

TRACK #6: WIDERSPRUCH WECKEN & WIDERSTAND LERNEN

Global civic engagement and democratic participation in times of decreasing solidarity and social cohesion: the role of (adult) education and lifelong learning

1. Background	2
2. (Adult) Education responds to Europe's challenges	3
3. The concept of citizenship and (active) citizenship education.....	4
4. Adult Education and Active Citizenship Education	5
5. Active citizenship and life skills	8
6. Social cohesion, equity and equality	8
7. Educating the Global Citizen	9
8. Concluding	11
9. Bibliography.....	11

1. Background

The development of the European Union has become an increasingly contested territory over the past years. Brexit, changes in the electoral behaviour in several countries, the economic crisis and cutbacks in social welfare systems as well as wars at the margins of Europe have shaped the political discourse. Correspondingly, demographic change sees shifting populations in Europe – people get older and therefore want to be active and healthy for longer. In many regions and countries where there have been significant changes in employment opportunities and few options to retrain, unemployment is very high, especially among the youngest and oldest adults. Growing digitalisation demands new skills and competences of employees, citizens and consumers. Climate change and other environmental challenges continue to pose threats to (not only) Europe's future and to necessitate more sustainable economies, societies and lifestyles.

Moreover, Europe faces growing inequalities, not only between people but also between regions and countries within Europe. More and more European citizens seem to question European values and liberal democracy by voting for xenophobic and anti-European parties. While some Member States are in favour of expanding the competences of the EU, others are drawing back with the aim to strengthen national competences and give fewer possibilities to the EU to impact national legislation and policy-making.

Thus, trends in some countries to limit freedom of press and media have fuelled debates on the meaning of democracy in the EU. Security and migration to Europe have been particularly hot topics as it has faced a high level of migration, which poses huge challenges to European governments and coherence. This has led to a wave of support from European citizens on the one hand but also to a defensive or hateful reaction by critics, on the other hand.

We need positive answer to these challenges of today's society – such as to the growing confusion about what is a fact, what is the interpretation of a fact and what is an opinion. We are constantly surrounded by all kinds of information, from political issues to advertisements, which gets to us with no filter other than our own capacity to critically assess its validity. Disinformation has become a political and (social) media tool to manipulate and confuse people. The dangers of this confusion are obvious: it undermines democracies and people's engagement in them.

Do we want a more equal Europe, in which the citizens participate democratically and actively - where people have the skills and knowledge to take part in civic activities? Then it is of high importance to engage people in deliberative democracy. We require tools for the development of critical thinking and empowerment in an active and knowledgeable civil society and spaces to develop active citizenship and civic engagement. Education, and adult education in particular, can play a vital role in shaping the future of Europe. It equips people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to become active, responsible and engaged citizens that can impact their environment to create an inclusive and sustainable future for all.

2. (Adult) Education responds to Europe's challenges

The next ten to fifteen years will determine what it means to be a citizen of the European Union, i.e. which space citizens will have in shaping political decision-making at the national as well as the European level. Education is a competence of the Member States of the European Union; this means that any policies or strategies adopted at the European level have recommending rather than directive power. This does not, however, mean that education is neglected at the European level. In recent years, the European Union has launched a number of additional initiatives and strategies that support education and training for the promotion of employability, social inclusion and active citizenship, notably “Upskilling Pathways” as part of the European Skills Agenda, and the European Education Agenda.

The OECD Learning Framework 2030 illustrates the role of learning for the individual, the community and society. Despite the learning framework having been developed for younger learners, it can equally be applied to adult learners:

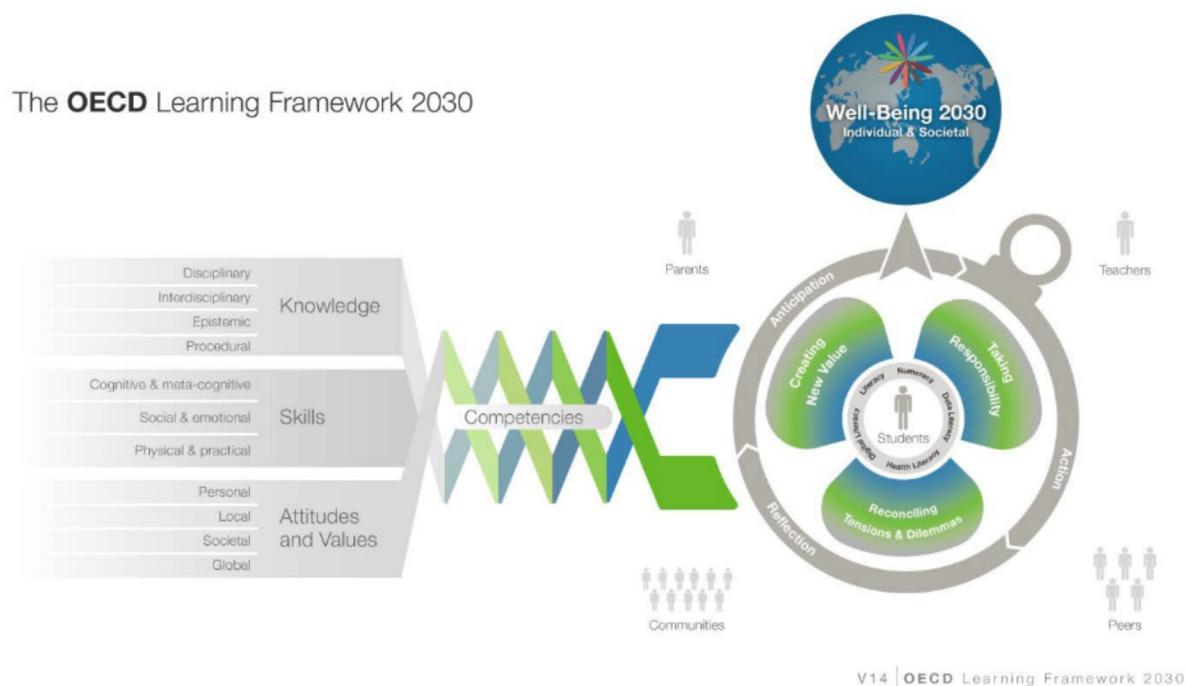


Figure 1. The OECD Learning Framework 2030: Work-in-progress. (OECD 2018: 4)

Agency – the ability to make informed choices about one's life and a sense of responsibility to participate in the world and to influence people, events and circumstances – is, according to the OECD, at the centre of learning, and consequently, of any change in society:

“Two factors, in particular, help learners enable agency. The first is a personalised learning environment that supports and motivates each student to nurture his or her passions, make connections between different learning experiences and opportunities, and design their own learning projects and processes in collaboration with others. The second is building a solid foundation: literacy and numeracy remain crucial. In the era of digital transformation and with the advent of big data, digital literacy and data literacy are becoming increasingly essential, as are physical health and mental well-being.” (OECD 2018: 4)

However, while there has been progress in the field of adult education and lifelong learning at the European level, this is not yet fully acknowledged in the topics that the European

Union considers most relevant for this sector. The topics currently discussed at the European level include, for instance, workplace learning and basic skills; however, themes central to non-formal adult education such as active citizenship and democracy, life skills, community learning or global education are not very high on the political agenda at the moment. Non-formal adult education can be defined as all systematic communication and transfer of skill, knowledge, and competences provided outside the limits of the formal education system. Its main objectives are the promotion of social inclusion, active citizenship, personal development and well-being, alongside the transfer of knowledge, competences and skills.

Within the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the Commission called for a renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning where quality education and training, equity, and social cohesion become a widespread reality. National coordinators in each Member State of the European Union follow up on the implementation process of the agenda. Education is considered a key priority area in the Europe 2020 strategy, and consequently, the Education and Training 2020 benchmarks include also a goal for adult education: at least 15% of all adults should participate in lifelong learning by 2020.

Data about participation rates in adult education is lacking in many European countries as non-formal and informal learning is captured differently depending on the national statistics organisations and their way of measuring. Where data is available, it is often limited to certain age groups, such as the working population, or it focuses mainly on work-related education and training. At the European level, there are two sets of adult learning statistics available: the labour force survey (LFS), and the adult education survey (AES). According to the most recent figures, currently only 11% of EU working age citizens participate in lifelong learning (Eurostat 2017).

Key policy documents for adult education are also the European Pillar of Social Rights that lists the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning as its first principle, and the European Commission's initiative to build a European Education Area by 2025. Programmes such as the European Social Fund and Erasmus+ as well as mechanisms such as the European Semester with its Country Reports, help to fulfil the EU's objectives.

3. The concept of citizenship and (active) citizenship education

It is argued that in light of the current political scenario, active citizenship is mandatory for our democracies to survive and its promotion is urgent. However, one of the most controversial and challenging issues about citizenship education is represented by the kaleidoscopic concept of citizenship itself, which results in a consequent heterogeneity of contents and methodologies or related educational activities. Schugurensky (2006), has identified four different dimensions of citizenship (citizenship as status, identity, civic virtues and agency) and observed that citizenship education activities are mostly carried out on the basis of one or more of those dimensions.

Citizenship as status could often be considered a synonym of nationality and refers to issues of membership and to a specific political community, with related political rights. As civic virtues it refers to values, attitudes and behaviors that "good citizens" should have. This dimension is controversial, first because it assumes a judgment on how a good citizen should be, second because this judgement is both rooted on the subjective understanding, both promoted by the state and/or the society in relation to historical, ideological and political contexts. Citizenship as agency sees citizens as social actors and implies that the collective or individual exercise of citizenship occurs in concrete social relations mediated by power. Finally, citizenship as identity refers to issues of feeling of belonging and it is

rooted in factors like a common history, language, religion, values, traditions and culture, which often do not coincide with the territory of a nation-state.

Looking at this dimension is particularly relevant the effort of the European Union in promoting European citizenship, not only inviting people to vote for a common parliament, but fostering a sense of common belonging through programs, projects and initiatives. The effort to foster a feeling of European citizenship and belonging to a common culture and value is particularly relevant at the EU level. Already in 2001 in the European Commission's Communication: Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality (2001), identified active citizenship as one of the four "broad and mutually supporting objectives" of the lifelong learning strategy (Council of the European Union, 2002).

Defining (active) citizenship education

Due to the ambiguity of the concept of citizenship itself, it is difficult to come up with a standardised model of citizenship education, either for young people and adults, at the European and at a global level. Citizenship education has been defined by UNESCO (1998) as "educating children, from early childhood, to become clear-thinking and enlightened citizens who participate in decisions concerning society".

The Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning (2006), issued by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, had highlighted the importance of strengthening active democratic citizenship through education, by including among the key competences a civic competence 'based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation'. This competence which 'equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation'. Also in the European Agenda for Adult Learning (2010) active citizenship is reported among the reasons to increase participation of adult learners in formal, informal and informal activities, alongside acquisition of work skills, and personal development and fulfilment. After the Paris Declaration in 2015 there has been a strong focus on the promotion of citizenship education, specifically in the perspective to the need of educating young people to become adults capable of critical thinking and of active engagement in the society.

In this regard, member states have worked on their policies in this area and citizenship education has become a component of school curricula, as highlighted by the Eurydice report "Citizenship education at school in Europe-2017". This report provides a comparative overview of how citizenship education is approached across Europe, focusing on the existing regulations and recommendations regarding citizenship education in schools of the public sector and includes general education and school-based initial vocational education training programmes.

4. Adult Education and Active Citizenship Education

The roots of adult education in many parts of Europe can be found in emancipatory movements. Today still, adult education promotes the engagement of citizens to share knowledge, skills and competencies as well as creates a space for civil society to develop democracy and become active in political processes. Access to and participation in adult education therefore also means empowerment and active citizenship, including the strengthening of values such as intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. Adult education has a fundamental role for active citizenship, through the development of citizenship education by providing space and opportunities to create a sense of individual and common responsibility, fostering civic engagement, tackling social exclusion and developing of critical thinking.

Critical thinking is considered particularly important, as it is fundamental for citizens to have tools to understand government and politics and be able to exercise their own judgment in order to overcome European issues such as increasing radicalisation, migration and social inequalities, and challenge the threat of the digital world, such as the phenomenon of fake news. At the same time, “alternative facts” and the flood of information that is increasingly difficult to navigate will challenge informed decision-making of citizens. E-citizenship (or digital citizenship) might exacerbate the effects of the digital divide on citizens and their access to trustworthy information and services. Media literacy will therefore play a pivotal role in empowering citizens to make use of their voice as citizens and their possibilities to engage in decision-making.

In addition to that, there seems to be a direct correlation between the basic skills of an individual and the trust that this person lends to political institutions and the political system (see for instance the PIAAC study of the OECD); i.e. the higher the basic skills, the more trust in political institutions and the system. The PIAAC study (the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) conducted by the OECD measures the skills among adults in different countries. This survey of Adult Skills is an international survey carried out in 33 countries and collects and analyses data that assist governments in assessing, monitoring and analysing the level and distribution of skills among adults. The OECD Survey of Adult Skills measures the key workplace and cognitive skills needed for individuals to participate successfully in society and for economies. The PIAAC study for example has shown a clear correlation between ‘trust’ and ‘political efficacy’ with skills levels. The lower one’s basic skills, the lower one’s trust is in institutions and the lower one’s belief is in one’s ability to have an impact.

Adult education in particular strengthens and regenerates civil society by building responsibilities and a feeling of belonging to Europe and to a democratic tradition. Participatory democracy is only made possible through broad participation and meaningful contributions to decision-making and critical evaluation of political and societal issues by all stakeholders. Furthermore, persons participating in adult education are more likely to engage in volunteering and becoming active in their communities. Also learning contributes to the development of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills such as critical thinking and creative thinking, as well as social and emotional skills such as empathy, self-efficacy and collaboration.

Further, Preston (2004)¹ analysed the impact of adult education on participants’ civic lives and on the formation of values, particularly tolerance. Individual engagement in education is a predictor of engagement in public life because ‘the more students are engaged in their education, the more willing they are, on average, to play a positive role in public life’. Adult education leads moreover to an increase in racial tolerance and a greater likelihood of voting. Preston found that learning has an impact on informal and formal civic participation. It helps individuals to build, maintain, dismantle, reconstruct and enrich their social networks. Additionally, the formation of values is influenced by learning. For example, changes in tolerance, understanding and respect were reported by respondents. Civic and social engagement (CSE) as a learning outcome has also been analysed by the OECD (2007)².

¹ <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/10015019/>

² <http://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/39097376.pdf>

Regarding societal cohesion, the main contributions of education are greater trust, more civic co-operation and lower levels of violent crime. Additionally, the individual engagement in education is a predictor of engagement in public life because “the more students are engaged in their education, the more willing they are, on average, to play a positive role in public life” (p. 20). Adult education leads moreover to an increase in racial tolerance and a greater likelihood of voting.

Good practice examples

There are good examples of how adult education organizations promote citizenship education, such as the work provided by AONTAS, Ireland's National Learning Organization, which commits to the community of practices. Developing the methodology of community education has proven to be effective in engaging learners and provides quality experiences that meet the learner's educational and training needs. Community education is a learner-centred approach, tailored on the requirements of a specific local community. In community education's programmes, learners work together with members of the community they belong to, or are about to be integrated in, and groups are normally heterogeneous in terms of nationality, religion, language and needs. Community education pursues the goal of engagement, involvement and empowerment of the individuals and consequently of the community itself, addressing mainly those who are at risk of social exclusion for their economic status, which is often linked to unemployment, poor health, limited general aspiration and expectations, lack of access to service and education. Offering short, part-time courses and programmes, community education can therefore act as a first positive step back to education, and lead to many possibilities for learners and communities, including skills development, confidence building, greater community involvement and progression to further education or employment. Often initiatives and projects in adult education are developed in a way that the two perspectives are interconnected, and the participation itself is seen as a step towards active citizenship. At the same time learners are challenged in practicing their participatory skills and getting new knowledge and information.

The Citizens First project in Romania has made a sustainable, nation-wide difference in small communities, in particular in the rural area. The project implements active citizenship to give people the voice to decide what is a priority for their community and provides them with the tools to create solutions they themselves can implement. Together they identify communal problems, vote on issues that will be addressed first, and collaboratively develop action plans. The Citizens First project went beyond the sheer implementation of the action plans. It produced a mindset shift from perceiving the public authorities as decision-makers to relating to them as partners for development. The question becomes: “what is to be done and what can we do ourselves for us and for our community?”

The Swedish Muslim study association Ibn Rushd ran a peace project: Att främja islamisk fredskultur (The promotion of Islamic Peace Culture) Young Muslims across the country were to be Peace Agents. They have been given the knowledge and tools needed to work with peace issues, anti-violence and human rights. The long term aim is to combat Islamophobia – fear and animosity towards Islam, mainly by people in the West – and Westphobia – fear and animosity towards the West, mainly by Muslims. The foundation for a

Muslim peace movement, Svenska muslimer för fred och rättvisa (Swedish Muslims for Peace and Justice) has been laid.

An interesting initiative is the International Democracy Festival Association, which represents eight democracy festivals from the Nordic and Baltic regions and a European-wide festival, with the aim to straighten and to promote the establishment of other democracy festivals as a vehicle for democratic change. Democracy festivals are platforms for democratic dialogue between civil society, politicians, business, media, universities and citizens. According to Zakia Elvang, Chair of the Democracy Festivals Association, “The vision of the Association is to revitalise democracy by strengthening the link between a political system and citizens as well as creating spaces for dialogue and participation”.

5. Active citizenship and life skills

The ability to actively participate in society and be engaged in society belong to those “civic capabilities”, which are considered part of the so-called Life Skills, defined as “a constituent part of capabilities for life and work in a particular social, cultural and environmental context. The types of life skills emerge as a response to the needs of the individual in real life situations”. As highlighted in Vandenabeele, Reyskens, Wildemeersch (2011), in the contemporary society citizens are increasingly encouraged to have an active participation, not only with regard to policy issues but also to issues related to everyday life.

According to this need, on one hand adult education promotes learning as a necessary prerequisite to access participation in democratic processes. This can address different needs, such as the improvement of basic skills, like literacy and numeracy, the development of participatory skills, as well as trainings and discussions on political and societal issues and challenges. This perspective implies that individuals should first learn participatory skills, before they can learn and speak as citizens (Vandenaabele et al., 2011). Moreover, it suggests that they are encouraged to activate and acquire the competences identified by the “rational community” to be good citizens. As commented in Biesta and Lawy (2006), this vision implies the existence of a norm of what it means to be a good citizen, and this norm is highly contextual and variable. On the other hand, adult education promotes a vision in which learning itself is considered as a form of participation in the community and not just a mean to prepare for participation (Wildemeersch & Berkens, 1997 in Vandenaabele et al., 2011). This perspective promotes citizenship as commitment in the “community of practices”, and participation in joint activities.

6. Social cohesion, equity and equality

Participation in education has a direct impact on the kinds of jobs that people can get, but also their life expectancy and quality of life overall. Adult education can provide learning opportunities for those who might not have adequate access or provision earlier in life. To ensure that everyone knows of and can enjoy these opportunities, outreach measures and guidance for those furthest away from learning are central. Partnerships across sectors play a key role in order to reach out to new learners; this includes, but is not limited to, cooperation with the social housing and the health sector. Adult education contributes to social mobility as well as to more equality and equity in society.

Individual levels of education have a huge impact on people's opportunities in life, ranging from the kind of jobs they can attain to life expectancy. There is a lot of international research, which highlights that those who have done better from their initial education and with higher levels of qualifications are more likely to continue to

learn. Therefore, education needs to further greater social mobility and outreach to groups that are not participating in learning is necessary in order to achieve more social inclusion. People will be able to participate more – in society, democracy, economy, arts and culture.

From basic skills training to second chance schools and language learning – education can provide many opportunities to improve individuals' lives but also to equalise societies on a larger scale and to create fairer societies as well as more economic growth. Learning is particularly powerful in bringing together people from different walks and stages of life, in developing mutual understanding and respect, and in contributing to active citizenship, personal development and well-being. This benefits society, democracy and social peace.

Research has shown that the less people are able to successfully shape their lives, an ability which is built and rebuilt throughout the course of their lives, the greater they are at risk of exclusion. This is why learning and education are given a key value. Wider benefits of education – in addition to the acquired skills and qualifications – are achieved through two mechanisms:

1. Personal characteristics and abilities: education and learning strengthens the development of key skills, abilities and personal resources as well as reinforces belief in the individual's ability to deal with disadvantageous situations.
2. Social interaction: education enables access to individuals and groups with a similar and heterogeneous socio-economic background, encourages social cohesion and provides possibility of social involvement.

7. Educating the Global Citizen

The context of a globalized world also makes demands on pedagogic thought and action, that requires a new understanding of education that goes beyond the teaching of factual knowledge. This is where the concept and principles of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) come in and which becomes even more important in the context of empowerment in LLL. Despite the fact that the notion of GCE is already used by many lifelong learning programmes, GCE is still in need for an overall acceptance and recognition as a key feature of formal, non-formal, and lifelong learning.

As an educational concept, GCE is not entirely new and builds on the pedagogies of intercultural learning, global education, cosmopolitan education, peace education and civic education.

AN UMBRELLA TERM

In this book the term “education for *global citizenship*” is used as an “umbrella term” covering themes such as education for tolerance and appreciation of diversity, conflict resolution and peace, humanitarian action, and introduction to the principles of human rights and humanitarian law, as well as civic responsibilities, – as these themes relate to local, national and international levels.

Themes within the field of education for *global citizenship*:

1. Values education and life skills education
2. Peace education; studies of the causes of conflict and its transformation, and other global issues.
3. Human rights education: critical thinking, empathy, avoiding stereotyping and exclusion, and the concepts associated with human rights and responsibilities.
4. Citizenship or civic education

Source: *Education Above All* (2012)⁸

GCE combines them and some of their essential components, such as ethical values and gives them a new and unique focus. GCE responds to globalization by expanding the concept of (active) civic (citizenship) education to global society. We need an awareness of our responsibilities on the global level and this has to be part of our citizenship. Global citizenship goes beyond national, regional and continental borders and boundaries and GCE means that we raise awareness of the global problems.

Principles of GCE are

- commitment to social justice and equity, identity and diversity, human rights
- commitment to participation and inclusion
- human relation to other human beings, environment and society as a whole
- humans having individual and collective power to work towards societal change.

GCE has the aim to be a foundational building block to transforming the present and future society, as it constitutes an original, necessary and forward-looking mental framework. It draws upon the “global society”- perspective but not only investigates global topics: it merges the global and the local into glocal. But this does that mean that national identities are obsolete. We are talking about a paradigm shift where the frame of reference is no longer the nation state but the global society! These societies are networked on multiple levels and equally localized and globalized. No parallel identity (a cosmopolitan one) is added to all other existing identities.

GCE is a also core element of Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030, specifically singled out in target 4.7., which calls on countries to “*ensure that all learners are provided with the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship*”

and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development”.

Global Citizenship Education aims to be a framework that leads to a positive transformation, both individual and collective, thus empowers us to transform ourselves and the world (no matter of age, sex, origin or occupation). It enables people to learn about the globalized world we live in, about our relations with the world and to be active citizens. It is not merely about preparing people for becoming active citizens of tomorrow – it is about learning to develop different ways of thriving together in an unpredictable and uncertain future.

8. Concluding ...

As there are a lot of external forces ruling our lives, it is crucial to interpret economic, social, political and cultural processes, to recognize possibilities of social participation and to actively shape and share responsibility in globalizing societies. Democracy, intercultural dialogue, social justice and cooperation are key for a Europe of respect, participation and cohesion. We need learning and education to reflect on societal situations and challenges, in order to learn from prevailing European issues such as increasing radicalisation, migration and social inequalities. These issues have shown that democratic attitudes, tolerance and respect need to be reinforced.

Lifelong learning and (adult) education can be a tool for the development of critical thinking and empowerment, a lively and inspired civil society, and knowledge and know-how, as it provides the space to develop active citizenship. In particular, non-formal learning has a key role in giving individuals the space and instrument to develop critical thinking and participatory skills. In this context, adult education offers clearly a unique space, both for those who did not get chances through formal education and in general for everyone, providing opportunities to learn how to address the continuously changing challenges of the society.

The core purpose of contemporary ALE is to enable individuals to understand complex global developments and to reflect critically on them. Thus, the goal of is (lifelong) learning and (adult) education is to enable people to be part of the informed decision making about the system, in the global agenda for the people and for the planet. **It is time to broaden our worldview and pave the way for a global lifelong learning perspective.**

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Short Bio

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