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The BeLL Study: Social and Civic Benefits of Lifelong Learning

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Agenda

- The BeLL project: aims and data collection
- BeLL: Quantitative data analysis
- BeLL: Qualitative data analysis
- BeLL: Preliminary interpretations

BeLL – Benefits of Lifelong Learning

- Funded by the European Commission as a part of the LLL-programme, funding stream “Studies and Comparative Research (KA 1)”.
- First comparative study on benefits of liberal adult education
- 10 European countries: Czech Republic, Finland, Germany (project leader), Italy, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, UK (England and Wales).
- 2012-2014:
 - quantitative data collection ended 26.6.2013 (n = 8646)
 - Qualitative data collection ended September 2013 (n = 80)
 - survey feedback sessions September – October 2013
 - final results January 2014

Project team & partners

The following organizations and persons are part of the BeLL research team: Dr. Marion Fleige & Dr. Bettina Thöne-Geyer (German Institute for Adult Education DIE, Germany), Prof. Jyri Manninen (University of Eastern Finland UEF, Finland), Prof. Monika Kil (Danube University Krems, Austria), David Mallows, Prof. John Vorhaus & Samantha Duncan (University of London, Institute of Education IOE, United Kingdom), Dr. Javier Diez (University of Barcelona, CREA Research Centre, Spain), Dr. Petra Javrh, MSc Ester Možina & Dr. Natalija Vrečer (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education SIAE, Slovenia), Dr. Hana Danihelková (Association for Education and Development of Women ATHENA, Czech Republic), MA Irena Sgier & MA Christine Hary (Swiss Federation for Adult Learning SVEB, Switzerland), Prof. Simona Sava (Romanian Institute for Adult Education IREA, Romania), Prof. Katarina Popovic, Dubravka Mihajlovic & Edisa Kecap (Adult Education Society AES, Serbia), Paola Zappaterra (Associazione di donne Orlando Addo, Italy) and for the dissemination of the results Francesca Operti (European Association for the Education of Adults EAEA, Belgium)



The “Wider Benefits of Learning” approach

- Focus on “wider” outcomes and benefits than just immediate learning outcomes and benefits
 - Aims to record the complexity between various educational efforts and the specific benefits for the well-being of the individual and the society
 - Is used to analyse how individuals, groups, organisations and society benefits from education in an unbiased way
 - Is characterized by various theoretical strands and a range of methodological approaches
 - No direct reference to (the policy aim of) increasing participation
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- Empirical results “Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning” (WBL), London
 - Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI/OECD)
 - Manninen, J. (2010): Wider Benefits of Learning within the Liberal Adult Education System in Finland

BeLL: aims

Two core aims of the BeLL project are:

- To explore the wider (personal and social) benefits of liberal adult education within 10 European countries.
- To investigate the development of the wider benefits within liberal adult education courses.

BeLL data collection: liberal adult education

According to liberal adult education the BeLL data collection focuses on adult education programs:

- **aimed at personal growth** (such as handicraft, arts, sports, professional orientation, preventive medicine, history and so on).
- **aimed at social growth** (targeted at specific population groups with the aim of enhancing their social role, for instance, parental counselling, women counselling, counselling of union trades members etc.).

→ non-credited and not directly devoted to labour market skills and employability; based on voluntary participation and on personal interests.

Liberal adult education = non-vocational, social, cultural & societal learning activities for personal development (cf. EU 2013) – BeLL Sample:

Type of course	Frequency	Percent
Health & sports	941	10,9
ICT & skills	1210	14,0
Languages	1290	14,9
Creative activities	1135	13,1
Society & culture	914	10,6
Work related and vocational topics	958	11,1
Several courses attended *	2099	24,3
Total	8547	98,9
Missing	99	1,1
Total	8646	100,0

* This category includes participants, who have participated more than only one type of courses

BeLL: survey questionnaire

The BeLL questionnaire is divided into

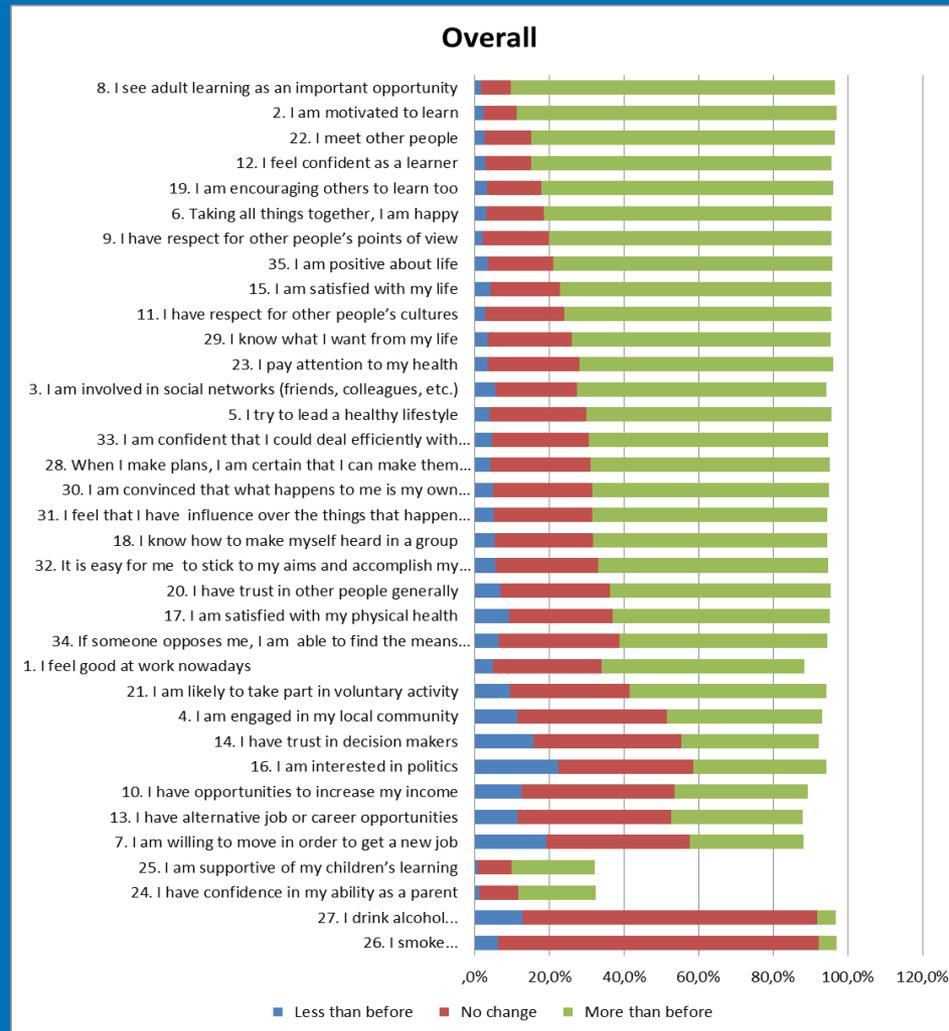
- a part oriented towards the participation in liberal adult education courses (number, type and length of courses, course providers)
- two open questions about changes and benefits of learning
- an operationalization of potential wider benefits into statements that can be subjectively assessed by the participants after the attendance of a course as experienced, remembered or recognized in itself
- two questions about the course elements and their importance in generating the benefits
- an individual-related demographic part
- ends with the question if the respondent is willing to participate eventually in a subsequent qualitative interview

BeLL data collection: the benefits

All potential benefits found in the literature (except lower crime level) were operationalized and included in the questionnaire BeLL^Q:

- Self efficacy, locus of control, tolerance, trust,
 - **social network, sense of purpose in life, civic and social engagement, civic competence,**
 - mental well-being, work-related benefits, health, health behaviour, family, changes in educational experiences and competencies
- Empirical results “Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning” (WBL), London
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 - Manninen, J. (2010): Wider Benefits of Learning within the Liberal Adult Education System in Finland.

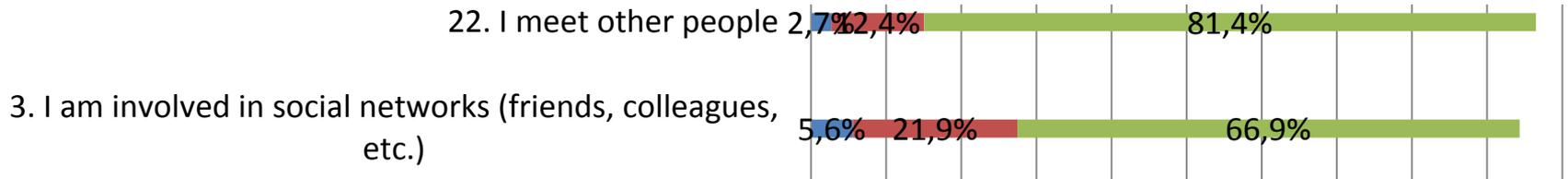
Quantitative data analysis – preliminary results



Quantitative data analysis – preliminary results: social and civic benefits

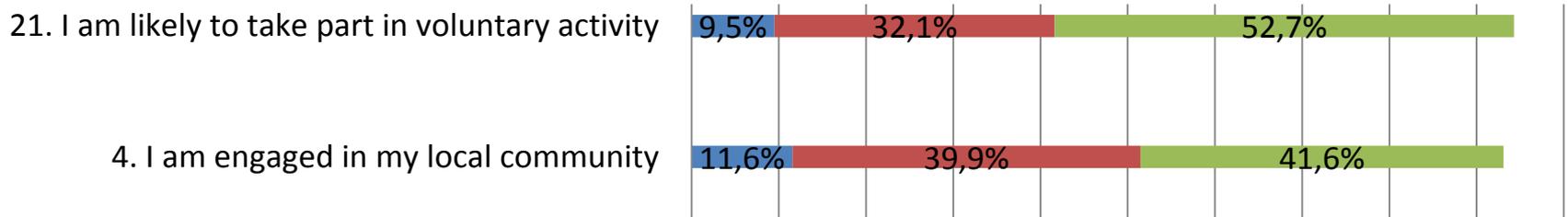
Social network

■ Less than before ■ No change ■ More than before



Civic and social engagement

■ Less than before ■ No change ■ More than before



BeLL qualitative research: methodology

Research questions behind the interviews:

1. How does liberal adult learning influence participants' lives?
2. Can participants name and describe the benefits?
3. What impact do national and cultural contexts possibly have on the benefits?

Sample: 8 course participants per country (80 interviews)

Method: semi-structured interviews, abductive approach to analysis

Qualitative data analysis - some preliminary results on social and civic benefits

Social benefits:

- Social interaction
- New networks and new friends
- Improvement of family life (i.e. coping with parental role)

Civic benefits

- Participation in society, shared expertise (i.e. volunteering)
- Cultural knowledge and tolerance
- Hints at change in attitudes, sense of responsibility

Civic benefits: example 1 (M, 22, SI)

“Since I came to the PLYA (Project Learning for Young Adults), I now notice, that I love helping others. I had my own problems and others helped me, now I’m helping others with similar problems.”

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

Social benefits: example 2 (M, 42, CH)

„A lot of it was about communication. I wasn't as rhetorically skilled before, I'm still not great at it, but I could convey things at least so that others can understand them. And I can also show more of an interest in others.“

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

Social/civic benefits: example 3 (F, 70, UK)

“I think the last 5 or 6 years have given me solidity: solidity in terms of fixing my own intellectual potential, in terms of honing skills, they have given me solidity in more firm friendships and a wider range of acquaintances. They have given me fun and fulfilment I suppose and they have put me firmly in the part of society which is older and still with it and wanting to be with it.”

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

Social benefits: example 4 (F, 77, CH)

„Well, my family is very happy - I make them clothes and very nice books as presents (laughs). When it's Christmas, they know they'll be getting another new book or something. And I think they appreciate the fact that I'm not the type of mother or grandmother who stays at home obsessing about her illnesses. That's a very good thing.“

„Even if I ended up in a nursing home, I don't think I'd get bored. And it may be that all this stuff I'm doing for myself, I could then pass on to others.“

BeLL qualitative data analysis – some overall preliminary conclusions

The BeLL interview analysis shows:

1. Participants experience a wide range of benefits and are able to name them - immediate outcomes as well as long-term effects.
2. Participants often use liberal adult education to promote their life projects (cf. Illeris 2004), not only to acquire specific competences.
3. Liberal adult education can be used to sustain and transform people's lives. This seems to affect not only the learner, but also the social context.

BeLL: qualitative data analysis – some preliminary interpretations

- Benefits of adult education, to our understanding, follow learning outcomes such as an increase of competencies, knowledge, physical and mental well-being.
- Unlike outcomes and effects they are bound to assessment *and* reflection.
- They seem to interact with learning interest and develop in courses, thanks to learning relationships with the teacher, fellow participants and the learning subject.
- They can have an instrumental dimension in the sense of making use of learning outcomes in work, family, social and civic situations and experiencing this as beneficial.

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Thank you!