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Von Ingemar Svensson

Presentation Workshop 1 Organisations for European Citizenship Education (non-public)

Ingemar Svensson, Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning

In this description of the situation of citizenship education in general in Sweden, I describe the situation in the non-public adult education area.

Citizenship education is actually the main and underlying task for the non-formal, mainly non-public, Liberal Adult Educational tradition in Sweden that is known as *Folkbildning*. In this area, you find 147 Folk High Schools and around 500 local Study Associations spread all over the country. Some of the schools are owned by County Councils, but most of them and all the Study Associations are owned and operated by popular movements like the Labour Movement, different religious organisations, farmers organisations etc.

The *Folkbildning* actually emerged in the late 19th century as a tool for the popular movements to educate their representatives in local and regional councils as well as their members of parliament. The Study Circle method became a very important and widely spread form of education in support of democracy. People could, on their own conditions, gather around to study in order to increase their opportunities to influence and change conditions in society. This tradition of studying in Study Circles is still strong in Sweden. Every year about 320 000 circles are organised all over the country with somewhere between 1,5 and 2 million participants!

To a large extent Liberal Adult Education in Sweden is financed by government and county subsidies. A fundamental reason for public support to the Liberal Adult Education is to foster democratic development in society.

In a recently made survey, the following questions concerning the future of the Liberal Adult Education in Sweden were formulated:

1. How can the Liberal Adult Education movement support the development of democracy?
2. How can the Liberal Adult Education movement, through its activities and organisations, support the individuals in their wish to actively practise their democratic rights and obligations?
3. How can the Liberal Adult Education movement take part in the defence work for democracy by constituting an arena for public discussions?
4. Can the Liberal Adult Education movement constitute a force for change and opposition in society?

I should mention that the Swedish government at several occasions has given special grants to the Liberal Adult Education movement to initiate study Circles on the question of the European Union. These initiatives have been taken as preparations for the

referendums that have taken place concerning membership in the EU and concerning membership in the EMU.

In our formal school system, citizenship education is, in normal cases, not a specific subject but integrated in political science.

I represent the Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning which is a government agency. It is our task to support and promote the development of flexible learning within the Formal Adult Education and within the Liberal Adult Education. I work with the support of flexible learning in the area of Liberal Adult Education and flexible learning should here be understood as Computer Supported Collaborative Learning. The aim of this support and promotion is to create a higher degree of availability for the individual to take part in Folk High School courses and Study Circles, by creating a higher degree of freedom in time and place.

In a recently started project we specifically support the development of new flexible forms for Folk High School courses and Study Circles aiming at answering question 1 – 4 listed above. In this project we also want to produce a handbook with a wide variety of good practice examples of how this can be done.

Liberal Adult Education studies are open for all Swedes. There are, however, certain target groups with a higher priority such as, low educated people in general, immigrants and disabled. In working with the development of flexible learning in support of democracy, we also see other target groups with a higher priority, for example people living in isolated rural areas where it is difficult to get in touch with politicians and local councils. Furthermore it is important to see young people as a target group with a high priority, since quite a lot of them tend to leave the established political parties and organisations and instead try to find new ways of making their voices heard, often through the internet.

In flexible forms of studies aiming at supporting democracy it is important to preserve the democratic study circle form. For this reason we have an ongoing pedagogical discussion about how to further develop and strengthen the Online Study Circle with its mainly asynchronous text based dialogue.

We find that with the help of flexible learning (online Folk High School courses and Study Circles) we can develop new and more modern and effective forms for the traditional task of the Liberal Adult Education to foster democratic development in society.

When it comes to gender mainstream, the problem in Sweden is not to strengthen women in taking part in flexible education for democratic citizenship. On the contrary, around 65 - 70% of the participants in adult studies are women, whether they are formal or non formal, face-to-face or online. The big problem is to activate unemployed men in rural areas.

CV Ingemar Svensson

B.A at the University of Lund, 15 years as a Folk High School teacher and Study Circle Leader, 5 years as a national project manager at the Swedish National Council of Adult Education. Project Manager at the Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning since 2002.