

**LOCAL EXPERIENCES AND GLOBAL COMMITMENTS IN CITIZENSHIP  
EDUCATION AND ADULT LEARNING IN COMMUNITIES: COMPARATIVE  
PERSPECTIVES ON AUSTRIA, GERMANY, HUNGARY AND SLOVENIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

The article is based on contributions to the Adult Education Academy of the University of Würzburg and partners in 2021. The authors met in the joint work on active citizenship which is a key issue for the UNESCO World conference on adult learning and education. They take a comparative look into examples from their four home countries: Austria, Germany, Hungary and Slovenia. Their experiences are quite diverse with respect to history, governance, structure, programmes, and activities. Even the names and terms used differ: folk high schools, cultural houses, study circles. These have much in common, such as community-based learning opportunities for youth and adults. UN Member States and UNESCO have adopted global commitments towards institutionalised learning arrangements for communities which will be part of the comparative analysis.

**KEY WORDS**

community education; adult education and learning; comparative analysis; active citizenship



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**EXPERIÊNCIAS LOCAIS E COMPROMISSOS GLOBAIS NA EDUCAÇÃO PARA  
A CIDADANIA E APRENDIZAGEM DE ADULTOS EM COMUNIDADES:  
PERSPETIVAS COMPARADAS DE ÁUSTRIA, ALEMANHA, HUNGRIA E  
ESLOVÉNIA**

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**RESUMO**

Este artigo baseia-se nos contributos da Universidade de Würzburg e seus parceiros no contexto da Adult Education Academy em 2021. Os autores desenvolveram um trabalho conjunto sobre cidadania ativa, uma questão-chave para a Conferência mundial sobre aprendizagem e educação de adultos, da UNESCO. Realizaram uma análise comparada de casos dos seus países de origem: Áustria, Alemanha, Hungria e Eslovénia. As suas experiências são bastante diversas no que toca à história, governação, estrutura, programas e atividades. Até os nomes e termos utilizados diferem: escolas superiores populares, casas culturais, círculos de estudo. Estas experiências têm muito em comum, como as oportunidades de aprendizagem comunitárias, para jovens e adultos. Os Estados-Membros da ONU e a UNESCO adotaram compromissos globais sobre mecanismos de aprendizagem institucionais para comunidades sobre os quais incidirá a análise comparada.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

educação comunitária; aprendizagem e educação de adultos; análise comparada; cidadania ativa



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PARA LA CIUDADANÍA Y EL APRENDIZAJE DE ADULTOS EN LAS  
COMUNIDADES: PERSPECTIVAS COMPARATIVAS DE AUSTRIA,  
ALEMANIA, HUNGRÍA Y ESLOVENIA**

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**RESUMEN**

Este artículo se basa en las contribuciones de la Universidad de Würzburg y sus socios a la Academia de Educación de Adultos en 2021. Los autores desarrollaron trabajo juntos sobre ciudadanía activa, que es un tema clave para la Conferencia Mundial sobre Aprendizaje y Educación para adultos, de la UNESCO. Realizaron un análisis comparativo de ejemplos de sus países de origen: Austria, Alemania, Hungría y Eslovenia. Las experiencias son bastante diversas en términos de historia, gobernanza, estructura, programas y actividades. Incluso los nombres y términos utilizados difieren: escuelas superiores populares, casas culturales, círculos de estudio. Estas experiencias tienen mucho en común, como las oportunidades de aprendizaje comunitario para jóvenes y adultos. Los Estados miembros de la ONU y la UNESCO han adoptado compromisos globales sobre los mecanismos de aprendizaje institucional para las comunidades sobre los cuales habrá un análisis comparativo.

**PALABRAS - CLAVE**

educación comunitaria; aprendizaje y educación de adultos; análisis comparativo; ciudadanía activa



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# Local Experiences and Global Commitments in Citizenship Education and Adult Learning in Communities: Comparative Perspectives on Austria, Germany, Hungary and Slovenia

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## BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Many countries around the world have developed community-based adult learning and education (ALE), and the examples show that there is considerable diversity. A recent study, for example, has examined this diversity from Africa, Asia and Europe. Furthermore, the study has shown that such community based ALE can be presented under different labels, being referred to as either citizenship, community, general, liberal or popular ALE, and is often viewed in a kind of dichotomy to ALE for continuing professional and vocational purposes (Duke, Hinzen, & Sarrazin, 2021). The study had a second lens as it specifically focused on public funding, in some cases the already well-developed ALE sub-sectors of the education system, embedded in and serviced from the triangle of policy, legislation and financing.

There is a growing discussion on the importance of citizenship education – globally and in Europe. The European Association for Education of Adults (EAEA) has analysed experiences and advanced some policy recommendations (EAEA, 2019b). With examples arising from what may be referred to as Central Europe, this paper concentrates on countries which not only share common borders but are also close in their cultural heritage and historical legacy. However, as the case studies from Austria, Germany, Hungary and Slovenia will show, there are communalities, similarities, and differences in their approaches to community-based ALE and their understanding and practice of citizenship education, both of which are of paramount importance, especially when considering the future demographic changes in ageing of these four countries as more people tend to get older.

Table 1  
*Population growth and 65+ projections*

	Population in 2020 (mio.)	Population 65+ in 2019	Population projection in 2030 (mio.)	Population 65+ projection in 2030
Austria	8.9	19.1%	9.1	23.7%
Germany	83.1	21.6%	83.5	26.2%
Hungary	9.8	19.7%	9.6	22.0%
Slovenia	2.1	20.2%	2.1	25.5%

Sources: EUROSTAT, 2021c & UN, 2019.

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As for the comparative scope, the co-authors of this paper decided to write a joint analytical paper in order to relate their topic to country-specific trends and issues regarding citizenship education and community development, and to examine not only the similarities and differences, but also to identify their underlying reasons. Consequently, this approach required knowledge and an understanding of both the national and local/regional aspects of citizenship education, within the scope of global scenarios and constraints concerning sustainability, social exclusion, inequalities, competition and alienation, etc. Therefore, this paper sought to formulate relevant conclusions and arguments to further develop this field of adult learning and education with particular emphasis on inclusion, participation and solidarity.

The paper was written in the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic which had slowed and in some cases locked down many areas of community life. Therefore, both educational and cultural institutions were experiencing severe restrictions. Kindergarten, primary schools and community learning centres (CLC) were closed for longer periods and secondary schools, colleges and universities shifted to various virtual learning platforms. Face-to-face encounters were limited to online settings, and in many respects emerging hard and software problems became the order of the day. Currently, these developments are often characterised as the new normal. Only time will show the extent to which participation in educational and cultural institutions will return and allow for closer contact between children, pupils and teachers and adult learners and facilitators. Forms of blended learning which combine the analog and digital and the physical and virtual, will remain important. However, a drop in adults' participation in non-formal education and training (ET) as an important component of lifelong learning, has already been observed in comparison to 2019, the year prior to the pandemic (EUROSTAT, 2021a).

Table 2  
25–65 year old adults participating in non-formal education and training (ET)

	ET participation in 2011	ET participation in 2019	ET participation in 2020
Austria	13.5%	14.7%	11.7%
Germany	7.9%	8.2%	7.7%
Hungary	3.0%	5.8%	5.1%
Slovenia	16.0%	11.2%	8.4%

Source: EUROSTAT, 2021b.

The latest results from the EU labour force survey show that from 2010 the participation rate of adults in lifelong learning at the EU level gradually increased until 2019 from 7.8 % to 10.8 %. The survey included adults aged 25 to 64 years who had participated in education or training in the 4 weeks prior to the survey. However, in 2020 the participation rate fell by 1.6 percentage points, reaching an average of 9.2 %. Adult participation in learning was one of the benchmarks of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training up to 2020, referred to as Education and Training 2020. This benchmark aimed at attaining an average of at least 15 % of adults participating in lifelong learning in the EU. The participation rates in almost all the Member States increased steadily between 2010 and 2019, except for Slovenia, Denmark, Cyprus, Spain, Poland and Romania. This trend reversed between 2019 and



2020 as only three Member States presented a slight increase during this period: Spain (+0.4 pp), Greece and Lithuania (+0.2 pp for both). Slovenia, below average with 8.4%, although still above Germany's 7.7% and Hungary's 5.1%, was far behind Austria's above average 11.7% (EUROSTAT, 2021a).

Participating jointly but also virtually in the Adult Education Academy (AEA) of the University of Würzburg with all its partners in "INTALL – International and Comparative Studies for Students and Practitioners in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning" the aim was to arrive at a common understanding of active citizenship education and community-based learning. It became clear that even in those nearby countries this was not an easy task. We began to believe that in a time of ever-growing internet opportunities and the almost explosive potential for information and exchange via social media and its channels, the search for adults learning in communities was much like a *retour à la nature* in former times.

It was therefore reassuring and inspiring to learn of the contributions of UNESCO's International Commission on the Futures of Education working towards *Learning to become* (UNESCO, 2021) which stands in the tradition of these outstanding reports of *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow* (Faure et al., 1972) and *Learning: the treasure within* (Delors, 1996). The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) had been invited for an expert consultation and produced the document *Embracing a culture of lifelong learning – Contribution to the Futures of Education initiative* with recommendations and action points which are at the heart of this paper. One of them reads as follows:

Promote local-level initiatives that reinforce a learning culture: Promote a variety of collective arrangements for learning at local level. Initiatives such as learning families, study circles, learning neighbourhoods, learning cities, learning territories, regions, etc., with a people-centred and learning-focused approach, provide the basis for fostering a learning culture within local communities. They also offer a collaborative, action-oriented framework for addressing locally the diverse challenges that society increasingly faces. (UIL, 2020, p. 32)

It is the importance of learning in communities, reflected in the above, that this paper describes, analyses and compares experiences in the four countries.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODOLOGY AND COMPARISON

The aim of this paper is to compare historical and present communalities, similarities and differences in community ALE in Austria, Germany, Hungary and Slovenia. Furthermore, it seeks to examine present ALE challenges and to compare the four countries' approaches to enhancing learner participation in different forms of adult education and training, whether through initiatives from different governmental bodies, legislations, learning institutions or learning programs. To meet these aims, the following research questions are addressed:



1. What are some of the key historical communalities, similarities and differences in the development of community ALE in Austria, Germany, Hungary and Slovenia?
2. What are the national institutions, organisations and legislations which present the framework for the functioning of community ALE, its promotion, and further development?
3. In view of future demographic changes, digitalisation and the present COVID-19 situation, what are the future tasks and global commitments of Austria, Germany, Hungary and Slovenia to enhance the participation of adults in ALE?

As for the research methodology, the comparative analysis of the four respective countries adopted an evolutionary perspective so as to highlight both the political and social dimensions of ALE in the rather turbulent times of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and Millennium. This enabled the authors to identify the particular choices and limitations of newly forming nation-states to collaborate under the EU umbrella for common goals in adult and lifelong learning, given the strong influence of constraints related to rapidly changing global conditions with their economic, technological, social and environmental implications. This comparative study, therefore, became a transformative analysis of evolutionary ALE trends so as to justify and advocate collective and interdependent responsibility towards widening participation in ALE through community-based learning, active citizenship, social inclusion for vulnerable groups, and equal opportunities for underrepresented adults with care and solidarity (Mertens, 2017). The lessons of the four represented countries led to the search for compound conclusions with sound meaning and results to identify the reasons for such similarities and differences. While developing the respective comparative perspectives for this paper, the co-authors were able to draw on several contributions from the previous AEA published in *International and Comparative Studies in Adult and Continuing Education* (Egetenmeyer, Boffo, & Kröner, 2020) as well as from the *Essential Readings in International and Comparative Adult Education* (Reischmann, 2021).

## HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF THE INFLUENTIAL FACTORS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION IN AUSTRIA, GERMANY, HUNGARY AND SLOVENIA

Most historians of education agree that the formation and development of modern adult education in the four countries under analysis have been commonly influenced by a set of specific issues. In line with the argument of Franz Pöggeler, it is our view that adult education in Europe is a late product of the enlightenment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which helped millions of adults to strengthen and develop their knowledge and skills by fellow citizens of their communities successfully preparing for socially and/or economically driven tasks and responsibilities (Pöggeler, 1996).

It was the result of political changes through revolutions and/or radical reforms formed by parts of the bourgeoisie that enlightened members of the nobility and the



ruling courts became open to new political formations regarding constitutional law, parliamentary structures and governmental formations, resulting in the separation of power and civic rights. Under the circumstances, modern adult education was able to make use of those challenging times which enabled citizens to form new communities intended for educating adults who were at that time facing several kinds of challenges.

Tom Steele highlighted that modern adult education in Europe was heavily influenced by social, political and economic factors which were mainly concentrated in urban environments and targeted communities through various forms of popular adult education (Steele, 2007). The history of adult education was affected by the rise of modern public educational programmes of the enlightened state in the German Empire and also in the Austrian Habsburg Empire in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. They served to pave the way for primary schooling to develop throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and also combined with community movements dominated by patriotic aspirations. Traditional religious communities, such as churches, had to adapt to new roles and widening services based on the needs of their members with more social concern and care. Additionally, urban communities of the bourgeoisie and working class used several forms of adult education to organise themselves and demonstrate their needs through use of the mother tongue to refer to newly emerging ideas and ideologies.

Another significant factor which immensely formed modern adult education was the industrialisation of towns and cities across Europe with a view to steering economic production towards new scales based on the skills and competencies of the workforce, which resulted in the dominance of industry and slowly but surely in the crisis of agriculture. Such radical economic changes expanded adult education and new forms of training, institutions and structures to help adults become and remain employable or to effectively respond to the challenges of migration from rural to urban, from one country to another and even from one continent to another.

It was the social factor which, as a result of political and economic development, served to demonstrate the choices and limitations of Central Europe since the rise of nationalism and radical political ideas fragmented interests through diverse power constraints to result in either the formation or deformation of monarchies. It is important to underline the impact of these social movements, such as that of the bourgeoisie, workers, women and peasants in changing societal rules and regulations and calling for their own societies to democratise and work for the separation of power through parliamentary democracy and the control of power via elections.

Societies formed a great variety of communities, cycles and associations so as to educate each other in formal, non-formal and informal manners. These diverse communities made use of the advancements of school education, vocational training, workplace programmes for employees, community and cultural education and religious education. Such developments used the mother tongue rather consciously so as to promote national identity, belongingness and trust in traditions, values and community principles.

World War I destroyed not only millions of lives but also the dreams and hopes of thousands of families looking to the future with fear, sadness and hopelessness. Some people experienced harsh violence, hatred, xenophobia, and alienation. Therefore, adult education became marginalised in many countries, especially in Austria, Slovenia and Hungary, where extreme populism and nationalism simply curbed the continuation or expansion of all forms of democratisation throughout society.

Considering the choices of those living in Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Slovenia in the wake of World War I, it is obvious that while the German Reich was dissolved, the 1919 Weimar Constitution signalled strong attempts towards democratisation and



building a republic. There were similar hopes in Austria after 1920, but the government in Vienna could not really strengthen democratic rule and fascism emerged in Austria, as Nazism became stronger in Germany in the early 1930s. In Hungary, the relative consolidation of power reflected a modest right-wing regime during the 1920s in a Kingdom without a king, but it was soon transformed into a fascist rule under Governor Horthy to give way to extreme right ideology, antisemitism and authoritarian power without real parliamentary control. Slovenia was in 1918, after the World War I, formed as part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and later, in 1929, as part of the Yugoslav Kingdom, which functioned as a geopolitical unit until the end of World War II and may have experienced similar adult education trends, as demonstrated in Austria, Germany and in Hungary. Such political extremes did not favour adult education, critical thinking or plurality of active citizenship endeavours in the communities, and therefore almost all forms of liberal adult education were prohibited.

These four countries and their peoples suffered from dictatorial rules and hoped to see radical changes. Democratisation began in the wake of World War II in 1945 and, consequently, adult education was able to initiate its new journey supported by democratic rules and principles backed by the international community. Paradoxically, Soviet Russia invaded most parts of Central and Eastern Europe and divided not only the continent, but also Germany into two parts. Communist rule integrated education into its priorities and supported formal democratisation leading to the massification of adult education as a new sector of the broader educational system. Austria and Western Germany were able to move towards republic-oriented political change and formed their real democratic parliamentary systems to support the reconfiguration of adult education with modern structures anchored on law, funding and provision. These concerns opened paths to adult education with more autonomy given to local and regional/provincial (Länder) training to be regulated transparently. Adult education in these two countries was in a position to construct new, flexible systems to respond to both societal and economic demands and to include almost all the stakeholders in the discourse and strategic planning on regular adult education platforms and later also in vocational education and training (Gruber & Lenz, 2016; Nuissl & Pehl, 2000).

In Slovenia (as part of the Yugoslav Republic between 1945 and 1991) and Hungary, the Communist period was supporting adult education, but forbade non-governmentally initiated or autonomous initiatives and practices in adult education. It also blocked all kinds of profit-oriented training institutions and organisations together with their programmes (Krajnc, 1996; Nemeth, 2014). When the Communist rule collapsed, for Hungary in 1989 and for Slovenia in 1991, they were able to gear their futures, together with relatively modern adult education systems, towards the democratically formed international community and the newly established EU and its member states.

## EXPERIENCES AND EXAMPLES: EXAMINING THE FOUR COUNTRIES

The historical outline has shown how developments in this part of Europe were interrelated and interconnected. Examining each individual country further, especially in the areas of citizenship education for adults, in addition to the communalities the variations of similarities and differences are also considered. The emergence of the EU



has significant weight for all four countries, however it should be acknowledged that the entry to become member was related to different phases and possibly even different conditions: Germany is listed as one of the founding members of the EU, Austria joined in 1995 and Hungary along with Slovenia in 2004. Some of the related issues are discussed in the sections per country, others further ahead when more of the comparative features are analysed.

## AUSTRIA

The Austrian Archive of the *Volkshochschulen* (vhs), literally translated as Folk High Schools, has made and still does make a significant contribution to the processing and research of the history of Austrian adult education, especially of the vhs. The materials and documents are collected in the rapidly growing library, scientific communication is organised (research projects, congresses, publications) and the journal *Spurensuche* on the history of adult education and science popularisation is published. However, in order to illustrate the complexity of the historical processes of adult learning, it should be noted that some of their aspects are broached by different disciplines (e.g. law, economics, sociology, geography and regional history). In addition, the history of adult education with Austria's entry in the European Union in 1995 cannot be described without this dimension (Filla, 2014; Gruber & Lenz, 2016).

As shown in the historical outline, the development of adult education intensified with the enlightenment and industrialization. The former held the hope of being able to influence people through education, whereas the latter accelerated the need for qualified workers. With the introduction of six years of compulsory schooling under Maria Theresa in 1774, another milestone had been reached and education was considered a political issue and thus a matter of the state. This promoted the modernisation of the education system and set an example for the importance of *Volksbildung* (Popular Education). Public education institutions such as Sunday schools for young people who had left school, agricultural societies and learning opportunities for mining and trade as well as reading rooms and reading societies, to name a few, may be assigned to this period (Gruber & Lenz, 2016). There were social issues with regard to adult education which were influenced by different interest groups. Along with these developments and on the basis of philosophical considerations of the enlightenment, the importance of education increased as regards the interests of the rulers and the powerful, but also of the dependent and the oppressed. In *Portrait Adult and Continuing Education Austria*, Gruber & Lenz refer to the fact that people were seen as capable of development in this understanding and that the social order was not seen as rigid, but rather changeable. These thoughts can certainly be used to justify the history of ideas for “modern adult education” (Gruber & Lenz, 2016) and can be incorporated into considerations on active citizenship concepts.

The specific constitutional process of adult education is interesting in comparison to other educational areas as it differs significantly. Crucial processes for the development of adult education in Austria were constituted “on the basis of a bottom-up approach”, primarily at the local or regional level and not at the state level. Adult education was established beyond the state and not on the basis of laws and developed primarily as the legal form of an association. At the time, funding was also largely private, for example

through participation fees, and was organised by means of open access based on voluntary participation (Filla, 2014). As a result of these developments, adult education soon displayed great diversity, both institutionally as well as in terms of content and methodology, through which different directions emerged in the second half of the 19th century, such as the bourgeois-liberal, denominational, and labour movements. In the case of the latter, a new political dimension came into play as the demands and efforts to change the social conditions were central and highlighted in the catchphrase “*Wissen ist Macht*” (Knowledge is Power).

At the end of World War I, and with the establishment of the Republic of German Austria, known as Austria from 1919, state funding for adult education and the introduction of state education officers and a central education office (Adult Education Department, Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research) under the undersecretary Otto Glöckl ensued (Gruber & Lenz, 2016). In contrast to the constitution of the Weimar Republic, there was no constitutional regulation of adult education in Austria. When considering the expansion of activities, qualification measures and the beginnings of an adult education policy in the 1970s, it may be said that Austrian adult education had been consolidated up to then. Also, the law on the promotion of adult education and the legal basis for Austrian adult education within the public library system was anchored in 1973.

When considering social requirements, in which adult education was justified, apart from economic and labour market-related tasks, it is clear that adult education as political education also contributed to freedom, equality and political empowerment. Segments of adult education can contribute to social cohesion and to reducing disadvantages as well as to the promotion of social participation through integration into the labour market and the provision of basic education (Sprung, 2019, p. 84). The results of the *Benefits of Lifelong Learning* (BeLL) study also highlight a large number of learning effects and an increase in people's well-being through adult education (Thöne-Geyer, 2014). As a result, different effects of adult education can work together and potentially have a positive effect on the cohesion of a society and the promotion of democracy.

Another development with respect to active citizenship is the anchoring of community education in the *Austrian Strategy of Lifelong Learning 2013-2020* (Republik Österreich, 2011). Since then, the approach has received increasing attention in Austrian debates in the field of adult education. The Strategy has several lines of action and the current status, goals, visions and measures have been outlined. Action line 6 reads: “Reinforcement of Community Education approaches by means of municipal institutions and in organized civil society”, whereby it is stated in the current status that “Initiatives such as district work, learning regions and any form of community-oriented educational work have set in motion important developments in Community Education approaches in their respective areas” (Republik Österreich, 2011, p. 34). The strategy shows that there is a need to promote alternative, locally coordinated educational offers in order to achieve increased participation in adult and continuing education. This should occur primarily through the cooperation and networking of educational players on a regional level.

The desired promotion of quality, the networking of libraries and the support of volunteer centres is particularly emphasised. The vision is to regard: “Learning [as] an integral part of civil society engagement and any form of participation is perceived as a valuable learning experience. In this way, participatory learning processes contribute significantly to individual empowerment and to securing opportunities for participation through self-organization, taking into account local and regional needs” (Republik Österreich, 2011, p. 32). Although “the development of a theoretically derived and



argued concept is still pending, which is why the assignment of activities to Community Education has to remain arbitrary to a certain extent” (Wagner, Steiner, & Lassnigg, 2013, p. 24), their roots can be found in Austria's past.

While there is no generally applicable definition, community education in general means education and learning with and for the community which supports cooperation and networking. Further development of the region needs to respond to a number of challenges such as demographic change, globalisation, digitalisation, migration, unemployment and recognition procedures. A central aspect is to promote participation in decision making and to accept the interests of people and to support and accompany bottom-up processes and initiatives (Tett, 2010).

In order to support active citizenship, appropriate support structures are required. As examples, two initiatives are mentioned that contribute to active citizenship education in Austria:

- The *Österreichische Gesellschaft für Politische Bildung* (ÖGPB, Austrian Society for Political Education) is a non-profit association at the national level that was founded in 1977. The aim of the association is to promote political education in the field of adult education. The two main tasks of the ÖGPB are to support political education in adult education in Austria through educational offers, project advice and further training measures as well as in the financial support of projects for political education within the framework of Austrian adult education (see <https://www.politischebildung.at/>).
- *Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund* (ÖGB, Austrian Trade Union Federation) represents the interests of workers based on voluntary membership. “The ÖGB has a major role in the development of new laws: it initiates the drafting of bills and provides political reviews of and comments on bills submitted by other bodies, which are then incorporated in the decision-making process”. The ÖGB Department for Education, Leisure and Culture (Association of Austrian Trade Union Education - VÖGB) supports its members with a wide range of educational offers. (see <https://www.oegb.at/der-oegb/austrian-trade-union-federation>).

In short, it may be said that in terms of political education and active citizenship, efforts and perspectives relevant to democracy building must always be central and not taken for granted. With reference to Oskar Negt, in his model of key competences and the idea of exemplary learning, it is necessary to ask what people need to know in order to orientate themselves in this world of upheavals. In doing so, one should never forget that “democracy is the only state-based social order that has to be learned”(Negt, 2010) and which should be worked on continuously.

## GERMANY

Historically, early developments of adult education can be traced back to the roots of the awakening or enlightenment, and to the formation of literacy groups and reading circles,



university extension and the popularisation of science which may be associated with political movements towards democracy and citizenship education. On the other hand, one may consider its roots, hailing from the requirements of the agricultural and industrial revolution with respect to vocational education and training, again related to political developments and the working class with their attempts to establish workers' education, towards what today would be referred to as competency, skills and employability. The afore-mentioned “Knowledge is Power” was the slogan of the time. A variety of activities and institutions began to flourish, including the vhs which was similar to a Scandinavian tradition with Nikolai Grundtvig as the founding father of the folk high schools (Bjerkaker, 2021). In a simplified manner, the vhs may be described as the German version of a CLC.

1919 saw the end of World War I and of the emperor system, the first democracy, the eight-hour-working-day, and the voting right for women. These were the results of revolutionary struggles, giving rise to the Republic of Weimar as the new reality. Adult education became a constitutional matter, just like schooling and universities, and was fortunately enshrined with the need for recognition and support in clause § 148 requesting “the popular education system, including the adult education centres, shall be promoted by the Reich, the federal states and the municipalities” (Lattke & Ioannidou, 2021, p. 58).

This right to adult education is a feature of present times and, as may be expected, is built on in different ways in the Federal Republic of Germany where most of the education system is not regulated at the national level but rather on the regional (the German phrase is *Länder*). This results in a variety of forms of how adult education is grounded in the constitutions, laws, and ordinances of the 16 *Länder*, and also different directives and regulations for administration, management and funding. These respective acts do not only create opportunities for the funding of vhs, but are also accessible to other adult education institutions and providers such as churches and trade union alliances.

The vhs has had a well-developed statistics system for the last 58 years which provides robust information on activities and programmes, full and part-time staff, legal and organizational requirements, as well as aggregated data for participants regarding age and gender, even with respect to the number and variety of courses. The latest report for the year 2019 provides figures for the number of vhs as 879 legal entities, with around 3.000 sub-centres reaching out to the communities; 63% of the vhs are part of the municipality structure, and 32% are registered associations, but all receive public funding. They have around 10,000 full-time and around 200,000 part-time staff. In total, up to 9 million registrations for courses, lectures, and excursions are achieved. One third of the participants enrol for health and nutrition as well as arts and crafts. The thematic area of citizenship education belongs to the 20% related to politics – society – environment, with around 1.6 million individuals enrolled in 2018. Around 75% of all the participants are female, and the 35 to 64 years age group is the most strongly represented (Huntemann, Echarti, Lux, & Reichart, 2021).

It should be noted that the vhs are all members of their respective 16 regional associations which engage in advocacy and are service providers for the further institutionalisation and professionalisation processes of their members. The national association is the *Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband* (DVV) which was founded in 1953 and states as its mission: “As a professional association, the DVV promotes educational work in adult education centres. Together with the vhs regional associations, it ensures the continuous professional development of the adult education centres in Germany and interaction amongst professionals ... It develops principles and guidelines with the aim of



ensuring the quality of continuing education at adult education centres and adapting it to the changing needs of society.” (See <https://www.volkshochschule.de/verbandswelt/dvv-english/adult-education-centres-germany.php>).

DVV International is the Institute for International Cooperation of DVV which was founded in 1969 (Hinzen, 2020a) to support the increasing demand for information and exchange, contact and cooperation in the field of adult education. “Our country and regional offices build local and regional cooperation and ensure the quality and effectiveness of our action in our partner countries. Our work focuses on literacy and basic education, vocational training, global and intercultural learning, environmental education and sustainable development, migration and integration, refugee work, health education, conflict prevention and democracy education” (See <https://www.dvv-international.de/en/about-us/profile>).

However, there are a number of specialised bodies in Germany that engage in citizenship education (Hinzen, 2020b), the most prominent of which are:

- The *Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung* (bpb, Federal Agency for Civic Education) which focuses primarily on “Strengthening Democracy - Fostering a Civil Society”. It is a national level agency which functions in cooperation with similar agencies at the regional level, frequently working in collaboration with vhs and other providers locally. “Citizenship education” in their understanding “broadly means educating and encouraging citizens to actively participate in society and in the democratic process. The bpb’s work focuses on fostering an awareness of what democracy is and on furthering participation in politics and social life.” (See <https://www.bpb.de/die-bpb/138852/federal-agency-for-civic-education>)
- The *Arbeitskreis Deutscher Bildungsstätten* (AdB, Association of German Educational Organizations) which brings together “Independent Institutions for Education for Democratic Citizenship und Youth Work” and can be active at local, regional and national levels. AdB is “an association made up of approximately 170 continuing education centres throughout Germany with various profiles - youth education centres, adult education centres, academies, European centres, educational centres of party-related foundations and international encounter centres” (see <https://www.adb.de/english>).
- *Arbeit und Leben* (Work and Life), which is jointly supported by the German Federation of Trade Unions and DVV. It is an organization “working toward a democratic culture of citizen participation” through “regional organisations in each of the federal states and approximately 150 local and regional institutions organised together under the umbrella of the national committee ... Through our educational offers, we seek to create opportunities to impart knowledge to people, to promote critical thinking in forming opinions and in decision-making, and to foster social participation” (See <https://www.arbeitundleben.de/wer-wir-sind/we-are>)

In short, as far as Germany is concerned, citizenship education may be observed in community-based structures for ALE with local institutions providing access for all, regional associations acting as support structures, national bodies for advocacy and capacity building, and international outreach and cooperation.

## HUNGARY

Adult education has dramatically changed in the last decade. However, cultural and community houses (*művelődési ház*) and centres have been able to preserve their roles and functions in the last thirty years and have played a significant role in the development of non-formal and informal adult learning through community-based programmes and services so as to raise participation and performance. These orientations have been influenced by the strong concerns with having to develop the life and community skills of the local citizens as members of their communities who have been confronted with many social and economic challenges stemming from democratisation and the market economy. In 1997, the famous Act CXL/1997 on Public Community Education (*Közművelődési Törvény*) underlined the significance of community education centres to provide cultural programmes for the communities and their settlements based on needs, traditional values and principles to maintain multi- and inter-cultural, multiethnic, multireligious and intergenerational orientations.

For over twenty-five years, this act has served as the basis of the community services of cultural and community institutions and houses having been maintained by the government and/or local municipalities. At the levels of the district councils of Budapest, regional cities and smaller towns, these cultural institutions, including museums and libraries, became the strongholds of culture, art, educational and training services to develop the skills and competences of adult learners beyond school age in a non-vocational context. However, in the meantime the majority of adult education has been shifted to vocational education and training related programs (Németh, 2000).

The European Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 established quality, access and partnership goals in education and influenced the development of adult and continuing education in the countries of accession. Hungary, amongst the newly emerging democracies, claimed that open education and culture and a variety of aims would be assigned to diverse providers to raise participation through the collection and exchange of knowledge and to build autonomous communities based on culture and cultural activities, voluntary actions and self-directed learning.

These aspirations also required that adult educators, other professionals in culture, and Hungarian universities made use of CONFINTEA V (Conférence Internationale sur l'Éducation des Adultes) documents to develop, plan and deliver programmes both at BA and MA levels in Cultural Organisation and Human Resources Development as of 1998. These majors were transformed into advanced adult education programmes for the Andragogy MA and the Human Resource Counselling MA during the 2006-08 period (Farkas, 2013). This era also enabled a number of researchers in adult education to join several European projects in education and culture to analyse ALE in the areas of education, culture and the labour market.

Not only those remarkable steps in ALE, but also the innovative and collaborative actions in the European programmes of education and culture have contributed to improving the cultural services and programmes in Hungary at both local and regional levels. This has been achieved through the involvement of a number of individuals, families and communities and given rise to a truly intercultural and intergenerational environment for citizenship, culture, art and adult education in the last two decades (Németh, 2016).

Further changes occurred in the field of culture and cultural services referring to the roles and responsibilities of local municipalities through the maintenance of cultural institutions in 2011; these basic compulsory public cultural services and tasks are listed



as part of the Act on Local Municipalities - CLXXXIX/2011. These basic services are compulsory services and may refer to each and every municipality, such as, for example, the promotion of community engagement in cultural activities and supporting such activities by providing relevant community spaces, fora, organisation of cultural roundtables and discussions with key figures of local cultural life.

Accordingly, a local municipality must provide a community place or cultural institution as a location of basic cultural service. However, responsibility for the maintenance of such spaces can fall to the municipality, state, minority council or association, but may also be delegated to a Church, organisation or even another legal entity. As for its type, this may be a cultural house or centre, a multifunctional cultural institution, a folk high school, a creative folk handcraft house, a leisure centre, a children or youth home. Based on recent national surveys provided by the Hungarian National Institute for Culture (NMI), the organisations entrusted with the provision of cultural services are as follows:

- 3,361 local municipalities;
- 5 county-ranked municipalities;
- 41 minority councils;
- 128 economic associations, mainly non-profit bodies;
- 55 religious organisations belonging to registered Churches considering public cultural services worth being supported;
- 570 foundations, public foundations which identify cultural activities in their statutes;
- 1780 public associations and trade unions offering cultural services;
- 37 central budgetary offices and institutes providing cultural services (see <http://nmi.hu>).

The NMI provides specific training for the staff and personnel of cultural and community houses and centres, maintains a record of the programmes offered, delivers specific surveys on the cultural programmes available within the scope of its services to local communities, in line with public needs and, with a view to publishing periodicals on national cultural life, e.g. *SZÍN – a Review on Community Culture* (see <http://nmi.hu>).

Beyond the cultural organisations and institutions, civic organisations and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are also entitled to initiate and maintain local cultural roundtables. However, autonomous folk high schools have lost significant ground in the cultural sector as a result of breaching centrally enforced rules and regulations on the cultural services of civic organisations. This has given rise to a dramatic fall in accessible public funding for folk high schools and other independent NGOs. Such conflicting issues have also been reported by several EU bodies that have investigated the status of cultural services in Hungary to claim equal access and opportunities for such organisations and institutions.

In order to strengthen communities and community-based cultural services, a special BA Community-organizer programme was introduced in 2015 to provide sufficient trained personnel for the provision of local cultural and community services.

Although cultural and community programmes have received a rather significant level of support through national budget sources and co-financing from EU-programmes and initiatives as part of the National Development Plans, questions are still being raised as to how the national government of Hungary may wish to control cultural activities and



reduce autonomous civil society activities. Some NGOs do not fully go along with the claims and demands of governmental centralized actions and have adopted critical positions towards governmental cultural and community initiatives.

This contradictory picture in Hungarian cultural life signals quality advances in cultural services, the professionalisation of cultural centres and houses' staff, and diminishing opportunities and choices for non-pro-government civil society groups and municipalities to develop cultural and community services of their own.

In the last two decades, Hungarian adult education has been relatively successful in raising participation in adult learning from the 3% average to beyond 6%, according to Eurostat and OECD surveys. However, the latest *OECD Dashboard on Adult Learning* also reflects a rather contradictory situation in Hungary: some indicators reflect stronger concern, while others resonate clear difficulties, calling for the use and implementation of complex policy measures (OECD, 2021).

To summarise, a number of missing indicators would also most likely signal a system with severe difficulties and challenges, which are not at all easy to view as hopeful directions or ways forward for expansion and development. Those missing items are the recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of the outcomes of prior and non-formal education, the quality development of professionals, guidance and counselling, non-vocational adult learning and the monitoring of the sector. When any of these features are related to the reality of ALE, then respective problems and constraints become visible and call for: the creation of a learner-centred system with a bottom-up focus, ensuring on-going and real consultancies with economic stakeholders, and ensuring that adult and lifelong learning includes measures to enhance education for active and global citizenship (Németh, 2020).

## SLOVENIA

ALE in the context of Slovenia includes organised and monitored activities, mainly in terms of vocational and up-skilling practices, thereby accommodating labour market needs (Mikulec & Jelenc-Krašovec, 2016). The Adult Education Act on the other hand offers a broader perspective of ALE and according to its article 21 aims “at increasing literacy levels and the access of vulnerable groups, providing general education, stimulating intergenerational cooperation and active citizenship, developing communities and stimulating community learning, contributing to sustainable development, the green economy, healthy lifestyles, national identity, cultural consciousness and other topics, set forth in the basic strategic act defining public interest in adult education” (PIS, 2020). It should be noted that the Adult Education Act only regulates non-formal education and the learning of individuals who have formerly fulfilled their basic education obligation and do not hold the status of pupil or student.

ALE is centralised under the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, as the governing body, and under the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE) as the main development and research body. Since ALE covers a variety of aims and forms, it is not an easy task to identify its overall national understanding (Bogataj, 2021).

Beginning with some general legislations and strategies that formally support ALE practices, the Organisation and Financing of the Education Act should be mentioned, which is the national umbrella legislation for the field of education. The Adult Education Act is the legislation according to which adult education is provided on the basis of the national long-



term master plan, adopted by the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia (Eurydice, 2019). The current legislation (still in force at the time of writing) is the masterplan for the period 2013–2020, and the new plan is to be adopted for the period 2021–2030 (EAEA, 2020). The Slovenian Development Strategy 2030, which represents “the state’s ... core development framework and a review of the current situation and global trends and challenges” (Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, 2017, p. 6) is also worthy of mention. This Strategy, with the help of the 17 SDGs, oversees the future of quality sustainable living, highlighting the particular importance of community lifelong learning in achieving this goal. EUROSTAT projections predict that by 2060 every third person in Slovenia will belong to the 65 years or above age group (Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, 2017; Jelenc-Krašovec, Radovan, Močilnikar, & Šegula, 2014;). Therefore, it is of utmost relevance to consider different ways of promoting ALE and consequently active citizenship, particularly in relation to adults and older adult learners (Gregorčič, 2019). After all, as is also highlighted in the Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21st century, “Adult education strengthens civil society and active citizens through promoting and providing social and civic skills and cooperating with ... NGO stakeholders” (EAEA, 2019a, p. 21).

Moving to the institutional level, in the 2020/21 school year, SIAE offered education, training and other non-formal learning programmes to 3,115 individuals, in collaboration with 200 providers (Slovenian Institute of Adult Education, 2021b). To support the arguments of this discussion, three examples which are closely connected to ALE and community learning have been selected, while one is still very much in an early stage of development. The aim of these examples is to demonstrate the diverse demographic characteristics being targeted by ALE practices. This could mean different learner age groups (young adults, adults, older adults), differences in the local setting and in the formality of ALE programmes (formal, non-formal, informal) and also differences in the previously acquired educational degrees and career paths of the participants.

First, SIAE supports the practice of study circles. “Based on the conceptual framework of the Scandinavian liberal education role model and learning in the local community, Slovenia established its own study circle model in the 1990s” (Perme, 2015, in Del Gobbo & Bogataj, 2015, p. 1). According to the EAEA it was established in 1993 (EAEA, n.d.). The Slovenian study circles model is, at the same time, a method and tool for the bottom up adult education approach and also for lifelong learning incentives. By stimulating community learning and the democratisation of relationships, local and individual needs and contexts as well as capacity building all play an important role in the accomplishment of study circles programs.

In line with Del Gobbo and Bogataj (2015), three best practice examples of cross-border study circles, carried out in 2013 and 2014, with the collaboration of Slovenia and Italy are noteworthy. The first was “Fruits from the emperor’s gardens: let’s revive fruit production”. Here, the participants tested their skills in an abandoned orchard. The skills were acquired as part of the study circle. The main idea was to revive old orchards that in the recent past had flourished, and to raise the awareness of the local people as to its economic, natural and social significance. The second example was attended by artisans and craftsmen who sought to preserve their traditional knowledge and skills, entitled “Our heritage: hand-made art and local crafts”. The aim was to bring together participants from both sides of the border in order to enhance their socio-economic collaboration. The third example of the study circles, “Embraced by the hills”, aimed to develop tourism and promote the local area. Therefore, the participants created a tourist map with five itineraries for different target groups of tourists.

Another case of best practices to enhance lifelong learning, ALE and community development is the Lifelong Learning Weeks (ALW) project. According to DVV International (2000), Slovenia was one of the first countries in Central and Eastern Europe to initiate the ALW agenda, now known as Lifelong Learning Weeks. The first ALW was run within the scope of the Socrates Programme in 1996, coordinated by SIAE and established as a yearly event. The project promotes transgenerational learning, in other words different age groups, from kindergarten to older adults. It includes events such as round tables, workshops, exhibitions, project launches, award ceremonies, and the dissemination of survey data to the media, etc., all of which take place in different parts of the country. This year, according to the SIAE newsletter (Slovenian Institute of Adult Education, 2021a), it will be reshaped, rescheduled and partly delivered online, due to the COVID situation, and will include topics such as: “Digital transformation of society”, “Inclusion, challenges of multiculturalism and active citizenship”, “Joint reading – for knowledge and fun!”, “Water for all – the global importance of water”.

This section closes with our last case, Age Friendly University (AFU), a project still very much in the development stage. It showcases the possibility of transgenerational cooperation and community development. In 2020 the University of Maribor became the first Slovenian member of an Age-Friendly University Global Network with its Centre for Professors Emeriti and retired higher education teachers (University of Maribor, 2021). In the same vein, the so-called wise faculty (*modra fakulteta*) community, offering learning programmes to older adults, is also being run at a further two public Slovene universities, namely the University of Ljubljana and the University of Primorska.

The AFU network already has over 70 members across the USA, Canada, Europe and Asia and these figures are on the rise (The Gerontological Society of America, 2021). Following on their principles, the AFU members work towards opening their doors to older adults and their active engagement in the university communities. This may be achieved through older adults’ participation in education programmes, the development of their second careers, in research for a better understanding and response to their varied interests and needs, or through participation in different cultural activities. This involves an exchange of transgenerational knowledge and active engagement with the university’s own retired community (STA, 2020).

In short, it may be said that there are national and community-based structures in support of lifelong learning and ALE in Slovenia, with local institutions appealing to different age groups. There are local associations and national bodies such as SIAE for advocacy, research, and ALE capacity building that also cooperate on a macro, international level.

## GLOBAL COMMITMENTS AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Let us return to the introduction and the current discussion of the UNESCO Futures of Education initiative and the contribution of UIL which pointed to the importance of community spaces for participation in learning: “Renew community spaces for learning opportunities: Encourage and support local lifelong learning initiatives, renewing community spaces for learning opportunities. Many existing (public) spaces, especially public libraries, museums, community centres and religious venues, are already entry points for continued education. As they already host learning communities and



opportunities, they could be supported and tasked to further engage in that direction” (UIL, 2020, p. 3). In this respect, this paper supports and contributes to the already existing findings that support the idea of diverse community spaces of learning. Furthermore it shows concrete examples of different attempts in support for community-based ALE, and also possesses with relevance from a historical perspective. Meaning that the historical view can give the reader some idea of the pluses and minuses of the past choices in community ALE of the selected countries, and with some adaptations keeps them relevant also for the thought and for the in-practice choices made for today and for tomorrow.

During the last decade, UNESCO, through conferences such as CONFINTEA and statements deriving from consultations with its stakeholders from the wider UN family, has advanced recommendations and commitments with regard to ALE and CLC which have been adopted by member states. They are presented here in the sequence of their appearance:

- *Bélem Framework for Action (BFA)*: in 2009, CONFINTEA VI formulated the following: “We recognize that adult education represents a significant component of the lifelong learning process, which embraces a learning continuum ranging from formal to non-formal to informal learning.” The BFA calls for “...creating multi-purpose community learning spaces and centres...”, and “citizenship” is considered important at the content level (UIL, 2010). BFA initiated GRALE, the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education; the 3<sup>rd</sup> volume covers the impact of ALE on civic and community life (UIL, 2016).
- *Education 2030 Agenda*: The outcome document of the World Education Forum in Incheon in 2015 was fully integrated as Goal 4 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) adopted by the United Nations Summit (UN, 2015) with the overarching education goal: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. As regards CLCs: “Make learning spaces and environments for non-formal and adult learning and education widely available, including networks of community learning centres and spaces and provision for access to IT resources as essential elements of lifelong learning.” Education for “global citizenship” is needed (UNESCO, 2015a).
- *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE)* was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in Paris in 2015 and points to the “significant role of adult learning and education in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. For successful implementation RALE calls for “...creating or strengthening appropriate institutional structures, like community learning centres, for delivering adult learning and education and encouraging adults to use these as hubs for individual learning as well as community development”. It includes “active citizenship, through what is known as community, popular or liberal education.” (UNESCO, 2015b)
- *Recommendation Concerning Technical and Vocational Education and Training (RTVET)* was adopted at the same UNESCO General Conference and considers work and life from a lifelong learning perspective, and reflects an expanded concept, far beyond the limited earlier view on vocational skills, including: “learning to learn, the development of literacy and numeracy skills, transversal skills and citizenship skills are integral components of TVET”. Implementation requires “...growing consideration of work-based learning and TVET in other settings including community-

based, distance and online...” and therefore “...encourage a variety of learning opportunities, whether in public and private TVET institutions, workplaces, homes...” (UNESCO, 2015c).

All four countries are members of UNESCO: Austria and Hungary joined in 1948, Germany in 1951 and Slovenia in 1992. The four documents have all been adopted in different processes by the UNESCO Member States: The BFA through a World Conference, the SDG through the UN General Assembly, and RALE and RTVET through the UNESCO General Conference. They therefore have some sort of binding and normative function which may be referred to as a global commitment at the policy level. In reality, the participation of countries in the processes that contributed to the emergence of the BFA, SDG, RALE and RTVET is diverse. In some cases, Governments as representatives of member states invite the participation of actors and stakeholders from civil society, academia or trade unions while in other countries they try to keep it as a closed governmental circle.

These are products of their time and any attempt to identify a cause and effect relationship within the limits of this study can only fail. However, we may consider a claim for some degree of plausibility that those documents were known and recognized by the respective ministries and policy makers. It may be another assumption that in this age of globalisation this trend is not decreasing. In the case of Germany, it should be noted that the afore-mentioned documents were translated into the national language which increased the potential of wider dissemination.

Returning to the comparative perspectives and research questions, the historical outline of the developments in all four as well as the reviews of the individual countries has shown that there are policies and practices of community-based ALE related to citizenship education. Historically, especially following the decades after World War II, in all four countries Government interest and interventions proven by policies, legislation and financing may be observed - although clearly at different levels reflecting how ALE decision-taking is seen as a national, provincial and local responsibility. However, ALE policies, as well as their implementation and related institutions, changed again in the 1990s in Hungary and Slovenia due to the system change and the new political, economic and cultural demands.

Another aspect that calls for attention is the comparative advantage of all four countries as members of the EU. In the last two decades, the EU has released important documents that have been highly influential –the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning in 2000, the Communication on ALE “It is Never Too Late to Learn” and the Education and Training 2020 programme. The following may be considered milestone events: European ALE Conferences, possibly indicating that while this paper is being written there are advanced preparations by the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU together with UNESCO for the “Dual Conference: Adult learning and Education – The Resilient Response to Future Challenges, 8 and 9 September, 2021” which at the same time is the European Regional Consultation advancing CONFITEA VII. In light of the above mentioned global documents, an important finding with respect to our second research question may be that follow-up is always needed at the regional and national level. The outcomes of the Slovenian EU conference need to be crafting and creating a framework for innovations in community-based ALE for active citizenship as a new European Agenda. At the national level, follow-up is required by enforcing a respective dialogue such as the current preparation in Germany for the 15th Adult Education Conference (*Volkshochschultag*) in



June 2022 with the motto “vhs 2030: Together in Diversity. Sustainable. Connected”, explicitly taking up the timeframe of the global SDG Education Agenda.

What could be the other main areas and themes for a comparison of the experiences in the four countries? In our third research question we posed issues such as demographic change and COVID-19. Our answers here are limited. Whether national Governments and ALE support institutions and providers will do what is necessary to enlarge participation and provide learning opportunities for younger and older adults to a level needed to ensure that the right and entitlement to lifelong learning as called for by UNESCO could become a reality is yet to be seen. The EU conference called for higher participation, and here, as with UNESCO, the member states are the ones calling for this and are hopefully implementing it in their own countries. More statistical data and research findings will contribute to a comparison of the extent to which the lock-down of ALE institutions has led to the interruption of provision, and how flexible larger numbers of institutions have developed blended and hybrid forms of courses and seminars where some participations can join on the spot while others participate via on-line modes. The digitalisation of ALE appears to have been affected by COVID more in the past year than through other policies in the past decade. However, little is known on the digital divide between rural and urban ALE community learning. The EAEA has just published a *Context Paper: Digitalization and Democracy* and two of the recommendations state:

- promote digital citizenship, which extends digital competence further in the domain of Education for Democratic Citizenship/Human Rights Education. To this end, education in its entirety should give rights-related approaches more emphasis within European societies and also regarding adult learners.
- fund and support learning and education in communities, fostering intergenerational learning. To this end, cooperation in Europe and with other parts of the world should be promoted and supported to foster digital education and learning to narrow the digital divide. (EAEA, 2021, p. 23)

Returning to our findings, when considering communalities there are certain forms of education for active citizenship and community-based institutions were observed as providers. Another similarity is the existence of national institutes as service and support providers in areas such as research and development, training and up-grading, documentation and data collection, information and exchange. In some cases, there is a regional/provincial level in between for the strengthening of services. These national institutes also play a role in the establishment of international contacts and cooperation. In all four countries specific forms and levels of Government support for ALE and citizenship education for adults were perceptible.

More research is needed to understand why in all four countries the respective governments' influence on ALE has positive effects, especially in the support of voluntary activism and of communities and groups at a local level which may be important for rural and urban developments. Here the importance of citizenship education and ALE has a wider and inclusive perspective as they are supporting an active mindset for local, national, European and global development. This deserves further research for stronger support.

## AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Heribert Hinzen, Carina Klement, Jaka Klun and Balázs Németh; Methodology: Balázs Németh; Validation: Heribert Hinzen, Carina Klement, Jaka Klun and Balázs Németh; Investigation: Heribert Hinzen, Carina Klement, Jaka Klun and Balázs Németh; Resources: Heribert Hinzen, Carina Klement, Jaka Klun and Balázs Németh; Writing – Original Draft Preparation: Heribert Hinzen, Carina Klement, Jaka Klun and Balázs Németh; Writing – Review & Editing: Heribert Hinzen, Carina Klement, Jaka Klun and Balázs Németh; Supervision: Balázs Németh and Heribert Hinzen; Project Administration: Carina Klement.

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