especially my children. I have learned something that will keep their health too, and I also have more time to devote to them and of course to myself. (SRB_M)

5.3.1.11 Skills and competences

The benefit category 'Skills' was **deliberately kept open**, which caused one researcher to name it an 'omnibus'. Indeed, this metaphor aptly captures the openness and diversity of this category. The interviewees do in fact report all sorts of skills, many of which are obviously related to the course topic—ICT and language skills, yoga, dancing, sewing, photography, creative writing, and

so on—while others do not have any explicit connection to the topic. Given the variety of skills, it is not possible to give an overview that would cover all the skills mentioned in the interviews.

Interestingly, most participants do **not just enumerate the skills** they acquired but **tend to contextualise them**, explaining why a specific skill is a benefit, or how they transfer and use the skills in their lives. Examples:

> My IT knowledge has improved. Today it is a very desirable qualification. (CZE_D)

> Furthermore, I began to read news on foreign websites, newspapers, and some interesting things. When I watch TV shows and movies I understand much more without looking at the subtitles, the song also, I even took the lyrics and translated them. (SRB_Ž)

Apart from skills that relate directly to the course topic, there is a range of skills that are—in the participants' opinion—**topic-related but in a less obvious way**. These skills seem to be essential for many participants, even if they are not likely to appear in any course announcement. Example:

> Dancing changes you, your respect for others—and you learn how to respect others, because otherwise you can't dance together ... and how to talk to one another—so dancing indirectly teaches you a whole load of things. Because it's just that dancing is not just about learning steps, but it also teaches you a whole host of social skills. As well as rhythm and coordination. (SWI_G)

Finally, participants report skills that have **no evident connection to the course topic**. These seem to be mostly **generic skills** that can easily be acquired in a wide range of courses and transferred to different contexts. These skills include especially social skills, communication skills, learning skills—skills that at least some participants seem to consider a **key to their personal or professional development**. Examples:

> I think it [working in culturally mixed group] hones one's people skills. (ENG_D)

> So the real impact is actually not letting yourself lose the art of learning and developing content. And that's what I like best about it. Doing something challenging, be it physical or mental, outside my professional life. (SWI_C)

The fact that most participants not only describe the skills but contextualize, explain, and interpret them in the perspective of their own lives indicates a **willingness and ability to reflect** on the way adult education influences their lives.

5.3.2 'Most important benefits'

When asked which of the benefits they have described was the most important one, almost all interviewees named benefits that belong to **more than one benefit category**, which is another indicator that they perceive bundles of benefits.

Since the question was asked towards the end of the interview, most interviewees went back to one or more benefits they mentioned before, focusing and condensing them to what they saw as the very **essence of their learning adventure**. From a constructivist point of view, these answers can be seen as the result of a construction process that the participants undertake to explain to a stranger why the courses they took were worth the trouble, the time and money they invested. In some cases, the core message that comes out of this process is very clear and simple—an insight,

a fact—in others, it looks more like an ongoing search or even a sort of vision quest, giving the impression that the participant is convinced of being engaged in personal development without being able to name a precise goal.

5.3.3 External criteria

The interviews show a wide range of external criteria for the benefits. External criteria were defined as external, **observable activities or products that provide verifiable evidence of the benefits** reported by the participants. The purpose of identifying such criteria was to make sure that the analysis captures concrete, real effects as opposed to mere abstract ideas about the potential of adult learning.

The codes found in the interviews are:

- Participation in events and social or political activities;
- Organizing events (cultural, social, sports events, journeys, etc.);
- Social recognition/appreciation;
- Adherence to organizational frameworks (e.g. membership in organizations or networks);
- Carrying out specific new activities (e.g. creative activities, writing, etc.);
- Sideline activities (e.g. publishing books);
- Transfer into everyday life (e.g. ICT skills, languages, handicrafts).

This catalogue of possible external criteria is not comprehensive. The purpose of identifying these criteria was not to define the range of existing criteria but to provide a good basis for interpreting the benefits reported by participants. Moreover, asking for examples of (observable) activities that would illustrate the benefits participants mentioned helped to check the plausibility of participants' statements and to recognize socially desirable answers or clichés about lifelong learning.

5.3.4 Bundles of benefits

The interviews show that participants typically report bundles of benefits and establish various relationships among the benefits when describing their experiences. This finding opens up **new research questions** that were not envisaged in the initial research framework. The statements evidencing relationships among benefits were collected for later analysis.

Some relationships, however, were discussed with respect to the different benefit categories as well as the emergence of benefits. One of the most obvious relationships is the connection between **'Mental well-being' and 'Physical health'**. And those two benefits can be seen as supporting the development of other benefits, like social interaction, tolerance or self-control, and vice versa. Another relationship that could be discovered without deeper analysis is between **'Skills' and 'Other benefit categories',** or between 'Social network' and 'Sense of Purpose in life' or 'New inspiration'. Interviewees who explicitly establish relationships between different benefits most often do this by using 'and' to link the benefits. Some interviewees also establish causal connections. Quotations supporting this finding can be found in the qualitative research report (Sgier, 2014).

6. Mixed-method Analysis of the Interrelation of Course-related Elements and Benefits as Experienced by Learners

Earlier studies (eg. Hammond, 2005; Desjardins, 2003; 2008b) have indicated that the relationship of learning processes and wider benefits is a complex one. In order to analyse these relationships, a set of structured and open questions was included in the survey questionnaire, and the question was added also in the semi-structured interviews. The links between learning situation and wider benefits have rarely been analysed in earlier studies, and the BeLL study seeks to open this 'black box' by taking advantage of the mixed-method approach used in the BeLL project.

This chapter describes the preliminary results, because the qualitative BeLL data (interviews and the open question) on this phenomenon need more analysis later on. The tentative results presented here are a combination of the statistical analysis of survey data (n=8646) and the qualitative analysis of interviews (n=82) and one open question (answers from 1,312 respondents analysed so far). The various data sets provide slightly different pictures about the importance of elements in the learning situation, which is understandable, because pre-defined, theory-based elements provided in the questionnaire cannot cover all potential elements, whereas qualitative data (in this case, interviews) give participants a chance to name the elements they personally experienced as important for their learning experience.

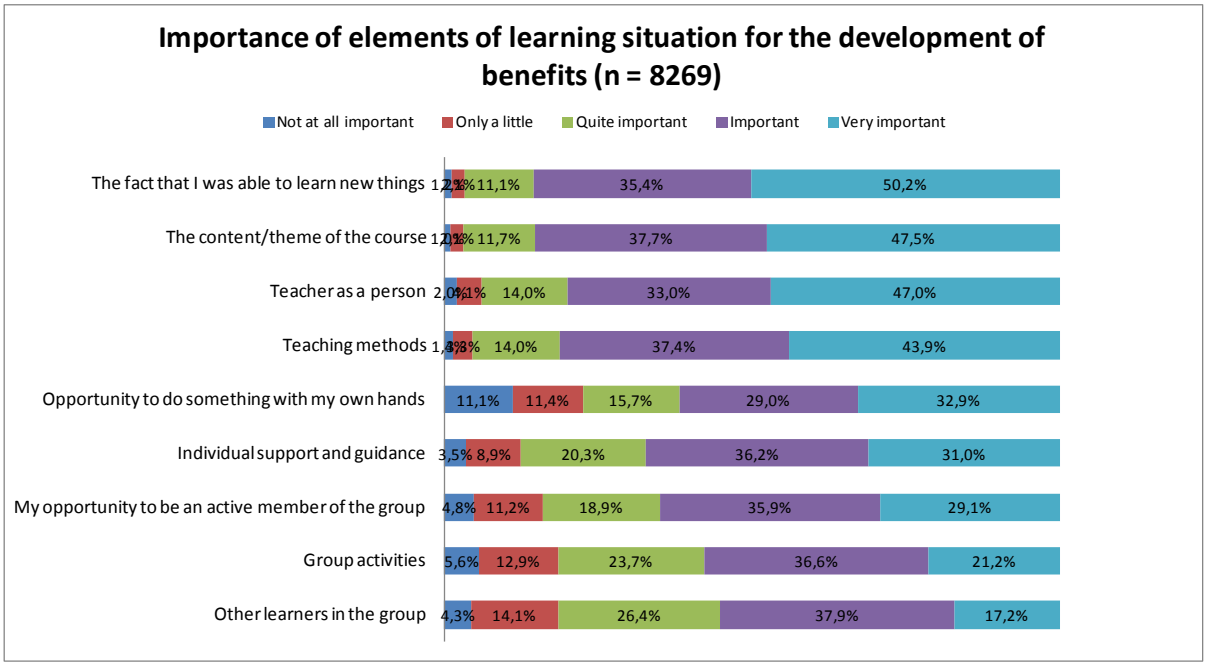
6.1 Statistical analysis of elements

In the questionnaire respondents were asked (Question 2.4) to rate the importance of various elements of the learning situation with regard to their learning and the development of benefits as experienced by them. They were introduced to a list of potential elements (teacher, teaching methods, group activities, etc.) and asked to assess how important they thought these elements were. Here's the exact wording:

> *2.4 Now think back to your learning experiences during the past 12 months. Please estimate how important the following elements of learning situation were for the outcomes you listed above. Use a scale from (1) to (5), where (1) is not at all important and (5) very important.*

The basic frequencies in Figure 12 show that the respondents felt the most important elements of their experience were learning new things, the contents of the course, the teacher as a person, and teaching methods. Group activities and other learners in the group are considered to be slightly less important elements.

Figure 12 Importance of elements of the learning situation for the development of benefits



Factor analysis was used to combine the elements into factors. Three factors were found in the analysis, and they were identified as 'Teaching', 'Group', and 'Self' (see Table 11 below). The first two factors were clear, with the first one indicating the importance of teaching, teacher, and course contents, and the second indicating the social dimension of learning (group processes and group membership). The third factor was named 'Self' because it seems to consist of elements related to an individual's personal learning experience: doing something with their own hands, getting individual support, and learning new things.

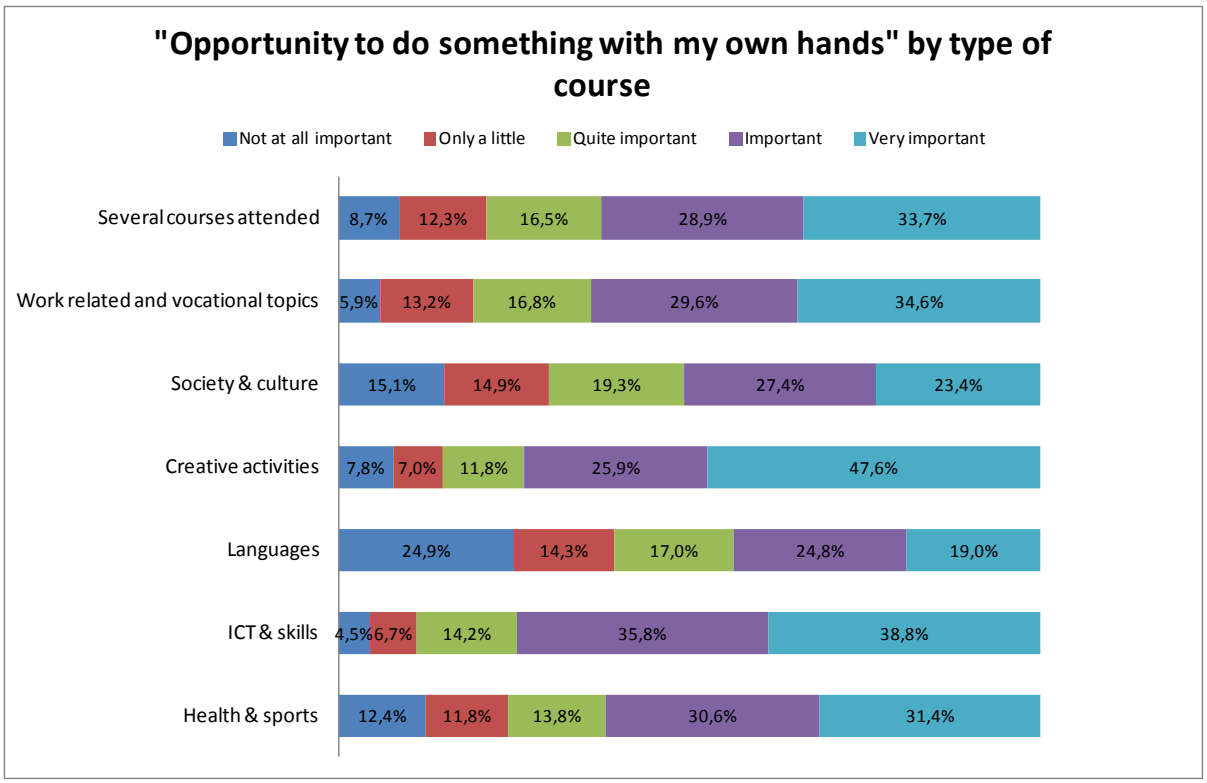
Table 11 Factor analysis of elements of the learning situation

	Factor		
	'Teaching'	'Group'	'Self'
Teaching methods	.813		
Teacher as a person	.660		
The content/theme of the course	.532		
Group activities		.814	
Other learners in the group		.749	
My opportunity to be an active member of the group		.615	
Opportunity to do something with my own hands			.641
Individual support and guidance			.707
The fact that I was able to learn new things			.499

The group differences in individual statements and in factor scores were analysed using ANOVA. There were statistically significant differences between all tested background variables in factor scores. Women, for example, are more appreciative of all elements, except for doing things with their own hands, where there is no statistically significant gender difference. At the factor level, women attach more importance to 'Teaching'-related elements than men. There is a linear relationship between 'Teaching' and age group, with younger participants paying more attention to teacher and teaching—except for the oldest age group, who also recognize the importance of 'Teaching' to a larger extent.

There are some differences between course types. ‘Group’ is a bit less important in health- and sports-related courses and in language courses (perhaps participants focus on their individual performance?). ‘Teaching’ is valued most in ICT- and skills-related courses, as are ‘Group’ and ‘Self’. ‘Self’ is also important in creative activities, but less so in language courses. This can be explained by the statement ‘Opportunity to do something with my own hands’, which is naturally important for handicrafts and other creative courses. Figure 13 shows the differences in that element.

Figure 13: Importance of ‘doing something with one’s own hands’ for the emergence of benefits



There is a linear and clear relationship between educational level and all factors: the lower the educational level, the higher the scores for all elements in the learning situation. It seems that less educated participants need more support from ‘Teaching’ and ‘Group’, as well as from ‘Self’ through their own positive learning experiences. The relationship is similar for ‘Group’ and ‘Self’. Respondents with lower levels of education value more individual support, enjoy learning for learning’s sake, and like doing things with their own hands.

Some differences at the statement level (single elements) are described in the following figures. Educational level seems to be strongly linked to experiencing teacher personality and group activities as important elements.

Figure 14: Importance of teacher personality for the development of benefits, by educational level

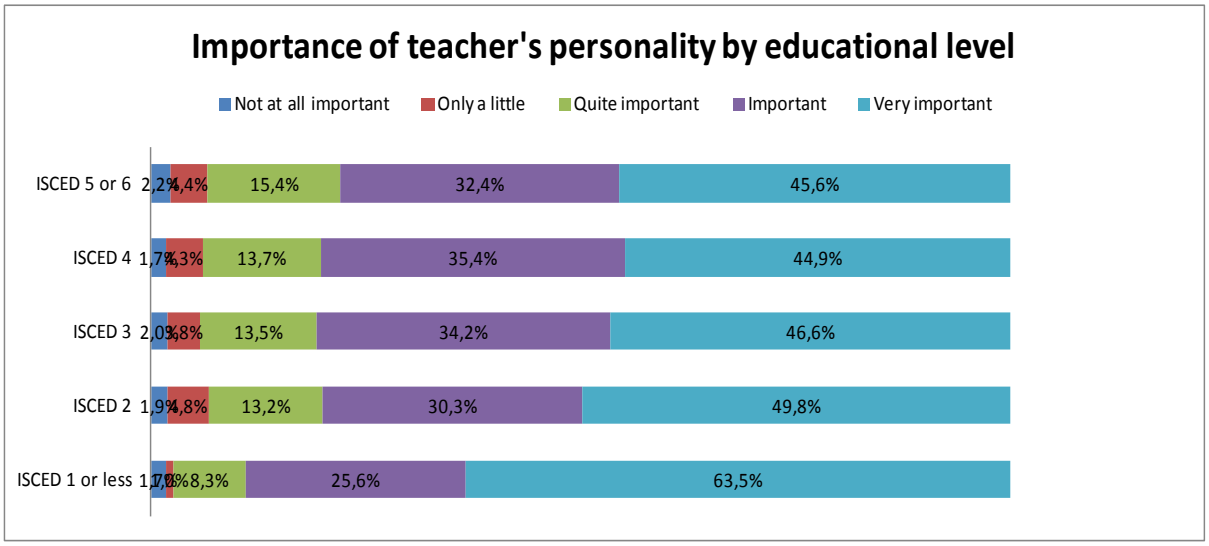
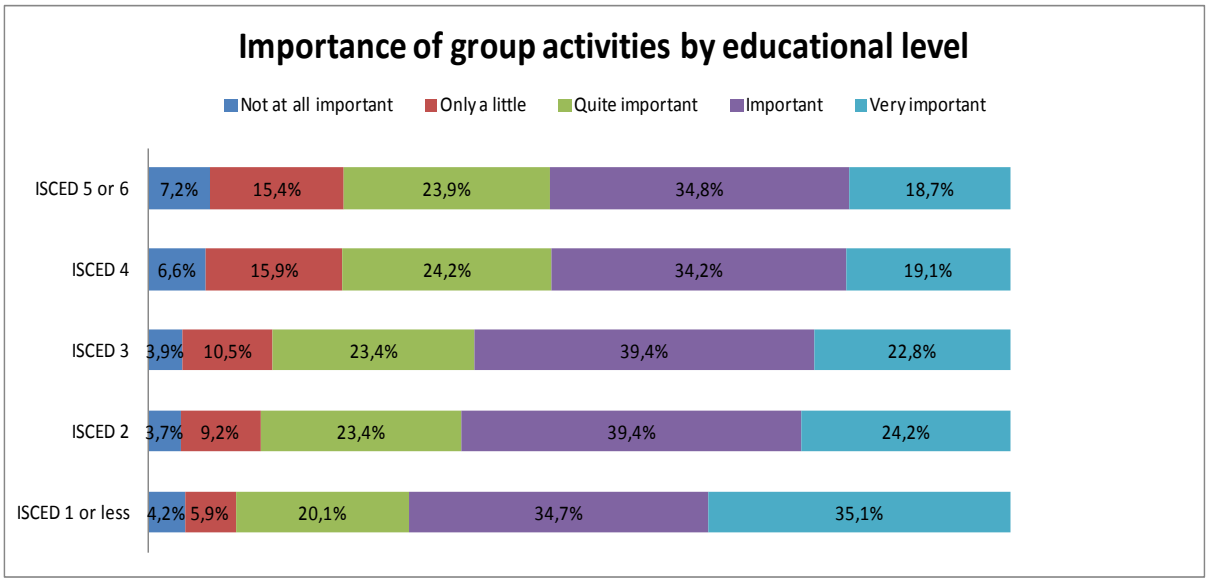


Figure 15: Importance of group activities for the development of benefits, by educational level



This strong link between educational level and the importance of various 'external' elements for the development of benefits is easy to explain by educational background. The higher participant's level of education, the better their learning skills and wider learning experience. This, in turn, is likely to reduce their dependence on external support (by teacher or group) in a learning situation. From a policy perspective, this result stresses the importance of various elements in the learning situation for less educated adults.

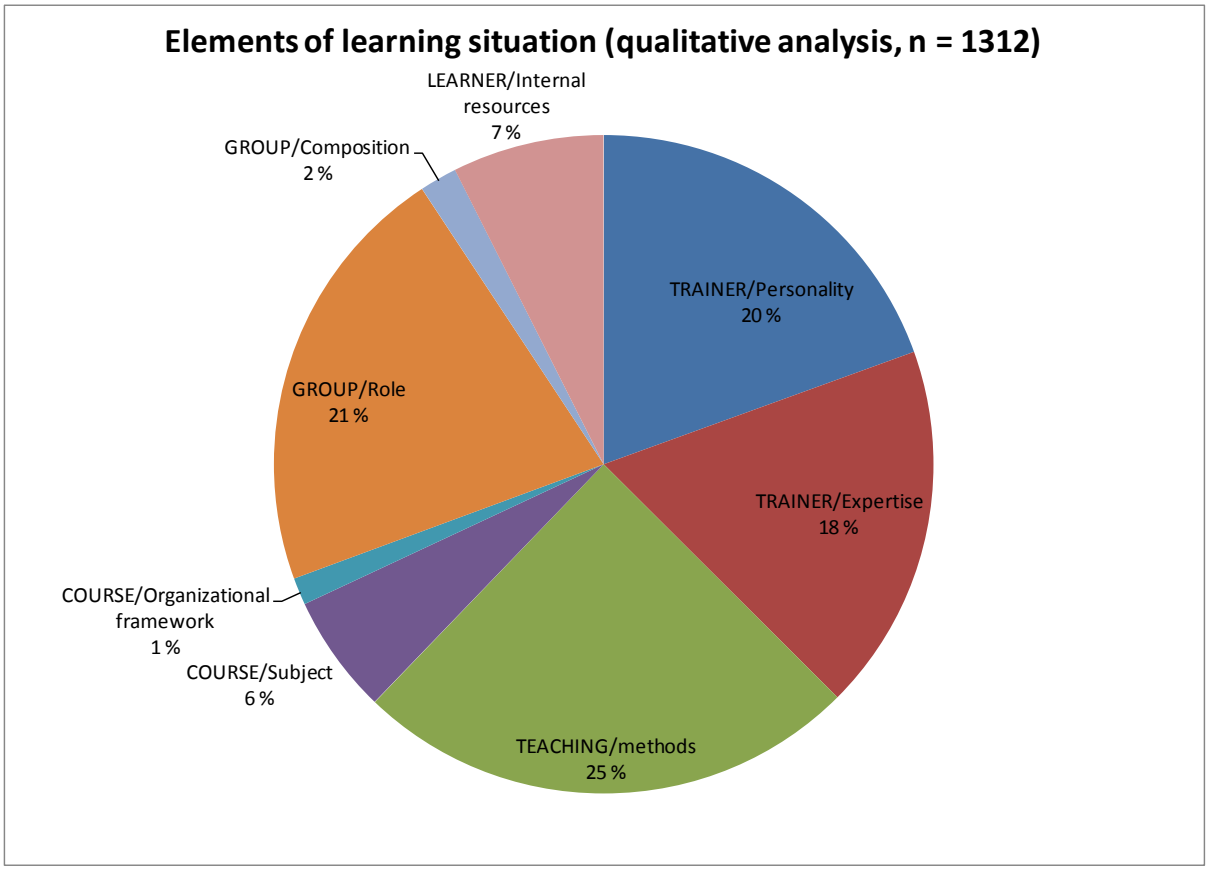
6.2 Qualitative analysis of open question

After working on the list of structured statements, respondents were also asked to answer an open question, to give examples of how these elements have been important for the development of outcomes:

2.5 If Possible, please give one or two examples which illustrate, why and how these elements were important for the outcomes you stated earlier.

The answers were analysed using qualitative data-driven content analysis following a procedure similar to that used in the analysis of the two open benefit questions 2.1 and 2.2 (for details, see Chapter 4 and Manninen & Meriläinen, 2014). So far, only 1,312 cases have been analysed, but the themes found already give us an additional picture about the elements that respondents themselves consider important for the development of benefits. In this analysis, we have to keep in mind that respondents were first given a list of potential elements (structured question 2.4) and afterwards were asked to give examples of how **these** elements helped generate benefits. Figure 16 shows the main themes ('elements' mentioned by the respondents) found in the qualitative analysis. A more detailed table of themes and frequencies is available in Manninen and Meriläinen (2014).

Figure 16 Elements experienced as important for the development of benefits



These percentages show which elements in the pre-defined list were considered to be most important by respondents, according to their individual experiences—experiences they consider worthwhile reporting in their answer to the open question. The results show that 'Trainer' and 'Group' are the main elements, whereas 'Doing something with my own hands' and 'Learning new things' are less important.

A deeper qualitative analysis of open question 2.5 will be done later, using more cases. We will also look at the processes of **how** the elements support the development of benefits.

6.3 Qualitative analysis of interviews

In BeLL, interviews were used as the most 'qualitative' method to assess elements of the learning situation, because in these interviews, respondents were not given lists or hints regarding possible elements. Therefore they were more likely to bring up new elements and elements that were especially meaningful for their own learning experience and for the development of the benefits in their life situation. Interestingly, however, the results were quite similar to those based on the survey data.

In the BeLL interviews, all participants were able to identify course-related aspects that contributed to the process of gaining benefits from course participation. The analysis of interview data was based on the same theme categories found in the first round of qualitative analysis of the open question in the survey questionnaire, but the coding was open so that new categories (elements) can be added if needed (for details, see Sgier, 2014). The **preliminary categories for the analysis** were:

- Trainer/Teacher;
- Teaching methods;
- Course in itself (incl. course topic and subject);
- Group/other participants;
- Institutional/organizational framework;
- Learner's internal resources.

The preliminary analyses show that **all of these elements play a significant role** in the development of benefits. An additional, more detailed analysis will be done after the project has ended.

Preliminary results from the first analysis show that these categories generally worked well, but codes for single elements within these categories need some further development. Moreover, a number of new categories were suggested, such as 'learning environment'.

The interviewees identify **trainers** as the dominant factor influencing the development of benefits in the course context. Participants emphasize different aspects of the teacher's personality—charisma, authenticity, passion, empathy, and the like—as well as the trainer's approach, that is, the way in which they present the content, the type of exercises they suggest, or their ability to create a good atmosphere.

Teaching methods were not mentioned very often as a distinct influence on the development of benefits. But it is noteworthy that many interviewees describe the trainer's skills in a way that comprises teaching methods, for example when highlighting the trainer's ability to keep the learning process interesting, to motivate learners by providing a wide range of exercises, or to create a good atmosphere. In this sense, we can say that the majority of interviewees do not typically distinguish between trainer and teaching methods, which does not mean that they were irrelevant for the development of benefits.

Almost equally important is the impact of the **group and other participants**. The aspects mentioned here are mainly social interaction, mutual support in the learning process, exchange and sharing of experiences. Moreover, some interviewees mention specific aspects of the group such as solidarity, common goals, peer support, the fact that all group members participate voluntarily and are motivated to learn, or the group's structuring function, which keeps the learning process active and makes progress visible.

Compared to the categories mentioned above, **the course subject** seems to play a less prominent role in interviewees' understanding of the development of benefits in courses. Many participants did not mention the course content at all when asked how the benefits they mentioned emerged in a specific course. But there are exceptions: In three national samples (England, Germany, Switzerland), content and topic were identified as the dominant factor. However, the analysis shows that content does usually play an important role in the context of motivation and as reason for participation. If interviewees do not mention the content when asked about the development of benefits, this does not mean that content and topic are irrelevant but that many participants do not explicitly and consciously connect the development of benefits with the course topic.

The remaining two categories—**organizational framework** and **learner's internal resources**—are mentioned less frequently. The persons who do mention these aspects, however, seem to see them as important factors in the development of their benefits. Moreover, learner's internal resources might be mentioned implicitly by participants who emphasize content and topic, especially when they show a tendency to self-directed or self-organized learning.

This first analysis of the course-related elements influencing the development of benefits confirms the conclusion that was drawn from the analysis of the benefit categories: Course participants perceive bundles of benefits and **multiple interrelations** between the various benefits. In the analysis of the development issue, an additional aspect becomes visible: Participants often see **specific benefits both as the cause and the result of their learning—and as the cause of other benefits**. This is the case, for instance, when participants describe social interaction as both resulting from and causing their learning progress, as well as causing the emergence of other benefits, such as tolerance or self-confidence. Social interaction frequently occurs as a mediating factor for the development of the benefits.

These initial conclusions indicate that course-related aspects play a significant and complex role in the development of benefits. Although many interview statements suggest causal relationships between specific course-related aspects and benefits, the interpretation of these statements in their context does not allow for drawing any general, linear causal conclusions. A deeper analysis, however, will certainly reveal patterns of interconnections between course-related aspects and learning benefits, which could be useful for practitioners.

6.4 Conclusions from the mixed-methods approach to the development of benefits

Both data sources and methodological approaches suggest that the development of benefits in the framework of liberal adult education courses is connected with **teachers'/ trainers' personalities, expertise, and teaching methods,** as well as participants' interaction with fellow **course participants**. As for **course topic and subject/content**, the factor analysis reveals a rather low significance/importance in connection with the development of benefits. Although the interview analysis confirms this result, it also shows that (1) the course subject plays an important role in the context of motivation and learners' reasons for participation, and that (2) learners see motivation as a precondition for successful learning. On this basis, we can assume that course content indirectly

plays an important role for the development of benefits, even if participants do not mention it spontaneously when asked how learning benefits emerge. The same assumption seems plausible in the case of **learner's internal resources**. According to both the survey and the interview analyses, only a few participants perceive this element as important. However, the qualitative interview analysis suggests a similar indirect connection between leaners' internal resources and the development of benefits.

Moreover, the survey analysis suggests an interrelation between participants' level of education and the three development factors. This result will be analysed in more detail and validated with the help of qualitative interview analysis in further elaborations of the BeLL study. For further evidence-based results on this issue, ethnographic studies and experiments would be interesting (cf. Schrader & Goeze, 2011; Goeze, Hetfleisch, & Schrader, 2013).

7. Summary and Discussion of Key Findings

The BeLL study shows that participation in liberal adult education, according to individual perceptions, seems to generate multiple benefits for individuals. Participants experienced multiple benefits after participating in liberal education courses These benefits are likely to have an impact also on their immediate social groups like family, work place, and other social networks, meaning that liberal adult education generates benefits for society as well.

Of the 8646 respondents, 70 to 87 % experienced positive changes in learning motivation, social interaction, general well-being, and life satisfaction. Changes related to work/career and active citizenship were experienced less frequently, but even here 31 to 42 % have experienced some positive changes.

The qualitative analysis of open questions in the survey (n=4443) shows that people are able to recognize, name, and describe these benefits—a finding strongly supported by the interviews. The qualitative interview analysis (n=82) confirms that the interviewees do indeed perceive a high influence, although we have to keep in mind that half of the interview sample consists of active learners (attending several courses), and the majority of them have medium or high qualifications (like adult learners in general).

The qualitative interview analysis led to a number of conclusions that support the survey results:

- Participants are usually spontaneously aware of more than one benefit category, although there are also benefits they only become aware of when asked to discuss their experience.
- Participants are able to recognize and reflect on their learning experiences and articulate direct as well as wider benefits and long-term effects of their learning.
- Participants generally report bundles of benefits rather than single benefits.
- Interviews point to the importance of social interaction and networks as well as well-being and life satisfaction as important benefits.
- The benefits are related to specific contexts, whose significance can be perceived very differently.
- Participants make connections between the benefits of learning and their individual life contexts. Often, participation is even connected to individual 'life projects' (cf. Illeris, 2010, p. 50).

- Interviewees identify the teacher's or trainer's personality, expertise, and their teaching approaches as important factors for deriving benefits from the course context.

Types of benefits, differences, interconnections

Whereas the qualitative interview analysis shows that interviewees perceive bundles of benefits and mention multiple relationships between benefits, the statistical analysis suggests that there are strong correlations between the various benefit categories. In fact, the statistical analyses of survey data (n=8646) resulted in the definition of 10 benefit factors. These benefit factors were further summarized as second order latent factors indicating changes in CONTROL OF OWN LIFE, ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL, and HEALTH, FAMILY, & WORK. The factors were used to calculate sum scores, which were used to analyse how different groups of people benefit from adult learning. There are some small but statistically significant differences between genders, types of courses, and countries.

In all ten participating countries, similar types of course topics were found, as well as similar benefits within these courses across the countries. Differences between countries can be mainly explained by different course or respondent profiles, but some differences in national results remain unexplained and need to be analysed deeper at a later point. For example, there are substantial differences between countries with regard to changes in 'Trust in decision-makers' and 'Interest in politics'. Likewise, the impact of adult learning seems to be different in some countries: respondents in Slovenia, Romania, and Spain seem to experience more changes, even when controlling for background variables.

The statistically significant differences by gender, age, employment status, and course types are rather small in practice, and the main result is that all groups seem to benefit from liberal adult education, and that all types of courses generate changes in peoples' lives.

For example, from among the age-related differences found in the survey, one notable fact is that for younger participants, liberal adult education serves as a 'stepping stone' into society, improving their sense of control of their own life. For older participants, it is a 'cushion' softening age-related changes like retirement, loss of friends and family members, and a decline in skills.

Arguably the most significant differences were found when the development of benefits was compared by educational background: the lower participants' level of education, the stronger the changes generated by participation in liberal adult education. The analysis of the BeLL data indicates that the lower respondents' educational background, the more they experience positive changes in motivation, see adult education as an important opportunity, feel more confident as learners, and encourage others to learn as well. These changes are biggest among the group of respondents with ISCED 1 or lower levels of education (primary education, first stage of basic education, or less). Thus, it would be important to further investigate whether liberal adult education can serve to narrow gaps between social groups in terms of learning opportunities and motivation. Moreover, less educated people experience more positive changes regarding other benefits—in other words, they benefit more from participation. This can be explained by the fact that persons with higher levels of education already have more control of their own life, are better able to support their kids' learning, enjoy better health, and so on. As a consequence, participation in adult education does not generate as many additional changes in their life as it does for less educated individuals. Furthermore, less educated persons also seem to need more support from the teacher and the group. For them, the various elements of the learning situation are more

important for the development of benefits than they are for those with a higher educational background and better learning skills.

The qualitative interview analysis produced a wide range of examples supporting the results of the statistical analysis outlined above. The benefit categories with the highest frequencies in the survey also appear as important benefits in the interviews. In the qualitative analysis, the predominant benefit categories were ‘Sense of purpose in life’, ‘Mental well-being’, ‘Social network’, and ‘Changes in educational experiences’. This result shows that the interviewees perceive liberal adult education predominantly as a useful tool for enhancing their personal and social development. Moreover, the qualitative interview analysis gives strong support to the above-mentioned conclusions derived from the survey regarding the crucial role of educational level. The same applies to the fact that age shapes learners’ perspective and the role liberal adult education plays in individual life contexts, for instance as a ‘stepping stone’ or a ‘cushion’ (cf. ‘life projects’ in the interview results).

Benefits and life contexts

Apart from confirming the survey results and validating the benefit concepts, one of the most valuable results of the qualitative analysis is that it gives insight into the diversity and context-relatedness of benefits, as well as the fact that all participants see liberal adult education in connection with their indifidual life contexts. This is an aspect that could not be seen in the statistical analysis. The interviewees emphasize their personal interest in the topics they study, and they interpret learning in the context of personal strategies to achieve diverse goals. This is true even in cases where learning is undertaken for pleasure and without any explicit goal in mind apart from the joy or challenge of learning.

With these findings, the qualitative BeLL analysis confirms and illustrates what Illeris (2004) says on the basis of his research on the process of adult learning:

‘[...] adult learning has the character that:

- adults learn what they want to learn when it is meaningful for them to learn
- adults, when learning, draw on the resources they have
- adults assume the responsibility for their learning they are interested in taking (provided they have the opportunity)

We might reverse these formulations. Then the key message would be that adults have very little inclination to learn something that makes no sense or has no meaning on the basis of their own perspective.’ (Illeris, 2004, p. 125)

Another result of the interview analysis is that interviewees report bundles of benefits rather than isolated effects. Although they are generally able to distinguish clearly between the wider benefits of different specific courses, they tend to see all benefits as interconnected aspects of their biographical situation, especially when taking a more long-term perspective. In other words, the interviewees tend to present their participation in liberal adult education not as a single, isolated

activity but as part of a more or less coherent, but not necessarily rational strategy for their individual development. They seem to address what Illeris calls 'strategic life projects':

'From the point of view of learning, "adulthood" is typically dominated by having some strategic life projects that spawn a multitude of things to do and attitudes that fill up the individual's life, and at the same time provide the benchmark for what one learns and does not learn.' (Illeris, 2004, p. 124)

Life projects are not necessarily based on clear and conscious decisions, as Illeris points out, they may also be be driven 'by the "automatic pilot", without much reflection, while the individuals nonetheless continue to choose and reject the various options that offer themselves' (ibid., p. 124). Life projects can be concerned with family life or working life, but also with leisure activities, politics, religion, or any other area of interest.

'Strategic life projects' appear in several BeLL interviews, most clearly—but not exclusively—in interviews with participants who report several courses in one year. These interviewees may have more than one project going on in their lives, but in most cases their narration about learning experiences seems to orbit around a dominant life project, for the achievement of which they find adult education useful. Examples of life projects found in the BeLL interviews are: keeping fit in later life; making up for learning opportunities missed out on at a younger age; processing traumas experienced in childhood; ensuring a high level of performance at work; advocating for social justice; being a good mother, and so on.

The BeLL results suggest that individual life contexts and life projects are not only important benchmarks in the learning process but that they also influence decisions to participate in specific adult education courses (for further discussions see Chapter 10).

Tu sum up: The qualitative analysis gives insight into some individual experiences of and perspectives on the wider benefits of adult learning. The interview analysis cannot answer the question of how many people experience wider benefits in the way the interviewees do, or how many people use liberal adult education for a specific life project. But as part of the mixed-methods approach adopted in the BeLL project, the interviews help to understand and illustrate learning benefits in their specific individual contexts. The interviews thus complement the statistical analysis, which in turn can give a picture of the frequency, relevance, and complexity of benefits but is not able to show the relationship between specific benefits and individual life projects or biographical contexts.

Interconnected benefit factors

Similar results were found in the statistical analysis. In plain language, the SEM model shows that the benefits of liberal adult education can be summarized into three main factors, which are connected to each other. It shows that participation in liberal adult education leads to a change in attitudes (regarding the importance of adult education, learner self-confidence, and tolerance) and to more active social engagement. This in turn generates a stronger sense among participants that they have control of their own life (feelings that can influence their life situation). Attitudinal changes also lead directly to benefits related to health, work, and family. Moreover, an increased sense of control of one's own life and benefits related to health, work, and family interact with each other. As a result, better health and increased career opportunities also boost people's self-confidence, for example, and vice versa.

In general, the change in ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL is essential with respect to the benefits gained. It seems to be a mediator that triggers and enables the emergence of other benefits. This interpretation was validated by the qualitative analysis of open questions and interviews. 'Social interaction' and 'New networks' in particular seem to generate processes leading to the emergence of other benefits. In the qualitative analysis of 4443 responses to open questions, three themes were found under the 'Social network' concept. These were 'New networks' (f=235, mentioned by 5.29% of respondents), 'Social interaction' (f=471, 10.6%), and 'New friends' (f=211, 4.75%). The central role of social networks and mental well-being is clearly visible in the qualitative data:

> Both classes provide me with social contacts which have proved invaluable since my husband died. My mental well-being benefits because I have activities and topics to plan around which mean I am less isolated than I might otherwise have been. Sharing ideas and responses is immensely important. (UK_OPEN_100291)

> Increased social contacts have become handy since I retired from customer services. [...] I feel positive about aging, when I meet people in study groups, and teachers are all experts in their course topics, and sympathetic as individuals among adult learners. (FIN_OPEN_200391)

The SEM model shows how the benefits develop and how they are linked to each other, and the qualitative data (open questions and interviews) validate these results. The results indicate that social interaction and the development of new social networks act as a 'seeds' for the generation of various benefits. Learning voluntarily and in a relaxed situation in a group seems to help learners have positive learning experiences, gain self-confidence and other benefits, which in turn lead to well-being and various wider benefits.

The results can be supported by theories and previous research. For example, Chen and Yang (2013) show that there is a connection between an individual's social capital and their possibilities to maintain good health. Elliot, Gale, Parsons, and Kuh (2014) found a strong relationship between the mental well-being of older adults and social cohesion (sense of neighbourhood belonging and social participation). Field (2009, p. 26) summarizes the results of several studies, showing that extended social networks and increased social capital in general play an important role in the emergence of benefits and the development of shared norms and tolerance. There is also strong evidence that participation generates confidence and self-efficacy, or, to use a more general theoretical concept, sense of agency (Archer, 2003; defined as 'perceived control over important life choices' by Field, 2009, p. 27), which equals 'Control of own life' in the SEM model.

Strong theoretical support for the BeLL results can be found in self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985; for examples of empirical research, see Deci & Ryan, 2008; Sierens, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, Soenens, & Dochy, 2009; Baeten, Dochy, & Struyven, 2013). SDT is based on the observation that autonomous motivation and interpersonal contexts facilitate basic psychological human needs such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness, and that these are related to psychological health (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 14). In addition, since liberal adult education is a voluntary activity, it is based on and generates autonomous motivation (as opposed to controlled motivation, as in non-voluntary education), which involves a sense of volition and choice, which in turn generates better psychological, developmental, and behavioural outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2008, pp. 14-15), as well as high levels of interest and enjoyment (Baeten et al., 2013, p. 485). It seems that voluntary participation in liberal adult education generates benefits because it offers activities focusing on topics that have personal relevance, provide social interaction and experiences of self-fulfilment and achievement. In SDT terms, liberal adult education provides 'a sense of volition and psychological freedom in learning (need for autonomy), feeling effective in

learning (need for competence), and experiencing a sense of friendship and closeness to peers (need for relatedness)' (Baeten et al., 2013, p. 485).

The central role of "Changes in educational experiences" in the SEM model can also be explained with the help of the motivational expectancy model (Pintrich, 1988). It explains how motivation helps activate, direct, and maintain the learning activity. Activating elements are more or less stable personality elements (e.g. curiosity, learner's self-image), while directing factors (e.g. outcome beliefs, task value) focus the person's interest on a specific target (a learning activity). Elements maintaining motivation (e.g. [test] anxiety, expectation of success) influence the learning activity while it is taking place, or as a feedback loop after the learning experience (like achievements), thereby influencing people's future motivation to participate or not. Since liberal adult education courses are selected by learners themselves, the activating and directing elements (like curiosity, task value) are automatically present in the learning situation. Slow-paced instruction, low expectancy levels, and rarely used tests reduce anxiety, and small gradual achievements lead to positive learning experiences, and therefore also to changes in learners' self-image and self-confidence. These in turn may lead to a better sense of control of one's own life, as the SEM model suggests.

The ability of liberal adult education to change educational experiences links the BeLL results to the long tradition of participation research (cf. Cross, 1981; Rubenson, 1979; Cookson 1986), where the individual's expectancy-valence analysis (Rubenson, 1979; cf. Pintrich, 1988) plays a central role, among many other factors. Expectancy is in many ways based on the ideas the person has about adult education, about their learning abilities, and about the usefulness of education and training in general. Some models (cf. Manninen, 2003) see learning behaviour as a process similar to customer behaviour, where adult learners are seen as decision-makers who more or less consciously analyse their past experiences, their current life- and work situation, and their future expectations, and then base their decision to participate or not on these complex elements.

Positive learning experiences also have a clear link to family benefits, as the SEM model indicates. Parents felt that they are now more supportive of their children's learning, which is likely to result from their own learning experiences and from the increased importance they ascribe to education. Similar results have been found in earlier studies (Wolfe & Haveman, 2002), and the well-known correlation between parents' educational level and children's' educational attainment provides further verification of this link.

Variety of types and couses topics of liberal adult education

As already indicated above, similar types and course topics of liberal adult education were found in all 10 countries of the BeLL sample. The results show, identify and underline the wide range and variety of course topics, learning themes and learning opportunities in liberal adult education in and across Europe. This landscape of liberal adult education and how it connects to Benefits of Lifelong Learning in Europe is described and portrayed in the next chapter.

8. Country Reports on liberal adult education relating to the findings of the BeLL study

The country reports illstruate specifics found in national data and intrepret them against the background of the specific landscape of adult education in the respective counties. The reports were done by the partners of the BeLL study, building on country reports, portraits etc. avaiable (see chapter 1.1).

8.1 Czech Republic (*Author: Hana Danihelková*)

1) DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL LIBERAL ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM

To give an overview of current key policies in adult education in the Czech Republic, a number of different regulations need to be mentioned, as a single integrated legal regulation does not exist. The current legislation comprises the Education Act, regulating 'education from pre-primary to upper and tertiary professional education and its public administration' (National system overview on education systems in Europe, 2011, p. 3), the Higher Education Act, 'which includes a provision on lifelong learning programmes' (Country Report on Adult Education in the Czech Republic, 2011, p. 4), and the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Outcomes, making a provision for the national qualifications framework. Furthermore, policies related to work performance, such as the Labour Code, the Employment Law, or the regulations of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, regulate adult and continuing education in the Czech Republic. Adult education here is mainly designed to promote social cohesion, active citizenship, and employability. It is provided in the areas of 'general education' (basic education, e.g. for early school leavers), 'further vocational education', and 'civic or special interest education' (concerns political, historical, and cultural interests). Key providers are primary schools, secondary and professional schools, language schools, universities, companies and organisations, as well as non-profit organizations. NGOs advocate for the development and coordination of adult education in the Czech Republic. The umbrella organisation in this field is 'The Association of Adult Education Institutions of the Czech Republic'. Very active are 'The Association of Universities of the Third Age', 'The National Centre of Distance Education', and 'The National Training Fund' (Country Report on Adult Education in the Czech Republic, 2011, p. 3-6).

There is a crucial difference in the financing of education activities there. The formal sphere of education, covering all of initial education, is primarily financed by the government, although there are some private providers here as well. Their number, however, is minimal.

Adult education is represented by two branches:

1) Vocational training
2) Liberal adult education

Ad 1) Vocational training is provided by the enterprises, institutions, and companies where training participants work, and courses are paid for by both employers and employees. Another possibility of taking part in vocational training courses is through an intervention by the Employment Office, which sends suitable persons to such a course to enhance or change their competences. People have to participate in such courses to improve the likelihood of being employed or finding a new job. People consider such courses obligatory, and in their minds they evoke the phrase: 'I MUST'. Vocational training is necessary to successfully compete in the labour market.

Ad 2) Liberal adult education is understood as any training and education activity that people attend out of their own interest. They develop the skills to support their hobbies. In people's minds, liberal adult education evokes the phrases: 'I CAN, I WANT.' It is 'a beauty' to develop the brainpower of human beings. People attend liberal education courses because they can imagine many benefits from them. Very often they gain new benefits, a fact that supports their motivation to participate in the process of lifelong training. They make new friends, attend more courses with them, and essentially enrich their lives in this way. Many people sign up in advance for highly popular liberal education courses to make sure there will be a slot for them. Liberal adult education belongs to the sphere of non-formal education, for which there is neither central nor regional governance. Plenty of bigger or smaller adult education providers offer manifold liberal adult education courses, including many schools and universities from the formal sphere of education.

2) DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE PLAN AND DATA COLLECTION IN OWN COUNTRY + PROBLEMS IN DATA COLLECTION

The diversity of providers of liberal adult education courses required a very specific approach to the survey. The goal for the survey was very ambitious: 1,000 questionnaires in each country. Because there is no regular network of folk high schools or any functional umbrella organization of adult education providers in the Czech Republic, it was decided to distribute the information about the BeLL project and the accompanying questionnaire through non-traditional ways and distribution channels. The main criteria for such a decision were survey efficiency and the quality of data provided.

Members of the regional network of adult education providers in the Moravia–Silesia region were contacted by e-mail with information about the BeLL project and the survey. They were subsequently contacted personally and asked for their help. Both staff of these organizations and course participants answered the BeLL questionnaire, which had been translated into the Czech language. Other umbrella organisations were contacted (Asociace podnikatelek a manažerek / Association of Women Managers and Women in Business, its independent branch in Moravia, the Regional Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the Association for Development of the Moravia–Silesia Region, and other organisations).

We also e-mailed a number of adult education providers in other regions of the Czech Republic, some companies providing liberal adult education, and institutions that directly collaborate with the Czech BeLL partner (Employment Offices in several towns in the Moravia–Silesia region), as well as some carefully selected schools, including universities.

The BeLL project and the questionnaire were presented to several course participants in liberal adult education with the recommendation to pass on the survey to other people, friends, colleagues, or relatives. Members of the regional network of adult education providers did the same. Participants filled out the questionnaires and contacted their relatives and friends with the request to complete the BeLL questionnaires, too. Students of Ostrava Technical University and students from the private Vysoká škola podnikání (University of Business) were contacted to complete questionnaires and to spread the information.

The Czech BeLL partner ATHENA offered information about BeLL and the link to the questionnaire on its website: http://www.athena-women.cz/projekty/mezinarodni-projekty/bell/

As a result of these complex activities, and by contacting a wide range of people of various age, gender, education levels, and other characteristics, we were able to reach the goal of the first part

of the quantitative analysis of the survey. It was crucial to have the required 1,000 questionnaires completed by the original deadline, to identify people for the interview part, and to keep them informed about the progress in the BeLL project to make sure they did not lose contact with what was going on in the project.

The emphasis was on personal contacts, because people are generally oversaturated by the many surveys they are asked to complete without knowing their purpose and especially their results. This leads to a high level of unwillingness to participate in any survey. Step by step, a network of 'BeLL Ambassadors' was built in the Czech Republic, and people completed the questionnaires either online or they submitted completed paper versions.

What worked?

Relying on personal contacts instead of anonymous information was the crucial strategic idea. Likewise, presentations and explanations made to various groups of people and individuals were very successful. Many of them became 'BeLL Ambassadors', enabling the survey to reach and cover some areas where direct contacts did not exist before. Many people preferred to complete paper versions of the questionnaire, returning them by post or in person. As a consequence, results could be published on the website of the Czech BeLL partner, and we could be certain that the effort was successful and that the results were online in time and without mistakes (some assistance was provided when people brought questionnaires personally and asked for help).

What didn't work?

It was not efficient to rely only on e-mail when contacting some associations, especially those from Prague. The BeLL questionnaire was too complex and quite long, and it was very important to provide explanations and information in advance, before people started to fill in the questionnaire.

A very important decision was to establish 'BeLL Ambassadors', to collect the information gained by them, and to use their activities and personal contributions to contact new people to reach the required number of 1,000 responses.

A unique idea was applied to speed up the data collection:

The Czech BeLL partner, ATHENA, massively exploited the period when the survey was carried out (December 2012), visiting some training and pre-Christmas events of adult education providers in Ostrava and its neighbourhood, spreading information about the BeLL project and survey, and collecting questionnaires in this way.

3) DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY ON NATIONAL COURSE PROVIDERS AND PROFILES

Table 12 Types of AE providers where respondents studied

National course providers where respondents studied	989	Mentioned by %
Adult education at secondary schools	21	2.1
Lifelong learning courses at universities	44	4.4
Municipalities, libraries, museums	18	1.8
Civic associations	89	9.0
Universities	37	3.7
Private adult education providers	638	64.5
Employers	98	9.9
NGOs	53	5.4
Self-organized courses	19	1.9
Other	0	0.0

Source: BeLL

The majority of liberal adult education providers in the Czech Republic are private organizations.

The former structure of folk universities was split up and replaced exclusively by private providers. Courses offered by civic associations represent an important part of adult liberal adult education. The number of employers who offer such courses as a bonus to their employees is significant. Other types of providers are not strongly represented. Universities, for example, offer AE courses only as an addition to their main mission: providing initial tertiary education and research. There are different types of liberal adult education providers in the Czech Republic but the most important group (featuring the highest number of providers) is represented by private organisations. The reason is hidden in the fact that the government is not financially involved in liberal adult education. The Czech Republic only provides funding for certain vocational courses for unemployed people (organized mainly by public employment offices) to improve their employability. This is the government's only financial involvement in adult education. The majority of state funding is directed towards initial education.

Some organisations supported financially by the state budget (schools, universities, vocational schools) do offer liberal adult education courses, but they charge certain fees. While such courses are generally cheaper than the others, they are not free of charge.

Some employers offer their employees some benefits, among them a financial contribution to adult education, including liberal adult education courses. Such students or trainees don´t need to pay the entire course fee; some course fees may even be covered completely by the employer contribution. A lot of people, especially women, use such an opportunity for personal development, relaxation, entertainment, and the like.

All interviewees in the Czech BeLL sample, therefore, attended liberal adult education courses offered by private organizations.

National course topics

The Czech liberal education system primarily offers courses that cater to people's interests and hobbies rather than work-related courses. With some course topics, however, it is difficult to tell whether such a course belongs to liberal adult education or to vocational training. This concerns courses in which people acquire skills suitable for both personal use and use at work: ICT courses, driving lessons, and similar courses may belong to liberal adult education if people attend them out of their own interest and pleasure and do not necessarily need them for their job.

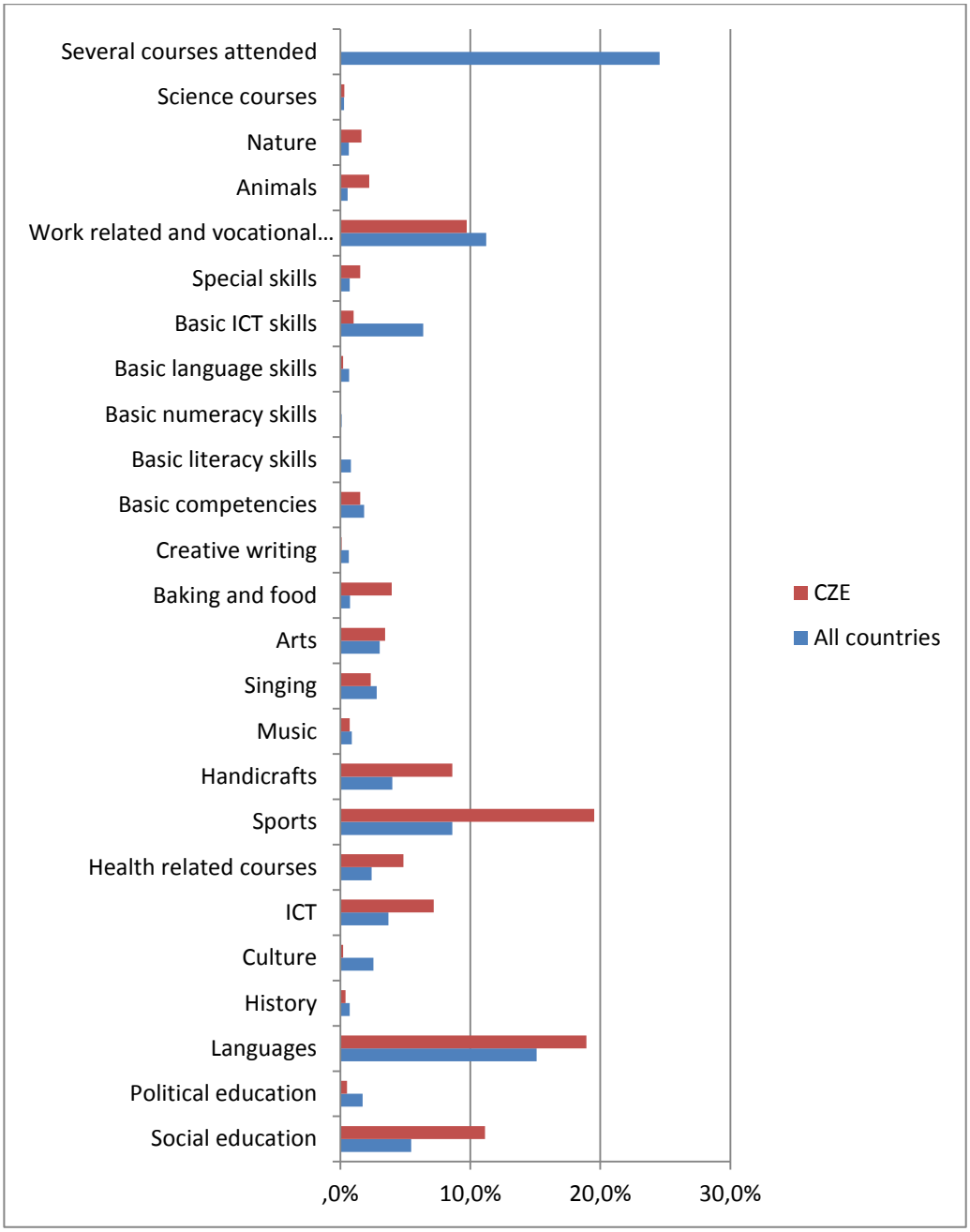
People prefer attending creative topics and courses for the development of manual skills (handicrafts, baking and food, arts, singing).

Language courses are very popular and sought after, because adults older than 40 years could not benefit from foreign language instruction at school—the offer was minimal with the exception of Russian, the obligatory foreign language for all pupils at the time. People are aware of this deficiency, which is why many adults attend courses in English, Spanish, German, French, and Italian—the most popular languages among adult learners.

Many people attend various types of social education courses, such as communication, social behaviour, negotiation, and so on. Course offerings in those fields are very diverse and very popular.

A very significant group of liberal education courses are sport, dance, and physical exercise courses. People are more and more aware of the value of health, and moreover like many kinds of sports. Thus, many adults regularly attend various courses in this field. Special health-related courses are popular, too, mainly among women (e.g. courses for mothers-to be, first aid courses, etc.).

Figure 17 Courses attended by BeLL respondents, by topic



Source: BeLL

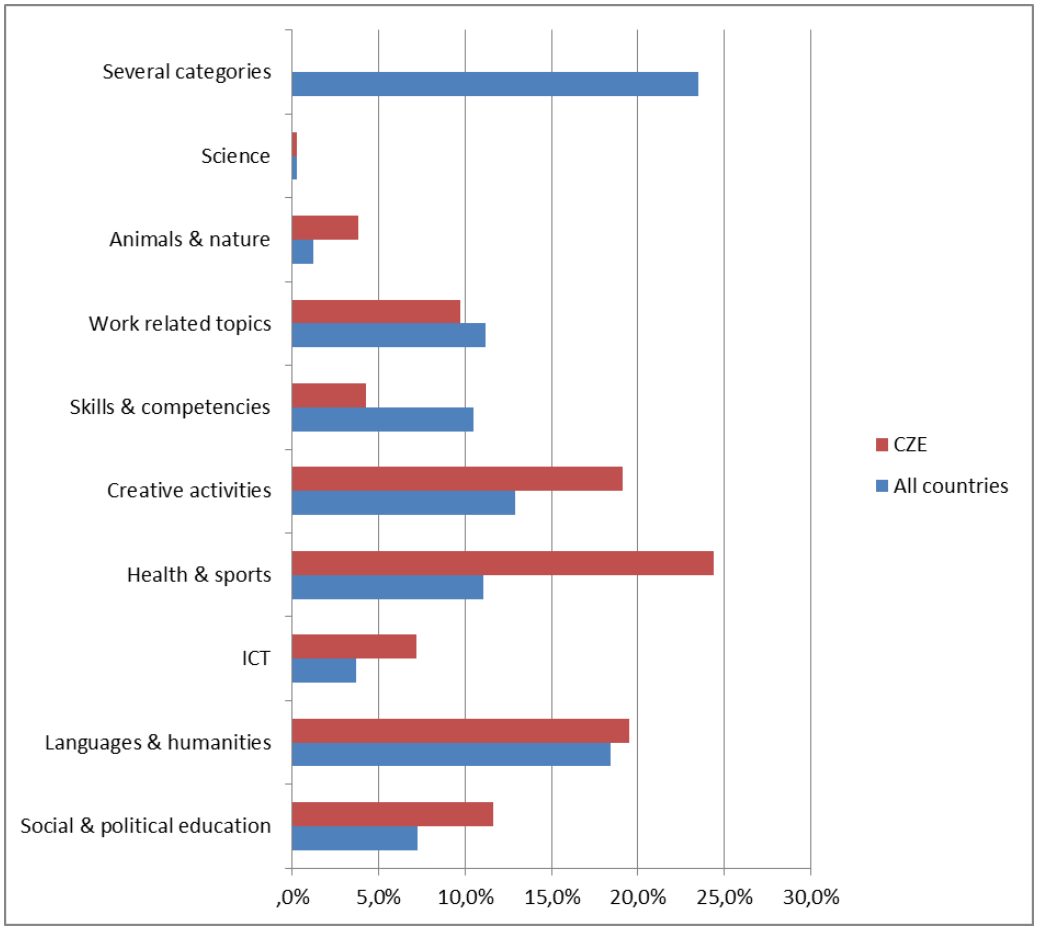
Czech adults attend work-related courses very often, but it is not possible to consider such courses as belonging to vocational training. Adults spend their leisure time and their own money on such courses if they plan some changes in their lives and if such changes may concern their future job. From this point of view, many kinds of courses were marked by respondents as work-related because these concrete respondents used their newly gained knowledge and skills for both their hobbies and interests.

The liberal adult education courses represented most strongly among the interviewees were similar to those mentioned in the quantitative part of the survey.

Despite the fact that the majority of adult education courses or trainings are vocational courses, the most widespread and most heavily attended types of liberal adult education courses are language courses and ICT training. Adults feel that it is necessary to keep up with ICT trends to find employment or to keep their current jobs. And many of them need to learn English or some other language. Again, this is mainly connected to their career or to finding a job in the first place.

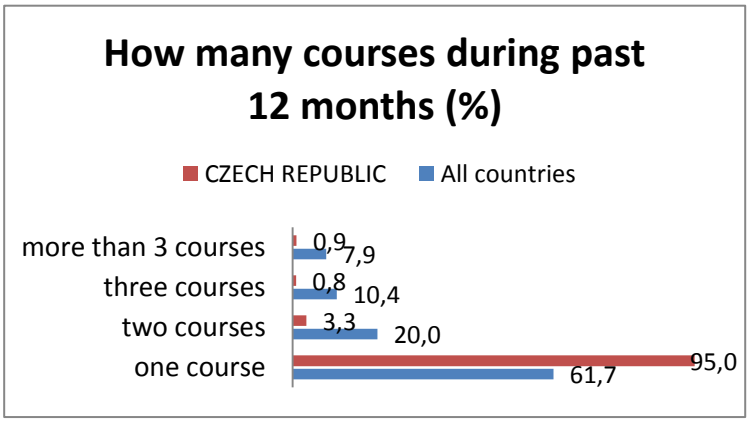
Many other types of liberal adult education courses can be considered to be related to hobbies, relaxation, or to help adults fulfil their dreams. Such courses are activities through which adult people can discover and develop themselves (Interview CZ_A provides a very good illustration).

Figure 18 Courses attended by BeLL respondents, by topic



Source: BeLL

Figure 19 Number of courses attended during the past 12 months



Source: BeLL

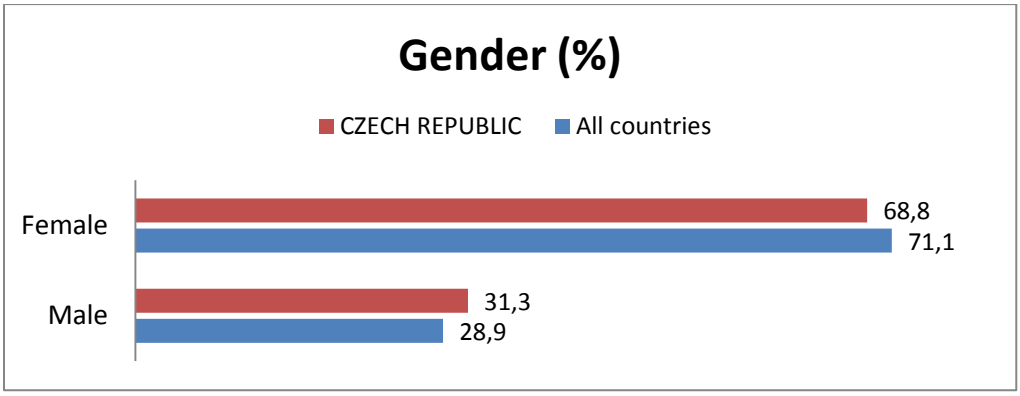
4) DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY OF NATIONAL RESULTS

National respondent profiles

Gender: In the Czech Republic, more women than men attend liberal adult education. This trend mirrors the distribution of jobs and job positions in the national economy as a whole, where men are more job-oriented and focused on job competition than women, who generally work in less paying jobs and in less paying sectors (education, health care, administration). As a consequence, women have more time for leisure activities and hobbies, especially when they do not have any children to take care of (anymore). More than men, therefore, women need to compensate for their not so satisfying work lives.

Most interview respondents in the Czech Republic were women. This is no coincidence: Although official statistics are not available for this segment, generally more women attend liberal adult education courses (according to the experience of adult education providers themselves). This may in part be due to the fact that men spend a longer time in their jobs and receive more frequent and more extensive training than women. Women often have to divide their time between their jobs and their family and may often feel they don't have enough time to devote to vocational training. That is why more women than men look for liberal education courses, which they tend to consider useful relaxation. Men, by contrast, tend to connect adult education more to their professional development.

Figure 20 Gender distribution of liberal AE participants

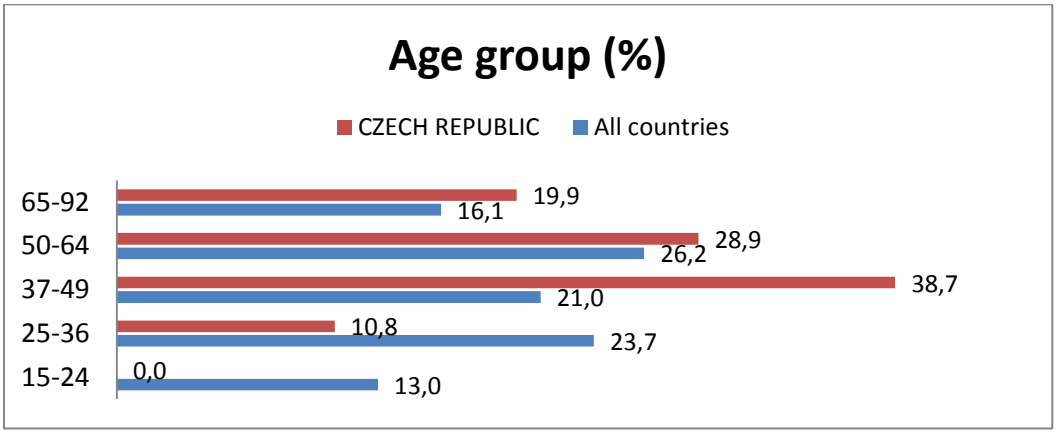


Source: BeLL

Age: Most respondents were aged between 37 – 49 years. The above-mentioned gender data distribution suggests that young women have to solve many problems concerning their job (starting their career and their family, with babies and small children to take care of) and only rarely find time for taking liberal adult education courses. Older adults mainly attend language and ICT courses; they prefer courses enhancing the skills they need for their hobbies (singing, handicrafts, arts, etc.).

People 50+ generally have more time than people at the peak of their active job performance ability and therefore can develop their skills in a wide variety of liberal adult education courses.

Figure 21 Age distribution of liberal AE participants

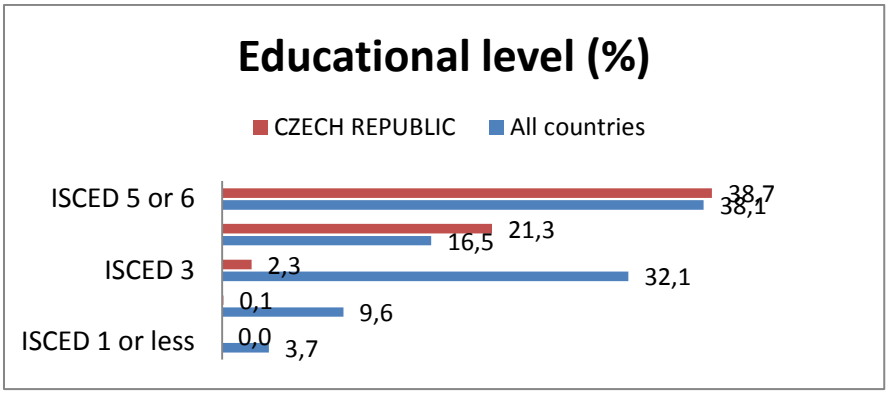


Source: BeLL

Educational level: As in other EU-countries, liberal adult education courses are most popular among people with higher educational attainment (ISCED 4–6). It is interesting that in comparison with Europe, there is a steep drop in enrolment among people with ISCED levels 3 and lower. One possible explanation lies in the social structure of Czech society. As early as the late nineteenth century, the Czech countries (then part of the Austrian Empire)

were highly industrialized and in need of many manual workers. This tradition remained during the whole twentieth century, when, moreover, people with higher levels of education were persecuted, killed and expelled in several waves. Therefore, although new elites emerged again and again, their fate was not an easy one. Many of them emigrated abroad. Today, Czech society has a very weak middle class, and stratification has accelerated during last 20 years.

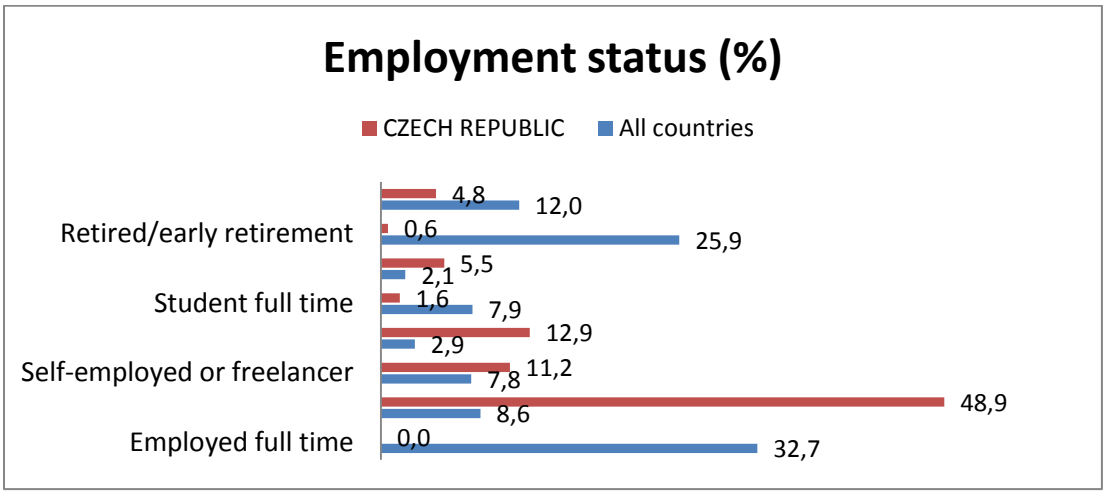
Figure 22 Educational level distribution of BeLL participants



Source: BeLL

Employment status: Both employed and unemployed people participate in liberal adult education courses in the Czech Republic. Many full-time employees can find the time to support their hobbies and interests by attending liberal adult education courses. There are not many people in the Czech Republic who work part time; it is nevertheless interesting that many of them use their free time to attend some liberal adult education courses. The increasing participation in these courses is obvious in the group of retired people.

Figure 23 Employment status distribution of BeLL participants



Source: BeLL

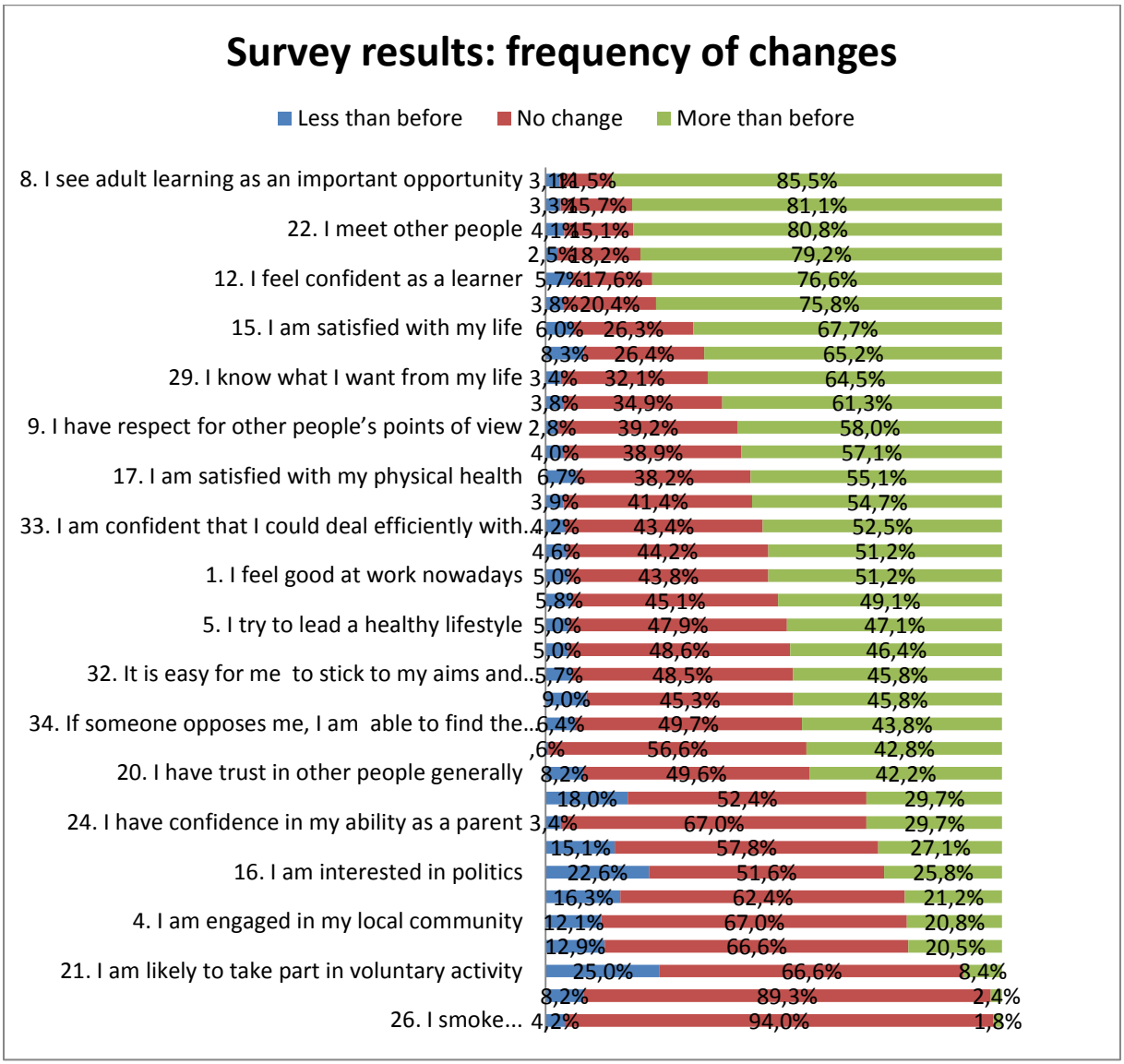
National results that are somehow different from the general results of the BeLL study. The quantitative data correlate with the data from other EU countries. Differences emerge regarding the popularity of some types of courses: Czech people more frequently participate in sport courses and courses focused on languages and social education. That is easy to understand, because language education in particular was minimal in the past. On the other hand, illiteracy is extremely rare among Czech adults, so training them in the basic skills is not as necessary as it is in some other EU countries.

It is also obvious that Czech adults tend to attend liberal adult education courses especially at middle age and when they retire. The participation of younger adults is lower than in other EU countries. But the participation rates of highly educated adults are higher than in other EU countries participating in this survey.

Analysis of benefits

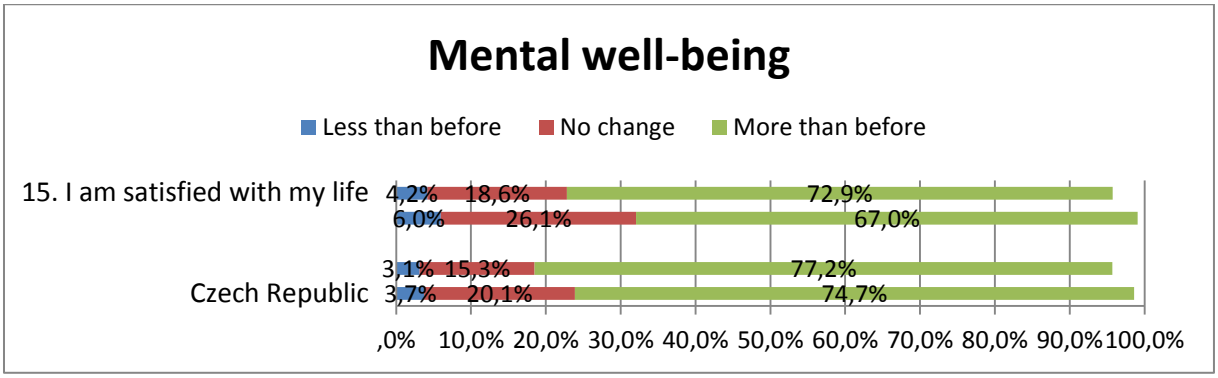
In the questionnaires and interviews, Czech adult learners mentioned several benefits in addition to those they originally expected. Figure 24 shows the changes in respondents' assessments after attending one or more courses. They could define many more changes and benefits than they had expected before a course.

Figure 24 Frequency of changes in BeLL participants' assessment of benefits



Source: BeLL

The most important benefits are shown in Figure 24a.



Source: BeLL

The most frequently mentioned benefit, **self-efficacy,** was mentioned multiple times in all interviews. As the reasons are very similar, we provide the most interesting quotes here.

Respondents were more **confident in their own skills**.

Respondents consider tolerance to be one of the especially important benefits. When asked, they sometimes revealed with surprise that they discovered some parts of their personality they were not aware of before.

Social networking

The social dimension of participating in courses is very important for all people. For some, it seems to be as important as the topic of the course itself, and many people sign up for follow-up courses mainly because they want to spend more time with the people they met in previous courses.

Social interaction was the most frequently mentioned subcategory. It is a very crucial element for people – to create new relationships, to communicate with new people, to discover their opinions, and so on.

Mental well-being

Health-related aspects were significant for participants in various ways. Physical health was mentioned in connection with courses dedicated to movement and physical exercise.

Language skills

A lot of Czech people study foreign languages because it is unlikely that people in the world will study Czech to communicate with them. That is why they describe **'language skills'** as a very important benefit for them.

The qualitative analysis showed that Czech people combine the motivation to attend liberal adult education courses because of their hobbies with the motivation to learn something new that can be useful both for their personal development, leisure time, and jobs (language and ICT courses). Nevertheless, they found many new benefits, especially self-efficacy, self-confidence, social relations, new friends, development of hidden skills, new purpose of the life, and the like.

5) NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS, REFLECTION

To enable more people to attend liberal adult education courses, the government should make liberal education one of its priorities. In this way, it could help make liberal adult education courses more popular. The distribution by education level indicated that such courses are attended primarily by people with a higher level of education (and very probably by people who earn higher salaries). If more people attended such courses, the general awareness of public affairs might support people's interest in being active citizens and identifying with the state more than they do today. Such approaches could help make people more active and influence the Czech Republic's global economic position in positive ways.

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8.2 Germany (*Author: Bettina Thöne-Geyer*)

1) DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL LIBERAL ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM

Legal and financial aspects

Adult education/continuing education (AE/CE) [14] in Germany is characterized by the variety of its course types and topics, forms of learning, responsibilities, and organizational forms, as well as state and market regulations (cf. Rosenbladt 2007:22). The area of AE/CE is regulated to a lesser degree than other areas of education. For instance, it is not regulated in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany but in the constitutions of the states, or *Laender* (states) (cf. Nuissl/Pehl 2004: 7). Fourteen of the sixteen German *Laender* include AE/CE in their constitutions. The most important state laws on AE/CE are the state's Continuing Education Acts. The most important principles for the organization of AE are more or less the same in all Continuing Education Acts of the *Laender*. They include:

- A secure institutional structure of AE, created through institutional support and legal recognition.
- Organizational autonomy—regarding sponsoring societal organizations such as trade unions, employers' associations, and churches—and autonomy in syllabus planning and staff appointments.
- Open access for all persons and groups of the population (cf. Nuissl/Pehl 2004: 21).

The financing of AE/CE in Germany is based on a so-called mixed funding system (Nuissl/Pehl 2004: 30) and depends on many financial sources: companies, student fees, local public funding, as well as federal and state funding. Additionally, resources from the European Social Fund (ESF) have increasingly been used in recent years to develop new AE/CE instruments and to support the co-financing for individual participation (Dohmen 2012: 135). Generally adult education funding in Germany in recent years showed some tendencies of demand-orientation. This process has been accompanied by the development of various kinds of aid, such as *Bildungsprämie* (education premiums) at the federal level and *Bildungsscheck* (education cheque) at the state level to help individuals from all parts of the

[14] The terms AE and CE are used interchangeably in Germany and in this report. That said, the expression *Erwachsenenbildung* (adult education) refers more to general, political, and cultural adult education, whereas the expression *Weiterbildung* (continuing education) tends to imply continuing career or professional training. Nowadays the term *continuous adult education (Erwachsenen- und Weiterbildung)* prevails.

population to participate in AE/CE (ibid.) (cf. Käpplinger, Klein & Haberzeth for effects of these instruments).

Liberal adult education in Germany

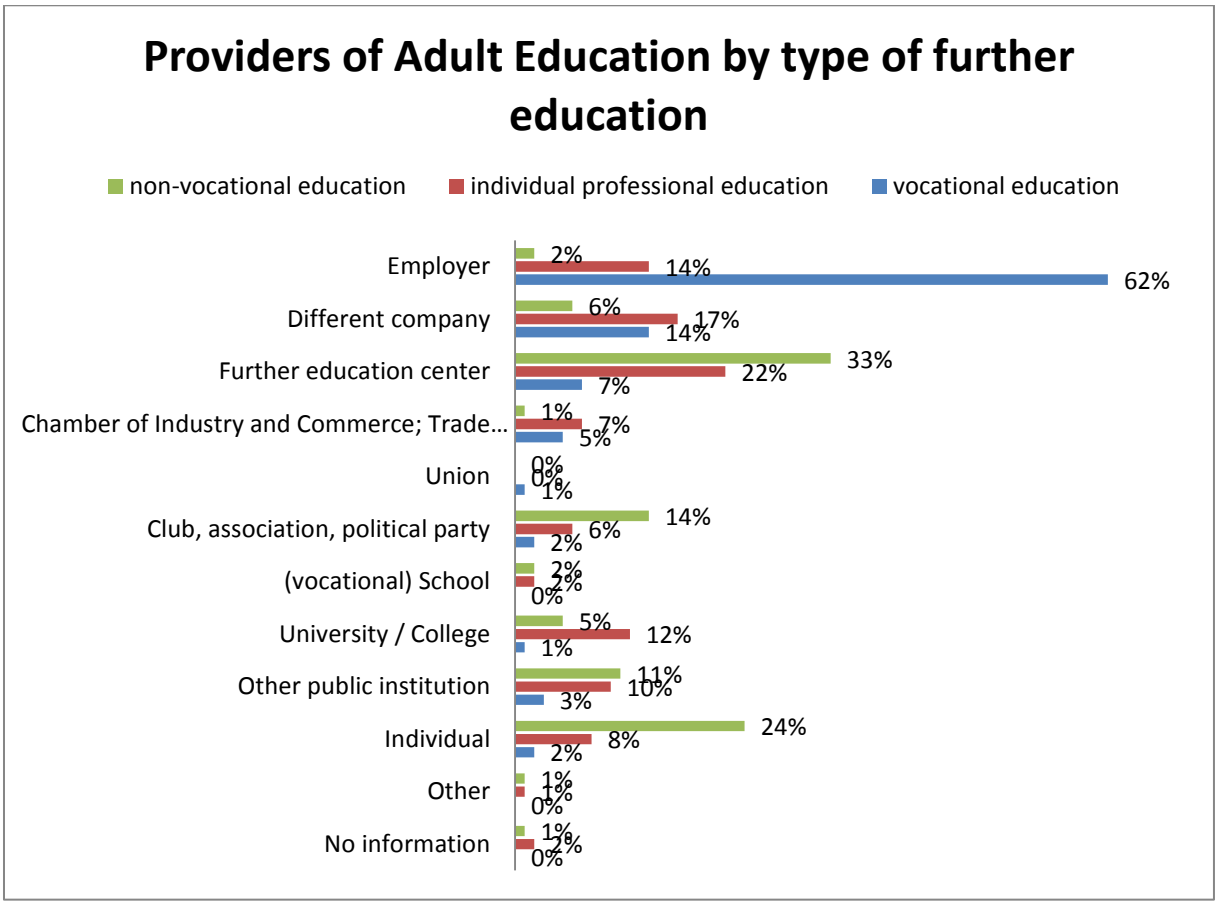
In 1970 the German Education Council defined AE/CE as the 'necessary and lifelong complement to initial education (…), as the continuation or recommencement of organized learning following completion of a training phase of whatever length' (Deutscher Bildungsrat 1970:197). Thereby adult education in Germany encompasses both general/liberal continuing education and career-related continuing education. General continuing education encompasses all adult education of a general, political, or cultural nature not directly aimed at achieving occupational qualifications (see BMBF 228:182) and including all those organized learning activities learners undertake 'above all for private reasons' (cf. Reichart 2013:4). In the most recent statistics on continuing education provided by the Adult Education Survey (AES), the area of general adult learning is included into the non-vocational segment. Overall, the area of general adult education, or non-vocational adult education, shares many of the characteristics of liberal adult education referred to in the BeLL study, even if the term itself is not common in Germany. The area of non-vocational continuing education encompasses 18 per cent of all learning activities in Germany. 13 per cent of all learning activities were undertaken in the area of individual career training, and 69 per cent can be attributed to the segment of continuing workplace training (Betriebliche Weiterbildung) (BMBF 2014:17).

Institutions

There are about 17,000 AE institutions in Germany (as February 2008) (cf. DIE 2008: 84), but the estimated number is even higher, around the 18,800 mark (cf. BMBF 2008:176). Almost half of these institutions are managed as private companies; other institutions operate within the legal and economic framework of an external sponsor or provider (ibid.).

Providers may pursue public interests (e.g. adult education centres), specific social interests (e.g. church-based education associations), commercial interests (e.g. private training companies), or organizational interests (e.g. enterprises.) Other establishments and organizations, such as libraries, museums, or publishing houses, also offer adult education programmes as a secondary activity (cf. BMBF 2008:174; Gieseke, 2008; Fleige 2011). These institutions cover – both in themselves and amongst each other – a wide range and lively variety of programmes, learning themes, learning spaces and learning opportunities.

Figure 25 Providers of adult education by type of education



Source: Modified based on 2007 AES data (Rosenbladt/Bilger 2008)

The most important AE institutions providing non-formal and non-vocational AE are:

- *Community adult education centres* (*Volkshochschulen*), which are linked to the liberal bourgeois origins of popular education
- *Protestant and Catholic adult education institutions* related to the socially committed liberal education movement of the last century
- *Trade union AE,* building on the tradition of workers' education
- The federal 'Work and Life' Association (BAK AL), a cooperative group of community adult education centres and trade unions
- *Residential adult education centres* offering mainly one- or two-week courses plus accommodation
- *Voluntary initiatives and alternative groups* working in specific fields or with specific target groups
- *Political party foundations,* which sometimes maintain their own education centres.

(cf. Nuissl/Pehl 2004:24 et seq.)

These institutions differ according to whether they cover the wide range of learning topics or are exclusively responsible for vocational education, whether their provision is limited to

specific groups or open to all interested persons, and/or whether they are part of major societal organizations (e.g. churches) or independent.

Provision

Providing continuing education courses in general, civic, and cultural education is mainly the task of the local adult education centres (*Volkshochschulen)* but also of other private-sector (third sector) institutions such as the churches. These institutions are responsible for providing a regular, public and comprehensive range of courses to meet a most diverse range of social requirements and individual needs (Eurypedia https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Germany:Institutions_Providing_Adult_Education_and_Training). The following data are taken from the adult education centre statistics (*Volkshochschulstatistik*).

Figure 26 Distribution of course hours/programmes at German adult education centres, by field of study

Languages	42.4%
Health education	20%
Work–Vocational training	12.5%
Arts–Handicrafts	11%
Basic education–*A*dult literacy	9.6%
Politics–Society–Environment	4.5%

Source: Own calculations, based on the adult education centre statistics (*Volkshochschulstatistik* 2013: 12f.)

42.4 per cent of all course hours at German adult education centres are language courses, followed by courses in health education. Courses on work and vocational issues (including computing and IT) are third, followed by courses in arts and handicrafts. Basic education and adult literacy, as well as courses about politics, society, and the environment, play a minor role.

Participation

According to the 2012 AES, participation rates in non-formal adult education/continuing education in Germany increased to 49 per cent. That means: Half of the 18-to-64-old population took part in at least one course, seminar, or short-time training in the sector of non-formal adult education[15], which is about 25.1 million people (BMBF 2012: 6). This is the highest rate since 1979, when the first report on continuing education (*Berichtssystem Weiterbildung* - BSW) was released. Non-formal adult education encompasses learning activities in vocational continuing education (i.e. the learning activity takes place during the working time and is paid for by the employer), individual career training (i.e. participation in

[15] The information is based on the 2012 AES data. Non-formal adult education according to AES.

learning activities is motivated by professional reasons), and non-vocational continuing education (i.e. participation in learning activities is based on private reasons) (BMBF 2012: 13). The highest growth rates are found in the area of continuing workplace training (*betriebliche Weiterbildung*) (from 42% in 2010 to 49% in 2012). Participation in individual career training stagnated at 12 per cent, whereas participation in non-vocational adult education increased from 11 to 13 per cent. This means there is a growing interest among learners in issues like health, languages, and civic and political topics (cf. BMBF 2012).

- Generally it is the working population that shows the highest participation in organized learning activities (51%) (Reichart 2014: 107). This is different for participation rates in non-vocational adult education. The highest participation rate in this segment is found among persons in training (28%), followed by those who are not in gainful employment (16%). Employed persons follow on rank three (10%), and the participation rate among unemployed persons is 8 per cent (cf. Reichart 2014: 107).
- Persons with higher educational attainment (ISCED 3 to 4 and ISCED 5 or 6) participate more often in organized learning activities (57% and 29%, respectively), followed by persons with lower qualifications (ISCED 1 or 2) (2% and 10%, respectively). These differences are smaller in the area of non-vocational continuing education. In this field of AE/CE, we see a higher participation rate among persons with lower qualifications (ISCED level 1 and 2: 16%; ISCED level 3 and 4: 25%; ISCED level 5 and 6:16%) (BMBF 2012: 32ff.).
- Men (51%) are more active in continuing education than women (47%), but women (15%) participate more often in non-vocational continuing education than men (10%).
- Growing participation rates are found among older persons aged 55 years and older (46%) but also among those younger than 35 years (52%).

2) THE BELL STUDY AND ITS MAIN RESULTS FOR GERMANY

Data collection: The BeLL data collection in Germany was carried out in two stages. First, three major organizations and three major umbrella institutions in the fields of family education, political education, and alternative adult education were contacted personally. They were all highly interested and motivated to support the project. All in all, these organizations sent out more than 1,500 e-mails directly to their participants asking them to participate in the research study. They also placed a link and project information on their websites. One institution combined placing the link and the project information with a request to participate in its newsletter (6,000 copies). Additionally, the organizations distributed more than 250 paper versions of the questionnaire. Only about 200 filled-out questionnaires were returned. After that, a Plan B was established. More than 30 adult education providers and umbrella institutions were contacted personally by phone and were asked for support. The BeLL researcher and a student visited the organizations in person for more than five days to present the project and distribute the questionnaires. At the end, 902 filled-out questionnaires were collected.

Overview of the BeLL sample:

The respondents of the BeLL questionnaires took part in courses or seminars at the following institutions:

Figure 27 Institutions attended by BeLL respondents

Institutions	**Survey (N=9 participants)**	**%**
Community adult education centres (*Volkshochschulen*)	540	60%
Church-related education providers (*Kirchlicher Anbieter)*	164	18%
Familiy education centres *(Familienbildungsstätte)*	139	15%
Public education providers (*Öffentliche Bildungsstätte*), such as learning centres and libraries, which offer AE/CE as a secondary activity.	64	7%
Providers with the legal status of an association (*Verein*) offering mostly voluntary initiatives and alternative groups working in specific fields or with specific target groups.	54	6%
Trade union education providers (*Gewerkschaft*)	31	3%
Residential adult education centres (*Heimvolkshochschule*)	25	3%
'Private Initiative' (*Private Initiative*) courses and seminars took place in one of the AE organizations. They are organized by the participants themselves as a follow up to one of the institutional courses.	54	6%
Others (*Andere*)	7	1%

Source: BeLL

Age: More than half of the BeLL respondents are older than 50 years (51.5%). About one-third belongs to the group of middle agers (30.3%). The group of young respondents (15-24 years old) is very small (1.9%); likewise, those aged between 25 and 36 are less well represented (16.3%) than the older age groups. The most plausible explanation might be the BeLL focus on liberal adult education. Courses in this area are often related to recreational issues, personal development, and/or health issues. These topics are probably not of much interest to younger persons who are in the phase of building their professional careers and starting a family. Nevertheless, in terms of age, the BeLL sample closely resembles the general demographics at adult education centres, where 40.2 per cent of all participants are more than 50 years old (Huntemann/Reichart 2012: 3).

Employment status: A look at respondents' employment status reveals that the group of full-time employees is best represented in the BeLL study, followed by those who are retired or in early retirement. The group of persons working part time is about 20 per cent, followed by those who are self-employed or freelancers. The group of homemakers is represented to a minor degree (6.6%); the same is true of full-time or part-time students (2.5%). Compared to the AES data for Germany, the group of those who are employed full time is 'overrepresented' in BeLL. The AES data reveal that participation rates in non-vocational continuing education are higher for part-time workers than for full-time workers (BMBF 2014: 26). In the AES data for Germany, persons in training make up the largest group in non-vocational continuing education (Reichart 2014: 107).

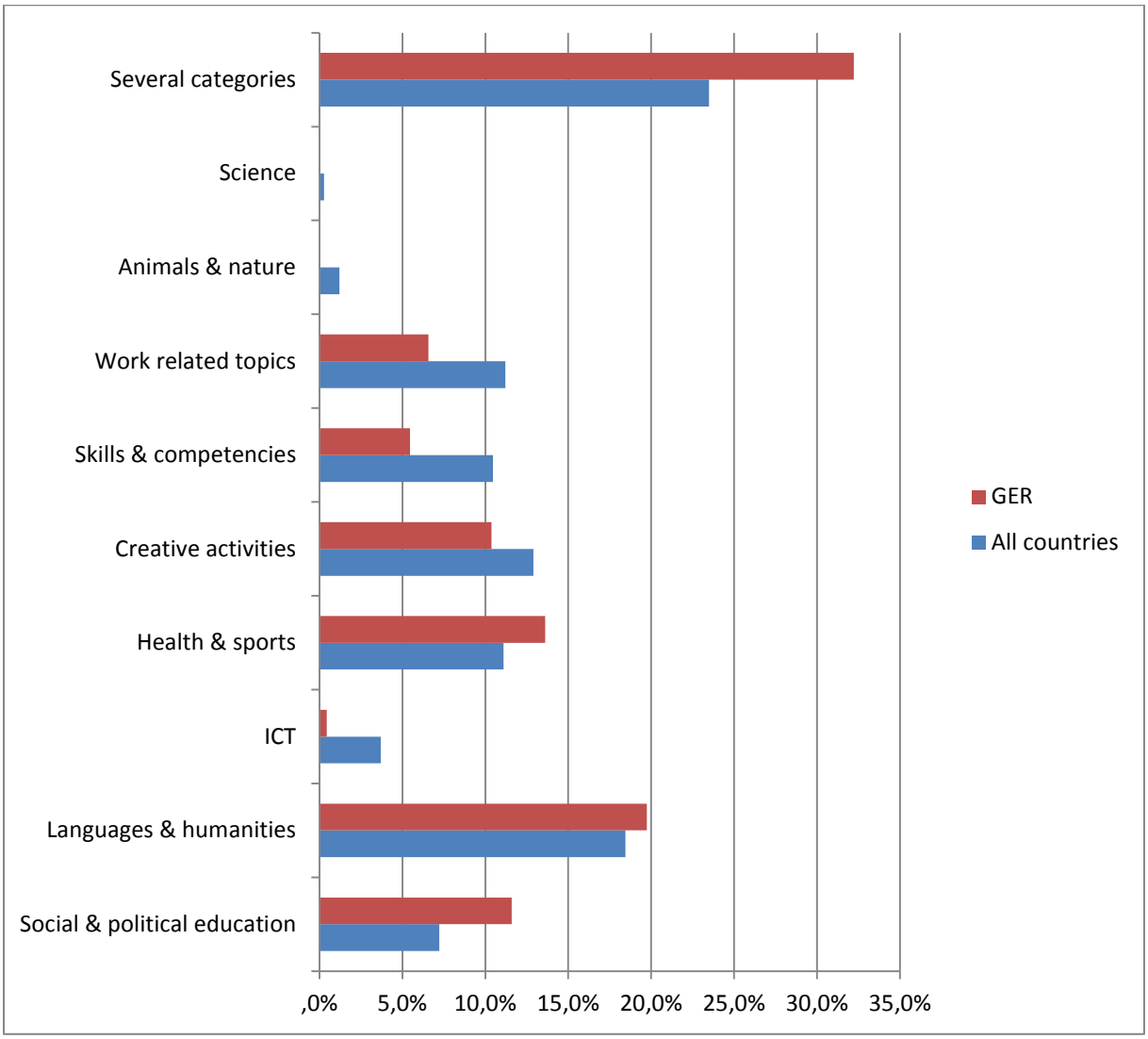
Educational level: Half of the respondents in the BeLL study in Germany are highly qualified persons. However, the group of less qualified persons is also represented quite well in the German BeLL sample (22.2%). Compared to all other BeLL countries, the number of persons with lower-level qualifications is nearly twice as high in Germany. As in all other European countries, less qualified persons participate less in AE/CE than highly qualified persons. This is equally true of non-vocational continuing education, even if the differences are smaller in this segment.

Gender: Two-thirds of BeLL respondents are women, and about one-third of respondents are men. A look at the German adult education centres' statistics reveals quite similar numbers: Women participate at 75.8 per cent, men at 24.2 per cent (Reichart 2012: 124).

Number of courses: The AES data for Germany show that about half of the participants (49%) were engaged in one non-formal learning activity, about 26 per cent undertook two activities, 20 per cent undertook three or four learning activities, and 5 per cent participated in five or more learning activities (BMBF, 2012:9). The BeLL sample shows quite similar numbers: 41.2 per cent of respondents took only one course; about 27 per cent took two courses or more, and 30 per cent took three courses or more during the last 12 months. That means that about half of the participants in the BeLL study—like participants in non-vocational AE/CE in general—might be categorized as 'multiple learners'.

Type of courses: The following figure presents an insight into the thematic distribution of courses in which the respondents of the BeLL sample participated.

Figure 28 Courses attended by BeLL respondents, by topic



Source: BeLL

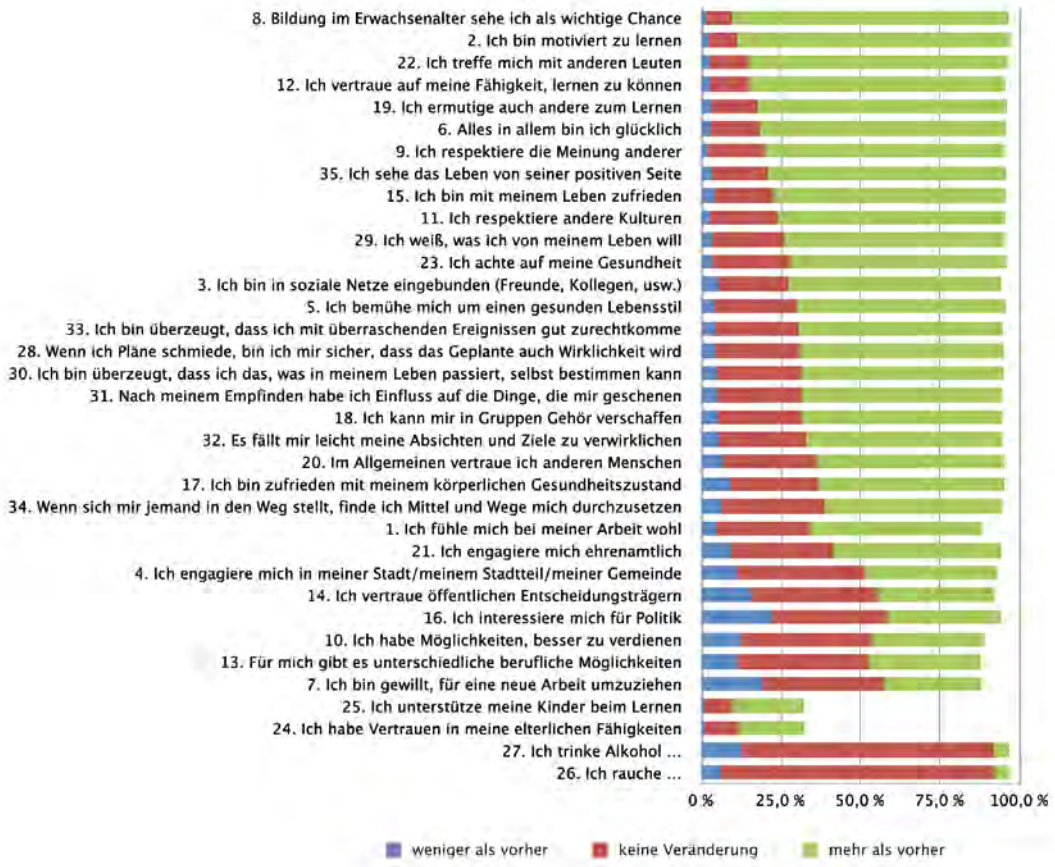
As the thematic categories in the BeLL sample are not identical to the classifications that are generally used in Germany, only a rough comparison is possible. Furthermore, the category ‘several categories’, which includes those respondents who attended two or more courses among the variety of courses avaiable, is the biggest one. As in the course profile of German adult education centres (see above), languages courses and health-related courses are among the most popular. The fact that courses in social and political education are represented to a higher extent than creative activities and IT courses is a noticeable and special feature of the BeLL sample.

All together, the BeLL sample gives a comprehensive picture of the target group participating in non-vocational continuing education in Germany, some differences in employment status notwithstanding. The main providers of non-vocational adult education are also represented quite well in the BeLL sample. Concerning the course profile there are some differences. Especially courses in social and political education are ‘overrepresented’.

Main findings:

The following figure shows the German results with regard to participants' assessment of the benefits of AE/CE.

Figure 29 Benefits of participating in AE/CE, according to BeLL respondents (in order of importance)



Source: BeLL

Compared to the other BeLL countries, there are no significant deviations in the order of perceived benefits in Germany.

As in all BeLL countries, German respondents see the most important benefits related to adult learning itself. Participation in general adult education courses seems to increase their general motivation to engage in lifelong learning. Furthermore, participants involved in organized AE/CE seem to develop a positive attitude towards learning. 82.3 per cent of respondents see AE/CE as a good opportunity to shape their life and are (presumably) willing to spend time and money for it. 80.8 per cent of respondents report that they are more motivated to learn after participating in general adult education. 77.5 per cent have more trust in their ability to learn, and we can assume that this is due to the good learning experiences they had in their courses. Lastly, 70 per cent of respondents mention that they motivate others to learn, too. This finding can be categorized as one of the positive effects of

AE/CE that go beyond the individual level, affecting also the surroundings of those participating in organized adult learning. The single statements are anchored in the concept of 'changes in educational experiences'. A short look into the analysis of the interviews may help clarify the meaning related to this benefit. All interviewees underlined the importance of the fact that their participation in the courses takes place in a self-determined manner. It is precisely this form of learning that is promoted by the conditions surrounding general adult education courses. Learning in this way provides an experience completely different from that of studying at school or university. For the most part, the interviewees describe adult learning as a pleasant experience. This assessment is particularly due to the fact that they do not feel as pressured as they did when at school or university. Instead, they tend to perceive themselves as being in a position to shape their own learning, as they are able to control the speed at which they learn and ultimately to determine the knowledge they acquire. The personal responsibility they assume for their own learning processes is supported by both the trainers and the environment in which general adult education courses take place: a setting which does not involve exams and is based solely on the principle of voluntary participation. This also allows the interviewees to try out various courses to see if they are suitable and to sound out whether they would be interested in learning about specific topics or carrying out specific activities. Among other things, this enables them to find out more about themselves and their personalities. On top of this, the interviewees knowingly use the seminars to gain new (learning) experiences or to come to terms with painful events from their past.

The second major area of positive change is clearly the area of mental well-being. In this, the German findings are different from those in the other BeLL countries. Although mental well-being is counted among the most important benefits in all BeLL countries, it's not considered to be that important elsewhere. More than 70 per cent of German respondents perceive positive changes in their life satisfaction and also feel happier. Yet there is also a small number of respondents who said they felt worse after participating in adult education courses. It is not new that participation in adult education may also have negative consequences for people's well-being and happiness, as it is often associated with stress, frustration, and anxiety felt through the process of learning itself (Field 2009:183 ff.).

A quick look at the qualitative interviews gives a deeper insight into what exactly respondents might mean when they perceive positive changes in mental well-being. The interview analysis revealed that mental well-being is mentioned by all eight participants. Mental well-being is related to well-being in daily life, good spirits, coping with challenges and keeping the mind active. Well-being in daily life can be a feeling that develops when participating in the course itself. The interviewees report that the courses prompt feelings such as 'anticipation and a subsequent feeling of satisfaction' (GER_E). These feelings also have a positive effect on the sense of well-being felt in everyday life. In addition, the interviewees spend their evenings after work with pursuits they perceive to be meaningful, which also helps them relax and wind down, more so than other activities (work-life-balance). Another aspect of mental well-being mentioned by the interviewees is that fact that they are better able to cope with difficult situations that arise in their (daily) lives, such as the birth of a child or the beginning of retirement. The theme of staying mentally active is primarily mentioned by interviewees who are no longer working. They attach even greater importance to the seminars' ability to keep them mentally fit and agile. Based on the analysis of the interviews, two main aspects seem to be related to the perceived benefits of mental well-being: coping better with critical life incidents and reducing everyday stress through participating in AE

courses. These positive effects gained directly from participating in AE courses also have sustainable positive effects on people's well-being in daily life.

Some conclusions from the interview analysis might be important for the further interpretation of the German quantitative findings. Altogether, the interviewees derive a series of benefits from participating in general adult education courses. Except for the categories 'locus of control' and 'trust', all categories were found in the German interviews. While the benefits invariably have an equally positive influence on the lives of the interviewees and how they lead them, the size of this impact varies between individual participants. The interviews suggest that both the type of benefits and the intensity with which they influence the interviewees' lives depend on the course content, course length, and the number of courses attended. At the same time, it seems as if the interviewees select courses according to their wishes, personal interests, and life circumstances in a way that allows them to 'work through these', enabling them to use the courses to advance and shape their own life projects and personal development. However, it appears above all as if the more far-reaching changes and/or personal developments are not directly intended by participants but instead, to some extent, become evident or develop as a result of participating in the courses. This process mainly seems to take place when people participate in multiple courses over a longer period of time.

Compared to the other BeLL countries, there are no significant deviations regarding the order of benefits in Germany. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that the reported (positive) changes in all benefit areas (locus of control, self-efficacy, social networks, etc.) are seen as less radical than in all other countries, with only one exception: 50.1 per cent of German respondents report to be more interested in politics after participating in non-vocational courses, compared to 35.7 per cent of respondents in the remaining BeLL sample. This result might be due to the German BeLL respondents' relatively high participation in social and political science courses. For all other statements, German respondents ticked off the answer 'no changes' more often than respondents in other BeLL countries. To be sure, these differences are small, but they are noticeable. The fact that these findings are similar for Switzerland, Finland, and England support the assumption that positive changes are felt to a lesser degree in countries less affected by the economic crises. Additionally, these countries have an established and functioning system of non-vocational continuing education accessible for the biggest part of the population, so participating in AE/CE is not something extraordinary for learners. Furthermore, one-third of German respondents are 'multiple learners' and might be used to taking part in non-vocational continuing education, so that changes in life might not be perceived to be that radical.

Conclusion:

The BeLL findings show that participation in non-vocational continuing education, or general/ liberal adult education, supports individuals' willingness and motivation to engage (further) in the process of lifelong learning. Participation in non-vocational continuing education is voluntary, and learners generally have free access to the provisions. This leads to self-directed lifelong learning processes based on learners' individual needs. Both aspects are part of the aims of continuing education, as formulated in various governmental strategy papers on continuing education as well as in expert recommendations (for detailed information see BMBF 2008: 151ff.).

The AES data for Germany revealed the highest participation rates, as well as the highest growth rates, in the segment of workplace continuing training. This means that for those persons who don't belong to the workforce, participation in non-vocational continuing education is one important—if not the only—possibility to engage in lifelong learning. Against this background, the wide range and lively variety of programmes, course topics and learning opportunities in liberal adult education and the opportunity of learning benefits connected to them has to be valued high.

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8.3 England and Wales *(Authors: David Mallows, Samantha Duncan)*

1) DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL LIBERAL ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM

Since 1998-99, education in the United Kingdom has been devolved from the UK Parliament in Westminster; the central administrations in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland are responsible for the educational system and educational policy of their respective countries. From 1997 until 2000 the UK experienced a long period of economic growth, enabling the government to make major increases in public expenditure, mainly in the education, health and social sector.

In England[16], a key feature of adult education is a strong publicly funded non-vocational adult education service. The English Government's main strategy for adult education is to strengthen economic competitiveness and address social exclusion by increasing the skills and qualifications of adults, thereby enhancing their employability. There is no distinct adult education sector in England: adult education takes place in a number of sectors including sixth-form colleges, higher education institutions, further education colleges, work based learning programmes and local authority adult education services. Of these, only local authority adult education services are exclusively for adults; this is both the sector where most adult education participants are located and the sector which has been subject to the largest cuts in public spending.

In England, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is responsible for most policy initiatives in the adult education sector. Since 2010, funding and regulation has been the responsibility of the 'Skills Funding Agency' [17] which was established under the 'Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act' of 2009. This act also introduced the right for employees to request time for training.

In England 'The Adult Entitlement to Learning' gives adults over the age of 19 free tuition on certain courses, including reading and maths courses and vocational courses leading to qualifications at Level 2 and 3. Students are required to pay to study on courses at higher levels. In 2013/14 further education loans (the 24+ Advanced Learning Loans) were introduced for people over the age of 24 who wish to complete full Level 3 or 4 courses in order to qualify for a job or enter higher education (eacec.europa.eu).

[16] BeLL project questionnaires were administered to learners in England only.
[17] http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/

2) DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE PLAN AND DATA COLLECTION IN OWN COUNTRY + PROBLEMS IN DATA COLLECTION

The Institute of Education began discussions with NIACE on the sampling plan for quantitative data collection immediately after the kick-off meeting.

In this exercise, the Institute of Education was joined by NIACE. Both organisations have extensive experience of similar data collection exercises with adult learners in England. In particular, we drew on the experience of NIACE's annual Adult Participation in Learning Survey.

Types of adult education providers in England

There are no robust surveys in England of the type of learning with which the BeLL survey is concerned, with all relevant data collection aggregating all types of adult learning, vocational and non-vocational. NIACE's annual Adult Participation in Learning Survey does not ask participants where their learning took place, focusing instead on participation and planned, or expected participation in the future. However, analysis of the Skills Funding Agency Individualised Learner Record (ILR) shows that the majority of the type of liberal adult education that is the focus of the BeLL study is delivered in Further Education Colleges and through Local Authorities (often via independent Adult and Community Learning providers). Higher Education Institutions and Private training providers also play an important role. Accordingly, we aimed to include learners predominantly from the following provider types targeting specific examples of each to ensure that the sample was representative.

- Further education colleges
- Adult and community learning providers
- Local authorities
- Higher education institutions
- Community groups

Distribution of AE providers

The most recent NIACE annual Adult Participation in Learning survey shows that there is little variation in participation within the English regions. Accordingly, the aim in drawing the sample was to gather data from as many regions of the country as possible.

Recruiting the sample

We first went directly to adult learners through a database held by NIACE of learners who have indicated in previous research that they were happy to be contacted for other research purposes. We sent individual, personalized emails to each of these individuals asking them to complete the survey and sent a reminder after three weeks. At the same time NIACE asked a series of large national and regional organizations involved in adult learning to publicise the survey through their newsletters and social media. Alongside this we began the process of gaining agreement from a group of large providers, representative of the provider types described above and which offered a broad enough range of courses to include all of

the target topics, to take an agreed number of hard copies of the questionnaire and to administer these to their learners.

3) DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY ON NATIONAL COURSE PROVIDERS AND PROFILES

Most of the English sample was drawn from learners on courses run either by Community Colleges (32%) or Local Authorities (28%), with other community organisations (17%) and FE Colleges (17%) also featuring high.

Table 13: Adult Education Institutions named in the BeLL study

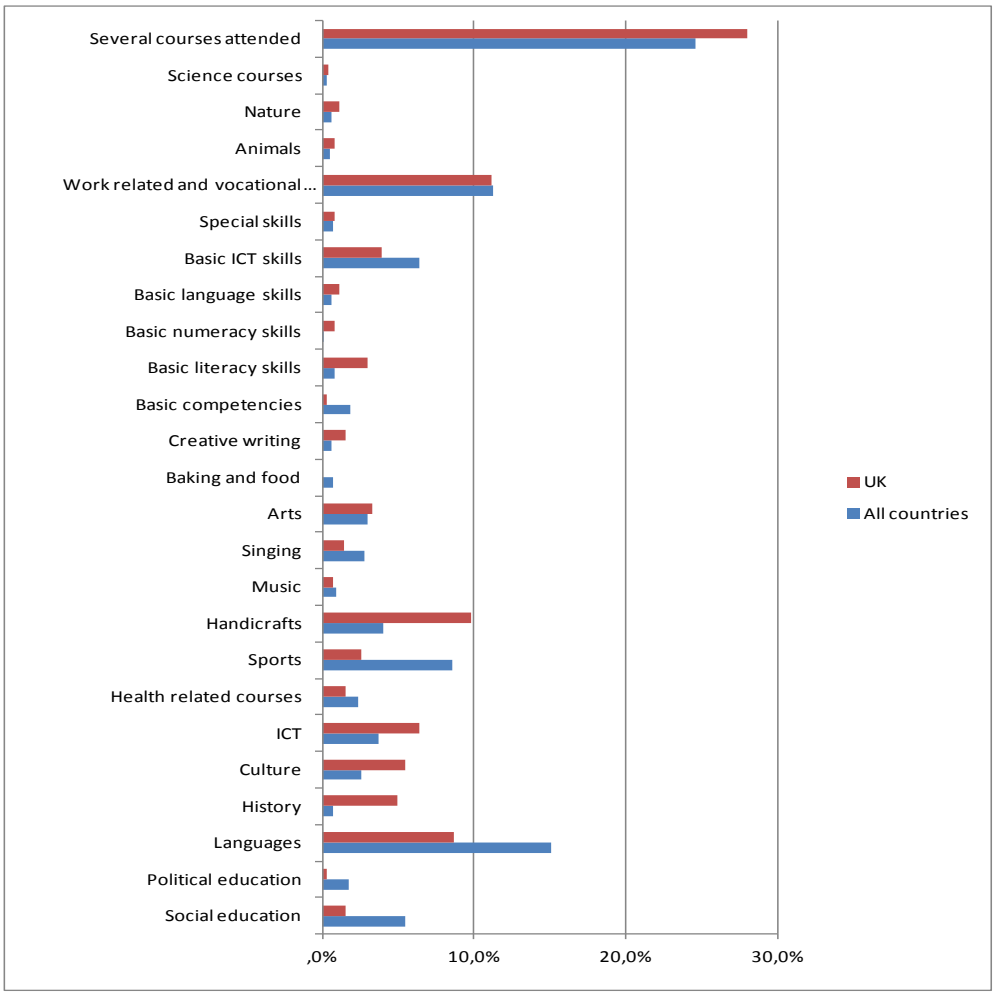
FE College	123	17,3%
Community College	225	31,7%
Local authority	195	27,5%
Community organisation	122	17,2%
University	50	7,1%
Private training provider	48	6,8%
Employer	8	1,1%
Union	16	2,3%
A self-organized course	41	5,8%
Other	23	3,2%

Source: BeLL

There were some interesting differences between the English and overall samples. There were less younger learners in the English sample: 4% were aged between 15-24 compared to the overall figure of 13%. There were also more older learners: 26% were aged between 65-92, compared to the overall figure of 16%. Unsurprisingly, considering this, there were also more retired people in the English sample (37% to 26%) and less people in full time employment (18% to 33%), but the percentage of unemployed people was similar (11% / 12%).

Participants in the English sample were slightly more likely to have done more than one course (50% / 33%), suggesting that the English sample contained a higher proportion of 'experienced' learners. The types of courses in or sample also differed somewhat from those in the rest of the sample, with a higher proportion of handicrafts, history and culture courses in England.

Figure 30 Courses Attended

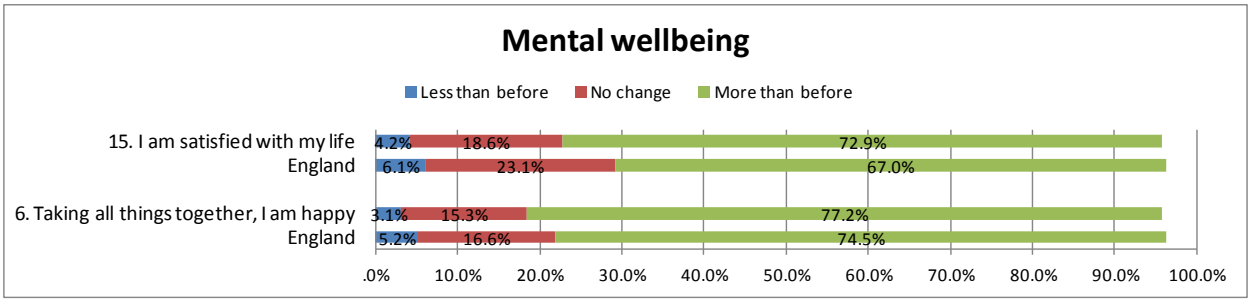


Source: BeLL

4) DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY OF NATIONAL RESULTS

Results from the quantitative analysis on perceived improvements in mental health following participation in the courses are striking and suggest that liberal adult education courses may have a more formal role to play in the treatment and prevention of mental health issues.

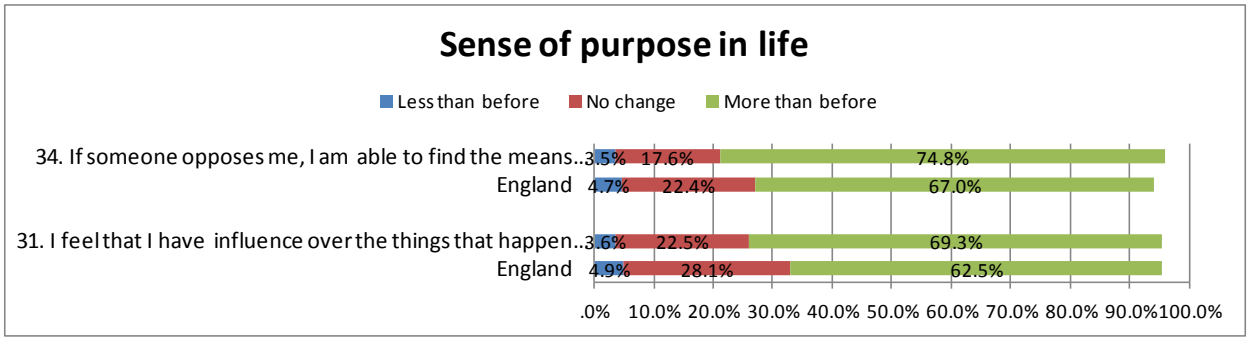
Figure 31 Results on mental wellbeing



Source: BeLL

The data suggests that participants in English courses benefit slightly less from improved mental health than the overall sample. This was also the case with the benefit category – 'sense of purpose in life', in which the English sample appears to have experienced less change than the overall sample. However, in both categories the differences are small and the overall message is still that course participation has great impact.

Figure 32 Benefit Sense of Purpose in Life



Source: BeLL

The English sample reported greater changes in the likelihood that they would take part in voluntary activity and become engaged in their local community. However, similar changes in course participants' civic and social engagement was evident across the sample.

Analysis of the qualitative sample of eight interviews identified self-efficacy, social network, sense of purpose in life, mental well-being and improved competencies as the most frequently mentioned benefits. Tolerance, civic and social engagement, civic competence, work-related benefits, physical health, family and shift/change in educational experience were also evident though to a lesser degree

Participants spoke a great deal of benefits in terms of self-confidence, confidence in their own skills, self-discover, structure in daily life, self-fulfilment/joy of doing, new hobbies, new inspiration, wider life circles and sense of belonging to a community.

No one spoke of trust. However, several participants discussed greater tolerance/understanding of others as a result of increased cultural knowledge, both as a result of subject content and as a result of being part of a culturally diverse group. Participants spoke a great deal about benefits within the category 'social network'. They spoke of meeting new people, widening their social circles, making new friends- who often became very good, close friends and the benefits of interacting with a range of different people.

Civic and social engagement/civic competence was another common category, with participants identifying benefits such as participating in local community events and groups, becoming more politically aware and active (in terms of both local and global politics) and reaching new conclusions or attitudes about social, civic or political life.

No statements were coded as health behaviour and participants only talked about physical health when prompted. However, Every participant discussed benefits to their mental well-being, from happiness/joy/enjoyment, to being more able to cope with emotional difficulties, and from relaxation to 'exercising your mind'.

Significantly, though none of the participants joined their adult education courses for primarily employability reasons (to find work or to gain a work qualification), they all identified work-related benefits of their courses.

5) NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS, REFLECTION

The results provide a significant body of evidence for the positive impact of liberal adult education on a wide range of outcomes. These impacts are of significance for a number of policy areas aside from education. Government departments with responsibilities for mental and physical health, (un)employment, social cohesion, social inclusion and the ageing population among others. There are also lessons for providers. For example the high value that learners appear to place on the social aspects of course participation, with improved social networks high among the benefits identified, suggests that providers should ensure that their premises and their course design should support informal socialising among their learners.

We received enthusiastic support in achieving the survey sample from colleagues in adult education providers across the country. Among those who helped us was the Adult Education Service in the London Borough of Waltham Forest in East London. Waltham Forest is in the north-east of the capital and boasts huge geographic diversity. Urban, residential areas in the south of the borough contrast sharply with the wide open spaces of the marshland, reservoirs and forests in the north and west regions adjoining the Lea Valley. Waltham Forest is often referred to as an outer London borough with inner London challenges. Its geographic diversity is matched by its social and economic diversity: Waltham Forest is home to a high proportion of minority ethnic residents and there exist large variations in levels of deprivation and public health outcomes between wards within the borough. We were invited by the head of the Adult Education Service to give a presentation to her team on the findings from BeLL and took the opportunity to gain feedback from them on the preliminary results. We visited them in the afternoon of November 4th 2011. We were joined by 14 adult learning curriculum managers and the Head of Quality and Curriculum.

We began by asking them if, on the basis of their practical experiences they felt that most of the benefits identified in the BeLL data are to be observed among participants in their courses. The participants recognised all the benefits and were particularly vocal about the confidence, feeling that adult learning classes empower people who lack confidence. In discussion participants felt that adult learning classes:

- were one of the few social spaces where you can meet strangers safely, interact with them and make friends;
- provided an opportunity to meet people who are different but like-minded with similar interests. They provide lots of scaffolding for social cohesion;
- helped reconfigure notions of the local allowing people to question whose community it was and what the limits of the community are;
- encouraged people to respect each other's views

There was overwhelming agreement among the participants at the survey feedback that they had observed the benefits presented in their learners.

We then asked them if there was a significant difference between their observations of learners and the results presented. There were no significant differences between the survey data and the experiences of the participants. However, they did suggest that on further analysis we might see differences between, for example, learners in urban and rural settings, older and younger learners etc. They also felt that much adult education of this type is 'hidden', not part of formal education provision and won't have been covered by the survey. There were a few occasions in which we needed to explain the terminology used in the survey, but once this was done participants were satisfied that the underlying concepts were the same.

The main element of the discuss centred on ways in which we could make best use of the results of the Bell survey. Participants felt that the evidence from the BeLL study could be of great use in advocating for support for adult learning with a range of stakeholders:

- **Local government** – they make lots of the decisions about and local adult education provision, so use the findings with local councilors to give them the evidence they need to argue for the importance of adult education.
- **Central government** – they need to understand that the benefits of adult education go beyond education, for example it saves money for the national health service and we should try and 'sell' the results of the study in that way.
- **Press** -we should engage with national, but particularly local press by preparing short press briefings that local adult education providers could use to get stories in their local press and encourage demand for their courses.
- **Employers** – participants discussed the fact that local employers such as Ford used to give their employees vouchers to take part in classes that they were interested in because they recognised that adult learning had benefits that were not directly related to work. They saw that their employees benefited and became better employees. Perhaps we could use the BeLL findings to encourage employers to do that now.
- **Education stakeholders** – need to engage various representative bodies (HOLEX, ALP, AOC) as well as the inspectorate (OfSTED)
- **Charities** – important messages for those who work with mental health (e.g MIND) or the elderly (Help the Aged) to encourage them to support / advocate for adult learning.
- **Learners** – the participants were enthusiastic about using the findings in their own publicity to attract learners.

The adult learning provision at Waltham Forest has suffered from successive years of cuts in funding. The curriculum managers that we met were clearly hugely committed to providing the type of learning that they felt adults wanted and which they benefited from, but were finding it increasingly difficult. They were very excited about the possibility of using evidence from the BeLL study to help them to argue for sustained or even increased funding for their work and also to help them engage employers.

8.4 Finland *(Author: Jyri Manninen)*

1) DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL LIBERAL AE SYSTEM

In Finland, more than 1.7 million adults (out of 5.2 million inhabitants)—that is, half of the working age population (18- to 64-year-olds)—participate in adult education each year. The majority of adult studies is work related. These numbers are based on a national survey. It is estimated that out of these 1.7 million people almost 520,000 adults participate in voluntary hobby-related and non-vocational courses (liberal adult education courses) (www.stat.fi). In 2005, the actual registered number of course participants in liberal adult education organizations was 1,022,851 (Kumpulainen, 2007), indicating that some adults often participate in more than one course. Participation rates in liberal adult education have remained unchanged since 1990, with a female participation rate of 26 per cent and a male rate of 11 per cent.

These high participation rates are common to all Nordic countries, and reflect the characteristics of the Nordic education systems and welfare states, as well as the historical importance of liberal adult education for the development of the nation state in Finland especially (see Antikainen, 2006; Rubenson, 2013). High participation rates in liberal adult education are also related to a good organizational infrastructure and a state-supported system for liberal adult education organizations (adult education centres, folk high schools, summer universities, study centres, and physical education centres). The contents and aims of these liberal studies are not dictated by the government, which in 2008 financed the system through a budget of €192 million. In addition, the system is financed by municipalities and participant fees.

Table 14 Finnish liberal adult education organizations in 2007 (Kumpulainen, 2009)

Type of organization	Number of organizations	Percent of all participants (n = 1,022,851)
Adult education centres	223	58 %
Folk high schools	83	11 %
Summer universities	20	4 %
Study centres	11	18 %
Physical education centres	14	9 %

Source: BeLL

The Ministry of Education is in charge of the whole education system. Every four years, the government compiles a development plan for the whole education sector. The 2007–2011 development plan included the implementation of a development programme for liberal adult education and for the development of competences among teaching staff. In 2007, a voucher scheme was introduced for adult education in Finland. Under this scheme, institutions offering liberal adult education courses receive study voucher subsidies to enable special target groups, like immigrants, unemployed persons, and pensioners, to lower or totally eliminate tuition fees for them. The main emphasis of Finnish adult education is on updating and upgrading the competencies of adults. Since the economic downturn during the 1990s, the adult education sector has changed from liberal adult education to a very certificate-oriented education system designed to address a drastic rise in unemployment (EAEA, 2011, p. 3-4).

2) DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE PLAN AND DATA COLLECTION IN OWN COUNTRY + PROBLEMS IN DATA COLLECTION

Sampling for the BeLL survey in Finland followed the same procedure as the original Finnish study (Manninen & Luukannel, 2008; Manninen, 2010).

The Finnish liberal adult education system is highly institutionalized, and because the organizations also receive state funding, good statistical data is available. This enabled a sampling procedure that had proved successful in the earlier study, providing a representative sample for each type of organization. The sampling plan was designed in a way as to create a representative sample reflecting the share of students in each type of organization.

Information about the survey (information letters for the organizations and for adult learners) and the link to the web questionnaire was sent by e-mail to all organizations based on existing distribution lists. The main delivery channel was the Finnish Adult Education Association (http://www.vsy.fi/en.php), which is the umbrella organization for all sub-organizations representing individual types of organizations (e.g. the Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres KOL, www.ktol.fi). Each sub-organization forwarded the information to their member organizations and centres.

In addition, the survey was advertised in a national web journal for liberal adult education (www.sivistys.net).

The objective was to collect 80 per cent of the questionnaires via the online survey. In addition, questionnaires in paper format were distributed and collected in cooperation with:

- two adult education centres (Joensuu region and Pieksämäki city)
- one summer university (Snellman Summer University in Kuopio)
- one folk high school (Kitee evangelical folk high school).

3) DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY ON NATIONAL COURSE PROVIDERS AND PROFILES

The majority (69.9%) of Finnish respondents had participated in courses offered by adult education centres. The second largest group (22.2%) studied at study centres, while 8.9 per cent attended folk high schools. Summer universities enrolled 3.5 per cent. These percentages are almost identical to the previous Finnish study (Manninen & Luukannel, 2008) and also reflect quite well the actual participation statistics in each provider category (Kumpulainen, 2009), except for adult education centres and study centres. The higher participation rates for adult education centres can be explained by at least two factors: There is a larger number of organizations and participants in this category, and they also have a clear organizational structure, which makes data collection easier.

The higher participation rate for study associations is based only on the coding system. This category also included third sector associations and organizations (sports clubs, dance groups, choirs, voluntary associations), which are not part of the official study centre system, but in practice organize similar types of courses following the same principles. The actual participation rate for official study centre participants is close to the actual participation rate (18%).

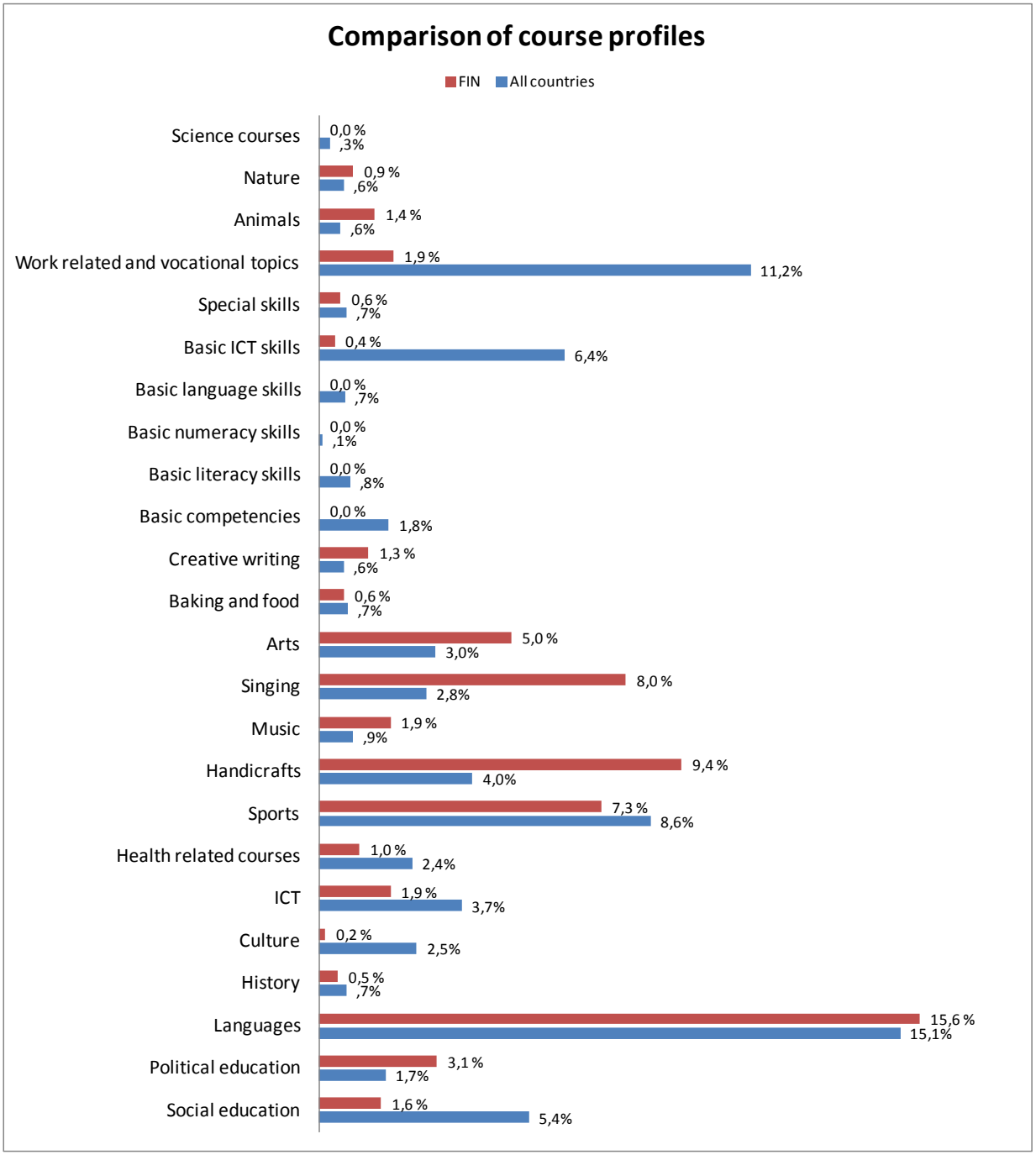
Table 15 Liberal adult education providers attended by Finnish BeLL respondents

Finland	Respondents	%	Registered participants in 2007 (%)	Difference (%)
Adult education centre	875	69.9	58	11.9
Folk high school	111	8.9	11	-2.1
Study centre or association	278	22.2	18	4.2
Summer university	44	3.5	4	-0.5
Physical education centre	6	0.5	9	-8.5
A self-organized course	40	3.2	-	-
Other	41	3.3	-	-
Total	1,252			

The low number of respondents who attended physical education centres can be explained by the fact that this is a different type of organization. Officially, these training providers were placed under liberal adult education administration and legislation in Finland a few years ago, but historically they have been more independent, offering different course profiles and addressing different target groups. They mainly organize sports-related week-long and weekend coaching camps for athletes; on the vocational training side, they offer longer formal courses for future professional coaches. For common people and families, there are usually short holidays based on outdoor activities and physical education. These courses are not regarded as liberal adult education courses in the same sense as, for example, yoga lessons at a local adult education centre.

The national course topics profile is presented in the following figure.

Figure 33 Courses attended by BeLL respondents, by topic



Source: BeLL

The major differences in course topics are in work-related courses and basic skills courses. Because of longstanding tradition, a strong organizational structure, and the well-established role of liberal adult education in Finland, Finnish liberal adult education organizations do not organize so many work-related or vocational courses, nor courses providing basic ICT skills. This is partly related to legal provisions defining the role of liberal adult education organizations (focus on hobby-related topics like the arts or singing, which are more popular in Finland than in the BeLL sample as a whole), and partly to the natural division of work between liberal adult education providers and vocational adult education organizations,

which provide vocational adult education for adults. Also, the need for basic skills (ICT, maths, reading, literacy) is smaller in Finland than in some other countries, because of the country's good schooling system and a lower percentage of immigrants.

The stronger emphasis on singing, the arts, and handicrafts is based on the traditional course profile in Finnish adult education centres. Therefore the Finnish data are also a good reflection of the actual course provision.

4) DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY OF NATIONAL RESULTS

Respondents were mostly women (77.5%), half of whom were working full time. The second largest group was comprised of retired people (40.5%). The majority of participants (42.8%) were in the age group of 50- to 63-year-olds. These numbers reflect the actual participation structures (see Kumpulainen, 2007) quite well. The Finnish dataset features more active learners, who participated in multiple courses more often than respondents in other countries. The Finnish respondents also have a higher educational level; this reflects the national educational levels and also the fact that the higher educated are more active participants in adult education. Adult education centres' participant profiles match these respondent profiles particularly well.

Figure 34 Number of courses attended by BeLL respondents

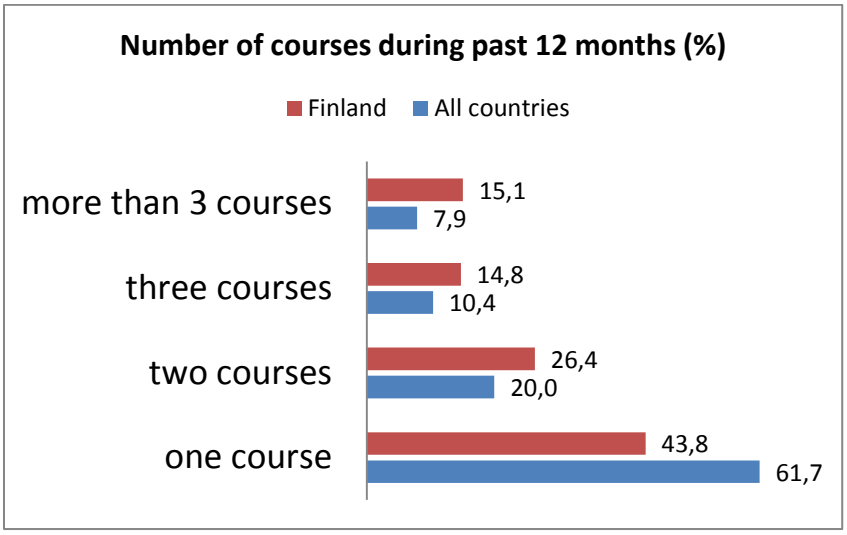


Figure 35 Composition of BeLL sample, by gender

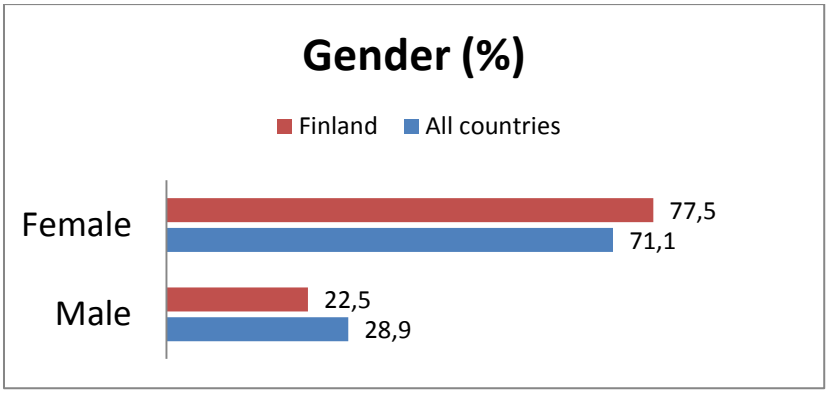


Figure 36 Composition of BeLL sample, by educational attainment

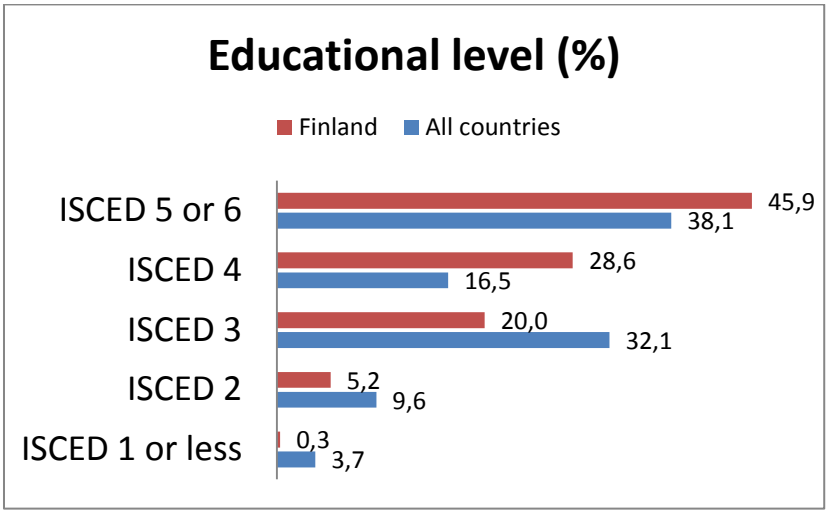


Figure 37 Composition of BeLL sample, by employment status

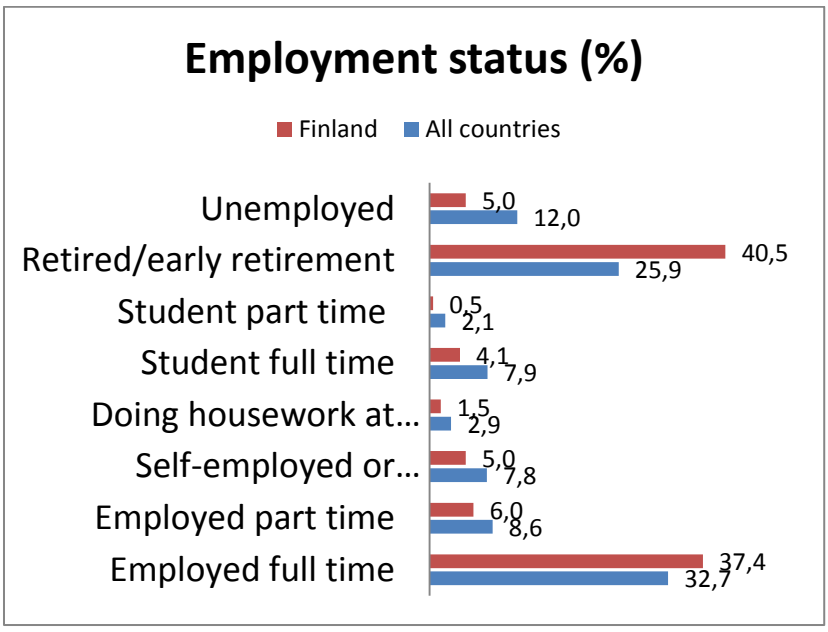
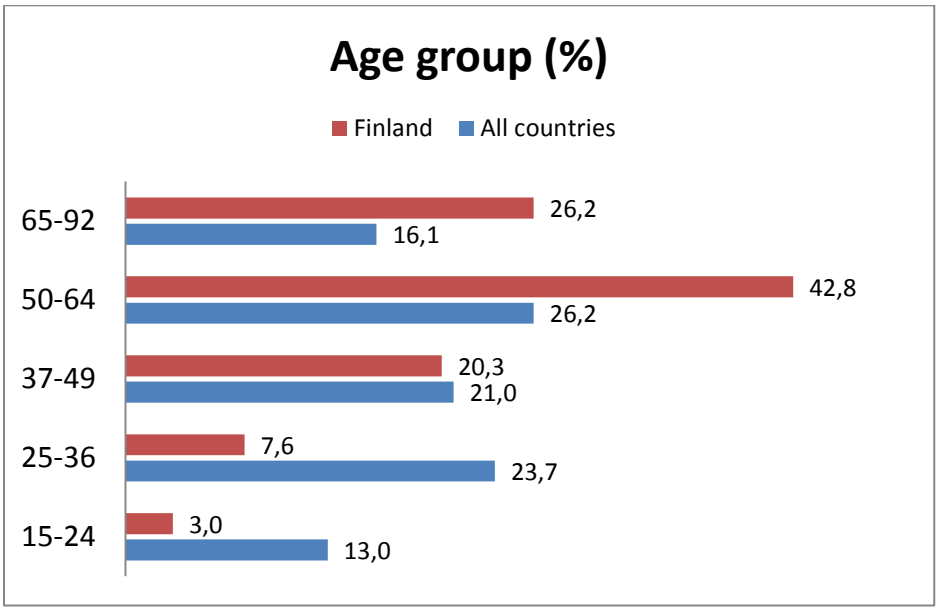


Figure 38 Composition of BeLL sample, by age group

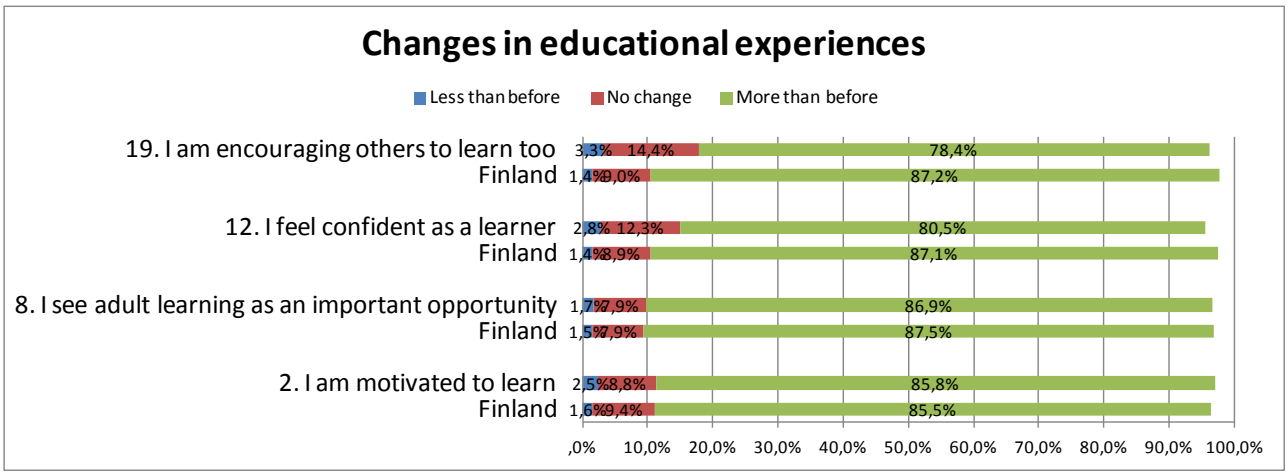


Source: BeLL

Finnish respondents tend to be older than respondents in general, except for the age group of 37- to 49-year-olds. There are much fewer respondents in the youngest age groups than in all countries in general.

There are no big or relevant differences in benefits when compared to all countries: there are mainly small differences that are based on different respondent profiles (age, educational level) rather than national characteristics. When comparing educational experiences, for example, there are only minor differences in Finnish respondents' profiles. The bigger changes in questions 19 and 12 can be explained by higher age: Older adults in particular generally gain more learner self-confidence when they realize that they are still able to learn new things, and positive learning experiences may increase the probability of them encouraging their friends to participate as well.

Figure 39 Changes caused by participation in liberal adult education in Finland



Source: BeLL

The following table summarizes the main points of the survey feedback session.

	FINDINGS/ COMMON CONCLUSIONS FROM FOCUS GROUPS	YOUR FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION
QUESTION 1 **On the basis of your practical experiences would you confirm that most of the benefits presented are to be observed among your participants?**	Adult learners in particular, but also teachers and rectors, recognized the benefits listed in the survey results. The most frequently mentioned benefits included: • health • networks and friends • political awareness • sense of belonging to the community, especially when on long-term sick leave from work, which prevents social exclusion • mental well-being • tolerance • encouraging others to learn too. One learner explained the process and its impact: Taking a language course in Swedish led to cultural information seeking (when preparing a presentation in Swedish about her own experiences in the 1970s), which in turn led to a history course, singing, and music courses (70s music), and several other courses. She used the term 'snowball phenomena' to describe her experience. One student spontaneously mentioned mixed age groups, where young and old meet each other, which help the old to keep track of current developments, create networks (to a local young entrepreneur working in the same field). This was seen to generate benefits for society as well. Teachers at the local AE centre were mentioned spontaneously as being extremely nice and motivating.	The focus group interview validates BeLL results.
QUESTION 2 **Is there a significant difference between your observations and the results presented?**	The only comment on this was that active, high-quality adult education centres (and the benefits they produce) generate a **better image for the city**, which is comparatively poor and loses inhabitants due to a lack of jobs and an ageing population in that region.	The group was not able to mention any additional benefits not already found in the BeLL study. This was asked three times during the session. This also validates the results.

5) NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFLECTION

The policy discussion in the survey feedback session (see following table) summarizes well the overall general discussions that have been going on in Finland since the publication of the national benefit study (Manninen & Luukannel, 2008; Manninen, 2010), and that continued during the BeLL project with the help of national media.

QUESTION 3 **How can you better use and/or exploit the results of the BeLL survey?**	• The Finnish government has been cutting funding for liberal adult education (because of neoliberal policy); therefore the decision-makers at the city council have also started negotiations about cutting funding. The BeLL results were seen as extremely helpful and valuable to protect current funding levels. • Positive feedback for the adult education centres was generally seen as a good outcome, both for teachers' work satisfaction and the centre administration. • The BeLL results help centres to maintain their good reputation and image, and therefore to promote their visibility at the local level. • Teachers could mention and distribute the results in their current learner groups. • Results can be presented to city decision-makers and inhabitants. • Bringing the benefits to the attention of younger participants could raise their awareness of this learning opportunity and might help develop new course topics targeted to young participants. • Local as well as national media should be informed about the results. • Results help to raise people's awareness in general about the benefits and importance of liberal adult education.	The results of the BeLL study were considered extremely important and valuable for liberal AE, especially in times when resources and funding are in danger. Reductions of investment in liberal AE were seen as short sighted, and it was suggested that it would be useful to show the financial benefits as well (for example, better health and well-being reduce expenditures for social and health services).

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8.5 Italy *(Author: Paola Zappatera)*

Since the 1970s the responsibility for adult education in Italy has mostly been transferred to the various regions. Because the southern and northern regions differ from each other in terms of their economic structure, and because migration is increasing in the whole country, lifelong learning in Italy focuses on social inclusion. Courses for adults were first offered in 1947 in so-called ‘social schools’ promoting literary and numeracy skills. From the 1970s up to the 1990s, associations and trade unions played a key role in Italian adult education. They worked closely together with political parties and the Catholic Church to promote literacy and improve professional skills. Since then, a number of legislative acts and agreements have been developed to advance adult education to its current stage. For example, the 'Circolare Ministeriali 7809/1990' was an act promoting the development of evening classes and their administrative organization. Further acts improved the rights to education and vocational training or the integration of foreign pupils. Starting in 2009 the Italian adult education system is being reformed by transforming the existing 'Permanent Territorial Centres' (CTP)[18] into 'Provincial Centres for the Education of Adults' (CPIA) with the aim to reorganize their activities and management. These reforms have been influenced by European institutions and policies and their recommendation to establish a 'European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training' (ECVET) (Country Report on Adult Education in Italy, 2011, p. 4-5).

The Permanent Territorial Centres and the evening schools are the main public institutions promoting adult learning opportunities. Additional private organisations, as well as NGOs, can be found. The CPTs operate in the field of formal and non-formal education. Their main purpose is to promote basic literacy skills, develop basic skills and specific knowledge, teach foreign languages, offer Italian language courses to foreigners, and to offer courses leading to higher education diplomas. CPT courses are free of charge and in most cases financed

[18] Established in 1997 ‘to improve the legislation concerning adult education’ (Country Report on Adult Education in Italy, 2011)

through the 'Ministry of Education'. Fields of study at CPTs include Italian, mathematics, technology, and foreign languages. The CPT evening schools also offer the possibility to obtain a higher education diploma. Moreover, they promote cultural as well as professional development for adults. Most courses involve a tuition fee, but some may also be publicly funded. NGOs like the 'Italian Association for the Education of Adults', the 'Folk High Schools', or the 'Universities of Third Age' are governed by different rules (depending on the region they belong to). In order to operate, all of them have to be recognized as associations. They must provide at least six different courses, two-thirds of the teachers have to have a university degree, and they should be financially independent. Furthermore, they have to be members of the national or the international association of Università per la Terza Età[19] (Country Report on Adult Education in Italy, 2011, p. 5-8).

The education system in Italy - Brief description according to the ISCED scheme

Level 0 – **Preschool**

Same for everybody

Children from 3 to 5 years. Not mandatory. Public (whole country). Free of charge.

Level 1 – **Primary education**

Same for everybody

Primary School. Duration: 5 years. Mandatory. Public (whole country). Free of charge.

Level 2 – **Second stage of basic education**

Same for everybody

First stage of secondary school . Duration: 3 years. Mandatory. Public (whole country). Free of charge.

Level 3 – **Third stage of basic education**

Young people have to choose between different schools

Second stage of secondary school, divided into 2 years of mandatory schooling (until the age of 16) plus 3 years of optional schooling (Level 4). Public (whole country). Free of charge.

(To be admitted to university, students must obtain a five-year diploma from a high school or technical college. However, most young people who are admitted to university usually still come from high schools.)

Organized in:

Senior high school, specializing in:

- Classical studies
- Modern languages
- Science education
- Didactic and education
- Arts education

[19] University of the Third Age

Technical college:

- Technical fields (mechanics, electronics, computer science, graphic art, chemistry and biotechnology, textiles and fashion, agriculture)
- Economic fields (accountancy, marketing, tourism)

The final two years of compulsory education may also be completed at **vocational schools**, which trains students for work, are public and free of charge but run by the regions. Every region has different rules and laws regarding vocational education and a different list of qualifications.

Level 5 – **First stage of tertiary education**

Degrees are split into 3+2 years.

First-cycle degree (similar to bachelor's degree): 3 years

Specialized degree (similar to master's degree): 2 years, the only one leading to the title of 'dottore'.

Level 6 – **Second stage of tertiary education**

Doctoral degree (3 or 4 years), similar to the PhD.[20]

Adult education

A recent legislative reform established so-called Centres for Adult Education (CPA) which have to provide both: courses for people who have yet to complete secondary school and courses in liberal non-vocational education.

Sadly, the reform exists only on paper at this point. In reality, we still have CTPs (Permanent Territorial Centres) in every province providing:

- courses to help adults earn their secondary school diploma (mainly at the evening schools of technical colleges or vocational schools);
- Italian language courses for migrants to help them obtain a long-term residence permit (immigrant visa).

The centres should also provide liberal adult education, but they can do so only if their budget isn't spent entirely on the other main activities (read: no adult liberal education in these centres).

[20] Within this landscape of education, vocational training is run by the regions; but there is also a special kind of employment contract, the apprenticeship contract, designed for young people aged between 15 to 29. This is an employment contract that leads to a professional qualification. ISFOL (Institute for workers' development and professional training), the public research agency that works with the Departments of Employment, Social Affairs, Education, University and Research, the regions, trade unions, and the Confederation of Industry umbrella organization of industrial entrepreneurs), the EU, OECD, OIL, and so forth, recently pointed to the fact that as in all of Europe, lifelong learning in Italy mainly attracts people who are highly qualified (in Italy, 51.4% of participants have a university degree, whereas only 8.2% have the 'diploma' awarded after the first stage of secondary school). However, in 2003 the government created a new tool for validating citizens' formal and non-formal competences, the 'Citizens Education and Training Booklet' (*Libretto formativo del cittadino*)—currently still in the experimental phase—which is designed to document not only educational attainment but all kinds of skills acquired in non-formal learning contexts (in all spheres of life).

It's a matter of fact that adult liberal education in Italy is offered only by non-profit organizations, especially cultural associations. There is a very large number of them, offering high-quality courses and activities. They have an important and rich tradition at the local level, but few have a structure encompassing the whole country. If they do, strong differences exist between northern and southern Italy, as well as between the regions.

No-profit organizations offering liberal adult education activities in Italy (country level)

ENDAS – National democratic organization for social activity

Founded in 1948; independent body not associated with political parties or the Catholic church.

Officially recognized by CONI (Italy's national Olympic committee) as a public body for promoting sports, ENDAS works to promote social participation and active citizenship through sports, culture, and solidarity. Offers courses on culture, the arts, and sports. In earlier times, ENDAS also worked to bring down illiteracy and to improve workers' education.

ARCI – National association of social development

Founded at the end of the 1950s and directly associated with left parties. The association often operated within the *case del popolo* ('The People's House', referring to the working class), the place where trade unions and leftist parties have traditionally run a wide range of activities since the beginning of the nineteenth century, especially in northern Italy. Workers' free time became more and more important as a result of the economic boom; over the years, ARCI provided a lot of cultural activities (courses, concerts, and exhibitions) and opened leisure centres and haunts with food, music, and so on. In the last two decades, ARCI was especially active against mafias (not only in Sicily but also in the whole of southern Italy) and against racism, acting in concert with immigrants.

UISP – Italian union for sport for everybody (Unione Italiana Sport Per tutti)

Founded in 1948 (closely associated with the left), UISP aims to widely promote sport not as a professional practice but as a good practice for improving one's health, education, social inclusion, and quality of life. UISP has 17,500 local sport associations in Italy, which work in every area of sport.

Universities of the Third Age

Cultural associations and non-profit organizations are very important at the local level. They usually run all kinds of courses and organize conferences and tours of museums, exhibitions, and monuments. There's a national umbrella organization of them in Italy, but it doesn't include all of the third-age universities.

DLF- National association for after-work activities for railway workers.

This ancient Italian institution for workers' free time and leisure was established in 1925 during the fascism period. Members of the association are railway workers both employed and retired; DLF operates sports facilities, hotels, green areas, clubs, and haunts and usually runs a lot of courses and leisure activities.

Sample plan: Gaps and difficulties

The BeLL questionnaire was distributed according to the sample plan. Due to the fragmented nature of the Italian adult education system, it took a very long time to complete the task. Achieving the online goal was especially difficult. We had to distribute paper versions of the questionnaire, often by joining the courses when they were in session in order to directly explain the project and its aims—a major effort and very time- and work-intensive.

Organizations involved in the distribution:

- Third age universities in Rome, Bologna, and Ravenna
- Emilia-Romagna Region (adult ict literacy program 'Bread and Internet')
- Women's association in Orlando, Armonie
- **ARCI –** National association of social development
- **ENDAS** – National democratic organization for social activity
- University of Bologna
- **DLF**- National Association for after-work activities for railway workers.

Despite the challenges regarding its distribution, the project and the survey received a very good welcome from the organizations involved, which saw the project as an opportunity to promote their activities.

Respondents were reasonably homogeneous. Most of them were enrolled at third age universities and Emilia Romagna region courses, meaning they were mostly retired people aged between 50 and 75, with a low to medium level of formal education and a good retirement salary (due to better work conditions in the past)—members of a vanishing middle class.

Reflections about national results:

When analyzing the data, I think we should always keep in mind the historical context of deep economic and social crisis in Italy: On the one hand, you have a tired and concerned population, hit by the crisis, very depressed and pauperized; on the other hand, you have retired people (the majority of our respondents), who (on average) enjoy better conditions than working people (the working poor in Italy are relatively young, non permanent workers).

Benefits most widely perceived concern relationships, friendships, and social networks: most respondents said that participating in courses gave them more opportunities to meet people and to visit museums, monuments, exhibitions, and the like. Another array of benefits widely perceived is related to the joy of learning, especially in a relaxed situation, where people don't have to show competence and self-confidence at any cost and can make mistakes without stress and apprehension. (That may sound strange, but in Italy the pressure of appearance and performance is very high.) Learning, especially many years after attending high school, helped people feel up to date (first of all in ICT, for example), dynamic, open-minded, alive, and useful.

Work-related benefits seem to be less relevant. This may be because most respondents were retired, so no benefits can have an effect on their career, on job opportunities, or their well-being at the workplace. Nevertheless, this result may also reflect Italy's situation as a

locked country, a ‘frozen’ society with very low social mobility—aspects made worse by the economic crisis and a progressively ageing population. Moreover, I think these results reflect the current situation: people are deeply pessimistic about the future, and about job opportunities – well, partly that is the general Italian mentality (we don’t like showing self-confidence and optimism: that sounds like a dangerous challenge to fate).

Likewise, benefits related to the locus of control seem be less important. That may be related to a mental habit and a cultural approach that tends to undermine individuals and self-help. People also need support and stimulus from a group in order to improve their competences, even in a field they feel ‘passionate’ about.

8.6 Romania *(Author: Simona Sava)*

1) DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL LIBERAL ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM

The 'Ministry of National Education', the 'Ministry of Labour, Social Protection, Family and the Elderly', and the 'Ministry of Culture and National Heritage' are the main institutions responsible for the organization and accreditation of non-formal adult education (NAE) in Romania. But so far, funding has mainly been provided to professional development, and less to personal development (covered mainly by non-formal adult education, as understood in the BeLL project). In Romania, liberal adult education (LAE) is provided mainly by NGOs or private institutions. They have taken over the offer of the public cultural institutions since the national network for cultural houses, coordinated by the ‘Ministry of Culture’, was decentralized more than ten years ago.

The main public providers of liberal adult education, the institutions belonging to the Ministry of Culture, were drastically sized down since they belong to the local authorities, and funds for their activities were cut continuously cut (see also “Country Report Romania”, Research voor Beleid, 2011, p.9, quoting the data from the Centre of Professional Training in Culture). In most situations, local authorities are more likely to finance public cultural events and outdoor activities rather than training courses.

An important step towards consolidating the national system for non-formal LAE was made in the Law of Education (2011), which includes a special chapter about lifelong learning and states the need for setting up community adult education centres under the local authorities’ responsibility. But as of today, that plan only exists as a draft and has not yet been adopted; therefore, it is unclear how much funding will become available for these centres.

It is difficult to give a detailed overview of the scope of the institutional system for non-formal adult education, as recent data are not comprehensive and not available in a structured and credible manner. The lack of statistics is also due to the increasing number of grassroots private and of civil society initiatives, which cover a wide range of provision, from private language centres to courses and other activities offered by cultural foundations, civic associations, and the like. As non-formal adult education, in the BeLL understanding, is not financed systematically by the state in Romania, there are not separate national statistics. The statistics available are the ones done for European data collection, for instance regarding the participation rate in lifelong learning (1.6%, a figure that has remained relatively constant over the past ten years – see, for instance, the European Monitor, 2013). Data

collection is difficult due to the large number of project-based offerings, which are delivered as part of a grant, meaning not on a long-term basis. Another reason is related to the structure of provision: most of the NAE providers are private or nongovernmental institutions with inconstant or indirect educational activities and delivery.

The country report prepared for UNESCO, CONFINTEA VI (2008), and all other reports done with different focuses (see e.g. Research voor Beleid, 2010) also state that statistical data about the providers of liberal adult education are not available. That is why setting up a representative sample of ALE providers was not possible; the same is true with respect to compiling a representative sample of liberal adult education participants.

Nevertheless, the data for Romania were obtained from all fields of non-formal adult education, as they are provided according to the BeLL guideline, covering all types of institutions typically providing non-formal learning (Sava 2002, 2003, 2007, 2008; see also the 2010 study of Research voor Beleid, which also mentions 'a plethora of institutions'):

- *Cultural houses, cultural homes, people's universities* (in most cases, people's universities were set up within cultural houses or in close association with them) – referred to as c*ommunity adult education centres* in the partnership agreement. In this category, we also included regional centres for adult education, set up around the most important cultural houses.
- A special type of community centres are the ones partly supported by public community funds, geared towards specific age groups (e.g. seniors' associations, youth associations, etc.) or other groups.
- C*ommercial AE institutions,* particularly those delivering foreign language courses, sports activities, ICT, and, nowadays, more and more, courses about soft skills.
- *NGOs* offer a wide range of courses, usually related to their respective expertise, ranging from social skills to nature, sustainable development, ecology, political education (e.g. at political party foundations), and the like. Such institutions often run their training programmes with the help of grants they obtain from European funds (e.g. Grundtvig, Youth in Action, European Social Funds-Development of Human Resources, etc.). Offering training courses may therefore not be their constant or main activity (see e.g. the bottom-up network on www.non-formalii.ro).
- *Churches* and related foundations—some denominations are quite active here.
- *Professional associations* offering professional development opportunities for their members, as well as courses in soft skills. The so-called teachers' houses have a special status, including national coverage, providing skills for teachers in non-formal education.
- *Museums*, art galleries, libraries, theatres, and so on.
- *Umbrella organizations,* like the National Employment Agency (NEA), or the National Authority for Qualification (now in charge of elaborating the national strategy for lifelong learning, but also coordinating the evaluation centres for the validation of competencies). Even such organizations (with their local branch offices) are mainly devoted to vocational continuing education, but they also handle budgets for soft skills, counselling, and empowerment.
- *Voluntary initiatives*, or cooperative *alternative groups* (e.g. providing workshops on art, street culture, etc.).
- *Employers* are becoming increasingly important players, but the courses offered on the job only indirectly address the 'liberal' aspects of adult education, mainly as soft skills. When they offer training grants to their employees to be spent according to their

interests, we see a growing number of them opt for non-formal training, as understood by BeLL[21].

- *Trade unions* have a rather limited offer of courses, most of which address professional development.
- *Clubs, cultural centres* (e.g. belonging to different minority groups)

Besides the institutions listed above, there are also the institutions of the formal education sector, some of which offer non-formal education as well. The 'basic education recovery programmes' are more related to formal education (the so-called 'second chance program'), whereas non-formal educational support for low-skilled adults is very rare. Most of these types of institutions are included in the Romanian BeLL sample.

2) DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE PLAN AND DATA COLLECTION IN OWN COUNTRY

Originally, we planned to collect about 70 per cent of the answers online and to gather the rest with the help of paid field operators, in paper-based form.

Since we did not have a systematic, comprehensive database, we used specialized forums (e.g. the Grundtvigers, Youth in Action, nonformalii.ro, etc.) and asked the umbrella organizations and the different ministries for permission to use their databases of contacts.

In each of the country's eight regions, we contacted recognized specialists with a large number of contacts and dissemination power, asking them to activate adult learners to answer the online survey. We subcontracted five regional coordinators, each of them charged with collecting 100 questionnaires. Together, they managed to collect about 340 answers.

IREA sent e-mail invitations to all our individual and institutional professional contacts (around 3,500 e-mail addresses). The list with the forums, networks, umbrella organizations, and institutions was sent to the project coordinator while designing 'Plan A' for sampling. Invitations were also sent out on two professional networks on LinkedIn and Yahoo (more than 4,000 e-mail addresses). After a few weeks, around 15 respondents had completed the questionnaire. We sent the invitation once more, and again, around 15 answers were received.

The questionnaire was distributed via IREA's Facebook page and via their newsletter. After several attempts, it was clear that the online approach did not work, so we needed to focus more on field research and face-to-face interviews. Therefore, we implemented 'Plan B', which involved paying more field operators to collect paper-based answers, mainly using students from the Educational Sciences Department of the West University of Timisoara. We provided them with a list of institutions, mainly from Timisoara and surroundings (satisfying our criteria of institutional categories). After obtaining permission, the students visited the various courses in person to ask participants to fill in a questionnaire 'on the spot'. Afterwards, the students entered the data into the common database. This solution proved to be successful: Within two weeks, we managed to reach the target for Romania, raising the number of answers from fewer than 400 to 1,043.

[21] The BeLL project aims to analyse the wider benefits of liberal adult education in people's lifes. It focuses primarily on the social and individual benefits of learning, such as well-being, rather than on economic or vocational benefits. In other words, it is looking for private, external, public, and non-monetary benefits of education and learning.

3) DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY ON NATIONAL COURSE PROVIDERS AND PROFILES

The national course providers where respondents studied cover a wide range of institutions, public and private, formal educational institutions, or primarily cultural institutions (e.g. cultural houses).

Below are some specifications to enable a better understanding of the way the types of providers were grouped in the overall data:

- Due to the specificity of the Romanian system of non-formal education, which so far does not feature adult community centers, the institutions listed as adult education centers should be understood as centers attended only by adults (e.g. seniors' associations and teacher training houses are both included here, even though such a combination might be surprising, since one is recreational and the other professional).
- The 'private initiative' category should better be called 'commercial initiative' sometimes, as it includes many such institutions, offering language courses, soft skills courses, or more work-related courses.
- One specific feature of the Romanian sample is that some respondents attended courses abroad, as part of the LLL Programme. Likewise, a lot of courses were offered through various LLL Programmes, like 'Youth in Action' or Grundtvig. As public funding is very limited, the list often includes courses that are part of projects or various community grants. Most of these are offered for free.

Table 16 Liberal adult education providers in Romania

Romania	1,043	Mentioned by %
People's university	65	6.2
Summer school	36	3.5
Intercultural institute	29	2.8
Volunteering centre	75	7.2
Cultural house	99	9.5
Private initiative	318	30.5
Adult education centre	117	11.2
Sport club	25	2.4
Self-organized course	5	0.5
Church	122	11.7
Higher education institution	20	1.9
Institution outside Romania – LLL Programme	25	2.4
Other	99	9.5

Source: BeLL

As it can be noticed, most courses were delivered by private providers. If we take into account that, on one hand, it is mostly the adult learners (or sometimes their employers) who pay for the courses, and, on the other hand, that private institutions are more flexible in adapting their offerings, which are generally diverse and of good quality, we can understand this option. Another possible explanation is the diversity of fields and providers listed under this category, ranging from language centres or ICT centres to employers or other providers of job-related training courses. Job-related courses are the most popular type of course among respondents (see Figure 1), which matches the fact that private organizations are the most popular type of provider.

Public institutions come in second—if we group together the people's universities and cultural houses (as people's universities were set up in close connection with the cultural houses and specialized mainly in course provision)—traditionally offering non-formal education (the former national network of institutions belonging to the Ministry of Culture). In spite of their decreasing number, they are still important players.

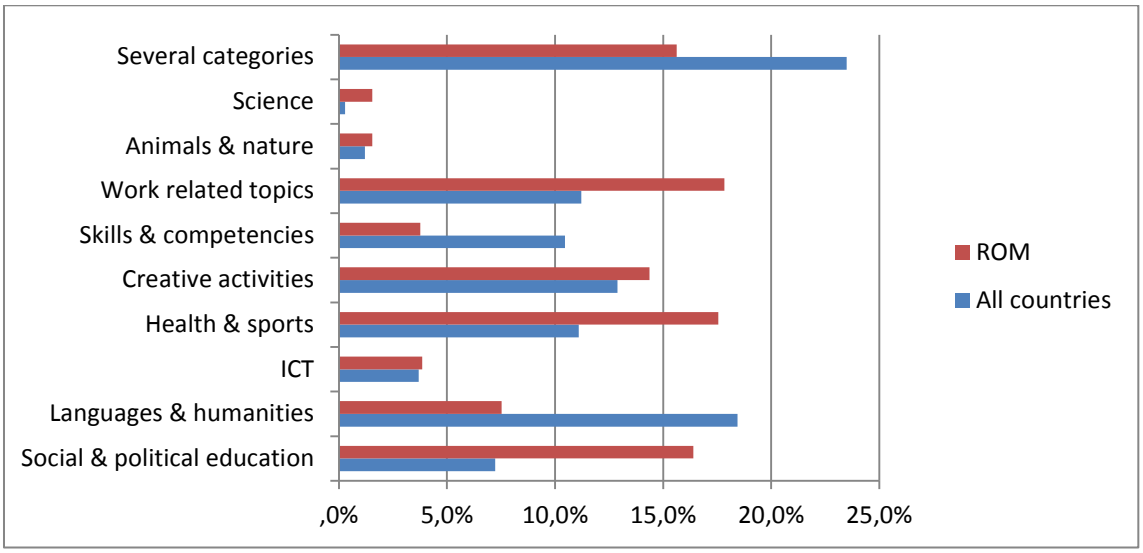
It might be quite surprising that churches are the third-most popular provider of liberal adult education in Romania. In fact, some denominations are very active in this regard, setting up their own education centres, where they provide all kinds of courses. However, even if Romanians are known to be highly 'church oriented', our estimations will not rank the church as high among national providers, even if their role is increasing and their (educational) services are getting more diversified.

The other figures are no surprise, but rather a good reflection of reality. One last word about the Intercultural institute: In fact, there is only one institution of that title in Romania, located in Timisoara. A lot of our data were collected in Timisoara, which helps explain why the institute figures so prominently.

The range of **course types** undertaken correlates with the answers regarding course providers. For instance, if we put together the course on ICT skills, languages, and work-related/vocational topics, their share (about 40%) roughly corresponds to the share of private providers, if we take into account that language and ICT courses are also offered by public providers. They are the most popular ones.

Creative activities come out surprisingly high among the most popular course types (14.4%). But the range of activities included in that category is quite diverse, ranging from music to handicrafts. This may reflect the high number of courses delivered by the church, many of which refer to participation in the church choir. More detailed explanations is offered by Figure 40, which compares Romania to the other BeLL countries.

Figure 40 Types of courses attended by Romanian respondents



Source: BeLL

As evident from the Figure, courses with work-related topics are most popular among participants in Romania (17.8%), getting one of the highest scores among all BeLL partners. This is characteristic of participation in adult and continuing education in Romania as a whole; the main reason for attending courses is often a career-related one.

The high percentage of participants in 'social and political education' courses (16.4%) in Romania, especially compared with the other BeLL countries, is surprising. The explanation behind it is the large amount of volunteer initiatives and community programme management (mainly run as part of the "Youth in Action" programme); courses in political education are barely mentioned.

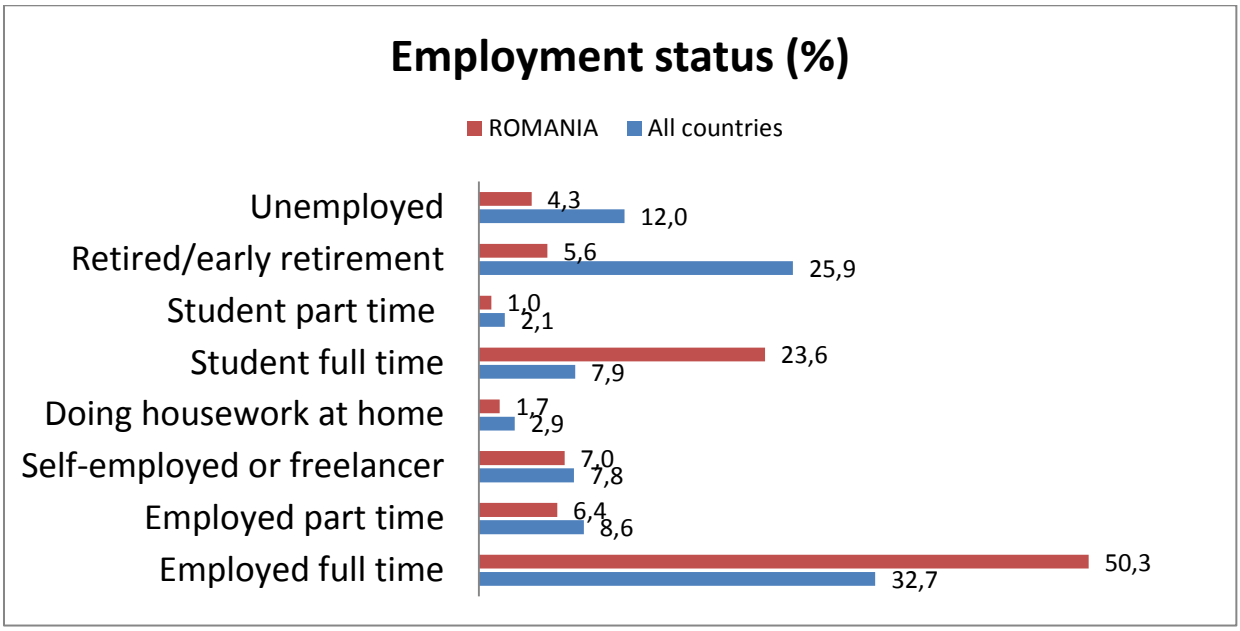
To understand the higher-than-average representation of 'health and sport' courses (17.6%), we should keep in mind that Romanian respondents were rather young (see point 4 below), with a majority of them having higher education degrees. Among that group, health and sport issues are more and more popular.

Overall, we see that Romanians tend to choose course for pragmatic and action-oriented reasons; courses on general culture are not of that much interest to them (see the low participation levels in 'humanities', especially compared to the other countries). We can confirm that this is a characteristic that can be observed at the national level as well, not just in the BeLL sample: the offerings of the cultural houses (the main providers of these kind sof courses) are quite poor and less attractive.

4) DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY OF NATIONAL RESULTS

In Romania, the national respondent profiles can be described as follows: respondents were mostly women (62.9 %), but the percentage of male respondents is the highest of all BeLL countries. 50.3 per cent of them worked full time (see Figure 41); the second largest group was comprised of full-time students (23.6 % - one of the highest participation rates among the BeLL countries).

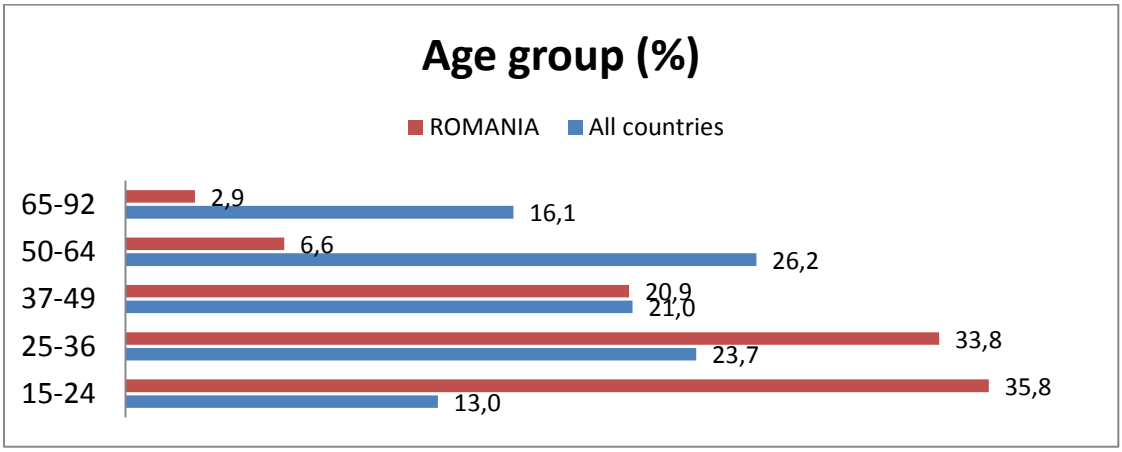
Figure 41 Employment status of Romanian BeLL respondents



Source: BeLL

The large percentage of students correlates with the relatively young average age of respondents: the highest number of participants from the sample belong to the group of 15- to 24-year-olds (35.8%), closely followed by those belonging to the group of 25- to -36-year-olds (33.8%) – see Figure 42.

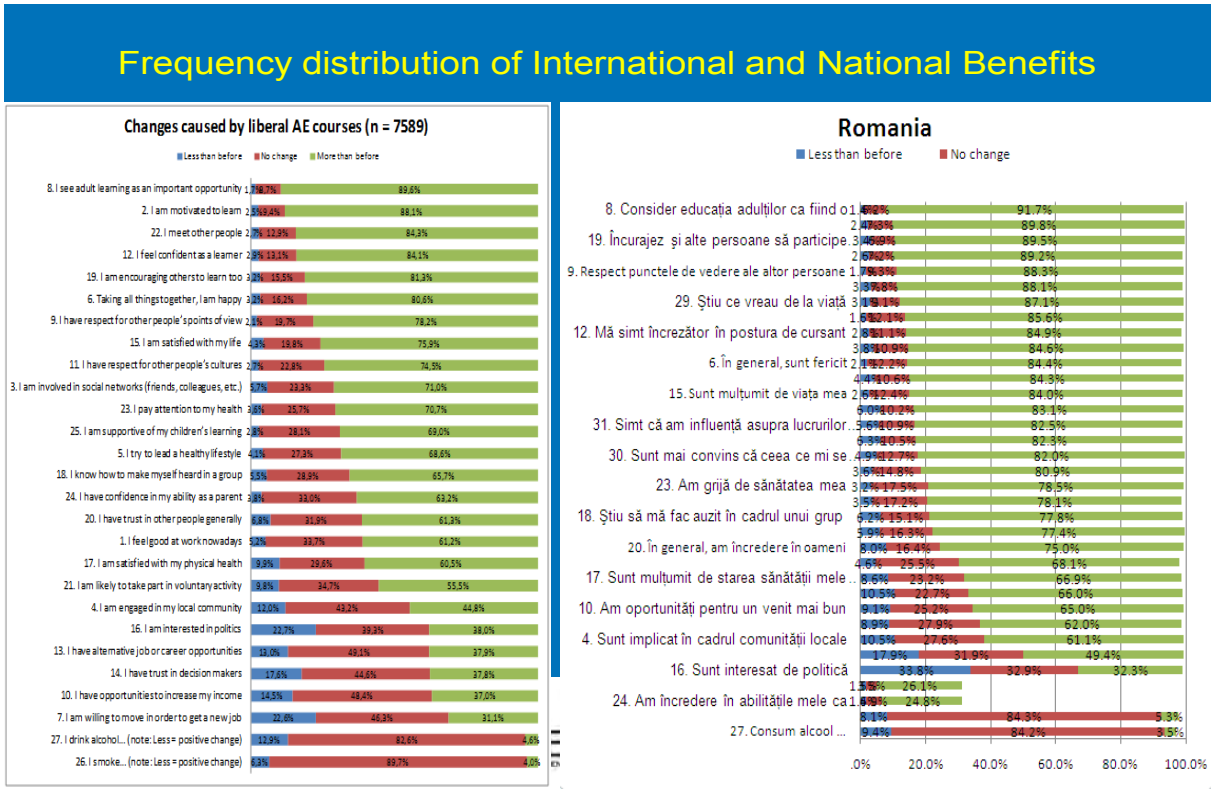
Figure 42 Romanian BeLL respondents, by age



Source: BeLL

The rather large percentage of less experienced young participants (life experience, but also experience undertaking such non-formal courses) looking for career prospects can help explain the fact that Romanian learners reported one of the highest learning benefits gained from participating in such courses. Benefits are not only mentioned in the work-related category, but in almost all categories. Overall, Romanian respondents reported more learning benefits than the BeLL average.

Figure 43 Liberal adult education benefits



Source: BeLL

As can be seen from Figure 43, Romanians not only report more benefits, they also mention a much more positive impact of these benefits than the average BeLL participant. This was a surprising result from Romania, and it is a strong reason for convincing policy makers of the need to provide more support to non-formal adult education in Romania, as the social, personal, and professional benefits felt by learners themselves are very significant. What makes it even more surprising is the fact that most participants already had a high educational level (54.3% with a higher education degree and more, followed by 36.5% with a high school diploma). Previous results show that a big impact is usually reported by participants with low levels of education. The large number of learning benefits also came from the interviews; the triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative data made the results even more convincing. The elderly and those currently outside the labour market were most enthusiastic about their learning experience attending the course(s). The young respondents also mentioned the social benefits, the joy of learning, and the boost in self-confidence.

In the qualitative part of the study, the benefits mentioned most frequently by Romanian interviewees were work-related benefits and personal competencies gained by attending seminars, very closely followed by self-efficacy. The high score for 'self-efficacy' can be explained by the fact that all the various achievements in most of the cases led to an increase in self-confidence and self-development. It can be said that in most of the cases, successful learning also increases self-confidence. This benefit is followed closely by 'joy of learning' and 'motivation to learn'. In a country where most of the education system is oriented towards vocational training, and where formal education mainly comes in the form of lecture-style teaching, the nondirective, active learning experience in LAE makes learners

experience the joy of learning and motivates them to learn even more. The social dimension of LAE is obvious, too.

But all these findings can be understood in a more nuanced way, as the in-depth interviews have clearly shown. For instance, work-related benefits are not to be considered simply as further training, but as a complex added value from a professional point of view as well, even if that was not directly intended. Surprisingly, for instance, even retired persons underlined work-related benefits. But this can be seen as an indicator of active aging, especially considering the educational level of the interviewees; they do not necessarily have an interest in finding a new job, but they see how they can transform their volunteering activities by earning an income with which they can support other elderly persons in need:

> *'The fact that I participated in the CAPIVAL course helped me to understand that I can use my life experience, even as a social worker. I have already gained several years of experience in helping my fellows – those of us who are stronger can help the weaker ones, because we do voluntary work in the hospitals, chatting with the elderly and the sic .... And since we already have this experience, we can validate it and certify it, and why not – even receive money for the social services we do for our fellow pensioners. Mostly we use this money to help them, the ones in need.'* (Retired engineer, 70 years old)

With the young respondents, it is interesting to see how they transfer into their professional context a cultural experience, thereby widening their understanding or enhancing their ways of expressing and coping with different communication or social challenges. This is even more interesting as the original reason for attending the course(s) was not work-related, but respondents reflected on the wider benefits of their experience. Even the work they mentioned was sometimes related to their involvement in community activities:

> *'I think I am at an age where I assimilate information in a more open way and in a bigger quantity and I am eager to learn as much as possible so I think that is the motivation I have for learning and in fields that will help me build the career I want…'* (26 years old, assistant manager, but also doing a lot of voluntary work)

Another example was that of a university assistant teacher who attended a course on poetry. He explained how he transfers what he learned into his interaction with students, encouraging them to speak directly and freely.

When we discussed this data with the training providers of a language learning centre (at that time, in October 2013, we only had preliminary data), they confirmed that the questionnaires they use at the end of each course to measure student satisfaction show similar results. The learner-centred experience serves to enhance students' self-confidence as they move on to more advanced levels and become more autonomous learners. The representatives of the institution confirmed that they also try to build a learning community beyond the course. They believe such an integrative approach is needed and should be extended, including inter-institutional partnerships. The practitioners themselves thought that the results may be an incentive for becoming advocates of lifelong learning, attracting both more students and extra resources.

5) REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The BeLL findings provide empirical input for policy formulation, offering evidence of the multiple benefits perceived by adult learners themselves as a result of their participating in liberal adult education. Each participant reported multiple benefits, ranging from personal, social, and health to work-related.

If in the quantitative data such positions could be explained as correlating with age and social status distribution, and with the type of courses attended by Romanian respondents, the fact that they came out on top in the qualitative analysis as well not only confirmed the validity of the data but also provided a more nuanced explanation of this fact.

The impressive amount of learning benefits reported by Romanian learners after participating in non-formal adult education is an incentive for promoting and disseminating such results among political decision-makers, encouraging them to make more of an effort to support non-formal adult education in better ways. It is obvious that the benefits mentioned in the Romanian interviews and open questions are 'more' than in some other countries represented in this project, mainly the western European ones (as the quantitative analysis has revealed). They are more in quantitative terms (the interviewees named more benefits) as well as in qualitative terms (the benefits are described more nuanced ways). Presumably this is due to the low level of adult learning in Romania, which is comparable to that of Spain, where we also find a 'more' in benefits. In countries where adult education is more developed, participating in a course is nothing special; it is a common thing to do. In Romania, participation is combined with great expectations, concerns, joy, and reflections about the situation as an adult learner. The learners are more aware of the learning process; they appreciate the outcomes more.

Even though it is not mentioned explicitly, the fact that there is no structural and sustainable funding of adult education in Romania is clearly visible. Adult education is voluntary and casual; it depends on persons, situations, and rare opportunities. Without a more structured system and more sustainable funding, this situation will not change in the future.

What is needed is a larger infrastructure, and a more diverse one, addressing all types of adults: the elderly, who remain at home alone after many of their children have migrated abroad, as well as the young, who need more support services and learning opportunities to be able to pursue their life and career plans. Supporting older adults by providing opportunities of social learning in groups should be a public policy, as the good practice example from the Senior's Council in Timisoara shows in the interviews.

The same applies to all groups of adults: more consistent financial support is needed. Financial aid can be designed either as a voucher system, or as an active measure for employment, seen in a more integrative way, or as (mental) health protection. However, the local authorities should have separate budgetary lines for funding course delivery and attendance. The empirical data are strong arguments for policy formulation, showing there is value for money.

To increase participation in adult education/LAE, we not only need more consistent policy measures but also better advocacy and *information campaigns* to motivate adults to learn, following the examples of their peers. Using quotations from learners themselves about the benefits they experienced is a strong motivational approach, because it is more credible. Such quotations should also be used by the training providers to attract adults and to advocate for more funds, which form the basis for the positive effects of their activities.

Following the policy circle, the implementation of policy measures should be done in a determined way, monitored and evaluated afterwards. For the last parts, research input is needed.

Research should be expanded to cover wider areas, with a greater emphasis on the NEET population (low-skilled people **n**ot in **e**ducation, **e**mployment, or **t**raining—the ones who are outside of the labour market for different reasons, residents in economically and socially disadvantaged communities, etc.).

In Romania, the lack of national data on course providers and types of courses makes it difficult to build up a representative sample, but also to build on reliable data. More systematic data collection is needed, as well as more coherent policy measures to articulate a rather fragmented and inconstant provision for non-formal learning.

At the *provider level*, providers need to act in a more integrative way, in partnership with other institutions, and to offer a wider range of non-formal learning activities, and in different formats, including, for instance, courses in creative writing, reading circles, courses to help adults organize themselves, and so on.

High-quality programmes also require well-trained teachers. The stress that is on the teacher became obvious in the Romanian interviews and open answers. Due to their lack of experience in adult learning (mainly among the young ones, who dominate the sample), people are looking very intensively at what the teacher is doing, and the teachers matter a lot to them, both as persons and as professionals. Very often the reported benefit is related to the teacher: their personality and the method they applied. Therefore, more intensive efforts have to be made regarding the *professional development of teachers*, to enable them to develop high-quality and joyful interactions, non-directive and formative ones, to foster learners' self-confidence and personal development.

Likewise, when measuring the quality of provision, items about the wider benefits of learning should be included, both in the feedback questionnaires at the end of the course and in the institutional course and self-evaluations. Including such items in the evaluation sheets helps participants to reflect on such aspects in a more structured way, also motivating them to engage in further learning.

Regarding *further research*, the surprising fact that Romanian respondents reported more learning benefits than those in other countries should be explored in depth to find out, for example, which of the those benefits remain and which are sustainable and transferrable. Some of the consequences of learning can be registered immediately; others will become evident only in a long-term perspective. It is difficult, therefore, to identify the impact of learning directly after a learning process is over. Even follow-up surveys (e.g. questioning or observing after six months) will not reveal all the changes that have occurred after a learning process.

For Romania, it would also be very important to examine the BeLL evidence on the national level to conduct more in-depth analysis for different age groups and different categories of people, each with their specific social and educational experiences. As a result, it will be possible to create customized policies for expanding and diversifying the educational provision for adults. That should be done very soon to increase participation in adult education, and in LAE in particular.

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8.7 Serbia *(Authors: Katarina Popovic, Edisa Kecap, Dubravka Mihajlovic)*

1) DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL LIBERAL AE SYSTEM

Adult education in Serbia has a relevant tradition, but the modern system was mainly shaped by the difficulties and losses in the 1990s and by the reforms after 2000. In 2000 the direction of adult education in Serbia changed with the new democracies and the new economic system. At that time, one fundamental issue was the reform of the education system. One of the main steps was creating the 'Strategic Directions for the Development of Adult Education' and the new ‘Strategy for the Development of Adult Education’ in 2006. This document

reported about the main problems of adult education in Serbia and defined some priorities for its future development. On the basis of this analysis, action plans and measures related to employment and the development of democracy and civil society were designed.

In the recent years, further important steps and changes in the national adult education system have been made. The most important one was the 'Law on Adult Education of the Republic of Serbia', adopted by the Serbian Government in June 2013 and in effect since January 2014.

This law establishes adult education and lifelong learning as an integral part of the education system in the Republic of Serbia, defining and regulating: the principles and objectives, competencies, qualifications and qualification standards, and activities of adult education; adult term, use of language, and improving the quality of adult education; the organization and implementation of adult education; records and public documents; plans and programmes of adult education; students, applicants, and employees engaged in the field of adult education; the annual plan of adult education; supervision; entrusting the tasks of the state administration to autonomous regions; penalty provisions; and other issues of importance to adult education (Министарство просвете, науке и технолошког развоја / Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, 2013).

According to this law, adult education is related to aims in two spheres: vocational education, employment, and labour market on the one hand; equality, social involvement, quality of life, personal fulfilment, democracy, and tolerance on the other. Still, the law focuses more on formal education (including the vocational and liberal education of adults) and less on non-formal education. In Serbia there is no tradition of liberal adult education *per se*—it is seen as a main part of the provision in non-formal education, and to a certain extent, it could be found in some programmes of formal education.

One of the recent legal definitions of non-formal adult education clearly illustrates this approach:

Non-formal education and training implies institutionalized learning which takes place through structured programmes, but it is not in the system of formal education. It consists of organized learning processes intended for work and related activities as well as for personal development. Non-formal education is implemented through: courses, workshops, seminars, instructions, job-training, and private classes.

Traditionally, adult education in Serbia has been understood as both professional/vocational education of adults AND general/liberal education of adults. The Law on Adult Education (Министарство просвете, науке и технолошког развоја / Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development, 2013) defines it as an integral part of the education system, which, on a lifelong basis, should provide adults with the competencies and qualifications they need for professional and personal development, work and employment, and civic and social responsibility. The public bodies/ministries responsible for adult education cover both aspects: the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development, especially the unit for adult education (within the Department for Basic Education); the Ministry of Labour, Employment, and Social Policy; the National Council for Vocational and Adult Education; and the Centre for Vocational and Adult Education of the Institute for Improvement of Education. Among the providers, liberal adult education is mainly the concern of providers of non-formal education. It is very important to say that NGOs have become the most influential pillars of the adult education system, especially in their role as advocates and promoters of non-formal learning, which has been overlooked or downgraded in previous years. They also offer the

majority of liberal education courses. Beyond that, institutions such as people's universities and cultural centres are also among the relevant providers. The number of private providers is slowly increasing, but not so much in the field of liberal adult education. According to the definition and understanding of adult education in Serbia, liberal adult education can be found in the framework of general education, leisure, and hobby education, offering courses for self-fulfilment and life skills.

Within the formal system, liberal education is covered by courses offered, for instance, in schools for basic education for adults, according to the new concept and the new curricula of functional basic education for adults (*responsible living, life skills, civic education*, etc.), or in other regular schools attended by adults (courses for general education).

There are no reliable data on participation in adult education in Serbia, though a participation rate of 3 to 4 per cent was suggested and mentioned in the UNESCO national report prepared for CONFINTEA VI in 2009. Factors that influence this rate include the relatively low level of education among the population, the insufficient economic situation, the unstable political situation, and educational provisions that do not match the needs of the population (see more at: infonet-ae.eu). However, a recent study by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia reports higher participation rates in adult education, based on data from 2000 – 16.5 per cent (4% in formal education, 13.6% in non-formal education); in informal education, the participation rate is 19.1 per cent.

More accurate data about adult participation are available for the formal education system, but it is difficult to isolate the data on liberal adult education, since it is an integral part of the overall curriculum. Although there has been an increase in participation, there is a problem of access and motivation, especially for liberal education. The typical Serbian participant in adult education and lifelong learning is male, aged 25—34, employed, from an urban area, with a higher education degree. The majority of courses in non-formal education are related to the job, but among the BeLL respondents the preferred courses are: general education, art, science, mathematics, and ICT. Women are more frequently found in humanities and art courses, whereas men are overrepresented in engineering, science, agriculture, and other more job-related courses.

This research provides data on barriers to participation, segregating the data according to sex, age, region, employment status, and so forth (Републички завод за статистику / Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2013).

2) DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE PLAN AND DATA COLLECTION IN OWN COUNTRY + PROBLEMS IN DATA COLLECTION

Numerous aspects were essential for choosing the BeLL research sample in Serbia – 1,000 participants of liberal courses. There were several factors determining it:

- the specific system of adult education in Serbia, which is divided into the subsystems of formal and non-formal education rather than vocational and liberal education;
- the nature of the liberal courses and the course topics;
- the need for diversity in the sample;
- the wish to include different geographic areas of Serbia.

The formal system of Serbian adult education, which includes liberal adult education (the focus of this study), consists of:

- *Schools for the basic education of adults*: The great change occurred in 2011, when the implementation of the pilot project *Elementary Functional Education of Adults* (involving 80 schools in a three-year cycle) established the new, modern system of functional basic education of adults, including both vocational and general, liberal courses;
- High schools: schools at the secondary level (developed since 2000 as part of the CARDS Program; as *Regional Centres for the Continuing Education of Adults* they replaced traditional secondary schools, offering both vocational and liberal courses);
- Higher education institutions (with very low participation rates by adults and older students because of the new system introduced in the wake of the Bologna process; it is not open and flexible enough to accommodate the needs of adult and older students).

The institutions and organizations providing non-formal adult education in Serbia are diverse:

- Open and people's universities (providing various programmes: languages, ICT, music, painting, health, programmes for the third age, etc.);
- National employment service (providing various programmes for unemployed persons, volunteers, and practitioners, sometimes including liberal adult education or mixed programmes such as foreign languages, ICT, etc.);
- Private organizations and institutions (foreign language schools, ICT schools, music, painting, acting, yoga, or photography);
- NGOs, civil society organizations (providing various programmes for civic and intercultural education, soft skills, culture and cultural expression, self-development, civic and political literacy, health, family life education, education of women, minority education);
- Companies (soft skills and programmes relevant for the company's needs);
- Universities of the third age (languages, ICT, painting, music, dancing, acting);
- Sport associations: sport clubs and recreation centres (various sports, martial arts, yoga, etc.).

There are a few more providers of adult education in Serbia (e.g. chambers of commerce, regional agencies for economic development, professional associations, etc.), but they were not included in our sampling plan at the institutional level, but their course offerings are mainly vocational.

The members and participants in the abovementioned institutions and organizations served as respondents in our research. Although the number of these institutions and the variety of their programmes are huge, the majority of respondents come from private organizations and NGOs, whose courses were closest to the idea of liberal adult education.

If we compare the nature of liberal courses in the traditional sense (as in the Scandinavian countries) and the course topics listed by Serbian providers (language/humanities; ICT; creative arts; social skills, active citizenship; health and sports; basic skills and

competences), we see that the providers mentioned above offer courses covering exactly the content usually called *liberal adult education*.

Achieving diversity in the sample was very important for the Serbian sampling plan. It was important to include respondents with diverse socioeconomic characteristics (gender, age, educational level, employment status) but also to include respondents from different geographic areas of Serbia. The plan was to collect questionnaires from all of Serbia, not just Belgrade, because of the big disparities between the capital and smaller cities. That is why we included providers from others towns and municipalities in our sampling plan.

An important part of our sampling plan was to include at least 100 participants of the *Second Chance: Elementary Functional Education of Adults* programme. Although it belongs to the formal education sector, the programme covers topics that are not obligatory in 'typical' elementary schools. These are liberal education topics (languages/humanities, ICT, basic skills and competencies) that have been developed specifically to match the needs of adult participants. Additionally, this was the best way to cover respondents with lower education levels (since they do not participate very much in other forms of education) and to achieve the necessary degree of diversity with regard to educational attainment as well.

The plan was to collect 50 per cent of the questionnaires online and 50 per cent in a paper-based format. This decision was based on research experience and the characteristics of Serbian respondents, who are not used to online questionnaires. (The second reason was the fact that participants in elementary functional basic education of adults needed to have the paper version because of their low ICT literacy.)

The research goal (regarding the number of questionnaires to be collected) was accomplished, but it was obvious that data collection in Serbia would be slow and that it would involve a lot of problems. We distributed a large number of paper questionnaires. We also used a lot of contacts made during presentations of the BeLL project at various events (related to adult education). Moreover, we researched institutions that could help us with the distribution of questionnaires. The result was a database of institutions and organizations suitable for further cooperation with regard to the BeLL questionnaires. A large number of questionnaires was collected that way. Yet it was not enough: some participants kept the questionnaires, and a lot of them never gave them back to us. Many providers (especially private companies) did not want to participate in the study because they did not want to disturb their participants. Some providers were suspicious regarding the purpose of the questionnaire. Plus, people were very unmotivated to fill out the online questionnaires (for various reasons: they did not have time, they did not like the questions, the questionnaire was too long, etc.). Furthermore, many people were willing to participate but did not fulfill the BeLL criteria regarding course length, course purpose, and so on. Because of all that, we sought new, more direct ways of questionnaire distribution by developing new networks. We have been cooperating with the Steering Committee of the *Society of Andragogists* and the *Second Chance* project, and all of these contacts helped us a lot with questionnaire collection.

3) DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY ON NATIONAL COURSE PROVIDERS AND PROFILES

Table 17 shows where Serbian participants were enrolled. The analysis of the table reveals that respondents mostly come from private education providers and organizations. This is not surprising considering the role of these kinds of institutions in the Serbian adult education system (in terms of their numbers and their diverse course offerings). This also confirms that they took precedence over the former workers' universities, now known as people's and open universities. These institutions have a long tradition in Serbia, and there were a great many of them until some years ago, but today their number is decreasing, and 'official statistics have stopped tracking these institutions which means their number has fallen below the statistical importance border' (CONFINTEA VI, 2008, p. 21-22). They face numerous problems (legislation, funding, etc.).

A large number of participants came from non-governmental organizations and institutions. The best way to summarize the role of non-governmental organizations in Serbia is: 'Even though their main role is non-formal education, non-verified and very often unrecognizable, their importance and role is invaluable: they have a key position for creating strategies for education politics, they are working on numerous research studies and projects; their activities often implement governmental strategies for development and inclusion, action plans, etc.; … they have development, additional and corrective role in education system.' (CONFINTEA VI, 2008, p. 24)

Professional associations are very important for the professional development of their members. Their role is becoming more and more important, thus the high number of participants in this group of providers is not surprising.

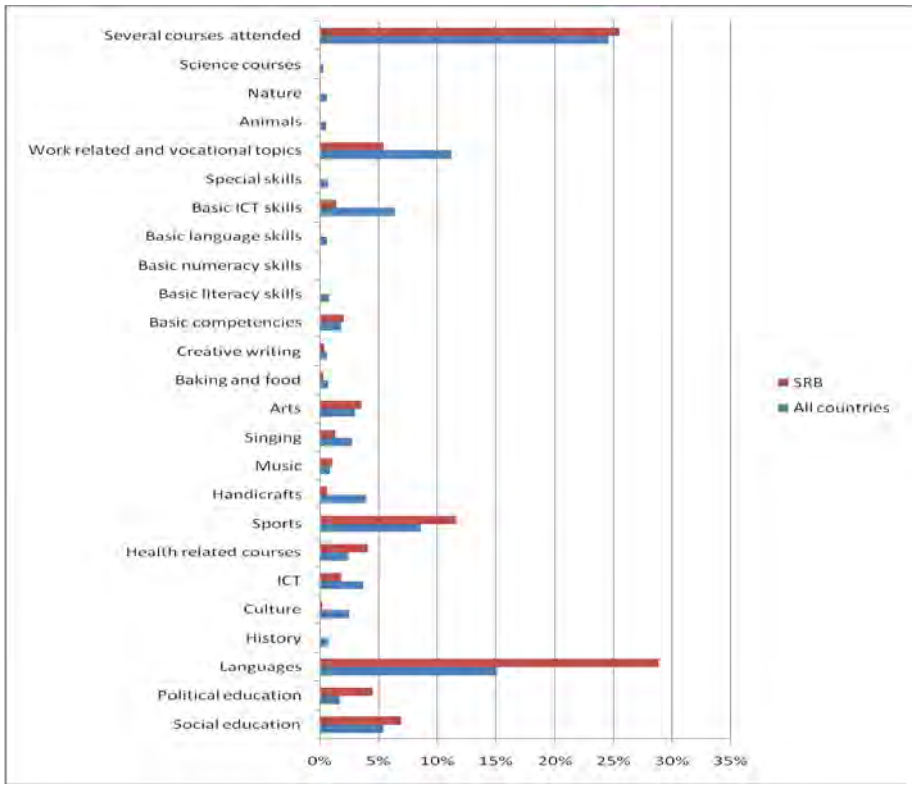
The majority of participants enrolled in elementary or secondary school courses are participants from the above-mentioned *Second Chance* project, 'Systemic development of elementary practice based adult education' (2011-2013). Their provision includes courses such as digital literacy, languages, basic life skills, or 'responsible living in civil society'. This part of the sample was very important considering the overall number of participants enrolled in this programme in Serbia.

The number and percentage of self-organized courses is surprising (more than expected based on previous estimations). This can be important for further actions regarding the liberal AE system.

Table 17 National course providers

Serbia	981	Mentioned by %
Workers', people's, or open universities	80	8.2
Third age universities	41	4.2
Cultural centres, reading rooms, galleries, museums, libraries	66	6.7
Nongovernmental organizations or citizens' associations	174	17.7
Private education providers/organizations	370	37.7
Professional associations	111	11.3
Courses within universities	83	8.5
Courses within elementary and secondary schools	105	10.7
'Self-organized' courses	96	9.8
Other	0	0.0

Figure 44 Courses attended by BeLL respondents, by topic



Source: BeLL

4) DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY OF NATIONAL RESULTS

According to the research results, Serbia had 966 valid questionnaires, 8 interviews, and one focus group.

Table 18 Composition of Serbian BeLL sample, by number of courses, sex, education, employment status, and age group

How many liberal AE courses?		Sex	Education		Employment status		Age group	
one course	66.6%	Male	ISCED 1 or less	10.1%	Employed full time	30.5%	15-24	26.5%
two courses	14.7%	28.2%	ISCED 2	0.9%	Employed part time	3.6%	25-36	47.5%
three courses	14.8%		ISCED 3	36.5%	Self-employed or freelancer	11.0%	37-49	14.2%
more than 3 courses	3.9 %	Female	ISCED 4	10.2%	Doing housework at home	1.0%	50-64	8.1%
		71.8%	ISCED 5 or 6	42.1%	Student full time	20.2%	65-92	3.8%
					Student part time	6.6%		
					Retired/early retirement	7.3%		

Source: BeLL

There are some differences between the Serbian results and the general results. There are more unemployed respondents and full-time students among Serbian respondents than in the overall sample. The reason could be that unemployed people see some work-related benefits in attending a course, some new opportunities for finding a job or acquiring new skills. In the case of the full-time students, they might be more aware of the benefits derived from that kind of learning, because they are already involved in a learning process and understand the situation on the labour market, so they want to adapt. On the other side, there are fewer retired/early retired respondents in Serbia than in the whole sample, and the reason can be their financial situation. Retired people in Serbia belong to the financially weakest groups of the population, and financial barriers for attending the courses are among the most frequent ones.

Based on the qualitative analysis, we can talk about 'more important' and 'less important' benefits. More important benefits are self-efficacy, social network, work-related benefits, and shifts/changes in respondents' education experiences and competencies.

In the research, we found that the following benefits are relevant: self-efficacy, tolerance, trust, social networks, sense of purpose in life, mental well-being, work-related benefits, physical health, health behaviour, family, shifts/changes in education experiences and competencies. There were some categories, however, that we did not find at all, like civic and social engagement and civic competence. This result is in contrast with other countries and with the general results of the study. Some other benefits did not appear in the qualitative part of the research even though they were mentioned in the quantitative part of the study, such as locus of control and civic competencies. In the quantitative part, some respondents considered civic competencies to be relevant, but it was a negligible number.

The reason is probably the perception of civic engagement as not a very positive one – as an inheritance of previous political regimes. The term *civic* and everything around it has a negative political connotation. Moreover, claiming that you are involved or interested in politics is usually interpreted as something very negative, since politics has a negative image in Serbia (not without good reason), and dissociating yourself from it to a certain extent is

perceived as progressive. Compared to the general results, we can conclude that we are dealing with cultural differences, where civic engagement and interests in politics are interpreted in completely different ways.

Surprisingly, family benefits do not come out as a strong effect in the quantitative part of the research. In the qualitative part, interviewees explicitly emphasized this issue, and some did get this benefit indirectly. They recognized it immediately, for example: When asked about family benefits, they could confirm them and reflect on them. In the focus group, it was reported that participants sometimes have difficulties identifying their own benefits because they are so mixed, and the economic situation is always at the centre of attention. But during the course, it did happen that they recognized additional benefits as well.

Our respondents often mentioned that they gained competencies. They improved their mental well-being and their quality of life. As a consequence, they had more opportunities for finding a job, learning other things, and staying in good mental or physical health. They pointed out the social networks they achieved, meeting new, interesting people who shared their interests. It was not so surprising, but still important to get confirmed, that participants have a huge motivation to learn and to improve their own knowledge and skills, to sign up for new courses with fellow participants they met—all of it based on the self-confidence they gained during the learning process.

Respondents noticed that the benefit or benefits they had in mind multiplied various times. They started courses with one purpose and completed the learning process with various benefits they had not expected. Furthermore, it was a valuable fact that participants recognized the key role of the teacher or trainer, as well as the trainer's commitment to what they perceive as a challenging, demanding, and difficult job. They also recognized steps in their own learning process.

The participants of the focus group were not surprised by the results we presented to them. There was no huge difference between our findings and their own observations, but there was huge enthusiasm about the BeLL results. Adult educators/trainers (participants of focus group) were impressed with the results about learners with the lowest educational level. The results showed that they had the strongest health-related benefits and the highest motivation to keep learning. They were surprised to see that the impact of learning is biggest on this category of learners. This differs from their usual experiences, but also from the results of other studies. This result is surprising in general, because usually it is persons with highest educational level who are found to benefit most from further education (Matthew effect).

Keeping in mind the financial situation in Serbia, we can conclude that participants value education very highly and that they see education as an opportunity to improve the quality of their lives, to gain self-confidence, and to get a job in difficult economic times. Participants are often not aware of the benefits they gained from their courses. When asked to reflect on their learning experience, they do not recognize them initially. But when asked in more detail, they could confirm and reflect on the benefits. In the focus group, there were comments that the benefits mostly depend on participants' motivation and the dynamics of the group. The benefits depend very much on various life circumstances.

Our general conclusion is that participants/respondents benefited a lot from attending the courses. Even if they do not name the benefits exactly, or talk directly about what improved the quality of their lives, it was easy to come to this conclusion from their statements and examples.

	FINDINGS/ COMMON CONCLUSIONS FROM FOCUS GROUPS	YOUR FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION
QUESTION 1 **On the basis of your practical experiences would you confirm that most of the benefits presented are to be observed among your participants?**	In general, the results match their experiences. There were a lot of examples for most of the benefits. It was a good thing to hear that course participants reported these benefits. Still, there were comments that the benefits mostly depend on participants' motivation and the dynamics of the group. The benefits also depend on various life circumstances. There were some different opinions. Some participants (in the focus group) reported that participants sometimes cannot exactly identify their benefits because they are mixed, and because the economic situation is always at the centre of attention. Some reported that participants often attended the courses because of some sort of instrumental outcomes. But then, during the course, they recognized some other benefits (which match the presented results). There were a lot of comments about what 'triggers' those benefits.	We find that participants of the focus group are not surprised with the presented results. We could connect this reaction to a discussion about what 'provokes' these benefits, which can also mean that some of them talk with their participants about the course's impact on their lives (on a general level) and that they are reflecting on their role as educators.
QUESTION 2 **Is there a significant difference between your observations and the results presented?**	There is no huge difference between the BeLL findings and their own observations, but there is a huge enthusiasm about the BeLL results. In brief, focus group members were not surprised, but they were very enthusiastic because of the results, especially regarding the results and answers of learners with the lowest level of educational attainment. The results showed they experience the most health-related benefits and the biggest motivation to learn. They were surprised to see that the impact is biggest among that category of learners. This differs from their own experience. The results regardinf participants with the	It is not surprising that the focus group did not expect such results regarding learners with the lowest educational level, because this kind of result is generally surprising, as it is different from the usual research results (usually the persons with the highest educational level are found to benefit most from further education). They saw a great new role for themselves

	lowest education level is considered to be a positive finding. It gives educators hope that they can develop some good strategies with this group of participants in their future work.	regarding the work with less educated persons. This can be very important for the discussions about functional literacy.

5) NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS, REFLECTION

QUESTION 3 **How can we make the best use of the results of the BeLL survey?**	This research seems to have a major influence on improving the practice of educators in the field of non-formal adult education. It is huge motivation for teachers and headmasters in non-formal educational organizations and institutions. They agreed that these results send a message to them, making them feel more responsible for their job and their role in non-formal education. The best way to use the results is to devise or initiate some better systemic solutions.	Focus group members had chance to see that their job can bring change to people's lives and to the situation of the country. They were very motivated to continue to 'change' and 'create' opportunities for them. So, the results served to motivate teachers, making them feel more responsible. Still, they feel that the results must be shared and presented in a way that can bring about some systemic changes. It is probably related to the lack of state support. In Serbia educational institutions are facing serious financial problems, and some changes are needed. Even when teachers/adult educators or education providers have a positive attitude and are enthusiastic about their mission, they face a very challenging financial situation. Discussions and sharing experiences among teachers of different courses can be very useful. Likewise, building some sort of network between teachers in the non-formal sector and reflecting on the BeLL results as a starting point for change would be useful.

- This research might effect some changes and improvements of the lifelong learning practice in the field of non-formal adult education. The BeLL results send a message to educators and make them feel more responsible about their job and their role in non-formal education. The best way to use the results is to devise or initiate some better systemic solutions. This requires a transformation of education providers or the education system.
- The results are highly motivating for teachers and headmasters in non-formal educational organizations and institutions.
- To promote adult liberal education is of utmost importance. The teachers (in the focus group) had a chance to see that their job can change lives and the situation in the country; they were very motivated to continue to 'change' and 'create' opportunities for participants. Still, they feel that the results have to be shared and promoted in a way that can bring about some systemic changes.
- It would be useful to initiate or create some sort of network between teachers in the non-formal sector, and to reflect on the BeLL results as a starting point for change.

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8.8 Slovenia *(Authors: Petra Javrh, Ester Mozina)*

1) The national system of adult education in Slovenia

Legal and financial aspects

Adult education/continuing education[22] and training for young school leavers and adults in Slovenia is defined as an educational activity of adults who have completed some form of initial formal education (or who dropped out of education) and includes educational activities categorized as: formal education; formal national certification system; formal or non-formal continuous training; non-formal and informal adult education.[23]

Since 1996 adult education has been legally regulated through several acts, including the 'Adult Education Act - AEA' or the 'Organization and Financing of Education Act', which define lifelong learning and equal access to education, as well as freedom of education and the professional and ethic responsibility of adult educators, as the fundamental principles of adult education in Europe. At the same time, they regulate the conditions for carrying out adult educational activities. The AEA does not address formal adult education. It regulates the conditions for delivering non-formal education, specifically: programmes for raising the population's level of general education and culture, literacy programmes, work-related and professional training, education and training of the unemployed, education for democracy, foreign language learning, Slovenian language courses for foreigners, and education for the quality of life. AEA also includes the Master Plan for Adult Education (MPAE)[24]. As a main strategic document for adult education, the MPAE determines priorities, target groups, and benchmarks; it also provides financial resources for several years in advance.

Regarding the scope and the time of data collection for the BeLL project in Slovenia (October 2012 – March 2013), it is important to mention that given the priorities of the first MPAE, the first emphasis was placed on general non-formal education, the second on formal education for raising the educational attainment of adults, and the third on job-related education and training. Another emphasis was placed on supportive activities, such as research and development, counselling, guidance, promotion, and quality assurance. We can stipulate that some of the policy measures implemented in Slovenia could be reflected in the results and explain some of the variance between countries. For example, in the 2010-2013 period, a considerable share of public funds for adult education were invested in raising the literacy levels and key competences of adults from vulnerable groups, as well as their computer and digital literacy.

[22] Terms *adult education* and *continuing education* are often used as synonyms in Slovenia.
[23] Non-formal education has two main fields: job-related and general education. The BeLL project is focused only on non-formal general education. In the Slovenian context, the term *liberal education* is often used synonymously with the term *non-formal general education*; it may also include informal learning. But the BeLL project focused only on organized non-formal general education.
24 Namely, the 'Resolution on the Master Plan for Adult Education in the Republic of Slovenia'.

Finances for adult education come from the budget supervised by the Ministry of Education and from local councils' budgets. In accordance with MPAE and annual adult education plans, finances are allocated for the prioritized areas of adult education. Funds for the implementation of annual programmes are provided by the two ministries: the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour.[25] The latter provides funds mainly for vocational education and training and for the acquisition of qualifications in the certificate system. Adult education is also funded by the European Social Fund. Adults enrolling in upper secondary and tertiary education must pay fees. Their fees can either be paid by themselves, or they can be paid fully, or in part, by their employer. In individual cases, when areas of education prioritized by the MPAE are concerned, fees can be paid by the Ministry of Education or by the Ministry of Labour as an active employment measure.

Non-formal general adult education in Slovenia

According to the data collected annually by the Statistical Office of Slovenia on participation in non-formal general adult education (25-65 years), participation has been gradually decreasing from 5.7 per cent (in 2005/2006) to 4.6 per cent (in 2008/2009), although the national target was 6 per cent. In 2009/2010, participation was closer to the target, but in following year it dropped again to 4.9 per cent.

The largest share of adult education is represented by programmes of non-formal adult education and learning; in some cases such programmes can also be accredited (aprox 15% of programmes). They are verified by authorized national bodies; adults receive a written confirmation of the knowledge and skills acquired. Accredited non-formal programmes are, for example, language programmes (foreign languages for adults, Slovenian for foreigners) and other programmes aimed at special target groups (project learning for young drop-outs, literacy programmes). Job-related accredited programmes include training courses, further training, and specialization courses.

Non-accredited programmes represent over 80 per cent of all programmes of non-formal education. Upon completion, adult students receive a written confirmation that they have attended and completed the programme; this statement has validity only in limited environments. These programmes include vocational training (73% of all programmes and 81% of all students) and general programmes (23% of programmes and 16% of students). Non-accredited programmes mainly serve the purpose of job-related training and sometimes also general education. Such programmes include programmes for personal and general needs and for leisure. Their duration can vary from several hours to one hundred hours and more. They are delivered in seminars, courses, lectures, expert conferences, study groups, and the like. Upon completion, participants are sometimes awarded letters of attainment that have no publicly recognized significance, but in most cases they do not receive any certificate at all.

For the time being, there is only one route for obtaining an officially recognized formal education: enrolment in formal education programmes. Since the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal education in the area of formal education has not yet been implemented in practice, non-formal education, no matter how formalized and standardized, does not count towards formal education (Slander, V., Hvala Kamenscek, P., 2007). From this point of view, non-formal programmes may represent an important way of improving and

upgrading your knowledge and skills and obtaining new competences, but they do not give you a higher social status. However, this may represent a competitive advantage when competing in the labour market.

Institutions

There are numerous providers of non-formal adult education in Slovenia, and their provision of programmes is attractive. Institutions providing adult education in Slovenia are: folk high schools (adult education centres), schools and higher education institutions, and other institutions whose main activity is not the provision of adult education. The data on types and numbers of providers, as well the number of participants, are collected annually on a national level via surveys at the providing institutions. However, from the list in Table 19 non-formal programmes not related to work are only provided by folk high schools, some adult education units in secondary schools, and non-governmental organizations.

Table 19 Types and numbers of providers of non-formal education in Slovenia in 2012

	Number of poviders	Number of participants
Folk high schools	30	34,274
Specialized training organizations	108	61,632
Adult education units at secondary schools	31	20,173
Training units in companies	31	128,269
Educational centres at chambers	3	9,050
Non-governmental organizations	29	14,132
Driving schools	107	22,784
Other providers	19	12,026
Total	358	302,340

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2012

In Slovenia, 30 folk high schools are currently in operation. They were founded by their respective local councils. The major part of their offer comprises programmes of formal education: foreign languages, science, mathematics and computing, and others. Most programmes are designed to help people meet the requirements for employment (48%), while others cover general needs and personal interests. The next group of adult education providers includes schools and higher education institutions providing education for youth and mainly in formal programmes that lead to a qualification or degree. They also offer short training courses, refresher courses, and supplementary and specialization courses. Private educational organizations specializing in the provision of adult education mainly offer programmes of non-formal education (services, computing, assistance with employment and foreign languages); however, they can also register to provide formal programmes.

Adult education is also provided by many other institutions whose main activity is not adult education. These include: education centres within companies; chambers of commerce, industry, trade, and crafts; small business, vocational, and expert associations; and others (e.g. libraries, centres for social work, clubs, and associations). There is a range of programmes in informal adult vocational education that do not lead to qualifications or degrees but are nonetheless important for enhanced job performance.

Participation

Compared the EU average, Slovenia seems a rather prosperous country as regards the participation of adults in education. Participation in all forms of education in Slovenia was 16.2 per cent in 2010, dropped to 15.9 per cent in 2011, and fell once more to 14.5 per cent in 2012 (EU target: 15%) (Celebic, 2010).

Comparative data show that Slovenia has extreme differences regarding the participation in adult education between the most educated (ISCED 5-6) and the least educated (ISCED 1-2) adults. In Slovenia, the participation rate in adult education among the most educated adults is three times higher than that among the least educated (in Sweden and Finland, it is 1.5 times higher; in Germany two times higher). As regards the participation of adults in non-formal education, this difference is even bigger: In Slovenia the most educated are five times more likely to participate in non-formal education; in Finland, Sweden, and Germany, it is two times more (Master Plan on Adult Education, 2013).

Although the importance, value, quality, and scope of publicly financed adult education and learning in Slovenia have grown considerably in the past decade, there are still many fields that should be addressed. Adult participation in education in Slovenia depends strongly on the socio-economic characteristics of the adult population (gender, age, formal educational level, status of activity, occupation, place of living, etc.) as indicated by several domestic and foreign studies. There are certain issues that need to be addressed in the future years: There is a considerable disparity between more and less educated adults in terms of their participation in learning activities; the most vulnerable groups haven't been reached with adequate support and motivation; the four-year secondary attainment rate at the upper secondary level, which is a prerequisite for tertiary-level enrolment, is not satisfactory; the share of non-vocational learning within non-formal learning is below the desired level; an adequate system of evaluation and assessment of prior learning has not yet been implemented; and the network of providers delivering publicly relevant and publicly financed programmes, as well as supportive activities for vulnerable groups, does not have proper financial support for stable provision on the one hand, and is not spread evenly throughout the country on the other (Beltram, 2013).

2) The BeLL Study and its main results for Slovenia

Data collection

Data collection for the BeLL project was implemented in several steps. First, we created a database of the main providers of non-formal education in Slovenia (e.g. folk high schools, private education institutions, secondary schools with adult education departments, public libraries, university of the third age, regional development agencies). The plan was to contact adult learners through those providers' organizations. The participation of institutions and adults in the BeLL survey was completely voluntary. First, we sent e-mails to the directors of

603 institutions, inviting them to participate in the BeLL survey. The following documents were attached to the mails: an invitation letter signed by director of SIAE (featuring an introduction of BeLL, highlighting the importance of the survey for AE in Slovenia, etc.), guidelines for selecting adult learners (24 learners in each institution), and a short letter to be sent to participants directly or printed out for the paper-based questionnaire. Providers were asked to select respondents from different types of courses, such as languages and humanities, ICT, creative arts, social skills, active citizenship, health and sports, basic skills and competences. Institutions were also asked to complete a short report about the data collection. Altogether, 60 organizations confirmed their participation in the BeLL project. For example, almost all folk high schools took part in the survey. Slovenia reached the target number of adults, and 1,075 questionnaires were collected in the period from October 2012 to February 2013.

One of the unexpected results of data collection in Slovenia is that more than half of all questionnaires were completed on paper, because people tend to avoid electronic versions of the questionnaire.

Overview of the BeLL sample

This distribution of adult education providers implementing the programmes in which respondents participated is characteristic of Slovenia. However, this distribution reflects the actual offer of liberal adult education programmes only to a certain extent. BeLL questionnaire respondents took part in courses or seminars at the following institutions (based on their answer to the question, "Which of the following course providers organized these courses?'):

Table 20 Liberal adult education providers attended by Slovene BeLL sample

Course providers	N=1055	Mentioned by %
Folk high school	507	48.1
Third age university	264	25.0
Private educational institution	132	12.5
Community health centre, centre for social work, labour office, development agency, etc.	97	9.2
Department of adult education at a secondary school or post-secondary vocational school	87	8.2
Library, museum, gallery, etc.	73	6.9
Non-governmental organization, association, trade union, religious organization	54	5.1
Other organization	35	3.3
I studied on my own.	34	3.2
Chamber (of commerce and industry, of crafts and small businesses, of agriculture and forestry, etc.)	11	1.0

Nearly half of Slovene respondents (48.1%) participated in programmes of non-formal education offerred by folk high schools, which is not surprising considering the distribution of the most important providers of non-formal education in Slovenia. A quarter of all respondents (25.0%) participated in programmes at the third age university. The BeLL sample thus reflects the situation in Slovenia, where folk high schools are the main providers of non-formal general adult education programmes. One of the reasons is that substantial public funding for non-formal programmes was available in the period of BeLL data collection (European social fund), and a lot of those funds were used by folk high schools to attract adult participants from older age categories. It has to be emphasized that older respondents are somewhat overrepresented in the Slovene sample, because the share of these respondents in the population that actually participates in non-formal education is smaller.

Private educational institutions are next (12.5%), followed by a diverse range of providers of non-formal education, such as community health centres, centres for social work, labour offices, development agencies, and so on. The least popular providers include departments of adult education at secondary schools or post-secondary vocational schools, libraries, museums, galleries, and even non-governmental organizations, associations, trade unions or religious organizations that organize non-formal education. Their low share can be explained by the fact that our research was implemented when many of providers were not responsive; the other reason is that many of those instutions do not provide courses and programmes on a regular basis.

It is interesting that the share of chambers is very low (e.g. of commerce and industry, of crafts and small businesses, of agriculture and forestry, of commerce, etc.), despite the fact that professional associations traditionally organize a broad range of non-formal educational programmes. One of the reasons was that courses were not related to work-related contents. Educational programmes offered by chambers are usually work related, even if they do not provide certificates.

Age:

The age structure of Slovene respondents is disproportionate in relation to the population, since most respondents (40.7%) were between 50 and 64 years old, and a quarter of the respondents belonged to the last age category of those up to 94 years old (25.0%). The age structure of the Slovene sample was similar to that of the Finnish sample; likewise, the Slovene sample featured considerably fewer (10%) younger persons (from 15-24 and 25-36 years) than are found in the population. According to LFS in 2009, the adult education participation rate was highest in the youngest selected age group (25–34 years) and lowest in the group of 55– to 74-year-olds. The participation gap between the youngest and the oldest age group was among the highest in the EU-27. The participation rate of adults in formal education decreases strongly with age, whereas participation in non-formal education among the populations aged 25–34 years, 35–44 years, and 45–54 years stays almost at the same level and decreases after the age of 55 years (Celebic, 2010).

Employment status:

The above is also evident from respondents' employment status, because the Slovene featured twice as many retired or prematurely retired persons as the average in other states (SI 52.8%; other states altogether 25.9%). One quarter of the sample is still active in the

labour market (employed or self-employed); one quarter is made up of homemakers, students, and unemployed individuals; and half of the sample consists of retired persons. The shares of unemployed and employed persons were nearly the same; however, regarding the whole sample of unemployed persons, there was a bigger share of unemployed persons in the Slovene sample than in other countries, and there were considerably fewer employed persons in the Slovene sample. This can be explained by the fact that folk high schools in Slovenia implement many free courses for vulnerable groups. Especially aimed at enhancing basic skills, these courses are financed by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour.

According to LFS data (2009) regarding participation in education by labour status, participation is highest among unemployed people, followed by persons in employment and the inactive population. Participation in formal education is highest among unemployed persons; participation in non-formal education is highest among persons in employment. Slovenia exceeds the EU-27 average in all statuses of activity: most among unemployed persons and least among the inactive population. In the 2004–2009 period, adult participation in formal or non-formal education increased only among unemployed persons.

Educational level:

As stated earlier, people's level of education is a predictor of their participation in adult aducation in Slovenia. On the basis of LFS data, the participation rate of adults aged 25–64 years in formal or non-formal education increases rapidly with the level of acquired formal education and is highest among tertiary-educated persons (Celebic, 2010). Regarding the educational structure of the Slovene respondents, there were more respondents at level ISCED 3, which is rather consistent with the statement that the majority of the sampled population participated in ICT and digital literacy courses, as well as in key competence courses—that is, courses designed for adults with fewer than four years of upper secondary education.

If we look at the educational structure, using a classification more suitable for the Slovene circumstances, we get a clearer picture. Most respondents finished upper secondary school; most finished four-year upper secondary professional school. Some finished upper secondary general school (e.g. grammar school); some finished three-year vocational secondary school. All of these three groups were included in ISCED 3, despite the fact that there are big differences between schools in terms of curricular requirements. It is evident that a relatively large number of respondents finished higher vocational school. These are predominantely found in courses at the third age university, which as a rule predominantely enrols older people with post-secondary or higher degrees. For those people, participation in liberal adult education has become a standard quality of life issue in the third age period.

Gender:

In the Slovene sample, the share of women is the same as the average in other countries. This result reflects the higher share of women in adult education in Slovenia. According to LFS in 2009, the participation rate of women in education was higher than that of men (annual data). The gender difference in adult education participation exceeded the EU-27 average. In the 2004–2009 period, the participation rates of both women and men decreased (Celebic, 2010).

Number of courses:

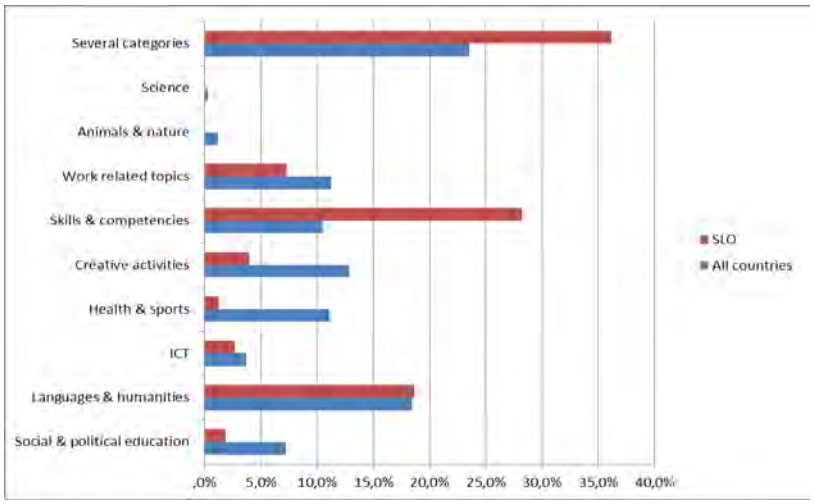
More than one quarter (26.2%) of Slovene respondents participated in two courses in the last year; one-sixth participated in three or more courses (16.5%); more than half of respondents participated in one course (57.3%). On average, the number of courses taken by Slovene respondents does not differ from the overal BeLL sample.

National course topics in comparison with other countries:

ICT courses are more frequent than it is the average in other countries. These are basic ICT courses, designed for people who previously did not have a need or an oppo-rtunity to enhance their basic ICT skills, such as e-mail, Internet, and basic digital photography. These are usually elderly participants, taking courses at folk high schools and the third age university. A higher volume of basic computer courses in Slovenia was also a consequence of higher government investment in this area in the 2010-2013 period. These courses were free for adults with no previous computer experience. Slovene respondents participated in programmes for the development of key competences twice as often as the average in other countries. This can also be explained by the national policy and the strong representation of folk high schools, which provide the majority of general non-formal programmes. In the year the project was implemented, folk high schools benefited from special national initiatives and measures, the goal of which was to enhance and develop people's basic skills and key competences. These initiatives included free education for less-educated target groups. It has to be mentioned that basic skills and literacy programmes have been developed on an ongoing basis for the last 15 years. Almost two decades of adult literacy provision is based on professional expertise and research, which confirmed the country-specific model of educational programmes for vulnerable target groups (Javrh, 2011).

Language courses enjoy above-average popularity, although there are fewer courses for basic language skills. In Slovenia, many people have traditionally participateed in language courses, basic and advanced. Besides, there are many conversation courses that aim to enhance learners' secondary school knowledge on an applied level. This conclusion is also supported by the comparisons between the main categories (see below), where we can see that the percentages for the 'languages & humanities' category are nearly the same as the BeLL average. The Slovene sample neither contained courses aimed at basic numeracy skills nor courses in the field of science, nature, and animals. Likewise, there were no courses in the field of music, despite the fact that there is a rich choir tradition in Slovenia. It might be that adults do not think of choir singing as an educational activity but rather as a leasure activity. In addition, there are other courses with below-average representation from the following fields: creative writing, history, basic literacy skills, sports, and special skills and crafts. A general comparison of the main categories into which the courses are divided enables us to draw some general conclusions.

Figure 45 Courses attended by BeLL respondents, by topic



* Multiple course types attended

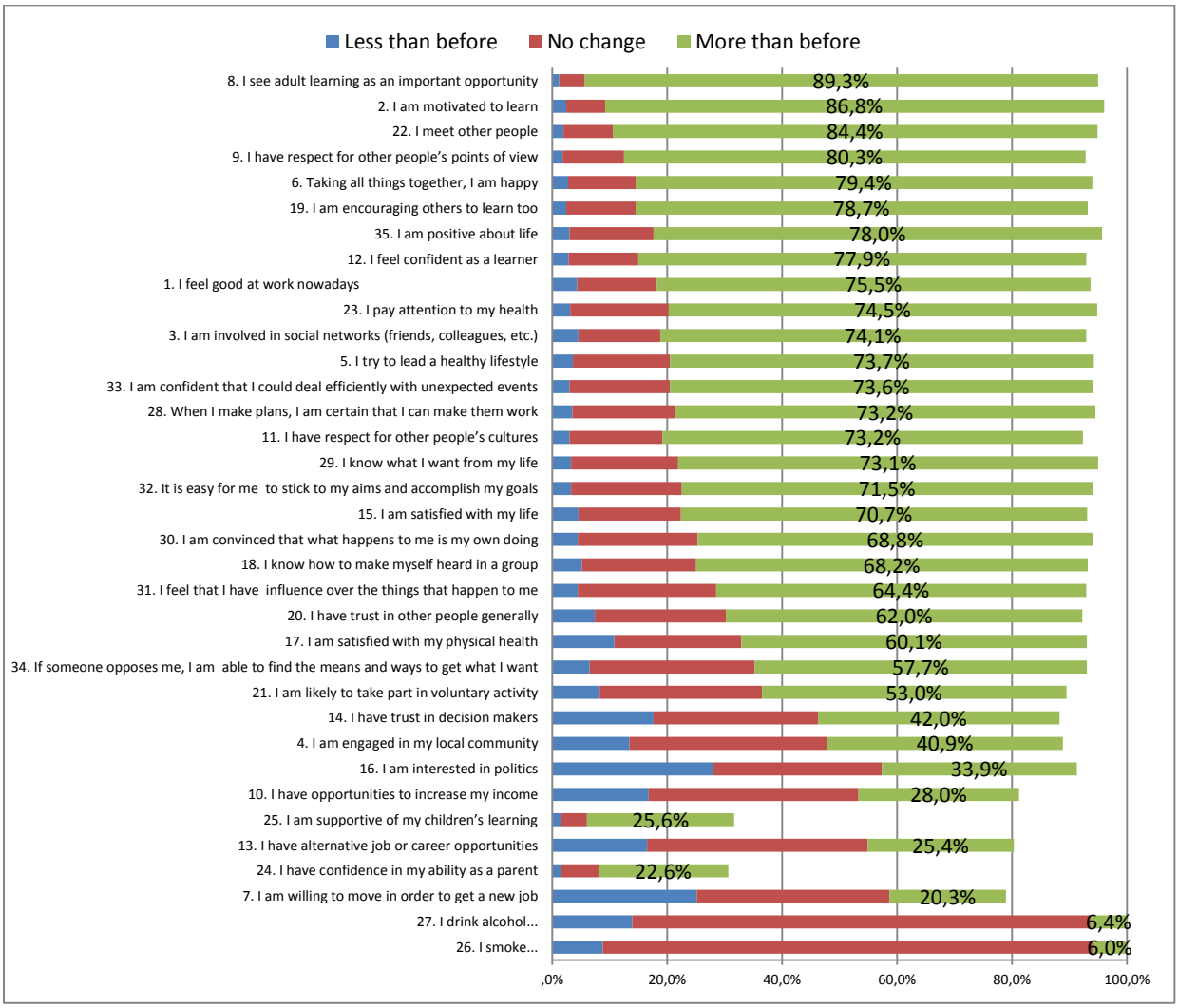
Source: BeLL

Foreign language and humanities courses were as popular as in other countries. However, the Slovene sample features considerably fewer courses in the fields of creativity and social education, and especially in the field of health and sports. Courses in science, nature, and animals were not represented at all in the sample. The main reason is the low response rate of institutions implementing such courses. Work-related contents are less popular in the Slovene sample than they are on the BeLL average. Researchers took seriously the requirement that, when selecting the sample, non-formal education courses that are not work related get included in the research. Special attention was paid to the fact that organizations offering work-related courses were not included in the sample. Slovenia took consistent account of this requirement.

It is interesting that ICT courses are not more popular, although Slovene respondents attended basic ICT skills more frequently (22.8%) than the average BeLL respondent (6.4%). This is due to the larger share of older course participants, who frequently seek basic ICT knowledge, because during their active working years, they did not have a need for this knowledge or the opportunity to acquire it. In Slovenia, adult participants in 2012 were considerably more (28.2%) focused on the development of basic skills and competences in the sense of general knowledge than in other countries (10.5%). Participants more frequently participated in two or more programmes.

Main findings and conclusions

Figure 46 Changes caused by participation in non-formal education in Slovenia



Source: BeLL

For the vast majority of Slovene respondents (more than 80%), the biggest changes occurred in the same fields as for participants in the other BeLL countries. However, the affirmative answers were several times more explicit than the BeLL average. Slovene repsondents saw the biggest changes in the fact that they view liberal adult education as 'an important opportunity' (89.3%), that they are 'more motivated for learning' (86.8%), that they 'more frequently (or again) meet with other people' (84.4%), and that they 'have more respect for the opinions of others' (84.3%). The percentage differences between the Slovene results and the results of the whole sample are not big, and it is possible to partially attribute them to differences in respondents' age structure, level of education, and employment status between the samples. Despite the fact that the changes caused by liberal adult education in Slovenia are small in comparison with the whole sample, it is necessary to pay attention to some interesting points and tendencies. It is evident that Slovene respondents prefer to choose more extreme answers and that they noticed the changes more frequently than the rest of the respondents (the difference is at least 2%–3% or even considerably more for the

majority of the answers). The biggest difference is in the frequency of the answer 'I feel good at work nowadays', because considerably more Slovene respondents (21.3% more) think that they also experienced benefits in this field, although other data show that work-related benefits are generally not as prominent among Slovene respondents as they are for the rest of the sample.

A detailed examination of differences in the results according to the main factors

Control of own life

When we look at the first order factors, the differences are not very big. In the dimension 'meaning of life'—this is one of the three components of the second order factor 'control of own life'—it is possible to notice some differences. Slightly more Slovene respondents feel positive about life (SI 78%, all BeLL countries 74%), and there are more who 'know what they want from their life' (SI 73.1%, BeLL 69.3%), which shows that they have slightly more control over their own lives. Regarding the factor 'control of own life', it was striking to see that in some countries, including Slovenia, respondents selected the options 'more' and 'much more' more frequently than respondents in other countries. Various interpretations are possible. Regarding the strongest influence of the country variable, one of the most persuasive explanations is that this tendency results from socio-economic differences between two groups of countries: a) economically stable countries, where participants of non-formal education do not recognize such strong benefits (e.g. Switzerland, Germany), and b) economically instable countries, where participants notice statistically important benefits (e.g. Slovenia, Spain, Romania). Nevertheless, it will be important to have a more detailed look at another possible explanation of the Slovene result: The majority of courses in Slovenia are of medium length, and they have more complex goals. Empowerment is another important goal—in other words, this means 'greater control of one's own life'. The courses which belong to the model of courses for vulnerable groups and the majority of courses implemented by the third age university—they both represent a big share in the Slovene sample—are exactly the kind of courses that aim to empower adults. Maybe the Slovene result reflects this benefit rather than social-economic differences between more or less stable countries. Slovene respondents listed self-efficacy as a consequence of their participation in liberal adult education more frequently than the average BeLL respondent (10% more).

Attitudes & social capital

Regarding this factor, Slovene respondents do not differ remarkably from the rest of the BeLL sample. The sum score of the comparisons between affirmative answers can be compared to the Finnish or German one. The changes noted with regard to enhancing and expanding social networks are characteristic of Slovene respondents; they are mentioned more often than on the BeLL average (SI 74.1%; BeLL 66.9%). This includes being involved in social networks (friends, colleagues, etc.) and meeting other people (SI 84.4%; BeLL 81.4%), which shows that Slovene respondents are not isolated, although the benefits in the field of social and citizenship inclusion are less frequent and weaker. Slightly more than half of them think they will become active in voluntary activities (SI 53.0%; BeLL 52.7%). However, regarding increased participation in a local community (SI 40.9%; BeLL 52.7%), Slovene respondents did not notice greater benefits than the average BeLL respondent in

the whole sample. There were even 12 per cent who became less active in a local community after participation in a course. One possible explanation is that Slovene participants frequently participate in more than one course and thus experience a lack of time. This speculation can be confirmed by the fact that slightly less than half of Slovene respondents participated in two or more courses in the year before the research was conducted. At the same time, we have to pay attention to the big share of retired respondents attending the third age university who typically participate in many courses at the same time, which is also time consuming. This is another fact which could help us explain why Slovene respondents, after participating in liberal adult education, became slightly less active in local communities than they were before their participation (less than before in SI 13.5%; BeLL11.6%).

If participants report positive changes resulting from their educational experience, we can assume they will increase their participation in the future. Here we can emphasize that liberal adult education is a social mechanism that helps 'repair' the damage done to individuals who had negative educational experiences in formal education. Slovene research in this field (Javrh 2011) shows that among educationally inactive adults from vulnerable groups, there were many who, in their personal educational biographies, had one or more consecutive negative educational experiences. These experiences had a massive influence on their further participation in education. The experiences of practitioners confirmed this in a 2009–2010 national evaluation of certified programmes for vulnerable groups (Možina 2010 a, Možina 2010 b, Možina 2010 c).

The experiences of practitioners revealed why a positive change in adult learners' educational experience is a precondition for them to achieve the envisaged course benefits. The in-depth interviews in the evaluation revealed again and again how learners' negative experiences at school reinforced the following convictions among adults from vulnerable groups: 'School is not for me'; 'Reading is too complicated, I make too many mistakes and I do not understand everything'; 'My hands are too clumsy for writing'; 'My knowledge of grammar is not adequate'; 'I do not understand mathematics, it is too demanding for me', and so on. Such negative self-assessments were most often revealed as resulting from unpleasant experiences at primary or secondary school, when teachers focused on students' mistakes and insufficient knowledge rather than on the progress in their learning.

Especially the change of educational experience—from negative, frustrating experiences to interesting, liberating, and pleasant experiences in a group of well-functioning learners—can be one of the basic paths out of the vicious circle of vulnerable adults. The so-called 'leading change' is motivated from the inside based on an individual's new perspective, new wishes and challenges rather than mere survival (cf. Javrh 2011). From the point of view of external motivation, the main goal of the change should not only the economic benefit of the company but also the ongoing development of an individual and a community. Such a change is also a way by which liberal adult education would assure long-term benefits—which is a key change regarding the importance of learning and lifelong endeavours for the development of each individual and thus of society. Therefore, it is not surprising that the vast majority of Slovene respondents, as well as those from other countries, confirmed that they clearly noticed the change in educational experience. A large percentage confirmed that they now view 'education as an important opportunity' (SI 89.3%; BeLL 86.9%). The share of those who said they were 'less motivated for learning', did not view 'education as an important opportunity' as much as they did before, 'encourage other people to participate less now', or even are 'less confident as learners' is practically negligible (less than 3% on average).

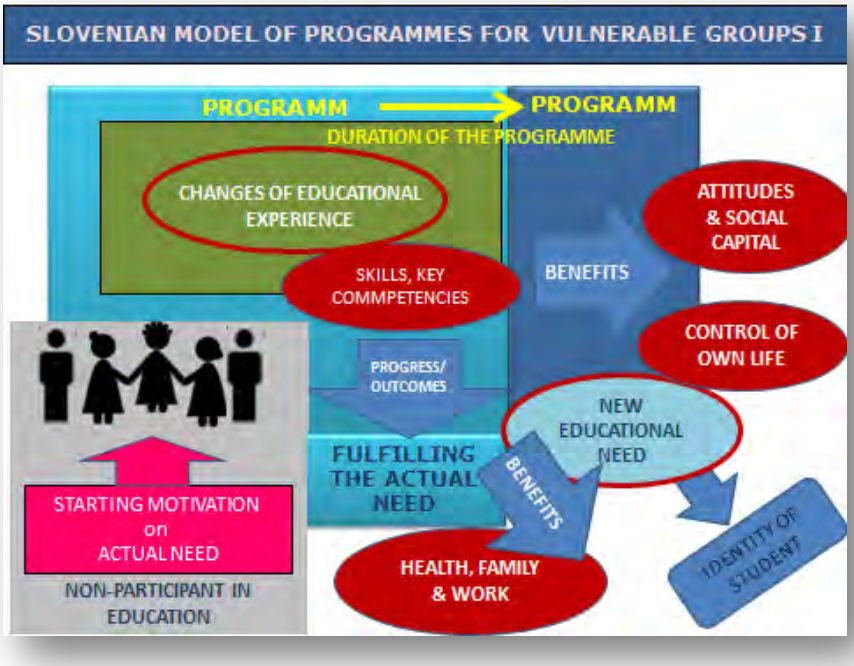
Health, family, and work

It is evident from the comparison of affirmative answers that the answers by Slovene respondents are most comparable to those of the Finnish and Serbian respondents. However, a more detailed analysis of the Slovene sample in comparison with the whole BeLL sample surprises us with certain interesting issues. The field of changes related to respondents' attitude to health in general is slightly more pronounced among Slovene respondents than in the BeLL average. After participation, 'they pay attention to their physical health' (SI 74.5%; BeLL 68.2%), they attempt to live a healthy life (SI 73.7%; BeLL 65.7%), and 'they are satisfied with their physical health' (SI 60.1%; BeLL 58.4%). This is also evident from the control answers, such as 'I drink alcohol' and 'I smoke', which fulfilled their role with regard to the percentages for individual items. The majority of people who participated in liberal adult education courses confirm that they are 'happy in general' (SI 79.4%; BeLL 77.2%). However, this tendency does not continue in the second statement of the mental health factor; namely, Slovene respondents do not experience as much 'satisfaction with their life' as the rest of the sample (SI 70.7%; BeLL72.9%).

Work-related benefits are the field where the Slovene result differs from the rest of the sample with regard to the main factor health, family, and work. 75.5 per cent of Slovene respondents 'feel good at work nowadays', which is 21.3 per cent more than in the whole sample (54.2%).

The main factors formed on the basis of the BeLL data analysis can be compared to the Slovene model of programmes for vulnerable groups. Figure 47 below illustrates the importance of the main factors related to the Slovene experiences and research up to now in the programmes for vulnerable groups (Javrh 2011). As mentioned above, changing adult learners' educational experience is in a way a precondition, or the basis, for all other changes. The Slovene model shows us that course length is an important factor. This was also confirmed by the BeLL data, since the majority of Slovene respondents participated in medium-length programmes.

Figure 47 Slovene model of programmes for vulnerable groups



Source: Author's own

From the analysis of learners' experiences up to now, we know that we cannot expect wider benefits in short courses (Možina 2010 a, Možina 2010 b, Možina 2010 c). However, we are certain that we can expect changes in learners' educational experience in short courses as well. We are sure that this 'direct' need, which motivated a person to participate in a certain programme, has only been partially fulfilled. In the Slovene programmes for vulnerable groups, we can legitimately expect the development of one or more key competences, and thus benefits in the field of health, work, and family are visible. In short programmes, it is more difficult to expect the following benefits: locus of control and changes of attitudes. It is legitimate to expect such benefits in medium- length and long programmes.

In the Slovene context, we do have programmes (e.g. PLYA – Project Learning for Young Adults) where the duration has been adapted to the following goals: better locus of control, better attitudes, and enhancement of social capital. In the Slovene programmes, the emergence of a new educational need is a reliable indicator of the quality of the programme, or the quality of liberal adult education for vulnerable groups. It emerges in short, medium-length, and long programmes. At the same time, it confirms that a change in learners' educational experience has occurred, and that learners are also convinced of the importance of further educational activity: they also came to the conclusion that an individual is capable of achieving more. In order words, we can say that a person's identity as a learner has been re-established. This is a very important long-term benefit from the educational point of view.

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8.9 Spain *(Author: Javier Diéz)*

1) DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL LIBERAL AE SYSTEM

In Spain, training and lifelong learning are delivered in three ways: adult education in the field of educational administration; occupational training for unemployed persons in the area of labour administration; continuing education for employed workers.

Educational administration is regulated by Article 3 of the Organic Law 1/1990, 3 October, of the General Order of the Education System, and has been developed for the various autonomous communities. It offers a series of educational activities aimed at all citizens who have reached the required age to help them acquire and update their basic skills and to provide access to all educational and professional levels.

In adult education we have three categories: formal education (FE), non-formal education (NFE), and informal education (IE). Unlike FE, which issues official qualifications, NFE is a voluntary educational process without a regulatory framework. But it does have specific formats, open and diverse typologies and designs, and it is intentional, planned, and continuously flexible. Some parts of NFE are regulated, offering the possibility to obtain academic certifications, but in reality it often does not lead to these kinds of certifications. IE is characterized as education inseparably bound to any learning situation experienced by a person until death, which is neither specifically planned nor organized as a strict learning situation.

Liberal adult education in Spain is situated between NFE and IE. Typical programmes include literacy, numeracy, personal development, arts (fine arts, arts entertainment, graphic arts and audiovisuals, designs and crafts), humanities (religion and theology, foreign languages and culture, autochthonous languages, history and archaeology, philosophy and ethics), social sciences and behaviours, horticulture and gardening, fishing, health, protection of the environment, and security service. In 2011 the number of people aged between 18-65 who attended liberal adult education courses was 5,559,780 (2,924,923 men and 2,634,858 women) (INE). The important thing about NFE is that while IE is involuntary and FE tends to have young students, in NFE people can voluntarily choose to continue learning, and participants come from a wide age range.

The basic level is structured as a single step process that includes all learning from how to learn to read and write to getting a degree in secondary education. In most autonomous communities, the adult basic education is designed in three stages. The first two stages cover initial education, whereas the third (Level III) is specifically aimed at helping students obtain the degree of secondary education, which does not belong to liberal adult education. The two stages of initial education are: initial I (basic literacy and training) and initial II (training of necessary basic skills for adults to start secondary education). They are aimed at people whose basic skill level does not allow them to access other kinds of education. People who are not able to read or write belong initial level I (CONFINTEA 2009).

In the current situation, people who make use of adult education are those who—for various reasons, such as geographic, economic, and family reasons—have failed to earn their credentials at an age this society deems proper for training, those who did not attend school or only with poor results, and those who had to work from an early age, as well as women who did not receive equal treatment in terms of cultural and *educational* opportunities.

Regarding the places where trainings and courses take place, the most important AE institutions and groups according to the classification made by Sanz (2006) are: popular universities, civic centres, NGOs, trade unions, foundations, citizens' organizations and neighbourhood associations, and adult education schools.

Popular universities are educative and cultural institutions created by groups, associations, and social organizations to promote liberal education directed at the population at large. These are non-profit organizations. The Spanish government promotes lifelong learning through this kind of institution.

Civic centres and centres of social action refer to the socio-cultural equipment located in the neighbourhoods and managed by local governments. The aim is to promote a participatory and associative social tissue.

NGOs (Citizens' organizations, foundations, and neighbourhood associations): These are nongovernmental civil and social institutions. They promote lifelong learning activities among various social groups, depending on the institution's mission.

Trade unions: The largest unions in Spain are UGT (General Union of Workers) and CCOO (Workers Commissions). They mainly offer vocational continuing education for workers.

Adult education schools: These schools develop educational programmes in literacy and numeracy but also other activities to promote ICT access, social skills, languages, and the like.

Libraries: These institutions promote activities designed to bring culture and literature to the population through reading seminars, courses, and so on.

2) DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE PLAN AND DATA COLLECTION IN OWN COUNTRY AND PROBLEMS IN DATA COLLECTION

In our country, quantitative data were collected by CREA-UB. We proceeded in various ways. First of all, we sent an e-mail presentation encouraging adult learners to participate in the online questionnaire. We sent it to more than 1,500 institutions in charge of adult education and lifelong learning in Spain: popular universities, adult schools, civic centres and centres of social action, citizens' organizations, foundations, and neighbourhood associations and libraries.

After this first contact, we proceeded by calling different institutions by phone (around 300 calls), mainly popular universities, adult schools and civic centres, to encourage their involvement in the distribution of the online questionnaire.

In the third phase, we contacted various adult schools in some major Spanish cities, such as Barcelona or Tarragona, and relatively small municipalities, like Ripollet, Platja d'Aro, and the like, where we collected a major part of the paper-based questionnaires, and then we introduced them to the online version.

As a result, the most successful strategy was to visit adult schools and talk directly with professionals. This communication facilitated not only the implementation but also the distribution of paper questionnaires and won us the support of professionals at the centres.

Regarding the qualitative data, as stated in the *Qualitative National Report* already submitted by CREA, we conducted a total of 10 interviews at two different adult education providers, both based in the North East of Spain (one in the city of Barcelona and one in the city of Tarragona). Interviewees were chosen randomly. The only selection criterion was that they were taking (or had taken) at least one liberal education course during the past 12 months. The research design was conducted by the BeLL team. For analysing the qualitative data collected, we used a *code list* developed by the BeLL project. The coding was conducted by two different persons in CREA. In addition, coding was also shared with the rest of the group via *Google groups*. The discussions conducted using this tool were useful to clarify ambiguous statements. Examples shared through *Google groups* helped clarify the codes.

3) DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY ON NATIONAL COURSE PROVIDERS AND PROFILES

Table 21 shows the percentage of places where participants studied. As we can see, the most popular place is the adult education centre. Enrolment there is remarkably high compared to the second place, which is local institutions or organizations. The less popular places shown here include unemployment agencies, employers, and trade unions, which is interesting because even though these places are associated with employment, people don't sign up for courses in these areas while society is concerned about rising unemployment. Another thing is that the strong popularity of adult education centres implies that they are well known among citizens, or easy to access when people are interested in taking classes. We also need to mention that the number of such centres varies. The popularity of AE centres is also due to the fact that they are found all over Spain. In 2010 the number of AE centres was 1,518, of which 386 are non-specific centres (359 public and 27 private) and 754 offer more specific programmes. (http://www.infonet-ae.eu/en/adult-education-in-spain-1077)

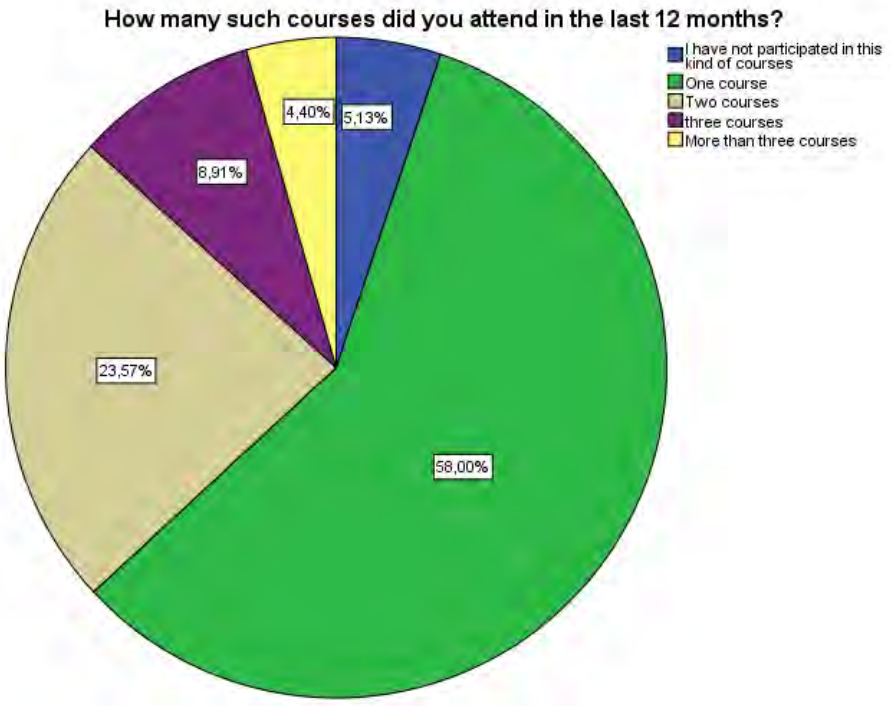
Table 21 Liberal adult education providers attended by Spanish BeLL respondents

Spain	898	Mentioned by %
Upper vocational training school	74	8.2
University school	17	1.9
Institution / Local organization	270	30.1
Community organization	113	12.6
University	24	2.7
Private entity	62	6.9
Employer	5	0.6
Trade union	9	1.0
Self-organized course	11	1.2
Others	18	2.0
Adult education centre	376	41.9
Unemployment agency	4	0.4
Middle school	24	2.7

4) DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY OF NATIONAL RESULTS

The majority of Spanish survey respondents are people who report having attended one course during the last 12 months, as shown in Figure 48

Figure 48 Number of courses attended by Spanish respondents during the last 12 months



Source: BeLL

The types of training attended by Spanish respondents indicate a wide range of interests. Table 22 shows that many participants take courses in 'social education', 'languages', 'culture', 'ICT', 'basic skills', or 'literacy', among others. This indicates a clear interest in acquiring general knowledge (as shown in the qualitative analysis of the interviews represented in Figure 49), and more specifically in getting in touch with other people (social interaction). This kind of benefit prevails over 'professionalizing' or labour market-oriented benefits, even though in Table 22 'work-related and vocational courses' appear as the most popular option.

In a disaggregated analysis, the first benefit is 'motivation for learning'. 'Career options' appear as the second category, also mentioned by interviewees as important. (For instance, all ten interviewees said that this was one of the most relevant reasons for them to start participating in a training course, as explained in the *Qualitative National Report*).

We think that this fact has to be understood in the context of the current financial, economic (and even social) crisis that is taking place in several European countries, including Spain. As expressed by some interview respondents, participating in training courses is a good opportunity both to make good use of their time (if they are unemployed) and to acquire more

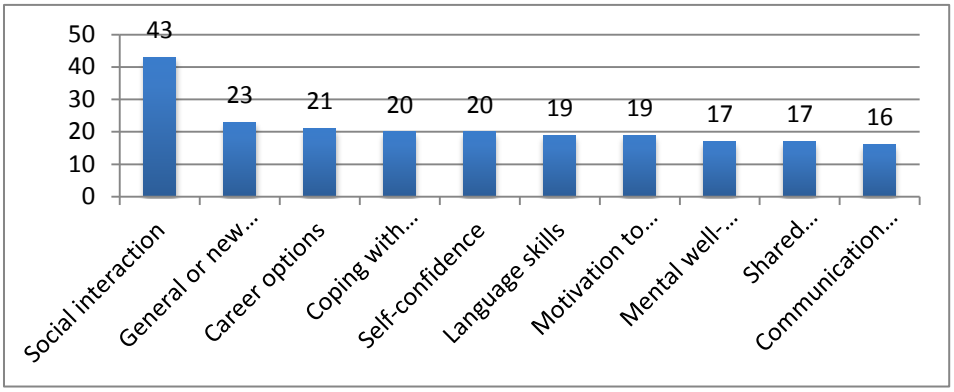
specialized training. In both cases, the goal is always to increase professional opportunities: to access job positions (when the participant is unemployed) or to improve the current professional position.

Table 22 Courses attended by Spanish BeLL respondents, by topic

	Frequency (n)	Valid per cent
Social education	19	2.2
Political education	5	.6
Languages	90	10.3
History	3	.3
Culture	45	5.2
ICT	52	6.0
Health-related courses	10	1.1
Sports	7	.8
Handicrafts	2	.2
Singing	3	.3
Arts	5	.6
Creative writing	2	.2
Basic competencies	60	6.9
Basic literacy skills	46	5.3
Basic numeracy skills	4	.5
Basic language skills	24	2.7
Basic ICT skills	116	13.3
Work-related and vocational courses	379	43.4
Total	873	100.0
Missing data	56	
Total	929	

Table 22 describes the types of topics of the courses taken by the questionnaire's respondents. The most important topic is 'work-related and vocational courses': almost half of all participants list this topic among the courses they took (43.4%). In the second position, far behind, we find 'basic ICT skills' courses (13.3%). These topics, together with 'languages', constitute more than the 60 per cent of the sample. This means that more than 6 out of 10 participants took courses related to one of these three topics. By contrast, training courses related to 'history', 'handicrafts', 'creative writing', 'basic numeracy skills', 'political education', 'sports', or 'arts' don't even represent 1 per cent of the sample.

Figure 49 The 10 most frequently mentioned benefits in the interviews



In fact, it is significant that in the analysis of the interviews conducted during the fieldwork, the most frequently cited category after 'social interaction' and 'general knowledge' was indeed 'career options' (see Figure 50). This has led us to consider—as a working hypothesis—that the variable 'access to work/working place' has a relevant influence on people's decision whether or not to participate in a liberal training course. The existence of a wide variety of academies and vocational training centres in Spain allows adult people to opt for different 'vocational' courses that, although not part of the national system of VET education, might be useful in terms of job seeking.

Respondents said they attended adult education schools (40.7%) or local institutions (29.4%) such as cultural associations, civic centres, or neighbourhood associations. However, hardly anybody chose to participate in training at the workplace (employer). In general, adult people attend trainings at specific training centres. Adult education schools not only integrate formal training offers for adults but also provide space and resources for organizing non-formal and informal training alternatives, that is, liberal education as understood by BeLL.

Table 23 Liberal adult education institutions attended by Spanish BeLL respondents

Upper university	75	8.1
School university	18	1.9
Local institution	273	29.4
Community organization	115	12.4
Private initiative	62	6.7
Employer	5	0.5
Trade union	9	1.0
Self-organized course	11	1.2
Adult education school	378	40.7
Employment agency	4	0.4
Middle school	24	2.6
Other	18	1.9

* Some courses may be organized by two or more types of organizations.

Source: BeLL

All respondents pointed out that attending courses of liberal education provided a number of benefits for them. 'Getting new knowledge' was highlighted as one of the most prominent benefits. But it is not the only one. Respondents also mention 'going deeper into their knowledge', benefits related to their self-image, health conditions, improved career opportunities, and so on. The majority of participants state that training has clearly improved their social networking. In addition, drawing on the qualitative analysis, other benefits came up, such as 'motivation for learning', 'appreciation of lifelong learning as a very important opportunity', and 'respect for other people'.

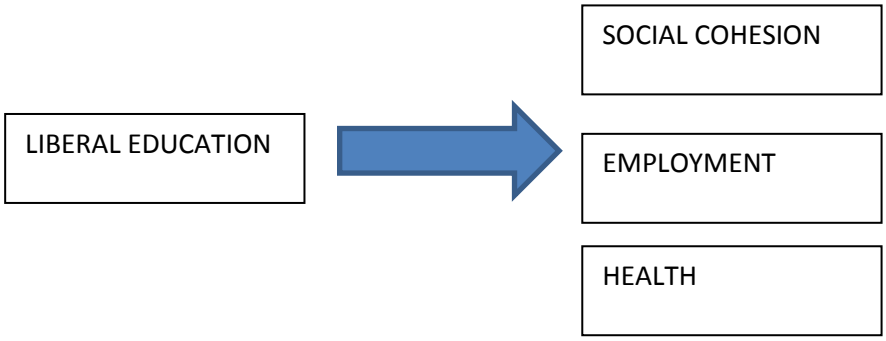
5) NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS, REFLECTION

Regarding the policy recommendations based on the results of this study, the first idea we want to stress is that liberal education produces clear benefits that help improve participants' lives and expectations. What this study indicates is that in the case of Spain, liberal education has a major impact on participants' social life. People explained that they got in touch with more people, enhanced their social life, and made more friends, and that this experience has an impact on the way we live together and the social fabric. Values such as solidarity, respect, or coexistence are benefits with a clear impact on social cohesion and people's welfare. As previously discussed, this is the main benefit emerging both from the quantitative and the qualitative analysis in the case of Spain.

Moreover, other relevant benefits identified in our study include the improvement of participants' career opportunities. We believe that this is an inflated element, caused by the current situation. But even though at this point a lot of people see training as a way to improve their professional situation, it is true that training in Spain has traditionally been closely related to the labour market. In this sense, a policy recommendation emerges from this connection between training and work, given that training can be a catalyst for re-organizing the national labour force according to professionalising criteria. This has an important economic, social, and productive impact, which many economic analysts have shown in the past.

Furthermore, another element identified as a benefit of liberal education is that participants change the way in which they take care of themselves. Training has positive effects on improving participants' health habits, as well as on health *per se*.

Figure 50 Key benefits of liberal adult education



Policy recommendations in our point view must take into account that liberal education plays a key role in our societies, considering the wide variety of benefits it produces. For that reason, counselling services for adults, and more specifically liberal education, must become more relevant in national educational policy and receive the same attention as the formal education system.

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8.10 Switzerland *(Author: Irena Sgier)*

1) DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL LIBERAL ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM

In Switzerland, adult education is a highly **decentralized and heterogeneous** system. Lack of transparency is a constant issue in this sector. Generally the government and the 26 cantons have a shared responsibility for the educational system. The cantons are responsible for the primary sector as well as for most parts of the secondary and tertiary sector. Vocational education is the responsibility of the federal government.

There is no federal law on liberal adult education and therefore no national funding or programmes in this field. There are, however, a few exceptions in specific areas of public interest. For instance, basic skills programmes can be supported by the state. Where general adult education is regulated, it is mostly in the responsibility of the cantons and communities, but only a few cantons have respective legislation. Some cantons support providers like the Folk High Schools.

Adult education in Switzerland is thus mostly **privately organised and funded**. The annual turnover of continuing education in Switzerland is 5.3 billion CHF (approximately 4.4 billion EUR). Course fees are the main financial source, coming from participants and (in the case of vocational courses) their employers. There are no free courses in adult learning in Switzerland, apart from a few exceptions like vocational courses for the unemployed.

Due to a lack of national **legislation**, the system used to be regulated only in specific areas, leaving the non-vocational part of the system almost entirely to the private sector. Responsibility for the parts that were regulated by the state has been located in several ministries on the national as well as the cantonal levels. This situation is now slowly changing, as the first national law on adult learning is under consideration and will presumably be introduced in 2015. The law will not change the adult learning system, and funding is not likely to increase, but the legislation clarifies the definition of continuing education and introduces some principles regarding responsibility, quality, competition, financing, and so on.

As part of this process, in January 2013, the two **federal departments** that held the principal responsibilities for vocational and adult education matters—and which were located in two different ministries—were merged to become the new 'State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI)'. This merger helps centralise federal responsibilities in that area and hence coordinate them more effectively. This process has positive effects but has not brought any fundamental changes to the adult learning system.

Definition of liberal adult education in Switzerland

Until a couple of years ago, the predominant distinction in adult learning was between vocational and general continuing education. The term *liberal adult education* has never been in use in Switzerland, but the respective kind of education corresponds largely to what was called general continuing education. In recent years, this perspective is gradually being replaced by the differentiation between formal, non-formal, and informal continuing education. What BeLL calls 'liberal adult education' corresponds largely to the field of non-formal, non-vocational adult learning in Switzerland. But in many areas, the differentiation between vocational and non-vocational (liberal) has never been quite clear. Neither providers nor participants feel the need to draw a clear line between the two purposes. In fact, adult learners often attend courses in some popular fields—especially languages, ICT, and personal development—for personal enrichment but with the idea that they might somehow become useful in a vocational context, or vice versa.

Providers

Switzerland has a large number and variety of mostly private providers in the field of adult education. Their exact number is unknown due to a lack of national statistics. But the annual national statistics on participation in adult learning allow for some conclusions about the range of provision.

Providers range from small private schools to large enterprises financed privately or through public bodies, associations, or social partners. There are small learning facilities and freelance instructors. The following table lists the most important types of AE institutions and groups providing adult education:

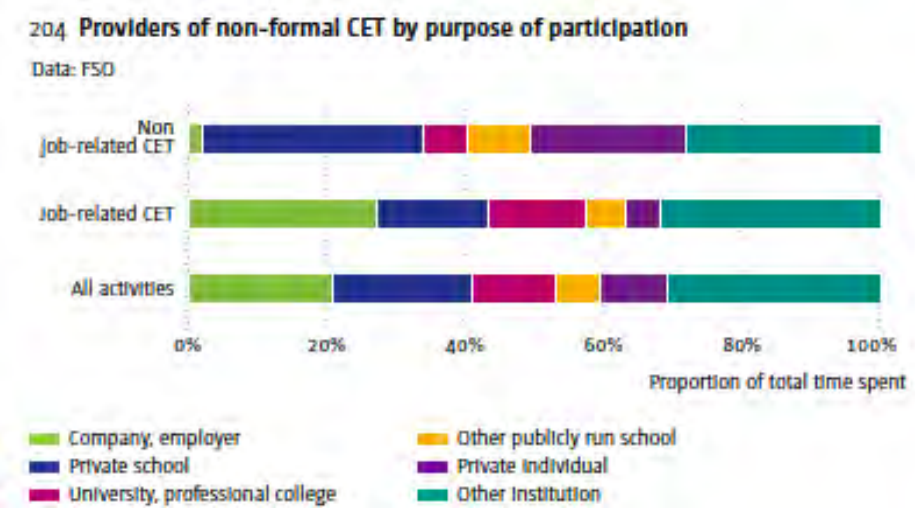
Table 24 Types of AE providers in Switzerland

Companies, employers	Adult education is a side business. It is mostly not public, and the content depends on the aims of the organization.
Private funding bodies (for-profit organizations)	Various AE institutions focussing on liberal adult education and/or vocational trainings
Private funding bodies (non-profit organizations)	AE institutions like *Volkshochschule*, *Migros-Klubschule*. In some institutions, adult education is the key task; in others it is just a side business.
Public funding bodies	Universities, universities of applied science, public vocational schools, EB Zürich
Political, social, and confessional funding bodies (incl. unions)	The contents are related to the values and goals of the funding body.
Self-organized courses	

Source: Author's own

Among the different providers in non job-related continuing education and training (CET), the private sector clearly dominates, providing about 80 per cent of the total training hours per year, whereas publicly supported courses provide only 20 per cent, covered mainly by universities, universities of applied sciences, and other public schools.

Figure 51 Providers of non-formal CET by purpose of participation

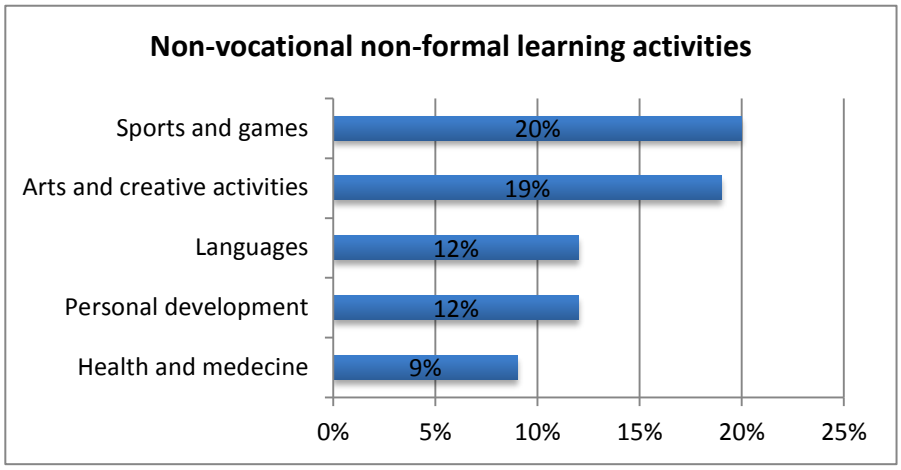


Source: Swiss Education Report 2010, SKBF / CSRE

Course topics

The most popular topics of non-formal, non-vocational education are sports/games, arts, and creative activities. The following figure shows the proportion of each topic (100% = total hours spent in non-formal, non-vocational adult learning per year):

Figure 52 Non-vocational, non-formal learning activities, by topic



Source: Author's own, based on the national participant survey BFS 2011

In the vocational field, health and medicine (15%) are the most popular topics, followed by ICT and personal development (11% each). These numbers refer to the learning activities, not to the learners (i.e. 11% of the total non-formal vocational adult learning in Switzerland in 2011 took place in ICT courses).

Participants and participation rates

Switzerland has one of the highest AE enrolment rates in the OECD area. 63 per cent of adults between 25 and 64 participate in non-formal education. 37 per cent take part in vocational learning only, 17 per cent participate in vocational and general education, and 10 per cent participate only in general education.

Participation rates are higher when informal learning is included: 77 per cent of the population aged between 25 and 64 use non-formal and/or informal adult learning.

The majority (39%) does one non-formal learning activity per year, 22 per cent do two, and 23 per cent do more than two activities (courses, seminars, private teaching, learning on the job).

There are no major differences between the sexes as far as overall participation rates are concerned, although women have a slightly higher participation rate. But there is one clear difference with respect to purpose: About 25 per cent of the women but only 10 per cent of the men take non-vocational courses. Another notable difference between the sexes concerns the course topics. Women attend more courses in health/medicine and personal development than men, while men attend more courses in ICT.

Highly qualified people are more active in non-formal learning than people with low qualifications, as is the case in all European countries. The disparity is rather high in Switzerland compared to other countries.

Regarding the relatively high participation rates in non-formal education in Switzerland, it has to be taken into account here that less than half of the non-formal learning activities (43%) are courses. The remaining activities are workshops, seminars, one-to-one teaching, or organized on-the-job training. The annual national survey does not distinguish between these activities.

(All numbers mentioned above without indication of the source are taken from the annual national survey on adult learning. These data were published by the Federal Statistical Office FSO in 2013, see bibliography below.)

2) DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE PLAN AND DATA COLLECTION IN OWN COUNTRY

In accordance with the BeLL research design and sample plan, survey participants were contacted through the most important providers of liberal adult education in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. The providers generally agreed to distribute the questionnaire, but as the survey period had to be postponed several times, some providers backed out. A second major problem was the low acceptance of the questionnaire in Switzerland, which has partly to do with the length and content of the questionnaire, and with the fact that the population constantly has to deal with numerous surveys. Both factors reduced people's willingness to answer the rather long BeLL questionnaire. Despite these challenges, 274 participants could be reached, which is a good basis for a survey in a single linguistic region in Switzerland.

In addition to the German-speaking region, we contacted the two major providers in the Italian-speaking region. Both agreed to participate but subsequently withdrew because the survey period had to be postponed. The French-speaking region of Switzerland could not be included, because no French version of the questionnaire was available. The German-speaking region comprises around 60% of the Swiss population.

Providers

The following AE institutions were involved in both the survey and the interview part of BeLL. They represent the most important AE institutions in liberal adult education in Switzerland:

Table 25 AE institutions providing liberal adult education in Switzerland

Provider	Number of courses attended by the participants	
	Survey (N = 274 participants)	Interviews (N = 8 participants)
Migros Klubschule is the biggest private AE institution in Switzerland with more than 600 different adult learning programmes and around 54,000 courses in the fields of languages, culture and creativity, sport and health, business and ICT. The institution has 50 campuses nationwide, and around 450,000 people attend an adult learning course per year.	165	5
EB-Zürich (EB = Erwachsenenbildung, which means Adult Learning) is the biggest publicly funded AE institution in Switzerland. It is a cantonal school offering a broad range of adult learning courses in vocational and general continuing education. Around 16,000 people attend a course per year.	85	8
Volkshochschule (Folk High School) is committed to offering liberal adult education for the public in various learning areas. All Folk High Schools in the German-speaking region are private organisations, most of which receive cantonal subsidies.	6	2
Language schools: Various language schools are included in the survey, as language courses are the most popular adult education offers in Switzerland.	9	2
Vocational business schools is a large provider offering mainly, but not exclusively, vocational courses in the trade sector, but is also open to other participants. In liberal adult education, this provider plays a role especially regarding ICT and language courses.	7	0
Universities offer various courses that can be attended for general adult education purposes, especially in the humanities.	7	0
Enterprises focus on vocational education but can also offer topics of general interest (like languages, communication, or ICT).	6	0
Other institutions: mostly private providers of varying size and with varying profiles; the majority are small local schools.	33	4
Self-organized courses: courses in small groups, individual learning following a course programme, or self-organized one-to-one teaching (e.g. individual study as a follow-up to a course).	8	2
Total	**326**	**23**

Source: Author's own

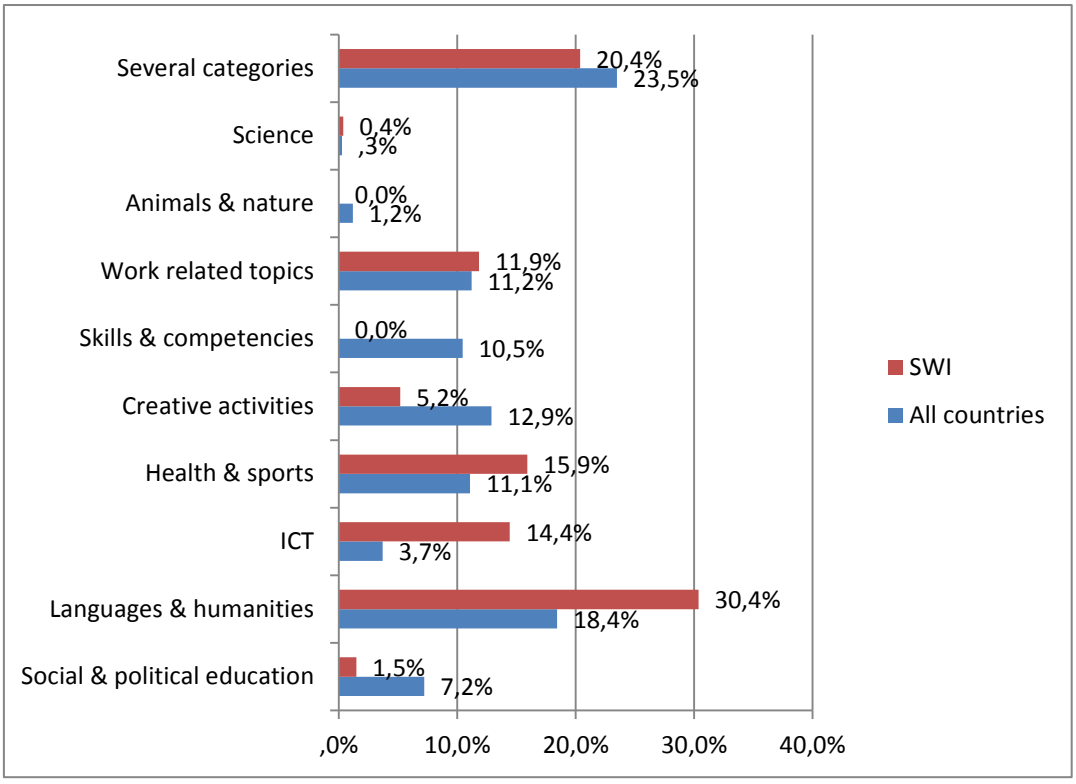
The BeLL survey focused on the region of Zurich, the biggest city in Switzerland and a very densely populated canton. Zurich probably has the most extensive and varied AE offer in the country.

The Migros Klubschule is the largest nationwide provider in liberal adult education. EB Zurich is the most important public provider of adult learning in the region of Zurich (and one of the very few public providers in Switzerland that offer continuing education only, with a focus on vocational continuing education). These two providers enrol the highest number of adult learners in the BeLL study (75% of the courses); the remaining institutions cover 25% of the courses included in BeLL. Exact information about the number of providers operating in the Zurich region is not available, but since we covered the two principal providers as well as a range of smaller institutions, the sample gives an adequate picture of the regional situation in adult learning.

Course topics

The course topics represented in the Swiss survey sample are:

Figure 53 Courses attended by BeLL respondents, by topic



Source: BeLL

This figure shows the percentage of persons who took a course in one of the various topics. For example, 30 per cent of the respondents took a language course. But we need to keep in mind that the percentages in the various topic categories represent only those respondents whose participation was limited to one course..

The most active participants—that is, those 20 per cent who took more than one course in the 12 months preceding the survey—are not included in the topics categories. Due to statistical reasons, they are subsumed under 'several categories', which means that the spreading of the different topics is in fact higher than suggested by the figure.

Compared to the other BeLL countries, the Swiss sample clearly contains more languages/humanities and ICT courses. Both topics play an important role in the Swiss adult learning system, although ICT is usually more important in vocational than in liberal adult education.

The sample covers the main topics of liberal adult education in Switzerland, although creative activities seem to be underrepresented.

In fact, although representative national data on participation in course topics are available, a direct comparison with the BeLL sample is not possible for two reasons. First, the categories used in the national data differ significantly from the BeLL categories ('personal development', for instance, gets the same percentage as languages in Switzerland but does not exist as a category in the BeLL survey). Second, the most active learners are included in the national data categories but not in the BeLL categories. And there is another remarkable difference: Only 39 per cent of Swiss participants take a single course per year, while the remaining 61 per cent engage in two or more non-formal activities. In the BeLL sample, 80 per cent took one course only.

This result suggests that the most active learners are underrepresented in the BeLL sample. But this difference may also reflect a methodological aspect: The Swiss statistics use the category 'non-formal learning activities', which comprises not only courses, but also seminars, conferences, and so on, whereas BeLL included courses only.

All topic categories are also represented in the Swiss interview sample. Of the eight interviewees, four took language courses, among other things, but none took only language courses.

Participants

The profile of the Swiss participants corresponds mostly to the target groups as known through the national annual survey. The providers involved in the survey feedback confirmed that the survey showed an adequate picture of their target groups.

Gender: About two-thirds of the participants in the BeLL survey are women (65%). In the interviews, we have four men and four women. Women are generally more likely to take part in liberal adult education, as demonstrated by the national annual survey: Women's participation rate in non-vocational courses is about 25 per cent, compared to 10 per cent among men (see above), which means that the sample gives a good representation of the target groups as far as gender is concerned.

Age: About one-third of the survey participants is under 36 years old: one-third is between 37-49; and the remaining third is above 50. The interview participants were between 38 and 77 years old. Younger participants (under 36) are not represented in the interviews. This is due to the sampling method: The survey participants were asked to give their e-mail address if they agreed to be contacted for an interview. Very few young people gave their address, and none of them replied to the interview request.

Educational background: About half of the survey participants have completed tertiary education. The interview sample has the same rate: Four of the eight participants have a tertiary degree.

Sample conclusions

All in all, the Swiss sample gives a reliable picture of the target groups in liberal adult education, and the courses included in the survey cover the main topics of non-vocational learning, as far as this can be concluded given the differences between course topic categories in BeLL and national adult learning statistics.

4) DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY OF NATIONAL RESULTS

Survey results

The general picture regarding benefits is mostly in accordance with the average international results. But in the Swiss sample, the rate of participants reporting the single benefits tends to be generally lower. Some results:

Lower benefit rates in the Swiss sample:

The percentages of Swiss participants who report the following benefit categories are below the international average (see figures in the annex):

- **Mental well-being** (SWI: about 60%, international average about 75%)
- **Tolerance** (SWI: about 60%, international average about 74%)
- **Health** (SWI: about 50%, international average about 65%)
- **Social network** (SWI: social networks 53%, international average 67% / meeting other people SWI 61%, international average 81%)
- **Self-efficacy** (SWI: about 45%, international average about 60%)
- **Locus of control** (SWI: about 50%, international average about 63%)

No difference between the Swiss and the international results:

- **Changes in educational experiences** was mentioned by about 80 per cent of Swiss respondents. The international average is similar.

Higher benefit rates in the Swiss sample

The percentage of Swiss participants reporting the following benefit category is above the international average:

- **Work-related benefits** (SWI: well-being at work 64%, international average 54% / carrier options SWI 55%, international average 35%)

The reasons why Swiss participants are less likely to report benefits than participants in the other BeLL countries cannot be given based on the survey. But there is some evidence for the hypothesis that the lower rates of participants reporting benefits has to do with the fact that Switzerland is a very stable country with a high living standard, a country that was not or only slightly affected by the economic crisis that most other BeLL countries had to face. Moreover, Switzerland has a comprehensive educational provision and high participation rates; as a result, adult learning courses are part of everyday life for many people.

In the case of social networks—where significantly fewer Swiss participants report benefits compared with the other countries—it is relevant to know that Switzerland is a small, densely populated country, boasting a very large number of associations, clubs, networks, communities, and the like. The Swiss are generally very keen to join networks and associations of all kinds. This is probably a reason why they do not need adult learning courses to get in contact with people; the BeLL interviews sustain this hypothesis.

The experts who were involved in the survey feedback supported the hypothesis that the relatively low benefit rates are due to economic and societal characteristics of Switzerland, suggesting that the country's social and economic situation helps explain the relatively low benefit rates. Low unemployment rates, high participation rates in AE, high economic standards, and well-functioning systems are especially important in this regard. The two focus groups assumed that Swiss participants report fewer changes because they already have a high degree of well-being, extensive social networks, and a stable or secure economic situation. The BeLL design does not allow for verifying this hypothesis.

Interview analysis

All Swiss interviewees report gaining a wide range of benefits form their participation in liberal adult education, and they are able to reflect on and name these benefits.

The most frequently mentioned categories in the Swiss interviews are **sense of purpose in life**, **mental well-being**, **social network,** and **changes in educational experiences**. The former two categories were mentioned by all eight participants, the latter by seven participants each. However, other benefit categories turned out to be very important, too. **Competences** play a quite prominent role in almost all cases, whereas **self-efficacy**, **physical health,** and **work-related benefits** are less important.

The Swiss interviewees report only a few benefits from the tolerance, civic competence, family, and locus of control categories.

No benefits were found in two categories: trust, civic and social engagement.

All benefits reported by the Swiss participants were covered by the code list; there was no need to define new benefit categories.

Regarding the most frequently mentioned categories, the results are not surprising. The interview analysis confirms and complements the results of the quantitative survey. Whereas the quantitative survey can tell us that 80 per cent of the participants gain more self-confidence through adult learning, the interviews give us insight in some concrete experiences of enhanced self-confidence in real-life contexts. This helps us understand how complex and rich the benefits are on the individual level.

Comparison with the international results

The benefit categories mentioned by most Swiss participants are also important in the international sample. Two categories—self-efficacy and work-related benefits—that were among the most frequently mentioned in the international interview sample seem to be slightly less important in the Swiss sample, but this cannot be seen as a significant difference between the two samples.

The most interesting result of the interviews is the insight they provide into the variety and context-relatedness of benefits, as well as the fact that all participants see liberal adult education as part of broader life projects. This is an aspect that could not be seen in the statistical analysis. All interviewees emphasize their personal interest in the topics they learn, and they interpret learning in the context of a personal strategy to achieve a range of goals. This is true even in cases where learning is undertaken for pleasure without any explicit goal apart from the joy or challenge of learning.

The connection of course participation with life projects was found in some interviews from other countries too, but it was not a confirmed result of the overall interview analysis. It is possible that the emphasis on life projects or broader strategies is connected to high engagement in adult learning. This would explain the fact that the Swiss interviewees, all of whom took more than one course, connect the benefits they report with broader projects. However, this hypothesis could not be verified within the BeLL study.

The conclusions that were drawn from the interview analysis of the whole BeLL sample are also valid for Switzerland.

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Bildungssystem Schweiz: Indikatoren Weiterbildung (http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/15/17/blank/01.approach.4007.html, Feb. 2014)

Potential resources for additional information:

Swiss Education Report 2014. SKBF, Neuchâtel 2014 (official national monitoring report on the whole education system including adult learning, e-paper available on http://www.skbf-csre.ch/en/education-monitoring/education-report-2014, Feb. 2014)

Swiss Education Report 2010. SKBF, Neuchâtel 2014

9. Conclusions and Outlook

The main purpose of the BeLL study was to investigate the 'wider' individual and social benefits perceived by adult learners after participating in liberal adult education courses, to define and refine the concept of benefits, to document and interpret learners' perceived benefits following participation in liberal adult education across ten European countries, to explore the benefits that were reported against data gathered on the landscape of liberal adult education in Europe, and thereby to improve the knowledge base on liberal adult education. Further aims were to refine the findings for different groups of participants with respect to gender, age, employment status, and course types. Moreover, the BeLL study was designed to elucidate the interrelation between the benefits of liberal adult education and elements of course-related settings and the learning situation, such as topics, teaching methods, learner groups, teaching styles, learning cultures, and teachers' personality, as well as relevant institutional conditions.

In order to reach these aims, the BeLL study used a mixed-methods design consisting of two interrelated phases of research, collecting 8646 valid completed questionnaires and 82 semi-structured interviews from the ten participating countries. The study was carried out in adult education centres sponsored publicly (public provision) or by various civil society (third sector) organizations. As a result, the BeLL study gathered a unique data set that provides insights into liberal adult education and its benefits in ten European countries and helps increase our understanding of the wider benefits of adult participation in liberal adult education. For this, the BeLL study operationalized the 'wider-benefits-of-learning' approach (Schuller et al., 2001; Manninen, 2010), expanding it to cover liberal adult education. The 'wider benefits' concept was refined during the research process, the construction of the questionnaire, and data analysis and interpretation, particularly through the qualitative elements of the study: open questions in the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Moreover, the aims of the study were also refined to some extent, compared to the initial grant application.

The results of the BeLL study suggest that participation in liberal adult education generates multiple benefits for individuals, as expressed by participants of liberal adult education courses. Based on the reports on benefits it may be assumed that benefits experienced at the individual level also impact on social groups, such as learners' families, their work place and other social networks.

Of the 8646 respondents, 70 to 87 % has experienced positive changes in learning motivation, social interaction, general well-being and life satisfaction. Changes related to work/career and active citizenship were reported less frequently, but even with regard to those areas, 31 to 42 % experienced some positive changes.

In all ten countries that participated in the BeLL study, similar types and course topics were found, as well as similar benefits occurring within these courses. The BeLL study depicted the landscape of liberal adult education in Europe, the wide range and lively variety of course topics, learning themes and learning opportunities in liberal adult education in and across Europe. The benefits of lifelong learning that were expressed by participants and identified in the study seem to be closely connected to this range of learning opportunities.

The qualitative analysis of open questions in the survey (n=4443) shows that participants can recognize, name, and describe these benefits. The qualitative interview analysis (n=82) confirms that interviewees do indeed experience strong benefits, and that participants were spontaneously aware of more than one benefit category, and able to articulate immediate as

well as long-term effects of their learning. Moreover, interviewees singled out the importance of social interaction and networks as well as well-being, life satisfaction, and patterning one‘s life contexts and life projects as important benefits. Interviewees emphasize their personal interest in the topics they study, and they interpret learning in the context of a personal strategy to achieve different goals. This is true even in cases where learning is undertaken for pleasure, without any explicit goal in mind apart from the joy or challenge of learning.

The interview data and their analysis thus helped to define nuanced benefit categories. Moreover, it became clear through the survey's open questions and the interviews that participants in the BeLL sample identify the teacher's or trainer's personality, their expertise, and their teaching approaches as important elements and conditions for generating benefits within the course context.

Furthermore, although the qualitative interview analysis shows that interviewees often perceive bundles of benefits and mention multiple relationships between benefits, the statistical analysis suggested that there are strong correlations between the various benefit categories. The statistical analysis of the survey data (n=8646) defined ten benefit factors and three second order factors (CONTROL OF OWN LIFE, ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL and HEALTH, FAMILY, & WORK).

With the help of sums calculated on the basis of the factors, it was possible to analyse how different groups of people benefit from adult learning. The statistically significant differences by gender, age, employment status, and course types are rather small in practice, and the main result is that all groups seem to benefit from liberal adult education, and that all types of courses generate changes in peoples' lives. For example, from among the age-related differences found in the survey, one notable fact is that for younger participants, liberal adult education serves as a 'stepping stone' into society, improving their sense of control of their own life. For older participants, adult education is more of a 'cushion' softening age-related changes like retirement, loss of friends and family members, and a decline in skills. Arguably the most significant differences were found when the development of benefits was compared by educational background: the lower participants' level of education, the stronger the changes generated by participation in liberal adult education. The qualitative interview analysis produced a wide range of examples supporting the results of the statistical analysis outlined above. The benefit categories with the highest frequencies in the survey also appear as important benefits in the interviews.

Moreover, the SEM model that was created on the basis of the factor analysis suggests that participation in liberal adult education leads to a change in attitudes (regarding the importance of adult education, learner self-confidence, and tolerance) and to more active social engagement. In general, the change in ATTITUDES & SOCIAL CAPITAL is essential with respect to the benefits gained. It seems to be a mediator that triggers and enables the development of other benefits. The SEM model also shows how the benefits are linked to each other, and the qualitative data (open questions and interviews) validate these results.

During the process of data analysis, one or two survey feedback sessions were carried out in each country, involving staff (managers, teachers and trainers, administrators) from one or two adult education providers. During these sessions, BeLL researchers and staff discussed preliminary results and their possible use in everyday professional practice, which was an important tool for the communicative validation of the research design and the results.

Against this background, the BeLL results suggest several areas for future research:

Nuances of benefits and relationship of benefits and effects of learning

We suggest to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between benefits, effects, and outcomes of learning. In the BeLL study, we identified 'benefits' as 'effects', and 'changes' as distinct categories, as well as distinct outcomes, such as skills and competences. However, one could also argue that benefits *result* from learning outcomes if learners think about how they have used learning outcomes in concrete life or work concepts (Fleige, 2011; 2013; 2014 forthcoming; Bank, 2005; Gieseke, Fleige, Robak & Schmidt-Lauff, 2010). This perspective, which strongly refers to concepts in the areas of adult as well as vocational education, requires a pedagocical concept of benefits in adult education. The current benefits concepts used in the BeLL study, however, stress a psychological rather than a pedagogical perspective on 'benefits', effects, and outcomes of learning. From such a pedagogical point of view, benefits—unlike outcomes and effects—depend on learners' assessment *and* reflection. In this perspective, the benefits of adult education follow learning outcomes, such as an increase of competencies, knowledge, physical, and mental well-being. Moreover, benefits can have an instrumental dimension if they are applied purposefully in concrete work, family, social, and civic situations (cf. Fleige, 2013; 2014 forthcoming). Furthermore, from a pedagogical perspective, there is no need to talk about 'wider' benefits because, from the learning individual's point of view, all benefits are 'wider' benefits, closely connected to real-life situations, life worlds, and learning biographies.

Biographical dimensions of benefits and the decision to participate in adult education

The BeLL results from interview analysis pointed to the fact that adult learning and participation are connected to strategic learning and life projects, and that participation in adult education is perceived as particularly beneficial when it involves or even generates such projects. Theoretical discussions as well as empirical research on these interrelations has been of great interest for adult education and research since the 1980s (cf. Tietgens, 1986; Siebert, Griese, & Czerniaswka, 1993; Gieseke, 2009; Grotlüschen, 2010; Dietel, 2012; Käpplinger, Klein, & Haberzeth, 2013; Illeris, 2014; see also the broad literature on the biographical dimension of adult learning in various European countries). Against the background of this research, we assume that both the biographical dimension of learning and particular learning interests interrelate with participants' perceptions of benefits (cf. Fleige 2013; 2014 forthcoming). It would be particularly interesting to explore these interrelations in depth. However, we cannot assume that learners are always aware of learning processes, learning projects, and the decision to participate. To some extent, the assumptions challenge the theoretical concept of benefits developed above and in Chapter 6 of this report. However, for further empirical research, it would be very interesting to describe and analyse the interrelations between learners' decisions to participate, their perceptions of benefits prior, during, and after participation, as well the biographical dimensions of learning and learning interests. Findings in this area would be most valuable for providers and organizations in the field of adult education, in particular for programme planners.

Benefit research and participation research

Thanks to the fact the BeLL study used and operationalized the experiences and perceptions of benefits, it is possible to make references to both PIAAC and AES data, which at some

point operate on the category of self-reported perceptions of benefits as well. The PIAAC study documents perceptions of wider benefits (focusing mainly on the categories of 'Trust' and 'Health perception'). AES data, too, operate on subjective perceptions of adult education benefits (cf. e.g. Behringer, Gnahs, & Schönfeld, 2013, for German AES data). According to AES, perceptions of benefits relate to perceptions of usefulness, as well as to the degree of satisfaction, to the relation of expected and actual benefits, and to certificates (cf. ibid., p. 194). Moreover, they are affected by sociodemographic background variables, such as employment status. (See Fleige 2014, forthcoming) Further links to participation studies in Europe were made in Chapter 6, and a good number and variety of recent literature comes into play (e.g. Saar, Ure, & Holford, 2013). However, in the context of participation and monitoring studies and BeLL, it would be good to have a more detailed conversation with studies from the area of economic investments and returns, too.

Learning motivation

BeLL data suggest that less educated participants benefit most from liberal adult education. This possible interrelation requires more in-depth analysis. Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate whether liberal adult education can serve to narrow gaps between social groups in terms of learning opportunities and motivation. Such studies, however, require methods different from those used in the BeLL study.

Relationship between benefits and elements of the learning situation and setting

Participants in the BeLL sample identify the teacher's or trainer's personality, their expertise, and their teaching approaches as important elements and conditions for experiencing benefits within the course context. This finding stresses the relevance of organized courses and learning settings in adult education. Therefore, the interrelations between elements of the learning situation and setting should be investigated in more detail. On the one hand, there is a great data corpus from the BeLL MaxQDA file on data from open-ended question 2.5 and the interviews, which needs to be explored more extensively. Additionally, ethnographic case studies in the classroom (cf. Goeze et al., 2013) could be applied as a next step. Findings in this area would be most valuable for adult education providers and organisations, in particular for programme planners, teachers, and marketing and management staff.

Comparing the benefits of adult education in different countries

The BeLL data allow for insights into the differences in adult education benefits in different countries. These may be explained by differences in course or respondent profiles (cf. Manninen & Merilainen, 2014). However, some differences in national results remain unexplained and need to be analysed deeper at a later point. For example, there are substantial differences between countries regarding changes in 'Trust in decision-makers' and 'Interest in politics'. Moreover, the impact of adult learning seems to be different in some countries: Respondents in Slovenia, Romania, and Spain seem to experience more changes, even when controlling for background variables. In the BeLL study, this is analysed with the help of covariance analysis (ANCOVA) (cf. ibid.). More detailed analyses of the BeLL data could be made with the help of regression analysis, for example.

10. Added Value of the BeLL Study and Recommendations

The BeLL project can be linked to several recent EU policy objectives, especially with respect to the follow-up indicators of the Lisbon strategy and the new Europe 2020 strategy.

The main overarching policy objectives to which the project contributes include:

- the collection of trans-European data on the adult education sector to monitor the multiplicity of adult learning and to develop evidence based policies;
- the achievement for a better insight into and understanding of the benefits of adult learning.

Compared to compulsory education, data on adult education are limited, not least because providers are dispersed, of different natures, and often outside the public sector. Reliable data are required to monitor the multiplicity of adult learning and to develop evidence-based policies. The Communication from the European Commission, *Adult learning: It is always a good time to learn* (2007), mentions that the failure to demonstrate the benefits of adult learning is a major weakness of the field. It also points out the urgent need for a common understanding to overcome the lack of comparable data in this sector. The Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (2011) invites all Member States to improve their knowledge base on adult learning, especially by collecting sufficient baseline data on the wider benefits of learning to adult individuals and society. In-depth analysis of issues relating to adult learning is required, but also analyses on the impact of the development and performance of the adult education sector in Europe.

As a European project investigating all wider benefits of liberal adult education, the BeLL study addressed these requirements in specific ways. Its empirical data set is unique and provides insights not only into the effects of adult learning but also into the liberal adult education landscape in ten different European countries. Through this, the BeLL study provides a strong argument for further research on liberal adult education in Europe.

Moreover, the research focuses on the connection between different elements of the learning situation (e.g. the role of the teacher, the group, the methods, etc.) and the development of wider benefits. Thus, we expect the results to not only contribute to improving the quality of liberal adult learning provision, but also to be instrumental in supporting steps to increase the professionalization of teachers and trainers as well as programme planners working in this field. The study improves the knowledge base on liberal adult learning and benefits in Europe, and it provides a number of benefit indicators that may be used in further assessments of the liberal adult education sector. Although the investigation of the social and individual benefits of adult learning is increasingly recognized by European and supranational institutions like the OECD, this specific approach is still uncommon and was not known in most of the BeLL countries. The BeLL study provided a theoretical framework and an empirical basis for an improved understanding of the wider benefits of liberal adult education.

Against this background, the BeLL consortium would like to highlight the following recommendations for policy-makers and stakeholders in the field:[26]

[26] Policy Recommendations are to be found in the Final Report of the BeLL study, too, but have a slightly more differentiated appearance in the Research Report, due to ongoing discussion of the BeLL researchers on the results of the study.

1. The important role of liberal adult education and its wide range of course types and topics as part of the Lifelong Learning system should be better recognized at the national and European policy levels.

2. Training organizers and adult educators have to acknowledge the impact of the social environment in which learning takes place. BeLL learners place a high value on the social aspects of course participation, with improved social networks ranking high among the benefits identified.

3. Training organizations and policy makers should provide sufficient resources for adult training courses, and adult educators should make optimal use of group processes.

4. Employers and social partners must be made more aware of the BeLL findings about the positive impact of learning and encouraged to facilitate such learning for their employees and members.

5. Legislators should increase public investment in learning for adults, and especially in liberal adult education.

6. Further research on the wider benefits of adult learning should be encouraged. For example, the OECD should consider adding questions on participation in liberal adult education activities to future rounds of its Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).

More policy recommendations are available in the country reports (cf. Chapter 8).

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