



**Comparative analysis of lifelong  
learning strategies and their  
implementation in Denmark, Estonia,  
Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania,  
Norway, Sweden.**

**Executive Summary**

**By Jonas Sprogøe  
The Danish University of Education  
Copenhagen, March 2003**

The report has been produced as the background document for the  
Nordic - Baltic Lifelong Learning Conference  
**“A Human Touch – Adults Learning with a Difference”**  
taking place in May 11-13, 2003, Riga, Latvia.

Baltic countries must in addition to this use adult education as a means of developing their democratic societies, stabilising the economies and create more social cohesion.

**Chapter 3: Short Presentation of the Countries**

The Nordic countries show some similarities in GDP and public spending on education as well as in religious orientation and demographic composition.

The Baltic countries also show similarities in GDP, public spending and in demographic composition.

Both regions have a similar labour market composition divided into (little) agriculture (more) industry and (most) services.

**Chapter 4: The National Overviews - background**

The comparative analysis is based on a questionnaire serving as an outline for the national overviews. The national overviews give answers to questions within the following fields of interest:

1. History of legislation that regulates adult learning / current legislative framework / current reforms and initiatives.
2. National strategy / policy documents in adult learning that follow the EU Lifelong Learning Memorandum discussion / priorities / resolutions concerning adult education.
3. Good practice / case descriptions showing the practice of the policy implementation / illustrating the activities related to the goals of the conference.

Within these leading fields of interest 9 questions are addressed in the national overviews.

**Chapter 5: Listing of the Answers given in the National Overviews**

**1.A. Which are the most important historical events / traditions / reforms that have deeply influenced / changed the sphere of adult education in your country?**

**Key Findings**

In the Nordic context Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden trace the origin of adult education back to the mid-19th century and the foundation of the first folk high schools. Lithuania and Estonia list a similar origin of the first adult educational ideas.

As a result of changes in society, especially an increase in unemployment, Denmark, Sweden and Finland all experienced an increased focus on vocational adult education and recurrent training in the 1970's, so as to cater for the marginalized people's need for upgrading their skills (DK p. 3), doing something meaningful or developing new competencies so they could (re-)enter the labour market. Also Norway presented a Law regulating Adult Education in the 1970's.

A similar turning point is found in Estonia in the 1970's, but with a different background. During that period several research and development initiatives were

**Executive Summary**

This is short summary of the main findings of each chapter. Please refer to the comparative report for further details on each individual area.

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

Several societal changes create a shift in educational focus from formal and primarily youth and children's education towards non-formal and informal learning in relation to adults.

The concept of lifelong learning has appeared in the international organisation's documents since 1960. Different organisations attach different significance to the concept and lifelong learning appears on their political and strategic agendas at different times.

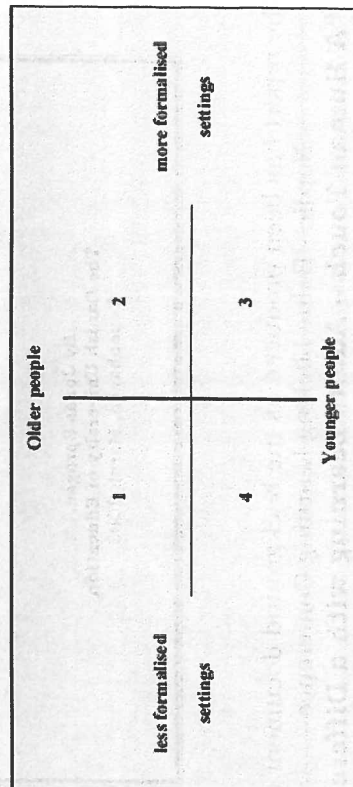
The concept of lifelong learning is defined by EU as:

**Encompassing all purposeful learning activities, whether formal or informal, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence**

The Commission and the Member States have adopted this definition.

A lifelong and lifewide dimension is added as a framework for working with lifelong learning on policy level.

Figure 1.1: "The lifelong-lifewide framework"



(Source: Report of the Eurostat Task Force on Measuring Lifelong Learning, p. 10)

**Chapter 2: The Starting Point for Implementing Lifelong Learning**

The starting point for implementing lifelong learning strategies is somewhat different in the two regions. The Nordic countries can use adult education and lifelong learning as means of reaching the required skills in relation to the knowledge-based society. The

launched to ensure a certain level of scientific research in the field of adult education in Estonia and also provide training for university lectures. (EE p. 2)

The Baltic countries were during the Soviet occupation heavily influenced by the Soviet outlook on education, and especially vocational training based on ideological and political grounds was carried out. Estonia and Lithuania note that non-formal adult education was carried out in so-called Knowledge-societies (EE p. 1 and LT p. 1). In Lithuania "resistance schools" were operating, where the spirit of national identity and cultural awareness was kept alive by courses in singing, amateur folk dancing, craft groups and study circles (LT p. 1).

The main historical event concerning the establishing of modern adult education in the Baltic countries is mentioned to be the restoration of independence (EE p. 2, LV p. 1, LT p. 1).

#### Box 1.A.

- Historically the ideas of adult education and folk high schools appeared at the same time in the Nordic and the Baltic countries
- Because of the Soviet occupation the starting point from which the 8 countries can develop their lifelong learning policies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is very different.
- The Baltic countries meet in their transition period some structural and political problems, that is not present in the Nordic countries (see also Chapter 2).
- The Nordic countries have a long and uninterrupted tradition and as well as a well-established infrastructure of adult education

### 1.B. What definition does your country have on Lifelong Learning?

#### Key Findings

It is most common that there is no official definition on lifelong learning, but the concept of lifelong learning is recognised, used and discussed at official level in all the countries.

Denmark, Norway, Finland and Lithuania recognise the EU definition of lifelong learning, which defines lifelong learning as: **...encompassing all purposeful learning activity, whether formal or informal, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence.** The countries recognise that lifelong learning not only is a matter of adult education, but also must take in consideration how to deal with children and youth as well as the elderly. As the Memorandum states: **"Lifelong learning sees all learning as a seamless continuum 'from cradle to grave'."**<sup>1</sup>

The lifelong and the lifewide dimension are both mentioned as part of the lifelong learning concept.

<sup>1</sup> A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, p. 7

Sweden, however, notes the importance of focusing on the promotion of active citizenship, not only employability. Sweden also notes that it is more reasonable to talk about *access to learning opportunities* than *rights to learning*, as the latter means that something can be demanded and that someone can be held accountable if the demand is not met. (SE p. 8)

#### Box 1.B

- The countries lack an official definition of lifelong learning to guide their future actions and make a more comprehensive and all encompassing lifelong learning strategy possible
- Both the lifelong and the lifewide dimension is included in the use of the concept
- EU has provided the framework for the countries' usage of the concept of lifelong learning

### 1.C. What laws in your country regulate adult learning? Please, indicate the name, the year of passing and the aim of the law.

#### Key Findings

Lifelong learning and the provision of adult education is not placed solely under one Ministry, but is involving several other ministries, especially ministries dealing with the labour market, employment and social issues.

For most countries it applies that the Ministry of Education has the overall responsibility and supervision with educational affairs.

The Laws are all from the late 1990's, regarding general adult education, liberal education as well as vocational education and training. Exceptions are: Sweden, where *The Education Act* is from 1985 (SE p. 5), Iceland, where the *Upper Secondary School Act* is from 1996 (IS p. 2), and Estonia which in 1993 was the first Baltic country to pass a law specifically on adult education. The countries do not specify whether or not the new legislation is updates of former laws.

Denmark has noted the most extensive legislation regarding the provision and financing of adult education in all forms.

Norway and Finland both specify laws regulating competence and qualifications assessment.

#### Box 1.C.

- No single legislation regulates adult learning
- Liberal education as a specific area of legislation is only found in Denmark, Finland, Lithuania and Norway
- Several ministries influence the adult learning provision
- Norway and Finland both specify laws regulating competence and qualifications assessment.
- The legislation is generally new (from the late 1990's)

**1.D. What law amendments / initiatives / reforms in your country currently influence the lifelong learning policy concerning the adult population in your country?**

**Key Findings**

Iceland is the only country that doesn't describe an overall national or governmental plan for adult education/lifelong learning policies. "In Iceland, the government has largely left it to unions and employers' organisations to negotiate terms that safeguard the rights of the workers, rather than imposing laws and regulations." (IS p. 2). However, several other initiatives have been launched, including a report from 1998 made by the Committee on Lifelong Learning in Iceland.

The countries' national plans focusing on lifelong learning are aimed at both vocational and liberal adult education, and all emphasise the promotion of economic growth.

Norway, Finland, Denmark, Sweden<sup>2</sup>, Lithuania and Iceland have launched Adult Education Weeks/Adult Learners Week, putting focus on adult education in various aspects, as well as promoting co-operation between several providers and partners in adult education.

Denmark is the only country introducing the general principle of user payment for all general adult education single subjects at lower and upper secondary level.

Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Finland specifically emphasise the need for the development of a strong co-operation between the education system and the work life.

**Box 1.D.**

- Most countries have launched a comprehensive strategy for adult education provision
- Adults learning weeks are established in several countries
- Vocational education and training is a major component of the initiatives launched
- Denmark introduces the principle of user payment on lower and upper secondary level
- Emphasis is put on economic growth
- Denmark, Iceland, Finland and Norway specifically recognise the importance of co-operation between the education system and working life
- In Norway employers financing education is exempted from tax

<sup>2</sup> Mentioned in the comments received

**2.A. What resolutions / policy documents / strategies have been passed / are being discussed / are planned to be passed in your country to follow up on the European Commission Lifelong learning Memorandum discussion?**

**Key Findings**

The number of times the different strategies and policies are mentioned in relation to the Key Messages:

- **Key Message 1: New basic skills for all - 7**
- **Key Message 2: More investment in human resources - 3**
- **Key Message 3: Innovation in teaching and learning - 2**
- **Key Message 4: Valuing learning - 7**
- **Key Message 5: Rethinking guidance and counselling - 3**
- **Key Message 6: Bringing learning closer to home - 4**

Half the countries, Estonia, Denmark, Iceland and Sweden are the only ones concerned with the Key Message 6, 'bringing learning closer to home' even though most of the other countries have very sparsely populated areas.

All the countries were occupied by the thought of providing basic education for all, and measuring non-formal and informal learning in order to recognise and integrate vocational qualifications and personal competencies has likewise a high priority for all countries. The wish for providing basic education for all can be seen as an underlying premise that includes bringing basic skills closer to the sparsely populated areas also, but the Key Message 6 is proposing for direct measures to be taken in order to distribute the learning opportunities more evenly.

**Box 2.A.**

- Most focus is placed on Key Message 1 - Basic Skills for all, and Key Message 4 - Valuing learning
- The least focus is placed on Key Message 3 - Innovation in teaching and learning
- Emphasis is placed on both the lifelong (Key Message 1) and the lifewide (Key Message 4) dimension of learning

**2.B. What are the aims of these strategies / policies (planned or implemented) concerning adults in Lifelong Learning?**

**Key Findings**

In general the aim is to strengthen the co-operation between the formal education system and the working life in order to raise competitiveness. As Finland states: "One of the main challenges for adult education and training is to find a response to the knowledge



and competence needs arising from changes in working life in order to secure the occupational mobility and flexibility of 2,5 million members of the work force" (FI p. 8).

But in Norway, Sweden, Latvia and Lithuania the aims of the policies described also include democracy and personal development.

Box 2.B.

- The aims of the strategies are generally two-fold: developing personal competencies and preparing the basis for a competitive economy, with most focus put on the latter
- Estonia has a whole variety of strategies aimed at different aspects of lifelong learning in relation to the accession-process
- Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden aims at democracy and personal development also

**2.C. What agreements (institutional, organisational, governmental) have been established to co-ordinate the strategy / policy in your country?**

**Key Findings**

Norway has established the Competence Reform Contact team as an overall supervising and co-operating unit. No other country has stated any formal or governmental agreement that co-ordinate the lifelong learning policy or strategy.

Historically and politically the Nordic countries have a long tradition of including and recognising social partners in the development of adult education. These councils work as sparring partners or as a consulting body for the government and Ministry of Education, in questions about framework, legislation, provision etc. in relation to provision and supply of adult education.

Lithuania has recently established two councils who serve as expert institutions in questions concerning adult education.

Estonia has a division for adult education within the Ministry of Education and Research.

Box 2.C.

- The countries lack official, institutional or governmental agreements that co-ordinate lifelong learning policy, except Norway where the Competence Reform Contact Team co-ordinates the Competence Reform
- Consulting bodies, Adult Education Boards and various other divisions and councils are consulted by the governments in the countries.

**2.D. What is the contribution / involvement of the level "adult education" as regards the lifelong learning strategy / policy?**

**Key Findings**

Lifelong learning and adult education seems to be inseparable parts of the same concept. However, by adhering to the EU-definition from "cradle-to-grave", lifelong learning in principle should include early childhood and youth education, as well as adult education.

The Competence Reform in Norway emphasises that caring for and education of children and youth reduce the risk of early drop out from education and therefore is a prerequisite for lifelong learning (NO p. 4). Also Finland's education system promotes implementation of the principles of lifelong learning by giving young people a high level of education (as well as providing the facilities for continuing education later on in life.) (FI p. 6)

Latvia will integrate adult education in their "ordinary" law on Education, and not have a specific law concerning lifelong education. This is a sign of adopting the lifelong learning approach, as they recognise that adult education cannot be separated from initial education in a lifelong learning perspective.

Box 2.D.

- Adult education is still the main "ingredient" in the countries conception of lifelong learning, but adhering to the "cradle-to-grave" definition of lifelong learning, the countries recognise childhood and youth education as focus area as well
- Especially Norway and Finland incorporate children and youth education in their lifelong learning strategy

**3.A. What are the main features if the projects implemented that realise the lifelong learning strategies / policies concerning adult learning in your country?**

**Key Findings**

'Good practices' are found in relation to all the Key Messages listed in the Memorandum. Also 'good practices' in areas not directly related with the Memorandum is found in the countries.

Reforms, initiatives and strategies are found in all countries, and even though they are not listed as good practices, they contain elements of practice that can be of interest in relation to implementing these practices in other countries.

There is no apparent correspondence between the strategies and policies planned or implemented in relation to the 6 Key Messages from the Memorandum (question 2.A) and the 'good practices' carried out or implemented (e.g. Key Message 4 gets a high priority on policy level, but the countries lack examples of good practices on this particular field).

Especially Sweden focuses on increasing the access to education for adults with handicaps, and focuses also on research and development within this particular field.

Box 3.A.

- 'Good practices' are found in relation to all 6 Key Messages
- Special focus directed towards reaching adults with low or insufficient educational level
- Information and guidance get a high priority
- More investment in Human Resources also get a high priority

### Chapter 6: Central Themes

Dealing with the educational issues in the Nordic and the Baltic countries, some very interesting questions arise. The following 4 questions are the pivotal point of the comparative analysis:

#### 1. Is it possible to trace a specific Nordic / Baltic dimension in regard to lifelong learning?

On the macro-level dealing with historical and political aspects, all evidence supports the thesis, that it is possible to trace a Nordic respectively Baltic co-operation. It is possible to divide the 8 countries into two more or less homogenous areas - the Nordic Region consisting of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, and the Baltic Region consisting of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

But moving down into the micro-level of policymaking, 'good practices' and definitions, the picture is not as clear. The answers produced in the national overviews don't give any support for the thesis, as no definition or no type of legislation is reserved solely for one region. All types of 'good practices' are also found in both regions. The only exception is found with the Baltic co-operation in the Learning 4 Sharing / KomPas adult trainer-project, described in the Latvian report.

So an unambiguous answer cannot be given to the question of a Nordic respectively Baltic dimension on lifelong learning, although it can be of practical value to distinguish between the two regions.

#### 2. Are the differences of / within the regions sought maintained and is it possible/desirable in relation to EU?

As mentioned above this question is a highly political one, and as such must be left to the national parliaments to decide upon. Seen from a national perspective there is nothing that prevents a country from choosing another path than the one set forward by EU, not even being a Member State. On the other hand, increased transparency and close co-operation are some of the means of achieving the goals for the Community and will enhance the chances of becoming the world's leading economic and educational

factor. This is a tempting prospect, not only for the Member States and acceding countries, but also for the neighbouring countries in the region. As the Communication states: "The key challenge, therefore, is to ensure that Member States remain free to develop their own coherent and comprehensive strategies, and to design and manage their own systems, while moving forward in the same direction."<sup>3</sup>

Seen from a specific Nordic point of view some harmonising of the educational systems, when it happens as a consequence of Nordic influence, give the Nordic countries a special status in regard to further development of other areas in Europe. Also the Nordic countries can contribute to set the standards based on the long tradition of adult learning already established in the countries. But this might demand an increased co-operation, as the Nordic countries, in order to achieve maximum influence, must speak with "one voice".

The Baltic countries will by increased standardisation receive a new and alternative approach to adult education that will distance them more from the former Soviet polytechnic educational tradition and help to make a more definite separation. But there are several dangers in adopting an alternative educational tradition unconditionally. One of them is that the educational structures are too rigid to incorporate new thoughts. Another one is that teachers and students need time to adjust to new modes of thinking and teaching. A third problem is that an EU approach doesn't necessarily is a good example as the other European countries themselves fight problems like unemployment, racism, poverty, social differences and corruption - problems that have arisen despite stable economies and democracies. To get the best lifelong learning policy, the borrowing from other countries must be measured against the national characteristics and educational traditions.

Kulich colourfully describes the prospects of future co-operation for the two regions: "If we resist the temptation as 'do-gooders' to force our models and solutions on the quite different situation and needs in the region, and if our colleagues there will resist the temptation for 'quick fixes' and for accepting uncritically models from abroad, and if they learn from their own past, they themselves will enrich significantly our knowledge and practice of individual and social change, and the role adult education can play in these processes."<sup>4</sup>

#### 3. Is the Nordic understanding of lifelong learning different from the one proposed by the EU, and is there a Nordic contribution to EU lifelong learning policy?

The Nordic "folkopplysnings"-tradition is still of value and interest, not only to the Nordic countries and surrounding areas, but also in whole of the EU. In the process of creating a democratic structure, that will facilitate the creation of a European citizen, the Nordic adult education approach can prove to be helpful. The focus on several perceptions of the concept *folk* can give the lifelong learning debates new input and add interesting aspect to the creation of a comprehensive and co-operative European union. But this demands that the Nordic countries can maintain a common strategy, which can enhance their influential powers. Also required is the willingness and openness of other European areas to adapt the Nordic view on adult education.

<sup>3</sup> The Commission, *Making an European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*, p. 25

<sup>4</sup> Kulich, (1995), p. 96

- Lifelong learning means that the responsibility is shifted from the state to the individual, which might be a heavy duty on the shoulders of some adults at risk
- Bridging the gap between formal education and informal and non-formal learning risk taking the joy and spontaneity out of the latter two, removing their uniqueness
- Lifelong learning risk turning into a "totalitarian" concept that cannot be escaped. Constant development and continuous education is becoming a duty rather than an option
- The subject matter and content of lifelong learning besides the basic knowledge and computer skills is not easily determined

#### Chapter 8: Future Discussion Points

Points for future debates on all levels:

- Definitions of lifelong learning suitable for each individual country
- Integration of primary, secondary and adult education into a comprehensive lifelong learning
- A supervising body to co-ordinate lifelong learning strategy and policy
- Creation of systematic knowledge on the field of lifelong learning
- Implementation of policy and strategy into good practices
- The possibility of a specific Nordic approach in order to increase influence
- The possibility of a the specific Baltic approach in order to increase interregional co-operation
- Integrating alternative lifelong learning strategies in accordance with the educational tradition
- Specific target areas as well as overriding societal goals
- A specific curriculum content in order to achieve the goals
- Alternatives to a 'totalitarian' concept of lifelong learning
- How to 'bring learning closer to home' and maintain the democratic aspects of non-formal and informal learning

#### 4. Are the Baltic countries' lifelong learning strategy influenced more by EU than by the Nordic countries, and what are the consequences of such a choice?

There is no easy answer to where the Baltic region should turn for inspiration or where they are able to influence the most themselves. Many factors need to be considered. But the historical, political and societal connections already established between the Baltic and the Nordic regions are a good foundation for future regional co-operation within the EU. But the national overviews suggest that the Baltic countries are looking more and more to the EU for support and project funding, which can take their adult education and lifelong policies in direction that lead away from the Nordic path.

One of the consequences of such choices might be that the tight bonds between the Nordic and the Baltic countries loosen a little, which will affect all countries in the region. The Baltic Sea region has an outstanding opportunity of influencing the EU policies on various matters. If the close co-operation will cease to exist, the whole Baltic Sea Area will miss out on important influence by not speaking with "one voice".

#### Chapter 7: Concluding Remarks

The concluding remarks try to sum up on the 8 countries' responses to the questions.

- In general the countries are taking the societal changes seriously. In the 1970's when an increase in marginalized persons were found some of the countries responded by offering educative measures. Also faced with the demands from the labour market and the demographic changes, new legislation regulating adult education is passed.
- Extensive debates on lifelong learning are held, especially following the EU Commission's Memorandum on Lifelong Learning.
- All countries report some good practices, which means that initiatives are actually launched and are working according to the plans set forward by each country.
- No official definition is presented, but the countries adhere to the definition offered by EU.
- Some of the countries have launched comprehensive strategies for lifelong learning including children and youth education, and well as formal, non-formal and informal learning arenas. This is a sign of recognition of the "cradle-to-grave" approach within a lifelong and lifewide framework.
- Information and guidance are major elements in the initiatives and practices launched by the countries. This is carried out in Adult Learning Weeks and by outreach activities in certain target areas.

The countries are well on their way in implementing adequate and necessary measures to ensure the national interest, it is important to note that the development of an all-inclusive lifelong learning strategy, both on national and international level, must be subject to an on-going discussion as several concerns lie within.