NESET RESEARCH PAPER

# Community Based Lifelong Learning Centres: Developing a European Strategy Informed by International Evidence and Research.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper seeks to examine strategies for establishing community based lifelong learning centres in EU member states. It explores evidence and research on the benefits and advantages of establishing such centres, as well as the barriers and difficulties impeding both the establishment and effectiveness of such centres. As part of developing a strategy for such community lifelong centres, an important focus is on supportive conditions for their effectiveness, rather than a deterministic assumption of their inevitable effectiveness. A number of examples of such centres in EU member states will be examined. Though the main focus on such centres is in relation to *nonformal* education, their scope will be seen to include not only potential bridges to formal education but also opportunities for synergy between nonformal and formal education pathways even in the same location. The scope of this paper will also acknowledge the lifewide dimension to lifelong learning, often neglected, in relation to such community lifelong learning centres.

At the outset it is important to locate the establishment of such community lifelong learning centres in relation to EU key objectives for lifelong learning. The opportunity offered by development and expansion of such centres is that they can simultaneously provide instantiations of a range of key lifelong learning objectives, such as active citizenship, social cohesion/inclusion, personal and social fulfillment, intercultural dialogue, as well as employment pathways. In other words, a notable potential they offer is as a kind of one-stop-shop for a wide number of core lifelong learning objectives of the European Council and Commission.

Developments at European Council level regarding access to education and lifelong learning include the EU Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') (2009/C 119/02). The Council recognised that the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme which — in the context of the Lisbon Strategy — established for the first time a solid framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training, based on common objectives and aimed primarily at supporting the improvement of national education and training systems through the development of complementary EU11 level tools, mutual learning and the exchange of good practice via the open method of coordination.

Significantly the EU Council (2009/C 119/02) agrees that:
1. In the period up to 2020, the primary goal of European cooperation should be to support the further development of education and training systems in the Member States which are aimed at ensuring:
(a) the personal, social and professional fulfillment of all citizens;
(b) sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue.

Setting out ‘a strategic framework spanning education and training systems as a whole in a lifelong learning perspective’, the EU Council (2009/C 119/02) goes on to state:

Indeed, lifelong learning should be regarded as a fundamental principle underpinning the entire framework, which is designed to cover learning in all contexts — whether formal, non-formal or informal — and at all levels: from early childhood education and schools
1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies.
2. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship (p. 3).

This statement amounts to a reiteration of the wide scope of lifelong learning explicated in earlier documents of the EU Commission (2000; 2001).

Under ‘Strategic objective 3: Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship’, the EU Council seeks ‘to foster further learning, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue’, while stating that ‘Educational disadvantage should be addressed by providing high quality early childhood education and targeted support, and by promoting inclusive education’. The key dimension of access to education is made an explicit priority as follows:

Education and training systems should aim to ensure that all learners — including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants — complete their education, including, where appropriate, through second-chance education and the provision of more personalised learning (p. 4).

It is on the basis of these stated priorities and objectives that community lifelong learning centres can be given renewed emphasis at EU level. They also offer potential bridges to those experiencing disadvantage and marginalization, as an implication of insights of leading thinkers in both sociology (Berger & Neuhaus 1977) and psychology (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Berger & Neuhaus (1977) emphasise the need for ‘mediating structures’ between the individual and the state, as well as between communities and the often impersonal and even alienating State system. Community based lifelong learning centres can play a key role as such mediating structures. Similarly, developmental psychologist Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) systemic ‘ecological’ focus on transitions between contexts offers a framework to emphasise the need for such transitional structures and locations for people who have experienced alienation and marginalization from the (social and educational) system, in the past. Important transitional opportunities potentially provided by community lifelong learning centres include both a welcoming atmosphere to help overcome fear of failure among those experiencing disadvantage (e.g. Glasser 1969; Warnock 1977; Handy & Aitken 1990; Kellaghan et al., 1995; MacDevitt 1998; Kelly 1999; Downes 2003; Jimerson 1999; Ferguson et al., 2001), and, as adverted to in the recent EU Council document (2009, above), an opportunity for ‘more personalised learning’. Slowey’s (1987) characterisation of distinctive features of non-formal education is also pertinent in this context of community lifelong learning centres. She observes that non-formal education tends to offer frequently dense geographical networks, curricula and attendance

options suited to learners' needs, lower psychological barriers for those experiencing educational disadvantage and faculties consisting mainly of practitioners.

The Lisbon European Council conclusions (paragraph 26) propose turning schools and training centres into multi-purpose local learning centres, all linked to the Internet and accessible to people of all ages. This is a major challenge for all Member States. Yet a more precise focus on the role of such centres in engaging with those experiencing disadvantage and alienation from the system is needed. Community lifelong learning centres additionally give expression two aspects, in particular, of the OECD ten steps to equity in education (Field, Kuczera & Pont 2007). These are:

- Step 6: Strengthen the links between school and home to help disadvantaged parents help their children to learn
- Step 9: Direct resources to students and regions with the greatest needs.

ET 2020 sets five major benchmarks, or outcome indicators, in relation to education.

These are regarding early childhood, basic skills, early school leaving, tertiary education and lifelong learning. This extension of the Lisbon strategy to go further in relation to lifelong learning and social inclusion in ET 2020 amounts to an implicit recognition that, in the words of Nicaise (2010), 'Lisbon 2010 has failed to achieve more inclusion/cohesion because this dimension was neglected'. From his analysis of EU social inclusion policy in relation to education, in a keynote address for the EU Belgian Presidency Conference in September 2010, Nicaise further concludes that 'there is room for stronger coordination between social inclusion and education policies at EU level'. Nicaise (2010a) highlights the overall picture of growing income inequality in the EU, based on OECD (2008) research, and reiterates that 'recognising the failure of the Lisbon Strategy to reconcile both objectives [of economic growth and social cohesion] is a first step towards a smarter strategy for the future' (p.20).

Currently families in Europe with a low-educated head face a poverty risk which is twice that of families where the head has completed secondary education (24% versus 13% on average for the EU 27) (Nicaise 2010a). EAEA (2010) argues that certain factors of adult learning contribute to reducing the risk of poverty, which include the provision of supportive learning environments, cultural sensitive curricula, a bottom-up approach to decision making, reaching people in their natural settings, a focus on social mobilization with learner support (2010, p.8). However, poverty related barriers to lifelong learning have been observed to include psychological aspects such as stress, depression, lack of sleep due to anxiety, lack of confidence (Downes & Maunsell 2007), as well as issues of time and space to read, lack of childcare support (Maunsell, Downes & McLoughlin 2008), discomfort of dwelling (Nicaise 2010), insufficient transport availability etc. These require a wider focus than one on access to education through community lifelong learning centres.

## 2. Evaluation of community based lifelong learning centres: Methodological Issues

An EAEA report (2011, forthcoming) makes a number of methodological observations on current research. Referring to 'Gaps in Knowledge Base', it notes that 'only a few studies focus on adult learning and its learning experiences that matter for wider benefits, which means that there are substantial gaps in our knowledge base on the potential impacts of non-formal adult learning. The interconnections between progress in learning and other dimensions that affect people's lives such as health, environment, family and community circumstances are not generally well represented'. It notes a focus on empirical evidence on attainment in formal education, without considering nonformal learning:

> Most studies focus on the number of years/month (for example Fend et al., 2004) or level of educational attainment and formal qualifications as an indicator of output, mainly because these kinds of data are cheaply and easily to collect. This has commonly been investigated as a simple linear effect, without distinguishing the relative benefit of educational participation at different stages.

Another issue this report highlights is selection bias: 'for each participant we can never know what outcomes that individual would have experienced had s/he not participated. Similarly, for each person who does not participate we cannot know what outcomes would have been experienced had s/he participated. Although many studies have used comparison groups to estimate the outcomes, simple comparisons of non/participants are likely to be subject of selection bias and do not provide reliable estimates of benefit (Ferrer and Riddell 2010)'. It is important to emphasise that these are problems inherent in all research on prevention and are not simply specific to nonformal education, nor community lifelong learning centres.

Another issue raised by the EAEA report (2011) is the transferability of results between regions as well as between types of adult education provision within the sector itself:

> Also internationally results of studies often cannot be compared, since the instruments and national meanings of adult education differ considerably by country. Manninen (2010) explains that specifically in qualitative research, the results are usually transferable only to situations and settings similar to those where the data were collected. Most of all, the possibility can not be ruled out that we are hearing more about the success stories than experiences of failure (Feinstein and Hammond, 2003).

Again this methodological issue of ecological validity is well recognized in psychology (Bronfenbrenner 1979) and is far from unique to the nonformal education sector. This EAEA report (2011) also notes that methodologically the analysis of learning benefits is challenging as it is seemingly hard to quantify the impact of adult education over and above the impact of previous knowledge and learning.

NIACE (2010) recommends a focus on the following key principles for evaluation; all of these could all apply to potential beneficial effects of community based lifelong learning centres:

- **Inclusivity** - NIACE evaluates adult education and training by the extent to which they help those adults who have benefited least from their initial learning and who face particular barriers to study.
- **Equitable contributions** - Building a learning society will require increased investment by everyone - individuals, employers and government alike.
- **Range of learning opportunities** - The public benefits of education and training are not limited to particular subjects or levels of study. They can be measured through the behaviours and attitudes of adults who identify themselves as learners.
- **Building adults' capabilities** - NIACE believes that to introduce a common curriculum framework would include measures to build:
- health capability;
- financial capability;
- civic capability; and
- digital capability.
- **Family Learning** - The capability of adults to be good parents, grandparents or carers is vital to the learning society. Families have more impact on the educational success of children than do schools.

There are a range of concerns with a purely outcomes driven agenda for evaluation, especially in contexts of socio-economic disadvantage. These are highlighted by Downes (2007):

> There is a temptation to select those with more stable background conditions in order to improve the chances of causal impact of the intervention. In other words, those who are most at risk, those with multiple disadvantages, are most likely to be filtered out of an evaluation according to…outcomes criteria. Those most at risk are likely to be subjected to a range of interacting background conditions which may hinder and neutralise the effect of the potentially causal dimension for change that the intervention seeks to provide (see also Rook 1984, 1992 on depressed people being more likely to drive away potential social supports). Thus, gains according to…outcomes may be largely a function of the selection/filtering process of potential participants in the intervention where the most marginalised become further excluded. To reiterate, [an] outcomes [preoccupation] bring[s] the danger that the most disadvantaged…may become filtered out of focus as it is these groups which may be most resistant to measurable gains – and programmes reliant on outcomes gains for funding may begin to eschew intervening with those where change may be most slow though they may need the support most (p 61).

This issue of evaluation of the benefits of community based programmes requires cognisance of the need for a wider focus on structural and process indicators and not simply on outcome indicators, as highlighted by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health (2005; 2006) (see also Mulkerrins 2007; Downes 2007a, 2008, 2011).

It is important also to emphasise that the role of a community lifelong learning system is a multifaceted systemic intervention in a range of other complex interconnected systems. This invites significant difficulty in drawing causal inferences about its distinct role (Downes 2007). Complex causality goes beyond simple input-output models of one antecedent and one consequent, as is recognized even in behaviorist psychology by Rachlin (1984).

**3. Preliminary findings on evaluation of community lifelong learning centres**

Recent qualitative research across 12 European countries[2], with a strong focus on Central and Eastern Europe, involved 196 interviews with Education Ministry Senior officials and management of educational institutions across 83 institutions, including both formal and nonformal education (Downes 2011). Key issues which emerged for the nonformal education sector, encompassing also community based lifelong learning centres, included the following:

- Concrete examples provided across a range of countries of the role of the arts, including festivals, in engaging marginalized communities;
- Non-formal education as a key bridge to ethnic minorities, immigrants and those experiencing social exclusion;
- The need for a national and regional strategy for nonformal education to relate but not reduce nonformal education to the formal system. Notable gaps were observed in relation to structures and strategies at national and regional levels with regard to nonformal education in a number of participating countries. A distinctive focus on social exclusion also needs to be more to the fore in a number of countries' nonformal education strategies, which would thereby include a stronger focus on community based lifelong learning centres;
- The need for more focused strategies for the development of community leaders;
- The need for more proactive outreach strategies to marginalized groups than simply information based ones;
- Though there was a marked prevalence of local community lifelong learning centres in a number of the participating countries, there were only a few examples of *lifewide* lifelong learning centres;
- The need for agreed, non-reductionist, accountability processes in the non-formal sector that would not amount to colonization of the nonformal education sector by the formal education sector (Downes 2011).

A Scottish report by HMIE on inspection and review 2005-2008 (HMIE 2009) provided the following conclusions on community learning approaches:

> Community and Learning Development (CLD) experiences typically engender great enthusiasm and motivation for learning amongst adult learners. Staff are

[2] Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, England, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Russia, Scotland and Slovenia

particularly effective in developing confidence and self-esteem in the majority of learners who are returning to learning, often following negative experiences of formal education.

Overall, youth workers and adult tutors develop very positive relationships with the people with whom they are in contact. They generally show a high degree of responsiveness to the needs and preferences of young people and adults and create environments which are sympathetic and supportive. Examples of best practice in the sector demonstrate the effectiveness of the work with particularly disadvantaged and marginalised individuals and groups.

Questionnaire and inspection evidence, drawn from CLD participants in 16 local authority areas, also suggests positive outcomes in relation to the *Vision for Scotland's Children.* Almost all young people who responded feel that they are better supported, are achieving more, are more active, more respected and responsible, and more included in their community. A majority of young people also feel safer in their communities and healthier as a result of being involved in youth work. The pattern for adults is very similar but slightly less pronounced in relation to feeling more respected, responsible and included.

This Scottish report (2009) continues:

* A key strength of learning programmes in CLD is that they are flexible and tailored to meet the needs of learners

* Evidence from questionnaires to participants in CLD activities demonstrates that almost all think that their experiences have contributed to their developing the capacities of *Curriculum for Excellence*. This is strongest in relation to becoming more successful learners and more confident individuals.

* Responses also indicate that almost all participants respected and valued themselves and others more. Almost all young people who responded also indicate that they have become more involved in their community. This feature is slightly less marked for adult learners. A significant minority of adults who responded do not feel that their experience has helped them to get a job or do their jobs better. This is likely to reflect the fact that much of the community-based adult learning is delivered with literacy and numeracy learners and those who, for whatever reason, are furthest from the job market.

*CLD participants have improved their communication skills and skills in working with others. A majority have improved their skills in number, ICT and problem solving.

It is notable that a lifewide dimension to community learning approaches is an emerging feature of the Scottish sector, according to this report in 2009:

> Family learning programmes are increasing and are effective in developing interest and aptitude among parents, carers and children in early literacy activities and in supporting the work of nurseries and primary schools. An emerging feature within the sector is the positive impact of a range of provision for adults on their mental health and wellbeing.

An example of a life-wide, community based lifelong learning centre model to engage ethnic minorities and those traditionally underrepresented in higher education is available from Kosovo. The *Balkan Sunflowers* four Community Learning Centres in Fushë Kosova, Gracanica, Plemetina and Shtime respectively support the development of over 600 children from Roma, Ashkanli and Egyptian communities. Their project work involves a school preparatory programme for ages 5-7 and a language club for ages 7-9. For adults, in 2009-2010, women's literacy programmes were initiated in two centres. A parenting life skills programme has also been developed, which is in addition to the regular meetings with parents and home visits. Each community receives at least 4 programmes during the year inviting parents to participate in parenting skills exchanges. These discussions employ audio visual materials around questions of children support: role models, discipline, supporting school attendance, nutrition, hygiene, care, attention and neglect, etc. Tutors and facilitators undergo a two-week training across all four Centres.

According to figures from *Balkan Sunflowers* NGO in Fushë Kosova, early school leaving rates over the two years of the Learning Centre operation decreased dramatically, from 120 in 2007-2008 to 14 in 2009-2010. Primary school enrollment has more than tripled in Gracanica since the Centre's opening in 2004 from 25 to 85 children. None of the children attending Gracanica Learning Centre dropped out of primary school in 2010[3], while only one child in Plemetina dropped out of school that year. 75% of all registered Roma children in Plemetina attend the Learning Centre, while girls' school attendance has increased and there are currently 58 girls in primary school (Downes 2011a).

An OECD review (Nicaise et al., 2005) in the Swedish context observed that:

> In the best practice in community capacity building, providers in local authority services and voluntary organisations work well together to support community organisations to influence local decision making and often to deliver effective services for disadvantaged people.

The bridge between adult education centres and the formal educational system is illustrated by the research cited by Nicaise et al.,(2005) which observes that at least 28% of all young people admitted into tertiary education in Sweden had passed through municipal adult education or liberal adult education :

> Adult education plays a key role in providing a second chance to students who were unable to complete gymnasium, as well as supplementing credits for admission into tertiary education. According to statistics of the Ministry, in 2004,

[3] In 2010, seven Roma girls graduated from King Milutin primary school in Gracanica. In contrast, over the previous twenty-five years, not even seven girls in total have graduated.

no less than 28% of all young people admitted into tertiary education had passed through Komvux or Liberal adult education: ¼ of this group had actually completed gymnasium but supplemented their grades in Komvux in order to enter tertiary education; the others managed to obtain their upper secondary diploma in adult education. The 'second chance' role of Komvux and Liberal adult education has been strengthened thanks to the 'Adult Education Initiative', one of the national government's earmarked programmes which aimed to reduce the rate of unqualified school leaving and to boost lifelong learning. This Adult Education Initiative has now come to an end, and observers fear that the earmarked budget will – as usually - be merged with the general transfer to the municipalities, which may mean that investments in second chance education will be pursued to different degrees, depending on municipal priorities

A range of international research on the wider benefits of participation in adult education is cited in a forthcoming EAEA report (2011)[4] (see appendix to this report). It is important to note that though such research on adult education generally does not necessarily specifically refer to community based lifelong learning centres, it is nevertheless thoroughly resonant with adult education approaches taking place in such centres. In other words, this EAEA report (2011) research (see appendix) supports an argument for investment in community based lifelong learning centres, as part of an investment in adult education generally. It is complementary to a focus on additional 'added value' to adult education that community lifelong learning centres may also bring.

## 4. Community based lifelong learning centres: Supportive conditions for their effectiveness

The themes and conditions highlighted here through mainly qualitative research is with a view to establish a range of key conditions for the effectiveness of community based lifelong learning centres. It is not intended as evidential proof of their effectiveness. The examples are illustrative of issues rather than necessarily being representative, even for the country the example comes from.

### 4a). A more welcoming and less threatening environment than the formal system for those experiencing disadvantage

The non-threatening environment of non-formal education given expression through community based lifelong learning centres offers an opportunity for learners to developed their sense of self-esteem. Rosenberg (1965) describes selfesteem as feeling that you are 'good enough'. Self-esteem is positively associated with academic achievement (Purkey 1970; Brookover et al.,1964; Hay, Ashman & van Kraayenoord 1997). The words of Handy & Aitken (1990) would predict alienation and loss of identity

[4] Thanks to Gina Ebner, Secretary General EAEA (European Association for the Education of Adults) for this material.

for the less academic students without a bridge between the formal and non-formal system:

> The loss of identity and sense of anomie of many students [occurs] in an organisation where such academic values are overemphasised and other experiences and achievements are under-expressed (p.28)

The non-formal system offers diverse pathways for recognition of the learner's contribution. MacDevitt (1998) highlights that one direction for educational reform in a European context is 'the recognition of achievement for all' (p.47) (see also Kelly 1999, p. 141).

An interesting example of how the non-formal community education sector can make the environment less hierarchical and a more welcoming environment is provided in an Irish project example, namely, that board members also attend the classes with the learners:

> The Director explained, *our community project members, the steering committee members, all go to the classes, so there's constant feedback between the classes because the community people who are the leaders, are members of the classes* (Dooley et al., 2010).

A notable strength such centres offer is personalised learning and literacy needs.

In the Austrian context, Rammel & Gottwald's (2010) qualitative research emphasises the distinctive role of non-formal education in meeting the needs of the individual learner, which is a key issue for basic education and beyond:

> According to the [non-formal education] interviewee the basic education offered with its individual approach is particularly helpful in giving adults with low levels of prior education confidence to continue with education. There is always an extremely heterogeneous group of participants within these courses, which requires individual adaptation of the contents to the regarded participants. This entails a different way of teaching, which also aims to ensure understanding.
>
> *People just notice, that everything is adapted very individually to them and that this is a different form of learning than they might have experienced at school (…) fear of contact is reduced. We make it possible that everybody can notice directly an increase of learning outcome*

This appears to be a real need in Austria:

> Since Austria did not participate in the IALS (Adult Literacy Survey), there is no valid data about illiteracy available in Austria. The UNESCO estimates that one to three percent of an industrialised country's population is illiterate. This would mean that there could be up to 300,000 illiterate persons in Austria. Experts in the field of illiteracy estimate that Austria has a much higher number: 600,000 (Markowitsch, Benda-Kahri & Hefler 2006, p. 11) (Rammel & Gottwald 2010).

The benefits of engaging those with low literacy levels through community based lifelong learning centres is apparent from Lind's (2008) UNESCO review. Lind (2008) highlights research that many important development indicators such as fertility rates and child mortality are strongly influenced by the extent to which women are empowered, including through their education and literacy. The average literacy score in a given population is a better indicator of growth than the percentage of the population with very high literacy scores. A country that focuses on promoting strong literacy skills widely throughout its population will be more successful in fostering growth and well-being than one in which the gap between high-skill and low-skill groups is large. According to Lind (2008), research findings suggest that adult literacy programmes help people living in poverty to raise their income, and that they compared positively to the returns of primary school education.

As Lind (2008) concludes:

> The returns to investment in adult literacy programmes are generally comparable to, and compare favourably with, those from investments in primary education. In practice, the opportunity cost for a child to attend school is typically lower than for an adult literacy programme. Yet, the opportunity to realise the benefits is more immediate for an adult who is already in some way involved in the world of work.

**4b). Engaging those experiencing marginalization from the system**

The Scottish HMIE (2009) report observes the following strengths of community based approaches:

> There is a strong commitment to inclusion, with examples of innovative and effective work with disadvantaged individuals and groups. Inclusion, equality and fairness were evaluated as satisfactory or better in all authorities. In some authorities, the sector is very effective at targeting excluded groups such as lone parents, the unemployed and former drug and alcohol misusers. Programmes of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) include learners from a wide diversity of backgrounds, including economic migrants and asylum seekers.

Nicaise et al. (2005) offer another example from the Swedish context with a focus on engaging marginalized youth at a community level:

> Another example that deserves special mention in this context is *Fryshuset*, a youth centre located south of the centre of Stockholm. *Fryshuset* was created in 1984 by the YMCA, and is now 'owned' by young people and the local community. Apart from cultural and sports activities, the centre soon developed innovative social projects to prevent violence and promote social (re-)integration in a multicultural urban environment. We met young leaders of three projects: the *Shadaf Heroes*, a movement of Muslim boys standing up against violence towards girls in their community; *Exit*, an organisation assisting youngsters to leave the neo-Nazi movement and *Calm Street*, a group of unemployed young people hired to patrol and prevent violence in the public transport sector, which

has now grown out to a movement liaising with local communities to enhance social integration. *Calm Street* also offers training in conflict resolution, first aid, law and ethics etc., to 'juniors'. The *Knowledge Centre*, an upper secondary school combining sports and cultural education with the core curriculum of gymnasium, is the education pillar of *Fryshuset*. The school has 850 students. Actually, the structure of *Fryshuset* – with its 30 or so divisions and projects in many different areas - is such that the school has emanated from the demand of the local community – rather than the other way round. There is also a *Fryshuset Resource School*, a project offering the equivalent of the individual programme to youngsters who have failed in compulsory (junior secondary) school.

*An Cosán* is the largest independent community-based education centre in Ireland.

The organisation's Mission Statement *'is to contribute to the development of a culture of learning and leadership through educational and enterprise solutions for the particular challenges that face us'*. The organisation offers community based education, childcare and enterprise and is divided into three sections:

• The Shanty Education and Training Centre, which provides Adult Community Education,
• Rainbow House, the Early Childhood Education and Care facility,

• Fledglings, the Social Enterprise Centre. Over 600 people attend adult education and training in *An Cosán* annually (Dooley et al., 2010).

*An Cosán* provides a service to an area of Dublin that is severely disadvantaged as a result of poverty and high levels of unemployment; this is a community living with high levels of poverty. It has a population of roughly 22,000 people, living mainly in rented housing in large, local authority estates. The area has a high immigrant population. The unemployment rate of principle earners is around 67%, and 40% of family units are headed by lone parents. There is a lack of amenities in the local area and poor public transport makes it difficult to access amenities elsewhere. There is limited access to childcare in the local area and anti-social behaviour is prevalent as many young people are pressured to join gangs and take drugs. An intergenerational cycle of educational disadvantage exists. The level of educational attainment is generally low, with 27% of the population having no formal education or only primary level education and over 34% of the population leaving school under the age of 16.

It currently offers education and training to over 400 adults per week. In June 2008, 450 students had attended classes in The Shanty. Between 150 and 200 participants attend training courses in Fledglings Training annually. In addition, 150 children per week receive early childhood education and out-of-school education each year. There are 25 participants in the biggest classes and the smallest classes would have 8 or 9 students.

A strength of the organisation is the wide variety of courses and people that it caters for. There is the option of progression through levels of courses for participants.

The starting point is courses on Personal Development and Communication Skills, Basic Literacy and Numeracy. A second series of courses reflect the needs of the local community for training in leadership e.g. training for community drug workers and community development. These courses have been developed at the behest of local community groups. The third series of courses are most important as they allow people to access further education. These courses include those run under the Young Women's Programmes. Some of their past students have gone on to third level colleges and universities, gaining certificates, diplomas and degrees. The majority of the students who access the service stay more than one year. The fourth series of courses have, as their immediate goal, retraining or formalising skills for employment; a state of the art computer centre allows courses to up-skill long term unemployed people. *An Cosán* supports participants 'to plot out a career path' and to access the programmes that they need to achieve this (Dooley et al., 2010).

They run programmes specifically for young women in the area who are lone parents and early school leavers. *An Cosán* caters for ethnic minorities who need to improve their English language skills, confidence or parenting skills. Parents, particularly fathers and their children come to some classes together. They cater for children in the local community in the early childhood education centre. They provide courses for men in the local area who are looking to up-skill or become computer literate - they run courses on Saturday mornings to cater for this hard to reach target group. They target community workers and leaders in the local community in order to support them and provide them with a qualification in the area. They cater for older people in the local area and provide support and advice for grandparents who help to rear their grandchildren (Dooley et al., 2010). This community centre adopts both a lifelong and life-wide focus.

The strategic themes of personal fulfillment and active citizenship pervade this community based approach, with a combination also of formal and non-formal education courses:

> The CEO explains, *our personal development programme has been extraordinary, probably one of the most successful classes run here… impacts on their own personal confidence, sense of self, the ability to find their voice, the ability to want more for themselves* (Dooley et al., 2010).

The OECD review of Sweden by Nicaise et al. (2005) highlights the need for greater strategic focus on the role of lifelong learning in promoting social inclusion and active citizenship in Sweden:

> However, it is surprising to see that the Swedish debate on educational equity is so overwhelmingly focused on gender issues, to the extent that it almost completely overshadows questions of social inheritance and, perhaps worse, the inequalities related to immigrant status. This bias was striking in many interviews we had during the country visit.
>
> In its report on lifelong and lifewide learning, (Skolverket 2000, Chapter 5) the NAE emphasises the key role of liberal adult education, linked with the civil

> society, in developing and nurturing a democratic culture. The Agency expresses its concern about the decline in political involvement of the population and observes a link between this tendency and the shrinking provision of adult education in this area.

An implication of this critique, as well as of the lack of partnership with parents highlighted by Nicaise et al. (2005) in the Swedish context, is that there is a strategic need for commitment to community lifelong learning centres both for active citizenship and social inclusion concerns, and to engage marginalized parents and adults as part of this strategy:

> Swedish schools do not seem to have a strong tradition of partnership with parents. Formal tools for communication and participation do exist (parents' evenings, membership of school boards etc.) but they are not really suited to encourage participation of disadvantaged groups. Nor can we expect that the six monthly individual 'development discussions' between teachers, parents and pupils, introduced in the context of the Quality Programme, will suffice to guarantee equal participation of all parents in school matters. In other countries, home-school-community liaison projects, school community action and/or genuine 'community schools' have been set up in response to this problem (Wilson et al., 2000). Such models build on a different view, where parents are seen as indispensable partners in the education of their children, rather than customers in a competitive market. Parents (as well as other parties) can help teachers understand the behaviour and needs of their children and make teaching more effective. They can also contribute with their own skills, which are diverse and often valuable complements to those of teachers. In exchange, the role of the school is defined as a resource centre for the development of the local community, which means that it gives all stakeholders (including parents) a sense of ownership and aims to respond in a flexible way to their needs. (Nicaise et al., 2005)

Community leadership development can play another key role in engaging marginalized groups in a local context. Dooley et al's (2010) interview account in an Irish context with the *An Cosán* Manager explains that:

> a *fantastic success and achievement…it is a Degree in Leadership and Community Development and is specifically developed for individuals from the community, who are either working in a paid or voluntary capacity in a leadership role and it is about developing their capacity for leadership within their community and also encouraging reflective practice. In the course they look at the knowledge and skills that they already have and that they need to develop …all of the assignments are practical based, looking at what is going on in their community, matching ...policies to practice that they see in their community*

Another example of a community based lifelong learning centre is that of *Citizenne* in Flanders, Belgium. Some of the main objectives of *Citizenne* are:

– Working on the bridging between communities and groups of people living in the different Brussels districts;
– Creating opportunities for cultural and social involvement for all the people living in Brussels;
– Enhancing social integration in and through the civil society.

In doing so, the organisation takes into account some of the specific characteristics of Brussels. Some examples are:
– There is a strong social polarisation in the city. This is reflected in, for instance, high unemployment among young migrants;
– Brussels is a city known for its cultural diversity: people with a lot of different nationalities and cultures all live together. Adults with Dutch as their mother tongue are actually a minority in Brussels.
– There are a lot of organisations offering non-formal adult education in Brussels. There is also a wide range of high-quality training opportunities for the Dutch-speaking population of Brussels. Over the last six months of the year 2005 more than 2,200 non-formal educational programmes were offered by over 200 different organisations. Because of these characteristics, the organisation focuses on some specific target groups and target issues.
First of all, the organisation tailors her services to the needs of specific groups under-participating in the field of adult education in Brussels, such as low educated adults (especially those having left compulsory education without a qualification).
Planning intercultural programmes is also essential for the organisation. One can not presuppose that in a city like Brussels and its metropolitan area people and groups of people find each other spontaneously in the mosaic of cultures and communities.

> Therefore, *Citizenne* explicitly wants to connect different cultures and communities in the city with each other (Vermeersch & Vandenbroucke 2010).

The organisation has been focusing on three types of issues over the last five years:

- *City and community development and urban characteristics*
Working on issues that urban communities and neighbourhoods are facing today (e.g. growing inequity, growing unemployment, economic recession, ethnic and socio-economic polarisation, etc.,) by means of community building and urban development.

- *Intercultural dialogue in a multicultural society*
The ethnic diversity among its residents is a characteristic of any major city.
Guiding and supporting intercultural processes (debates, discussions, exchange of ideas, etc.) between different cultural communities and ethnic groups so that they can meet in a friendly atmosphere

- *Empowerment*
Helping people and groups that experience social discrimination to regain and increase their social strength, using methods like consciousness-raising and social action.

These focuses arose from the region analysis and the SWOT-analysis the organisation applied when making a strategic plan. By doing so, the organisation is able to clearly analyse the needs of the people living and working in Brussels (Vermeersch & Vandenbroucke 2010).

**4c). Outreach and more diverse sites for learning in the community**

Outreach to marginalised groups is a strong feature of *Citizenne*:
- Within communities
According to the staff interviewees, it is critical to ensure various learning opportunities as close as possible to the adults. Both interviewees accentuate that one can not expect all participants to come into a classroom. The educational activities should be 'home delivered'. Therefore the organisation makes efforts in providing education within the communities, decentralised all over Brussels (in mosques, sports clubs, pubs, etc.) (Vermeersch & Vandenbroucke 2010).

- Community leaders
Another important outreach strategy is working together intensely with so-called community leaders (a person who plays a key role in organising or running activities for the community and who is well known and respected in that locality). As the community leaders are already engaged in processes of community building, they have the power and the role to enhance the participation of others in the community. That is why finding those key persons is an essential task of the organisational staff (tutors and educational experts). *Citizenne* does not simply use the community leaders as a means to attract new target groups. The organisation also trains and coaches them to be organisers and tutors themselves. By doing so, the organisation offers to them challenges and perspectives in their role as community leader and gives them the responsibility to design educational programmes for their community. Some of them make a long-term commitment (at a high level) to the organisation; others chose only to make short-term commitments.
It should not go unnoticed that some volunteers and community leaders are also rewarded (according to the Belgian law on volunteering). They receive 25 euro for occasional activities and 110 euro for other activities, according to the amount of responsibility they take. This is an extra motivational element which has a particularly great impact on the participation of some specific target groups.

- Community networks
The support of community leaders into the organisational network is in line with the institutions networking strategy in general. With a view on community development, networking within and between groups (ethnic groups, social groups, neighbourhoods, etc.) is a vital point to open and promote access, emphasise both interviewees (Vermeersch & Vandenbroucke 2010).

A key strength of such centres is as a local place for engagement. Community based lifelong learning centres bring education into the centre of a local area, as is highlighted in Scotland:

> The location of classes were *'where they are needed'*, a range of different premises were used and crèches were sometimes provided though the interviewees also noted that there was more nursery provision now through the education system: *We run these where, that meet the needs of local people. So it could be in a church hall. It could be in a community centre. Anywhere that suits the needs* (Weedon et al., 2010).

This Scottish report also emphasises that learners experiencing socio-economic disadvantage may be much more at ease taking classes in such community based environments:

> Another initiative to engage with potentially disadvantaged learners was the schools' activity programmes. These allowed young learners who are at risk of not engaging with learning or entering the labour market to come in to the college for a few days and do a programme of activities that included a variety of different subjects in order to give them an insight into college life. This was designed to give them an idea of the variety that was on offer and it was hoped it would make them think about what they were going to do in the following year. In addition to this, there were community groups and community-based adult learning courses where the college staff would go out into the community and deliver courses in order to try and get people back into education.
>
> Near the end of these courses all of the student will come into the college because they were seen as college students. These courses were considered very successful in bringing in disadvantaged groups of learners who were more comfortable in a community setting: We do a lot of European Social Fund classes that target people who are less likely to come into education and in my department the community classes are the way forward I think in terms of getting people into education (Department Head, College B) (Weedon et al., 2010).

Examples from Hungary of diverse community sites for lifelong learning centres include a garage (*Derecske Open Learning Centre*), a store in the pedestrian part of the main street in Hatvan (*Open Learning Centre of Hatvan*) and a ski boot manufacturing works (*Open Learning Centre of Nagykallo*).

*An Cosán* in Ireland also engages in a proactive outreach strategy.

> In relation to reaching potential adult participants, the Manager…explains that when recruiting participants they, *go around the schools, talk to different women's groups…we used to have a mini bus, letting people know that we have a big registration day on…trying to make an event out of it…turning up a local community events, to let people know we're here and what we're doing…being part of a lot of networks of local community organisations.* In relation to steps to

> reach those who are most socioeconomically disadvantaged, the CEO explained that, *our focus is to work with the most disadvantaged, now we always know that there's lots of hugely disadvantaged people we're not making contact with…in an area where…literacy is a huge issue, putting leaflets through doors is of limited value.* She went on to explain that, *word of mouth is probably the biggest way, somebody goes and talks about it and brings a friend* and that the organisation is, *supporting all our participants to be active recruiter* (Dooley et al., 2010).

**4d). Nonformal and formal education in a common community based location**

The OECD (2007, p.75) highlight that has over 260 adult education centres, which have evolved from adult vocational training to offer wider learning opportunities for the entire adult population. They also illustrate the key role of municipal authorities in Sweden and Spain (as well as Spanish regional governments) in providing adult education centres. In the UK (Ofsted, 2009) a survey reported that in 16 out of 23 local adult and community learning providers, most adults progressed to further courses (depending on the emphasis placed on the qualifications). In Denmark it was observed that adult education in Denmark leads to further participation in education, which was particularly the case with general adult education courses (Clausen et al., 2006, p.114).

Boyadjieva et al's (2010) qualitative research report from Bulgaria also provides evidence for the key role of community based learning centres, for personal fulfillment and active citizenship objectives, including for formal education:

> *The Community centers (chitalishta)* play a crucial role in relation to the personal and citizenship perspectives on LLL. Being unique traditional self-managed units in Bulgaria, they function as 'training fields' for acquiring skills for managing collective activities. In the smaller towns they are the only organisations that provide access to libraries, internet and other types of information. Given their multitude (there are 3 450 *chitalishta* listed in the register of the Ministry of Culture), location and institutional sustainability, they may be regarded as a unique national resource for the implementation of various educational initiatives, including LLL. Some *chitalishta* conduct qualification courses for adults following curricula with internationally recognised certificates. In recent years, the modern information and communication technologies have been introduced and utilised in the community centers (Boyadjieva et al., 2010).

These Bulgarian examples resonate with Connolly's (2009) suggestion that community education builds the 'community capital', which is a combination of cultural and social capital, the intellectual, educational, social relationships, collective resources for the entire community to build up and foster a community spirit and activism. This builds up communities in sustainable ways by linking education theory with practice, local issues with the global issues and the personal with social advocacy.

In the Irish community centre, *An Cosán,* there is a clear focus on progression for learners:

> There is the option of progression through levels of courses for participants. The starting point is courses on Personal Development, Communication Skills, Basic Literacy and Numeracy. Another series of courses reflect the needs of the local community for training in leadership e.g. training for community drug workers and community development. These courses have been developed at the behest of local community groups (Dooley et al., 2010).

One of this project's interviewees in Dooley et al., (2010) advocated the need for stronger connections and cooperation between the non-formal and formal education sector, including with their own community based organisation:

> The CEO talked about her experience of working with the formal education sector, *I've been very involved in this with three different formal educational institutes…the commitment to working with disadvantage is limited in the formal education sector…the commitment to working with our sector, I don't see that formalised, I don't see that supported…in order to get colleges…to work with us…you have to show them very clearly what's in it for them. It's a lot of work for the person who is working in the nonformal sector to support the student to put together a portfolio or identify pieces of work that will match learning outcomes for a particular programme or so... I think a lot of work needs to be done around that* (Dooley et al., 2010).

However, as noted earlier, there is a need to prevent the danger of colonization of the nonformal sector by the formal (Downes 2011), this is especially necessary to avoid if they are in a common location.

**4e). The need for agreed, non-reductionist, accountability processes in the non-formal sector**

In the Norwegian context, Stensen & Ure (2010) raise an important issue regarding both the need for accountability in the non-formal education sector and the difficulty in providing such accountability:

> Recent development within the educational sector and perhaps the society in general, implying that institutions and organisations become more and more accountable for their output, e.g. how many students pass their exams on schedule, how many degrees (or ECTS points) they are able to produce each year.

It is evident that any such accountability for non-formal education must be distinguished from that of the formal education sector:

> The point made by our informant is that it is hard, if not impossible, to hold study associations accountable for many of their activities in the same way as other institutions and organisations, e.g. universities. Despite this, the political climate is more or less demanding this from them and the situation is frustrating for the study associations. Our informant pointed out that higher esteem among public authorities and people in general was one of the main challenges for *Folkeuniversitetet* in the coming years (Stensen & Ure 2010).

Engel et al. (2010) point to concerns with local community funded approaches in the English context which may also be applicable to potential concerns with accountability, leadership and strategic direction for community lifelong learning centres:

> The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF): 'the principal funding mechanism deployed to drive forward the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) at the local level' in England's 88 most deprived local authorities, aiming to 'improve services and narrow the gap between deprived areas and the rest'. During 2001-2006, £1.875bn was allocated to eligible LSPs, and a further £1.05bn was made available in 2006-2008. (Cowen et al., 2008, p. 13) An officially-sponsored evaluation of the programme found the NRF had 'achieved a range of positive achievements', but that its 'cumulative impact and effectiveness' had 'not been maximised' for a number of reasons, including:
> − 'evidence use in the planning of programmes and interventions' had 'not been embedded', so that 'the level of sophistication in targeting NRF was often poor',
> − interventions had been 'inadequately evaluated, or not at all, meaning there has been a limited understanding of what does and does not work',
> − 'data on performance, outcomes and impacts' had 'not been collected in a robust fashion, resulting in an inconsistent understanding of progress, with the issue of impact a particular concern' (Cowen et al., 2008, p. 68). Whilst this is only one example, these are problems not untypical of such programmes

In Scotland, the HMIE (2009) report on community learning approaches points to the need for more accountability and strategic direction in its leadership.

> CLD providers make substantial contributions to a number of the key outcomes of the National Performance Framework. However, the sector overall needs to improve its capacity to demonstrate how it contributes to these outcomes and to track improvements over time.
>
> Strategic leadership within local authorities and community planning partnerships also shows variations across the country. In some places, CLD services have a central role in local community planning and community

> engagement. In others, CLD is an approach to working with communities that runs across services such as libraries, museums, culture and sport. In one very good example of community capacity building, the key structural change that took place a few years earlier had combined CLD and community regeneration services into one service. All CLD strategic partnerships are now aligned with key community planning theme groups across Scotland (HMIE 2009).

An important issue raised here by the HMIE (2009) is that of fostering improved self-evaluation processes:

> The period covered by this report began with the publication of the second self-evaluation framework for CLD in Scotland, *How good is our community learning and development? 2 (HGIOCLD? 2).* As with other sectors of education, it has taken time for the process of self-evaluation for improvement to become embedded in the sector. *HGIOCLD? 2* has become well established in the local authority sector as the main basis for self-evaluating provision. Some voluntary organisations too have used this tool in their work. However, there remains work to do to embed self-evaluation, leading to improvement, within the work of partners and in partnership working.

This need to establish and embed self-evaluation processes in the community sector has also been highlighted in the context of community based out of school services in Ireland (Downes 2006; Ivers et al., 2010), for example, with a focus on a cyclical process of design, implementation, evaluation and modification.

An interplay between national strategic direction and local insights has been raised as an issue in the context of Sweden (Nicaise et al., 2005):

> Equality of opportunity across the country now depends (too) crucially on a nationwide consensus between central and local education authorities. The evaluations carried out by the NAE in recent years suggest that it may be preferable for the national government to maintain some authority over funding mechanisms, either through a minimal degree of earmarked budgeting, or through central regulation of local expenditures. Further, national institutions such as the National Agency for Education and the National Agency for School Improvement may receive more authority and impact on local education policy.

Accountability is a theme emphasised also by an Austrian Education Ministry official (Rammel & Gottwald 2010)not only for recognition of prior learning but for the non-formal education sector generally :

> What are the main obstacles to establishing a mechanism for the recognition of prior nonformal learning and work experience in order to open access for adults to the education system? *I can see a lack of quality management, one which is*

> *satisfactory and trustworthy for both parties. It will probably exist in future but the universities now, which are claiming to be practising quality assurance, thus legitimising themselves, will probably point to the fact that these are somehow individual situations where they cannot guarantee the quality or scope of how things work.*

When asked how these difficulties can be overcome, the Austrian official gave the following response:

> *By getting past this the usual way, just by working together and developing something together on how to approach this. I think the interaction between the participating institutions is not established well enough for people to trust each other. It will work on an individual basis but the universities and institutions have to decide on what their resources are and if they want to do it, since they are operating at full capacity. Also if there are governmental grants or support to be had. If it is a political declaration of intent which is being promoted accordingly so people can be employed who will be responsible for that. I see financial limits and quality management* problems (Rammel & Gottwald 2010).

The theme of a distinctive approach to accountability was also highlighted for the nonformal education sector by an interviewee in a Scottish qualitative report (Weedon et al., 2010):

> He concluded by stressing the potential role of the voluntary sector but stressed that there should be less power vested in formal institutions [to evaluate it] but without losing the accountability provided by the formal sector: *.. so I do think there is potential for the voluntary third sector, independent sector, however you wish to describe [them] because they are all different, to grow and deliver lifelong learning much more effectively. I would take much more of it away from the power of the institutions, but I might leave the accountability with the institution, because I think it could be good at that, if they understood what's going on better* (Learning Connections interviewee).

As (Weedon et al., 2010) observe, accountability is not simply to be reducible to a measurable outcomes focus:

> This interviewee felt that CLDs had to be more active in promoting its influence but that one of its problems was that the government focused on measurable outcomes which were not relevant to CLD learners: *The importance of CLD has to be more explicit in its influence … we need to spread that message about the kind of learning opportunities that we provide and create and the outcomes that that can deliver, because people are obsessed with - they are not obsessed with outcomes: if they were obsessed with outcomes I would not have a problem, but they are obsessed with outcome measures. You know, say, for example, I take*

> *this from Curriculum for Excellence: 'We want to create more confident individuals and more responsible citizens.' That's absolutely wonderful ... And then they will say, 'And the measure of that is whether they get more Standard Grades or not.' To me, that is a madness, there is a disconnection* (CLD 1 manager).

The issue raised in this Scottish interview with regard to the limitations of outcome measures is an important one. It is important to emphasise that a search for accountability in the non-formal sector needs to eschew the narrowing which may occur in any kind of 'testing' type focus, which often occurs in the formal education sector – and which may disproportionately impact on those experiencing social and economic marginalisation. Field et al's (2007) OECD report highlights the dangers of 'teaching to the tests' (p.129). Moreover, Booher-Jennings (2005) and Gillborn & Youdell (2000) highlight the filtering process involved in 'educational triage' in U.S and U.K contexts respectively, where preoccupation with test scores tended to result in a diversion of resources away from those viewed as least likely to pass and towards those on the threshold of passing the test.

Jarvis (2008, p.75) offers a critique of instrumental rationality as leading to uniformity in education. There is a need to recognise that instrumentalism requires some challenge also in the context of access to education, for whatever age group. Motivation for learning concerning those from traditionally marginalised groups goes beyond simply instrumental learning to include the social and personal developmental features of such learning (see also Slowey 1988). The danger especially arises for non-formal education and community based lifelong learning centres that a drive for measurable outcomes will lead to an instrumentalism that will endanger a more relational, interpersonal approach, sensitive to individual differences and centred on the needs of the learner.

Especially in the non-formal education sector, there is a need to start from where the learner is at - and an outcomes' focus as a dimension of accountability tends to impose an agenda on the learner that is not necessarily shared with and owned by the learner. Moreover, the learner's pace, especially if an early school leaver, may not fit within the limits of the outcome timeframe. Commitment to generic outcomes may be in tension with the disparate starting points of the range of individuals involved in the particular non-formal education classes (Downes 2007). Kelly (1999) criticises educational models predominantly based on education as transmission of knowledge and curriculum as content (see also Hunting 2000, p.245, and Downes 2003a for a critique of curriculum as content in the context of Estonia and Latvia).

**4f). Financial Barriers**

According to Nevenka Bogataj (personal communication, June 2011), the first evaluator and developer of a framework for community lifelong learning centres in Slovenia, the following situation has occurred in this country:

> The first evaluation has been published, but only in Slovenian[5].
>
> The essence of the concept was: free of charge service, general self-engagement of participant, accesibility of information, professional support of the staff and co-operation on several levels (institutional partnership, group work etc.). The primary conception combined two areas of their activity, both thought to become a kind of umbrella for a dozen of projects from different sectors (culture, education). They generally offered two services:
> - non-formal learning (e.g. self-learning centres, knowledge exchange, study circles, e-schools, multimedia centres, libraries etc.)
> - counselling (for adults, for youth).
>
> There were 13 of LLLCs, set regionally, mostly at folkuniversities. At the time of analysis LLLCs succeeded to attract different socially marginalized groups (older people, rural inhabitants, unemployed, non-educated, female segments, …) and set partnerships, which was very new than. In 2006 over 10.000 participants were documented (ICT participants were not recorded!). Counselling covered cca 6000, non-formal learning cca 4500, some of them overlapping.
>
> After seven years of being financed by EU Social Fund... non-formal learning, according to my own interpretation, excellently responded to, is marginalised, financially and strategically (e.g. despite rich bibliography, accessible by website, its results are nearly skipped in new strategic documents).

This strategic and financial marginalisation of such centres in Slovenia invites a response to further develop this sector.

Maunsell & Downes (2012, forthcoming) observe a fragmentation of funding sources for community based lifelong learning centres in an Irish context, even prior to the current recession. A barrier to a social inclusion focus and strategic role for non-formal education in relation to ethnic groups who may have low participation in education, is that in some countries the non-formal education is largely a private sector phenomenon:

> …The adult education is a market-based sector. According to my knowledge, in other European countries, adult education sector is not privatised as much as in Hungary (Balogh et al., 2010).

This important point regarding privatisation of the non-formal education sector raises the issue of the need for strategic State investment in non-formal education in Hungary.

[5] See: (Centri za vseživljenjsko učenje : nove možnosti za vse / Nevenka Bogataj in nosilci prvih CVŽU po regijah. - Ljubljana : Andragoški center Slovenije, 2007 (Ljubljana : Pleško)

This is also a prevalent theme in Lithuania where the need for a social inclusion focus to be given expression through the non-formal education sector is highlighted:

> However, the promotion activities [of the non-formal education institution] are not targeted at social exclusion groups. The proposals might be addressed to organisations which bring together such people but social responsibility is not stressed in these proposals. Social exclusion groups are sometimes involved in international and local projects, but the marketing strategy usually aims at business and company trainings. The models of good practice of working with risk groups do not exist (Taljunaite et al., 2010).

In Estonia, an interviewee in Tamm & Saar (2010) envisages a movement away from a laissez-faire approach to engaging those on the margins through non-formal education to one where the State plays a more proactive role:

> *Adult education is less developed than in other countries. I was in Ireland and their opinion was that offering courses for the unemployed is better than leaving them alone and letting them to alienate from work. If a person completed a course and did not find a job he can enrol on another course and is paid for it. He has something to do, a purpose. Here we leave the unemployed alone and then complain that they have lost motivation* …. (Tamm & Saar 2010).
>
> The respondents however admitted that things have started to change. While in the past non-formal education was paid for by participants or employers then now: *The government is supporting participants in adult non-formal education – both employers and participants. This is much needed* (Tamm & Saar 2010).

An Estonian example illustrates local desire at community level to establish such community learning centres. Yet finance is the key obstacle:

> For several years the town has planned to establish an adult education centre offering formal adult education and also non-formal education, i.e. courses that support entry to and coping in the labour market. Cooperation with an enterprise has also been considered. This would increase the opportunities to acquire practical skills and the number of general education learners as combined knowledge and skills would increase the competitiveness of people and help them to gain a better position in the labour market (Tamm & Saar 2010).
>
> Negotiations have started with the local authorities but lack of resources is an obstacle yet to be overcome (Tamm & Saar 2010).

Financial barriers to staff continuity and staff professional development operate as an impediment to the expansion and development of community lifelong learning centres.

The HMIE (2009) report in Scotland argues that the CLD sector has lagged behind other sectors in Continuing Professional Development. Downes (2011) highlights a related issue of the need for staff continuity and sufficiently long contracts of employment in the community nonformal education sector to ensure both stable relations of trust with those who are more marginalized, as well as in order to develop the sector through professional development. These strategic issues again point to the need for sufficiently stable investment in community lifelong learning centres and nonformal education in order to promote these issues.

**5). Conclusions**

Community based lifelong learning centres can simultaneously provide instantiations of a range of key lifelong learning objectives, such as active citizenship, social cohesion/inclusion, personal and social fulfillment, intercultural dialogue, as well as employment pathways. In other words, a notable potential they offer is as a kind of one-stop-shop for a wide number of core lifelong learning objectives of the European Council and Commission. Community learning centres offer a potentially key pathway and bridge in providing outreach to marginalized communities, including to ethnic minorities, and also connection over time between the non-formal and formal system. As is evident from a range of centres across different European countries, the community based location and proximity is an advantage in being able to engage with hard to reach groups who have tended to be alienated from the formal system.

It is to be acknowledged that the research base on the benefits of community based lifelong learning centres, over and above those of nonformal education generally, requires further attention. There is a need to devise evaluation frameworks that embrace structural and process indicators to monitor performance and to not simply focus narrowly and exclusively on an outcomes agenda that is often ill-suited to engaging with the most marginalized and to a learner-centred focus and timeframe.

As mediating structures between marginalized individuals, communities and the 'system', community based lifelong learning centres invite a strategic focus across government departments not only of education, but also of health and justice. They also invite a focus on the important role of the arts in engaging with the experiences and motivations of those on the margins, building on current practices. Key features of good practice in community based lifelong learning centres include:
- A welcoming, supportive, nonhierarchical environment for the nontraditional learner, with a personalized learning focus,
- A proactive outreach strategy to engage those on the margins,
- A commitment to both leadership development within the organization and to fostering community leaders for communities experiencing marginalization,
- A commitment to democratic engagement with the voices and real needs of the learner, as part of a learner-centred focus and commitment.

- A commitment to both self-assessment and independent evaluation, to coherence between strategic objectives and activities engaged in, though being cognizant of the limitations of a narrow agenda simply on outcomes for engaging those experiencing social marginalization,
- A commitment to engage in strategic partnerships as part of pathways for progression and communication between formal and nonformal education settings.

There is a need for more focused strategies for the development of community leaders – and on lifewide dimensions to community lifelong learning centres, with successful examples of this lifewide dimension operating to engage marginalized groups evident in Ireland and Kosovo. A lifewide focus however also invites a broader conception of the location of such community based centres, into diverse locations to engage groups who may not traditionally engage with the system – and especially also to engage with youths in settings that are particularly amenable to their needs and interests.

It is recommended that a distinct funding strand to be developed at EU level, in conjunction with commitments from national states, a strand purely focusing on establishing such community based local learning centres with a central commitment to the goals of these centres being to especially engage with those experiencing marginalization from the system and educational disadvantage. An evaluation framework can be built into this funding strand from the outset.

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**APPENDIX**

European Association for the Education of Adults (2011, forthcoming). *On the wider benefits of adult education*. Brussels: EAEA.

The following research on the general benefits of adult education, though not community lifelong learning centres specifically is cited in the EAEA report (2011):

Manninen's results showed that liberal adult education in Finland brings positive outcomes to individual's lives as well as benefits – at least in a long run – wider communities and society in general. It was estimated that approximately 900.000 people have been able to develop their skills and competencies and well-being. Also 352,000 people improved their work-related skills and income possibilities, although these are not main objectives of liberal studies in Finland. Manninen and Luukannel (2008) compared their results to those of earlier studies (such as Schuller et al, 2002 and Feinstein et al. 2003) and found that they are almost identical. Hence the wider relevance of these results is assumed, although undeniable cultural and contextual differences were revealed.

A Danish study aims to provide information on the effects and perceived benefits of participation in adult education, re-education and further education of 8.599 people participating in these activities (Clausen et al, 2006). The effect is measured on the basis of the level of employment, earnings and increase in number of education activities. The main conclusions of this report are that adult education in Denmark leads to further participation later on, which was particular the case with general adult education courses. Participation in vocational training was found to have positive effects on the level of employment, but not on hourly wages.

The main aim of a German BIBB-Study "Kosten und Nutzen berufliche Weiterbildung" (Beicht et al., 2003) was to oppose the direct and indirect costs of non/formal adult vocational education initiatives to the benefits from participants' experiences, also in order to detect their motives for participation. From 2000 interviewees the real benefit was evaluated by more than half (57 per cent) of the participants as very high, 15 % even chose the highest scale value.

**Australia: Ballatti and Falk (2002)**

A study was commissioned by the government of the State of Victoria in Australia as a series of narrative case studies (100 recorded interviews) (Balatti and Falk, 2002). Also here the purpose was to investigate the range of individual and community benefits that can be experienced as a result of participating in adult education programs. It was illustrated that the benefits of adult learning can go beyond the usually cited ones of individual satisfaction, course completion and employment toward the benefits that the wider community gains.

Increased networking and self-confidence led to community action, which in turn led to community benefits. The community benefits from more learned citizens when engaging in family life and social life, in paid labour and volunteer work and though civic participation generally.

**Australia: Ballatti, Black and Falk (2006)**

Another Australian study by Balatti, Black and Falk (2006) examined specifically the social capital outcomes experienced by 57 students as a result of their participation in

adult literacy and numeracy courses. It was found that these courses produced social capital outcomes for 80 per cent of the students interviewed, even though improved literacy and numeracy skills were not necessarily presented. These outcomes were largely realised as a result of changes in network structures and/or changes in network transactions. However, changes were more usually a result of a combination of different kind of course outcomes, such as socioeconomic impacts tended to result from a combination of both social and human capital outcomes (interpersonal skills, literacy and numeracy, self-confidence). Balatti et al., emphasise that they do not envisage a dilution of human capital skills as outcome of adult learning courses, but underline the evidence that human capital (technical skills such as literacy and numeracy) are necessary but usually insufficient to ensure that course participation impacts on the socio-economic well-being of adult learners. The study showed that the social capital outcomes produced were highly valued by students and played an important role in improving the student's quality of life.

**Adult Education and Mental Health** There is a body of literature which describes adult learning and its relation to mental health (for instance McGivney reports positive consequences, 1997). A survey conducted by NIACE found that almost nine out of ten adult learners reported positive emotional or mental health benefits (Field 2009: 21). Furthermore**,** Bynner at al. (2003) demonstrated a clear negative association between malaise and mental well-being to the possession of literacy and numeracy skills.

**Adult Literacy and Health Benefits** An Australian study (Hartley and Horne 2006) is looking into the benefits of investing in adult literacy and numeracy skills, and has found links between lower literacy and a higher risk of hospitalisation, higher rates of depression and an inability to understand drug prescriptions. Hartley and Horne show that health literacy is a broad concept linked to the impact of poor literacy on general understandings of health issues, access to information and participation in healthy behaviours. Therefore they underline that a greater focus is required on measuring the benefits of investing in health literacy.

**Adult Learning and Societal Involvement** A survey of over 600 literacy and numeracy learners in Scotland showed significant increases among female and older people in the proportion of going out regularly, about intentions on community involvement, extending their networks and a rise in numbers of people they could turn to for help, through contacts with tutors and fellow students (Field, 2009:23).

**Adult Learning and Active Citizenship** Active citizenship is related to social capital (as explained above), which requires networking and skills such as self-confidence in order to facilitate societal involvement. In Canada, a 2009 report by the Canadian Council on Learning states that "fostering adult-learning opportunities contribute to social capital and social cohesion" (CCL, 2009:11). Empirical evidence from the United Kingdom (Feinstein and Hammond, 2003) has shown that adult learning is associated with civic engagement, concerning political interest, membership to organizations and voting

behaviour, though survey findings cannot show causation. Preston and Feinstein (2004) claim that adult learning has positive effect on social cohesion, as those who take part are more likely to take part in community activity, to have flexible attitudes and are less likely to be intolerant of the views of others. Also the European Social Survey (2010) found a strong and consistent positive relationship between years of education and interest in politics. Every additional year of education in general raises the likelihood of voting in national elections by a three percentage points. Bynner and Hammond (2004) suggest from their findings that participation in adult education courses is linked to higher levels of civic and political participation, increased membership in groups and voter participation. Those who participate in one or two courses are 13 percent more likely to begin voting compared to those who abstained in the previous elections.

If learning makes individuals healthier this is good for them, but also for their family, their community and for the health service and the taxpayer (Sabates, 2008). Schuller and Desjardins (2010) describe the connections between the benefits of adult education, explaining that adults participating in adult education are less likely to be unemployed and more likely to experience wage growth. This can translate into improved self-satisfaction, personal health and quality of child rearing. It can generate time and money for engaging in civic, social and political activities, which in turn are essential for democracy, social cohesion and equality.

The Centre for Research on the Wider benefits of Learning has emphasized throughout that it is important to acknowledge that the wider benefits of learning can be identified at various levels:
- Individual,
- Family,
- Community and
- Nations.

Moreover the impact of adult learning on earning for those not in employment is unexplored, while it seems that individuals less likely to be in employment (migrants, women from ethnic minorities, etc.) may benefits economically from their participation in adult education. Sabates (2007) furthermore points out, that it is not clear whether other forms of adult learning lead to wage benefits or which forms of adult learning lead to economic benefits because little research exists on general adult learning. Although there are indications that improvements in basic skills during adulthood improve earnings potential. British studies have examined rates of return on basic skills improvements (Field 2009, p. 19) and found that improved performance in numeracy and literacy appeared to produce higher earnings.